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From a Better Past to a Better Future? The Role of Teachers in Educating the Nation; a case study from Andhra Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

While less than one fifth of the population was literate at the time of Independence, two third of the population was literate in 2001. Especially the 1990s have witnessed an enormous increase. Public norms about education have also changed, and the need for universal education is no longer challenged. The mood within the government is therefore positive: India may not be fully on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, yet, there is no doubt that huge progress is being made.

This positive government narrative stands in sharp contrast with the way in which government teachers themselves think and talk about education. Instead of feeling pride and satisfaction, many teachers are unhappy, and surprisingly, stress that many things were better in the past.

Based on focus group discussions and interviews with teachers in Andhra Pradesh, south India, this paper provides an ethnographic account of how government teachers look at the importance of their profession, and how their professional status has changed over time. It becomes clear that, rather than a sense of fulfilment, they lament a 'better past' in which they were respected and could bring 'enlightenment' to the people. Paradoxically, at the time that universal education becomes a fact, it seems that government teachers feel less appreciated, something that affects their motivation negatively. The paper proceeds with an analysis of the reasons behind their unenthusiastic attitude, and concludes that there is a need for a new professional ethos and culture. In the 21st century, teachers are no longer 'gurus', but there is still an important role to play from them. New forms of teachers' professionalism have to be stimulated and promoted, in order to secure a better future.

From a Better Past to a Better Future? The Role of Teachers in Educating the Nation; a case study from Andhra Pradesh, India¹

Jos Mooij

I. Introduction

When India became independent, less than one fifth of the population was literate. Under British colonialism, it was primarily upper caste male children that went to school, if at all. Despite the intention at that time, even laid down in the Constitution, that all children should go to school, it lasted till the 1980s before a somewhat concerted action was undertaken. In 1986, an all-India National Policy on Education was drafted, prioritising elementary education, and restating the importance of universal education. In 1987, the Operation Blackboard scheme, was introduced, meant to increase the number of teachers and amount of learning equipment. More radical change came in the 1990s, with the introduction of a large integrated scheme, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), initially in a restricted number of districts, but expanded in the course of time. In the first decade of the new millennium, DPEP was replaced by SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Education For All), which is implemented all over India, and focuses also on the upper primary (class 6 and 7) years of schooling. For both DPEP and SSA, the Government of India receives external support from donor organisations, for whom these programmes are a way of contributing to the Millennium Development Goals.²

¹ This paper was earlier presented as a Seminar 'Education and Inequality in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal', CESS, Hyderabad, 21-22 September 2006, organised in the context of our study 'Palanquin Bearers. Education, Decentralization and Social Inequality', funded by the Indo-Dutch Programme for Alternatives in Development. Useful support was also given by the GAPS (Governance and Policy Spaces) project. The seminar in Hyderabad was co-organised by GAPS. The study was coordinated by Dr. Manabi Majumdar (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata) and myself. We were assisted by various field researchers. I would like to thank Madhu Gottumukkala and B. Srinivasa Naik for conducting the focus group discussions on which this paper is based.

² The Millennium Development Goals are goals to which the donor community has committed itself in 2000. The two goals that are about education are 1) to ensure that, by 2015, all children will be able to complete a full course of education, and 2) to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

The most important aspect of DPEP and SSA is the campaign to get all children into school. Teachers and community members are stimulated to convince parents to send their children to school, and special bridge courses have been set up to mainstream older children who dropped out or have never gone to school. New schools have been built; existing schools have been upgraded with additional classrooms or other infrastructural improvements, and there has been an intensification of in-service teacher trainings.

As a result, the 1990s have witnessed significant improvements, most notably with regard to literacy rates. Between 1991 and 2001, the overall literacy rate increased with 13 per cent points, from 52 to 65 per cent, while the previous decade had witnessed an increase of nine per cent points only. By 1998-99, 82 per cent of the population between 10 and 14 years old was literate (87 for boys, 76 for girls) (IIPS, 2000: table 2.7), and girls are catching up with boys. The number of primary (and upper primary) schools increased by 18.6 per cent in the 1990s (this was 16.2 per cent in the 1980s). The increase in the numbers of teachers in these schools was 19.8 per cent (a decline as compared to the 1980s, when the increase was 21.5 per cent). Enrolment has continued to go up. Gross enrolment in primary schools was 114 per cent in the 2000-01, but in middle/upper primary (class 6-8) it was still only 43 per cent.³

Nowadays, most Indian children, hence, at some point in their childhood, do go to school. Apart from the increasing accessibility of schools, this is also related to the attitude of parents. Various surveys have indicated that poor people have started to see the value of education, and want their children to go to school. The PROBE report, for instance, based on a survey in five states, found that many parents (also low-caste, poor and illiterate parents) regard education as indispensable in modern society (PROBE, 1999: chapter 3). Also among other segments of the population, ideas about the necessity of 'education for all' have changed. In a book published in 1991, Weiner noted that the Indian middle class makes a distinction between 'children as "hands"' and children as "minds"; that is, between the child who must be taught to "work" and the child who must be taught to "learn"' (Weiner, 1991: 188). Fifteen years later, there are still millions of out-of-school children,⁴ and many middle class households still employ child domestic workers.⁵ Nevertheless, it

³ These figures come from the Dept. of Education, GoI, downloadable from <http://www.education.nic.in/htmlweb/edusta.htm>, (accessed on 26 May 2006).

⁴ A report submitted to the GoI in 2005 estimated the number of children between 6 and 13 years old who are out of schools at 3 million (or 7 per cent of the population of that age group) (SRI, 2005: table A1).

⁵ From October 2006 onwards, employment of children as domestic workers or as servants in restaurants or hotels will become illegal.

is no longer politically acceptable to defend that some children do not need to go to school. The norm of universal elementary education has become dominant in public discourse, even though not always practiced in reality. This is also reflected in the adoption in 2002 of the 84th Constitutional Amendment, making free and compulsory education a fundamental right. The Planning Commission regards education as “the most critical element in empowering people with skills and knowledge and giving them access to productive employment in the future” (GoI, 2006: 45). The association of education with social and economic progress is also evident from the SSA logo, showing two children flying on a pencil, on the way to a bright future.

Many things have, hence, changed for the better. There is no doubt, however, that many needs are still far from fulfilled and that many problems continue to exist, as I have argued elsewhere (Mooij, forthcoming). But it is also not surprising that the mood within the government of India is optimistic, and that the 1990s have been coined the literacy decade. The Planning Commission (2006) lists many issues that have to be addressed in the 11th Plan, but also states that “[t]here has been considerable progress in enrolment and near 100% enrolment of 6-14 years olds is likely to be achieved by the end of the 10th Plan [in 2007]” (GoI, 2006: 45).

This positive picture about the achievements so far, and the urgent need to move on, is in contrast to the way in which government teachers themselves compare the present situation with the past. In fact, many are disheartened and complain about their work conditions (Ramachandran, 2005). Rather than progress, they emphasize that many things were better in the past. Ironically, they do not seem to have benefited from the fact that education is nowadays regarded as an absolutely essential input in development and economic growth.

This paper aims to investigate this paradox. How do teachers look at their own profession? Why are many teachers, despite obvious progress and widespread acknowledgement of the importance of education, demotivated and dissatisfied? The analysis is based on fieldwork in Andhra Pradesh in 2004 and 2005, and focuses on teachers in government schools – the majority of the teachers. In the next section, the methodology of the study will be briefly described. Section 3 analyses how teachers look at their own profession, while the fourth section tries to understand this against the changing context in which government school teachers work. The section focuses on two dimensions of this context, namely the increasing social division within the educational system, and administrative structures and changes therein. The fifth section concludes the paper, and argues in favour of a new professional ethos and culture.

2. Methodology

The fieldwork of the overall study ‘Palanquin Bearers: Education, Decentralization and Social Inequality’ took place in States of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in India. In each state, we selected two districts (one more educationally advanced, and one educationally less developed), and within each district, we selected two regions (again, on the basis of educational indicators). In each region, we did a school survey; a household survey; in-depth interviews with school principals; in-class observations; interviews with government officials, teachers union representatives, representatives of NGOs, members of school- or village-level school management bodies and others; child consultations, and focus group discussions with teachers. We complemented this with further interviews at the state level, and secondary material.

The present paper focuses on Andhra Pradesh only, a south Indian state, that is, relatively underdeveloped, with a population of approximately 70 million people. The literacy rate in Andhra Pradesh was 61 per cent in 2001 (as compared to 65 per cent for the whole of India) and its human development rank was 10 (of 15 major states in India).⁶ The two selected districts in Andhra Pradesh were Kurnool (relatively underdeveloped; literacy rate 54% in 2001) and East Godavari (literacy rate 65% in 2001).⁷

In the course of this study, we conducted 7 focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers, and it is especially (though not exclusively) these FGDs that provide the main inputs for the present paper. Generally, these FGDs were attended by about 20 teachers. They lasted a full day (from 10.00 am to 05.00 or 06.00 pm) and were held on Sundays or holidays. The participants were primary schoolteachers (i.e. teaching in class 1-7), occasionally high school teachers (class 8-10), and in rare cases teachers who had been selected to work for the government as ‘resource persons’ in the context of a government programme (the District Primary Education Programme, or the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan–Education For All). Almost all of them were government teachers. This is an important fact. A FGD with private school teachers would give a totally different picture. As will be clear below, many of the issues that were discussed are related specifically to government schools. We used different strategies to invite the teachers for the FGDs. One or more of the local branches of the teachers unions was sometimes helpful; we invited teachers in the schools that we had visited; we asked teachers to bring colleagues, etc. Both male and female

⁶ All figures from GoI (2002).

⁷ Figures from census, 2002. See, for instance, <http://www.educationforallinindia.com/page157.html>.

teachers were attending (but more male than female). The teachers were not paid for their presence, but they received Rs. 100 (about 2 euros) compensation for their travel costs, and they received a lunch and refreshments. The discussions were held in a neutral venue (a rented hall in a local restaurant or hotel). Government officials or other outsiders were not invited and did not attend.

All FGDs followed a similar set-up. After a brief introduction about the project and an ice-breaking exercise, the whole group was split up in 4 subgroups. Each subgroup was asked to prepare a short presentation on a particular topic. The topics were: 1) reasons for motivation or de-motivation, 2) changes in social status over time, 3) relationship with educational department, and 4) relationship with community. Each group received pencils and flip-over sheets to support their presentation. After 60-90 minutes, the first presentation started, followed by a discussion. This was repeated till we had had 4 presentations and 4 discussions. The discussion was moderated by one of the field researchers. The day ended with a vote of thanks. The whole day was recorded (not taped, but in a note book) by one of the field researchers. The two field researchers prepared a detailed report afterwards. The language during the day was Telugu, but the final report was prepared in English.

Generally, the FGDs were very interesting. It was striking how eager many teachers were to inform us about their problems and pleasures. Several expressed their appreciation afterwards: finally somebody seemed to be listening to their problems and was genuinely interested. Several teachers were extremely frank, for instance, in their description of themselves as totally de-motivated teachers. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind, of course, that what teachers say during events like these is meant for public consumption. It is their public discourse that is revealed. As such, however, the FGDs provided interesting information about how teachers see and wish to see their profession.

3. Teachers about their Profession

Joys and Frustrations

Each FGD started with a round in which each teacher briefly mentioned the best and the worst experience so far in his/her career. Although this question was only meant to function as an ice-breaker, the answers were very interesting. The request to mention a 'best moment' was evidently used by some to show off their achievements, and it is very likely that some of these accounts give a highly inflated picture of the real achievements. The recorded 'best moments' do, however, illustrate the list of issues that teachers are proud of. Table 1 summarizes these sources of pride and satisfaction.

Table 1: Analysis of Best Moments, as Reported by Teachers in the Focus Group Discussions.

Number of respondents: 127 (The total of column 2 is more than 127, as some teachers reported several experiences, and as experiences were occasionally double-coded)

Best Moment	Number of times reported
Appreciation from officials, including being awarded a prize (Out of which: getting a prize or an award)	31 (11)
Increasing enrolment figures	24
Getting a job as a teacher	24
Good performance of students (either collectively, or individual students)	23
Interest of parents or the community in the school	15
Success with regard to improving school infrastructure	12
Appreciation from the community or parents	8
Appreciation from the students	7
Enjoyment of preparing and using teaching and learning materials; using 'alternative' teaching methods	5
Trainings	4
Good relations with headmaster or colleagues	4
Organisation of cultural activities	3
Success in competition with local private school	3
Spending time with children, attachment to the children	3
Success in 'civilizing' the children or sanitizing the school premises (e.g. in convincing the children that they should dress well)	2
Increase in salary as result of the pay revision	2
Success in working against caste discrimination	2
Own personal development (in both cases, not by being a teacher, but by becoming a resource person)	2
Other reasons	4

One of the revealing facts was that, in a large number of cases, the description of the achievement was immediately followed by a sentence that the effort was appreciated by others, very often by someone within the government. To give a few illustrations from the field workers' reports:

Before he [a teacher] joined in the school, enrolment was very poor, and due to this reason, the MEO and MDO had decided to close the school in that village. But after he joined the school, he took the initiative and mobilized the community and due to his efforts all the school-age children enrolled in the school and the MDO and MEO appreciated him. He informed that this is best moment in his career. (31 October 2004, Adoni)⁸

⁸ Four FGDs were held in Kurnool district (two in Kurnool town, two in Adoni), and three in East Godavari district (two in Amalapuram and one in Rajamundry).

He informed that in his previous school he mobilized Rs 12,000/- money from the community for painting the school building and he was appreciated for getting good community support. He informed that it is the best moment in his career. (31 October 2004, Adoni)

In Parmanchala High school he was well appreciated by the community members for his contributions. He introduced school day celebrations in the school and conducts these every year. He also added that the parents of the children feel very happy when the children perform on the stage on the School day. He also added that the District Collector visited the school and all the teachers in his school were appreciated. The British High Commission also appreciated them for their good work. (11 June 2004, Kurnool)

These quotes suggest that the appreciation that is received for the 'good deeds' is sometimes perhaps of equal or more importance than the pleasure and satisfaction of 'doing good'. I think this is revealing, and will come back to this issue of appreciation below.

The second most recorded 'best moment' is the success with regard to increasing enrolment figures. This clearly reflects government policy. One of the main objectives of DPEP and SSA programmes is, after all, to increase enrolment figures. Within Andhra Pradesh, there is a lot of pressure on schools and teachers to make sure that 100% enrolment is achieved, even to the extent that false statistics are presented to the department.⁹ Although at other moments in the FGDs, the teachers expressed their frustration with the fact that they were forced to present false figures, it was obvious that some had become used to the practice of boosting numbers. One teacher, for instance, mentioned that he had succeeded in increasing enrolment from 30 to 300 students.

The responses in relation to the worst moments were also interesting. There were a number of teachers who claimed that they had not had any bad moment so far in their career, but many were very outspoken, and took the opportunity to complain about something they had problems with. Table 2 summarizes the results. As table 1, also this table illustrates the importance of appreciation. To quote a few instances:

⁹ The civil servant responsible for out-of-school children in east Godavari told me that there are ten times as many out-of-school children in his district than reported in the statistics. This, he said, is an effect of the permanent pressure to report progress.

In the last QIP (Quality Improvement Programme), she did a lot of hard work but she didn't get any recognition or appreciation from the officials and she didn't get any co-operation from the department. (31 October 2004, Adoni)

She came 15 minutes late to the school once and MEO (educational officer at the subdistrict level) gave her MEMO even though she is working hard in the school. (11 June 2004, Kurnool)

While only 15 of the 127 teachers mentioned this lack of appreciation as their (or one of their) worst moment (s), there was a much larger group that agreed with the fact that there is, indeed, a major problem in this regard.

Table 2: Analysis of Worst Moments, as Reported by Teachers in the Focus Group Discussions.

Number of respondents: 127 (Some teachers did not wish to mention any 'worst' moment. Others mentioned several points, or their response was double coded. As a result the total of column 2 is still more than 127).

Worst Moment	Number of times reported
Parents (or community) do not give enough importance to education	25
Efforts of teachers are not appreciated or supported by officials;	
abuse by officials	17
Remoteness of school; poor transport facilities	16
Problems related to service conditions	12
Being a single teacher, multi-grade teaching, not enough teachers	9
Politicization in the village; problems with the school education committee	8
Problems with the headmaster; not enough appreciation from the headmaster	7
Failure as teacher; inability to do justice to profession	7
Problems related to the midday meal	7
No respect from parents or community	6
Problems experienced by students (no blame on parents)	6
Caste discrimination of villagers or in class room	5
Poor infrastructure	5
General problems of the educational system	5
Others reasons	15

As table 1, also this table illustrates the importance of appreciation. To quote a few instances

Another issue frequently mentioned was the lack of parental support and interest in education. While table 1 suggests already that teachers value parental interest in education very much, table 2 shows that many are very unhappy in this regard. To illustrate:

He informed that in the last academic year he worked in a slum area. Most of the parents in this area are illiterates and they do not know the importance of education. Though all the teachers of the school did hard work to mobilize parents they did not show any interest to send their children to school. (7 August 2005, Rajamundry)

He expressed that though the present catchment area has majority of people from the forward caste yet they do not show interest in the education of the children as they think that they do not get jobs and it is no use even if they send their children for higher studies. So, most of the parents are not interested to send their girl child to school after completion of fifth grade and they involve them in agriculture or home based coir works. In the case of boys, most discontinue their education after 10th grade. He expressed that as a teacher he tried to counsel the parents and motivate them to send their children for higher studies but they simply ignore his request. He informed that most of the children are intelligent in the studies but because of their parents negligence they are not able to continue their studies. (25 April 2005, Amalapuram)

These complaints by teachers were genuine, in the sense that many of them were really convinced that parents lacked interest. Yet, it is my impression that the teachers are mistaken. In any case, our interviews with parents, the household survey and secondary material (e.g. probe, 1999) give a very different picture. Many parents would like their children to go to school. They see education as the main road towards upward social mobility. There is, however, a systematic failure in the relationship between the schools and the parents, which means that there is almost no way for parents to show their interest. Many (not all!) teachers do not welcome parents in the school. They cannot enter the class rooms. They are called or visited only in case of problems (or at flag-hoisting or other annual rituals in the school). Parent-teacher meetings, if they are held at all, focus primarily on enrolment and irregular attendance. Parents are lectured at best, scolded at worst about their inability to make their children go to school. It is this impossibility to relate to the school in a more constructive way that makes them, indeed, 'disinterested'. The teachers, however, do not see the 'lack of interest' as a relational issue, but put the blame exclusively on the parents.

The Teacher's Profession

Why do government teachers (want to) become teachers? This was one of the issues that came up during the discussion about motivation. Obviously, there were many different reasons.

When enquired about the reasons to become a teacher, some senior teachers expressed that the teacher's profession has a respectable status in the society and, thinking that this is better than any other job, they became teachers. They added that the future of the country is in the hands of the students and so by becoming teachers they would mould the children into good citizens and contribute towards the better future of the country. Some said that they took their own teachers as role models, and due to their respect for these teachers they became teachers themselves. But some younger teachers said that this is all very ideal thinking. In reality, they chose to be teachers because they have to earn their livelihood and it is a government job providing job security. Some of them said that they had no other option and therefore became teachers. (31 October 2004, Adoni)

Some of the teachers said that as their parents are teachers or as their spouse is a teacher, they have become teachers. There were also some teachers who said that they could not get any other better job so they have become teachers. (18 October, 2004, Adoni)

When enquired about the reason to become a teacher they expressed that teachers always had a good reputation in the society and teachers always had a special status. They added that teacher's profession is very dignified and respectful. They said that they would continue in this profession. However, during the discussions, there were also many who said that they opted for a teacher's profession because it gives job security and it is relatively easy to become a teacher. (7 August 2005. Rajamundry)

Parents are important, not only because they prefer a secure over a less secure profession, but also because, in quite a few instances, they were teachers themselves. But apart from this, it is possible to discern two kinds of arguments. One has to do with the development of the nation: moulding children into good citizens, or 'carving the future of the country', as one of the female teachers expressed it. The other has to do with more mundane considerations: it is relatively easy to get a job as a teacher; it gives a reasonable salary and secure income; and, often there is simply no better alternative. On the whole, the

younger teachers emphasized these more mundane considerations more while the elder generation is more inspired by the commendable higher ideals. All, however, emphasized the inherent respectability of the profession.

When the question was raised what they regard as an ideal teacher, there were, again, two kind of repertoires from which the teachers draw.

A good teacher should not only have a healthy relation with the community; he/she should also be affectionate towards the children, trying to satisfy their needs and becoming a role model for the children. He should have adequate knowledge about the subject and should be able to adapt to the changes in the teaching methods. He should also apply novel and better teaching methods with the cooperation of the colleagues and with the support of the headmaster. A good teacher should also identify the skills and weaknesses of the children. They added that a teacher must be dedicated to his profession and maintain good rapport with the community and his/her colleagues. (18 October, 2004, Adoni)

When enquired about qualities of the good teacher, the group reported that: the teachers should wear traditional dress when they go to school; there should be clarity in what they speak; the teacher should be dedicated to his profession and should be able to take timely decisions depending on the situation; teachers should be affectionate to children and should be loved by the children; they should be able to respect the opinion and views of the children and finally the teacher should have good knowledge on the subject. During the discussions they expressed that earlier the teachers used to wear dhoti and looked very respectable. But nowadays, teachers also wear jeans and T-shirt when they go to school. So there should be a dress code for the teachers. They said that teachers should be dedicated to their profession and they should be able to perform well even in difficult situations. If the teachers are dedicated, they will definitely be recognized by the society. They expressed that the performance and interest of the student in any subject depends on the faith and attachment on the teacher. So if a child has to perform well it is necessary that students should have faith in the teacher. The teachers should treat the children affectionately even if they come to school with dirt or even if they come from slums. (7 August, 2005, Rajamundry)

First, there is the 'role model' repertoire. Teachers should set an example for the students. They have to be dedicated; they have to be honest, and they have to be simple. Wearing a dhoti, in this perspective, is more appreciated than wearing jeans. In other FGDs, it was

remarked that teachers should not go to bars or entertainment clubs. This repertoire has clear associations with a Gandhian ideology of simplicity and truthfulness. The second repertoire emphasises the joyfulness of the learning experience. It emphasises the desirability of child-friendly and playful teaching methods, and is clearly inspired by the jargon of DPEP and SSA programmes.

One of the striking things here is the fact that, apart from the fact that teachers stress that they should feel the same kind of affection towards all children, whether poor or rich, filthy or clean, there is no reference to the fact that, in actual practice, government teachers are dealing almost exclusively with children of illiterate and poor households. With the spread of private English-medium education, many slightly better-off households have withdrawn their children from government schools. Yet, this phenomenon of a changing social background of the students has hardly penetrated the government teachers' discourse about their jobs. In their descriptions of best and worst moments it figures: both in the sense that they take pride in raising the performance of the children, and in the sense that they lament the 'illiteracy and unawareness' (terms often mentioned together) of the parents. In their conceptualisation of their profession, however, it plays no role. They still keep referring to very general notions of 'good citizenship' or 'the future of the nation'. They do not refer to their contribution to the empowerment of a so-far excluded section of the population, nor to social goals of equity, the creation of equal opportunities, empowerment, let alone, the creation of a less unfair world. This is a striking silence. Poverty and illiteracy are seen as problems, not as the core challenge of their profession. In that sense, teachers, as a group, are a-political.

When asked about their individual motivation and demotivation, the challenge of educating 'first generation learners' was occasionally mentioned, but other factors were often more important. Apart from the issue of social status, respect and appreciation, factors that motivate teachers have to do with school infrastructure, availability of teaching aids, affection of the children, good training programmes and community support. Strong demotivators are the increasing amount of non-academic work (i.e. filling in forms, reporting progress), difficulties with officials, unfavourable student/teacher ratios, the necessity of multi-grade teaching, lack of support from the community, political interference and over-qualification. Most teachers emphasize, by the way, that their motivation has increased over time (although some drew revealing graphs indicating a clear downward motivation slope).

Social Status, Respect and Appreciation

The reported increase in motivation is in stark contrast with the description of the decline in the social status of the teachers. In all 7 FGDs, the teachers agreed uniformly that there has been a considerable decline in their social status over the years. In the past

The teacher used to be a guide and an advisor for the village but he no more enjoys a similar position at present. (22 April 2005, Amalapuram)

The community vested lot of trust in teachers and they used to approach teachers for any sort of advice or assistance. They used to feel that the teacher is a God. (Guru Brahma) (9 June 2004, Kurnool)

The teachers reported that in the past the parents or the community used to visit the school out of respect. The parents used to visit teachers for any kind of help or suggestion, even regarding issues of day-to-day activities. (18 October 2004, Adoni)

Nowadays the situation is different.

The teachers clarified that earlier everyone considered teachers as a Guru not as a government servant but now there is a clear hierarchy in the government system thus from a politician to a common person. Teachers are treated as government servants. (7 August 2005, Rajamundry)

At present there is a poor impression about the teachers and their performance in the schools. Due to this the teachers are not well treated or respected, and they are no longer supported by the community. (18 October 2004, Adoni)

The most reported reasons behind this decline in social status include the amount on non-academic work, which forces teachers to spend less time on teaching; the fact that they no longer reside in the villages; the appointment of volunteers or para-teachers, suggesting that anybody who has studied 10+2 years can become a teacher; political interference in the schools; and their own indulgence in bad habits (drinking, visiting clubs, etc.).

Two phenomena are worth noting. The first has to do with the contradictory effects of village/rural development. Due to increased levels of literacy, the presence of television and newspapers, and the intensified interaction between village and town, the teachers have lost some of their magic charm. They are no longer the only persons who are educated.

They are no longer needed to bring news or inform villagers about the world outside their village. Their role to inform, explain and give advice has largely disappeared. This, however, has not led to a more equal relationship between the village community and the teachers. In fact, the tensions have only increased. This has to do with the second phenomenon, the widening social class gap between the teacher and the students. On the one hand, the present students in government schools are almost all children of households that were, so far, excluded from the educational system. On the other hand, the teachers themselves have been upwardly mobile. Over the years, and especially after the introduction of the recommendations of the 5th Pay Commission in 1998, the salaries of the teachers have increased, with considerable consequences.

At present the teachers are paid adequate salaries with incentives and most of them are reluctant to stay in the village in which they work. The improvement in the economic status of the teachers has made them conscious of their class and increased the gap between the teachers and the community. (22 April 2005, Amalapuram)

Teachers have started to see themselves as members of the middle class, and acquired middle class tastes and preferences. Together with this newly acquired middle class consciousness, there has been a mass migration of teachers to the towns. As a result, their presence in the villages has become much less. At best, they are commuting teachers; at worst they have become absent. This has had a very negative impact on their command of respect in the villages. In other words, their economic status has gone together with a decline in their social status.

Teachers remain self-critical about their middle-class identity. The fact that they no longer live in the villages is mentioned by themselves as one of the main reasons for the decline in respect, and, in meetings like the FGDs, they publicly condemn habits like drinking, smoking, wearing jeans, visiting 'entertainment clubs and neglecting their duties'. It is obvious that the new lifestyle that some of the teachers have started to enjoy does not fit in very well with the idea of the teacher as a morally superior and simple human being, the role model for young children, that many of them continue to associate with the teaching profession.

The new class status of the teachers, in the context of an overall booming middle class, has resulted in new aspirations for their own children. During the whole period of our fieldwork, we have met very few government teachers who have their children in the school in which they were teaching themselves. In fact, one of the main arguments for out-migration has

been the absence of English-medium educational facilities for their own children. And this is the irony: while they sincerely regret the decline in their social status, their occupation has also lost importance in their own eyes. They do not value Telugu-medium education themselves. They think that a career in a government school is worth much less than a career in an English-medium private school. Telugu-medium education is something for others, not for their own kind of people.

Whatever the contradictions, teachers would like to regain some of their position and respect. First, they emphasize that teachers can still be respected.

During the discussion some of the teachers expressed that a good and hardworking teacher always gets respect from the community, and that, even in the present condition, he is treated with respect by the community. One of the teachers reported that it is also true that community encourages and supports hardworking teachers. (31 October 2004, Adoni)

Some teachers, however, said that they have been maintaining cordial relation with the community. They emphasized that the relation between the teacher and community depends completely on the teacher. Every one in the village will respect a teacher who is hard working and sincere. (11 June 2004, Kurnool)

The respect that they refer to in these two quotes is, however, fundamentally different from the earlier form of respect, since it has to be earned, and does not come automatically with the position.

Second, they desperately seek appreciation from their superiors within the government. It is against this background of the overall decline in the social respect for government teachers, that we have to understand their craving for respect and appreciation from the educational department. This yearn is, for instance, clear from the importance that individual teachers give to 'best teacher' and similar awards, even though everybody knows that the awarding process is partly politicised (as also reported in the FGDs). Individual teachers are very interested in a word of praise, and collectively they conclude that the lack of praise is one of the main factors de-motivating teachers.

When discussing recommendations for making the teachers profession more attractive and to increase the status of the teachers, they expressed that teachers put in a lot of hard work but they receive not even a token of appreciation and this leads to de-motivation for many teachers. They suggested that the

higher authorities should encourage hard working teachers by giving awards and appreciation. (7 August 2005, Rajamundry)

The crave for recognition even goes to the extent that they would welcome more serious monitoring and inspection.

There is a general frustration that there is no proper inspection. “The MEO just comes for formality sake. The whole inspection is a formality. The message is: here I am; I have done the inspection”. Even though there are many officials, they are not supervising. They do not give any guidelines. The teachers expressed that they want more inspections. (31 October 2004, Adoni)

It is clear that, in whatever form, the teachers would really appreciate some positive attention from the department. The way they formulate this desire echoes the way they talk about their own relationships with children. As teachers they should be understanding and affectionate towards the children and listen to them. Similarly, they recommend that

The department should attend to the problems of teachers and provide them with quick solutions. The department should learn to appreciate and encourage the hard working teachers (7 August 2005, Rajamundry).

The higher officials should be trained first in human psychology. They should be taught to appreciate good work and make constructive criticism, which should be like a suggestion. They should also understand human limitations. (11 June 2004, Kurnool)

4. The Changing Context of the Government School teacher

The analysis in the previous section highlighted several joys and frustrations, sources of (dis)satisfaction and ambiguous feelings of the teachers vis-à-vis their profession and working conditions. These observations point to, and reflect, features of, and contradictions within, the wider context in which teachers work. In this section, two dimensions of this context are described in more detail. These are related to 1) divisions within the educational system, and 2) the administrative structure in which teachers work.

Increasing Divisions Within the Educational System

One of the major trends in education is the increasing importance of private schooling. Private schools exist already for a long time in India, but the phenomenon has become

much more important in the last 10-20 years. Almost a quarter of the children going to (primary or upper) primary school (class 1-7) in Andhra Pradesh goes to a private school nowadays. In Hyderabad, this is about two thirds. See table 3. In many rural areas, there are not (yet) many private schools, but some of the children, especially of the better-off and educated families, commute or live elsewhere in order to attend a private school.

Table 3: Rise of Private Schooling in Andhra Pradesh

	Andhra Pradesh		Hyderabad	
	1995-96	2004-05	1995-06	2004-05
Total no of primary and upper primary schools	56423	78347		3138
No. of private unaided schools (primary and upper primary)	3192	9147		1945
% of private unaided schools (out of total schools)	5.7	11.7		62.0
% of school-going children enrolled in private unaided schools	10.3	22.8		68.0

Sources: Department of School Education and Office District Educational Officer Hyderabad

There are different kinds of private schools. The administrative distinctions that are made are between aided and unaided, and between recognized and unrecognized schools. Aided schools have a private management, but the salaries, infrastructure and textbooks come by and large from the government. Historically, they were often founded by philanthropists or charitable trusts. Their number has not expanded very much in the last decade. Unaided schools have a private management and are privately funded. This means that they are run primarily on the basis of fees. It is especially these fee-demanding schools that are becoming more and more important.

Within this category of unaided schools, there is an enormous variety, ranging from so-called international schools, with large campuses, extensive sport facilities including a swimming pool, AC coach services to and from the school, sometimes residential facilities, and fees of about Rs. 50,000-100,000 per year (i.e. 10000-20000 euros). These schools are for the upper classes, and children from non-residential Indians. At the other end, there are private unrecognized schools that charge a fee of Rs. 50 per month per child or less. The facilities of these latter schools are sometimes comparable to those in government schools. The difference is that teacher absenteeism is lower in the private schools, and so are the

educational qualifications of the teachers. While some teachers in unrecognized private schools have sometimes not studied further than their intermediate years (i.e. 10+2), teachers in government schools are all trained teachers.¹⁰ The number of unrecognized schools is not exactly known. The phenomenon of private schooling is therefore more widespread than the official figures suggest, as many private schools are not recognized and therefore not included in the government statistics.¹¹ In a street-by-street survey in two wards in Hyderabad, I found that about half of the schools were unrecognized.¹²

The rise of private schooling is directly related to the importance attributed to English as medium of instruction. Almost all private schools are English-medium, or they claim to be English-medium. English, already the language of an elite in colonial India, has become very important for a much larger group of people in the last one or two decades. Schooling in prestigious English-medium schools has become part of normal middle-class childhood and adolescence, and huge donations are sometimes made to secure admission in top schools (Lakha, 1999: 258). For the middle classes, proficiency of the English language 'is a form of cultural capital that serves to secure their middle class status' (Scrase, 2004: 3). This, as Scrase argues for West Bengal, is not only true for the rich, but also for the lower middle class. The same phenomenon seems to be true for Andhra Pradesh. A mandal-level politician in East Godavari, for instance, told me that her son (about 10 years old) was not going to the local government school, but travelled every day with about ten other children in an auto rickshaw to a school in a nearby town.

We cannot communicate with you directly. We want our son to be able to talk to people like you without the need for an interpreter.

This boy was no exception. Many village schools in East Godavari are exclusively populated by first generation learners, often of poor households. All the other school children commute to nearby towns, live with their grandparents, aunts or uncles somewhere else or go to boarding schools.¹³ Lower middle class parents make huge sacrifices sometimes to enable

¹⁰ A necessary side comment here is that during the last few years, the government has also started to appoint so-called volunteers, called Vidya volunteers in Andhra Pradesh, who take over regular teaching activities from the teachers in government schools.

¹¹ The Hyderabad figures of table 3 for 2004-2005 include 349 private unaided unrecognized schools. These were listed by the District Educational Office of Hyderabad. The Hyderabad District Educational Officer told me, however, that he thought there were about 800 unrecognized schools (interviews September 2005).

¹² The two (electoral) wards in which I conducted a survey were Somajiguda and Sultan Shahi. Six of the 14 schools in Somajiguda were unrecognized; in Sultan Shahi this was 12 out of 22.

¹³ In Kurnool, where literacy rates were lower anyhow, this trend was not yet as out-spoken as in East Godavari.

their children to go to English-medium schools. Although I have not studied the phenomenon in much detail, it is evident that for many people English language proficiency is an important class marker and a prerequisite to fulfil their upwardly mobile aspirations.

Coming back to the increasing importance of private education, the irony is that the exodus of more well-to-do children from government schools comes more or less at the time that universal education becomes within reach. As a result, government schools are to a large extent populated by so-called first generation learners, often from poor economic backgrounds.

This fact is well-known in India. What is less reflected upon, however, is that this trend challenges the positive liberal discourse about education in a fundamental way. As mentioned already in the introduction, there is a broad consensus that universal education is a priority and precondition for development. Two kinds of arguments are underpinning this consensus. One is Amartya Sen's argument focusing on individual human capabilities. Education is seen as one of such capability, and as crucial for enjoying a better quality of life; it affects individual opportunities to participate in economic growth; it is, therefore, an important component of a person's freedom (Sen, 1993; Drèze and Sen, 2002). The second line of argumentation stresses the importance of education for economic development. Education is seen in terms of human resource development, and therefore as an input in economic development. Some government documents rely (in part) on this perspective, and argue, for instance, that 'outlays on education are an investment and not an expenditure' (GoAP, 1999: 73). Although different, both arguments are complementary. They are both optimistic about the potential of education. They regard education as crucial for progress and growth, for enhancing opportunities and for making economic development more inclusive.

The increasing importance of English-medium private education catering for the elite and different sections of the middle class, parallel to government schooling in the local language in poorly endowed schools mainly for children of poor and uneducated households, raises a number of uncomfortable questions regarding the liberal perspective. Is universal education able to challenge the existing social divide? To what extent does the educational system transform or reproduce social inequalities? Given the existence of parallel streams, will universalization of education really lead to a more inclusive society? In other words, how valid is the liberal perspective? Is it not blind to important social divisions within Indian society, and within the educational system?

I will not be able to answer these questions exhaustively here, but I would like to suggest

that there are at least four reasons to take these questions seriously. The first has to do with the risk that quality of education in government schools goes down once educated and more well-to-do people withdraw their children from government schools. Their exodus means that a kind of natural accountability, where parents can hold the teacher accountable because they are like peers, is absent. There is, indeed, a systematic accountability failure in primary education in India (PROBE team, 1999; Sen, 2001) and this is, in part, related to the lack of power of parents or local communities over teachers. The second has to do with language. As much as the English language unites educated Indians from different regions and cultural backgrounds and connects them with the rest of the world, it excludes those who have not been part of this educational system, especially since the level of teaching English in government schools is not very high. The third has to do with educational inflation. The higher the number of educated people and the higher their levels of education, the less the value of educational qualifications. This inflation is already very visible in India. There are many educated young people who are unable to secure a job matching their educational qualifications. Related to this is a fourth reason: it is ultimately the availability of work/employment and the characteristics of the labour market that determine whether or not educational qualifications will lead to a higher income and inclusion in productive economic activities. It may be that a significant skilling of the labour force will lead to an intensification of entrepreneurial activities and an increase of productivity. But it seems unlikely that skilling people without creating employment opportunities at the same time is sufficient to create a more inclusive society. Yet, this was exactly what happened throughout the 1990s. The 'education for all' campaign got its momentum at a time that 'employment for all' was certainly not on the political agenda (i.e. briefly after the initiation of the economic reform process).¹⁴

Given these trends, it is surprising that the liberal discourse has not been challenged much more systematically in India but that almost all policy documents as well as many academic publications remain fully optimistic about the emancipatory promises of education. This is different from the European and North American situation, where a similar optimistic vision has been seriously scrutinized. In these contexts, Marxist and other scholars have argued that education cannot and will not contribute significantly to a more inclusive development. On the contrary, they argued that the educational system only serves to reproduce a particular social order and class relations, rather than challenge these (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). This is not necessarily a functionalistic argument. Paul Willis (1981), for instance, showed in an interesting ethnography how working class 'lads' prepare

¹⁴ The Congress(I)-led coalition government that won the Parliament elections in 2004 seems to be more serious about employment again.

themselves, in the school, and through the development of a counter-school culture, to working class jobs. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) analyse how the educational system selects and excludes. In the process, it legitimises a class society where those who have ‘cultural capital’ continue to rule, justified on the basis of ‘objective’ tests and ‘fair’ meritocratic selection procedures.

In Europe and North America, this radical critique is no longer marginal, but accepted by many people, and elements of the argument have found their way into policy domains. This ‘reproduction’ argument is, however, totally disregarded in development contexts. The literature on, and lobby in favour of, the Millennium Development Goals, for instance, keeps promising a more inclusive and egalitarian future once everybody is educated. Also within India, as argued before, policy speech is optimistic about the promises of universal education. Reproduction arguments have been developed by some,¹⁵ but they have not been picked up by policy makers within the government or by the main NGOs working in education. Within the mainstream, there is some dissatisfaction and critique,¹⁶ but this relates to the speed of the process, not to the direction or underlying assumptions. This optimism is convenient, of course. Basically, it allows for ‘doing good’ without addressing class. After all, the reproduction argument would force policy makers to look beyond universal education and address the issue of social hierarchies within the educational system.

If we look at government school teachers against this background, it is perhaps no longer surprising that they do not share the optimist perspective of the government. More than anybody else, they are confronted with the existing social divisions in the educational system and dilemmas that come with it. They teach in government schools but their own children (or their younger siblings, nephews and nieces) go to private schools. They know that they will never be able to offer their own students the facilities and classes that they would find acceptable for their own children, because – despite the rhetoric to prioritise education – there is not enough money. It is not surprising, therefore, that they do not share the positive mood that prevails within the government.

On the whole, however, they have not started to critique the system. On the contrary, many accept the social divide. Many teachers tend to rationalize it by emphasizing the difference between themselves and the parents, between their own children and their students, and they often do not expect much from the students they teach. Perhaps,

¹⁵ See, for instance, various contributions in Chopra and Jeffery (eds.) (2005) or Mukherjee and Vasanta (2002).

¹⁶ See, for instance, GoI (2006).

surprisingly, caste is rarely referred to by the teachers to distinguish themselves from their students. But, indeed, the caste background of the teachers and students in the schools of our sample did not differ much (although the ‘other caste’ category is somewhat over-represented amongst the teachers). See table 4. The difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is one of educational background and lifestyle, i.e. class-related factors, rather than caste.

Table 4: Caste Background of Teachers and Students

	Kurnool		East Godavari	
	Students (n = 13683)	Teachers (n = 326)	Students (n = 12415)	Teachers (n = 373)
Scheduled Caste	21	17	19	14
Scheduled Tribe	1	7	23	20
Backward Caste	61	39	37	29
Other Caste	7	24	20	25
Minorities	10	13	1	11
Total	100	100	100	100

As discussed earlier, teachers complain about the decline in their social status. The underlying cause – the increased importance of English-medium education – is, however, hardly mentioned, let alone critiqued as an expression of India’s class structure. Teachers are therefore not only products of the class structure, but also accomplices in the reproduction of this structure in the realm of education. In fact, there is an opportunity lost here – an issue to which I will come back in the last section of this paper.

Changes in the Educational Bureaucracy

Given the fact that government teachers are professionally trained, it is surprising how little decision making powers teachers or school headmasters have. There are virtually no decisions that can be taken by teachers individually or collectively at school level. Headmasters of primary and upper primary schools have very little decision space,¹⁷ as is clear from table 5.

Teachers have to a large extent internalised this utterly centralized set-up, and many would be reluctant to take up more responsibilities. There are only a few areas in which they

¹⁷ Decision space refers to the “range of effective choice that is allowed by the central authorities (...) to be utilized by local authorities (...)” (Bossert, 1998: 1518). The space is often defined by rules and regulations, but is, in the end, the outcome of a social process.

would like to have more decision space or in which they claim more space. The most important one relates to teaching methods. Teachers feel very strongly that teaching methods should not be prescribed, but that the teachers should be sovereign in this regard. This outspokenness can be understood as a response to the trainings they have been following in the context of the DPEP or SSA programmes, in which activity-based play-way methods were promoted. Several teachers mentioned to us that they really appreciated these trainings, but many mentioned a) that it is very hard to apply these methods in overcrowded classrooms and in a situation of multi-grade teaching, and b) that activity-based methods make it very difficult to complete the syllabus, and are, therefore, only applicable to the lower grades. In addition to this issue of methods, headmasters feel strongly that they should have more powers with regard to personnel issues: they should be able to take disciplinary action against under-performing teachers, and should be involved in the selection of para-teachers (the Vidya-volunteers). In the case of almost all other functions, most teachers and headmasters do not complain about their restricted decision space.¹⁸

This consent does not mean, however, that they are happy with the administrative set-up and culture of the educational department. One persistent complaint is the lack of appreciation and the presumed deliberate effort to humiliate teachers. Again, from one of the FGDs:

They (the teachers) reported that the officials always try to find fault with the teachers' work and do not even give a word of appreciation to a hard working teacher. In case if a teacher does some mistake during Janmabhoomi or Chaduvula Pandaga (two government programmes) the higher officials yell at teachers in the presence of the community members. This is very embarrassing for the teachers and reduces the respect the community has towards teachers. (18 October

¹⁸ There are exceptions, of course, and some teachers are willing to take initiatives even without permission. One headmaster in Nandyal, for instance, told us that he likes to take his students out on tours and excursions. "The MEO is, however, not interested as he thinks it is very risky. Yet, every year, I am taking the children out at my own risk. Last year, I got a memo from the MEO. The MEO said I had not asked for prior permission. I had sent a letter to ask for permission, but I had not received an answer, and we had gone. Afterwards, I sent an explanation letter to the MEO. Sometimes, we have to take some risk to win the hearts of the children and parents". (Interview September, 2004).

20004, Adoni)

Table 5: Decision Space of Headmasters (Primary and Upper Primary Schools)

Andhra Pradesh		
	Range of Choice	Comments, as made by headmasters in a group interview,
Kurnool, October 2004		
PERSONNEL		
Recruitment of teachers; promotions, transfers	No	"We can bring vacancy to the notice of the MEO"
Disciplinary action	No	"We can report the matter to the MEO. The only power we have is to grant special and casual leave"
Incentives to teachers	Restricted	"There are no methods to reward teachers, except by giving appreciation" "We can nominate them for 'best teacher' awards" A fundamental difficulty is, however, that the headmasters felt they cannot assess the quality of their teachers.
Trainings	No	No possibility to recommend teachers for particular trainings
Selection of para-teachers/volunteers	No	"The SEC recommends and the DEO appoints"
Training of volunteers	No	This is done by the government. Of course, a headmaster can do something informally, but "there is no guarantee that the volunteer will be appointed again next year. Why should we invest our time?"
CONTENT OF EDUCATION		
Curriculum	No	"This should be set at the central or state level"
Syllabus	No	"This should be set at the central or state level"
Textbooks	No	"Teachers are consulted, and their experience is reflected in the textbooks." One of the six headmasters was in favour of district-level books for subjects like social or environmental studies.
Teaching methods	Restricted, But claimed	The government imposes activity-based methods, but "teachers are best aware of the environment in which they teach". It is in this area that they claim decision space: "When the DIET lecturers give their classes, we pretend to agree, but we do not follow them".
Student assessment	Restricted But not used	"In standard 1 to 5, we could assess the way we want, but class 6 and 7 have to do the exams of the Common Examination Board exams." None of the six headmasters had, however, ever experimented with other assessment methods. "The MEO gives us forms (mark registers) on which we have to fill in the marks of the quarterly and annual exam" "How can we use the note books to evaluate students, when parents are too poor to buy notebooks?" "It is only possible to do a continuous assessment of the students when you have 20 students in the class, and not more".
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE		
School timings	No	"The DEO should decide this".
Detaining students	No	There is a state-wide no-detention policy.
Relationship with parents	No But sabotaged	The dates for PTA and SEC meetings are prescribed by the department. "The government should not impose these dates. It should be done as per the convenience of the people". But in most cases, the meetings are not held anyway. "Our meetings are limited to minute books".
FINANCE		
Teaching material	Restricted	Every teacher gets Rs. 500 to purchase teaching material. "As long as we produce the right bills, nobody does any verification".
School development fund	Restricted	There are strict rules for which purposes this fund can be used.
Raising money by introducing fees	No	This is not possible.
Raising money by finding sponsors	Restricted	The headmasters in this interview had never tried this. "I simply have never thought of the possibility of raising money". In other districts, however, schools are encouraged to seek donations from individual or institutional sponsors.

But apart from that, teachers complain about an excessive non-academic workload, and about the absence of academic guidance, inspection and constructive feedback. Evidence supporting both grievances could easily be found in interviews with people within the educational department, or observations in schools, offices or during meetings. Mandal educational officers (MEOs) complain that they do not have time to visit schools; some mandal resource persons admitted that they never give model classes (as they are supposed to do); they visit the schools regularly, but this is only to pass on information from the department and/or to collect forms. Jokingly, they are therefore referred to by teachers as the postmen of the MEO.

The non-academic workload that teachers complain about refers to different types of tasks. Teachers have election duties, participate in census operations, pulse polio campaigns, economic surveys and other activities that have nothing to do with education *per se*.¹⁹ Apart from this, there is an amazing amount of forms and registers that has to be filled in every month. In one school, we counted 22 registers that have to be maintained. School inspection is, by and large, reduced to a check whether the registers are maintained properly. Apart from that, there are many forms that have to be submitted on a regular basis to the MEO office. In the course of our fieldwork, we came across several forms that were so repetitive and demanded such detail that the teachers' and headmasters' resentment became very understandable to us.²⁰ There is, indeed, an excessive demand for statistics to monitor progress.

This trend towards checking progress and performance fits within a larger pattern within Andhra Pradesh. The Chief Minister who ruled the state between 1995 and 2004, Chandrababu Naidu, had made 'governance' one of the key areas in which he wanted to make a mark. His inspiration came from new public management theories. In the book in which he explained and justified his intentions, he wrote, for instance, that '[a]t the heart of the administrative reform we are attempting is the change in role for the government from being actor, to enabler and facilitator' (Naidu with Ninan, 2000: 12). 'The machinery which attempts to run the state needs an urgent overhaul itself. It is huge and self-

¹⁹ There has been a Government Order making it more difficult to involve teachers in these activities, but, in the view of many teachers, this GO has been of little effect.

²⁰ To illustrate, as part of a campaign to make schools clean and green, there was a monthly form with entries about 1) extent of plants planted upto the month (ha), 2) number of plants planted upto the month, 3) extent of plants planted during the month (ha), 4) number of plants planted during the month; 5) cumulative extent (ha) upto the end of the month; 6) cumulative number upto the end of the month; 7) number died during the month; 8) number replaced during the month; 9) number survived at the end of the month; 10) survival percentage.

perpetuating. It is slow and accountable to nobody. Above all, it is obstructive. It essentially exists for itself, not for public service' (*ibid*: 45). Governance, therefore, should become more result oriented. This was attempted, for instance, by a move towards performance-oriented budgeting, an intensification of performance assessments within the bureaucracy, regular video conferences with district-level officials to assess progress at the district level, the development of targets within the bureaucracy and ranking districts and institutions with the help of these targets (Mooij, 2003).

In the area of education, this performance orientation is visible particularly in the continuous need to fill in forms, and the use of targets to monitor progress. In this process, performance is reduced to a number of measurable indicators. Qualitative aspects of classroom practices and teacher-student interaction are ignored. Inspection has become minimalized and ritualised, because the MEOs and mandal resource persons also have their targets of numbers of schools to visit in a week. Meaningful feedback is rarely given, and there is no accountability. The result is that, "almost paradoxically, teachers are both controlled and neglected" (Majumdar (2005: 11).

Moreover, since officials higher up in the educational bureaucracy demand progress, teachers are forced to fill in false data. A teacher and office bearer in one of the teachers unions in East Godavari narrated the following (interview April 2005):

The MEO has made it clear that he wants to have 100 percent enrolment, and 0 per cent child labour. But, there are two types of child labour. One type consists of children who do not like to go to school, and then their parents send them to the field. This can be eradicated. But the other type consists of sons in female-headed households. The family would starve without the son's income. We cannot force these children into the school. But the DEO has told the MEO that there should be no child labour. The MEO organised a meeting and said: "All the other mandals have 100 per cent enrolment. We are much ahead. Why don't we have 100 per cent enrolment? I don't know what you do, but I want 100 per cent enrolment." So, what we do is that we state that there is no child labour, even when there is.

(...) The DEO wants 80 or 85 per cent exam results. In a public meeting he has said: I don't know what you do, but I want 85 per cent. If you don't get it, I will cut your increments. The headmasters then run to their schools and pass the message on to the teachers. But, of course, it is impossible. There are children who hardly come to the schools. But when the DEO fixes the targets, we will fix the matches. So, what happens is that the teachers help the students with their

exams. We are very well aware that we are losing respect in society because of this. Children will tell their parents, of course.

I am not aware of a case in which increments are really cut, but the threat is there, and we have to oblige. Once there was a headmaster who said in a meeting that it was impossible to get these results. The District Collector scolded him in public and said that he was a useless fellow. It was very humiliating, and the headmaster was crying. The lesson was clear to all of us: shut up, and do as told. (In another interview, a teacher joked that the Board exams, (called after the examination board) are board exams in the other sense: answers are written on the black board.)

The focus on results in education has, hence, led to a number of undesirable practices. More generally, we can note that, while in the new public management doctrine a focus on results goes together with some delegation, decentralisation or contractual relationships – and, in the end, it is the output or outcome for which the executing agencies can be held to account and not the way in which they managed to get there – the performance orientation in Andhra Pradesh has not diminished centralization and bureaucratic control of the traditional public administration. New targets and forms of progress monitoring have only been added on to already existing hierarchical control practices. The result is an administrative system that combines the worst of both worlds – and that fails to motivate teachers to do a better job. In fact, we can perhaps say that it is despite, rather than because of, the educational bureaucracy that some teachers remain motivated.

5. Towards a New Professionalism?

This paper had as its point of departure a paradox: on the one hand, the need for universal education has become widely accepted, and the importance attributed to education has never been as large as it is at present; on the other hand, government school teachers do not seem to have benefited from this. Many feel that they are held in low esteem, and some are outrightly unhappy in their profession. In a more detailed analysis of the way in which teachers look at their profession, it became clear that, although some are very motivated, all agree that there has been a significant decline in their social status. While, in their own account, in the past, teachers were seen as ‘gurus’, with an important and respected role in village life more generally, they are now faced with regular harassments, humiliations and indifference towards the academic side of their work.

These dissatisfactions of teachers and ambiguous feelings about their profession have to be understood in the context of the rise of private English-medium schooling, and changing

practices within the educational bureaucracy. The growing demand for private English-medium education is the result of an expansion of the middle class. The resulting cleavage within the educational system is, hence, an expression of India's class structure. Government teachers reproduce this cleavage in several ways. Over the years, they started to see themselves as members of a middle class, rather than as similar to the children and parents they are dealing with in the schools. Their own children, therefore, go to English-medium schools. They have lowered their expectations of the schools in which they teach, and of their students. They lament a decline in their social status, but, contradictorily, also in their own eyes, it is second-rate education that they are providing. On the whole, they are not conceptualising the social division in political terms: as an expression of class relations. In that sense, teachers are not politicised.

The changing practices within the educational system, as I have argued, are related to an attempt to introduce elements of New Public Management. The introduction of a performance orientation and targets has, however, not gone together with management at arm-length, as also advocated in New Public Management. On the contrary, the bureaucracy remains centralized and the focus on results has only led to new forms of control. As a result, teachers are faced not only with a lot of additional administrative work, but also with ever increasing guidelines and instructions. Their professional expertise is hardly valued or trusted, let alone relied upon or made use of.

If this analysis is right, two things are needed. The first is a new professional ethos and culture. Teachers need to be seen, and behave, as professional educators, capable of making pedagogical and other decisions individually or collectively. They are all trained as teachers; they have experience and should be able, and allowed to, make their own judgements and act accordingly. This confidence in their professional expertise does not mean that there would be no need for in-service training. This could still be very useful, but the topic and content could be decided by teachers or their professional associations, and should not necessarily be the same for everybody. It should also be academic performance that is assessed, rather than all kind of administrative details. All this requires a major change in the educational bureaucracy: most importantly, a willingness to hand over responsibilities and decision-making powers to schools, and a focus on quality rather than numbers.²¹ It

²¹ The establishment of local level committees (village education committees, school education committees) is currently seen by many as a solution to overcome the malaise of government schools. The experiences are mixed so far. I would suggest that community or parent involvement can only work in a more decentralized administrative context. Local level committees can only hold local-level decision makers to account! If decisions are taken at higher levels, we cannot expect local level committees to challenge these.

also requires a change in the mindset of teachers: from ‘making out’ and risk aversion, to a willingness to define professional goals (rather than letting others define them), and taking the responsibility to meet them.

Secondly, there is a need to address the deepening class division in education. A uniform system with only government schools is, of course, no realistic alternative. But it would perhaps be good to include private schools in the ‘access for all’ campaign. Furthermore, the introduction of English as a subject in the lower classes taught by well-trained English-speaking teachers could help in narrowing the gap, and getting some middle class children back into the government schools.

Who could be the carriers of such changes? This is not an easy question. Centralization is an entrenched characteristic of the Indian bureaucracy, and has created particular sets of vested interests. Teachers themselves have also internalised the situation, in the sense that they find it difficult to see alternatives. Similarly, it would be unrealistic to expect teachers, who have themselves developed into members of the middle class, to become critical about India’s class structure and the way it is reproduced within the educational system.

Perhaps the best-placed organisations to address both needs are the teachers’ unions. Unlike, for instance in West Bengal, the AP unions distance themselves from government policies and practices and are independent. Although at present, their main focus is on service conditions, several teachers unions in AP have a history of radical activism. Some have been closely associated with the radical left in the Telangana region. In the course of my research, I have interviewed many office bearers of several unions. They share the dissatisfactions that were also voiced during the focus group discussions. Moreover, they have articulate, sometimes charismatic and politically thinking people. But whether they would be able to contribute to these two developments – i.e. 1) to move away from the ‘teacher as guru’ concept, but to develop a more political narrative in terms of empowerment of so-far excluded sections of the population, and 2) to stimulate professionalism amongst teachers, and claiming more decision space at school levels – is still to be seen. And also perhaps to explore in further research.

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