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School Choice and Divided Primary Education: Case Study of Varanasi, UP State, India

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Introduction

A committee of education experts was formed in the mid-1960s to consider the education issues facing India after its independence. This Education Commission proposed various reforms with most of them being later employed in India's education policies. However, one reform idea proposed by the Education Commission, "Neighborhood Schools," was not realized. A Neighborhood School is the concept of a single school in a given school district to provide education for all children, regardless of income, caste or religion. Due to strong opposition by those concerned that this would be a severe limitation of parental freedom, it is unclear when this idea might become a reality.¹⁾

In India, school choice is generally left up to the parents, even from the primary school level. In the 1960s when Neighborhood School was proposed, there was a sense of crisis that schooling would divide society into two groups: big city elites, who had the resources to choose private schools, and common people, who attended government schools. Naturally, this di-

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vision would be a major obstacle to primary education's objectives of equal opportunity of education and social integration. Also, primary education-related topics, such as the failure of free and compulsory education, have already been critically debated [Tilak 2001] [Weiner 1991]. An additional condition which has not been emphasized until now is the relation between the objectives of primary education and leaving school choice up to the parents; this paper argues that this is an important condition which characterizes primary education in India. Also, the impact of school choice is thought to be of growing import. For freedom of choice to have any real meaning, a choice must exist, and for primary education in India today, in the form of private schools, the choices are rapidly increasing. In 1996, it became evident that it was no longer possible to ignore the impact and growth of private primary schools [Kingdon 1996].

One can view this increase in private schools in one of the following two ways. Like the Education Commission's view, the first of these is the pessimistic view that primary education must continue class-divided, and the growth in private schools will be paid for by the beneficiaries themselves. However, unlike the 1960s, this pessimistic view does not appear able to completely tell the story of private schools in the present day. That is to say, previous field surveys indicate various kinds of private schools, ranging from the relatively affordable to the prohibitively expensive, pointing to the wide range of users of private schools [De et al. 2002]. The poor quality of India's government primary schools is also well known. As a result, one can take the optimistic view that today's private schools offer new alternatives in educational opportunity.

At this stage, it is not clear which of these viewpoints is correct, because previous primary education research has shed very little light on the actual private school situation.²⁾ For instance, why are private schools increasing in numbers? Is this a phenomenon common throughout India? Who attends these private schools? What relation do private schools have with government schools? Even basic questions like these remain unanswered. This paper will attempt to answer these questions by considering results of a survey conducted in India's Uttar Pradesh (UP) state. Naturally all of these questions cannot be answered through the results of a survey of a single city in UP. Our discussion will be limited to a single state in northern India, and will only be able to consider this city's conditions. Even the answers to these basic questions are provided with the following

two limitations. The first issue is the variety of the mixture of government and private schools providing primary education. The second issue concerns the parents' school choice and the results. In examining and defining these two issues, this paper aims to assess the recent growth trend of private schools. That is to say, it seeks to focus upon the current existence of the problem of a reproduction of inequality between social classes through education, a situation that has long been found in India.³⁾

The remainder of this paper is laid out as follows. Before dealing with the central issue, we will look at the background and present situation of primary education in UP where private and government schools coexist. Then, using data from a survey conducted in Varanasi, UP from 2001 to 2002, we will shed light on the variety of schools and parents' school choice and its effects. In the final section, we will revisit the issues which were raised in this introduction, and discuss what meaning freedom of school choice and private choice holds for school education in India.

1. Primary Education in UP, Where Government and Private Schools Coexist

Freedom of school choice is only meaningful when there is a certain amount of variety in the available choices. Based on impressions from the field, the options in cities in UP appear quite rich. In this section, we will discuss the private school accreditation system, and with existing education statistics we will describe the current condition of primary education in this private/government mixed environment.

1.1 Private and Government Schools in UP

For educational statistical purposes, primary schools are grouped into: a) Government Schools, b) Local Body Schools, c) Private Aided Schools (PA), and d) Private Unaided Schools (PUA).

a) Government Schools and b) Local Body Schools are established and operated by national or local governments, and for this reason they are both considered 'government schools.' PAs are private schools that have been accredited by the central or regional government (states or directly administered regions) and receive public funding. In receiving government funding, PAs become publicly operated, with public control of operational areas such as teacher selection. While they are technically private

schools, for all practical purposes they have the same characteristics as government schools. PUAs are private schools that have received government accreditation but no public funding, and have passed government standards for quality of facilities and subject matter content. One requirement for UP government accreditation is that the school uses the regional language (Hindi) as the instructional language. There are also e) Unrecognized Private Schools (Un-P) which are not recognized by the governments.⁴⁾ Un-Ps are true private schools and as such are not bound by government administrative or subject content regulations.

Unless they receive funding through non-government sources (i. e. non-governmental organizations), funding for PUA and Un-P, which do not receive public funds, comes mainly from the students. In other words, the system for primary education in UP allows for private schools supported by the beneficiaries. Also, the existence of Un-P suggests that the system allows flexibility in forming educational practices and setting up schools run by ordinary citizens in areas where the state has little or no control. Additionally, private schools can be not only state-accredited, but instead receive accreditation from the central government, New Delhi or other directly administered regions. This means the state government's educational policy to use Hindi as the instructional language does not necessarily impact the programs of schools that were accredited by other government entities.

The above discussion shows that institutionally, parents have four choices: government school, PA, PUA, and Un-P. However, even more diverse choices may exist within the PUA and Un-P categories. Since government schools and PAs fall under strong public control when they receive public funding, and their educational programs are relatively standardized. On the other hand, this standardization has no impact on PUAs and Un-Ps. In the case of Un-Ps, which are completely unregulated, it is not unusual for there to be a wide range in the quality of education, even for schools with similar tuition rates. Also, while PUAs are regulated to some extent by accreditation, various types of PUA may exist because multiple government entities are accrediting them.

1.2 Primary Education in UP with Mixed Private and Government Schools

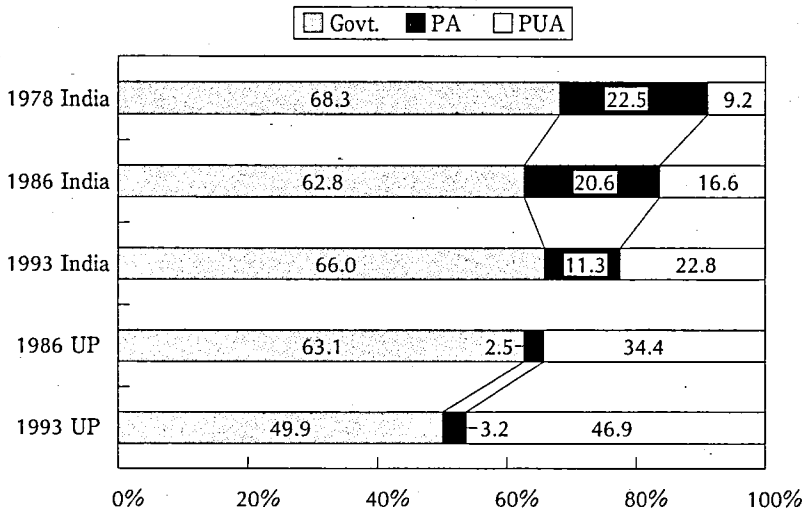
In UP primary education there is a great variety in school choice. Our

next question is: which schools make up what percent of the total? We will briefly address this by referring to data from National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)'s school survey: All India Educational Survey (AIES). AIES is a regular survey of all schools in India, and is the main public education database. However, AIES has the following two major limitations: first, it contains no information about Un-Ps, and second, PUAs, which are extremely diverse when viewed from the perspective of private school accreditation, are all grouped into a single category. Even with these shortcomings, the AIES data allows us to understand to a certain extent the status of primary education in UP with mixed government and private schools.

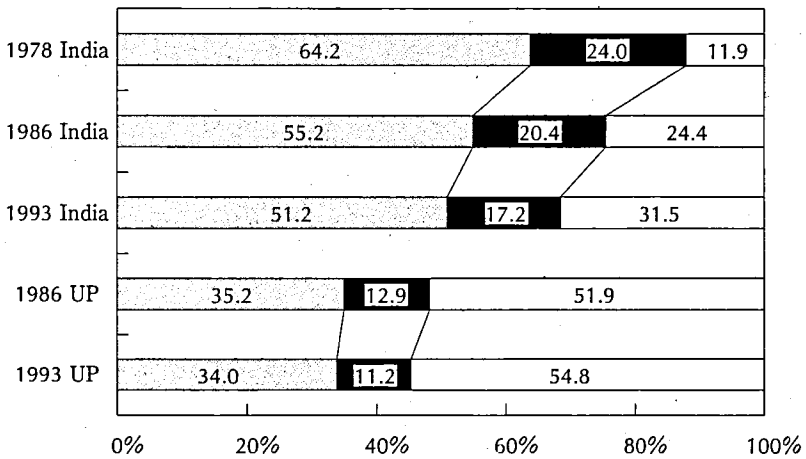
Table 1 represents the AIES results for 1978 (4th AIES), 1986 (5th AIES) and 1993 (6th AIES) for three of the four school types: Government, PA and PUA. Un-Ps are omitted from this table because they were not included in the AIES statistics. For both India and UP, only city results are referenced for this data.⁵⁾ It is interesting to note that on India's nationwide level, PUAs began increasing significantly from 1978. In urban areas in India for the present (1993), approximately 20 percent of primary schools and approximately 30 percent of upper primary schools are PUA. The table also shows how reliant Uttar Pradesh is on PUAs to fulfill its compulsory education needs. As early as 1986, the PUA share in UP surpassed India's present day average for urban areas, and as of 1993, PUAs made up 46.9 percent of all primary schools and more than 54.8 percent of all Upper Primary Schools. Another interesting observation when comparing compulsory education in UP with that of India as a whole, is that the PA share is small, with government schools and PUA constituting the majority.

The AIES data shows that, first, there have been many private schools in urban areas in UP for quite some time, second, the data shows that these private schools are not PAs, which are subject to public regulation and are very similar to government schools, but instead are relatively "free" PUAs. In other words, even from the 1980s parents have had the choice of government or private school types, and the environment has been favorable for diversification of private schools. Additionally, through the balance of government and private schools, the favorable position of PUA became even stronger in the 1990s. This is the extent of what can be learned from the AIES data. In the next section, we will, using original

Table 1 Shift in Numbers of Government and Private Schools in Urban Areas
Primary: Class I-V



Upper Primary: Class VI-VII



Note) "Govt." refers to central and local government schools.

Per-state data does not appear in the 1978 NCERT Report.

Source) [NCERT 1982: 368-369] [NCERT 1992: 404] [NCERT 1998a: 15]

survey data, approach the topic of diversity of schools in urban areas in UP in ways that cannot be learned from only the official education numbers.

2. Overview of the Varanasi, UP Survey

a) Survey Range and Period

The surveyed region was the city of Varanasi and its suburbs, in the eastern part of UP. According to 2001 census results, Varanasi's population is about 1.2 million people, ranking fourth in population of all cities in UP [JRC 2002: 172]. The state of education in Varanasi, like that of UP as a whole, is not good. The literacy rate is 69 percent (UP average for urban areas is 70.6 percent) [JRC: 2002: 173]. As of 1989, there was a total of 263 primary schools (Class I — V) in Varanasi [Register General of India 1999: 490]. This survey focused on the defined Varanasi (Varanasi Urban Agglomeration: VUA) area, but also included schools and households outside this area (politically defined as 'villages'). This was done to include information on some schools that use buses to collect students who do not live within the VUA limits. The survey was performed from August 2001 to December 2002 in three phases (each phase lasted for approximately 2 months).

b) School Survey

The target of this survey was 5-year primary schools, which comprise the first half of primary education in India. These break down into five private schools (PUAs) and six government schools. Headmasters or school administrators filled out a provided survey form, answering questions in English or Hindi about basic school information (such as type of certification, tuition, and facilities). The eight remaining schools were selected based on the service area of three PUAs; however the survey was not performed at two of these schools.

c) Student Survey

This survey was conducted on parents of students attending the 11 schools targeted in the School Survey. A Hindi questionnaire created in cooperation with the schools was distributed to and later collected from the parents. Through various categories, the parents supplied basic house-

hold information such as family structure and income, as well as educational expenses and enthusiasm for school education. Taking parents with poor reading skills into consideration, the format was plain and simple. One school agreed to the school survey but declined cooperation in the student survey; for this school student questionnaires were not distributed or collected. For the 10 schools that participated in the survey, 1350 households returned questionnaires (response rate: 67.5 percent).

d) Non-Student Survey

This survey targeted parents of children who were of primary school age but not currently attending school. The method employed was a questionnaire-based face-to-face interview. Question categories largely mirrored those of the student survey. The non-student survey targeted 179 households; of these, 93 households returned data for the appropriate age group (ages 6-10) that could be compared with the student survey results.

3. Primary School Variety

Based on the dominant position of private primary schools, especially of PUAs, and the state of private school accreditation in UP cities, school variety is expected. Based on survey results, in this section we will focus our attention on school quality and tuition expenses in Varanasi.

3.1 Quality of Education

As expected, a diverse range of schools existed in Varanasi (Table 2). Of the private schools, three were advertised as "English Medium" schools, using English as the instructional language. The other private and government schools held instruction in Hindi. All of the private schools were PUAs, but unlike state-accredited private schools "D", "E" and "F", private schools "A", "B" and "C" were under no obligation to follow the state's educational policy. In present-day Indian society, early exposure to English in education has merit in preparing students for competition in higher education and the job market. Therefore, in this survey, a large difference in education quality between private schools "A", "B", "C" and the other schools is expected.

Except for the "computer" educational facilities category, the categories

Table 2 Schools Summary

School Name (Location)	Certification Type (Applicable to Private Only)	Monthly Tuition	Instruction Language	Facilities												
				School house	Black- board	Desks & Chairs	Play- ground	Laboratory	Music Room	Library	Boys Lavatory	Girls Lavatory	Drinking Water	Computers		
Private A(City)	Certified, No Aid	Rs.250	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Private B(City)	Certified, No Aid	Rs.330	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Private C(City)	Certified, No Aid	Rs.360	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Private D(City)	Certified, (UP) No Aid	? Rs.20	Hindi*	Yes*												
Private E(Suburb)	Certified, (UP) No Aid	Rs.20	Hindi	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Private F(City)	Certified, (UP) No Aid	Rs.75	Hindi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Govt. A(Suburb)	—	Rs.1.5	Hindi	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Govt. B(Suburb)	—	? Rs.1-2	Hindi*	Yes*												
Govt. C(City)	—	Rs.1.2	Hindi	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Govt. D(City)	—	Rs.1.2	Hindi	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Govt. E(City)	—	Rs.1.2	Hindi	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

Notes) 'Blackboard' refers to whether or not a blackboard is available for each classroom. 'Desks & Chairs' refers to whether there are sufficient desks and chairs for all students. 'Computers' refers to whether there are computer educational facilities.

Items with blank fields are unknown. Items marked with? were estimated based on pupil survey data. Items marked with* were visually confirmed during survey cooperation.

shown in Table 2 are based on categories defined by NCERT for surveying facilities at educational institutions. Large differences in the quality of facilities were seen between the different schools. Frequently, government schools in rural areas did not even have a schoolhouse, not to mention the lack of basic equipment such as blackboards, desks or chairs. Also, the extreme condition of the government school facilities was even more evident when compared to the facilities of the private schools. Private schools "A", "B" and "C" had the best facilities, even having computers in the classroom, an environment in demand these days. Next in facility quality were the private schools "D", "E" and "F", followed by the government schools with the worst conditions.

Parents were also asked about the differences in education quality in free-form questioning in the survey. The following comments from parents of students attending government schools reveal their dissatisfaction:⁶⁾

"The teacher doesn't come to class on time." - Father, 40 years old, wage earner. "The teachers come to class and sit down but don't teach children the subject material. The children are all wandering around or playing, but the teacher doesn't pay any attention to them." - Father, age indeterminate, cultivator. "My daughter has been going to school for three years and is currently learning level 3 material, but she can't even write her own name or the name of our village. She can't spell any words." - Father, 39 years old, wage earner. "The children can't read Hindi. They can't count. They can't solve math problems." - Mother, 35 years old, housewife.

In visits to government schools during the survey, teachers were rarely seen holding lectures. Instead, they had students engaged in self-study, and several children were observed wandering around the classroom. This type of behavior was not seen in private schools. The low quality of government schools is not only an issue concerning the facilities, but extends to the quality and drive of the faculty as well. As a result, students have difficulty acquiring even basic reading skills. The school conditions and parents' freeform answers reflect on the educational institutions' situation having deteriorated to the worst possible state of affairs. School variety appears to figure prominently in the cause of an extreme gap in educational quality between schools. In this structural divide, government

schools are in last place.

3.2 Tuition

Variation was seen in tuition as well (Table 2). Tuition for government schools was practically free. On the other hand the cost of attending the best private schools - "A", "B" and "C" - was several hundred times more expensive. As seen previously with the wide range of school quality, there was a similar wide range in tuition expenses. When considering not only tuition but also other expenses paid by parents to the schools, the gap becomes even larger. In government schools, the only expenses other than tuition were periodic testing fees, costing 20 to 30 rupees each. Especially in the case of private schools "A", "B" and "C", on the other hand, parents were asked to pay for a variety of items. For example, private school "C" charged parents Rs 650 a year for a "facilities fee" and Rs 600 for "computer facilities". Moreover, these three schools offered school bus services, and parents paid between Rs100-200 per month (depending on distance and route) for its usage.

Tuition expenses for the other private schools fell somewhere between government schools and the most expensive private schools. Unlike private schools "A", "B" and "C", it is important to note here that not all private schools placed a significant financial burden on households. For private schools "D", "E" and "F" in this survey, the tuition was only Rs 20. This can hardly be considered an excessive financial burden, even for low-income households making less than Rs 1500 per month. For the cost aspect, there is an extremely diverse range, from extremely expensive private schools to very reasonable ones.

4. School Choice and Divided Primary Education

Confronted with the wide variety of choice in education as discussed in the previous section, what choice do parents make when they have the freedom to do so? In this section, we will consider the state of school choice and its consequences.

4.1 School Choice by Parents

According to NCERT, in primary education, it is most desirable for the school to be within 1 km of the child's home⁷ [NCERT 1992a: 14].

Table 3 Distance Student Travelled to Each School, by percentage

	Under 1 km	2-3 km	More than 3 km	Total (Frequency)
Private A (City)	33.3	38.4	28.2	100.0 (177)
Private B (City)	21.2	56.0	22.8	100.0 (184)
Private C (City)	8.2	38.8	53.1	100.0 (98)
Private D (City)	43.5	51.4	5.1	100.0 (177)
Private E (Suburb)	52.8	42.1	5.1	100.0 (176)
Govt. A (Suburb)	85.2	14.2	0.5	100.0 (183)
Govt. B (Suburb)	90.3	9.7		100.0 (72)
Govt. C (City)	34.2	58.9	6.8	100.0 (73)
Govt. D (City)	71.8	28.2		100.0 (39)
Govt. E (City)	100.0			100.0 (52)

In the case of government schools, most children live less than 1 km away (Table 3). On the other hand, most students attending private schools do so from beyond walking distance. For instance, more than half of the students attending Private School "C" lived more than 3 km away. For Private School "C", less than 10 percent of the pupils lived near the school. This was a common tendency for Private Schools "A", "B" and "C", all of which offer bus services. For the other private schools, students attended from a smaller area than those of Private Schools "A", "B" and "C", but compared to government schools the schools serviced a relatively wide area. However, when judging by distance, there were few students attending school across city or suburban borders, excepting the private schools with bus services. Other than Private Schools "A", "B" and "C", all of the schools generally served children living within a 3 km radius of the school.

Even so, parents who choose private schools, instead of sending their children to government schools in the neighborhood, intentionally send them to more distant schools. Parents' awareness regarding school choice was high based on comments on the freeform questionnaire for parents of children attending private schools.

"I think this is the level of instruction to expect for this tuition. Government schools these days are so inexpensive they can't provide

quality instruction. There's practically no discipline. Expensive places have a good curriculum." – Father of child attending Private School A, 45 years old, cultivator. "It's expensive, but compared to the government schools all around Varanasi, the tuition here is a good value." – Mother of child attending Private School A, 35 years old, housewife. "This school is cheaper than other schools which teach in English." – Father of child attending Private School A, 40 years old, salary earner. "The curriculum at this school is better than the schools in my village which are only 2–3 minutes away." – Father of child attending Private School D, 28 years old, businessman. "The level of instruction at this school is not very high when compared to those in town [i. e., in Varanasi]. But I think it's better than the schools in the countryside." – Father of child attending Private School E, 35 years old, businessman. "My family's economic situation is discouraging, so we will be unable to send our child to a better school in the future." – Father of child attending Private School D, 35 years old, owner of a small business.

An overview of the freeform responses as a whole indicates that parents were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the burden of expenses. About half of the freeform responses of parents of children attending private schools were dissatisfied with the high tuition. However, this was not simply dissatisfaction; while parents did touch upon the burden of expenses, only about 20 percent of all of the comments were from parents who accepted the situation considering the services provided compared to other schools. Based on the parents' comments above, a reason to choose private schools is to avoid the low quality of government schools. In addition, various private schools were also compared, and the standards for that comparison were whether or not the school was commensurate with the expense and the balance as to whether household finances could bear the burden. Parents choosing private schools took educational content and expense into account and selected the school.

"The tuition is so high that middle class families can barely afford it. But we must shoulder this burden to provide this quality of education to our children." – Father of child attending Private School C, 35 years old, salary earner. "In this day and age the quality of education decides our children's future. So, paying this much makes sense." – Father of

child attending Private School A, 37 years old, salary earner.

Many of the parents of children attending Private Schools "A", "B" and "C" in particular expressed dissatisfaction regarding the burden of expenses, but some parents willingly shouldered this burden in order to guarantee their children's futures. Also, English ability was the symbol of a good education for parents bearing a heavy burden for the future of their children. Some parents complained about the curriculum of private schools advertising themselves as English Medium schools. It is difficult to draw conclusions based solely on parent's comments about schools using English as the instructional language, but it shows at the very least that parents who send their children to elite private schools are strongly demanding English as "essential in modern society".

"In all normal ways the teachers at this school are good, but the atmosphere is not good. Even though this is supposed to be an English school, all the teachers use Hindi or even Bhojpuri (note: Bhojpuri is a Hindi dialect). Even though it's supposed to be essential in modern society, how are the children supposed to learn to speak English?" - Father of child attending Private School A, 39 years old, qualified professional.

The first reason parents choose private schools is to sidestep the poor quality government schools. When they choose expensive schools even though they are expensive, it is because they choose private schools for the future of their children. Among parents who directly link education with their children's future, many declare that the purpose of education is to become adept at the English language.

Faced with diverse choice, parents are actively choosing schools. However, cost is a limiting factor in their choices. In addition to cost, their degree of expectation of their children's education also influences their choice. It goes without saying that not all parents have the same financial constraints or educational hopes for their children.

4.2 Who do Private Schools Serve?

In this section, we will compare social and financial conditions for the households of students attending each school. This exercise helps to ex-

plain the correspondence between class structure in regional society and educational opportunity. However, the following limitations must be considered for the data used in this paper: first, this data was collected from households of students attending schools over a wide area, and second, the indicators dividing the social classes are limited. Accordingly, it is not possible to completely explain correspondence between regional social class stratification and educational opportunity. However, it is possible to define the social class characteristics of children attending the various schools. The following analysis will roughly indicate who is served by each school. Incidentally, city households with non-students are included for reference. Also, urban and suburban schools will be compared separately. This was done because city and suburban schools are thought to have a small area of coverage, as seen in school coverage shown in Table 3. Furthermore, government schools that were judged to provide equivalent educational opportunities were placed into two categories, urban and suburban. Below, we will compare the household status of non-students and students attending each school, as shown in Table 4.

From a comparison of household income and parents' occupation, it is evident that pupils attending high quality private schools "A", "B" and "C" come from households belonging to the privileged classes. There are virtually no lower-income children attending Private Schools "A", "B" or "C". Private schools commanding high fees are exclusively used by well-to-do households. Also, the occupations of Private School "A", "B" and "C" parents were characteristically white collar, professional or self-employed on a large-scale basis. The occupational status of parents of city pupils attending private schools "D", "E" and "F" and government schools and non-pupils was lower than parents of children at the top three private schools. Their professions were characteristically odd jobs, self-employed on a small-scale basis, or craftsmen/artisans. Judging by career differences, parents of pupils attending the top three schools and the other parents had a large difference in status. Clearly, high-quality private schools "A", "B" and "C" exist to serve children with different backgrounds from those served by the other schools.

While high-status private schools serve a wide area, including the suburbs, they exist mainly to serve affluent families with a higher occupational status living in the city and suburbs. Ultimately, only a select few households are free to choose from the full range of school options; other

Table 4 Socio-economic Conditions of Student and Non-Student Households

(City)	A) Household Monthly Income Distribution (%)			B) Occupation of Parent (%)		C) Educational Background of Parent			
	Low	Medium	High	Frequency	Top 3 Categories	Freq.	Primary Education	Higher Education	Freq. (Father/Mother)
Private A	3.0	36.5	60.5	167	1. Salary Earner (65.9) 2. Qualified Professional (10.4) 3. Business (7.9)	164	F 0.0 M 1.7	F84.0 M59.0	175/178
Private B	2.9	47.7	49.4	172	1. Salary Earner (36.0) 2. Business (31.6) 3. Qualified Professional (12.3)	114	F 0.0 M 0.5	F80.8 M71.3	182/185
Private C	0.0	24.3	75.6	78	1. Salary Earner (55.7) 2. Qualified Professional (18.0) 2. Business (18.0)	61	F 1.1 M 1.1	F90.0 M78.9	90/90
Private D	64.0	32.4	3.6	167	1. Cultivator (47.2) 2. Salary Earner (12.3) 2. Wage Earner (12.3)	106	F 9.1 M52.1	F29.1 M 6.7	165/163
Government	66.7	31.6	1.8	117	1. Wage Earner (41.2) 2. Artisan (23.5) 3. Salary Earner (20.6)	34	F22.8 M50.3	F 7.0 M 3.0	171/165
Non-Pupil	66.7	32.3	1.1	93	1. Small Business (33.8) 2. Wage Earner (15.5) 3. Artisan (14.1)	71	F48.4 M85.8	F 2.2 M 0.0	91/92
(Suburb)									
Private E	59.0	37.3	3.7	161	1. Cultivator (39.7) 2. Wage Earner (31.3) 3. Salary Earner (9.9)	131	F20.0 M64.1	F14.1 M 2.3	170/173
Government	92.6	6.9	0.4	231	1. Wage Earner (43.0) 2. Cultivator (17.7) 3. Artisan (12.7)	79	F44.1 M88.7	F 2.1 M 0.0	238/229

Notes) (A) "Low income" = Rs1500 or less, "Middle income" = Rs1501-5000, "High income" = Rs5001 or more. (B) Occupation Categories are based on categories of the India National Council of Applied Economic Research [NCAER 1996: 2-3]. Salary Earner is any white-collar monthly salaried worker, including government employees. Wage earner is any daily or piece rate worker (including odd jobs such as agricultural worker or rickshaw driver). Qualified Professional includes doctors, lawyers or other self-employed professionals. Business is any self-employed person earning Rs3000 or more per month. Small Business is any small self-employed person (such as street stand vendor) earning Rs3000 or less per month. (C) "Primary Education" refers to those quitting or finishing school after having completed 5 years of elementary education. "Higher Education" refers to those graduating university or above.

households cannot freely choose any school they wish. Depending on the household's economic status, opportunity in primary education is clearly differentiated.

However, at least economically, the lower class is not necessarily excluded from private schools completely. In the suburbs, pupils attending government schools are indeed overwhelmingly from poor families, but 60 percent of pupils at private school "E" in the suburbs were also from lower-class families. Additionally, inside the city, the economic status of families of students attending private school "D" and government schools is nearly the same. Moreover, for the city, there also is no difference seen for non-student households. Currently, some private schools are open to the lower class as well. We have already confirmed the sad state of affairs at government schools, but could the increase in number and variety of private schools be providing good quality schools as a substitute for government schools for the lower class as well?

However, we feel this is an overly optimistic perspective, because while private schools available to the lower class are indeed better than government schools, they are not significantly so. Furthermore, within the lower class, there are differences between households that choose private schools, those that choose government schools, and those that choose to not send their children to school at all. When comparing parent educational background, parents of children attending private schools have a better education than parents of children attending government schools. Additionally, the educational level of parents of non-students is remarkably low. Also, as

Table 5 Expectations and Prospects for Children's Education

City	A) Expectation for Advancement (Distribution) (%)				B) Is it possible to meet expectations?	
	Complete Compulsory	Complete Secondary	Complete University and Above	Total Frequency	No (%)	Total Frequency
Private A	0.6	0.6	86.1	172	16.3	147
Private B	0.0	1.7	89.5	162	16.0	150
Private C	0.0	1.2	76.8	86	9.2	65
Private D	6.3	33.4	54.0	174	44.9	147
Government	2.5	14.2	69.1	155	66.2	142
Suburb						
Private E	6.6	40.4	42.8	166	50.4	131
Government	9.3	41.3	42.7	237	90.8	196

seen in Table 5, there were differences in awareness of school curriculum between parents of pupils attending government and private schools. For expectations of educational advancement, parents of the top three schools had the highest expectations, and expectations of parents for all other schools tended to be low overall. There is not much difference in expectations for the other government and private schools, but differences were seen in their outlook. For both the city and suburbs, parents who sent their children to public school had more of a passive outlook regarding their children's future. This difference in educational background and educational hopes suggests that parents of children attending private schools have a higher affinity for school education than parents who send their children to government schools. The government's stance of non-regulation of school choice could be considered an economic as well as cultural asset for households, but the objective of this paper is not to examine the factors for school choice, so no further reference will be made in this regard.

Parents are actively working to give their children good educational opportunities. In doing so, school choice is expanding not only in the upper class but in the lower class as well. However, this school choice is limited by economic reality, and except for the rich, school choice is not truly free. Also, even lower class parents were divided into those who could and could not choose. The Varanasi survey showed that high-cost private schools serve children of the privileged class, reasonably priced private schools serve the lower class but only for parents with educational hopes for their children and a relatively advanced educational background, and government schools serve lower class children with comparatively low educational hopes. Furthermore, some children do not attend school of any kind. School variety and leaving the choice to parents is causing class division in primary education.

Conclusion

Our discussion up to this point has addressed several of the issues raised in the introduction of this paper. For cities in UP, the increase in tuition-based private schools is putting the education system under the control of tuition-based private based schools, out of the reach of state government control. Also, in regions which have a variety of private

schools, government schools ranked last. When considering the question of who is served by private schools, it immediately became obvious that expensive private schools serve the rich. Some private schools also were open to the lower class. However, parents of children attending government school and non-students are different from parents of children attending private school. Private school variety offers new educational opportunities for a subset of society, but the reality in Varanasi is that only the rich have rare educational opportunities, while many other children are forced to attend inadequate government schools. With private and government school education divided into two streams for the rich and poor, the simple schema presented by the Education Commission is no longer valid. However, class division clearly existed through more pluralistic streams. Thus, the tragic outlook indicated in the beginning of this paper has sadly been reinforced.⁸⁾

The conditions in Varanasi confirmed through this paper show that at the very least, in Indian cities today, primary education holds very important meaning in being 'the starting point of inequality' in opportunities throughout life in society. Naturally, the disparity in opportunities in primary education can also be considered a 'result' of socio-economic class inequality outside of schooling. However, primary education is labelled a 'starting point' because of the awareness of the need to remedy inequality. As an example, lower-class children attending schools that cannot even teach them to read Hindi are clearly disadvantaged in future competition in secondary and higher education and the job market compared to upper-class children attending English Medium schools. Children who attend government schools have little chance of even getting a foot in the door in real-world competition. Ultimately, class inequality in the job market and secondary and higher education is largely predetermined in primary school years. In India, affirmative action programs such as higher education reservation systems have been put in place to help the lower class, but this policy is doomed to fail unless the problems of inequality in primary education are resolved. Attempts to significantly improve equality in school education cannot succeed unless drastic measures are also taken in primary education.

However, reform is not that simple. The Neighborhood School is one radical reform concept, but there are currently no plans to implement this scheme. Improving the quality of government schools, which are currently

at the bottom of the educational ladder, is urgently needed, but we are immediately confronted with two problems. First, structurally there is little incentive to fix the problems with government schools. Parents who are concerned for their children's education have already left the government school system behind and chosen private education. The frustration parents feel toward government schools has been answered by private schools, so they do not seek to improve government schools. Second, the serious issue of quality must be considered. The reason private schools are popular is not simply because they offer escape from poor-quality government schools, but because they hold the promise of success for regular children. This is manifested through parents' demands for English education. Government schools based on instruction in the mother language are unable to satisfy parents' demands, hence the existence of private schools. If this is true, should government schools not be reformed so their quality matches that of private schools and satisfies parents' demands? This point will likely be the subject of intense debate.

In actuality, no viable solution has been found to fill the gap between the kind of education demanded by parents and the kind of education created through educational policy, and this remains a difficult question unresolved in Indian education. Primary education in independent India began through the creation of the Basic Education plan proposed by M. K. Gandhi. This education plan was one proposal to deal with this difficult problem, but by replacing colonial-era school education, which emphasized English and met urban, white-collar needs, with hands-on learning and emphasis on learning in the mother tongue, it did not satisfy the needs of some parents (the urban rich), and was instead rejected by parents, leading to the plan's withdrawal. Also, the Neighborhood School was one proposed solution to this problem that sought to make equal education for all children compulsory. However, even now, they cannot be considered practical remedies unless a political consensus can be achieved. Leaving school choice to parents and allowing a variety of schools lead to differentiation in primary education, which further aggravates the problem. Here, we wish to emphasize that in order to resolve this problem it is necessary to return to and confront the problems existing from before Gandhi's time.

Notes

- 1) One important proposal of the Education Commission was, with the goal of

equality and unification of society, to create a common school system aimed at all citizens (referred to as the "Common School System"). In chapter 10 of the *Education Commission's report*, the concept of the Neighborhood School appears and is recommended for implementation as a basic primary education feature of the Common School System [Biswas and Agrawal 1989: 239-271]. Later debate on the concept of the Neighborhood School by the Education Commission was summarized by education scholar J. P. Naik, who participated in the Education Commission. According to Naik, ultimately the main reason this concept was not put into practice was because a political consensus could not be reached [Naik 1998 (1979): 98]. Recently, in an NCERT-hosted research seminar, the Common School System was once again a discussion theme, and the pros and cons of the Neighborhood School concept were debated. From the seminar report, it is evident that there is a great divide between those arguing for enforced compulsory education and those arguing that this would be a limitation of freedom for parents, and it is unlikely that a political compromise will be reached any time soon [NCERT 1999]. Also, when considering not this confrontation of ideologies along with India's administrative capabilities, the Neighborhood School requiring advanced governance capabilities will frankly be difficult to implement.

- 2) There is some research dealing with the topic of primary education disparity between government and private schools. For example, survey research analyzing factors in school non-attendance found that the low quality of government schools in comparison to private schools plays a role in lowering motivation to attend government school, and encouraging school dropout rates [Lieten 2000]. Also, from the perspective of dropout rate differences, some survey research points out differences in output for government and private schools, which were not considered in this paper [Singh and Sridhar 2002]. However, that research only highlights differences between government and private schools, and does not deal with the realities of educational opportunities in increasingly pluralistic regional society, including various schools.
- 3) The issue of reproduction of inequality between classes through education means having a direct impact on the distribution of position and occupations, and the Board Examination and university are obviously critical. With that as a given, this paper has focused on primary education, but the first reason for doing so is because the disparity in secondary education is thought to be naturally dictated by the preceding stage of education. A second reason (and this is more crucial than the former) is that a 'hands-off' policy toward school choice for primary education is not a condition normally seen in developed countries, and characterizes the existence of inequality in educational opportunities in India.
- 4) Un-Ps, which cannot exist officially, are able to exist as educational institutions through an informal mechanism. For example, Un-Ps, which cannot issue degrees for grade advancement or graduation, acquire this capability through nearby government schools, PAs or PUAs. In the author's experience in Varanasi, children attending non-accredited schools would get grade advancements

or take examinations at a nearby PUA and would receive a graduation diploma from that school as a technicality. Other field researchers have also pointed out this kind of informal arrangement which allows Un-P to exist in UP. For instance, Dreze and Gazdar presented a case of a rural UP village where Un-P pupils transferred to a nearby government school in their graduation year for the sole purpose of obtaining graduation diplomas. According to Dreze et al, arrangements of this type benefit not only for the Un-P but also the government school, which is under pressure to keep enrollment up to maintain faculty staffing levels [Drèze and Gazdar 1997: 73].

- 5) Currently, according to the latest available AIES data, government schools comprise 95.3 percent of the primary schools and 86.8 percent of the upper primary schools (1993) in India's rural areas, and in UP rural areas they account for 93.3 percent of primary schools and 63.2 percent of upper primary schools (1993) [NCERT 1998a: 15-16]. In India as a whole, most rural primary schools are government schools. Also regarding UP, there is reliance on private schools from the upper primary school level, but for primary schools as are the focus of this paper, dependence on private schools is unusual. However, some recent domestic research surveys in India are reporting increasing numbers of PUA and Un-P in rural areas as well [PROBE 1999: 102]. Final judgement should be withheld until the release of results of the next (7th) NCERT survey.
- 6) Freeform responses on questionnaires collected from government schools were as predicted in terms of the method of survey, but they were extremely poor. There were only eight forms with freeform responses of a total of 289 forms. However, information pointed out by the parents was confirmed by the author himself and found to be objective fact, so it was presented here. Nonetheless, the subjective opinions of parents with children in government schools towards schools are not sufficiently known because of the poor freeform responses. In contrast, the freeform responses of parents with children in private schools were relatively rich. The numbers of freeform responses obtained (as percent of the total) were 49 from Private School A (27.5 percent), 26 from Private School B (13.8 percent), 32 from Private School C (32.3 percent), 34 from Private School D (17.7 percent), and 30 from Private School E (15.8 percent). Some subjective opinions about education and schools of parents choosing private schools were known, so this was used in the analysis in Section 4.
- 7) The objective of this standard is to evaluate placement of schools in rural districts where lack of schools is still an issue; it does not mean that most students live more than 1 km away from schools in the city of Varanasi. It is only an interim standard for primary schools, setting 1 km as a distance which is assumed not to constitute a barrier to school attendance for pupils who walk to school. Therefore, according to the assumptions made by NCERT, it is not normal for students to live more than 1 km away from school.
- 8) The existence of lower-income parents who chose private schools (Private Schools D and E) is a fact which suggests that after the Education Commission class division in terms of educational opportunities, which was generally

understood to be static and fixed in the past, has now become dynamic and fluid. Thus, the tragic prospects in this paper need not be accepted in toto. The background for different behavior concerning school choice in the lower class and the role of reasonable private schools such as Private Schools D and E as a source of educational opportunities have not necessarily been clarified by the current survey. We hope to next take up these points as topics for survey research in Varanasi.

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