Special articles

Education Guarantee Scheme and Primary Schooling in Madhya Pradesh

This paper presents the results of a field study of public schools in Betul and Dewas districts of Madhya Pradesh. The study aims to document the functioning of public schools, whether created by the Education Guarantee Scheme or not and to understand the consequences of the reforms on the links between education and rural society and on the development of private schools. While the results may not be representative of all of rural Madhya Pradesh, they provide an accurate picture of the situation in two areas atypical of the settings targeted by EGS, viz, adivasi villages and dalit hamlets.

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I
Introduction

Madhya Pradesh has among the lowest levels of economic and human development in India, but 2001 Census data show sharp increases in literacy rates for males and females aged seven and above since 1991, from 58.5 to 76.8 per cent and 29.4 to 50.3 per cent respectively. At 64.1 per cent, average literacy has almost caught up on the national average of 65.4 per cent, and the very large gender gap has somewhat decreased, at 26.5 percentage points vs 29.3 in 1991 (Census of India 2001).[1] The government of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP) has widely advertised these results in magazines and journals, and presented them as the outcome of reforms it has undertaken since the mid-1990s (e g, Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission 2001).

Indeed, government educational policies have been more clearly defined in Madhya Pradesh than in other north Indian states. They include the creation of primary schools through the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), the Alternative Schools (AS) programme and, especially, the implementation of the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS); the decentralisation of school management through the recruitment of local residents as teachers, the creation of new administrative units, and the empowerment of gram panchayats and institutions like Village Education Committees (VEC). The GoMP has supplemented these measures promoting primary education with the creation of middle schools and the Padhna Badhna Andolan, an adult literacy programme.

While expanding the supply of primary schools to rural areas of Madhya Pradesh has been an undeniable necessity, the specific reforms implemented by the GoMP have sparked much controversy about the features of the resulting school system and the role of the state in the field of education in the long run [Rahul 1999; Sharma and Gopalakrishnan 1999; Vyasulu 1999; for a critique of DPEP, see Kumar et al 2001 a and b] – not to mention the uncertainty on future cooperation between the GoMP and NGOs resulting from the closure of the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme in July 2002. Unfortunately, independent research on the implementation and impact of these reforms is hardly

available as yet, and the literature circulated by the GoMP tends to mix information with promotion (examples of the former are mentioned in Section II below; Josson 2001 and Vyasulu 2000 tend towards the latter).

This paper presents the results of fieldwork conducted in the rural areas of Betul and Dewas districts from December 2001 to March 2002 (a complete development is given in Leclercq 2002; see also Leclercq, forthcoming a and b). The fieldwork aimed to document the functioning of schools belonging to the public sector (whether created under EGS or not), to describe the structure of their management, and to understand the consequences of the reforms on the links between education and rural society, notably attitudes towards education and the development of private schools. The results are not representative of rural Madhya Pradesh as a whole, but they should give an accurate picture of the current situation in two areas typical of the settings targeted by EGS, namely adivasi villages and dalit hamlets. A general assessment of the current situation of primary education in Madhya Pradesh would need to address the issues highlighted in the present paper, which is arguably the first independent study of the reforms undertaken in this state since the mid-1990s.

Section II presents the reforms. Section III explains fieldwork methodology and describes the areas under study. Section IV analyses the quality of public schools (available inputs, classroom activities, educational outcomes). Section V discusses their management structure (status of teachers, role of decentralised institutions). Section VI investigates the links between primary schools and rural society (attitudes of parents, teachers and the state towards public schools, impact of the opening of private schools). Section VII concludes.

II
Reforms of Primary Education in Madhya Pradesh

Pradesh [Gopalakrishnan and Sharma 1998; Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission 2000; Sharma, undated; Sharma and Gopalakrishnan 2001] or commissioned by it [Kothari et al 2000; Jha 2000; Srivastava 2000], reforms undertaken since 1994

address two issues identified as the causes for educational deprivation in the state: The insufficient reach of the public school system and the negligent behaviour of its teachers [Govinda and Varghese 1993, for a detailed investigation of the quality of primary education in Madhya Pradesh a decade ago].

2.1 Extension of the Public Sector

Reducing physical distance to schools has been the objective of EGS, which has resulted in the creation of about 28,000 schools consisting of (usually) one or (at most) two teachers and at least 25 pupils in tribal areas, 40 elsewhere. The creation of an EGS school is conditional on the reception by the government of a request made by parents of prospective pupils through the gram panchayat, thus making the reach of the school supply responsive to parents' – or sarpanches' – demand.[2] Participation in DPEP and the experimentation of new teaching methods in Alternative Schools (now merged with EGS ones) have also contributed to the extension of the public sector, which would cover all habitations in the state – a remarkable step also taken in Rajasthan, in contrast with other north Indian states. However, where they are profitable, private schools have largely contributed to the sharp increases in the number of schools and enrolment figures observed in the 1990s [De et al 2002; Kingdon 1996]. Furthermore, attendance rates for children aged six to ten years were still far below 100 per cent in 1998-99, according to NFHS-2 data: 74 per cent for girls and 80 per cent for boys [IIPS and ORC Macro 2001].

2.2 Decentralisation of Management of Public Schools

The decentralisation of the public sector started with the implementation of the panchayati raj and the first phase of DPEP in 1994-95, went on through EGS, and is now generalised to all public schools. Political decentralisation empowers local protagonists (parents and panchayats). Administrative decentralisation, through the creation of local administrative units, makes the action of the state more local, without empowering autonomous institutions.

Political decentralisation has comprised the transfer to panchayats of control over the recruitment and supervision of teachers as well as physical inputs and incentives given to parents to enrol their children (notably midday meals). A related measure has been the re-activation of VECs (EGS schools have a School Management Committee (SMC) and Parents-Teachers Associations (PTA). These structures comprise pupils' parents and teachers, and VECs also panchayat members. VECs and SMCs are involved in input management, while PTAs deal with educational matters – they are expected to allow parents to control teachers and teachers to gather parental support in running the school.

Administrative decentralisation has consisted in the replacement of the former inspection system with local units of the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (RGSM) – the state-level administration created in August 1994 to manage DPEP – which have much smaller numbers of schools to deal with, and are expected to be more efficient. A two-tier structure has been created at the levels of the block (Block Resource Centre (BRC)), and the cluster (Cluster Resource Centre (CRC)), a cluster comprising about 10 to 20 schools. CRCs consist of two experienced teachers, responsible for the academic (Cluster Academic Coordinator (CAC)) and administrative (Cluster Resource Coordinator, (CRC)) supervision of schools. BRCs comprise several officers and clerks; among other activities, they organise training, thus they supplement the District Institutes of Educational Training (DIET).

Before 1994, all public schools were staffed with 'assistant teachers', i e, civil servants employed by the state government. This cadre is disappearing. Indeed, in government schools, the replacement of retiring teachers and the creation of new positions or new schools have been covered since 1995 by the recruitment through janpad panchayats of a new category of teachers called 'shiksha karmis', and now of 'samvida shikshaks' (teachers recruited on fixed-term contracts). EGS teachers are also recruited locally and depend on gram panchayats; official documents term them 'gurujis'. Four categories of teachers thus temporarily coexist within the public sector, and differ in employer (state vs panchayats), security of tenure (assistant teachers have security of tenure, shiksha karmis have by and large obtained it, but samvida shikshaks and gurujis can be dismissed), transfer rules (there has been a temporary ban on transfers of shiksha karmis; gurujis cannot be transferred), qualification and training (completed higher secondary schooling is required for all categories, but assistant teachers are often better qualified and received more training), and salary. Government school headmasters earn Rs 5,000 to 8,000 a month, assistant teachers Rs 4,000 to 6,000 (or more, given seniority), samvida shikshaks Rs 2,500, shiksha karmis Rs 2,256, and gurujis a mere Rs 1,000, up from Rs 500 at inception of EGS.[3] These measures aim to alter the incentives structure of the public sector; teachers belonging to the new categories have weaker bargaining power than assistant teachers vis-à-vis parents, panchayats, and the government. The absence of security of tenure should incite them to teach effectively, as they can be sanctioned if parents or panchayat members complain. The fact that samvida shikshaks and gurujis, contrary to assistant teachers and shiksha karmis, do not constitute district-level cadres also makes organised agitation more difficult for them – which should help the government to resist the pressure to bring their statuses into line with the status of assistant teachers.

2.3 Increased Reliance on Private Sector

Restrictions on the state recognition of private schools have been lifted. Two arguments have been put forward to justify this move. First, rules for recognition were ineffective, since they could be bypassed through corruption or fictitious enrolment of pupils of unrecognised schools in government schools. Second, privatisation is considered as reducing the burden falling on the public sector, which could thus 'focus' on children whose parents cannot afford private schooling.[4] The status of private school teachers, characterised by insecurity of tenure, low salaries, and tight control by the employer, seems to have become a paradigm for the status of public school teachers. However, the mechanisms underlying the accountability of private school teachers

Table 1: Primary School Supply in Villages in Shahpur Block of Betul District

Village	Shahpur 1	Shahpur 2	Shahpur 3	Shahpur 4
EGS schools	1	0	1	1
Government schools	0	1	0	0
Private schools	0	0	0	0
Total	1	1	1	1

to parents – the payment of fees essential to the survival of the school and the dominant social status of parents (people who send their children to private schools tend to be wealthier, better educated and more influential than those who use public schools) – are not directly replicable in the public sector.

III
Fieldwork: Methodology and Context

Fieldwork was conducted from December 2001 to March 2002 in Betul and Dewas districts with the help of Eklavya, an educational NGO based in Bhopal and Hoshangabad [Eklavya 2001].[5] Its aim was to document the state of the primary school system, focusing on the EGS.

3.1 Fieldwork Methodology

Three topics were investigated. First, the functioning of public schools: Available inputs, teaching activities, educational outcomes. Second, the management of public schools: teachers (recruitment, training, working conditions, motivation), political and administrative decentralised institutions. Third, conceptions of education by children, parents and teachers. Questionnaires were designed following these lines. Data collection included interviews of teachers, pupils and parents, basic achievement tests, and observation of classroom processes; observation of school management institutions and interviews of their members.

It was decided to study the two settings at which EGS is targeted: adivasi villages that had no government school before EGS and dalit hamlets located at the outskirts of large villages which already had schools not fully accessible to children living in those hamlets. Shahpur block of Betul district and Tonk Khurd block of Dewas district are typical of each of these two settings. Four villages were studied in Shahpur, three in Tonk Khurd. In Shahpur block, most villages have only one (public) school: three villages with an EGS and one village with a government primary school were studied. In Tonk Khurd block, large villages located on the Agra-Bombay Highway or connected to it, 20 to 30 km north of Dewas city were selected. All three have one EGS school, as well as two government and several private schools. Each EGS school and one government school were studied in detail; shorter visits were paid to most other government and private schools. The rest of this section describes the areas under study (figures from Census of India 1991, 2001 and government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998); Tables 1 and 2 summarise the primary school supply in the villages visited.[6]

3.2 Areas under Study

Shahpur block is located halfway between Bhopal and Nagpur. It consists of a largely forested plateau and hills belonging to the Satpura range. The block is entirely rural. In 1991, adivasis constituted 63 per cent of the population, most of them gonds or korkus living in small villages which have often less then 1,000 inhabitants. National Highway 69 (Bhopal to Nagpur) runs through the block headquarters, Shahpur, a large village with some of the functions of a rural town (e g, a weekly market). Most villages are accessible only through kaccha paths on which villagers ride bullock carts of bicycles. Recession of forests and limited availability of irrigation make sylvo-agricultural activities risky – many

households supplement their incomes doing wage labour, which implies temporary migration to more prosperous districts such as Hoshangabad. In 1991, non-agricultural activities barely employed 5 per cent of the workforce. Access to education was a major issue until the early 1990s, and literacy rates in the block were not higher than 45.0 per cent for males and 18.6 per cent for females (aged seven and above) in 1991. EGS has considerably extended the supply of primary schools, which now includes 130 government and 53 EGS schools, with only 10 private schools concentrated in the largest two villages and thus inaccessible to most children. Quick progress in literacy seems to have been made during the 1990s in the district, from 57.4 per cent to 77.3 per cent among males and 33.9 per cent to 56.1 per cent among females.

Tonk Khurd block is close to Dewas city and Indore. This part of the Malwa plateau is fairly densely populated, and belongs to 'mainstream' north Indian society, dominated by 'upper' castes, notably rajputs, with a large dalit population (but no adivasis). Factories located along the Agra-Bombay Highway (which connects the block to industrial areas around Indore) provide significant non-agricultural employment opportunities. The area is relatively prosperous (it attracts migrants) and politically influential, though it suffers from environmental problems, notably drought and pollution. Villages visited are large (3,000 to 5,000 inhabitants) and have much more infrastructure than those visited in Shahpur. Access to education is characterised by a phenomenal gender gap, so that in 1991 male literacy was much higher in Tonk Khurd than in Shahpur (64.1 per cent vs 45 per cent), but female literacy slightly lower (16.6 per cent vs 18.6 per cent). Most villages already had a school before EGS, which added only 12 schools to the block, mostly located in dalit parts of large villages. As a result, in stark contrast with Shahpur block, the creation of numerous private schools in the 1990s has more contributed to the increase in enrolment and to the change in school management practices than the extension and reform of the public sector.

There is a sharp contrast between Betul and Dewas districts, and villages were chosen so as to intensify this contrast. However, regularities common to both areas are striking, hence there is no separate presentation of fieldwork results for each district in Sections IV to VI.

IV
Quality of Education: An Incomplete Guarantee

The creation of schools through EGS has dramatically improved access to primary education in Shahpur block, where physical distance to schools used to be an issue – as mentioned above, the number of public primary schools increased by 44.2 per cent, from 120 to 173. Villages visited in Tonk Khurd block already had at least one government school, but children living in dalit hamlets did not have easy access to them, social obstacles

Table 2: Primary School Supply in Villages in Tonk Khurd Block of Dewas District

Village	Tonk 1	Tonk 2	Tonk 3
EGS schools	1	1	1
Government schools	3	2	2
Private schools	4	2	2
Total	8	5	5

compounding physical ones. Interviewees consistently said that EGS created rather than diverted enrolment.

According to the RGSM, EGS is based on renewed teaching methods and improved teacher-'community' relations. Government schools have been reformed similarly, and textbooks have been common to all public schools since July 2001: Are EGS and government schools different? Is a new paradigm emerging? A separate description of EGS and government schools is required to answer these questions: After a detailed analysis of the quality of EGS schools, a comparison is made with government schools to which children enrolled in EGS schools could have access.

4.1 Educational Inputs Constituting EGS Schools

EGS was designed to raise the number of schools without a major increase in educational expenditure. Costs have been cut through the payment of very low salaries to gurujis and the absence of systematic funding for buildings. Meanwhile, the RGSM provides pedagogical inputs like training and teaching/learning materials.

EGS schools have usually one, at most two gurujis who have to teach the whole primary curriculum. Consequently, pupils/teacher ratios tend to be high, above the numbers required to open a school.[7] Even more importantly, EGS generalises multi-grade teaching. Tables 3 to 5 describe the situation in visited schools in the school year 2001-02: Each guruji has to teach 37 to 58 pupils and two to five grades. Meanwhile, the number of pupils enrolled in each grade is often very small: A shortage of pupils coexists with the shortage of teachers. Visited schools are relatively large; consequently, five of them had two teaching positions sanctioned when they opened. However, three schools have lost one guruji; one was appointed to a new middle school in a nearby village, another died, and the third one, a woman, is prevented by her husband from leaving the village where they reside. Only in the first case was a new recruitment procedure going on at the time of the fieldwork; in the third case, the position has been withdrawn for 2002-03 – the school was hardly functional in 2001-02, with small enrolment limited to classes 1 and 2. EGS shalas are classes rather than schools. In areas like Shahpur, where villages only have one EGS school, the scheme indeed resulted in the creation of schools where there were none. In villages like those visited in Tonk Khurd, which have other primary schools, the quantitative impact should rather be evaluated in terms of the number of classes opened.

Teacher-related inputs are also scarce as compared to government schools in the same areas (described in sub-section 4.5 below). First, gurujis earn Rs 1,000 a month. Several teachers complained about delays in payment (salaries are often paid in the middle of the next month rather than at the end of the right month). In one case, delays of two to four months would be frequent. Second, gurujis receive limited formal training. Pre-service training lasts for 21 days; periodic training consists in one yearly session, of 8 to 12 days in Shahpur, 21 days in Tonk Khurd. Most interviewees expressed satisfaction with the training, but observation suggests that they have not been imparted effective teaching methods and ease in interacting with children. Furthermore, as EGS schools have only one or two inexperienced teachers, informal training is limited to 'learning-by-experience': 'Learning-by-watching' or 'learning-from-others' cannot take place within the school. Meetings organised at the CRC and BRC levels can only partly compensate for this.

'Communities' demanding a school under EGS have to provide 'a space for teaching/learning'. In fact, all schools visited (but one) had or were about to have a building, obtained without 'community' involvement. In Shahpur, a Rs 50,000 subsidy for each school from the RGSM allowed the construction of small buildings with one classroom and one veranda when the schools opened in 1997. These buildings were in good condition, although the materials used (cement, concrete, corrugated iron) are not well-suited to the climate: buildings are hot in summer, cold in winter, and noisy during the rains. In Tonk Khurd, schools started in rented buildings – a soya bean godown in Tonk1, rooms of private houses in Tonk2 and Tonk3. Buildings comprising two classrooms and a veranda are being built on DPEP funds (Rs 1,10,000 each) in Tonk1 and Tonk3. In both villages, completion of the buildings has been delayed, apparently because of misuse of funds by the gram panchayat or the sarpanch; classes have been taking place in the unfinished buildings amidst gravel, metal rods and cement bags. The building in Tonk1 has

Table 4: Teaching Positions in EGS Schools

	Shahpur 1	Shahpur 3	Shahpur 4	Tonk 1	Tonk 2	Tonk 3
Sanctioned	2	2	2	2	1	2
Appointed	2	1	1	2	1	1
Male	1	1	0	1	1	1
Female	1	0	1	1	0	0

Note: Figures appointed on the basis of appointed teachers.

Table 5: Pupils/Teacher and Grades/Teacher Ratios in EGS Schools

	Shahpur 1	Shahpur 3	Shahpur 4	Tonk 1	Tonk 2	Tonk 3
Pupils/teacher ratio	41	44	38	51.5	58	37
Grades/teacher ratio	2.5	5	4*	2.5	5	5

Notes: Figures based on the number of appointed teachers;
* No child enrolled in class 4 in 2001-02.

Table 3: Enrolment in EGS Schools

	Shahpur 1			Shahpur 3			Shahpur 4			Tonk 1			Tonk 2			Tonk 3		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Class 1	19	19	38	5	7	12	5	3	8	22	29	51	?	?	11	?	?	?
Class 2	8	7	15	4	6	10	2	6	8	13	10	23	?	?	14	?	?	?
Class 3	11	2	13	1	7	8	7	6	13	10	6	16	?	?	12	-	-	-
Class 4	4	1	5	2	2	4	0	0	0	8	1	9	?	?	12	-	-	-
Class 5	4	7	11	5	5	10	6	3	9	0	4	4	?	?	9	-	-	-
Total	46	36	82	17	27	44	20	18	38	53	50	103	27	31	58	15	22	37

Notes: M: males; F: females; T: total; ?: not available; -: not applicable.
Figures based on the number of appointed teachers.

now been completed, but the classrooms are not used lest they get dirty before the official inauguration. None of the schools has electricity or proper toilets, and not all have a hand pump; sometimes water has to be brought from a long distance (at least 500 m in Shahpur3).[8]

Teaching/learning materials are financed by the RGSM through the provision of school and teacher 'contingencies' (respectively Rs 2,000 and Rs 500 a year). Equipment is limited (desk, chairs for gurujis, metal cupboards; at least one blackboard, maps and charts). As usual in rural India, pupils sit on mats and have nothing on which to lean their notebooks or slates while writing. Several schools of Shahpur block had not received the 'contingencies' for the year 2001-02 by January 2002. The delivery of textbooks was especially important in July 2001, as a new package was being introduced. Books were not available in Shahpur block until September, and several schools received incomplete sets (e g, in one school all books for class 5 were missing, and another one had not received mathematics books for class 4). Furthermore, while teachers asserted that all pupils had received free textbooks, many parents said they had to buy them: All pupils had textbooks in their schoolbags, but it is unclear how many had received them from the RGSM.

While levels of material inputs are low, the scarcity of teacher resources is the main characteristic of EGS schools. However, the observation of classroom activities suggests that the use of inputs is an even more important issue than their availability.

4.2 Quantity of Teaching in EGS Schools

The quantity of teaching which takes place in a school is determined by three factors: school times, teachers' attendance and pupils' attendance. The yearly calendar of EGS schools is fixed by the state government,[9] but weekly times are fixed by VECs or SMCs. In schools visited in Shahpur block, classes are held from 10:30 to 16:30 with a lunch break between 13:30 and 14:30. Morning classes are held once a week from 8:00 to 12:00, on market days. In Tonk Khurd block, classes are held every morning, from 7 am to 11 am, allowing children to combine schooling with house or farm work. Official school times thus provide for 21 to 33 hours of teaching a week. However, actual school times are much shorter. First, attendance registers and interviews suggest that schools are operational only from August to March. Second, seasonal factors, whether climatic (rain, heat), economic (peaks of agricultural activity) or socio-cultural (melas, wedding season) can result in de facto holidays. Third and foremost, the 'adaptation' of opening and closing hours by teachers reduces teaching time by 25 per cent to more than 50 per cent (Table 6 gives a few examples, believed to correspond to usual practices).

Reliable information on gurujis' attendance is difficult to obtain, as registers are filled up by the gurujis themselves, who fudge them before inspection by their CAC. Gurujis of two de facto single-teacher schools were said to be very irregular (this seemed true), but in general it is difficult for gurujis who work in single-teacher schools not to come at all, since this means the school will remain closed. On the contrary, where there are two gurujis, they may be tempted to take turns rather than teach simultaneously. This seemed to be sometimes the case in one school, where the male teacher would often leave his female colleague teaching alone, while he was dealing with private matters.

Pupils' attendance is a major cause for concern. 32.4 per cent to 70.5 per cent of enrolled children were at school on the day of my first visit (unannounced), and further visits yielded comparable results – average attendance figures mentioned by gurujis correspond to attendance rates of 68.5 per cent to 96.1 per cent…Further evidence can be gained from pupils' attendance registers. These key documents are inspected regularly by cluster academic coordinators and teachers have to compute summary statistics which enter the RGSM's information system. How carefully the registers are kept gives some indication as to the motivation of the teachers; except in Tonk3, where registers are unusable, comparisons between attendance observed and recorded on the same day suggests that registers are reasonably accurate. Three points are worth noticing. First, enrolment varies at the beginning of the school year, and stabilises after September: A few children drop out, others enrol late, but the balance is not very large in most schools.[10] Second, nominal enrolment is rare in the schools under study. It is massive only in Shahpur4, where 31.6 per cent of enrolled children never attended school in September; it is limited in Shahpur1 and Shahpur2, where less than 4 per cent of pupils, all in class 1 or 2 never attended from July to December and July to October, respectively. Third, most worryingly, irregular attendance is common, as shown in Tables 7 and 8. A sharp contrast emerges between Shahpur and Tonk Khurd blocks. Attendance is low in Shahpur1 as well as in Shahpur4 (where about half the pupils are regular), and in Shahpur3 there is a distinction between a significant minority of children who hardly attend (less than 20 days in four months), and a large majority who are regular. The situation is better in Tonk1 and Tonk2, where about 80 per cent of children are regular, and few children are very irregular.[11] An issue is that respondents always come up with a good reason to justify that some children have not come to school today: A wedding, harvests, a fair in another village… These events get the priority over schooling; both parents, who do not send their children to school regularly, and teachers, who do not act much to improve the situation, are responsible.

Most schools visited are basically functional: They open for a few hours everyday with some children and at least one teacher. Nevertheless, the quantity of teaching is problematically low, and largely the responsibility of teachers. For example, teachers have little incentive to fight absenteeism, which cuts pupils/teacher ratios down to comfortable levels (12 to 35 during my first visit to each school). Yet irregular attendance is a handicap, and does not benefit regular pupils, as it does not reduce multi-grade

Table 6: Examples of Actual School Times in EGS Schools

	Shahpur 1	Shahpur 3	Shahpur 3	Tonk 1
Official times			(morning class)	
Class	10:30 to 16:30	10:30 to 16:30	8:00 to 12:00	7:30 to 11:30
Lunch break	13:30 to 14:00	13:30 to 14:30	?	9:30 to 11:00
Hours taught	5 h 30	5 h	3 h 30	3 h 30
Actual times				
First pupils arrive	11:00	10:50	8:50	7:45
Teacher arrives,				
Class begins	11:30	11:30	8:50	8:00
Last pupils arrive	11:45	11:30	9:30	8:00
Lunch break	12:55 to 14:45	13:15 to 15:00	10:50 to 11:20	9:30 to 10:30
Class ends	16:00	16:30	11:35	11:30
Hours taught	2 h 45	3 h 15	1 h 35	2 h 30
Percentage of official				
times lost	50.0	35.0	54.8	28.6

Note: ?: not available.

teaching. Indeed, beyond its low quantity, the poor quality of teaching is the key deficiency of visited schools.

4.3 Quality of Teaching in EGS Schools

Gurujis teach two to five grades simultaneously. AS textbooks, which used a 'non-graded' approach supposedly solving the difficulty were replaced in July 2001 with a new package, which restores grades. Gurujis' appreciation of the new textbooks varies; the non-graded approach was better suited to their needs, but also required much more effort than the familiar graded one.

Teaching methods are inadequate. First, gurujis spend more time supervising children than teaching: They sit at their desk busy with registers, talk to visitors, or do nothing but check notebooks and slates. Meanwhile, pupils do basic exercises (e g, writing the Devanagari script), or chat with each other. Second, when actually teaching, gurujis rarely address all children of a grade together; they check exercises individually and do not organise games or sports. Blackboards are mostly used for teaching the Devanagari script and numbers: The guruji (or a pupil) reads aloud letters, syllables, words or numbers, and children repeat after her. When using books, gurujis read aloud and ask children to repeat bits of the text after them, but do not necessarily make sure the text is understood (e g, in one school, pupils had to repeat after each word separately). Third, better practices were sometimes observed. Most children know poems or songs; a guruji in Shahpur1 would read aloud stories, and relate them to her (Gond) pupils' everyday life, asking them for Gondi equivalents of some of the key Hindi words in the text. Fourth, English courses have been introduced in all schools from July 2001 onwards, but gurujis cannot speak English and got four days of training… Predictably, the actual objectives of the courses are modest (knowledge of the English script and a few basic words), and the results uninspiring; children vaguely memorise the alphabet but they cannot read words or even letters not in the alphabetical order.

Relations between gurujis and their pupils are limited. In Shahpur block, many pupils belong to adivasi families whose language is Gondi or Korku rather than Hindi, the medium of instruction. The teacher of Shahpur3 stressed that using Gondi is necessary to make pupils comfortable, but other gurujis do not speak adivasi languages. Class-5 Adivasi pupils had picked up some oral Hindi, but their reading skills were distinctly bad, and the younger children confront gurujis who shout at them in a language they cannot understand.[12] Many gurujis, especially male ones, are obviously bored of spending time with children. They treat their pupils with neglect and excessive authority. For example, most shout rather than talk, and slap a few children every day. They do not ensure proper use of books: Pages ripped off them may be used as plates for meals or as raw material for folding exercises; textbooks quickly become hardly readable and children barely learn how to take notes.

An exception is the school of Shahpur3, which functions distinctly better than the others, and constitutes an example of what a motivated guruji can achieve. While actual school timings and pupils' attendance are not better than elsewhere, little time is spent on anything else than active teaching when classes are held. After checking attendance and homework, the guruji alternates between two age groups (classes 1-3 and 4-5). While teaching, he addresses all children of a given group together, really explaining things using the blackboard. The other group are given exercises written on the second blackboard and thus common to all of them. The guruji does not shout at his pupils and very rarely hits them.

4.4 Educational Outcomes in EGS Schools

Indicators of grade attainment like years spent at school/grades completed can be computed using school register data. Average ratios hover between 1.0 (no grade repetition) and 1.6; most children enrol on time, at the age of six, but many stagnate several years in classes 1 to 3. As a result, children are almost adolescents when they complete the primary curriculum, which limits their ability to study further.

Achievement was measured through simple tests aimed at checking whether class-5 children – about to complete the primary

Table 7: Enrolled Children Attending Less Than 50 Per Cent of School Days in EGS Schools 2001
(Figures in percentage)

	Shahpur 1 July to December			Shahpur 3 July to October			Shahpur 4 September			Tonk 1 July to October			Tonk 2 J to D
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	T
Class 1	26.3	36.8	31.6	20.0	28.6	25.0	40.0	100	62.5	18.2	3.4	9.8	0
Class 2	0	57.1	26.7	0	16.7	10.0	50.0	0	12.5	0	0	0	0
Class 3	9.1	0	7.7	100	0	12.5	0	100	46.2	10.0	0	6.3	0
Class 4	25.0	0	20.0	0	50.0	25.0	-	-	-	0	0	0	0
Class 5	0	0	0.0	40.0	20.0	30.0	16.7	66.7	33.3	-	0	0	11.1
Total	15.2	30.6	22.0	23.5	18.5	20.5	20.0	61.1	39.5	9.4	2.0	5.8	1.7

Notes: J to D: July to December; M: male; F: female; T: total; -: not applicable.

Table 8: Enrolled Children Attending More Than 80 Per Cent of School Days in EGS Schools 2001
(Figures in percentage)

	Shahpur 1 July to December			Shahpur 3 July to October			Shahpur 4 September			Tonk 1 July to October			Tonk 2 J to D
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	T
Class 1	31.6	31.6	31.6	80.0	42.9	58.3	40.0	0	25.0	72.7	75.9	74.5	81.8
Class 2	87.5	42.9	66.7	100	66.7	80.0	50.0	100	87.5	100	90.0	95.7	78.6
Class 3	63.6	100	69.2	0	100	87.5	85.7	0	46.2	90.0	100	93.8	75.0
Class 4	75.0	100	80.0	100	50.0	75.0	-	-	-	100	100	100	100
Class 5	50.0	100	81.8	60.0	80.0	70.0	66.7	0	44.4	-	75.0	75.0	55.6
Total	54.3	52.8	53.7	76.5	70.4	72.7	65.0	33.3	50.0	86.8	82.0	84.5	79.3

Notes: J to D: July to December; M: male; F: female; T: total; -: not applicable.

curriculum – master basic literacy and numeracy. Children were asked to read a few sentences of Hindi texts taken from story books or the *Khushi-Khushi* class-5 textbooks, published by Eklavya.[13] Few children could not read at all, but hardly any could read fluently with few mistakes and correct intonation, understanding the text. Most would either decipher each syllable separately, or read words in one go but pause between them. They would try to read as fast as possible without respecting sentence construction (e g, pausing at full stops). In fact, children are taught to decipher characters rather than understand sentences and texts. A fraction of the children mastered enough to be able to use literacy for basic activities, but full access to the Hindi written world is still far from sight. Children were asked to write answers to a few questions on their family. The answer sheets show that many children are unable to write up the questions – which were written on the blackboard and read aloud – without making mistakes. Many as well are unable to write correct and meaningful sentences; besides spelling mistakes, sentence construction is often absurd, and the basic sentence structure of the Hindi language (subject/complements/verb) not mastered. Answers are often not understandable: These children are not able to answer simple questions even when they know the answers.

Results for numeracy are better. Almost all children master addition, subtraction and multiplication of 2-digit numbers without carry-overs; many master addition and subtraction with carry-overs. Division proves too difficult. Mistakes are sometimes explainable (e g, omission of carry-overs), but most often their origin is absolutely not traceable.

The headmaster of a middle school in Tonk Khurd block asserted that most pupils enrolling in class-6 do not master the primary curriculum, whether they studied in EGS, government, or private schools: The lack of experience of EGS teachers (in 2001-02, class-5 children belonged to the first batch of EGS pupils) would be no explanation to a general and permanent issue. Indeed, the organisation of board examinations at the end of class-5 is problematic. First, in Tonk Khurd block government school teachers were accused to help their own pupils... by their private school colleagues (examinations are held in government schools, to which EGS and private school pupils come). Second, examination papers show that rote learning is still essential. In Hindi, children were given two texts and asked to comment on them, but also to say from which lesson of their textbooks they had been drawn; other questions asked for punctual answers not requiring children to write sentences, but to have memorised facts such as the day the festival of Ganatantra is celebrated. In mathematics, children had to do basic computations and fill up sentences such as 'the largest 3-digit number is ...' The English paper epitomises the purely nominal character of English classes; it mostly asks children to form English letters and informs them that 'all equactions are attempt'.

4.5 Comparison with Neighbouring Government Schools

RGSM documents expect teaching to be better in EGS than in government schools, yet visited EGS schools are deficient. Some children of Shahpur1 attend the government school of Shahpur2, and the villages visited in Tonk Khurd have two government schools each: A comparison is possible between neighbouring EGS and government schools. The (co-educational) school of Shahpur2 and the girls school of Tonk1 were surveyed in detail; shorter visits were paid to the others. Results are not representative of rural Madhya Pradesh, but they should be relevant to the description of educational opportunities in the areas under study.

Government schools have a better potential for effective teaching. Pupils/teacher ratios are similar, and grades/teacher ratios are much lower, though the separation of girls and boys in Tonk Khurd is unfortunate in that regard: In each village, co-educational schools would have more than one teacher per grade (Tables 9 to 11, school year 2001-02). Assistant teachers and 'shiksha karmis' are appointed to these schools. The former have higher qualifications than gurujis (usually a BEd), and are more experienced, as they were all recruited before the shiksha karmi policy started in 1995. Shiksha karmis' qualifications and training are comparable to gurujis', but they benefit from interactions with their colleagues – though assistant teachers tend to substitute shiksha karmis' work for their own, e g, in one school a shiksha karmi often teaches classes 1 and 2 while the headmaster sits idle. Government schools have more suitable buildings, with one room per teacher. A qualification is that buildings are common to the primary and the middle schools in Tonk1, and to the girls and boys schools in Tonk2. Consequently, these schools operate in half-day shifts.

Unfortunately, the quantity and quality of teaching in government schools are insufficient. In Shahpur2, official times are 11:00 to 17:00 with a lunch break, but a quarter of teaching time is lost: Teachers arrive late in the morning, and spend much time

Table 9: Enrolment in Government Schools

	Shahpur 2` Co-educational			Tonk 1 Girls	Boys	Girls		Tonk 2 Boys*		Tonk 3** Boys
	M	F	T	F	M	F	M	F	T	M
Class 1	22	15	37	25	58	?	19	-	-	29
Class 2	18	22	40	32	38	?	23	-	-	17
Class 3	39	19	58	21	45	?	10	-	-	21
Class 4	21	15	36	21	37	?	19	-	-	13
Class 5	25	20	45	42	37	-	20	14	34	25
Total	125	91	216	141	215	82	91	14	105	105

Notes: M: male; F: female; T: total; ?: not available; -: not applicable.
* The girls school is being created, and in 2001-02 ran until class 4, hence the presence of class-5 girls at the boys school.
** Data for the girls school not available.

Table 10: Teaching Positions in Government Schools

	Shahpur 2 Co-educational	Tonk 1 Girls**	Boys	Tonk 2 Girls	Boys	Tonk 3 Boys	Girls
Sanctioned	6	4	3	3	3	5	3
Appointed	6	4	3	3	3	5	3
Male	6*	1	1	2	2	5	3
Female	0	3	2	1	1	0	0

Notes: * One of the teachers has become CAC, and no longer teaches, though he is still officially appointed.
** The male teacher is the headmaster and does only paperwork; he does not teach.

Table 11: Pupils/Teacher, Grades/Teacher Ratios in Government Schools

	Shahpur 2 Co-educational*	Tonk 1 Girls*	Boys	Tonk 2 Girls	Boys	Tonk 3 Boys	Girls
Pupils/teacher ratio	43.2	47	71.7	27.3	35	21	?
Grades/teacher ratio	1	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1	1.7

Note: * Excluding the teachers who do not actually teach.

doing paperwork, or talking to each other or to visitors. The girls school of Tonk1 operates in afternoon shifts, from 12 to 4:30 pm with a break from 2:00 to 2:30 pm. Teachers commute from Dewas city; owing to bus timings, they arrive in the morning before 12 pm but leave just before 4 pm. Pupil absenteeism takes forms not observed in EGS schools. In Tonk1, about 40 per cent of the pupils do not come back after the break and thus attend for only two hours a day. Further, nominal enrolment is frequent (Table 12). The teachers of Tonk1 strike off the registers the names of children who never attended classes during the previous month, but in Shahpur2, about a third of enrolled children were maintained on the registers in January 2002 although they had never attended in December 2001. The proportion of enrolled children who attend regularly is low in both schools (Table 13). As for the quality of teaching, there is little contrast between the EGS school in Shahpur1 and the government school in Shahpur2. On the contrary, in Tonk1 and Tonk3, government schools appeared much more active than EGS ones.

Educational outcomes do not seem to differ much between visited EGS and government schools. Attainment is somewhat more regular in the latter (years per grade hover between 1.0 and 1.3 in Shahpur2 and Tonk1), but literacy and numeracy test results are very similar. In Shahpur2, two class-5 pupils were unable to read, and only two among 21 interviewed can be considered functionally literate. Results of the end-of-year examinations for 2000-01 are available for Shahpur2. They are extremely bad: Almost 40 per cent of enrolled pupils failed to pass the examination, and nearly all of those who did obtained grade 'C' only. Results for class 5 are crucial, as they determine the number of pupils the school will send to upper-primary classes. Only 27.5 per cent of children enrolled in class 5, and not a single girl among them, passed the examination, all with grade 'C'.

Similarities between visited EGS and government schools are more striking than dissimilarities. Gurujis often asserted that they work better than teachers positioned in government schools; the latter stressed that their schools are more established. Members of resource centres would usually remark that all schools have the same curriculum now, and that the lack of teachers affects many of them, whether EGS or government ones: There would be no systematic difference.

4.6 An Incomplete Guarantee

Access to education has improved through EGS, especially in Shahpur, and visited schools are functional. In that respect, children are offered an 'education guarantee'. Yet this guarantee is incomplete: some children are nominally enrolled, attendance is erratic, and the quantity and quality of teaching, as well as educational outcomes, are insufficient. The extension of the system is more notable than its reform: EGS schools tend to converge towards the usual functioning of government schools, as the official focus on school quality has not translated into decisively improved practices. One may also wonder whether inputs provided to public schools are sufficient for them to function efficiently; notably, multi-grade teaching seriously constrains the quality of EGS schools. These results hold for Shahpur and Tonk Khurd blocks in the school year 2001-02: They may not be representative of Madhya Pradesh, and future evolutions of these very recent reforms may or may not confirm them. However, the severe malfunctions observed in some EGS shalas show that the new schools are fragile institutions; as well, the

fact that new schools tend to function like previous ones is plausibly general, given the difficulty of altering well-entrenched habits.

V
School Management:
Potential Decentralisation

Reforms of school management aim to improve school quality by increasing the control exerted by local protagonists (parents, administrative officials, local councillors) on teachers. Decentralisation is being implemented in both EGS and government schools, and differences between them are mostly residual: The specificity of EGS lies in the school creation process, not in the management of schools once created. Furthermore, visited schools are all affected by comparable deficiencies. EGS and government schools are thus considered together in this section, which focuses on the determinants of gurujis' and shiksha karmis' behaviour.

5.1 Teachers: Disgruntled Would-Be Civil Servants

Local recruitment of gurujis and shiksha karmis is at the core of the reforms. First, the physical distance between teachers' residence and workplace should be reduced. In Tonk Khurd block, shiksha karmis and gurujis all reside in the village where they teach, while some of the assistant teachers commute from Dewas city (30 min by bus from Tonk1, but the trip to remote villages is much longer). In Shahpur block, all teachers but one guruji do not live where they teach, but in larger villages, often the seat of the gram panchayat.[14] With one exception, this does not involve travelling long distances.

Second, local recruitment is hoped to help reduce social distance between teachers and pupils, but does not quite succeed,

Table 12: Enrolled Children Not Attending Classes in Government Schools
(in percentage)

	Shahpur 2						Tonk 1 (Girls) (2001)		
	Year 2000-01			December 2001			July	Dec	J to D
	F	M	T	M	F	T	F	F	F
Class 1	11.1	?	-	45.5	13.3	32.4	25.9	16.0	0.0
Class 2	40.9	13.8	25.5	16.7	45.5	32.5	0.0	6.3	3.1
Class 3	17.6	38.7	31.3	46.2	31.6	41.4	9.5	13.6	4.8
Class 4	5.9	0.0	2.9	33.3	53.3	41.7	14.3	14.3	9.5
Class 5	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.0	35.0	24.4	17.6	2.4	0.0
All	18.3	-	-	33.6	36.3	34.7	13.7	9.2	2.8

Notes: J to D: July to December; M: male; F: female; T: total; ?: not available; -: not applicable.

Table 13: Enrolled Attending More Than 80 Per Cent of School Days in Government Schools
(in percentage)

	Shahpur 2						Tonk 1 (Girls) (2001)		
	Year 2000-01			December 2001			July	Dec	J to D
	F	M	T	M	F	T	F	F	F
Class 1	77.8	?	-	45.5	33.3	40.5	37.0	72.0	40.0
Class 2	59.1	65.5	62.7	50.0	36.4	42.5	84.8	90.6	31.3
Class 3	52.9	41.9	45.8	43.6	52.6	46.6	61.9	86.4	33.3
Class 4	70.6	82.4	76.5	52.4	20.0	38.9	57.1	71.4	57.1
Class 5	100.0	100.0	100.0	40.0	35.0	37.8	68.6	95.2	81.0
All	68.3	-	-	45.6	36.3	41.7	64.1	85.2	51.8

Notes: J to D: July to December; M: male; F: female; T: total; ?: not available; -: not applicable.

as social distance exists within villages as much as between them. In Tonk Khurd, EGS pupils belong to deprived castes, usually SCs, yet teaching positions are held by men of dominant castes, notably rajputs.[15] Paradoxically, while most assistant teachers, shiksha karmis and gurujis belong to upper castes, several headmasters of government schools are SC, owing to reservations: local recruitment does not always reduce social distance as compared to centralised recruitment and posting. In Shahpur, most pupils, especially in EGS schools, belong to adivasi families, while most teachers are non-adivasi and cannot speak the local languages.

Third, shiksha karmis and gurujis are recruited by block-level boards which mostly comprise janpad panchayat members and are expected to select qualified and motivated applicants, based on local information not available to a centralised recruitment system. Unfortunately, actual selection processes do not correspond to this. Applicants have to satisfy eligibility criteria (residence and, if there are reservations, gender and caste) and are selected according to their qualifications (grade attained, marks) and an interview with the board. Manipulation of interview notes makes it possible to bias the results; it seems that a corruption system has arisen. According to a private school teacher interviewed in Tonk Khurd block, obtaining a public teaching position requires social connections and money to bribe board members. For example, his former colleague in the private school, who has become a guruji, is a close relative of the person who then was the sarpanch. Other respondents confirmed the existence of bribery: An EGS position would cost Rs 5,000 to 10,000, and a shiksha karmi position Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000. Markets for public employment are known to exist all over India, so this state of affairs is not surprising: The issue is whether decentralisation has increased corruption. There is a consensus that it has rather reduced it, by making it more visible. However, the nature of teacher recruitment is altered, from the official vision of a search for qualified and dedicated individuals, informed by local knowledge, to the distribution of public employment among influential families. In areas with low education levels, persons educated enough to become school teachers tend to belong to privileged families, so that the first batches of gurujis or shiksha karmis could not massively come from exactly the same backgrounds as their pupils. Corruption does not entirely create this kind of selection, but reinforces it.

Furthermore, teachers once appointed are given few positive incentives to teach actively. As already mentioned, shiksha karmis and gurujis receive very little training, and have to confront difficult working conditions, owing to families' lack of experience with the school system, the low levels of inputs and, mostly, high grades/teacher ratios. Unfortunately, the policy allowing to demand an EGS school does not apply to teaching positions: neither teachers nor parents can act to maintain low grades/teacher ratios, and EGS cannot have more than three teachers, whatever enrolment size.

A complex issue that has attracted much attention is that of low salary levels, and disparities between different categories of teachers generate much resentment. Creating a single new category of teachers paid lower salaries may be a consistent policy, despite unavoidable tensions in the transition period when both payscales co-exist, but creating three categories (guruji, shiksha karmi and samvida shikshak) with varyingly lower salaries than assistant teachers is more difficult to justify. Salaries of assistant teachers remain a reference for shiksha karmis and

gurujis. The consequences of this discontent on motivation are a matter of debate. Indeed, despite better salaries, assistant teachers are not all more motivated, and it is transparent that what most respondents want is to be better paid without working more: merely increasing salaries would not improve motivation.[16] However, the salaries of gurujis (and perhaps samvida shikshaks and shiksha karmis) deserve further consideration, as they are too low for their recipients to consider teaching a fulltime activity. Many male respondents participate in cultivation on the family farm, or give private tuition. Some have an activity which is hardly compatible with teaching (e g, one guruji in Tonk Khurd block runs a tea shop). Note that gurujis earn hardly more than wage labourers, whose daily wages hover between Rs 25 and 35, up to Rs 50 during peaks of activity: If salaries do not allow them to escape the kind of poverty experienced by wage labourers without engaging in other economic activities or relying on their household's income, the impact of other positive or negative incentives is likely to be minimal. As an employer, the public school system should send appropriate signals concerning the economic returns to human capital on the labour market and the equality between different individuals performing the same tasks with similar qualifications.

Interviewed gurujis and shiksha karmis are young (21 to 35 years), educated (all but one completed higher secondary schooling, several had completed or were taking BAs) and come from established families, e g, their parent's education levels are above local averages. Most they say they would seize any better paid regular employment opportunity, but private employers often do not pay better salaries than those of shiksha karmis, and government employment is scarce. Female teachers added that social norms further prevent them from accessing regular employment. The recruitment policy of the RGSM is thus feasible because there is excess supply on the market for qualified labour. Being a guruji or a shiksha karmi is seen as a temporary first step towards a government job associated with higher salaries and other benefits; corruption should be analysed in that light. At least, respondents expect to be regularised as assistant teachers. The status of shiksha karmis has evolved a lot as a result of their agitation, and low salaries are the main difference that remains between them and assistant teachers. Gurujis are kept in uncertainty as to their legal status and its future evolutions: they often do not know whether they can be transferred, or how they can find employment in other public schools. However, all respondents but one consider themselves civil servants rather than employees of the panchayats: the government's attempt to create a permanent structural break in the organisation of the public sector has not yet materialised, as the unambiguously better status of assistant teachers remains a reference.

5.2 Administrative Decentralisation

Implemented from 1994 onwards in Betul and 1997 in Dewas as part of DPEP, administrative decentralisation aims to promote a new work culture among teachers by strengthening their links with institutions responsible for inspection and training.

The pre-DPEP inspection system had only one inspector per block, who thus had to inspect more than 100 schools in Shahpur as well as in Tonk Khurd – obviously an impossible task. Clusters comprise 6.4 primary schools on average in Tonk Khurd, and 14.1 in Shahpur (9.8 before EGS): for Cluster academic coordinators, regularly inspecting each school is feasible. Registers

show that most schools are inspected about once a month, and several visits were observed during the fieldwork. Cluster resource coordinators are supposed to check any problem with inputs; they also collect examination fees. BRCs organise teacher training sessions, transmit funds for salaries and minor school expenditure from the district to the cluster and village levels, and dispatch textbooks and teaching materials. Resource centres organise regular meetings with teachers, devoted to the discussion of academic and administrative issues. Two examples: first, during a CRC meeting observed in Tonk Khurd block, 18 teachers representing all (but one) primary and middle schools of the cluster discussed the organisation of midday meals, the forthcoming election of the presidents and vice-presidents of parents-teachers associations, the building of a new room for the CRC, and the preparation of the end-of-year examinations (to avoid that too many pupils obtained grade D, it was decided that irregular children would not take the examinations). Second, a BRC meeting was organised in Tonk Khurd in February 2002, to discuss the organisation of the board examination at the end of class 5 and prepare questions, under the guidance of a DIET faculty member. As expected, about forty teachers attended (including only two women), but the meeting started one hour late and attendance kept fluctuating. Examination questions were supposed to have been drafted during CRC meetings, but this had not been done and the programme was consequently delayed. As discussed in section IV, the questions turned out to rely heavily on rote learning, although the organisation of such meetings is supposed to allow the design of more relevant questions.

According to all teachers, CRCs and BRCs are in charge with most actual school management; only relatively minor complaints were expressed (irregularities in the delivery of textbooks, burden of presenting school registers for inspection). Yet the functioning of schools is deficient, a situation known to CRC and BRC members. Why administrative decentralisation does not result in deeper alterations of teachers' behaviour requires some explanation. First, remote schools may be rarely visited (e g, the school of Shahpur4 is not inspected more than three or four times a year), and the number of schools per cluster may be still quite high in a few cases (one cluster of Shahpur has 21 schools).

Second, the 'best' teachers were selected as CACs, and head-masters as CRCs or to work in BRCs. This makes sense – dedicated teachers are likely to be dedicated supervisors as well – but some schools were deprived of their best teachers, and the reward for motivation in terms of career is to become CAC and stop teaching. In that respect, administration is still more valued than education

Third, the functioning of CRCs and BRCs tend to neglect academic issues as compared to administrative ones. According to inspection registers, CACs check teachers' and pupils' attendance, get an idea of achievement levels and give some advice, but this does not seem to be done in any depth. During the inspections by CACs which I could observe, there was no control of school times and teaching activities; not more was required from teachers than keeping the school open with pupils in it. Given the malfunctions of many schools, one would expect sanction procedures (which CRC and BRC officials can start) to represent a real threat for many teachers, but it seems none has never happened in either block.

Fourth, resource centres are staffed with former teachers, who belong to the same social and professional milieu as the persons they control. It is thus difficult for them to criticise colleagues

too harshly and try and change well-entrenched habits; they tend to share the comparably lax norms about the quantity and quality of teaching. Frequent practices such as arriving late and leaving early, or supervising rather than teaching pupils, seem to be considered acceptable. A counterpart to the close links between all teachers and the noticeably friendly atmosphere of meetings at resource centres is that the system represents teachers' (at least) as much as pupils' interests. Establishing and maintaining high standards of teaching would require major improvements in the behaviour of teachers, which cannot come from within their ranks.

5.3 Political Decentralisation

Political decentralisation is expected by the GoMP to change the nature of public schools, which would be controlled by a local 'community' of parents and panchayat institutions.

VECs and SMCs are supposed to meet once a month to check the availability of educational inputs, set rules (e g, school times) and monitor the functioning of the schools. They can discuss the use of funds provided by the government, and transmit complaints against teachers to CRCs, BRCs or the block or district administration. Teachers say that meetings are regular, but rarely remember the date of the last one, topics discussed, or decisions taken. Registers mention more or less regular meetings (almost every month in some schools, but only two to six a year in others), but reports merely reproduce topics as prescribed in official instructions and rarely mention practical decisions. In fact, registers are not reliable: in one school in Shahpur, I observed the headmaster to copy on a new page the information concerning the previous meeting, while only two persons had turned up, including the sarpanch but not the committee president. The observation of a less fictitious SMC meeting suggests that interactions between parents and teachers are anyway limited. Besides the two gurujis, 14 men and three women had come, but only the male guruji spoke. After stressing pupils' low attendance and bad examination results in January, he complained about working conditions, trying to gather support to have another classroom built. Much time was spent collecting examination fees of Rs 20 to 30 per child, and Rs 10 per child for Republic Day. Parents were only let to approve the guruji's own description of the school: shortcomings of gurujis' behaviour were never mentioned.

Respondents consistently confirmed that most VECs and SMCs are dysfunctional. The SMC president of Shahpur1 said that parents of his village consider their EGS school a government institution staffed with civil servants, and would not think of taking initiatives towards improving it. However, it would be misleading to blame only parents for the deficiencies of school management institutions, while teachers' behaviour is so central to the deficiencies of the schools themselves. First, gram panchayat members are usually president and vice-president of the committees, and exert actual control over their activities. Second, teachers, one of whom is (statutorily) secretary of the committee, have no interest in parents controlling them, hence the tendency not to inform parents of the dates of meetings and not to engage in a dialogue with them.

By contrast, teachers and administrative officials expressed optimism about the election of the presidents and vice-presidents of PTAs, which took place on February 24, 2002. The election was observed at the EGS school of Tonk1. Instructions had been given through the BRC, and meetings were organised at the CRC,

during which the gurujis were given official papers (notification of the election to parents, forms to be filled in by applicants, meeting register). The election echoed the SMC meeting described above. Besides the two gurujis, about 25 persons (including less than 10 women) turned up. The male guruji spoke, giving his vision of the role to be played by the association. One seat was reserved for an SC or an ST, and one for a woman. A consensus somehow emerged on the name of the man to become the president; more time was spent convincing a woman to be the vice-president – women hardly spoke at all. Results for other schools visited exhibit fairly consistent patterns: women are chosen to be vice-presidents rather than presidents, and the president is often a non-SC. PTAs provide teachers with a tool for furthering those interests of the school which correspond to their own. In Tonk1, the male guruji said the PTA could help obtain another teaching position, the construction of another classroom, a hand pump or a boundary wall. All this would be useful, but of a limited impact on pupil's achievement unless teaching itself improves. The absence of other villagers than parents strengthens the latter's position within PTAs, but social distance to teachers remains. Furthermore, in schools visited in Tonk Khurd, no date had been fixed for the next meeting. Whether PTAs will indeed allow dialogue to take place between parents and teachers is unclear.

Gram panchayats were usually said to take little interest in the functioning of public schools. Their members are not regular visitors to schools, though they interact informally with teachers. They tend to belong to the same social circles, which limits the control they may be willing to exert on them: a rajput sarpanch or upsarpanch of Tonk Khurd block has little interest in confronting a rajput guruji appointed to an EGS school catering to dalit children.[17] Gram panchayats would act only when there is a possibility to manipulate funds, for example during the construction of school buildings. In a government school of Tonk Khurd block, one classroom has been ruined since the 1980s. In 1999, a new building was constructed. Some administrative problem prevented the school from moving into its new building for two years. Since July 2001, it has been used by the husband of a former sarpanch, to host his private primary school. In the absence of an outside intervention, the government school will have to wait for a specific building to be built for that private school to move into its own building. It seems that nothing much can be done against the owner of the private school, whom respondents obviously fear.

Gram panchayats are involved in the organisation of mid-day meals. In Shahpur block, meals consisting of daliya (pounded wheat cooked in water with some oil and sugar) have been served in government schools for several years, and were extended to EGS schools. Wheat is provided by the central government through fair price shops (FPS), but oil and sugar are bought from local private stores, and wood is bought from labourers who collect it in the forest. In visited schools, meals are prepared by a woman hired by the gram panchayat and paid by them Rs 15 a day. This arrangement was not said to generate any problem. In Tonk Khurd, meals should have started from February 1, 2002, after the Supreme Court prescribed an India-wide extension of such schemes. In Tonk2, they are provided regularly, following the same organisation as in Shahpur block. In Tonk1 and Tonk3, they had not started at the time of the visit, and teachers did not know whether they would. The sarpanches had not hired anyone to prepare the meals; teachers were reluctant, as they feared they would have to organise the meals themselves. Several parents said they preferred the distribution of grain rations, perhaps because they can control their use, while only children benefit from school meals.

5.4 A Potentially Decentralised System

During the school year 2001-02, the inadequate behaviour of teachers remained the major deficiency of schools visited in Shahpur and Tonk Khurd blocks. The new statuses of teachers do not generate and sustain their motivation, and local residents once recruited want to become civil servants rather than teachers. Improving positive incentives, among which training and the reduction of grades/teacher ratios are likely to matter even more than salaries, should be a priority. In comparison, administrative and political controls can play only a limited role. While administrative decentralisation has helped establish useful links between teachers and the district and state administration, it cannot be expected to revolutionise the public school system, as it is internal to it. Political decentralisation has created some potential for parents and panchayat members to get involved in school management, but its effectiveness depends on the quality of local political processes, which is deficient in the areas under study. As yet, public schools remain sarkari institutions staffed with would-be civil servants: they are likely to be most responsive to informal interactions between teachers and gram panchayat members, who often belong to the same dominant social groups. This specific aspect of school management may not have changed much as compared to the situation which used to prevail before political decentralisation. In a way, the decentralisation process still remains a potential.

VI
Education and Rural Society: No 'Schooling Revolution' Yet

In rural India, unequal access to education has been both an expression and a source of social inequality. Social differentiation is an essential output of the school system, and non-enrolment nothing but the lowest rung of the educational ladder – thus quite acceptable from an upper caste male point of view. Before the extension and diversification of the school supply of Madhya Pradesh through EGS, DPEP and the spread of the private sector during the 1990s, upper caste boys would constitute the bulk of enrolment in mainstream areas like Tonk Khurd block, girls and children of other background being massively deprived of schooling. In tribal areas like Shahpur block, many villages would not have schools: inequalities between villages would be as important as inequalities within them. Equal access of all children to public schools coupled with improved teaching methods and closer links between teachers and parents could thus have a deep impact on village society and economy. It has been argued that a 'schooling revolution' has taken place in Himachal Pradesh over the last decades [PROBE Team 1999], and the GoMP considers current policies a historical breakthrough. Is Madhya Pradesh experiencing a 'schooling revolution'? This section argues that the school system is being extended and diversified rather than universalised. The lowest acceptable rung of the ladder is irregular attendance in incomplete primary schools rather than complete non-enrolment, but the educational hierarchy remains, and is renewed: children of dif-

ferent socio-economic backgrounds have separate access to schools of different types. In the public sector, parental demand features some serious limitations and the state does not send adequate signals; private schools reproduce existing social structures instead of challenging them.

6.1 Limitations to Demand for Education

An overwhelming majority of rural north Indian parents are willing to enrol their children in primary schools. Habitations where EGS schools are to be created are identified by the expression of parental demand, and this strategy seems to have worked impressively well: thousands of demands were received by the RGSM in the first months of 1997. Yet the adequacy of parental motivation, on which the effectiveness of current policies depends, cannot be taken for granted.

The success of EGS is an imperfect measure of parental demand for education. Parents just have to give their names and sign the demand form, which is transmitted to the RGSM by the gram panchayat. The school creation process may be largely driven by sarpanches, to whom the creation of a school yields political gains and an opportunity to manipulate funds and employment. Most parents of EGS pupils and many parents of government school pupils received little or no school education: their idea of how a school should function is imprecise. Not enough attention is paid to important details like sending children to school punctually, or always giving them plates for mid-day meals (rather than letting them use textbook pages instead). Parents tend to consider a school functional if it opens a few hours a day, without questioning teachers' attitudes. Indeed, teachers' misleading discourse, which blames low educational outcomes entirely on parents, often seems internalised. Parental motivation is a reality, but cannot be the source for major improvements in the quality of public schools.

Decisions on school participation depend on perceived returns to and costs of schooling. Parents hope schooling to improve their children's position in society: private returns are envisaged, but there is little expectation of broad social change through the spread of education. Sons are hoped to obtain regular employment (especially in the government sector), which would guarantee stable income, a crucial step out of poverty for wage labourers and small farmers. This translates into a willingness to let boys study for a long time, the standard horizon being class 12, especially in Tonk Khurd block, where middle and secondary schools are more easily accessible. However, parents are aware that these positions are scarce and available through social networks and bribery; many are disillusioned. Respondents say that prospective brides are more and more often expected to have received some basic education; coupled with the limited productivity of young children, this helps explain why parents enrol their daughters in primary schools. However, girls are married very early in both areas under study and except for those who will do wage labour, they will have almost no employment opportunities outside their husband's households, so they are unlikely to study much beyond the primary level.

Officially, primary education in public schools is free: there are no fees or uniforms, and some or all pupils receive textbooks, mid-day meals, clothes and scholarships. Yet parents' and teachers' estimates of the direct costs of schooling are high. First, cluster resource coordinators do collect examination fees, and parents also have to contribute to functions like Republic Day.

Amounts (around Rs 10 per child) are not negligible if several children of the same family are enrolled. There is no reason to raise any money if schooling is free. Second, all parents have to buy textbooks, notebooks, slates, pens, pencils, chalk and schoolbags, up to Rs 150 a year per child. Third, in Shahpur block the clothes children wear at home are not deemed suitable for school, hence the need to buy extra clothes, a few more Rs 100 – even though the condition of a child's clothes is not an educational input.[18] Estimates of total costs vary from about Rs 100 for class 1 (excluding clothes) to Rs 800 for a child in class 5 (including them). Wage labourers say they earn Rs 25 to 35 a day, and do not find work for more than 15 or 20 days a month: one year of primary education can easily represent an adult's month of work. Yet a daughter's wedding usually represents several times the cost of her education up to class 5: the perception of education as costly also reflects the low priority it is given. Public policies need to question the socially-determined valuation of education vs marriage and other social institutions; in the short run, education should be entirely free, especially for girls.

Meanwhile, opportunity costs are limited, at least for boys. According to respondents, paid child labour is rare and affects only children aged 12 and above. Many children do unpaid work (cattle grazing, household chores). These activities may be adapted so that they be compatible with schooling, but household work was consistently cited as one of the reasons for female non-enrolment.

For parents, keeping children at school is costly, and getting involved in school management difficult, for it means challenging the vested interests of teachers and gram panchayat members without having a clear idea of how schools should function. Parental demand alone cannot be a major source of change in the education system.

6.2 Ambiguities of State's Position

Officially, decentralisation allows closer interactions between parents, teachers and local institutions to improve the quality of schools. Yet protagonists like teachers or gram panchayat members implement it according to their own interests, which may not coincide with this vision. Assistant teachers had formed a lobby privileging their status over their work. The shift to local recruitment was designed to prevent the re-formation of such a lobby – which has happened at least with shiksha karmis – but demotivated local residents have been substituted for civil servants without a professional ethos being promoted. Most (not all) interviewed shiksha karmis and gurujis showed interest for teaching; at least one of them seemed strongly committed, but this was an individual characteristic more than an outcome of the recruitment system. The new teachers behave according to their interests as local residents belonging to influential families and eager to become fully-fledged civil servants. They neglect the interests of their pupils. Teaching methods further illustrate the lack of change in educational values. Rote learning remains essential; it is the logic of the education teachers received themselves. Training is too limited to challenge this conception: giving autonomy to local protagonists in organising education may be necessary but cannot be sufficient to promote change, e g, teaching methods generating 'joyful learning' cannot be spontaneously adopted by teachers to whom they are not familiar ways of interacting with children.

As neither parents (or other members of the 'community') nor teachers are both able and willing to promote school quality, the

role of the state remains central. Unfortunately, despite systematic statements of its importance in official publications, the GoMP's position towards school quality is ambiguous. EGS schools receive low resources, and local residents are not 'transformed' into teachers. Two further examples. The introduction of English courses is supposed to make public schools as 'attractive' as private ones. These courses are nominal (teachers received four days of training and grades are not taken into account in examination results): although textbooks were distributed, no tangible results can be expected in terms of learning. Certainly, English courses are often nominal in private schools as well, but it is disturbing that public and private schools compete in terms of nominal attributes rather than of the quality of teaching.[19]

Under the so-called 'Headstart' programme, the installation of 'computer labs' has been experimented in a few CRCs, including one of those visited in Tonk Khurd block. The 'lab' has four computers and two printers. Two persons who hold degrees in IT teach middle-school and class-5 pupils (mostly those of the same village), once or twice a week. In class 5, exercises observed were limited to game-based activities around the Devanagari script. It is doubtful whether computers are necessary to teach this, which class 5 pupils should already master anyway. Furthermore, computer literacy is acquired and retained only through regular practice, while groups of five children would sit in front of a computer for only 10 minutes in each session. The contribution to children's achievement is likely to be minimal, though the social status of the CRC was enhanced.

While attempting to reduce gaps between public and private, or rural and urban schools, the introduction of English and computer courses involves substantial trade-offs with other inputs – notably teaching positions and training – which are likely to have more impact on the acquisition of Hindi literacy and numeracy.

The malfunctions of public schools and school management institutions can be explained by insufficient change in social values regarding education. While initiatives like the Padhna Badhna Andolan were said by respondents to have improved attitudes to education, the state should put more emphasis on the quality of schools. In that context, increasing local control over schools may not necessarily result in universal primary education of decent quality.

6.3 Spontaneous Evolution of Village School Systems

Reforms of public schools in Madhya Pradesh have not happened in isolation: the spread of private schools during the 1990s has to be taken into account while assessing policies like EGS. This is best done analysing how schools of different types co-exist within the same areas. Villages visited in Shahpur have one EGS or government school, hence there is not much to add on their situation. In sharp contrast, villages visited in Tonk Khurd have several public and private schools. The lack of local educational planning appears to generate divided and inefficient local school systems.

Privatisation is wide-ranging in villages visited in Tonk Khurd: eight among 18 primary schools are private (Table 2), but none is more than 10 years old. Being larger than EGS schools, and comparable to government ones, they represent more than half of total enrolment (about 350 children among about 600 in Tonk3). Three of these schools (one in each village) are Saraswati Shishu Mandirs (SSM) belonging to the RSS network, Gram

Bharati; others are independent, several of them opened by former SSM teachers.[20] A small private school of Tonk Khurd block looks like an ideal EGS school: it has one qualified teacher (BA) and 42 pupils from similar social backgrounds, operates in a rented kaccha room and has the same limited equipment as EGS schools. The teacher would earn Rs 1,500 a month; he seems committed and friendly towards his pupils, and stresses his accountability towards parents. Literacy tests results are excellent: all class 5 could read fluently and with intonation. However, the mechanisms underlying this apparent success are not replicable in EGS schools: the teacher is a brahmin and most of his pupils belong to privileged backgrounds; his accountability arises from the payment of fees by parents able to monitor their children' achievement.

In sharp contrast, SSMs are large schools (in Dewas, many have pre-primary or middle classes) allowing more interactions between pupils and teachers. SSMs have one teacher per grade, and base their reputation on the regularity school timings, teachers' attendance and discipline. Buildings have small, badly constructed rooms (worse in some respects than public schools buildings, e g, brick walls are not even painted), teaching/learning materials are rare, and teaching methods may not be, say, innovative. In Tonk2, literacy tests results in class 5 were excellent among children seated closest to the teacher's desk, but quickly worsening as one moved away from it. Here again, teacher accountability arises from strict employment conditions (associated with low salaries, Rs 700 to 1,250 a month) and the payment of fees by upper caste parents who accept the very specific ideology associated with the RSS.

In Tonk Khurd, most of the recent extension of the primary school system is due to private schools, which have managed to establish close links with parents and the 'community'. For example, in March 2002 the annual fête of the Tonk3 SSM included an evening-long theatre performance by pupils, on the main square at the entrance of the village, which attracted several hundred villagers. However, private schools do not represent a model for the public sector. First, the payment of fees bars poorer households from accessing them. Indeed, fees vary from Rs 40 a month plus a yearly Rs 75 in the small school of Tonk1 described above to Rs 195 and a yearly Rs 295 for class 5 in SSMs – this does not include not-so-voluntary 'donations' of several hundred rupees which have to be paid when enrolling a child for the first time. Second, social differentiation and signalling are crucial outputs of these schools, many of which promote debatable political ideologies detrimental to children from deprived social groups. The private sector might have contributed a lot in increasing enrolment rates, but its development is unlikely to lead to the universalisation of quality primary education.

Reforms undertaken in Madhya Pradesh since the 1990s tend to favour the creation of additional schools over the extension of existing ones, which would sometimes have been feasible. Creation of EGS schools, division of co-educational government schools into separate girls and boys ones, reliance on private schools many of which are small. This leads to the generalisation of multi-grade teaching. Most schools visited, whether public or private, have less than five teachers, with dire consequences on the quality of teaching, as the 'graded' approach is the only one vaguely mastered by most teachers and understood by parents. The government itself appears unable to do away with it, since the new textbooks re-introduce it. Nonetheless, multi-grade teaching is not always a necessity. In villages visited in Tonk

Khurd block, the total number of primary school teachers exceeds five, or 10 and village-level pupils/teacher ratios are not high. Were it not for the fragmentation of the school supply between five to seven schools, multi-grade teaching could be avoided. Physical distance may be a real issue in some adivasi areas of Madhya Pradesh, but densities of 139 inhabitants per sq km, as in 'scarcely' populated Betul district in 1991, would be considered high in most countries in the world. The proportion of Indian children living in areas where there are not enough of them within a 1-km radius to justify the existence of more than two teaching positions is likely to be low.

Second, the school system ends up reproducing the divisions of rural north Indian society, instead of reducing them. In Tonk Khurd block, wealthy and/or upper caste families send their children, especially their sons, to private schools, while people belonging to intermediary economic and social categories send theirs to the government schools – where girls and boys are separated – and dalit children have access to the EGS school. In Shahpur block, adivasi children attend public schools, either EGS or government ones; only children living in the largest two villages (Shahpur and Bhoura), many of them non-adivasi, have easier access to private schools.

The constraint constituted by the near monopoly of the government bureaucracy on the primary school supply of Shahpur and Tonk Khurd blocks has been relaxed: The current system is more responsive to the demand for education expressed by villagers. The features of the emerging school system thus depend on the nature of the demand expressed by different social groups, and privatisation may have had more impact than reforms internal to the public sector. The 'market' for education thus created does not seem to be efficient, as it is characterised by the proliferation of schools too small to function correctly, each catering to specific social groups. On the whole, it is unclear whether increased local control over schools is paving the way for universal primary education.

VII
Conclusion

The reforms of primary education undertaken in Madhya Pradesh since the mid-1990s are notable. Indeed, the GoMP has acknowledged that the deficiencies of public schools have been the major source of educational deprivation in the state, and sought to address them through policy changes which include many elements long advocated by social activists and researchers, aiming to improve access to primary and middle schools and to create accountability of the teachers to their pupils' parents. Yet fieldwork results suggest that, by 2002, in Shahpur and Tonk Khurd blocks, the public school system has been extended and divided without the reforms having a decisive positive impact on its functioning. Further research is needed to assess the situation of rural Madhya Pradesh as a whole and its evolution, but a general interpretation of these partial results – which are consistent with the conclusions of other recent studies of primary education in rural India [Bhatty 1998; Drèze and Gazdar 1997; Drèze and Sen 2002; Govinda 2002; Jha and Jhingran 2002; Kingdon and Muzammil 2001; PROBE Team 1999] – is possible.

Jean Drèze and Mrinalini Saran (1995) analyse school systems as sets of 'resources', 'incentives' and 'values'. In Madhya Pradesh, reforms have implied low levels of inputs per school. This is supposed to be compensated for by a renewed incentives structure in which teachers are supported and controlled. This policy has two flaws. First, resources may be too low for teaching to be effective. For example, the combination of multi-grade teaching and the lack of formal or informal training makes it difficult for gurujis to impart their pupils – most of whom are first-generation learners – the contents of the primary curriculum. Second, the effectiveness of incentives depends on values. If teachers and panchayat members belong to the same dominant social groups and do not consider the education of dalit or adivasi children a priority, the current incentives structure is ineffective. Decentralisation leads to an adaptation of the school system to existing values; it cannot challenge them.

Commenting on EGS and comparable initiatives, Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen (2002, chapter 5) acknowledge the potential of 'second-track schooling facilities' as temporary means to increase enrolment but stress the risks involved in terms of the quality, equity and sustainability of the resulting school system. These issues are certainly crucial, but the perspective should be broader than a comparison between EGS and government schools. Indeed, the management structure of all public schools converges towards the same decentralised organisation. Meanwhile, non-enrolment, or at least very irregular attendance, persists, and private schools develop quickly. Equity issues should be analysed considering the whole range of educational opportunities open to each child. Whether there is a systematic difference in quality between EGS and government schools in Madhya Pradesh remains an open question, but fieldwork suggests that the poor quality of teaching is a crucial issue across school types – even private schools seem to offer more rather than better teaching. Sustainability is an issue for all schools, not only EGS ones. Private schools appear and disappear, depending on their profitability, and enrolment in public schools varies as a consequence. The school system of each village is intrinsically unstable, which is detrimental to children.

Through decentralisation and privatisation, current policies tend to let market-like mechanisms determine the school supply in villages of Madhya Pradesh. Given existing social structures, this market often fails. The school supply is fragmented into schools which are too small to be efficient, and social inequalities are reproduced rather than reduced. Universalising primary education probably requires some planning of the school supply, say, at the cluster level, so that the system has the capacity to enrol all children in schools of a reasonable size, avoiding multi-grade teaching wherever this is possible. This implies regulating the development of the private sector, but also challenging current attitudes towards children of underprivileged social backgrounds and towards public schools. A 'schooling revolution' will be achieved only if local politics are made to promote a radically democratic policy of education for all. 𝗘𝗣𝗪

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Notes

1 National Family Health Survey data for 1992-93 and 1998-99 show a slower progression, from 64 per cent to 72 per cent for males, and 34 per cent to 44 per cent for females (aged six and above), the gender

gap decreasing from 30 to 28 percentage points (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2001).

2 Hereafter, the term 'EGS schools' refers to schools created under the EGS and to Alternative Schools; 'government schools' refers to primary schools which existed before EGS or were created under DPEP; 'public schools' and 'the public sector' refer to EGS and government schools put together; 'private schools' and 'the private sector' refer to all types of private schools.

3 Hereafter, the term 'teacher' refers to all four categories taken together; when a specific category is concerned, its name is used. There was no samvida shikshak in visited schools, hence this category is rarely mentioned in the rest of the paper.

4 In states like Uttar Pradesh, privatisation has resulted from the near-collapse of the government sector – retiring teachers are hardly replaced. It has been external (creation of private schools) and internal (recruitment by government schools of teachers paid through tuition fees). In Madhya Pradesh, reforms may have prevented internal privatisation (but for private tuition given by public school teachers), but large numbers of private schools have opened in areas where they can be profitable.

5 The reader should note, however, that I carried out the fieldwork itself alone, and that this is an independent study, not an Eklavya study.

6 Villages names have been replaced by a code comprising the block name and a digit.

7 EGS schools open with one teacher and at least 25 pupils in tribal areas and 40 elsewhere. They can have a second teacher if enrolment is above 50; it was announced in February 2002 that this would be generalised. EGS schools cannot have more than two teachers.

8 The GoMP announced the installation of hand pumps in all schools in February 2002.

9 Officially, classes are held on Monday to Saturday, July 1 to April 30.

10 Exceptions are Shahpur4, a largely dysfunctional school (16 of 54 pupils dropped out from July to September 2001), and Tonk2, which operates in a very small, cramped room (11 of 69 pupils).

11 The specific difficulty for Gondi- or Korku-speaking children, especially the youngest ones, to follow classes taught in Hindi may help explain why attendance rates are much lower in Shahpur than in Tonk Khurd.

12 Language is not an issue in Tonk Khurd block, where children speak either Hindi or Malwi, the local Hindi dialect.

13 Government primary schools have used 'Khushi-Khushi' in Shahpur block, but not EGS ones. Children were not acquainted to the texts they had to read.

14 Villages being small, each gram panchayat covers several of them.

15 It seems that many female teachers are SC; Women of upper castes are less likely to be authorised by their husband's family to take such employment.

16 The government further argues that many private school teachers earn less than even gurujis and work more. However, as argued in Section VI, the accountability mechanisms of the private sector are not replicable in public schools.

17 It has often been said that sarpanches harass teachers; this does not seem to be the case in the villages under study.

18 Nobody mentioned this in Tonk Khurd block, where children wear the same clothes at school and at home.

19 Introducing English courses which do not allow pupils to grasp anything of that language hardly makes sense. The general role that English should play in the education system of Madhya Pradesh is a different question.

20 Six of these schools could be briefly visited: Two SSMs (Tonk2 and Tonk3), and four independent schools (two in Tonk1, one each in Tonk2 and Tonk3).

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