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Para Teachers in India:

A Review

by

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Section I

Context of Teacher Management in India

Introduction

School education system in India has witnessed rapid growth and unprecedented level of attention from educational planners and policy makers during the last decade and a half. In fact, the system has been expanding consistently since 1950 when the country began to reshape the elite oriented system inherited from the British colonial rulers to a system of mass education. However, a significant surge ahead in the number of educational institutions began with the National Policy on Education – 1986 and picked up further momentum in the 1990s with the launch of District Primary Education Programme and more recently the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the flagship programme of Government of India for achieving the goal of EFA in a Mission mode. The basic education system, which consisted of around 200,000 schools in 1950, has expanded to more than 800,000 in 2004. The growth has been particularly impressive in the decade of 1990s. During the same period enrolment increased from mere 22.3 million to 155.7 million. (See Table 1) An estimated 95% of the rural population living in 826,000 habitations have a primary school within 1 km. and about 85% population have an upper primary school within 3 km.

Table 1: Progress in Education Since 1950

Indicators	1950-51	1999-2000
Primary Schools (Grades 1-5)	210,000	642,000
Upper Primary Schools (Grades 6-8)	13,600	198,000
Teachers in Primary	538,000	1.919 million
Teachers in Upper Primary	86,000	1.298 million
Enrolment in Primary	19.2 million	113.61 million
Enrolment in Upper Primary	3 million	42 million
Public Expenditure on Education (% of GDP)	0.68%	3.77% (1998)
Literacy	16.6%	65.40%

Apart from this expansion, recent years have also seen several policy changes in governance and funding of primary education in the country. As is well known, 1990's saw the opening of the primary education scene to external assistance on a fairly large scale. Possibly as part of the commitments made by the international donor community at the Jomtien Conference, the country saw the emergence of a large multi-State programme for EFA under the banner of District Primary Education Programme. Alongside this, Rajasthan initiated a fairly large programme of EFA under the name of *Lok Jumbish*. In the changed scenario, primary education in India truly became a subject of international scrutiny. The EFA projects have been in operation, gradually expanding to cover half the country, for six to eight years. These EFA initiatives coupled with various centrally sponsored schemes have undoubtedly made 1990's the most intensive period of primary education development in India. Meanwhile, the literacy scene also got galvanized with

mass literacy campaigns stretching across the length and breadth of the country through the National Literacy Mission. Therefore, the assessment exercise would also throw light on the performance of these initiatives.

Another development in the last decade that forms a part of the backdrop is the Constitutional Amendment adopted by the Parliament making education in the age group 6-14 a fundamental right of every citizen. Currently, the formulation of a Central legislation to make the constitutional provision effective is underway. Though there are more than 150 million children currently enrolled in the primary schools, estimates around the turn of the century indicated that around 42 million children of the school going age were out of school. This coupled with the information that around 40 per cent children entering Grade 1 drop out without completing even the primary school cycle of five years point to the fact that the system may have to grow further in order to accommodate all children in schools.

Increasing Demand for Teachers

The situation with respect to demand for additional school places and the consequent need for additional physical infrastructure and teacher supply is not uniform across different states. For instance, Kerala is in a unique position as it is in the population stabilization phase, leading to an unusual situation of oversupply of physical and human resources for the number of children enrolled in primary schools. In several other states such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh recent demographic analysis show that the cohort entering primary schools has started falling gradually. This would mean that the demand for school places and consequently for teachers in schools would begin to stabilize, assuming that these states have already created adequate capacity to accommodate all children of the school going age as indicated by gross enrollment ratios. This, of course, may not come too soon as the completion rate for the primary (Grades 1-5) is still low and participation levels in upper primary (Grades 6-8) which is part of the compulsory education stage is alarmingly low. Added to this is the fact that some of these states have created many small schools with single teachers; equipping them with minimum national norms of at least two teachers per school would demand more teachers. Thus, even in these states demand for teachers may not come down in the near future though part of such increased demand could be met through increased efficiency achieved through careful consolidation of small and unviable schools.

The third category of states are those where the pressure is likely to increase with population growing apace and the performance in terms of children's participation in schooling is far from satisfactory. It is found that more than 75% percent of around 40 million out-of-school children are in 5-6 states of the country which include such large states as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The demand for additional resources both in terms of school places and teachers continues to be greatest in these states. Not surprisingly these states are also chronically stagnant in terms of economic growth and are unable to raise internal resources from within the state budget. For instance, Uttar Pradesh has been showing huge deficit in its revenue account to the tune of about 25%. In fact, the size of the deficit increased from Rs 7,245 million in 1991-92 to Rs 76,185 million in 1997-98 seriously curtailing the ability to meet demands for additional investment in primary

education. Consequently, most of these states are perpetually and almost wholly dependent on resources from central government for effecting any development in education. Appointment of additional teachers on a regular basis which would imply carrying a substantial recurring expenditure from the state budget is viewed by these states as an untenable proposition. In their search for all means of reducing the financial burden on the state exchequer, they seem to consider recruiting teachers on contract basis as a step in this direction for two reasons. One, such appointments would not entail a recurring burden on the state as teachers are dispensed with every term; two, they are paid much less in comparison to regular teachers.

Even though there is no direct correlation between financial status of State Governments and their tendency to substitute regular teachers with para teachers, this back drop should help in understanding the variations in the way contract teachers issue is being addressed in different parts of the country.

Teacher Management

Historically, State Governments did not have a total control over management of teachers in all public supported schools. While state schools were large in number, sizeable number of schools were under the management of District Boards, Taluka Boards, Municipal Corporations and so on. The service conditions for teachers were also not uniform for all teachers even within a state. This unevenness among teachers performing similar tasks resulted in considerable unrest and subsequently all schools managed by such public bodies were brought under State control and management in most of the states. Even in States where such total take over was not effected, state governments took on a more direct role in norms of operation for all the schools in the State. In any case, since district and municipal bodies essentially depend on financial subvention from the State government for their revenue, adopting state specified norms was considered quite appropriate. With respect to teacher management, this effectively meant streamlining recruitment and posting, deciding on requirements of professional training and fixation of pay scales as well as promotion and disciplinary procedures. Some consider that this led to service protection for school teachers on the lines of other government employees without suitable arrangement for performance assessment and accountability, finally leading to emergence of powerful teacher unions with statewide membership.

It was in mid-1990s that a new wave of decentralization swept many states following the Constitutional Amendment related to empowerment of panchayati raj bodies. Some state governments took this to decentralize wholly or partially the teacher management system. Accordingly, teacher cadre is not as monolithic as it was earlier at least in some of the states. State governments have also allowed for considerable variations in the service conditions of teachers appointed by local self-government bodies. In fact, the steps taken by some state government such as Madhya Pradesh implicitly imply dismantling of teacher service cadre at the state level. Gradually this unevenness in service conditions of teachers with each state and across different states in the country has increased. Local Self Governing bodies within the state are given a

reasonably free hand to decide on teacher recruitment at local level, apparently operating within a broad framework provided by the state. While some teachers are employees of local village level bodies, the block level or district level bodies may employ some others; though the older ones continue as state government employees. The policy and practices related to para teachers in different states essentially have their origin in this gradual liberalization or control and the unstated move towards dismantling state level teacher cadres.

Another significant development during the 1990s, which has the potential to influence professional development of teachers, is the creation of a system of district and sub-district level teacher resource centres. Following the National Policy of Education – 1986 recommendation, every district in the country was provided with a district specific teacher education institution – District Institute of Education and Training. Subsequently, under DPEP, with a view to taking the teacher support system closer to the work place of the teachers, a resource center in every development block and a cluster resource centre covering about 20 schools were created in all the districts. This has been now being universalized to reach all states and districts of the country under SSA.

Para teachers and the Present Study

Engagement of teachers on contract basis as opposed to employment on permanent tenures particularly in government schools is a recent phenomenon. The term ‘para teachers’ is a generic term applied to characterize all teachers appointed on contract basis often under varying service conditions in terms of emoluments and qualification requirements. Some documents also refer to them as ‘contract teachers’¹. In fact, official documents of state governments refer to them in vernacular terms such as *shiksha karmi*, *shiksha mitra*, *guruji* and so on depending on the Schemes under which teachers are being employed. In one sense, there is no clarity on who is a para teacher or under what kind of contract do teacher gets engaged if not on permanent tenures. With different state governments adopting a variety of procedures, it is difficult to draw generalizations on the situation. In fact, the subject has not yet attracted adequate attention of professional researchers. This is probably due to the perception that it is only a passing phase in the development of the system and would soon disappear. This, however, is not likely to happen in the near future unless a drastic revision of thinking at the national level emerges among education policy makers. At present, as would be described in the forthcoming sections, it is an expanding phenomenon and the policy pronouncements clearly favour its continuance.

The cadre of para teachers, however unclear is its definition be, has witnessed enormous expansion in many states even in its short period of existence. The number across the country possibly runs to more than 300,000 and is steadily increasing. If one goes by the national level policy documents, political leadership seems to be convinced that this is the right step to take for improving access to primary education. It is not that every one is happy with this situation. There has been considerable amount of public out

¹ In this paper these two terms, ‘contract teachers’ and ‘para teachers’ have been used interchangeably though not all contract teachers are necessarily para teachers in the sense of para professionals.

cry on the issue. Professional teachers associations have been quite vocal in their opposition on the ground that it tends to deemphasize the professional nature of teacher's work by employing people without adequate professional orientation. Creating multiple layers of teachers with different salary structure and qualifications but doing exactly similar work is likely to lead to divisions and dissatisfaction on the one hand and make the profession vulnerable to arbitrary actions at local level by those who have no professional training or authority, on the other. Apart from this, many scholars have also joined the issue by questioning the wisdom of appointing para teachers on the ground that it is detrimental to quality in the long run. Where exactly does the reality lie? What is the rationale for employing para teachers? Are para teachers starkly under qualified that their involvement would affect the quality of education? How different are the service conditions of regular and para teachers? Is there an emerging consensus across the country on the desirable profile of para teachers and their professional training arrangements? How genuine is the concern of fragmentation of the teacher cadres? How do the para teachers themselves perceive the situation? What policy lessons do the current experience with para teachers suggest? These are some of the critical questions that would be addressed in the present review paper with a view to understanding the evolving dynamics of teacher management in the country, as whole and of the phenomenon of contract teachers, in particular.

The paper is essentially based on documents, research and review papers already available on the subject of para teachers in India. The second section of the paper is devoted to taking an overview of the status of para teachers across the country. As attempt is made to capture the scene in a comparative perspective based on existing information. The situation in the country is too varied across the country and the general overview may not give an insight into the dynamics of field implementation. Keeping this in view, with a view to understanding the dynamics of implementing schemes involving recruitment of para teachers and for eliciting the perception of various stake holders concerned with basic education, a brief field investigation was carried out in Uttar Pradesh, one of the largest states in India employing a large number of para teachers. This is presented in the third section of the paper. This is followed by a discussion of the critical question concerning the issue of para teachers in India states. Finally, the paper attempts to briefly highlight the possible policy options in different states of India with respect to engagement of para teachers in particular and on teacher management as a whole, in general.

Section II

Para Teachers in Indian Primary Schools: An Overview

Induction of para teachers into primary schools, as already noted, is a relatively new feature in India. However, one could find a precursor to this in the non-formal education programme launched by Government of India as a means of reaching education to out-of-school children in the age group 9-14. The teachers were selected from local areas on small honorarium and worked on a part time basis. But the concept of a para teacher that has emerged in the last few years is very different. These are full time teachers working invariably in regular schools but on a contract basis with a monthly emolument that is much lower than what a regular full time teacher gets. How did it originate as strategy for staffing regular primary schools? Is it now part of the official policy of the country or is it viewed still as an ad hoc arrangement? What is the rationale articulated for adopting the practice of para teachers? How widespread is the practice and are there common norms for engaging para teachers across the country? These are some of the questions to be addressed in this section. Though the purpose of the section is to present an overview of the current status across the country, attempts will be made to answer the question with illustration from specific state settings. This is considered pertinent in the Indian context as matters related to schooling and teacher management are essentially governed by state governments. There is no comprehensive information available on para teachers in different states through government documents. For instance, the Selected Education Statistics annually published by Government of India makes no reference to existence of such teachers on contract basis. Even State level statistics do not give systematic information on this category of teachers. This is probably because para teachers are recruited under specific Schemes and therefore do not find place in the regular pay roll of the Government. The present review, therefore, extensively draws on two compilations done in 1999 and 2002 by the Technical Support Group of District Primary Education Programme.²

Policy Perspective on Para Teachers

Within the provisions of the federal democratic structure, schools systems in India have been functioning under the control and management of State Governments. Therefore, rules and regulations for appointment of school teachers are matters to be dealt with essentially by legislative bodies at the State level. The role of the national government has been confined to formulate broad policy framework particularly with a view to maintaining quality standards and setting norms for utilization resources channelised through centrally sponsored national programmes for development of education. For instance, the National Council for Teacher Education created as statutory body by the Parliament is vested with the responsibility to regulate professional qualification requirement for school teachers as part of quality monitoring in teacher education. Thus policies with respect to recruitment and service conditions for contract or

² *Reaching Out Further: Para teachers – An Overview*, District Primary Education Programme, Government of India, 1998; Dayaram, *Para Teachers in Primary Education – A Status Report*, DPEP Technical Support Group, Ed.CIL, New Delhi, 2002.

para teachers as with the regular teachers are essentially formulated by the various state governments. It is because of this that one finds wide variations, as would be illustrated at a later stage in the chapter, in the situation with respect to contract teachers across the country.

However, large scale interventions made by the national government in recent years to achieve the goal of universal elementary education, particularly with the launching of the District Primary Education Programme in 1990s and subsequently the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan brought in a new dimension to the discourse as well as practices related to teacher management in school education. It is in this context that some of the observations made in policy documents at the national level with respect to teachers gain significance in promoting the practice of recruiting para teachers at the state level. Interestingly, these documents not only present the approach to teacher management and the place of para teachers in it, they also attempt to build a rationale for adopting such a policy. Some of the documents even elaborate on the steps to be taken to avoid legal complications that may arise as the para teachers would perform the same role as regular teachers. Observations contained in two such documents which make direct reference to the issue of para teachers are discussed below.

Though DPEP Project documents had made reference to the idea of contract teachers and promoted the practice in Project schools, the first major reference to the issue can be found in the recommendations of the National Committee of State Education Ministers which was set up to recommend the approach to be adopted for achieving UEE in a mission mode. Referring to the problem of teacher shortages, interestingly the Committee chose not to go into the problem of vacancies not being filled by state governments, even though at that point of time taking all the states together there were several thousands of unfilled posts of primary school teachers. Instead the Committee pointed out: "Lack of community control over teachers, teacher absenteeism and low teacher motivation is often cited as reasons for not recruiting new teachers but for only concentrating on reducing wastage and internal inefficiency of the educational system. Even after making allowance for enrollment in private unaided and unregistered private schools, the teacher shortages are very significant. It is on this account that the recruitment of para teachers has to be considered a priority if all vacancies have to be filled up in shortest period of time. The issue of teacher/para teacher recruitment has to be addressed by all states as the long-term implications are for the states."³ It is clear that the National committee considered filling up of existing vacancies with para teachers has to be approached for ensuring teacher supply. It may be noted that the reference here is not to recruitment of teachers on contract basis in remote and difficult areas or to special schools such EGS schools otherwise unserved by regular schools.

By then (1999), in fact as the Committee observes, a large number of states had already started experimenting with appointment of para teachers who were are paid lump sum amount, which was less than the pay scale of primary teachers. The Committee goes

³ Government of India, Report of the National Committee of State Education Ministers under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Human Resource Development to Develop the Structure and Outlines of Implementing Universal Elementary Education in a Mission Mode, MHRD, New Delhi, July 1999, (22-23)

on tot articulate the rationale for adopting the route of para teachers for filling teacher vacancies by observing that the state governments had resorted to this means largely “for meeting the demand for teachers in a manner that the state can afford. Appointment of pay scale teachers to fill up all teacher vacancies as per teacher-pupil norms would require resources that state governments are finding increasingly difficult to find. The economic argument for para teachers is that provision of teachers as per requirement is possible within the financial resources available with the states. The non-economic argument is that a locally selected youth, accountable to the local community, undertakes the duties of teaching children with much greater interest. The accountability framework is well defined and by making the local authority as the appointing authority, the para teacher’s performance assessment is the basis for his/her continuance. The quest for UEE as Fundamental Right signifies a certain sense of urgency in doing so. This urgency calls for appropriate modifications in National Policy in order to respond to local felt-needs. The recruitment of para teachers is a step in this direction.”⁴ The Committee was surely aware of the fact that the National Policy on Education (NPE) provided no scope for recruiting para teachers. Rather the NPE had strongly recommended for improving the working conditions of teachers in schools including their social and economic status. It is possibly in recognition of this fact that the Committee suggested for modifying the National Policy demonstrating how convinced the members were of the appropriateness of recruiting teachers on contract basis to meet the problem of teacher shortage.

The para teachers, in most states, are being appointed by the Zilla Panchayats or School Committees. Often this is presented as apposite feature as part of the process of decentralization of educational governance. However, the real rationale for this route for recruitment has been as the Committee observes candidly, “This has been done to avoid possibilities of litigation for pay scale at a future date. The appointment of para teachers on a lump sum emolument is sometimes agitated as an infringement of the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work’ and there are court matters in this regard in many states.” Pointing out that Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have managed to resolve the legal issues in appointment of para teachers, the state governments should follow an appropriate path keeping in view judicial pronouncements on the subject. Surprisingly, the issue of who could be appointed as a para teacher has been mostly left untouched by the Committee except for a brief statement that the selection must be community based and all efforts should be made to improve the teaching abilities of such para-teachers by effective teacher training modules and other distance learning packages. States may also make appropriate operational arrangements to ensure adherence to norms prescribed by the National Council of Teacher Education regarding minimum qualifications before any para teachers are considered for regular pay scale appointments.⁵

There have been a couple of review studies describing the status of para teachers across the country. But scholarly investigations into the matter are difficult to come across. Yet, the issue seems to have attracted considerable attention of mass media and a serious public debate is taking shape in the country viewing the issue of employing para teachers often with relatively lower qualification as leading to increasing inequity.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

Capturing the substance of such debates Krishna Kumar and others highlight that the official strategy has been to appreciate para-teachers for their regularity and enthusiasm. They are being held up as model for the full-time teachers who receive a far bigger salary and allegedly work less. Parallels are being drawn between para-teachers and the 'barefoot doctors' who served as people's friends during China's cultural revolution. The glory of para teachers is supposed to reflect on panchayati raj institutions of which these teachers are already a part in many states. The claim that they are performing far better than older, regular teachers also legitimizes the slogan of decentralization which, in turn, covers up the policy of state withdrawal from spheres such as education and health. This policy is one of the pillars of the structural adjustment programme (SAP), and it has successfully remained in the dark. The ultimate objective of SAP is to increase the scope for privatization in every sphere. Handing over of primary schools to the so-called 'local communities' has enhanced the role of personal patronage, and it can be seen as an early step towards the eventual privatization of a substantial proportion of primary schools.⁶

They go on to point out that the argument that para-teachers are more dependable than regular teachers has been belied in a study made under the auspices of the DPEP itself. The 1999 study conducted under the auspices of DPEP refutes almost every claim made on behalf of the new, restructured system of rural primary education. The study gives data on the number of para teachers appointed between 1994 and 1999. The total of some 220,000 para-teachers cited in the study has more than doubled now, and the number is going to increase further with Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar having announced new schemes to hire para-teaches. This phenomenal growth has occurred despite the finding recorded in this report that classroom transactions are of poorer quality under para-teachers. The report says that low salary, combined with the contractual character of the job, has been the major source of discontent and lack of motivation among para-teachers.⁷ It is, of course, difficult to come up with such categorical judgments for policy-making based on the DPEP reviews which are more descriptive than analytical. Also, it is true that appointment of contract teachers leading to savings in public expenditure fits well with the conditionalities prescribed under structural adjustment programmes which some of the states are pursuing fairly vigorously under the guidance of the national government as well as international agencies. However, it may sound a bit far fetched to argue that the para teacher phenomenon is essentially a part of this framework as the Committee which has elaborated on the idea and gave a consensus report consisted of several state ministers affiliated to a variety of political ideologies including those opposed to IMF conditionalities. In fact, some of the states had already begun this process even before external funding for primary education entered the country.

Notwithstanding the public debate and criticism, national leadership in the country do not seem to entertain any such doubt regarding the appropriateness appointing teachers on contract basis instead of full pay regular teachers. This is clear from the recommendations in contained in another major reference, namely, the Approach Paper to 10th Five Year Plan discussed and adopted by the Planning commission. It states,

⁶ Krishna Kumar, Manisha Priyam, Sadhna Saxena The trouble with 'para-teachers', Frontline,

⁷ Ibid

“Steps would have to be initiated to fill up all the existing vacancies of the teachers through in a time bound manner, with defined responsibility to local bodies and communities, and to remove legal impediments in the recruitment of para-teachers. For quality education, provision of adequate academic support/ training to all the teachers will be necessary. In this connection, the use of IT needs to be explored in terms of teachers’ capacity building, as also for spread of literacy through TV, media.”⁸ This is a fairly clear and categorical endorsement of the idea propounded by the National Committee referred to earlier. Significance of this document lies in the fact that all the development funds to states are allocated based on the policy directions incorporated in the National Five Year Plan proposals. Accordingly, funds for expansion of primary education in states would be required to follow the directions included in the Plan document.

Genesis, Rationale and Expansion of the Practice

Generally, the practice of employing teachers on contract basis is associated with the implementation of DPEP and the Education Guarantee Scheme of Madhya Pradesh towards the latter part of 1990s. However, it was in vogue in Himachal Pradesh much earlier since 1984 under the banner of ‘Himachal Pradesh Volunteer Teacher Scheme’. The Scheme, designed and financed by the State Government, was primarily introduced to help single-teacher government schools to cope with increase enrollment and to ensure teacher availability in remote area schools where regular teachers were reluctant to go. A secondary purpose of the Scheme was to provide temporary employment to educated youth. The minimum qualification was kept as 10th Std. Though no professional training was required. By 1991, there were a total of 9547 such teachers of which 4032 posts were converted into those of regular teachers provided the candidates had got five years of experience as volunteer teachers and completed 90 days condensed training programme. The Scheme was discontinued in 1992 due to litigation and no new appointment of volunteer teachers was made thereafter. The Shiksha Karmi Project in Rajasthan, which came a little later towards the end of 1980s with financial assistance from SIDA, also aimed at recruiting volunteer teachers who were ready to live and teach in remote area schools to which invariably remained teacher-less. Again, the qualification requirements were lowered and the teachers were given a lump sum honorarium for the services they provided. It could be seen that in both cases, para teachers were not appointed against posts of regular teachers. One could say that they represented creation of additional resources. It may be noted that even these schemes have undergone change over a period of time losing their original objective. For instance, the original Scheme with some variations reentered Himachal Pradesh in 1998 under the banner of Vidya Upasak Yojana with revised guidelines more as a means of filling in vacant posts of teachers in formal primary schools.

In contrast to above programmes that set the stage for recruitment of teachers on contract basis, the Schemes that appeared in several state towards the end of 1990s clearly focused on employing teachers on contract in regular schools where in the normal

⁸ Government of India, Approach Paper to 10th five Year Plan 2002-2007, Planning Commission, Government of India, 2001 p. 40

course fully paid teachers would have been working. A careful examination of the various Schemes operating across the country reveals appointment of para teachers to two types of schools.

Para Teachers in Formal Primary Schools

The first category of teachers are recruited to be posted in regular schools. Alternatively, one could say that they are appointed and posted against regular posts of teachers. Such Schemes are in operation under different names in six states, namely, Andhra Pradesh (Andariki Vidya –Vidya Volunteer Scheme), Gujarat (Vidya Sahayak Yojana), Himachal Pradesh (Vidya Sahayak Yojana), Madhya Pradesh (Shiksha Karmi Programme), Maharashtra (Shikshan Sevak), Rajasthan (Shiksha Karmi Project) and Uttar Pradesh (Shiksha Mitra Yojana)⁹. It may be noted that all these programmes, except Shiksha Karmi Project of Rajasthan, were launched during the implementation of the DPEP.

A review of the Project documents (Table 2.1) makes it amply clear that all these Schemes are meant to meet the existing shortage of teachers. Some also consider this as means of countering teacher absenteeism and some others specify the purpose as providing additional teachers in schools with adverse pupil-teacher ratio. On the whole, it is clear that the Schemes were launched either to compensate for the inefficient functioning of the system as due to teacher absenteeism and teachers' lack of willingness to work in remote rural areas. Or explicitly as cost saving measures to meet the expanding demand for teachers due to increasing enrollment and even for replacement of regular teacher positions with that of para teachers on the retirement.

Table 2.1: Objectives of Deploying Para Teachers in Regular Schools

Andhra Pradesh	Gujarat	Himachal Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh	Maharashtra	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh
UEE; imparting quality education; mobilizing community participation; Assisting existing teachers in school management; and to address adverse teacher-pupil	To address problem of teacher shortage in primary schools; to improve enrollment & retention; and to improve quality of classroom transaction	Ensuring access in remote villages; to address problem of teacher shortages; to improve standard of education; to counter teacher absenteeism; to provide opportunity	To address the problem of teacher shortages due to unfilled vacancies	To provide teachers against vacancies accruing due to retirement; and to provide teachers for additional enrolment	To solve the problem of teacher absenteeism in school located in remote areas; to bring qualitative improvement in primary education; and ensuring 100% enrolment of boys and	To provide a second teacher in single teacher schools; and to provide an additional teacher in schools with adverse pupil-teacher ratio

⁹ As reported in Dayaram, Para Teachers in Primary Education: A Status Report, TSG, Education Consultants India Limited, New Delhi, 2002. More states have adopted similar Schemes during the last two years under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

ratio		for unemployed youth			girls in the age group 6-14	
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With the expansion of the Scheme to cover more schools during the last few years, the regular cadre of teachers is gradually getting replaced with para teachers. In fact, Madhya Pradesh has virtually stopped recruiting teachers in the regular pay scale with accompanying service conditions. All primary school teachers for the last 4-5 years have been recruited only by panchayati raj bodies at district, block and village levels and all the teachers are Shiksha Karmis (teachers on contract). One may say that the regular teacher in Madhya Pradesh is dying cadre. But the phenomenon is not confined to Madhya Pradesh. Taking the lead from Madhya Pradesh, many other states have begun replacing regular positions with para teachers even though no such policy pronouncements can be found in any of the states. In fact, it is even difficult to get a clear picture of the number of regular teachers being appointed and number of para teachers being appointed every year. This could probably be kept less transparent in order to avoid pressure from teacher unions. This phenomenon of replacing regular teacher with contract teachers is quite evident from the data given in Table 2.2 for Orissa which is still new in adopting the Scheme of para teachers with financial assistance from Government of India under SSA.

Table 2.2: Position of Teachers and Para Teachers in Orissa State
(as on 31st December 2003)

No. of Primary Schools	No. of Upper Primary Schools	No. of Sanctioned Posts	No. of Teachers in Position	No. of Vacancies	Total n. of Para teachers engaged (2001- 03)
35162	9452	136637	109353	27274	25969

Para teachers in Small or Remote Habitation Small Schools

The second category schools are special schools created in places which probably do not qualify for establishing a full primary school according to existing norms. A large number of such habitations exist in all the states which are invariably inhabited by marginalized groups or located in remote, hilly and isolated areas. These habitations do not have a school within one km and are so small in population size that opening a full primary school is not financially viable. Such single teacher schools employing para teachers can be found in several states and called by different names. For instance it is called Education Guarantee Scheme in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal; Alternative Schools in Assam, Multi-Grade Learning Centre in Kerala; Vasti Shala in Maharashtra, Community Schools in Andhra Pradesh, R.G.S.Pathshala in Rajasthan and Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi in West Bengal. Of these, the schools in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are specifically treated as feeder schools with only up to Grade 2, whereas in all other states they function as regular single teacher schools up to grade 5. All these Schemes began operating between 1997 and 2000 under District Primary Education Programme and have been no absorbed under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Thus, most of the

school function with the help of central assistance. In other words, employment of para teachers is being promoted with central funds as per the norms of SSA and not as means of conserving State government resources. All the Schemes explicitly state 'ensuring universal access' as the objective of establishing such schools and employing para teachers.

There is no authentic data on number of para teachers currently employed in different states of the country. In 2002, it was estimated that around 220,000 teachers had been employed under various Schemes. By, now this number must have gone up significantly. The number is currently estimated to be around 500,000. This massive increase is because till 2002 such Schemes with Central Assistance were available only to States operating DPEP. However, all States have become eligible for utilizing Central support for such schemes under SSA which covers the whole country. The number is increasing faster now than earlier. Even those states, which have a reasonably good teacher-pupil ratio, have begun implementing para teacher schemes as they are eligible to receive central funds for such appointments and it relieves them of incurring recurrent expenditure towards those teachers. Table 2.3 shows the magnitude of the para teacher phenomenon in major states of the country. These estimates have to be read with caution due to official designation and definitional problems. For instance, though Madhya Pradesh began recruiting para teachers many years ago and have a large proportion of teachers on contract employed by the panchayat bodies, the Survey data do not reflect this possibly due to the fact that the State Government has brought new legislation renaming all of them in one category called 'teachers' and transferring the teacher cadre (for all new recruitment) to panchayat bodies. Thus, state level official statistics do not differentiate between regular teachers and para (contract) teachers.

Table 2.3: Percentage of para-teachers in primary and upper primary schools in major States in India, 2002-03

State	Primary level		Upper primary level	
	Para-teachers		Para-teachers	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Andhra Pradesh	11.56	8.60	19.13	7.58
Chhatisgarh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gujarat	43.08	14.31	31.79	13.35
Haryana	1.11	1.72	4.23	5.80
Himachal Pradesh	10.46	3.27	2.36	5.25
Jharkhand	3.71	1.50	0.94	1.30
Karnataka	2.63	7.56	2.62	6.73
Kerala	1.11	0.96	1.14	0.63
Madhya Pradesh	1.53	2.30	0.00	0.00
Maharashtra	5.88	4.75	5.20	4.36
Manipur	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Meghalaya	1.17	1.69	2.44	1.98
Mizoram	1.90	0.83	0.79	0.88
Punjab	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Rajasthan	2.54	0.14	5.84	0.10
Tamil Nadu	1.93	8.10	1.51	3.35
Tripura	1.01	1.83	0.87	0.59
Uttar Pradesh	12.30	2.88	1.95	2.93
Uttaranchal	7.17	2.26	0.85	1.69

West Bengal	0.62	0.58	0.74	0.37
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Source: Seventh All India Educational Survey (Flash Reports), August 2004.

Recruitment and Service Conditions

In most of the programmes, the local community leadership has an important role to play in identifying suitable people to be recruited as para teachers in the local formal primary schools, though actual power to appoint lies with the local self-government bodies. A committee consisting of local self-government representatives and experts does the selection from among the identified people. Of course, such a procedure is not uniformly followed in all states. For instance in Himachal Pradesh, selection is done by concerned officials of the Education Department. The process is more decentralized in appointing teachers for special single-teacher schools created for remote areas. In these cases, the local village education committee or the school management committee essentially consisting of local community members is empowered to appoint the teacher.

The honorarium paid to the para teacher varies very widely across states. It ranges from Rs. 900 paid to a Shiksha Mitra in Uttar Pradesh to Rs. 3500 paid to a para teacher teaching upper primary classes under Education Guarantee Scheme in Madhya Pradesh. For para teachers working in schools set up in remote areas, the honorarium is still less; except in Kerala, such teachers receive only around Rs. 1000 per month. On average, in comparison to the monthly salary of a regular teacher, five para teachers are employed with the salary of a regular teacher who gets around Rs.5000 per month.

Appointment of all categories of para teachers are on an annual contract basis. These contracts may be renewed if their work is found satisfactory. However, no systematic framework for assessing the performance of para teachers exists in any state. Even where some criteria have been formulated, its implementation is arbitrary. Most of these contracts are issued by local village bodies or school committees. This has possibly been done in order to avoid litigation against the State government. In some states, there is provision of annual raise in the honorarium for deserving teachers. Also some states have the provision to absorb para teachers into regular positions after a minimum length of service as para teachers. However, such schemes are becoming less relevant as the state governments have begun to fill in posts of regular teachers with para teachers on contract basis with a small honorarium.

Table 2.4: Recruitment and Service Conditions

State	Honorarium per Month	Appointing Agency	Duration of Contract
Andhra Pradesh	Rs. 1000/-	School Committee	10 months in a year
Gujarat	Rs. 2500/-	District Education Committee	2 years; to be absorbed after 3 yrs if vacancy exists; to be absorbed after 5 yrs irrespective of vacancy provided there is no adverse performance

			report
Himachal Pradesh	Rs. 2500/-	District Primary Education Officer	One year; can be extended after evaluation of performance and approval by the Director of Primary Education
Madhya Pradesh	Grade I (Secondary) Rs. 4500/-; Grade II (Upper Primary) Rs. 3500/-; and Grade III (Primary) Rs. 2500/-	Block Panchayat (Local Self Government) for Primary; District Panchayat for others	One year; renewable up to 3 years if there are no adverse performance reports; to be made permanent after 3 years.
Maharashtra	Rs. 3000/- (proportionate) honorarium to be paid on the basis of working days other than school holidays.	Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad (District Local Self Government)	June-April (10 months) every year renewable for three years based on performance
Rajasthan	Rs. 1800/- including Rs. 500/- for prehar pathashala (night school) which is mandatory	Shiksha Karmi (Project) Board	Appointment reviewed every year and made permanent after 8 years
Uttar Pradesh	Rs. 2250/-	Village Education Committee of the Gram Panchayat (village self-government)	Annual Contract for 10 months from 1 st July to 31 st May

Source: Dayaram (DPEP Study, 2002)

Who becomes a Para Teacher? – Background, Qualifications and Professional Training

In almost all the programmes, the para teacher has to be a local resident. Thus, most of the para teachers belong to the same village and community and speak the same language. This gives them an insider status with the community members which is not the case with most of the regular teachers who are generally from outside and some of whom may not speak the same local language. This is a significant factor that brings the school and the community closer. This is likely to ensure regularity in the functioning of the school.

As can be seen from the Table below, there is no major difference in the prescribed minimum qualification between para teachers and regular teachers. This is so particularly for those engaged in regular primary schools. However, the situation is more liberal with respect to those who are appointed in remote area schools. In most cases, the basic academic qualification required to become a para teacher is Higher Secondary (12 years of education), which is the same for regular teacher also. It is only in the Shiksha Karmi Project of Rajasthan that the qualification is much lowered to 8 years of education. The main difference in educational background between regular and para teachers is in their pre-service professional training requirement. A regular teacher is required to have completed a two-year programme of Diploma or Certificate in Teacher Training before being considered for appointment as a teacher in a primary school. In contrast, the para

teacher is given after appointment a short duration training before taking up the position of a teacher in the school. Two observations in this regard are important.

Two points need special mention here. One, teachers who have to work in single teacher schools in remote areas have more difficult job to do than their counterparts in regular schools as they work alone and have no peer group to guide. This does not seem to be reflected in the duration of pre-service training given to them. Second, the duration of pre-service training received by para teacher in different states vary very widely and appears to be completely arbitrary. This is surprising as all these programmes have been initiated under the same national programme of District Primary Education Programme and are being currently implemented under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Table 2.5: Qualifications and Professional Training

State	Minimum Educational Qualification	Pre-Service Training	Duration and Frequency of In-service Training
<i>Para teachers in Regular Schools</i>			
Andhra Pradesh	Higher Secondary; Secondary in low literacy areas	7 days	15 days every year
Gujarat	Higher Secondary with Teacher Training qualification	2-year pre-service training is essential	7 days refresher training
Himachal Pradesh	Secondary with minimum of 45% marks	21 days	45 days every year
Madhya Pradesh	Higher Secondary	12 days	Same as for regular teacher
Maharashtra	Higher Secondary with Diploma in Education	2-year pre-service training is essential	Not specified
Rajasthan	8 th Grade for Males and 5 th Grade for females	37 days	Refresher training of 30+ 10 days every year
Uttar Pradesh	Higher Secondary	One month	15 days refresher training
<i>Para Teachers in Remote Area Schools</i>			
Assam	Higher Secondary	24 days	7-10 days every year
Kerala	Secondary (10 th Grade)	Initial orientation- 5 days; school attachment – 12 days	-
Madhya Pradesh	Higher Secondary	20 days	14 days every year
Maharashtra	Higher Secondary	2-year Pre-service Training qualification	Not specified
Orissa	Secondary	20 days	5 days refresher training every six months

Rajasthan	Higher Secondary; and 8 th Grade in case of desert areas	45 days	15 days every year
Uttar Pradesh	Secondary	30 days	15 days
West Bengal	Secondary	15 days	Not specified

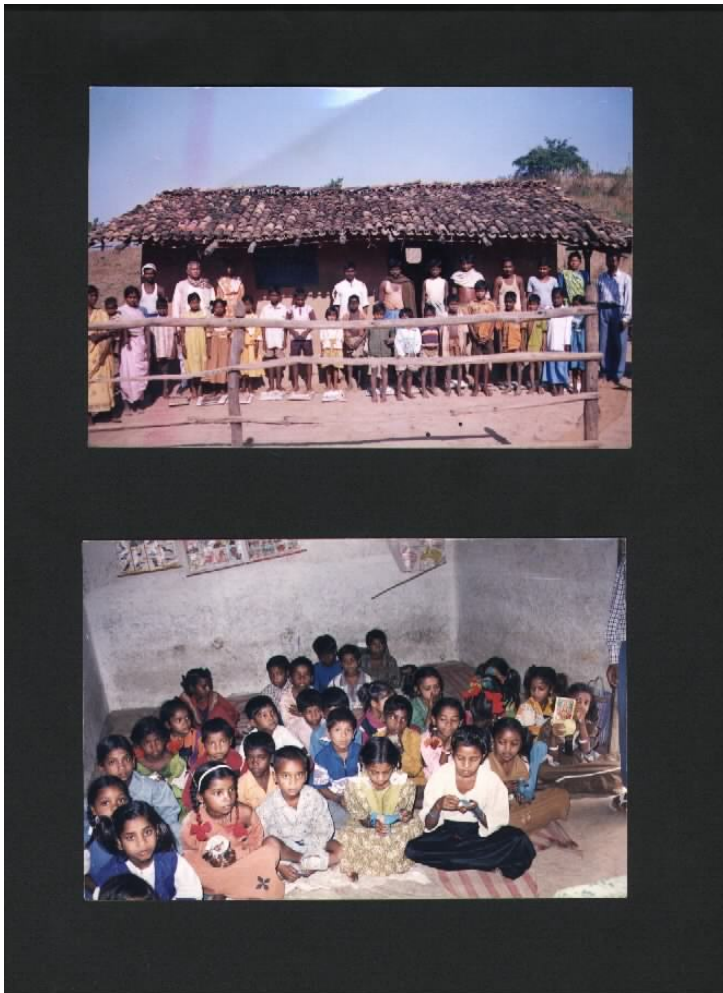
Source: Dayaram (DPEP Study, 2002)

Official documents describing the schemes for employing para teachers in all the states invariably refer to the incumbents as volunteers and accordingly the financial compensation given to them as honorarium and not salary. In fact, some of the documents such as the one in Uttar Pradesh specify that the aspirants to the position of para teachers should have *seva bhava* (attitude for social service). In this context, the findings of the study done by DPEP in 1998 are worth noting. Study reports that before joining as para teachers most of them were unemployed and were doing odd jobs, working as casual wage labourers or working on their own farm. They were enthusiastic to utilize their educational competence and para teacher programme provided them with an opportunity to do so. All of them referred to their income as salary and not as honorarium; all them cherished the hope that they would become permanent and be absorbed as regular teachers.

Quality of Schooling and Para Teachers

How does induction of para teachers affect the quality of education provided in the schools? This is the constant issue being debated upon in all discourses on para teachers. This requires examining the school conditions in which the para teachers work, transaction processes that characterize their classrooms and the outcomes they produce in terms of student learning. As already mentioned there are no systematic investigations into this aspect. Limited amount of field information available from the studies conducted under DPEP show results, which are not quite encouraging.

As mentioned earlier, para teachers work into categories of schools – the regular primary schools where they work along side regular teachers and remote area or small habitation schools which function as single teacher schools. The situation even in the former type of schools is far from satisfactory. For instance, most schools with para teachers in Uttar Pradesh have a very high pupil-teacher ratio and most of these schools involve multi-grade teaching. Yet, one can see that the inputs available in these schools are far better than what one finds in the latter category. Except in a couple of cases such as the RGSJ Pathshalas of Rajasthan and Multi-Grade Learning Centres of Kerala, the remote area schools work in very poor infrastructure conditions where the building is to be invariably provided by the community. In some cases, such schools are conducted in the premises of temple, masjid or the panchayat house. Even where buildings are provided by the Education Department, they are often found to be in a dilapidated condition.



Under DPEP, regular schools receive a small annual grant for school improvement and the every teacher also got a grant for preparing teaching-learning material. The practice has been continued under SSA. However, such grants are not uniformly made available in the single teacher schools created for remote areas. Further, the studies have invariably revealed that blackboard and other learning facilities provided were quite inadequate and many cases the items were not usable. This is an important issue as para teachers in remote area schools by their isolated locations are already handicapped. One would have expected the facilities provided in such schools would at least to some extent compensate for this handicap. But the reality seems to be just the other way.

What kind of classroom environment and transaction processes characterize the teaching learning process organized by para teachers? In the study conducted under DPEP in 1998 covering 21 para teacher schools in five different states, it was observed that the teaching learning process was largely textbook based; other activities or materials are seldom used. Given the fact that para teachers have to invariably work in schools with a high pupil-teacher ratio and with inadequate classroom space, multigrade teaching is the standard feature. However, with the exception of a few para teachers most were unable to cope with the situation of multi-grade teaching. Some states have made effort to produce material specially suited for multi-grade setting. But the general rule is to use the same textbooks and learning material used in all the formal schools. This definitely places para teachers in small schools in serious disadvantage. Overall, the teaching-learning situation was unsatisfactory. Para teachers could not create a classroom culture of interactive learning involving the students and often gave the impression that they lacked basic pedagogic skills and confidence, though enthusiasm was not lacking. However, one could observe that teaching in regular schools were no better; they also suffered from the same drawbacks in classroom transaction process.

'Is student learning satisfactory under para teachers?' This in away is the central question for quality assessment. There are no comprehensive data available on the performance of children in primary schools in general and in para teacher schools in particular. Therefore, answering questions on student learning is a difficult proposition. The DPEP study in 1998 collected some interesting information on the status of learning in schools involving para teachers in different both in regular and remote area category schemes which is given in Table 2.5.

Table 2.6: Learning Achievement under Para Teachers: Percentage of students scoring below 50% Marks+

Programme*	Number Assessed	Class III Hindi	Number Assessed	Class V Hindi	Number Assessed	Class III Maths	Number Assessed	Class V Maths
1	27	74%	26	77%	27	52%	26	84%
2	19	37%	6	16.5%	19	26%	5	83.5%
3	22	68%	14	71.5%	22	64%	9	78%
4	24	66.5%	24	33.5%	24	58.5%	24	95.5%
5	22	45.5%	16	62.5%	21	43%	16	75%
6	23	74%	22	77.5%	23	65%	24	83.5%

+ Reproduced from Reaching Out Further: Para Teachers – An Overview, District Primary Education Programme, Government of India, 1998

*Programmes 1. Shiksha Karmi Project, Rajasthan; 2. Alternative Schools Madhya Pradesh; 3. Shiksha Karmi Yojana, Madhya Pradesh; 4. Volunteer Teacher Scheme, Himachal Pradesh, 5. Rajkiya Prathmaik Vidyalaya, Rajasthan; 6. Shaskiya Prathmik Vidyalaya, Madhya Pradesh (5 and 6 are regular government schools not involving para teachers taken for comparison)

The findings of the study could be summarized as follows: (1) The overall performance of children in all four para teacher projects including Volunteer Teacher Scheme of Himachal Pradesh and Shiksha Karmi Yojna of Madhya Pradesh where para teacher worked along with regular teachers and also that of government schools (with no para teachers) is a matter of concern as their performance is far from satisfactory; (2) alternative Schools in Madhya Pradesh performed fairly satisfactorily at grade III tests but performed as badly as others in Grade V tests; in general, performance at Grade V level is far worse than that at Grade III level in spite of the fact that several students drop out and only a smaller number reach Grade V; (3) Generally speaking, there is nothing markedly distinguishable in the achievement of para teacher schools and Government Primary schools.

At the outset it may be noted that the sample taken in the above analysis is too small to generalize for all the schools involving para teachers. But they are clearly indicative of the problem of poor learning levels across the board, whether the focus is para teacher schools or regular schools with fully paid teachers. There is hardly anything to choose between the two categories in terms of learning levels. This also shows that futility of comparative evaluation studies carried out by some of the state governments involving regular government schools and para teacher schools demonstrating that the later category are as good as the former. What is required is a more formative framework for monitoring the learning process and outcome evaluation.

Section III

Para Teachers in Uttar Pradesh: A Closer Look

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state of India with a population of more than spread over 83 districts. Each district is further divided for development administration purposes into several blocks and Nyaya Panchayats (local self government bodies) each level with elected representatives alongside administrative offices. Basic Shiksha Parishad (Basic Education Board) at the state level is the wing of the State Government responsible Governance of school education at the elementary level.



Governance of school education, in general and management of teacher service, in particular is essentially a subject of State governments in India. Therefore, it is the policy and practice adopted at the State level that would illuminate the situation with respect to para teachers in the country. With this in view, this chapter presents the findings of an empirical analysis of the situation in Uttar Pradesh, one of the largest and educationally underdeveloped state of the country. The Chapter discusses the evolving policy pronouncements with respect to employment of teachers on contract basis in the state and the perceptions of stakeholders, namely, para teachers, regular teachers and local level administrators on the issue of para teachers in primary schools. Field perceptions were gathered through focus group discussions. By hindsight, one could say that probably the issue requires in-depth individual interviews to elicit the reality. However, due to paucity of time and resources, the investigation has to be limited to conducting focus groups discussions with select groups of respondents and a few in depth interview in two districts of the State, namely, Barabanki and Pratapgarh. Table 3.1 gives the numbers and categories of respondents from whom information was elicited.

Table 3.1 Numbers of Respondents in Focus Group Discussions

Category	Number
Shiksha Mitra – Para teachers	110
Regular Teachers	90
Head Teachers	20
Department Officials	20
Village Education Committee members	20

UEE Initiatives and Para Teachers in UP

With a view to achieving the goal of universal and easy access to schooling the government of Uttar Pradesh attempts to follow the national norms and provide a primary school within a radius of 1.5 km. for each habitation of 300 people and an upper primary school within 3 km. for a habitation having a population of 800. At present there are 94,476 primary schools and 20,675 upper primary schools managed and supervised by the U.P. Basic Education Board.

Table 3.2: Educational Institutions in Uttar Pradesh (2003)

	Schools	Enrollment	Teachers
Pre-primary	50	39304	
Lower Primary (Grade 1-5)	94476	13855668	312669
Elementary (Grade 1 –8)	20675	4824960	103943
Secondary	3149	2328183	31343

Although special efforts have been made from time to time to fill up the vacant posts of primary teachers it is found that primary schools are under-staffed in the rural areas, especially the far flung ones. The average teacher-pupil ratio in primary schools comes out to be 1:42. However, Management Information System data compiled in 2003 for 15 DPEP districts revealed that 29.9 percent teachers were located in single teacher multigrade schools. In the case of 9.31 percent teachers the teacher-pupil ratio was 1:150 and above. The incidence of irregular functioning of schools was of high magnitude particularly for single teacher multigrade schools, seriously affecting the quality of teaching-learning activities in the schools. However, inadequacy of financial resources of the state government is invariably stated as the reason for slow or non-recruitment of full-time permanent teachers. It is in this context that appointment of para teachers is viewed by the state government as a cost-effective means of providing teachers in all primary schools. Data given in the following Table clearly indicates the changing trend in recruitment of regular and para teachers. It may be noted that while recruitment of regular teachers has practically been halted, para

teachers are being appointed on a large scale during the last few years. As reflected in the latest data collected by the All India Education Survey (see Table 2.3) Uttar Pradesh already has a very high proportion (more than 10%) of para teachers in service.

Table 3.3: Teacher Recruitment Status in recent years+

Year	New post of Teachers Sanctioned*	Primary Teachers in Position#	Number of Para Teachers appointed*
1999-2000	2173	318992	12345
2000-01	1162	320121	5802
2001-02	6119	293911	19690
2002-03	3829	Not Available	-
2003-04	-	Not Available	68,199
2004-05	-	Not Available	10,495 (till August '04)

+Note: The data are incomplete and are only indicative. Reliable data on appointment of regular teachers were not available

*From Basic Education Project Office, Lucknow (unpublished)

Selected Educational Statistics for various years, MHRD, Government of India, New Delhi

First major effort to improve the situation of teacher supply in the state came with the centrally sponsored scheme of Operation Blackboard launched in late 1980s under which Government of India provided assistance to all the State to ensure that every primary school will have at least two teachers and two classrooms apart from other basic academic inputs. However, the advantage gained through the project quickly evaporated as the State government failed to fill in the vacancies that arose over the years. The next large scale effort for UEE came through the UP Basic Education Project (UPBEP) launched with World Bank assistance in 1993. The Project which came to completion in 2000 covered in a phased manner 15 districts and contributed significantly to the primary education infrastructure in the State. Though the Project had a non-formal education component, the focus was mainly on strengthening and improving the quality of government schools. Overall, the Project constructed more than 5000 school building and added around 10,000 classrooms. To improve the teacher supply position, around 29000 posts of teachers at the primary and more than 8000 teachers at the upper primary were recruited under the Project.

As the UPBEP moved into its final years it was gradually integrated into the national framework of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). The objectives of the programme continued to be UEE as already enunciated under UPBEP, except that as per national norm for financial responsibility, the state government was to bear 15% of the expenditure while the Central Government provided the remaining 85%, largely through the funds raised through external sources. Induction of para teachers on a large scale essentially began with the DPEP through two sub-component programmes. One is the Scheme of Shiksha Mitra (literally meaning, education companion). The second Scheme is the 'Education Guarantee Scheme' (EGS). The core specification for Shiksha Mitra Scheme were: (a) Intermediate passed youths of the village will be employed; (b) Out of total appointments for para teachers made at any time, at least 50% would be women; (c) Selection of and administrative control over para teachers would be with the local Village Education Committee; and (d) Para teachers would be appointed on contract

basis for a period of 10 month and will be paid Rs. 2250.00 per month. The EGS had similar type of criteria. The Scheme was specifically meant to serve habitations which did not qualify for opening a new school as per the existing norms. In 1999 it was found that around 20,000 such habitation were in UP with out schooling facility. The specific criteria for opening a Centre known as '*vidya kendra*' were as follows: (a) There were at least 30 children in the age group of 6-11 years; (b) In hilly areas, a centre could be opened even with 20 children; (c) Teaching will be done in the centre for grades 1 and 2; (d) The teacher (*guruji*) will be a local person with zeal for social service; (e) Appointment of Guruji would be for one session and on contract basis with an honorarium; after each term fresh appointments will be made; (f) Panchayat (local self government) would bear the cost of honorarium and provide space for these cntres; (g) Each centre will be provided Rs. 2350 for basic infrastructure and other teaching material and Rs. 1000 for free textbooks.

All these initiatives for UEE undertaken through UPBEP and DPEP have now been incorporated under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which covers all the districts in the State. Thus, para teachers have come to occupy a significant place in the landscape of educiaotn in Uttar Pradesh. As will be elaborated in this chapter, para teachers in UP are not just those working in specially created small schools in remote areas. They are being appointed in regular schools raising the question whether the cadre of regular teachers will altogether be replaced in course of time with contract teachers. Or, is this seen only as a transitional arrangement to be rolled back in course of time? How do teachers and administrators who have already been engaged on regular basis perceive this trend? What could be the eventual impact of this massive induction of para teachers on the morale and quality of work in schools, in general? These are some of the questions addressed with the help of field observations.

The filed observations presented in the section relate mainly to the Shiksha Mitra Yojana which is meant to provide para teachers in Government primary schools who are to work in this schools along with regular teachers. The observations may not therefore pertain to the Education Guarantee Scheme which is meant for remote area single teacher schools which operate as feeder schools with only Grades I and II. The Shiksha Mitra Yojana gains its importance due to the emerging practice (though not a stated policy) in the State to appoint only para teachers and not to recruit any regular teachers even against vacant posts.

Shiksha Mitra Yojana: The Scheme of Para Teachers

The Shiksha Mitra Yojana was launched by the Government of UP in the academic year 1999-2000. According to the original Government Order, the Scheme was launched to serve two-fold purpose: (1) To maintain standard norms of teacher-pupil ration in all schools; and (2) To achieve this at lower costs to wards teacher salary. The objective was therefore to augment teacher resources in government primary schools, which could include appointment of para teachers against vacant posts as well as engaging additional para teachers to meet increases in enrollment. In effect it has also meant a virtual stop to recruitment of teachers on regular salary scale in the State.

Who becomes a Shiksha Mitra (SM)?

The Government Notification states that keeping in view the local needs and demands, any person available at Gram Sabha (village) level and educated up to Intermediate (which is equivalent to Higher Secondary in Uttar Pradesh) and appointed on contract basis by the Education Committee of the Village Panchayat at consolidated honorarium will be called '*shiksha mitra*'. The Village Education Committee will identify qualified male and female candidates in the village where the school is located. In special circumstances, when qualified candidates are not available in the village, suitable candidates with similar qualification could be identified from neighboring villages but within the same panchayat area. The minimum and maximum age for Shiksha Mitra will be 18 and 30 years. Close relatives of the Chairman and Secretary of the Village Education Committee are not eligible to become Shiksha Mitras. In any school 50% of Shiksha Mitra positions will be filled by female candidates. Reservations will be provided for marginalized groups as per existing rules of UP Government.

Table 3.4: Educational Profile of SMs

Sex	Qualification Categories (%)			
	MA/MSc	BA/BSc	Higher Secondary	Total
Male	32	35	13	80
Female	3	10	7	20
Total	35	45	20	100

It should be noted that though, higher secondary is the minimum qualification prescribed, around one third of the respondent SMs had postgraduate qualification and even a larger proportion were university graduates. This should be seen along with the information that almost all of them are local unemployed youth from the same villages, showing the high levels of educated unemployment and the unutilized potential of educated youth in rural areas. Interestingly, the subject of communication in this regard from the State Government to all those concerned with the implementation of the Scheme reads: "Involvement of Educated Youths through the Implementation of Shiksha Mitra Yojana for the Universalisation of Primary Education in the State." The distribution of male-female teachers among the respondents may not be fully representative of the ground reality though the overall position of teachers in schools may still weigh in favour of males.

In terms of age profile, the para teacher groups is essentially of a younger age cohort as compared to regular teachers, probably due to the age restrictions placed for recruitment. It was also reported that around 10% of para teacher are in the age group 18-21 and about 73 percent are in the age group 22-27. On the whole, 90% were in the prescribed age group of 18-30 yrs.

Recruitment, Posting and Honorarium

The recruitment procedure for the post of para teacher is fairly well laid out. The initial work on identification of qualified candidates is done by the Village Education Committee. The committee prepares a list of eligible candidates in order of merit based on marks obtained by the candidates in Secondary and Higher Secondary Examinations. Performance in teacher training examinations is also taken into consideration in preparing the merit list though this is not essential. Recommendations of the committee should be supported by details on the enrollment situation in the local school. This is done keeping in view the teacher pupil ratio of 1:40. The specification also state that ratio of regular teacher to para teachers in regular schools will be 3:2. Preference will be given to appointment of additional para teacher in schools where only one teacher is in position, where the ration will be 1:1. In no case will para teachers solely handle any regular formal primary school. It may be noted that the Government directives in this regard only refers to number of working teachers and not to sanctioned posts of teachers in any school, indicating that para teachers are appointed could be appointed against vacant posts of teachers in order to achieve the norm of 1:40 teacher- pupil ratio.

Though the prospective candidate has to be a local person, the appointing authority is not vested with the VEC. The list is sent to the District Primary Education Officer who will get the necessary approval form a district level committee nominated by the State Government. The candidate thus selected will have to first undergo a preliminary training on month in the local District Institute of Education and Training. During the period of training each candidate will receive a stipend of Rs. 400 in addition to free boarding and lodging facilities. After successful completion of the preliminary training, the appointee joins the concerned primary school purely on contract basis with an honorarium of Rs. 2250 per month (which is around half of the basic pay of a regular primary school teacher). The contract is only for the academic year and automatically terminates on 31st May of the following year. For renewal of the contract, the VEC has to go through the whole process again.

Performance Monitoring

Service of SMs is controlled by the Village Education Committee but teaching work is to carried out by them under the directions and guidance of the head master of the primary school. At the time of inspection of a school, para teachers are treated on equal terms with regular teachers of the performance of the school. The inspection team presents their observations regarding the work of the *shiksha mitra* to the concerned VEC to review his or her performance. If the VEC receives reports critical of any SM regularly, the contract of the VEC is authorized to cancel the contract of the concerned SM and arrange for selection of a new person.

Functioning of the Recruitment and Monitoring System: Field Observations

The detailed instructions issued by the State Government are apparently very clear and the processes proposed are quite transparent. But, what is the ground reality and what is the reaction of stakeholders to the arrangement and the way it is working? The question was posed to all respondents – para teachers, VEC members and officials of the

Education Department. There was a general appreciation by all respondents regarding the involvement of local people in the selection process, which has brought a sense of ownership and accountability at the community level. However, some respondents observed that, despite clear guidelines, the process could not be completely freed from considerations of caste affiliations; the process being controlled by the village head, a complete stranger to the professional work involved in teaching, was matter of concern to some. Some stray instances of favour based on caste and kinship were quoted. There were some complaints that people belonging to the same caste as the village head got priority consideration, though, by and large, the procedure is working well according to all categories of respondents. Observations of caste based considerations are difficult to investigate since caste consciousness is so deeply embedded in the social life that most people irrespective of caste affiliation tend to indulge in caste based actions in their daily life.

One factor in the recruitment process that was appreciated by almost all respondents was that the procedure helped ensure selection of teachers who speak same language and dialect as the children and the community members. Many respondents expressed that this was considered by the community as a positive fall out of the new procedure facilitating easier communication between the teacher and the children as well as other community members. It was also appreciated by the community members that generally the proposals made by the VECs are approved by the District Authorities. This was highlighted by the Officials as genuine decentralization and empowerment of the community. However, on closer interaction, it was found that this was done mainly to ensure that the para teachers do not stake claim to any other benefits from the Department.

Again the guidelines are emphatic on the process of monitoring the performance of para teachers by the supervisory and support staff of the Department such as the Block and Cluster Resource Coordinators and inspecting staff of the District Primary Education office. The VEC concerned could act based on the reports of such supervisory visits to the schools. However, it was observed that the process of supervision is quite banal. In fact, many schools never get supervised. Therefore, evaluation of the performance of para teachers works no better than that of the regular teacher. The systemic malady of poor accountability and performance assessment equally afflicts both categories of teachers. Direct monitoring by the VEC is only limited to checking regularity of school functioning. It was observed that, at present, almost all para teachers get their contract renewed year after year. Some people are apprehensive that absence of professional monitoring of performance would on the one hand, affect quality and on the other hand, it may lead to arbitrariness and creation of vested interest at the village level.

Arrangement for Training and Academic Support

As already mentioned, it is essential for every new para teacher to undergo one month pre-induction training at the local District Institute of Education and Training. After appointment as a para teacher, he or she has to under go a 15 days orientation programme during the academic session. For this purpose, the State Council of

Educational Research and Training has prepared a special curriculum separately for the one-month induction programme¹⁰ and for the 15-day in-service orientation. The induction training has been designed to give the para teachers first hand experience of teaching in the local primary school. They are also given some inputs regarding child development and pedagogical techniques as well as school management. Apart from similar inputs, the in-service orientation programme attempts to tackle the real problems of teaching in the primary school faced by the incumbent para teachers. If the contract of a para teacher is renewed in the following year, the teacher has to again undergo a repetition of the in-service orientation module. It is unclear how this will be different from the first year of their in-service training. A review of the existing training material does not indicate that care has been taken to differentiate between the needs of the freshly recruited para teachers and of those para teachers who have already been teaching in primary schools.

Apart from these structured training inputs, the SM is also supposed to get academic support during the tenure from the resource centres located at the village panchayat and block levels. For this purpose, the coordinators of these resource centres are to participate in the monthly day-long meetings/workshops in each school. These workshops are utilized to diagnose the problems of the school as well as the teachers including the para teachers and give necessary guidance.

As already discussed in Section II, induction of para teachers without adequate training is a major issue raised by many observers in terms of its possible adverse impact on quality of education provided in the schools. In fact, in case of Uttar Pradesh, this acquires greater significance, as most of the para teachers possess Bachelor or Masters degree and therefore, basic academic qualification is not a matter of contention. How do para teachers themselves perceive the value and adequacy of the training received? Respondents were unanimous in emphasizing the vital role of pre-service and in-service training for effectively doing their work in the schools. They were also unanimous in voicing the opinion that the training given to them is far from adequate for performing their job effectively. But most of them were reluctant to express their candid opinion on the nature and quality of training inputs provided by the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET). "Induction Training at DIET is very important, as without that we cannot take up our posts in the primary schools as teachers." This is all one could elicit. Probably, they were conscious that negative observations are not in their interest, as they have to continue depending on these trainers during their work as teachers. Some, in private meekly mentioned that the DIET staff could be friendlier towards them during their training. However, the respondents were quite forthcoming in giving several suggestions for improving the organization and contents of training programmes: (a) State and District level authorities could invest in developing a cadre of master trainers who could be deployed to give on job support to teacher on a continuous basis. (b) At present about 95% of the para teachers are getting reemployed. Therefore the emphasis has to be on reorientation of the teachers. (c) The initial induction training is not adequate for carrying out their work in the schools; renewed training after working in the school for some time will be very useful. (d) More training in different aspects of subject

¹⁰ Outline of the curriculum prepared for the induction training is given in the Annexure

teaching and teaching methodology is needed. Currently there is undue emphasis on knowledge base in the induction training. Induction training should include orientation in such aspects as child health, cleanliness, and environmental issues. (e) Induction training should be conducted during summer months before the school year begins. (f) Since most of the para teachers are reemployed, reorientation can be conducted at the block level by master trainers. This should be based on real need assessment of the working para teachers. Transaction of a standard training module is not adequate to meet the requirement of teaching in different conditions in which para teacher are placed. (g) Induction training should be longer as one month is not adequate. (h) There should be more scope for practical training during the induction course. Time devoted to this aspect in the current curriculum should be extended. (i) Training inputs should focus on aspect of quality improvement in real classroom conditions, which involved dealing with large class size, and children of varying ability. (j) Supervisory guidance and support in the school particularly from the cluster level could be strengthened. Monthly meetings/workshops are not adequate to meet the individual needs of teachers in different schools

Motivation to become a Para Teacher and Job Satisfaction: Varying perceptions

With such low financial compensation, with no guarantee of continued income and with not even the status of a regular teacher, what is it that attracts people to become para teachers? VEC members and Department Officials confirmed that there is no dearth of qualified candidates aspiring to become para teachers in most of the villages even with such unattractive conditions. First reaction of all the respondents was that they were very happy to have got the position. However, discussions about the nature of the work they do and on whether they feel equal to their colleagues who get full salary on a regular basis brought out other responses.

It was found that the para teachers were responsible for opening the school every day and closing it at the end of the school day. They were also responsible for cleaning and maintenance of the school premises. These chores were, of course, seen as natural as they stay in the village while many of the regular teachers come from outside. Of course, it also came out that invariably during the discussion that the arrangement allows the regular teachers to come to the school at their convenience. It was also mentioned by around 50% para teachers that they are involved in administrative work, which normally should be done by the head teacher. Further, contrary to the generally agreed practice in schools with regular as well as para teachers, around 45% para teachers had also to teach grades IV and V. They were not, in general, dissatisfied with any of the tasks they were performing in the school. However, the fact that they work as much as the regular teachers or even more than them but are paid only a fraction of the salary left many of them with a sore feeling. Some felt that they were being exploited by the system due to the predicament they are placed as unemployed educated youth in the village.

What about being employed only on contract basis and on a small honorarium? The general response was: “Do we have a choice? Something is better than nothing.” They felt that being a para teacher is better than being totally unemployed after studying

at school and college. Many also viewed the job in a positive light: 'teaching is noble job.' Many felt that their status has improved in the village after they became teachers in the local school. In fact, this feeling was even more pronounced among female teachers than the males as women considered the job to be ideal as it did not require them to go outside the village.

But the amount of honorarium they were getting was a matter of concern for all. This was particularly a matter of serious anxiety for male teachers since in many of their households, they were the main bread winners and the uncertainty about future earnings created considerable unhappiness, pushing them to look for more lucrative jobs. Yet, the hope that if they do well, they may get absorbed as a regular teacher motivated them to continue with the arrangement. In fact, with this in view, many expressed their willingness to do hard work and not to complain about their conditions so that they may become full-fledged employees of the Department. Did they know that the State Government has not been filling in all the vacant posts of teachers and indeed, they are working in those vacant posts. Neither the para teachers nor the villagers were very clear about this emerging policy of the Government.

Community Involvement: Pros and Cons

Giving the village community a voice in influencing decision making in the local school has been the accepted policy in all Indian States for along time. Bu this has not been actively translated into action in moist states. It is in this context that the move of UP Government to involve the VEC in appointment of para teacher has to be seen as appositive step. But why not empower them in the process of selecting and monitoring the work, at least of regularity of attendance, of all school teachers? But, despite this limited role, villagers were quite happy with their involvement. They viewed this as positive step in ensuring that the local school functions regularly without frequent disruptions even if the regular teacher remains absent. Education Department officials also endorsed this as bold step in decentralization and as a means of ensuring regularity in school functioning. One may wonder: 'Will this not indirectly imply that everyone concerned, community as well as Administration, is condoning the behaviour of those regular teachers who chronically fail to perform their duties as teachers?' Further, are the VECs active in helping the school beyond selecting the para teacher? It was pointed out that only some VECs are active in their participation for maintaining and developing ht local school.

Some of the Administrators interviewed admitted that this transfer of authority for appointment of teachers also helps in avoiding legal complications. In fact, it was explained that the para teachers have to give an undertaking to the effect that they are joining the service only as volunteers to serve the community and will not aspire for full time position. Also some feel that the initial bonhomie of having a local teacher may disappear when the same person gets repeatedly reappointed, as it is happening currently, and develop entrenched interests in the village. Also, some fear that local social and caste equations may influence the behaviour of the teacher from within the village. There is no hard evidence to suggest any of these as the approach is currently working well.

However, in the long run, the issue has to be investigated more thoroughly. After all, avoiding development of vested interests in the village to the neglect of school duties has been the standard justification given for the policy of centralized appointment, posting and transfer policy.

Reaction of Regular Teachers towards employing para teachers

How do regular teachers react to wards the appointment of para teachers to work with them in their school? One would expect them to vehemently oppose this policy and practice. After all, induction of non-cadre teachers into the system on large scale would seriously weaken their bargaining capacity with the establishment. Indeed, teacher unions at state, national and international levels are waging a major battle against appointment of teachers on contract. But, surprisingly, regular teachers who were contacted during the field study did not express any displeasure with the practice. In fact, some of them expressed appreciation for the good work being done by para teachers in spite of their lack of experience. Only negative point the expressed was that it discriminated against them as they had undergone full-fledged professional training and had to face a stringent process of selection. That the para teachers were being appointed only based on examination performance with recommendations form VEC members without any professional assessment of their suitability was considered detrimental to quality of teaching in the long run.

Value of SM Scheme and its Impact on Quality

Do the various stakeholders in the field really see any merit in appointing teachers on contract instead of full term tenure as regular teachers? Is this approach affecting the quality of education provided in those primary schools?

It was difficult to engage any of the respondents to reflect on the long-term impact of recruiting para teachers to primary schools. However, there was considerably unanimity among all respondents in recognizing the short-term benefits of the approach. The main benefit highlighted was regarding the improvement in efficiency of school functioning – the school opens regularly; functions for the whole day as expected; and children are engaged in activities through out the school day. In addition, it also brings in greater external efficiency by ensuring fuller enrollment of children in school and greater regularity in their attendance. Education Department officials and some community members considered this as the best antidote for tackling the problem of teacher absenteeism and consequent non-functioning of schools regularly. Department Officials were of the opinion that, considering the level of unfilled teacher vacancies, this was the best way to ensure that a reasonable teacher pupil ration could be maintained in all the schools. Thus, essentially they were echoing the Government line of thinking. Probably there was need for longer and more in-depth engagement with the respondents to elicit their personal opinions on the issue.

On the issue of quality, the officials argued that it could not negatively impact on quality of teaching-learning as most of the para teachers recruited based on merit and

invariably possess higher academic qualification than the prescribed minimum which is just higher secondary certificate. They conceded that para teachers lack professional qualification but this could be made up with recurrent training. As already noted community/VEC members could not reflect on this seriously. It was only the regular teachers who opined that lack of professional training in pedagogy would affect quality. Of course, it was difficult to get any clarity on the concept of quality being referred to. In fact, it will be complex exercise to delineate the effect of teaching by para teachers on student learning as both categories of teachers are officially engaged in teaching in the same schools. Comparing with learning in schools with only regular teacher may also not serve any meaningful purpose as these are already being criticized for their poor quality.

Overall observations

Uttar Pradesh, being the most populous State of India, employs largest number of teachers in its schools. But during the last few years, records show that the number of teachers' posts being filled has fallen drastically, adversely affecting the teacher pupil ratio. Instead, the proportion of para teachers employed by the school system in the State is growing at a fast pace. Government circulars indicate that this is the policy of the State to meet the demand for extra teachers arising out of increased enrollments and for replacing those who retire. The policy is being defended on two counts. One, this is the best way to tackle rampant teacher absenteeism. Strange argument, indeed! Punish all teachers for the failure of the administration to monitor school functioning. The second argument: "State Government has no money to appoint regular teachers on full term tenure and bear the recurring cost."

At the moment, the State Government seems to be getting away without serious protest from any quarter. Focusing on improving the micro-level reality of schools in the rural hinterland and initiating incremental improvement in their functioning through induction of local teachers seems to be pleasing every one in the field. But what is the long-term vision for development of basic education in the State? Can the Government afford to completely wipe out the cadre of regular teachers? What will be the educational as well as political cost of such a policy? On the contrary, if this is only a transitional action in view of difficult fiscal condition, how and when will the situation be normalized? Is it not necessary to have a well thought out roll back plan for reestablishing and strengthening the cadre of full time teachers in the State? It is perhaps not so important as to who appoints and controls the teacher – the state government or the local panchayat. What is more important is the service conditions offered and the care taken to ensure that the quality of education provided in government primary schools are not further jeopardized.

Section IV

Para Teachers: Critical Issues and Policy Options

The two-room school of the small village stood in the middle of nowhere. It was surrounded on all sides by sand. From the badly maintained all weather road, one has to walk through the scorching sun and the hot sand for several miles to reach this school in interior Rajasthan. The school that day was abuzz with enthusiastic children. ‘New teacher has come to the school.’ That was what everyone in the village was telling. But the village elders did not share the enthusiasm of the children. They had seen this happening many times in the past. After three days, the school reacquired its normal condition – locked doors. Villagers understood: ‘The new teacher had got herself transferred to another school.’ Everyone agreed: “We need some one who would at least open the school every day; someone who can just be with our children in the school; someone who can at least teach them basic reading and writing skills. This is possible only if the person lives in the village.” But the Government teacher would not like to stay in this remote village. “Perhaps one should look for a volunteer who may not be a fully qualified teacher but has got some schooling and is ready to teach our children” Someone said: “Perhaps, we could look for a married couple who would live in the village and teach our children in the school during the day; and in the evening they could help the older out-of-school children and adult illiterates to acquire some literacy. We could give them an honorarium for the voluntary service and assist them in other ways in the village.” That was the birth of the concept of a ‘shiksha karmi’. The idea caught the imagination of the representatives of a development NGO working in the area and eventually took the shape of the now well-known *Shiksha Karmi Project* implemented in selected villages of Rajasthan. The Project received appreciation from national and international quarters for the impact it could make on the participation of children and their learning, and also for the simplicity of the idea that evolved from within the field.

Around ten years later, bureaucrats in some of the neighbouring states found the idea a lucrative proposition – in the sense that one could get a teacher at a much lower salary than the normal. Thus, the ‘shiksha karmi’ was reborn in a new incarnation as the generic ‘para teacher’ and multiplied on a large scale essentially building on the economic aspect of the scheme; the social and voluntary spirit behind the idea was abandoned as irrelevant. Initially, such teachers were placed, involving the local community in the selection process, in remote school-less habitations. But the economic lure was too compelling that the Governments decided to have such teachers placed in the regular schools also. To begin with, they were appointed to meet the demand for additional teachers arising out of new children who came to school in response to enrollment drives; particularly in schools functioning in externally assisted EFA Project areas, with full endorsement and financial support of the national authorities. Para teachers, thus, became part of regular schools. Meanwhile, teacher vacancies had remained unfilled in huge numbers running to hundreds of thousands across different states. State Governments designed new schemes with more attractive names to fill these

vacancies with para teachers. Since then number of para teachers have increased enormously in several states. It was around 220,000 in 2002; the number has probably got doubled by now to around half a million. The spread is of course not uniform. There seems to be a concentration of such teachers in a few selected states. From the pace at which induction of such teachers into the system is taking place, it appears that some State governments are pursuing an agenda of gradually replacing all regular teachers with para teachers. Several issues have arisen out of this new development of employing teachers on contract basis in regular formal primary schools on large scale almost threatening the very existence of a professional cadre of school teachers. This section is devoted to discussing some of the critical issues concerning para teachers and exploring the policy options available to deal with them

The Real and the Illusory

As the 21st century unfolds, the public school system in India seems to have been trapped in a peculiar situation. Tens of millions of children in the country are still out of school and one third of the adult population continues to be illiterate. Yet, with a clever quirk of the bureaucratic hand the State appears to have succeeded in creating an illusion that the goal of UEE is imminent, even with less money. Every one is happy in the game! The State is happy because it has to spend less money and does not have to bother about the continued welfare of their contract teachers. Possibly, the IMF and pundits of structural adjustment programme are happy that the Government is able to reduce public expenditure significantly, without virtually reducing access to school places. Village elites are happy that they have an important role in selecting the para teacher; because the school functions more regularly; and either they are incapable of comprehending the nature and quality of transaction taking place in the school or they are indifferent to it because their children do not study there. Para teachers are happy that at last the curse of unemployed is at least partially wiped out; there is a lingering hope that they may become full time teachers (more importantly Government employees) at some point of time in the future. Civil society organizations and private school managements are happy because Government is only endorsing a practice that many of them have been adopting for long. Even the regular teachers are happy because the school will remain open every day even without their going; the criticism of school remaining closed due to their truancy and habitual absenteeism does not hold any more. Is it only some teacher educators and teacher unions who are crying foul?

The issue needs a more dispassionate analysis. It is real that several State Governments in the country are caught in deep fiscal crisis. They find it difficult to even maintain the existing level of recurring expenditure and are definitely unable to expand government expenditure, a major part of which goes towards staff salary, including that of teachers. It is real that children in many schools remain unattended and consequently do not learn due to teacher absenteeism, some of which at least if not most is unauthorized. It is real that many small habitations have no schools and even with a school, there is no guarantee that one can get a regular teacher to live in the village and serve the school regularly. It is real that there are a large number of unemployed educated youth who are ready to live and work in the village. It is real that schools served by para

teachers open more regularly and function for the whole day. It is true that more children are getting enrolled and attending schools where para teachers are working. It is real that para teachers in most cases do not possess professional teacher training thus flouting the national norms set by NCTE for becoming a school teacher. It is real that para teachers are being exploited as they receive a much lower compensation for doing the same work as compared to a regular teacher; they do not get even normal benefits such as leave and medical assistance though they work full time in the government system. It is also probably correct to say that student learning is unsatisfactory in all schools whether they have only regular teachers, or only para teachers, or a combination of the two. Finally it is real that a very large number of para teachers are already working in the system, perhaps for several years by now.

Critical Issues and Policy Options

It is amply clear that even in the short period that it has been in practice, employment of para teachers has become a highly contentious issue. Opponents and proponents have emerged on both sides of the divide. While the policy and practice is being defended by the proponents for the immediately visible benefits it is bringing in, the critiques highlight the detrimental impact it would have on the education system in the long term. While the proponents point to the economic benefits involved, others criticize the view as myopic and opportunistic as the long term educational costs and even economic costs involved outweigh the immediate benefits such practices bring in. The issue is definitely quite complex involving multiple elements and varying stakeholder perspectives. There is an urgent need to address the subject carefully and examine the various policy options available in tackling the issues. The following paragraphs are devoted to delineating the component elements constituting the practice of engaging para teachers and identifying the possible courses of action.

1. Teachers as Employees of Local Bodies – Not of the State Government

Elementary school teachers in most of the states are state government employees. Empowering the local self government bodies with respect to governance of elementary education system has been a long standing demand, which is also a part of the recommendations accompanying the Constitutional Amendment concerning elections to and composition of Panchayati Raj bodies. State Governments have been slow to bring in legislations to this effect. However, some state governments have issued executive orders transferring control over the elementary education system to local bodies. Thus, one should not have any problem with the policy of making school teachers employees of the local bodies and not of the State Government. In fact, this has been the case in some states in Western India – for instance, teachers in the public schools of Mumbai or Vadodara are employees of respective Municipal Corporations and are not treated as State Government employees. Therefore, is there an issue about para teachers being appointed by local bodies? The problem seems to lie in discriminatory practices being adopted in certain states by creating categories of teachers and para teachers; different categories to be appointed at different levels; the full time regular teacher continues to be appointed by the State Government. State Governments have to come out with a proper

policy on personnel policy on teachers and should be followed uniformly for all teachers in all districts and other local body areas. Giving freedom for the local bodies to arbitrarily decide on salary scales and service conditions would lead to unwarranted confusion and feelings of discrimination among employees working in neighboring schools. The State has to establish acceptable norms for employing teachers and that should guide all the local bodies. After all, State Government subventions constitute the essential sources of revenue for most of these local bodies. Some observers raise the issue of corruption and favouritism finding their ways into the process of teacher selection by local bodies. But this is an issue that has to be tackled at all levels, State Government level included, not just at the level of local bodies.

2. Appointing Teacher to a School – Not to the System

In the traditional framework of teacher management, all teachers are appointed to the system, normally to the general pool of teachers in a district and they are then posted to schools fill vacancies. Contrary to this practice, para teachers are appointed to a particular school. Since one of the major sources of teacher grievances, often involving corrupt practices, in the system relates to posting and transfers, appointing teacher to the school should be seen as a positive step. The teacher who takes position in the school is conscious that moving out of the school cannot be manipulated; rather it would involve competing with other candidates again for selection in another school. This would also help associate the performance of a school with the groups of teachers rather than with the ubiquitous problems of the system as a whole. The fact that their performance will be viewed in a contextual fashion with regard to a particular school in which they are working imbues in the teachers a sense of affiliation and attachment to the school.

3. Insistence on Appointing the Teacher from the Same Village

Another practice adopted in appointing para teachers which needs careful reexamination is that of appointing them only from within the village where the school is located. This has both positive and negative consequences. The practice is invariably defended on the count that outsiders are not willing to reside in the village and work regularly for the school. The chronic problem of teacher absenteeism in many schools is quoted as the rationale for the practice. Perhaps, the issue of teacher absenteeism is being oversimplified. Restricting the positions only for the local residents limits the scope for competition from eligible candidates and promotes parochialism. In fact, the empirical study in Uttar Pradesh did bring out a few such instances. It also obstructs the emergence of a professional teacher cadre based on work and a process of professional selection process rather than ascription through local leadership in the village. That outsiders will not be ready to reside in the village is more of an assumption, as teachers have never been selected till now for a particular school. Residing in the village may be made a precondition for the offer. While appointing teachers to individual schools could do well to bring in a sense of institutional affiliation and ownership to the teacher, belongingness to a larger professional peer group is equally important. Schools and teachers have to view themselves as part of a larger system. Therefore, limiting the selection process to the local village community will destroy this larger identity that is essential.

Irregular functioning of the school due to absenteeism and irregularity among teachers cannot be the logic for appointing local persons as teachers without professional screening. The solution, obviously, lies in strengthening the process of school monitoring. Malaise of low motivation, poor accountability, irregularity and absenteeism is not confined only to the teacher cadre within the education department. It is quite pervasive at other levels also. Otherwise, how does one explain the existence of a school in the village for several decades but producing practically no literates? What have the school supervisors been doing, if the teachers have not been attending to their duties in the school properly? Stricter implementation of the supervision system will go a long way in reducing teacher absenteeism and improve school functioning. Also, there is more to the system of teacher posting and transfer than what is written in the rulebook. Irrational actions with regard to appointment, posting and transfer on the part of authorities at the state level have given ample space for corruption and nepotism, thereby taking away the moral authority of the leadership to effectively monitor the work of the teachers. Indeed, some State Governments have attempted, with considerable success, to streamline the system through a programme of personal consultation and counseling both at the stage of initial posting and during subsequent transfers, making the whole process transparent and publicly accountable.

4. Involvement of the Local VEC or SMC in Teacher Management

Almost all policy documents in recent years have talked about the important role that local community can play in school management. Specific references are made to the way it could influence school-community relationship and provide an opportunity for the parents to be actively involved in the education of their wards. It is with this perspective that several state governments have begun to redefine the role of VECs and School Management Committees by empowering them with several functions and authorities in school management including certain elements of control over teachers. For instance, in certain states, attempts have been made to decentralize sanctioning of leave to teachers to the local SMC. There is no doubt that such efforts have helped develop a sense of ownership of the school among the community members contributing significantly to managerial efficiency and development. However, teacher management should not be seen only as monitoring the regularity of the teachers. Facilitating professional development of teachers through appropriate supervision and support mechanisms forms an integral part of teacher management. It is in this context that fully localizing the phenomenon of teacher management in all aspect is likely to negatively affect the professional aspect and consequently affect quality of teachers work in the school. Every teachers have to be growing professionally and it is essential that career development paths are worked out for every teacher; provision of professional support and arrangement for assessing of professional achievement has to be made for every teacher. These cannot be organized by fully decentralizing teacher management to local levels. Teachers have to belong to a peer group of professionals. The locus of control on teacher management has to lie in such professional groups, which can be organized only at reasonably larger level and policies of the State Department of Education, would be critical for this.

5. *Employing Teachers on Contract instead of Permanent Tenure*

Should teachers be employed on permanent tenure till retirement or could they be employed on contract? Employment on contract basis cannot be completely ruled out. There could be short term tenures but this should be accompanied by a transparent system of performance assessment. Continuation of tenure would have to be dependent on the findings of such assessment. Further, being contract should not deny the teachers from other normal benefits of service such as leave, medical benefits, pension/provident fund, and so on. This should be available as per rules and regulations that already exist for determining such benefits and should be applied to all teachers. Also, if teachers are to be appointed on contract, such a policy should be declared as applicable to all. It cannot be applied selectively to some while some others are appointed on permanent tenure basis.

Appointment on contract basis is being advocated as means of bringing discipline among teachers and for increasing their motivation does not seem meaningful. There is no basis to believe that dangling the short term contract like a Damocles' Sword would raise the motivation level of all teachers. Nor is it meaningful to consider appointment of teachers on contract as part of voluntary social service offered by the educated youth. In fact, as the studies have shown persons have joined as para teachers essentially to fight out current unemployment and with the hope of getting a permanent tenure in course of time. All indications are that in due course of time, holding such an insecure appointment, which can be arbitrarily terminated, will only increase dissatisfaction with the job and adversely affect the work in the schools.

6. *Employing Teachers with Lower Academic Qualifications and Professional Training*

Teacher is the only academic resource available to the children, in many schools of the country. In such schools, as much as in other schools, quality of education provided is determined almost exclusively by the quality of the teachers in the school. How does one ensure the quality of the teaching community? Teachers' quality in any school depends on a variety of factors which includes their own motivation and the willingness to apply themselves to the task effectively. However, a basic necessity for good teaching is their mastery of the subject knowledge and their professional pedagogic skills. It is with this in view that minimum levels of academic qualifications and pedagogic training requirements are prescribed as *sine qua non* for becoming a teacher. It is true that possessing academic qualifications and professional training does not guarantee quality but compromising on the basic minimum would prove dangerous, damaging the very foundation on which the teaching profession is organized.

What should such minimum qualifications be for teachers in elementary schools? This is already specified by the National Council of Teacher Education, which is the statutory body established the Parliament for regulating teacher education and the professional requirement for teaching in schools at various levels. Thus, employing teachers without the specified minimum qualifications is not justifiable in the normal course. Non-availability of qualified personnel in remote areas is often given as the rationale for appointing teachers with lower levels of academic qualifications. But such

exigencies will have to be dealt with as special after close scrutiny of the need on school-by-school basis. They do not warrant formulating any general policy of exemption so that non-availability is used as the bogey for appointing people who are not fully qualified to teach. This should be applied for both academic qualification and professional training requirements. Unfortunately, exceptions are being quoted as the rule by those very authorities who are actually responsible for safeguarding the provisions. Even in cases where such less qualified persons are employed either they should be replaced in a time bound fashion by fully qualified persons or the employing authorities should create avenues for on job training to bring their qualifications at par with the prescribed levels. Use of modern technology and distance education mechanisms could be explored for reaching such on job education improvement programmes for teachers.

To what extent does lowered qualification requirement affect quality of education provided in the schools? One of the major criticisms against appointing para teachers is that they are ill prepared to handle teaching. Empirical information collected from across the states shows that most of the para teachers possess the basic academic qualification, namely, 12 years of formal education. In fact, data from Uttar Pradesh showed that most of them had university degrees. Thus the real issue is that of professional training. While para teachers just receive a month long orientation on a standard package, regular teachers go through a two-year programme. How do the two groups compare in terms of student learning? This has been the subject of investigations in some of the studies sponsored by state governments or project organizers? Indeed, some of the studies show that teachers with lower qualifications working in poorly equipped learning centres do better than their counterparts in regular schools functioning in better equipped schools. However, most of the studies are inadequate in their technical design quality to unequivocally establish the findings. Further, comparing performance of students with regular government schools that are already known to be poor in quality does not prove anything worthwhile. As micro studies (such as the one quoted in Section II) of student learning on criterion referenced tests invariably reveal that learning levels of children in government managed schools are uniformly poor irrespective of whether they are taught by para teachers or fully qualified regular teachers. Thus, the issue of academic and training qualifications have to be followed essentially as a standard state policy; there is no much meaning in trying to show that under qualified teachers are good enough through ill designed comparative evaluation studies.

7. Appointment of Para Teachers as a Cost Saving Measure

That a Government has to pay salaries to its employees according to the means available is a logical proposition. Therefore, it is a defensible proposition if a State government decides to reduce the salary scales of its employees including those of school teachers. However, appointing teachers on contract as a cost saving measure under exploitative conditions of service (mainly because the incumbents are helpless as unemployed educated youth) is not only indefensible but also reprehensible. This is particularly so as the schools, which are targeted for employment of contract teachers are those where children from the poorer sections of the society study. Thus it would exacerbate inequity in the society by creating classes of government schools with

different kinds of teachers for different classes of population. Second, such measures will in the long run jeopardize the development of a system of primary education for which the establishment of a cadre of professionally qualified teachers is critical. Therefore, it is inevitable that the State Governments which have launched such programmes prepare to roll back the schemes. Governments could examine the possibility of creating multiple salary structures for school teachers with in-built promotional possibilities based on performance assessment. For instance, entry-level salary scales for teachers could be slashed without affecting other benefits that should accrue to them. Such arrangements already exist in other sectors of government service such as the secretarial service. The need is to look for innovative solutions that have long term sustainability; and do not destroy the basic fabric of the education system and are not detrimental to the evolution of a strong professional community of teachers

What would one do with the huge number of teachers who are already serving for several years on contract basis? The issue needs careful handling. The situation is not uniform across states and even within states and therefore warrant decisions based on local conditions, without compromising on the commitment to meet the standards and norms stipulated by the NCTE. First of all, employing persons without even basic academic qualifications has to be considered only in extra ordinary circumstances. The primary option in these cases should be to replace them with fully qualified individuals. As a second option they should be offered opportunities for enhancing their qualifications so that in a time bound fashion they reach the same level of academic credentials. Since the number of such persons is relatively small, this should not pose a major problem in any state. As has already been noted, the number of para teachers without adequate professional training, though with the necessary academic qualifications, is very large. Some states already have the provision to absorb the teachers on contract provided they have acquired all the prescribed academic and professional qualifications. Such schemes of absorption have to be streamlined to ensure that the long-term interests of the incumbent teachers as well s of the system are protected. Other states could also emulate some of these policies. In addition, it would be necessary to launch programmes of in-service training for the teachers already in schools on contract for more than two years to acquire full teacher training qualifications. Acquisition of such professional training qualifications could be made mandatory without financial assistance form the state. Such a measure would, of course, be meaningful only if further induction of teachers into the system without full training qualifications is immediately stopped. The goal will have to be to initiate actions that bring back the teacher cadre to a stable setting but without affecting the functioning of the school where para teachers have already been engaged.

Conclusion

Within the federal framework in which India operates, school education is essentially governed by individual State Governments. However, there have been concerted efforts by the national and State Governments to move towards the creation of a national system of education which embodies national values and commitments without impinging on the freedom of the State Governments to manage the affairs of school education within the State. It is within this perspective that a common structure of the education system has come to be adopted across the country consisting of 8 years of

elementary education corresponding to the compulsory education age group, followed by 2 years of secondary and then 2 years of higher secondary education. Part of this endeavour to build a national system of education was also to prepare personnel who can effectively deal with the task of teaching the children at various levels. After several decades of debates and discourses, a broad consensus was arrived at for determining the contours of the teaching profession in terms of academic and professional training qualifications appropriate for those teaching at different levels of education. Specifically, a general consensus was arrived at specifying that to be a teacher at the elementary stage, it would be necessary to possess at least 12 years of education followed by two years of professional training in pedagogy. Similar understanding was evolved for teachers at other levels of schooling also. Culmination of these efforts was the creation of the National Council of Teacher Education vested with the authority to regulate teacher education programmes, in general and the requirements for teaching at various levels, in general. In fact, specifications by the NCTE are in the form of legal mandate that all States have to follow. The underlying purpose of these efforts has not been to centralize control of teacher cadre at the national level but to establish a teaching community of acceptable standards of quality to teach the younger generation studying in schools across the country.

Need for creating and nurturing a professional cadre of teachers does not require any special justification. Building such a cadre governed by well-designed norms and standards of agreement between the State and the teachers is an important task that the State Governments have been engaged for along time. In fact, one could see a reasonable level of success being achieved in this regard in several states. Aberrations being created by the employment of para teachers who do not conform to nationally agreed standards have to be viewed in this context. State governments can indulge in such actions only at the peril of undoing the efforts made to streamline the system over several decades. The need at the present juncture is to move towards a stable cadre of teachers with a transparent process of recruitment, posting, and promotion.

Government of India's role in tackling the problems arising out of appointment of para teachers is very critical. There is a general sense of agitation among many stakeholders that second track options are being passed onto the poorer sections of the society. National level leadership has to be proactive in aligning practices in different states with the national policy perspective, which has consistently highlighted the need for building a strong cadre of teachers. It is important to recognize that all states are not similarly placed either in terms of their financial conditions or in terms of education development. National level interventions in promoting primary education in states should be informed by these contextual variations. At the present juncture, on the one hand, there is need for considerable flexibility in implementing centrally sponsored programmes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in different states and on the other hand, to encourage State Governments to view investment in education including the development of a strong community of professionally qualified teachers in a positive sense as creating assets and not liability. Short term economic gains and political expediency should not be allowed to cloud the vision for creating a national system of education in the country.