

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS' SCHOOLING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN RAJASTHAN AND WEST BENGALⁱ

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Abstract

This paper contrasts the opportunities for schooling for girls in rural communities in Rajasthan and West Bengal. It is based on a larger study of young people in the 11-18 year age group. Access to schooling, and its quality, in the two states were very different, and inadequate in both. In neither state are young girls assured of the freedom to be in a schooling environment which will facilitate their progress through the schooling cycle. Resources allocated are not commensurate with the size of the task. Resources available are also not utilized efficiently within the schooling system, particularly in Rajasthan. Personal, social and environmental factors in making use of the schooling facilities available are also very different, and particularly antagonistic to girls in Rajasthan's villages. Young people in Bengal benefit from the much longer tradition of schooling in Bengal, for boys and girls. Yet even within this generalized system of schools failing to build capabilities of young girls adequately, we have noted that there are benefits from schooling in the present scenario.

Introduction

This paper deals with opportunities for girls' schooling in rural areas of two very different states -- Rajasthan and West Bengal. It looks at capabilities that have been built through the schooling system in the nineties during which period there has been a concerted drive towards Education For All. Our study found that only 39% of girls in Bengal and 26% of girls in Rajasthan in the 15-18 year age group had completed class 8, and an even lower proportion would finally go on to complete class 10.ⁱⁱⁱ One could describe the situation in both states as one of "capability failure". This is shocking even for Rajasthan which is well known for very low levels of female education in particular, but where there have been a number of new educational initiatives^{iv} and much money has been poured in. But it is even more shocking for West Bengal which has a well-established tradition of schooling.

The situation with respect to completing class 8 was also found to be low for boys in both the states. Only 40% of boys in Bengal and 33% of boys in Rajasthan in the 15-18 age group had completed class 8. The situation in Bengal was similar for both boys and girls. The situation in Rajasthan was better for boys than girls as we might expect. The low achievements of boys and girls indicate that there are severe shortcomings in the access and quality of schooling provision in both states. But it also points to the need to understand the various pulls and pushes arising from differences in parents' socioeconomic backgrounds, their differing aspirations for their boys and girls, and the ability, or lack of it, to transfer these aspirations into reality.

Gender relations are of particular interest to us in the context of our focus on differences in opportunities for girls' schooling in the two states. While gender relations in Bengal are within a patriarchal context, women have a considerable degree of mobility and visibility. Norms of seclusion of women are very strong in the dominant Rajput tradition in Rajasthan and serve as a role model for other groups. Rural women from poor and

historically disadvantaged groups in Rajasthan suffer the cumulative handicap of caste, class, gender and location, and are the most excluded.

NFHS-2, 1998-9 gives us a macro picture of the very different gender relations in the two states. Figure 1 maps median years of schooling among males (on the X Axis) and among females (on the Y Axis) in the 15-19 year age group in Rajasthan, W Bengal, and India as a whole. While Rajasthan's boys have more than 8 years of schooling, the girls have little more than two years of schooling. Bengal's situation is more equitable. Boys have about six and a half years of schooling on average while girls have over five years of schooling. The picture for India as a whole is better than in both states, both for boys and girls, and in terms of gender equity indicating that both states are below the all India average.

The study was based on a cross-sectional survey in 2001 in four districts each in Rajasthan and West Bengal. The districts were selected after stratifying all the districts in each state into four groups according to rural female literacy rates and then choosing one from each group purposively to ensure a sample of districts from different agro-economic zones in each state (see Table 1). Within each district, four villages were selected randomly among villages with population in the 500 to 5000 range (according to the 1991 census). These 16 villages were the sample villages for the survey.

The survey included a household survey and a survey of all schooling facilities with classes beyond primary level. 323 households and 32 schools were surveyed in Rajasthan, and 305 households and 22 schools in Bengal. For the household survey, within each village, 20 randomly-selected households were chosen; if the selected household did not include one person in the 11-18 year age group, it was replaced by a neighbouring household with a person in this age group. Within each household, questions were addressed to a parent, preferably the mother, and to the young person themselves. The school survey looked at all schools in the village with classes 6 (5) onwards in Rajasthan (W Bengal) – the focus was on upper primary and secondary schools. There were semi-structured interviews with the class 6 (5) teacher; the class 9 teacher; and detailed observations on school functioning. In the case of villages without

schools with classes beyond primary-level, the nearest school with such classes which was being accessed by children in the village was also included in the survey.

The paper focuses on adolescent girls (11-18 years) in rural areas in Rajasthan and Bengal and highlights differences in the role of schooling in their lives, and also contrasts this with the lives of boys in their families. Section 1 takes a look at levels of enrolment and grades completed in this age-group. Girls in Rajasthan are found to be the most disadvantaged. Section 2 focuses on the schooling experience of these young people. The contexts are entirely different. There are access and quality issues related to schooling in both states, which provide a considerable part of the explanation for the low proportions of girls (and boys) that finally complete class 10 in both states. Nevertheless it is clear that young people in Bengal benefit from a more functional school system, and this contributes to greater development of their capabilities as seen, apart from other ways, in their ability to express their dreams and aspirations for the future. Section 3 looks at the very different home backgrounds in the two states and explores how girls enrolled in school get very different levels of support to continue their schooling. For households in Rajasthan, there are much higher indirect costs of schooling and lower perceived benefits from schooling than in Bengal. Parents in Bengal are themselves more educated, have greater aspirations for schooling for their children, and demonstrate this keenness by spending more on schooling. Thus girls in Bengal benefit from their parents' opportunities for schooling being built up in an earlier generation, particularly their mothers. The concluding section discusses the benefits of schooling even within the present scenario.

1 Enrolment and Grade Completion among Adolescents

Girls in rural areas of Rajasthan were found to be the most severely disadvantaged, in comparison to girls in rural areas of Bengal, and in comparison to boys in their own households in Rajasthan. High proportions were never enrolled in school – as much as 43% of those in the 15-18 year age group, compared to 23% in Bengal (see Table 2). The proportion of adolescent boys in Rajasthan who had never been enrolled was found to be

as low as 17% highlighting the huge difference in parents' demand for education for their sons and daughters.

Such high rates of never-enrolled young people were also found among the younger adolescent (11-14 year old) girls in Rajasthan. The situation in Bengal on the other hand appeared to be improving over time. Proportions that were never enrolled were much lower for the 11-14 year age group (11%), indicating that girls' schooling had become a social norm even in groups which were previously not enrolling their girls (Table 2).

Low motivation for girls' education was very much part of the social ethos in Rajasthan.^v Late enrolment was also common, so a considerable proportion of those enrolled in school were overage for their class. This reduced the likelihood that they would even complete class 8, with social norms favoring both their withdrawal from school post-puberty as well as early marriage.^{vi} There was a limited amount of dropping out which took place during the primary years and before they transitioned to the next level. In the upper primary years there was a much higher rate of dropping out. Looking at girls in the 15-18 year age group, we found that 58% had been enrolled in class 1, 48% completed class 5, and 29% completed class 8 (Table 2). Proportions of girls that finally completed class 10 were likely to be greater than the 9% who had completed it already as 17% of the girls in this age-group were still enrolled in school.

Girls in rural Bengal were at a comparative advantage: 77% of those in the 15-18 year age-group had been enrolled in class 1, 65% completed class 5, and 39% were found to complete class 8 (Table 2). Although the proportion that complete class 10 appears to be as low as in Rajasthan, the proportion of those who finally complete class 10 is likely to be much higher in Bengal because as much as 41% of 15-18 year old girls were still enrolled here .

Figure 2 plots the progress of a particular cohort of girls (the 15-18 year age group) through the schooling cycle (from grades 1 to 10) in Rajasthan and in Bengal. It is useful to compare this with the progress of boys in the same age group and in the same

households. On the X Axis, we have grades 1 to 10, and on the Y Axis we have the proportion of 15-18 year olds who reported that they had completed the specified grade. The graph shows how girls in Rajasthan are the most disadvantaged, but also how there is continuous dropping out in all four groups. Dropping out is relatively low in the first few years, which is partly linked to the policy of automatic promotion in primary school. Post-primary, the rate of dropping out increases steeply as is shown by the slope of the graph.

2. The School Environment

In both Rajasthan and Bengal, adolescents in the sample villages faced a fragmented schooling experience, in the sense that they had to shift from one school to another after completing a particular stage. These schools were usually in different locations, under different managements, and generally varied in quality, with quality worse at lower levels. The poor quality of primary schooling was often responsible for destroying children's chances of completing the schooling cycle.

Rajasthan and Bengal have considerable differences in schooling structures. In Rajasthan, primary school includes the first five grades, in West Bengal it is the first four. In Rajasthan, classes 6-8 may be merged with the primary classes to form upper primary schools (classes 1-8) or they may be part of secondary schools (classes 6-10) or senior secondary schools (classes 6-12). In Bengal, classes 5-8 are a part of secondary schools (classes 5-10) or senior secondary schools (classes 5-12).

2.1 Schooling provision varied in the sample villages

Understanding the difference in schooling provision is extremely important to get an idea of the access to and quality of schooling available to the children within their village, more so for girls in Rajasthan (where parents are less willing to send girls out of the village for schooling).

In the Rajasthan sample, only one village had a secondary school and five villages had only primary schools (see Table 3). The remaining had upper primary schools, many of which had been set up in the last 15 years by extending the existing primary schools. Both the primary and upper primary schools were under the management of the panchayat (local authority), and were generally poorly funded compared with schools under the management of the State government. The primary and upper primary schools had poor infrastructure in terms of pakka rooms, boundary walls, teaching aids and facilities like drinking water and toilets, and poorer facilities in general. For example, playgrounds, tube-lights, laboratories and libraries were far more likely to be found in secondary schools (see Table 4).

In Bengal, one sample village had no school. Half the villages had only a primary school. One had an upper primary school. Six had secondary or higher secondary schools (Table 3). Access to a secondary / senior secondary school inside the village in six villages (as well as the average distance to the nearest secondary / senior secondary school being much less, which is discussed below), indicates quite a different quality of schooling provision and quite a different level of schooling development in Bengal compared to Rajasthan. However, the fact that as many as eight villages had only a primary school, and one had none, indicates that schooling provision was still far from adequate. Access to upper primary schooling was particularly poor in W Bengal.

The enormous difference in access to schooling between the two states is very apparent when we average the distances to the nearest schooling facility across the villages (see Table 3). While the average distance to the nearest primary facility and to the nearest upper primary facility was somewhat similar in the two states (less than one km), access to secondary and senior secondary schools was quite different. The average distance to the nearest secondary school was two km in Bengal and seven km in Rajasthan, while the nearest senior secondary school was four km away in Bengal and twenty-eight km away in Rajasthan. Clearly girls in Rajasthan had a much lower chance of being allowed to continue their schooling beyond the upper primary level because of higher costs (greater time needed to travel to and from school) quite apart from safety issues.

Distance in both states had to be seen in terms of terrain and other problems of connectivity. In Rajasthan, this factor contributed enormously to the lower level of school participation beyond primary level. The problem could vary from family to family. For the goldsmith's household in a very accessible part of one village, school was two minutes away but a boy from another family in the same village took 90 minutes to walk crossing high sand dunes and thorn scrub. To get to and from their secondary school, four km away from one of the sample villages, a boy and his sister took three hours every day.

The distances which needed to be traversed in Bengal were not as great as in Rajasthan, but poorly maintained roads and transport system led to commuting problems, aggravated further in the monsoon. Children had to wade through knee-deep mud and slush (very risky because it was so slippery), others had to cross two rivers on swampy ground, still others had to cross the river in a boat to get to school. There were other access problems. In Murshidabad, children had to deal with heavy traffic while crossing the highway with the consequent danger of road accidents. Girls in the same district complained of eve-teasing while walking to school through fields and lonely places. These problems meant that students were not always regular, and contributed to their dropping out.

2.2 The schooling experience in Rajasthan

1. Primary schools / upper primary schools (classes 1-5; 1-8; 6-8)

A substantial proportion (of the 11-14 year age group) enrolled in school in Rajasthan's villages were in the primary classes, either in primary or upper primary schools. The upper primary classes in the upper primary schools had relatively low enrolment; class sizes were quite small (average size was 21). The lower enrolment^{vii} at upper primary level was partly on account of higher direct and indirect costs of schooling at this level but also related to the poor quality of the schooling system, of which there was some evidence (see below).

Only two teachers were appointed per primary school, and between three and four teachers for the eight classes of upper primary schools, so multi-grade teaching was inevitable. Teachers were quite unaccountable to the parents and the village community in general.

- a. Teachers were frequently absent, often busy trying to get themselves transferred to other schools.^{viii}
- b. Teaching itself appeared to be minimal judging from the lack of fluency among students who had had even five years of schooling.
- c. Students reported that they were very frightened of masters beating them. Some young people in the 11-18 year age group reported that they dropped out of school because of the arbitrary beating of the teacher.
- d. Bunking was frequent – it was easy because classes were held out in the open.
- e. Teachers were generally male and upper caste, not always sensitive to gender and caste issues. A young scheduled caste boy and his family told us how the teacher insisted that he drop out of school as he would not achieve big things.

The local administration was not always responsive to complaints. In three of the four Bikaner villages, the community had complained bitterly about the primary school teachers but with no success. In fact the shiksha karmi, the sole teacher in one small village school who was blatantly irregular challenged them to complain – he said he was least concerned. In a village in Barmer, no action was taken in response to parents' complaints that the teacher was asking for money to promote the children.

Some schools however had the full approval of the village community. In one such school in a village in Barmer, the administration had responded to complaints about the teachers in the local upper primary school and they were removed; the school was currently reported to be functioning well.

2. Secondary and senior secondary schools (classes 6-10; 6-12)

Physical infrastructure was better in secondary and senior secondary schools, but they also had very large class sizes, possibly because they had an enormous catchment area. The secondary school in one of the sample villages, for example, had students coming from Government Middle School Jodhsar, 40 km away from the sample village and Government Middle School Meken, 30 kms away.

There was a considerable shortage of teachers – between six and seven teachers were appointed in the large secondary schools. Here too the teachers were mostly male and upper caste. Schooling for girls was not a social norm, neither was schooling for the lower castes. This was reflected in teachers’ attitudes but also in that of fellow students. Satram, 12 years old in class 6, and from a scheduled-caste family, was sensitive to the violence of older upper-caste boys in his school. “*Badi class ke bacche kharaab lagte hain. ladaai karte hain, humse maar-peet karte hain kyonki vo Thakur hain (badi jaati ke)* (I dislike the boys in higher grades, they fight with us and hit us because they are Thakurs (upper castes))”.

Our survey indicated laxity in school functioning here too: bunking; teacher absenteeism; teachers coming late, leaving early. Students^{ix} criticized teachers for not teaching well, and for refusing to explain. “*Poochne par gaali dete hain. Bolte hain ki mujhe koi nahi poochega sab neeche baith jao* (The teacher abuses us if we ask questions. He says that no one is to ask me questions, everyone should just sit down)”. But there was also praise for teachers: “*jab tak yaad nahi hota aage nahi badte* (He does not move ahead until we have understood what is being taught)”, and for those who did not frighten or threaten their students (*darate-dhamkate nahi hain*). Hence while infrastructure was better than in the schools which did not go beyond class 8, the teaching input was quite variable.

2.3 The schooling experience in West Bengal

1. Primary schools (classes 1-4)

The poor reading ability of many children who have dropped out in primary school bears evidence of poor teaching in many schools. The poor quality of primary schools was a reason for discouragement with the whole system. Shanti from a poor scheduled-caste family in Murshidabad, for example, dropped out of primary school because the teacher did not come and there was no teaching in the school.

2. Secondary and higher secondary schools (classes 5-10; 5-12)

The bulk of adolescents enrolled in our sample were in secondary and senior secondary schools. They were able to give us evidence of a functional schooling system,^x albeit there were many problems which we shall discuss in greater detail below.

Students had a refreshing level of engagement with both their teachers and their coursework. They were articulate when asked for their opinions about their likes and dislikes whether it was about teaching methods or about subjects or about their future hopes and aspirations.

Students were very grateful for good teaching (defined by students as “teachers who explained well and who did not mind explaining again if students asked questions”). They also appreciated teachers who were cheerful and gave them the feeling that they loved children. The older ones liked teachers who discussed things with them; who treated them as friends; and who did not scold or beat them without reason, particularly if they couldn’t answer a question.

What was remarkable about the schools in Bengal was the impact that they had on the young person’s self-esteem. It opened up a different world to them. Their schooling experience was not confined to book learning. Most schools brought out school magazines. There was also evidence about many students actively enjoying art, music and sports. Schooling gave the students a level of confidence to dream about the future. Several talked about their dreams of being an artist or a music or dance teacher. There were those who aspired to study to higher levels: “Perhaps a PhD,” said one young man,

not too sure what a PhD was. Some wanted to help the less fortunate. They enjoyed the opportunity to talk about their dreams and aspirations for the future.

Adolescents in Bengal benefited from being part of an aided school system – teachers were in non-transferable posts (and hence not engrossed in arranging for their transfers to other areas as in Rajasthan). They were on the whole more accountable to the community with community representatives being part of the managing committees of the school. The students also benefited from the way in which these schools functioned as part of a “common schooling system” – all the children in the village were enrolled in these schools.

However, some explanation is required for the low proportions of boys and girls who complete class 10. One important contributory factor was that hardly any schools had been set up in the nineties.^{xi} This had overstretched the system and led to several infrastructural and teaching problems, which we describe below.

a. Overcrowding in schools: Schools were available within accessible distance but they were bursting at the seams. The infrastructure in the existing schools was just not adequate to cope with the demand. The rooms were too small to accommodate the large classes, often over a hundred. Class 6 in a secondary school in Uttar Dinajpur for example had 167 students enrolled. In Hooghly, children reported regular fights to get seats. Some said they had to reach school at least an hour before in order to get a seat. Many classes had only durries to sit on. Class 5 in a school in Birbhum had 125 children crammed into a room which was dirty and hot with the children barely able to find sitting space on the floor. Children in classes 5 and 6 in a school in rural Murshidabad came to school on alternate days. Some schools reported that during examinations, children had to come in shifts, for lack of space. It was difficult for teachers to maintain discipline let alone to teach the large classes. The classes were especially large in the upper primary stage during which a large number of children drop out.

b. Other infrastructural inadequacies: Though most schools had facilities for drinking water, there were stories of fights breaking out while children queued for water. Toilets were also there, but insufficient for the large number of students, and often too dirty to use.

Few classrooms had lights and fans, leading to hardship in summer and poor visibility in the monsoon. In general, students complained of unbearable heat. The heavy monsoons brought additional problems. Classes could not be held in many of the schools because the roof needed urgent repair.

Many schools had no boundary walls or gates which made it easy for students to bunk. Bunking was a regular phenomenon in some schools, more common among boys. A large number of boys were said to leave school for lunch and not come back. Teachers in some schools reportedly tire of scolding and beating students and look away.

c. Insufficient teaching time: School hours were found to be very short - four hours of teaching for classes 5, 6 and 7; and four and a half hours of teaching for classes 8, 9 and 10. In addition, the number of active teaching days were low - only 166 days a year. The rest was taken up by examinations and extra-curricular activities. Teaching time was further reduced by the heavy rains during the monsoon, and by teachers themselves being irregular. One parent said bitterly, "*pray-i class na niye chhuti diye dei*" (very often teachers do not take class and declare a holiday at school). Children also complained about negligent teachers - who just read from the book without explaining or who were angry with them if they asked questions. Even more extreme were teachers who wouldn't teach and just slept through the class or who beat them without reason.

d. Heavy curriculum: The curriculum was also heavy. Students in Bengal were being taught History, Civics and Geography as compared to an integrated Social Studies course elsewhere. Similarly they were being taught Life Science and Physical Science, while elsewhere they are taught a single subject. In Bengal there were more clear demands that

certain competencies be achieved. While this did mean that children learnt more in Bengal, it also meant higher rates of failure at the end of a year.

Summing up, we note that adolescents in Rajasthan were more likely to be in poorly-resourced primary/upper primary schools run by local authorities (panchayats); adolescents in Bengal were likely to be in private-aided secondary/senior secondary schools. This sets the base for very different experiences in school, which in turn differentially impacts the futures of young people. Adolescents in both Rajasthan and Bengal had to deal with a school environment characterized by poor infrastructure and inadequate teaching time. At the upper primary level and beyond, the curriculum was tough, and non-comprehension and failure was common. Failure in the annual examinations was an important reason for children dropping out. Schools had no remedial measures to help students who could not keep up. The system was functioning far below its potential. Instead of attracting those families who had a never-enrolled child, it was filtering out the majority of those who had entered the schooling system in the course of the schooling cycle.

3 The Home Environment

The home backgrounds of the adolescents in the two states differed vastly. We begin our discussion by looking at the time-use of female students, to get an idea of the pushes and pulls involved in terms of schooling. We found that Bengal students spent more time in school-related activities and did much less housework / economic work compared to students in Rajasthan. This difference in the kind of support given to young people enrolled in school is determined by a wide range of factors in the students' home environment – their parents' economic backgrounds; their work patterns, in particular, the extent of labour force participation by mothers and children; the parents' educational levels; their aspirations for their children; and their expenditure on schooling. Schooling of girls is much more a social norm in Bengal; indirect costs of schooling are lower, and perceptions of benefits of schooling are higher.^{xii}

3.1 Contrasts in lives of enrolled girls in Rajasthan and W Bengal

The contrast between the experiences of girls in the two states is very clear even just from looking at the proportions of those enrolled in the 11-14 year age group.^{xiii} Only 40% are in school in Rajasthan, while 63% of girls are in school in Bengal (see Table 5).

Looking at the time-use^{xiv} of those enrolled in school, we get an insight into the differences in the role of schooling in the two states. Three aspects need to be highlighted, all of which indicate that girls in Bengal had more time and energy to study than girls in Rajasthan.

Firstly, school occupied more than six hours a day on average in Rajasthan, compared to 4.7 hours a day on average in Bengal. The dispersed settlement pattern and the harsh terrain in the desert areas in Rajasthan is likely to have contributed to longer hours of travel.

Secondly, girls in Bengal were fortunate to have more time for self-study and were also more likely to be sent for private tuition. On average, they spent 3.5 hours per day in self-study and tuition compared to two hours among girls in Rajasthan (see Table 6). This meant a greater commitment of time and money on the part of parents in Bengal.

Thirdly, pressures on children to do housework and economic work were much greater in Rajasthan. Close to two-thirds of enrolled girls in Rajasthan reported doing housework compared to less than half of the girls in Bengal, and about one-fourth of girls in Rajasthan reported doing economic work compared to a negligible proportion of girls in Bengal. Girls in Rajasthan were spending more than three times as much time as girls in Bengal in supporting their families through such work.^{xv}

3.2 Economic status of households

Interestingly, the sample families in Bengal and Rajasthan were of somewhat similar economic background.^{xvi} About one-fifth were very poor, another two-fifths were poor, and the remaining two-fifths could be classified as somewhat better off. Yet the opportunities provided for schooling were very different in the two states. Parents' agency is very important, in deciding whether to enroll the child, in how far the child should study, and what kind of support they can give the child. In this context, we highlight differences in parents' characteristics.

Parents in Bengal were more likely to be in non-farm occupations, and demand for education is reported to be positively linked to the extent to which people are involved in such activity. Bengal is more industrialised and urbanised than Rajasthan. Landlessness was also quite high in Bengal. A considerable proportion of adults were self-employed in home-based production, and others were employed in nearby towns. Only 39% of rural Bengali households reported that their main source of income was agriculture (see Table 7). Farming had a different meaning in the two states. In Bengal, the land is fertile, and cash crops were being cultivated, with a high proportion of adult males involved in farming. The proportion of adult women and adolescent girls who reported that they were doing economic work (including farming) was comparatively low (less than 15%) – see Table 8.

In Rajasthan, the type of agriculture was more subsistence rain-fed agriculture; there were frequent droughts; and agriculture was supplemented by rearing of livestock. As much as 73% of households reported agriculture as their main source of income (Table 7). Comparatively high proportions of adult women (63%) and adolescent girls (55%) were involved in cultivation and rearing livestock (Table 8). High female labour force participation of adult women in Rajasthan goes with the increased demand for labour of adolescent girls, to work with their mothers outside the home and to substitute for their mothers in housework. Such a picture indicates lower demand for education for females, in terms of higher indirect costs associated with sending girls to school and lower perceived benefits in the future.

Our survey does not tell us how much work pressures such as grazing animals, helping family members in home-based work, household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and child care, and other work which can be done side by side with attending school contribute to poor school performance through reducing time and energy which could otherwise have been used for self-study. Work pressures on enrolled girls were very high in Rajasthan throughout the year, but during peak season in agriculture, they were high for students in Rajasthan and in West Bengal, and students in both states reported having to miss school.^{xvii}

Parents in Bengal expressed great keenness for education. An important factor which contributes to this is that much higher proportions of parents in Bengal had had some schooling (60% of fathers and 42% of mothers) compared to those in Rajasthan (43% of fathers and 10% of mothers)(see Table 9). Bengal has clearly had a longer tradition of education and in particular of female education. Although there is a clear gender gap in Bengal, we see the much larger gender gap in Rajasthan, where it is clear that female education is in a very nascent stage.

To get some idea of how the situation has changed over time (see Table 10), it is useful to compare the proportion of women who were ever-enrolled between two generations -- 42% of mothers compared to 77% of adolescent girls (aged 15-18 years) in Bengal and 10% of mothers compared to 57% of adolescent girls (aged 15-18 years) in Rajasthan. Clearly there has been a huge jump in both states, but Rajasthan appears to be 20 years behind, with Bengal having a larger base of educated fathers and mothers to build on.^{xviii}

Parents were very keen to educate their daughters in Bengal. Close to two thirds wanted secondary level or above. However the girls were less privileged than the boys. As much as 77% of parents had aspirations for their sons to complete class 10 and beyond, compared to only 64% of parents who had such aspirations for their girls (see Table 11).

Parents' aspirations for schooling were relatively low for their daughters in Rajasthan and reflect the socio-cultural norms that prevailed in those areas. Close to 40% want class 5

or less for their daughters, but hardly any want this for their boys. Parents are keen to educate their sons and to high levels. 80% wanted secondary and above for their sons whereas this was as low as 34% for their daughters (Table 11).

3.3 Cost of Schooling

Averaging across households in the 16 villages in the two states, we found that families in Bengal spent larger amounts on educating their children. The average annual household expenditure on schooling for a child enrolled in the upper primary grades was Rs 1347 in Bengal compared to Rs 772 in Rajasthan (see Table 12). This was even though the young people still enrolled at upper primary level in Rajasthan was a much smaller proportion than in Bengal and likely to be from better-off families.

Students had negligible school fees in both states. Expenditure on travel was also negligible in both states. Parents in Rajasthan spent more on school uniforms possibly because of the cold winters. Parents in Bengal spent substantially more on books and stationery and on private tuition. Together these inputs are likely to have had an impact on the learning of the school-goers in Bengal, particularly the girls.

Parents' willingness to spend on providing private tuition for their children against all odds is one more indication of Bengali parents' keenness to educate their children. Parents in Bengal relied on private tuition to compensate for inadequacies in teaching and in home support. It appears that a negligible proportion of students in Rajasthan were taking tuition, and this appeared to be related to the fact that such services were not easily accessible in villages in Rajasthan and that sending children for private tuition was not a well-established norm. Questions of affordability would come into play in villages where such services were available.

Parents did not necessarily have the wherewithal to be able to sustain the direct costs of schooling over the years. The high cost of schooling was a critical factor in limiting parents' demand for education. Only families who were above survival level could

manage the fees, books, school uniform etc., associated with higher levels of schooling. In Bengal there was the additional cost of private tuition, perceived as essential by parents and children. The inability to pay for private tuition was frequently cited as a reason for failure and the consequent dropping out.

Boys were prioritized over girls, particularly in Rajasthan but also in Bengal. In Rajasthan, the situation was aggravated by lack of access to cash except in certain seasons. For poor families, schooling continued as long as the costs were more or less minimal.

Socio-cultural factors were a crucial part of the resistance to girls' education in Rajasthan. Rajasthan is known to be a more strongly patriarchal society. Fathers and paternal grandmothers in Rajasthan were more the loci of decision-making about schooling, and not so strongly behind girls' education. Mothers in Bengal had more education and more voice, and were strong advocates of education for their daughters.

Families in Bengal were more likely to be in nuclear units. They had a lower dependency ratio, in terms of the ratio of children to adults. Families in Rajasthan were more likely to be extended and joint families, and had a higher dependency ratio. 54% of families had more children than adults (compared to 39% in Bengal). Demands of household chores, and childcare in particular were more likely to push up indirect costs of schooling and thus curtail schooling of older siblings in Rajasthan, particularly girls. Families in Rajasthan also required more labour input for bringing water, with the water source more than 500 metres away^{xix} for a substantial proportion of families while this was negligible in Bengal.

Young girls in both Bengal and Rajasthan were married young,^{xx} and their schooling brought to an end. In a sense this marks an end to their freedom to leave the house and to have time to meet friends and be involved in less physically demanding activities. Bengali girls were sent to live with their husbands at an earlier age and there were many examples where they had been deserted at a young age and left to bring up children on

their own.^{xxi} Such breakdown of traditional institutions in Bengal is likely to fuel the perception that girls would benefit from education so they could look after themselves in such an eventuality. Rajasthan's social structure is such that *gauna* (co-habitation) takes place at a later age. Adolescent girls provide useful labour support to their mothers, particularly in a context in which men migrate to other areas to look for work.

Summing up, we find that in both states, girls' schooling was given less priority than that of boys. Irregular attendance and pressures to drop out altogether were much more part of the schooling experience of girls. Girls in Rajasthan were still part of a world where the majority of adult women were illiterate, and where their own labour was in great demand. Girls in Bengal benefited from growing up in an environment where schooling of girls was considered important. However, pressures of survival for at least two-fifths of the households (this proportion was classified as very poor or poor) in our sample meant that even they could not be assured of being sent to school till the end of the schooling cycle.

4. Benefits of Schooling

Our discussion so far details a number of factors in school and at home which prevent the schooling system from building up capabilities in girls (and boys). Yet there were important and visible benefits of schooling for girls even in the present scenario.

1. Empowerment

Girls apparently gained greatly from the schooling experience in terms of being more articulate and confident – even if the schools were functioning poorly. Perhaps this has much to do with schooling for them being related to more exposure, and more opportunities to do something other than housework, both in school itself – and even in the future. Never enrolled girls were often described as “*dari hui*” and “*udaas*” (scared and quiet as if depressed). In Rajasthan adult women were still largely illiterate – so girls could feel visibly more aware and exposed than the previous generation in their own

household.^{xxii} On the whole, all currently-enrolled adolescents, and those who had dropped out after five years of schooling, were self-confident. Of course the empowerment was much less than it should be because so much damage occurs in the way in which schools function.^{xxiii}

Education appeared to increase the young person's feeling of self-worth and give them more confidence to negotiate within the household and in the external world. Negotiating their way in their new marital homes was potentially important for girls in Rajasthan and Bengal. Education was particularly useful for girls in Bengal to negotiate better terms for themselves whether it was in employment (a few women were employed as maids) or self-employment (quite an important source of income for many households).

2. Protection

a. From longer hours of economic work and housework

Schooling offered some protection from the demands of housework and economic work. This was very obvious when we compared time-use of school going and out of school adolescents (Table 13). The enrolled adolescent was found to spend most of her day on school-related activities in both states. Enrolled girls in Rajasthan spent much more time on housework and economic work than those in Bengal, as discussed earlier. But even this was a fraction of the time that out of school girls in both Rajasthan (upto 6.9 hours on average) and Bengal (upto 6.4 hours on average) spent in such work.^{xxiv}

Girls were very aware of the help they get from being enrolled in school. The fact that schooling gave them a break from chores came up repeatedly. The lack of options that life has to offer them to explore the world outside the home works strangely in their favour in keeping them on in school.

b. Protection from early marriage

Our survey suggests that early marriage is much more common in families which attach little importance to schooling. In Rajasthan, as much as 38% of the 15-18 year age group were married compared to 23% in West Bengal (see Table 14). Girls were conscious that once they were married they would no longer be sent to school. It was found that more than 60% of those in the 15-18 year age group who had been married in Rajasthan and in Bengal were those who had had no schooling.

Conclusion

Schooling in Rajasthan has benefited from the thrust on providing Education For All, and the additional resources poured into this sector since the nineties. West Bengal on the other hand has a history of high investment in education, but in the nineties suffered some degree of stagnation in this sector. Our study found that access and quality of schooling available in the two states in 2001 was very different, though inadequate in both. In neither state are children assured of the freedom to be in a schooling environment which will facilitate their progress through the schooling cycle. Resources allocated are not commensurate with the size of the task. Resources available are also not utilized efficiently, particularly in Rajasthan, where school management and the teachers do not appear to be accountable to the community. Personal, social and environmental factors in making use of the schooling facilities available are also very different, and particularly antagonistic to girls in Rajasthan's villages. Children in Bengal benefit from the much longer tradition of schooling in Bengal, for boys and girls. Yet even within this generalized system of "capability failure", we have noted that there are benefits from schooling in the present scenario.

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Table 1 Districts selected in each state in each literacy quartile

Quartiles by rural female literacy	Rajasthan		West Bengal	
	Districts	Rural female literacy (%)	Districts	Rural female literacy (%)
Q1	Alwar	16.7	Hoogly	51.1
Q2	Udaipur	10.3	Birbhum	35.0
Q3	Bikaner	8.8	Murshidabad	26.8
Q4	Barmer	4.2	Uttar Dinajpur	20.9

Source: Census, 1991.

Table 2 Never-enrolled, Ever-Enrolled and Grade Completion Rates

	Girls		Boys	
	Rajasthan	West Bengal	Rajasthan	West Bengal
Proportion (%) never-enrolled				
15-18 years	43	23	17	11
11-14 years	45	11	14	6
Proportion (%) of 15-18 year olds who				
Have ever been enrolled	58	77	83	87
Are currently enrolled	17	41	33	45
Have completed class 5	48	65	64	71
Have completed class 8	26	39	36	43
Have completed class 10	9	8	16	14

Source: CORD survey, 2001.

Table 3 Schooling facilities in sample villages

	Rajasthan	Bengal
Number of villages with		
No school	0	1
Only primary school	5	8
Upper primary school	10	1
Secondary/senior secondary school	1	6
Distance (in kms)		
Primary	0.96	0.8
Upper primary	1.6	1.9
Secondary	6.9	1.9
Senior secondary	28.1	4.2

Source: CORD survey, 2001.

Table 4 Physical infrastructure in Rajasthan, by school type

Proportion of schools with:	Upper primary schools (classes 1-8, 6-8)	Secondary schools (classes 6-10)
Playground	53	86
Tube light	18	71
Laboratory	0	29
Library	29	100

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Table 5. Enrolment and dropping out among girls (aged 11-14 years)

Proportion (%) who	Rajasthan	West Bengal
Have ever been enrolled	55	89
Have dropped out	15	26
Are currently enrolled	40	63

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Table 6. Time use of enrolled girls in 11-14 year age-group

	Rajasthan	West Bengal
Time spent at school and in travelling to and from school (hrs)	6.1	4.7
Time spent in self-study at home (hrs)	2	2.2
Time spent in tuition (hrs)	0	1.3
Time spent doing work* (hrs)	1.6	0.5
Proportion who reported doing housework (%)	63	46
Proportion who reported doing economic work (%)	26	5

Time-use data based on sub-sample (37 girls in Rajasthan and 57 girls in Bengal) of larger group.

*Included housework and economic work. Girls reported doing one or both types of work or neither.

Source. CORD survey 2001.

Table 7. Livelihoods of adults (19-60 years)

Proportion (%) of households who cited the following as their main source of income	Rajasthan	West Bengal
Cultivation	73.0	39.1
Agricultural labour	1.0	18.4
Non-agricultural labour	4.6	5.7
Self-employed	10.7	24.9
Jobs in informal sector	4.1	5.0
Jobs in formal sector	6.6	6.9
	100	100

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Table 8. Work participation among adult women and adolescent girls

Proportion (%) who reported doing economic work:	Rajasthan	West Bengal
Adult women (19-60 years)	63	15
Adolescent girls (15-18 years)	55	13
Adolescent girls (11-14 years)	55	12

Source: CORD survey, 2001.

Table 9. Educational levels among parents of all adolescents aged 11-18 years

Proportion (%) with specified level of education:	Rajasthan		West Bengal	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Illiterate	56.6	90.1	39.8	57.8
Less than class 10	27.8	6.9	47.5	39.3
Class 10 and above	15.6	3.0	12.6	2.9

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Table 10. Comparing enrolment among adolescent girls and their mothers

Proportions (%) ever enrolled	Rajasthan	Bengal
Adolescent girls (11-14 years)	55	89
Adolescent girls (15-18 years)	57	77
Mothers	10	42

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Table 11. Parents' aspirations for their daughters (and their sons)

Proportion (%) of parents who want to educate their child to the level specified below:	Rajasthan		Bengal	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Primary level or less	37	5	13	5
Upper primary	26	10	15	9
Secondary or above	34	80	64	77
Other	3	5	8	9
	100	100	100	100

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Table 12. Average annual household expenditure (rupees) in upper primary grades

	Rajasthan	Bengal
Annual fees	136	101
Books / stationery	245	523
Uniform	319	206
Travel	9	22
Private tuition	63	495
Total	772	1347

Source: CORD survey, 2001.

Table 13. Average time (hours) spent in work by enrolled and out-of-school girls

Time (hours) spent in work* by:	Rajasthan		W Bengal	
	11-14 yrs	15-18 yrs	11-14 yrs	15-18 yrs
Enrolled girls	1.6	3.0	0.5	0.3
Out-of-school girls	6.9	6.5	6.2	6.4

*Work includes economic work and housework.

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Table 14. Incidence of marriage among 15-18 year old girls

Proportion (%) of 15-18 year olds who:	Rajasthan	West Bengal
Had been married	38	23
Those with no schooling	23	15
Those with some schooling	15	8

Source. CORD survey, 2001.

Figure 1: Median Years of Schooling Among 15-19 year olds

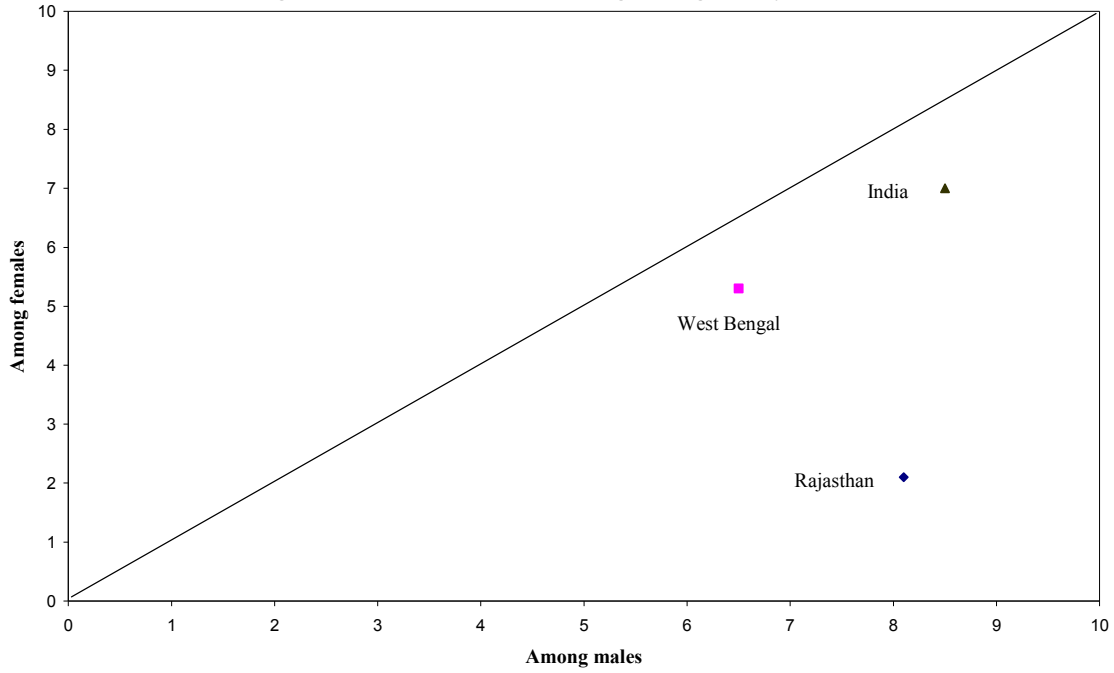
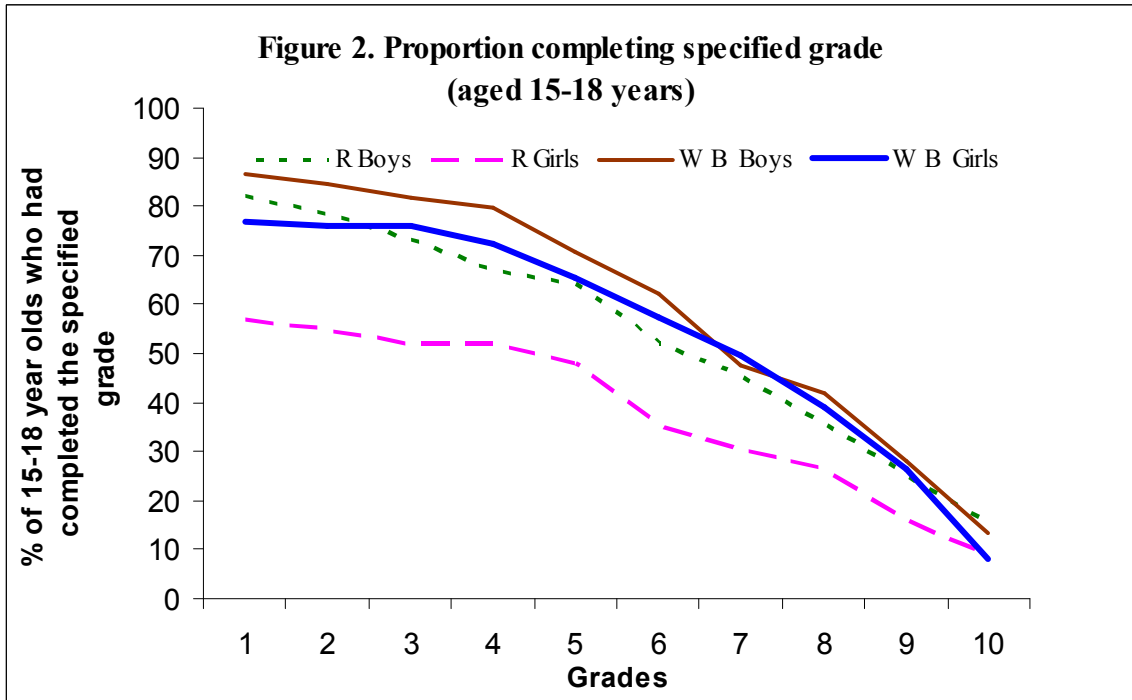


Figure 2. Proportion completing specified grade (aged 15-18 years)



Source. CORD survey, 2001.

ⁱThis paper was presented at a symposium on Gender Equality and Education, at the HDCA Annual Conference, New Delhi, 10-13 September 2008. It is based on a DFID-funded study of adolescents – for details of the larger report, see De, Noronha and Samson (2005). The authors are indebted to all the researchers involved especially Richu Agarwal, Manjishta Banerjee, Swati Chakraborty, Tanuka Endow, Reetika Khera, Sanjeev Kumar, Neeru Sood and Abha Tewari. Reetika Khera also provided valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

ⁱⁱThe authors are part of Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD), www.cordindia.com

ⁱⁱⁱ Class 10 is the first level of education for which there is Board certification, and in this sense represents a minimum qualification.

^{iv}This includes Lok Jumbish, the Shiksha Karmi programme, DPEP, and SSA.

^v This is discussed in greater detail in section 3.

^{vi} According to NFHS-2, the “singulate mean age of marriage” for females is less than 18 in rural Rajasthan, and between 18 and 19 in rural Bengal. For males it is much higher in both states (more than 22).

^{vii} By this level of schooling, higher direct and indirect costs also contributed to children dropping out of school.

^{viii} Teachers often came from outside the village, and faced problems from poor connectivity if they wanted to live in the nearest town.

^{ix} Most of this feedback was from boys, since very few girls in the sample households were enrolled in secondary or senior secondary schools.

^x Here too infrastructure was better than in the primary schools.

^{xi} Between 1985-6 to 1998-9, primary schools increased at an annual rate of 0.3% and secondary schools actually declined (-0.65%) (see Selected Educational Statistics). The High Court had put a stay order on the opening of new schools in response to a number of court cases.

^{xii} See Deshmukh-Ranadive (2002) who discusses the importance of perceived costs and benefits of education as distinct from actual costs and benefits.

^{xiii} We focus on the 11-14 year age-group because there are too few enrolled girls in the 15-18 year age group in Rajasthan.

^{xiv} To gain a deeper insight into the life of the adolescent, for a randomly selected sub-sample of adolescents, we recorded with the help of the parent and the young person, how the day previous to the day of the survey had been spent. For those enrolled it had to be the last day of school before the survey.

^{xv} Girls in the 15-18 year age group in Rajasthan reportedly spent even longer hours in work when the coursework and curriculum are more demanding. This was not true for Bengal (see Table 13).

^{xvi} This was based on ownership of assets reported and observed during the field visit, as well as observations of general levels of health and well-being in the family.

^{xvii} Boys from poor and very poor families in rural Rajasthan were under pressure to migrate to look for any earning opportunities during holidays and even term time.

^{xviii} It has also been documented that educated boys are keener to have educated brides (see PROBE, 1999). Again this process would have gone further in Bengali families with its longer tradition of education.

^{xix} More particularly in the harsh terrain in Bikaner and Barmer.

^{xx} Table 14 gives details of incidence of marriage among 15-18 year old girls in our sample.

^{xxi} This is in keeping with the findings of Da Costa who documents how Bengali women in her study in South 24 Parganas expressed fears about domestic violence and desertion. See Da Costa (2008).

^{xxii} Such empowerment was potentially extremely important for the girls to be able to negotiate better terms for themselves in the future, at home and outside.

^{xxiii} Discussed in section 2. See, also, Da Costa (2008) who argues that the value of schooling is not “unambiguous, universal, and neutral” as seems to be assumed by Amartya Sen’s generalized claim that improving girls’ access to primary education will be empowering for them.

^{xxiv} For boys, there were greater pressures to do economic work than to do housework. Younger (11-14 years) and older (15-18 years) adolescents who were out of school in rural areas in Rajasthan and Bengal were spending from six to eight hours on average doing such work. Boys who were enrolled in school in Bengal had a much lighter load (upto 0.4 hours on average) than in Rajasthan (upto 2 hours on average).