

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Privatization of school education has gained prominence in the recent years and is often viewed (or romanticised) as a silent revolution taking place in India. The magnitude and outreach of the private sector in the field of school education has been remarkable. It started gaining momentum in the 1990s, though private schools have existed right from independence in a marginal scale. It is viewed by many as an answer to the various shortcomings of government schools. Various literature that dealt with the issue of privatization of education painted a bleak picture of the state funded schools. The PROBE team report (1999), for instance, shows that there is a rising parental demand for education due to decline in the quality of government school system. The reasons cited were manifold - lack of accountability of teachers, poor physical facilities, shortage of teachers, high teacher-pupil ratio, and so on. Similarly, in their study in Uttar Pradesh, Dreze and Gazdar (1996) found that expansion of private schooling facilities is partly a response to the decay of the public schooling system. They found that in government schools, the physical conditions of schools were very poor, teacher absenteeism and shirking was endemic, and the student attendance was erratic. These deficiencies in government schools prompted parents to turn towards more reliable, efficient and quality services in education. This type of privatisation has been referred as '*de facto* privatisation' (Tooley and Dixon, 2006:444) where responsibilities for education have been transferred *de facto* to the private sector through the rapid growth of private schools, rather than *de jure*, i.e., through reform or legislation.

However, private schools are also criticised by scholars on various grounds. The often cited criticism levelled against private schools is that they cater to the needs of the elites, upper castes and boys, and are confined to urban areas. Tilak (2002), for instance, argued that unaided private schools do provide some financial relief, but at huge

economic and social cost and the adverse effects include accentuating dualism, elitism, and class inequalities. In similar vein, Dreze and Gazdar (1996) also pointed out that school attendance in private schools is significantly male dominated as parents are reluctant to pay school fees for female children. It involves commuting to a different village, which female children are often not allowed to do. Some scholars reported that attending private schools is considered as symbol of prestige by the parents. De and Samson (2009), for instance, reported that there are problems of access and quality in private schools. These schools are not accessible across socio-economic groups, and thus, private school education is seen as a status symbol. Kumar (2009) argues that the coexistence of these two parallel schools ensures that children of the better-off are separated early from the children of the poor.

Several pro-privatization studies (for instance, Tooley and Dixon, 2006; Kingdon, 1996; 2007) however strongly refuted this notion of class, caste, gender, and region bias of private schools. These scholars have found that private schools for the poor are growing even in slums, peri-urban, rural and low-income areas. Tooley and Dixon (2003) for example, reported that the official figures from Hyderabad, the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh, show that more than 61% of all students are in private unaided schools and large numbers serve the poor in the slums, serving children whose parents are daily-paid labourers or market traders. Moreover, some studies (Coleman *et al*, 1982; Govinda and Varghese, 1992) found that the learner's achievement was significantly higher among private school students when compared to their public school counterparts¹. Thus, the present study addresses this debate between government and private schools from an anthropological perspective.

¹ There is a middle course too referred as Public Private Partnership (PPP) that also co-exists alongside the government and private schools.

I

ANTHROPOLOGY OF EDUCATION: EMERGENCE OF THE SUB-FIELD

Anthropologists' preoccupation with culture is extended to education too, where the latter is viewed as the process of learning and transmitting culture. The vast body of literature on schools and education from various disciplinary backgrounds were mostly devoted to criticism of textbooks and other curriculum materials. Wax and Wax argued that researchers working on schools and education have an interlocking chain of assumptions:

Schools are primarily and exclusively agencies of formal education (rather than being social institutions); that pupils are isolated individuals (rather than social beings who participate in the life of peer societies, ethnic groups, and the like); that formal education is synonymous with education; and that the principal task of the teacher is to educate (1971: 3).

The major problem was to make the schools teach their students more, better, and faster rather than asking what kind of social processes are actually taking place in relation to the schools (ibid, 1971). Thus, the educationist treats schooling as a technocist enterprise that is confined to the outcomes of teaching and learning through formal curriculum in schools and techniques for assessing, imparting, and enhancing skills (Smith, 1992).

Anthropologists and sociologists, on the other hand, focus on the relational reality of schooling characterized by a complex, ordered set of relationships. They also reiterate the importance of various non-school factors in shaping an individual's life. Kneller (1965), for instance, suggested that education in terms of schooling is only one of a number of enculturating agencies like the family, church, peer group and mass media. If the educator wants to cultivate certain qualities in the child like clear thinking and independent judgement, he may not be able to do so as other agencies might be moulding the child differently. Anthropologists are of the view that in order to create effective educational exchanges in schools, educators must take into account the distinct cultural styles and understandings that may be

operating across school, family, and other community contexts (Foley *et al.*, 2001).

Thus, the unique feature that sets apart the field of anthropology of education from various other disciplines studying education is its diversity. Anthropology takes a broad view of education that encompasses almost everything that a person learns in his lifetime, through informal as well as formal means (Harrington, 1982). Durkheim, known as the founding father of sociology of education, categorises education as a social fact which is external to the individual and constraining one's behaviour. Taking a broad and holistic view of education and not just confining it to schooling, Durkheim states:

Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined (1956: 71).

In the beginning, anthropologists (Mead, Firth, for instance) primarily worked in simpler societies where institutions of formal schooling were absent and socialization was primarily in the hands of the kin groups. Gradually, with increasing technological complexity and with the impact of civilization, western style schools started appearing in simple societies too. School as a key institution took over certain socialization tasks that were the responsibilities of the kin group (Suarez-Orozco, 1991).

In the course of emergence of the subfield, the 1950s acted as a watershed with the formal acceptance of anthropology of education as a legitimate subfield. This important development took place with a major conference in 1954 on Education and Anthropology by George Spindler jointly sponsored by American Anthropological Association and the Department of Anthropology and School of Education at Stanford University. This resulted in the publication of George Spindler's edited book, *Education and Anthropology* in 1955. The

conference addressed the relationship between the two fields, anthropology and education. For the Spindlers', education is the process of transmitting culture which includes skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values, as well as discrete elements of behaviour (Spindler, 2000)². The notion of cultural therapy has also been central to their work, which is a process of bringing one's own culture (in their research, teachers) to a level of awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge (Spindler, 1999). George and Louise Spindler carved their own niche in the field of educational anthropology, apart from their contributions in psychological anthropology and American Indian studies.

In school ethnographies too, there was a strong influence of the culture and personality school. In fact, the anthropology of education grew in the shadow of anthropological linguistics and psychological anthropology (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). There are two conspicuous reasons for this. Firstly, many who excelled in research in schools came from the subfield of psychological anthropology (Spindler, Henry, Gearing), and secondly, the definition of indigenous education as cultural transmission has been carried forward to the definition of formal education where schooling is viewed as an aspect of cultural transmission (Ogbu, 1981).

In the 1960s, three events further developed the sub-field of the anthropology of education (Ogbu, 1994): First, anthropologists were called during the social and political crisis in the United States to contribute to the solution of the nations' educational problems. Second, anthropologists attacked the theory of cultural deprivation proposed by educational psychologists on conceptual, methodological, and substantive grounds. Third, anthropologists attempted to incorporate anthropology into the public school curriculum. Thus, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed intense educational activity and growth in

² In Spindler's words, "Every teacher, whether mother's brother or Miss Humboldt of Peavey Falls, re-enacts and defends the cultural drama as experienced" (2000: 63).

the discipline. There was diversity in geographical specialization which was accompanied by diversity in theoretical interests. The field was no longer dominated by the models of structural-functionalism and culture-personality paradigms and a wide variety of methodological tools were used to collect data and test theory in the field (Eddy, 1985).

In the 1970s, educational anthropology finally emerged as an academic subfield and anthropologists started taking anthropology of education seriously as a field of systematic inquiry. Prior to the 1970s, educational anthropology did not exist as an academic subfield³. Ogbu (1994) cited several explanations for this lack of seriousness. Firstly, anthropologists studied societies that lacked institutionalized schooling. Secondly, studying schooling as an agent of social change was incongruent with their predominantly structural-functional orientation. Moreover, Levinson (1999) reasoned that anthropologists tend to think that western-style schooling has the same effect everywhere, and hence, take the effects of schooling for granted. In 1970, anthropological interest in education resulted in the formation of the Council on Anthropology and Education. The Conference on Anthropology of Education at Stanford in 1954 and the formal organization of the Council on Anthropology and Education in 1970 were the major turning points in the history of educational anthropology (Eddy, 1985). Anthropological pursuits in the field of education have been as diverse as the field itself. Therefore, it is vital to understand the various theoretical and conceptual contributions made by educational anthropologists on various aspects of education. As the interests of anthropologists and sociologists are overlapping, the approaches used by sociologists in the field of education are worth mentioning and are discussed in the following section.

³ Nevertheless, anthropological studies on educational matters in American Anthropology were evident from its beginning in the late nineteenth century. The first American Doctorate in anthropology was awarded at Clark University in 1892 and it was titled "Is Simplified Spelling Feasible?" (Comitas and Dolgin, 1978).

II

ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EDUCATION IN THE WEST

The extensive literature on anthropology and sociology of education reveals that there is a striking difference between British and American school ethnographies. Delamont and Atkinson report,

Whereas the American research on schools and classrooms has been conducted primarily by applied anthropologists, that in Britain has been done overwhelmingly by researchers who see themselves as sociologists (1980: 140).

Thus, they suggest that there is a relatively large amount of educational anthropology work in America and sociological work has not gained much prominence. On the other hand, the ethnographic works in Britain have sociological orientation and there is a complete absence of educational anthropology. The British sociology of education, according to them, is characterized by a higher level of theoretical and methodological awareness. The recurrent preoccupation has been the organisation and negotiation of everyday life in schools and classrooms (Delamont and Atkinson, 1980: 148). The schools themselves were the topic of systematic observation and enquiry and the structural functional mode of analysis dominated in most of the British ethnographies. The following sections elaborate the various approaches used to study education in the sub-field of anthropology and sociology of education.

Studies of cultural transmission

Anthropologists' initial engagement with education started with understanding of the process of cultural transmission and is clearly reflected in the earlier studies conducted in simple societies. In fact, cultural transmission studies remained the main focus in the sub-field of anthropology of education for a long time (Gearing and Tindall, 1973). In this cultural transmission era, the focus was on those who produced the uniformity, the *transmitters* of culture, especially the adults (Wolcott, 1994). Even though there was a shift towards cultural acquisition in the 1980s, but the terms *cultural transmission* and

cultural acquisition were considered similar to each other⁴.

Studies on socialization and enculturation, as informal means of cultural transmission, played a significant role in unravelling the learning process. Although the concepts, socialization and enculturation, are interlinked and often used interchangeably, there are subtle differences between the two which are well explained by Herskovits (cited in Hansen, 1979) and Mead (1963). Cohen (1971), however, makes an important observation by distinguishing socialization from education. For him, socialization, which is the predominant mode of shaping of people's minds, is:

the activities that are devoted to the inculcation and elicitation of basic motivational and cognitive patterns through ongoing and spontaneous interaction with parents, siblings, kinsmen, and other members of the community (1971:22).

On the other hand, education is “the inculcation of standardized and stereotyped knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes by means of standardized and stereotyped procedures” (ibid: 22). Studies of cultural transmission have their roots in the culture and personality school that gained popularity in the early twentieth century. The school was later relabelled as psychological anthropology which offers perspectives on three areas critical to the anthropology of education: cross-cultural variation in cultural process, socialization and social change (Comitas and Dolgin, 1978). In fact, this school provided the backdrop for the most famous studies on socialization. These studies were not just confined to the events in which learning occurs, but also dealt with the interactive processes that promote and facilitate learning of different kinds and significance (Poole, 1994).

Of the many famous studies on socialization, Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* carved its own niche. Also in the 1930s, British anthropologists, Meyer Fortes and Raymond Firth analysed the educational forms among the Tallensi of Africa and the Tikiopia in the

⁴ Burnett, for instance, states, “By some peculiar semantics in the anthropologist's use of the term, cultural transmission always also in part entails culture acquisition” (1974: 25).

South Pacific respectively. Whiting's *Children of Six Cultures* (cited in Poole, 1994) is another classic example that followed the culture and personality approach. Amidst the studies of cultural transmission, numerous works (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986, for instance) focussed on the role language plays in the process of socialization. In language socialization, the attempt was to understand how linguistic resources organize interactions between small children and their peers, older siblings, and adults in their day to day environments.

However, studies of socialization were criticized for viewing societies as static or in the state of equilibrium. It was emphasized that socialization was not a simple transmittal from one generation to another, but a dynamic process through which differentiation and change can occur. Poole (1994), in addition, argues that this approach is insufficient on its own and needs to be complemented with the nuances of children's own understanding of cultural knowledge.

Studies on home- school incongruities

As formal schooling became a dominant mode of learning, anthropologists too started studying schools and their role in learning process. The importance of home and child rearing practices was very evident in the early studies of formal education. Most of the studies pointed out the incongruence in the values and attitudes in the school and home atmosphere which, in turn, affected the child's performance in the school. The cause of these incongruities, as reflected in many studies was rooted in differential socialization experiences of working class and middle class children. Mead, for example, states:

Every intellectual capacity that is later tested by achievement, test, or observation is intimately linked with early childhood experience, with the level of education of parent or nurse, with the structure and furnishing of the home, with the content with which the members of the family and the neighbourhood are preoccupied, and with the availability of the apparatus and technology on which abstract thought is dependent (1971: 74).

Further emphasizing on the importance of early childhood experience, she states that the child who is reared in infancy and early childhood by individuals of a lower level of education faces a different

educational situation than the child who is reared from infancy by parents who represent the same level of education to which the child is expected to aspire (ibid: 74). On similar lines, Musgrove (1976), a sociologist, suggests that the differences in attainment between children of various social groups are due to the differences in childcare practices and family dynamics. Emphasizing the importance of experiences at home, Henry (1971) asserts that the outcome of the child's experience with the formal education system as the sum of several types of experiences at home, school, and peer group.

The above mentioned studies pointed out that the experiences at home are an important determinant for the performance of the child in the school. It was argued that the home environment of middle class children facilitates in school success when compared to the home environment of working class children.

Explaining academic performances of ethnic minorities

In American anthropology, most of the works addressed one common research concern: explanation of school performance of ethnic minorities (works of Ogbu, Erickson, Treuba, Phillips are a few to cite). A considerable literature exist explaining low school achievement of minorities in the United States and other developed countries. In the beginning, the explanation for this was rooted in *genetic deficit* model which explained that the poor children of colour or minority cultural and language background were inherently inferior to the children of the middle class. This model was replaced by *cultural deficit* or *cultural deprivation* explanation (Oscar Lewis 'Culture of Poverty', for example) in the 1960s which states that victims living in impoverished circumstances under the care of poorly educated kin are deprived of culture (Hansen, 1979). It was argued that the minority children were culturally deprived or socially disadvantaged and that they did not experience a cognitively stimulating environment which ultimately cripples the child's capacity for learning. Many anthropologists attacked this explanation as being ethnocentric and culturally biased and put forth the *cultural difference* explanation.

They explained the cause of differential school success as the result of deprivation of minority students arising from cultural differences.

In the 1970s, *socio-linguistic* approach emerged which identified factors inside the school that played an important role in low school achievement of minority children. The studies on the role of language and communication were not restricted to traditional cultures, but were also viewed in the context of western schooling. This approach was propagated by Dell Hymes and attained popularity for explaining school failure of ethnic minorities. The basic tenet of the socio-linguistic approach is that language serves several functions in social life, and spoken and written messages have social meanings to construct and interpret social actions (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). The cause of high rates of academic failure among some ethnic minorities was attributed to the difference between patterns of language use favoured in school settings and those learned at home. Thus, educational anthropologists argued that language is the 'cultural difference' that makes a difference (Foley, 1991). Each child in a classroom has a linguistic competence that is partially unique to it and largely shared in terms of social origins and experience, and not identical with that of a dictionary (Hymes, 1971).

The emphasis of this approach was to understand how culturally different 'speech styles' (kinesics, proxemics) and 'communicative competencies' (the ability to use language in socially appropriate manners) created 'cultural conflicts' or 'cultural incongruities' which led teachers to treat students differently (Foley, 1991). The unit of these studies was teacher-pupil interactions during a given classroom activity. Their argument is that students and teachers' expectations are derived from their experience outside the school called *speech communities* or *speech networks*. These cultural differences in ways of speaking and listening between the child's speech network and the teachers' speech network leads to systematic and recurrent miscommunication in the classroom (Hymes cited in Erickson, 1987). The focus was primarily on continuities and discontinuities between

the home and classroom in interactional and communication styles. The ultimate goal was to show how the educational outcome of the students is determined by the teaching process which, in turn, is viewed as a communicative process (Ogbu, 1981).

Bernstein (1975), a sociolinguist, argues that the genes of social class are carried less through a genetic code, and more through a communication code that social class itself promotes. This communication code, according to him, is of two types: An 'elaborated code', wherein the speaker selects from a range of alternatives and the probability of predicting the organizing elements is reduced. Second is the 'restricted code' in which the number of alternatives is often limited and the probability of predicting the elements is greatly increased (ibid: 125). For him, working class children and their families are limited to the restricted code. Bernstein uses these linguistic codes to explain the educability of children belonging to a particular social class.

The studies of Mehan (1980) Erickson (1987) and Susan Phillips (cited in Pelissier, 1991) are some other landmark studies using socio-linguistic approach. This perspective shifted the whole focus of classroom studies to student-teacher communication, challenged teachers to have knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds and showed how linguistic and cultural differences contribute to school failure (Foley, 1991).

However, in the mid 1970s this approach was criticised by John Ogbu (1981; 1987; 1998) for excluding larger historical and community contexts and for lacking holism and comparative analysis. Moreover, he argued that socio-linguists did not study other minority groups who do well in schools despite possessing different cognitive styles, communication styles, and interaction styles. Erickson (1987) pointed out that socio-linguistic approach takes a cultural determinist position in which cultural differences are seen as necessarily leading to trouble and conflict, and cultural similarities are seen necessarily leading to rapport and absence of conflict.

Ogbu (1981) argued that most of the earlier cultural transmission studies of formal education entirely ignored other societal institutions and focussed on school, classroom, home, and playground events. Thus, he called these studies as microethnographies, the unit of which was teacher-pupil interaction or communicative interchange during a given classroom activity. For him, the microethnographic approach (like socio-linguistics), that was preoccupied with home, school, and classroom events was inadequate as it was not comparative and ignores the forces of the wider ecological environment. In comparative research, according to him, the goal is to explain why different minorities adjust and perform differently in schools despite language and cultural differences, and why the problems created by the latter seem to persist among some but not among others (Ogbu, 1987). He also reinvigorated the fact that school ethnography should be holistic, which should show how education is linked with the economy, the political system, local social structure of the school and the belief system of the people (Ogbu, 1981). Against this backdrop, Ogbu advocated for a macroethnography and holistic study, and thus, followed a multilevel approach.

His theory, called as *cultural ecological theory*, considers the broad societal and school factors as well as the way minorities perceive and respond to schooling. His theory brought back the school, society and community forces into account to give a holistic explanation of minority school performances. He states that voluntary minority communities (such as immigrants from China, India, Japan etc.) and parents are optimistic about schooling. They see the cultural differences as barriers to overcome in order to achieve their long range goals of future employment. They trust white-controlled institutions and are willing to accommodate while still retaining their own culture and identity. At the community and family levels, children are encouraged to develop good academic work habits and perseverance.

In the case of involuntary groups (such as American Indians, Puerto Ricans, black Americans etc.) minorities have a negative dual frame of

reference; first is their position in the United States and the second is the status of white Americans. For them, the comparison is a negative one as they see their social and economic status as inferior to those of middle-class white Americans and they do not see opportunities for success in the United States. They distrust white-controlled institutions due to their long history of discrimination, racism, and conflict. They feel that learning white ways will result in losing their minority identity. Thus, Ogbu (1981) argues that as part of their survival strategy, they develop an 'oppositional culture' and oppositional social identity as they perceive their oppression as collective and enduring. Due to job and wage discrimination they know that school success does not lead to a good job. Thus, they convey to their children contradictory messages about education. They blame teachers and schools for poor academic performance of their children. They fear that mastering school curriculum, learning to speak and write Standard English, and other white society requirements will deprive them of their identities, and thus, distrust white institutions. These attitudes and beliefs lead to their poor academic performance (Ogbu and Simons, 1998).

However, this approach was also criticised by many scholars, especially by those who were ethnic minorities. They were not guided by Ogbu's objectivist notions of research and theory building, but they were primarily interested in documenting and producing ethnic school success rather than failure (Foley *et al*, 2001). Enrique Treuba (1988), a Chicano anthropologist and sociolinguist, indicated that many minorities succeed in school without losing their cultural identity. He further states that Ogbu's theory failed to explain why individuals subjected to the same oppression within the same ethnic group respond differently. Treuba also questions the overwhelming generalization of Ogbu who stated that 'caste-like' minorities are composed of individuals who live involuntarily in the United States and remain at the bottom of the education and economic ladder, failing to incorporate into mainstream American society. He emphasized that there is another reality where there is rapid upward

mobility of individuals and families to advance economically and educationally. Treuba advocated a socio-culturally based theory and practical approaches of academic success that recognize the significance of culture in specific instructional settings, prevent stereotyping of minorities, help resolve cultural conflicts in schools, integrate the home and the school cultures, and stimulate the development of communication and other skills. Foley (1991) argued Ogbu has excessively emphasized on racial oppression and its negative historical legacy. Erickson also criticized Ogbu's position on the grounds that: i) it does not explain the success of many "caste-like" minority students under similar settings ii) it takes a position of economic determinism iii) it questions the empirical validity of Ogbu's evidence. He advocated for a culturally responsive pedagogy that can reduce miscommunication by teachers and students, foster trust, and prevent the genesis of conflict (1987: 355).

Thus, the ethnographic research in educational ethnography in the United States and Canada is characterized by a common methodology and recurrent concerns. In the words of Delamont and Atkinson, "Research attention has been concentrated on groups who are a 'problem' in educational terms, because they are seen to be 'failing' (1980: 143, emphasis original). As is evident by the above reviewed literature even in the famous studies of Ogbu and Treuba, the research concern remains the same: explaining academic performances of ethnic minority groups.

Studies on education and class

In Britain, most of the studies focussed on how education contributes to social and cultural reproduction. Earlier studies in the anthropology and sociology of education discussed the role of schools in meritocracy, where upward mobility was assumed to be an outcome of talent and effort. Researchers described the institution and analyzed the educational outcomes (Levinson and Holland, 1996). This view of considering the role of schools in upward mobility was challenged by many scholars and critical approaches started emerging

in the mid-seventies. It started with Marx for whom education was a tool of ruling class interests. It was found that despite the schools' promises of upward mobility, most children of the subordinate working class ended up in the same class and had adopted the same values and meanings as the parental generation (Foley *et al*, 2001). Thus, there was the rise of 'new sociology of education' that elaborates on the role of schools in *social reproduction* (Levinson and Holland, 1996; Bourdieu, and Passeron, 1977, Bernstein, 1975, Young, 1971). Levinson and Holland, for instance, point out:

In particular, these scholars endeavored to show that schools were not "innocent" sites of cultural transmission, or places for the inculcation of consensual values. Nor could schools be understood as meritocratic springboards for upward mobility, the great leveling mechanism, according to dominant liberal ideology. Rather, critical scholars argued that schools actually served to exacerbate or perpetuate social inequalities. In their view, schooling responded less to popular impulses for advancement and empowerment, and more to the requirements of discipline and conformity demanded by capitalist production and the nation-state (1996:5).

The social reproduction approach threw light on the reproduction of structural inequalities in the schools. In relation to class inequalities in schools, Bernstein states:

The relative backwardness of many working-class children who live in areas of high population density or in rural areas may well be a culturally induced backwardness transmitted by the linguistic process. Such children's low performance on verbal IQ tests, their difficulty with 'abstract' concepts, their failures within the language area, their general inability to profit from the school, all may result from the limitations of a restricted code. For these children the school induces a change of code and with this a change in the way the children relate to their kin and community. At the same time we can offer these children grossly inadequate schools with less than able teachers. No wonder they often fail- for the 'more' tend to receive more and become more, while the socially defined 'less', receive less and become less (1975: 151).

Pierre Bourdieu and his associates made another important contribution by putting forward the theory of *cultural reproduction*. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that the school system contributes to reproducing the structure of the distribution of cultural

capital among classes, apart from contributing to the social reproduction, defined as the reproduction of the relations of force between the classes. Only the cultural capital of the elites, that is, their tastes for certain cultural products (art, literature, film, music), their manner of deportment, speech, style of dress, consumption patterns, and the like were recognized as signs of intelligence by the schools. Bourdieu states:

The culture of the elite is so near to that of the school that children from the lower middle class (and *a fortiori* from the agricultural and industrial working class) can only acquire with great effort something which is *given* to the children of cultivated classes - style, taste, wit - in short, those attitudes and aptitudes which seem natural in members of the cultivated classes and naturally expected of them precisely because (in the ethnological sense) they are the *culture* of that class. Children from the lower middle classes, as they receive nothing from their family of any use to them in their academic activities except a sort of undefined enthusiasm to acquire culture, are obliged to expect and receive everything from school, even if it means accepting the school's criticism of them as 'poddlers' (Bourdieu, 1974: 39, emphasis original).

Taking a neo-marxist orientation, he views school as a socially conservative force rather than a liberating force and one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern of inequalities instead of increasing social mobility. He shows that the academic failure of poor students has more to do with institutional bias or a mismatch between the culture of the school and the class culture of the students than the inherent cultural and linguistic deficiencies (Foley *et al*, 2001). In similar vein, Firth and Corrigan (cited in King, 1983) propose that uniforms, assemblies and games, all have an 'ideological' function in the 'reproduction' of the relations of production. For them, organization of school is part of 'hidden curriculum', the prime function of which is to serve capitalism.

Levinson and Holland (1996) view schools as sites of cultural production which provides a direction for understanding how human agency operates under powerful structural constraints and how collective struggles of cultural identity groups against race, class, and

gender dominance are conditioned in schools. A very influential work in this regard was that of Paul Willis (cited in Foley *et al*, 2001), who studied the British working class youth. He observed how middle-class schools and teachers systematically devalue the linguistic and cultural practices of working-class youth. The working-class youth rebel against the bourgeois norms of the school which ultimately results in their school failure, and thus, take up unskilled manual occupations. Another important work in critical ethnography of education was Bourgois' (1996) study of Puerto Ricans in the inner city of New York. Throwing light on the racial segregation of Puerto Ricans, he argues how aborted school experiences play a central role in shaping their future careers in the underground economy as drug peddlers, muggers, armed robbers, and single mothers.

Bourgois (1996) states that most school ethnographies in the 1970s and 1980s owed much of their critical perspective to some version of neo-marxism or to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and his concepts of 'cultural capital', 'habitus' and 'symbolic violence'. Sharma (2005) argues that the linguistic model of Bernstein, the observations of Mead with regard to cultural resources available to children in a family and such similar studies can be put under the broad category of 'cultural capital' and the availability or non-availability of such capital would determine the educability of the children. Many critics have pointed out that the reproduction literature was too deterministic, mainly concentrated on class inequality, and thus, had little to say about how race and gender articulate with class⁵.

III STUDIES ON EDUCATION IN INDIA

The diversity of the field of anthropology and sociology of education as witnessed in the west has not gained much prominence in India. From the very beginning, education was primarily equated with schooling. Thus, the vast body of research on education in India dealt with

⁵ An overview of studies on feminism and educational ethnography is given in Foley *et al* (2001), Goetz (1978), and Goetz and Grant (1988).

enrolment, retention and achievement levels of children. A number of reasons were cited for poor educational attainment that include economic deprivation, insufficient investment in education, gender bias, lack of infrastructure, lack of parental motivation and so on. An attempt has been made to present an overview of various issues in education and some of the significant empirical studies undertaken in India.

Since independence, the focus has always been on achieving Universalization of Elementary Education (henceforth, UEE) which still remains as a dream to be fulfilled. Many policies were implemented and many strategies were planned by the government to achieve UEE within the stipulated period. However, in every five year plan the target year of UEE was extended. Most of the studies concentrated on the reasons behind this slow achievement of UEE.

One study that highlighted the gaps between promise and performance as far as universalization of education is concerned was that of Sudarshanam (1991) who studied four schools located in three villages in Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh. He focused on four major dimensions: environment of education, administrative set-up, problems and perceptions of teachers, students, parents, and village elites. He found that unhelpful environmental set-up, unsuitable administrative system, inadequate infrastructure, unhappy teacher community, indifferent village elites are mainly responsible for the underdevelopment of rural education in India. Low enrolment and retention levels of children in schools were one among the many reasons cited for not being able to achieve UEE. Dreze (2003) observed that there are many causes for educational deprivation of children. According to him, there has to be money for school expenses, the child has to be freed from work, the parents have to be convinced that what the child learns is worthwhile and the child should have interest in sustained learning. He reasons that inadequate parental motivation, economic deprivation, and school quality are the major factors contributing to illiteracy in the country. He further points out

that the educational disparities which contribute in the persistence of massive inequalities are largely derived from fundamental inequalities like class, caste, and gender. Stressing the economic aspect Khasnabis and Chatterjee (2007), in their study in the eastern slums of Kolkata, also found that retaining students in formal schools is more difficult than enrolling them, particularly when the students belong to a poor economic background.

Apart from enrolment and retention, another major problem was dropping out of children before completing a particular stage of schooling. In order to increase the enrolment of children and to tackle the dropping out problem, almost all major states in India tried to make primary education mandatory and a number of acts have been passed to this effect. However, studies show that over ninety percent of officials dealing with the administration of education were unaware that their state had any law for compulsory education (Jha, 2007). In this regard, a macro study was undertaken by Seetharamu and Ushadevi (1985) on school drop outs covering 80 schools and 62 villages drawn from ten *talukas* (or blocks) of five different regions of Karnataka state. They found that drop out phenomenon is significantly high in the initial stages of schooling and specifically at the first standard stage. They cited many reasons that influence the premature withdrawal of children from school. Among these, the non-school factors include poor socio-economic background of parents, need for children to work at home (fetching water, looking after younger children, cooking, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, etc.), need for children to take up paid agricultural and non-agricultural labour (looking after cattle, pigs, poultry, collecting cow dung/firewood, shopping etc.), prospects of higher marriage expenses associated with education of girls and so forth. Scholars like Choudhury (2006) and Jayachandran (2007) in their studies pointed out that lack of interest on the part of the child is also an important predictor for dropout.

In many other studies, scholars argued that there are many loopholes in the policies which perpetuate the poor educational standards. Nambissan and Batra (1989), for instance, argue that poor enrolment, large number of drop outs, and inadequate learning skills are a product of policies, apart from the reasons like social and economic circumstances of families. Similarly, Dreze and Sen (1995) also point out that there are number of shortcomings in the field of basic education which include inconsistencies of official statistics, the inadequacy and poor use of educational expenditure, the mismanagement and lack of accountability of schooling establishment in rural areas. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population have been given many provisions in education like scholarships, free tuition fee at all stages, and so forth. However, several problems arise at implementation level. Faulty disbursement of the amount, unutilised funds, and students receiving the benefits late are only some of the many reasons to cite (Channa, 1996; Roy, 1998). Scholars like Zachariah (1972) are sceptical about the government actions for disadvantaged groups like separate schools and hostels as these actions will only delay the integration of scheduled castes with the rest of the society. He argues that those who are not economically very much better off, feel quite resentful of the privileges that Scheduled Castes receive.

It is believed that the high prevalence of child labour is considered to be a sign of underdevelopment of any country and the major reason for dropping out. On one hand, many activities like housekeeping, carpentry, weaving, working in family farms, working as trainees in workshops were lauded for their socializing and training aspects. On the other hand, these were felt to be largely exploitative. Schooling is considered as an antidote to child labour. Anthropologists argued that low value of children's work is related to gender and age i.e., who performs the work. Nieuwenhuys (1996) suggests that illness, lack of support at home, competition in the classroom that builds a sense of inferiority and high costs of schooling (need to look respectable in dress and appearance) incites poor children to engage in remunerative

work. The author cites the example of Kerala, where children spend much time earning cash for books, clothes, and food. On the contrary, Dreze (2003) is of the view that child labour as an obstacle to universal schooling has been overemphasized as many children work for the reason that schools are unattractive and teaching conditions are very poor.

Another major concern that gained attention of many scholars is the gender disparity in education. Robert McIver, a famous sociologist stated that 'when you educate a man you educate an individual; when you educate a woman you educate a whole family'. Despite such an importance attached to female education, the picture of female literacy is very disappointing in India and needs immediate attention⁶. Endemic female illiteracy in India is due to many reasons like early marriage, household responsibilities, parental apathy, dissonance between social role and perceived function of education, social practice such as secluding purdah, instruction in language other than the mother tongue, and indifference of the teachers towards girls (Channa, 1996). The gendered division of labour, patriarchal norms, practice of dowry and the ideology of hypergamous marriage further intensifies gender disparities (Dreze and Sen, 1995). Kumar and Gupta (2008) are of the view that removal of gender disparity in education demands overcoming the deep mental blocks in the minds of the adults that binds girls to limited traditional skills.

Moreover, many scholars (for example, Jayaweera, 1987; Dreze, 2003; Clemens, 2004; Kapadia, 2002) argued that expenditure on the education of girls is considered to be a poor investment in terms of future returns. Community and parents perceive boys as future income earners, heads of the household, and supporters of parents in their old age whereas girls are seen in the role of child bearers and child rearers, and are socialized accordingly. Female education is less valued due to low economic returns and no tangible benefits to the

⁶ A detailed picture on gender and education in South Asia is given in Jayaweera (1987); in India see Patel (1998).

parents during their old age. Thus, low parental motivation is also a major cause for a dismal picture of female education. However, some like Ramachandran (2006) noted that literary drives, which mechanically transfer reading skills, have little impact on the overall development of women. For her, collectivism, confidence building, organizational building and leadership development are more important than literacy. Clemens (2004) argues that any intervention in the field of women and education is almost inevitably confronted with the power of deep old structures of a society and hierarchy, and thus, one should be prepared not only for open as well as hidden resistances, but also for unexpected and unintended changes of the society, which in themselves call for new solutions.

Many studies have been undertaken on tribal education, and here too the focus was more on formal schooling and less on socialization and enculturation. This shows that the schools have penetrated almost everywhere in India and every attempt is being made to increase the educational attainment of tribal children. Tribal studies mostly reflected the constraints faced by the tribal children towards attainment of formal education and the reasons included both school and non-school factors. Stressing on the economic dimension in educational attainment, Rao (1986) in his study among the tribals of Visakhapatnam District of Andhra Pradesh found that tribal children drop out from schools as they are required in the family for economic pursuits. Other major reasons that were responsible for dropping out were failures in examinations, stagnation, failure to cope with the school atmosphere, irregular teachers, and so on. Similarly, based on his study among Bhils of Madhya Pradesh, Naik (1969) also observed that economic condition of the family is the major determinant for participation of Bhil children in school. He found that those families who have more earning members and where there is a regular source of income are sending their children to schools. However, poor economic conditions, absence of schools in the village, irregular payment of scholarships, absence of regular teachers, and lack of

proper knowledge regarding institutional facilities are some of the major reasons for not sending the children to school.

Apart from ecological and socio-economic constraints, Rathnaiah (1977) pointed out several internal constraints in tribal schools like poor quality of instruction, alien language and content, and loopholes in administration and supervision. On similar lines, Pathania *et al* (2005) portrayed physical facilities in classroom, non-availability of books, stress and fears experienced at school as the major constraints faced by the Bhot tribal community of Himachal Pradesh. Some studies like that of Toppo (1979) reflected on the changes among the tribal community due to the introduction of modern education. Her study among the Oraons of Bihar revealed that modern education has resulted in breaking of joint families and affected the community life and relationship with parents and relatives.

Such impact of formal schooling has also been pointed out by various other scholars who are sceptical about modern schooling. Historically, the education system in India was informal, and children were mostly taught at home by either relatives, or at learning centres. These indigenous learning centres thrived well as the locally perceived educational needs were rooted in community culture (Bapat and Karandikar, 1998). Saraswati (1998) is of the view that traditional education aims at expanding the spheres of existence by social awareness (forming kinship with the entire world), cosmological awareness (expanding of being by self-transformation) and technological awareness (relating creativity to the ritual enforcement of life). On the other hand, modern education teaches a way of life limited by self-centred consumerism, allows man's ego to establish itself as the conqueror of nature, and fragments people through competitive vocations and specialized technical professions (1998:2).

Through formal education, India has inherited: a) employment oriented education; b) Westernization of the content of education; c) public examinations to impose uniform curricula and textbooks; d) a class of persons educated in a foreign language; e) neglect of

indigenous system of education; and f) the withdrawal of religious education through direct educational enterprise (Saraswati *et al*, 1998: 62). Naik (1998) pointed out that in the present day education, the teachers are unfamiliar to the community to which they teach and they are accountable to a governmental or a private body which are different from people's aspirations and customs. Many scholars do not encourage this modern schooling system and prefer the traditional way of learning as they argue that formal education uproots the child from the culture to which he or she belongs, as the values inculcated are those of success, achievement, material progress of the little self in a competitive world. In this process of achievement, they are uprooted and unaligned with the very ground from which they are nurtured (Vatsyayan, 1998). On similar lines, Mathur (1998) argues that in the midst of empiricism, experimentation, and demonstrability that are reining the world, there is a deepening crisis in education marked by eroding wisdom, depleting values, and denuding self-knowledge. Patnaik (1998) views the present educational system as elitist and class-biased. Like other scholars, he too points out that it develops a plastic culture as the moral/ethical instruction has no place in the educational curriculum. Thus, the debate on the efficiency of traditional and modern education still continues.

There have not been enough studies on education in India that laid emphasis on theory or used the concepts or theories generated abroad in Indian context. One landmark study that uses Bourdieu's concepts is that of Jeffrey *et al* (2005) among the Chamars (dalits) of Uttar Pradesh. They try to draw attention to how Chamars link education to forms of embodied competence located in the young male *habitus*. They try to throw light on this by understanding how young people respond and perceive schooling in the face of a hostile employment market. They found that some unemployed men responded to this by establishing themselves as local political figures or *netas* (emulating the BSP model) while others are more ambivalent and speak of themselves as being 'trapped' by education. However, both continue to place value on education as a form of cultural capital, as a source of

cultural distinction that distinguishes them from illiterates, but not as a means for securing job, hence reproducing class inequalities. Another work that is worth mentioning is that of Thapan's (2006) case study of Rishi Valley School in South India run by Krishnamurti Foundation of India. It is an ethnographic study wherein the author gives an account of what life at school is all about. The study relies on symbolic interactionist approach and analyses the participants' perspectives and the meaning they bring to interaction in the daily activities.

Another detailed ethnographic study was undertaken by Sharma (1987) among Savaras in Srikakulam District of Andhra Pradesh. His study was based on home-school incongruities and he found that the culture of the Savara and the culture of the school to which Savara children go were not in harmony with each other. The values of Savaras like slow but steady approach, honesty, mutual help, their strategy of 'learning by doing' and working in a group do not find a place in the school. Thus, they face a conflict of values and problems in adjustments which results in their poor response to school education.

Reflections

From the above reviewed literature, it is evident that the field of education from anthropological and sociological point of view has been extensively researched in the west where anthropologists studied the learning process both inside and outside the classrooms. However, the literature clearly reflects that there has been a marked difference in studies undertaken in British and American anthropology of education. In the beginning, anthropologists were preoccupied with the studies on cultural transmission through the process of socialization. Anthropologists' entry into the field of formal education is only a recent phenomenon. In America and Canada, most of the studies dealt with the issue of the reasons behind differential school performances of ethnic minorities (Chicanos, Indians, Blacks, Puerto Ricans). The explanations regarding the academic performance of

ethnic minorities can be broadly classified into two categories: some dealt with classroom events, interactions, and communicative styles, whereas others focussed on the structure, process, and function of the school system, linked to other socio-cultural institutions. Many related theories emerged, the most prominent ones being - cultural deficit theory, cultural difference, socio-linguistics and cultural ecology. Each theory provided a critique of earlier ones, and in the process, put forth several new concepts like elaborated and restricted code, communicative competencies, caste-like minorities, and so on.

There has been more sociological work in education in Britain and explanations have typically adopted a Marxist orientation. These studies elaborated on how schools were not designed for upward social mobility, but were contributing in reproducing existing structural inequalities, and thus, formed the new sociology of education. Most of these studies revolved around the concepts of social reproduction, cultural reproduction, cultural capital and *habitus*. Levinson and Holland (1996) pointed out that in British studies, for example, issues of class, race and gender dynamics have been dominating in education, whereas in the United States, cultural differences based on race and ethnicity have gained more prominence. Even though the presence of schools is mentioned in most ethnographic works, little attention was paid to the ongoing effects of schools as powerful sites of intentional cultural transmission, thereby, structuring identities and power relations. Thus, Levinson argues:

The sense of schools as a pervasive product of modernity- as powerful sites of intentional cultural transmission within and against which identities are constantly being constructed- appears to have been lost (1999: 596).

The journey of anthropologists from cultural transmission through informal means to studies of formal education has been extensive. Some studies focussed on school factors while some others focussed on wider aspects outside the school. Some studies have taken classroom interactions as the unit of analysis whereas others have taken societal factors as their unit of analysis. Although there have

been many studies in the anthropology of education in the west, the common criticism is that schools have not attained wide recognition among anthropologists. Despite many new approaches and concepts some scholars argue that discourses of education in anthropology have not been able to carve their own niche and schools are understudied by anthropologists. Comitas and Dolgin (1978) and Delamont and Atkinson (1980) give an overall view of anthropology of education saying that it is best described as ethnographic with only limited links to theory. They point out that theoretical development in anthropological work in education has been rudimentary.

Their views are applicable in the present context too as put forth by Levinson (1999). He argues that even as formal schooling became regularized in the later part of 20th century, anthropologists continue to study a range of educational practices outside the school and the study of school was mostly left to sociologists. Hirschfeld (2002) further confirmed this by throwing light on the publications on child related topics. He found that between 1986 and 2001, there were only three articles on children in American Anthropologist journal. He is of the view that children are strikingly adept at acquiring adult culture and contribute in creating their own culture. However, a sustained, theoretically influential program of child focussed scholarship has not emerged due to an impoverished view of cultural learning that overestimates the role of adults in cultural learning and underestimates the contribution children make to their cultural reproduction and are conceived as mere appendages to adult society. Gonzalez (2004) also points out that issues relating to schools and schooling have been largely peripheral to what are taken as the central concerns of anthropology in issues relating to education.

The methods that anthropologists adopt in studying schools were also criticised. Sindell (1969), for instance, is very sceptical about the methods that anthropologists have utilized in obtaining and analysing data. He argues that they rarely interview students in depth about their feelings, attitudes and values, nor do they usually do participant

observation with children outside the classroom. Moreover, they do not specify where, when, and under what conditions research was done. The same was also reiterated by Delamont and Atkinson (1980) who argued that there is lack of field work in schools and classrooms and little ethnographic material on the classrooms themselves. Moreover, in the published documents it is often unclear how long the researcher was in the field, what roles were adopted, and how the data was collected and recorded.

In India, the sub-field did not gain much momentum as in the west. The inequalities in education were explained on the basis of caste, class and gender when compared to the explanations based on race and ethnicity in the west. The emphasis in India was always on reaching the target of UEE, and thus, the studies reflected on the barriers for the same. The empirical studies were either conducted through surveys or through extensive fieldwork, and were considered to have major policy implications. In these studies, several issues and debates like dropping out, absenteeism, enrolment and retention, school infrastructure, gender disparity, and the darker side of modern education have been discussed at length. Amidst these surveys, studies from anthropological standpoint did not receive much impetus. As a consequence, the concepts and theories generated in the west were not used in an Indian context. There have been many studies on tribal education in India, but these studies lacked conceptual models generated abroad while dealing with similar variables (Sharma, 2005). Thus, there had not been any theoretical breakthrough in the field of anthropology of education. This becomes more evident when one goes through the anthropology journals in India. One can find very few articles that focus on education from an anthropological perspective.

IV RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study addresses an ongoing debate between government and private schools in India. Privatization of education has invited

mixed responses from scholars and policy makers. Earlier studies that compared government and private schools pointed out various issues in government schools like decline in school quality, massive parental demand for schooling, lack of teacher accountability, poor infrastructural facilities, and so forth. As a consequence, private schools emerged as an answer to the problems in government schools and with certain promises like superior teaching quality, innovative curriculum, better infrastructural facilities, good performances of students, highly qualified teachers, and so on. Thus, the expansion of private schools has been appreciated by many who see it as a catalyst in achieving the long cherished dream of Education for All (EFA). However, the issue of privatization of education has been criticised by some whose studies revealed that access to private schools is a social privilege, catering to the urban upper classes, and more specifically to the boys. Moreover, increasing privatization has also been criticised for undermining the role of government in providing quality education.

Nevertheless, it is an indisputable fact that private schools have gained prominence in recent years and their presence is conspicuous almost everywhere. At this juncture, several important aspects are worth mentioning. Firstly, there are very few studies that dealt with the issue of privatisation of school education in detail. Studies like that of De *et al* (2002) and Kingdon (1996) give an overall picture of the extent of privatisation that has taken place in India. However, these studies were mostly quantitative and survey based. There is a paucity of research on the private sector in school education and crucial issues about the involvement of the private sector in school education remain under-researched (De *et al*, 2002; Kumar, 2004). Secondly, there have been studies on education from the perspective of class, caste and gender, but studying schools in their own right and the way these schools operate and decisions are made has not received much attention. Though Tooley and Dixon's (2003) study of low cost private schools in Hyderabad gives an account of how these schools function, but the study does not include the voices of teachers and pupils which form the essence of any ethnographic study.

Thirdly, the question regarding what actually happens inside the classrooms has also not been dealt in detail (Kumar, 2009). Fourthly, from the above reviewed literature in India, it is apparent that detailed ethnographies of schools are quite rare. There are few ethnographic studies (Sharma, 1987; Thapan, 2005; Sarangapani, 2003), but their research concerns were different from the present study which is primarily a comparative study of a government and a private school.

The present study attempts to reflect on the above mentioned shortcomings from an anthropological perspective. It views the school in its own right, as a separate institution with its own organization and culture and attempts to provide a detailed picture and precise description of 'what the system is and how it operates' (Wolcott, 1971). An ethnographic study permits observation of what actually happens inside the school and classrooms, what sort of social processes take place in the schools and how people organise and negotiate their everyday life at school and classrooms. It also helps in understanding the attitudes and perceptions of parents, teachers and students towards one another and towards the schools. Thus, the rationale of the present study is twofold. A detailed ethnographic and comparative study reflects on the educational experience of the child and teachers in each school. Moreover, since the debate between government and private schools largely revolves around the issue of quality, the present ethnographic study attempts to understand the same by studying the culture of a government and a private school at the micro level.

With this rationale, the following objectives were framed for the study which together forms the culture of the school:

- To study the organizational structure of the schools;
- To understand the teachers' work culture and their perspectives towards the school;
- To understand the students' world and their perceptions towards their teachers and the school;
- To examine the teaching-learning process in the school.

V CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the present context, the approach used to study the schools is through their culture. School cultures are complex webs of traditions and rituals built up over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together and deal with crises and accomplishments (Deal and Peterson, 2009). For the present context, the concept of 'school culture', which forms the basis for the present study, is derived from Jules Henry's notion regarding what do we mean by the culture of the school. Henry (1971: 284) asserts that the answer to the general question of what is the culture of the school lies in the answer to the following questions:

- What are the values, perceptions, and attitudes of the people in the school? What are the class position of pupils, teachers, and principal? Their values, their perceptions of one another, their attitudes towards the school? What are the general value orientations of school personnel as well as the values they use in judging one another and their pupils and vice-versa? How the pupils perceive the teachers, and vice versa, how the teachers perceive one another and the principal, and how he perceives them? What are the attitudes of all the members of the school culture toward the school itself?
- What is the internal structure of the school? What is the hierarchy of power in each school? Who are the pace setters, the cultural maximizers, the arbiters of value judgements? What are the roles of the teachers and the principal? How much freedom of choice is there for the teacher? What are the relative power positions of the newcomers and the old hands? What in general are the lines of formal and informal communication and organization? What are the patterns of recruitment into the school? What are the "quit" patterns? What processes determine turnover, advancement, and so on.

- What is the relationship between the parents and school system?
- What goes on in the classroom?

For Henry, the dynamic sum of answers to all the questions above constitute the ethnography of the school and this gives a general answer to the question: what is the culture of the (particular) school? In similar vein, Reid (1978) also talks about culture of schools and includes almost everything that happens in the school.

While this is the primary approach for the present study, two different paradigms are used to study the culture of each school. On one hand, schools are viewed as organisations having their own goals, hierarchy of power relations, decision-making process, and so on which are analysed in the present study. On the other hand, the study also uses interpretative approach at the micro level and views schools “through the eyes of the participants, the way in which they construct, interpret and negotiate the meaning of the social world they inhabit and the results of such activity” (Reid, 1978: 73). Both the approaches are not mutually exclusive, but inter-related and provide a holistic view of the schools.

VI

RESEARCH METHODS

Fieldwork and rationale for selecting schools

In Andhra Pradesh, Ranga Reddy district has recorded highest urban growth rate among all other districts (Census, 2001). As privatization is more rapid in urban areas, Ranga Reddy district was selected for the study. In order to shortlist two schools, a preliminary survey was conducted to get an overview of the schooling system in the district. The initial survey helped in understanding the various types of government and private schools existing in the district, their management, functioning, fee structure, and so on. Two schools were then selected keeping in mind the facts that schools should not be very dissimilar in terms of homogeneity of student population and

should be comparable. The following parameters were adopted for short listing the two schools:

- Schools having almost similar socio-economic composition of students (i.e., a private school meant for the elites was not compared with a government school);
- Schools having almost similar year of establishment (i.e., an old school was not compared with a recently established one);
- Schools with necessary infrastructure (i.e., both the schools having basic amenities like drinking water, school building etc);
- Selection of a low to medium cost unaided private school (in order to compare it with a government school);
- Selection of co-educational upper primary schools (due to the fact that upper primary students can articulate better than the primary students);
- Both types of schools catering to the same locality (in order to understand why parents are opting for the private school).

Keeping these rationales in mind, a local body managed school, commonly referred as Zilla Parishad High School (ZPHS) was selected for the study as in Andhra Pradesh the percentage of local body run schools is much higher than the schools run by the State education department or the municipalities⁷. Zilla Parishad high schools are managed and funded by the Zilla Parishad, which is a local body at the district level. These schools are basically high schools and provide education to children from classes' six to ten. Among private schools, an unaided private school was selected for the study that entirely runs on fees. Private-aided schools were not considered for the study for the reason that even though they are run by the private management, they are largely funded by the government and are very similar to the government schools in many aspects like teachers' salaries, students' fees etc. The study area Nayapally (pseudonym) falls under Balanagar Mandal⁸ of Ranga Reddy district⁹. For the

⁷ Statistical details of the schools in the district are given in chapter 2.

⁸ A 'mandal' is the basic unit of the district which covers about 2 lakh population in a given geographical area.

present study, government school is referred as ZPHS while private school has been referred as NMHS. To protect the identities of the schools and to maintain confidentiality, all the names used here are pseudonyms.

Fieldwork for the present study was conducted in the academic year 2008-09 for nine months, i.e., from November 2008 to the end of July 2009. Initially, the fieldwork was started in ZPHS through informal conversations with the teachers and office staff of the school. It was followed by taking the socio-economic profile of the teachers. Gradually, interactions with the students were also initiated. After spending two months entirely in the ZPHS, fieldwork was started in the NMHS. It was essential to take up one school at a time in the beginning in order to get a detailed picture of the daily routine, interactions between students, teachers and parents, school rituals, hierarchies in the school, and so on. Once the rapport was established with the teachers and school authorities, field work was done simultaneously in both the schools. The visits to the schools were, to some extent, dependent on the events taking place in the school. This helped in observing various school events like ceremonies, examinations, results declaration, admissions, parent-teacher meetings and so forth. The summer vacation of the school was utilised for interviewing parents about their perceptions of the teachers, their attitudes towards the school, reasons behind enrolling their child in a private school, and so forth. Throughout the fieldwork, many duties of the teachers were undertaken which, in turn, helped in better understanding of both the schools.

Rapport Building

Gaining entry in the schools was an uphill task, especially in the private school. There were not many objections when the ZPHS was approached, although there were many questions raised regarding the study like what was I exactly doing, how long I will be visiting the school, what kind of questions will be asked, and so on. Nevertheless,

⁹ More details on the area and schools are given in chapter 2.

permission was granted in the government school and teachers as well as the office staff co-operated in the study.

The real difficulty was encountered while approaching private schools for getting permission into the school. The school authorities were apprehensive that the research may disturb their academic activities. Moreover, they were suspicious regarding the long duration of the visit to the school. Thus, the school personnel of a couple of schools refused me to conduct the study. Finally, the school authorities of Nalanda Model High School¹⁰ (NMHS) allowed proceeding with the study, though they ordered not to disturb the tenth grade students. The director of the NMHS also kept a condition that I have to take classes in the school since I am qualified to do teaching. Students, however, were not clear about the rationale behind my visit to the school. They used to enquire whether I was a regular teacher or a training teacher or regarding the purpose of the visit. Most of the teachers were also under the impression that I was undergoing B.Ed training¹¹ in the school. Throughout the fieldwork, many questions were asked by the teachers and students like: Why are you here? Why have you chosen only this school and not other schools? Who has sent you here? Why are you collecting all this information? Why do you want to speak to the parents, and so on.

In both ZPHS and NMHS, I worked as a 'substitution teacher', i.e., if a teacher remains absent for the day, his/her classes were allotted to me. This, in turn, facilitated me to interact with the students. Quite often, ZPHS teachers willingly used to give their classes to me. This trend was, however, completely absent in NMHS. Apart from taking substitutions, I also took 'spoken English'¹² classes in NMHS as per the request of the director. I also used to evaluate the exam papers, make progress cards for the students, take attendance of the

¹⁰ A pseudonym.

¹¹ A one month internship in schools, the successful completion of which results in the attainment of formal degree of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed).

¹² A colloquial term used for improving communication skills in English among the students.

students, take computer classes, and so on. All this, in turn, helped in gaining the confidence of the teachers as well as the students.

Some of the teachers with whom informal and close relationships were established became key informants in course of time. Moreover, greater involvement in the school activities like visiting houses for new admissions in the NMHS and participation in the cooking of mid-day meals in government schools helped in better understanding of the school. Sharing meals with the students during lunch break helped in bonding well with the students. I was invited to school ceremonies like republic day, teacher's day, farewell party etc which gave a chance to observe these ceremonies closely and participate in them. Visiting students' houses after school hours and interacting with them as well as their parents helped in gaining their confidence. Continuous note-taking became like a norm throughout the field work and many times students and teachers were curious about what was being written. While interviewing, teachers were more interested in the notes rather than the questions being posed to them. On the whole, a relationship of mutual understanding and trust was developed with the teachers and students which helped in collecting in-depth data for the study.

Methods for data collection

Intensive fieldwork and sustained observation remain the essence of an ethnographic study. As this is an ethnographic study, the data primarily relied on the method of observation. Prolonged observation in its natural settings helped in acquiring data on various subtle and hidden aspects which the teachers or the management would not have revealed in the interviews. Classroom observations were done meticulously and every teacher in the high school was observed in the classes allotted to them for at least 3 to 4 times. While doing classroom observations, the researcher used to sit in the last bench which facilitated in uninterrupted observation, and at the same time, the entire teaching process was not disturbed.

To get a detailed picture of the socio-economic composition of students in ZPHS and their family background, detailed interviews of

71 students were conducted and this group of students constituted one section of each class from VI to IX. In NMHS too, detailed interviews of 40 students were taken which comprise 10 students from each class of VI to IX who were randomly selected.

Apart from this, structured interviews of the teachers with detailed standardized schedules, in-depth informal interviews with open-ended questions of the students, detailed case studies of students and teachers were also used for data collection. Questionnaires were used to collect data on the socio-economic profile of the teachers and the students. Questionnaires meant for the students were filled by the researcher as the latter had to translate and explain the questions in Telugu. Students were interviewed multiple times depending upon their interest and their ability to articulate their responses and experiences. The data was also collected from what Woods called as 'naturalistic or behavioural talk' which is heard and noted by the observer in the 'ordinary course of events' (cited in Thapan, 2006). The aim of using all these tools and techniques was to give a thick description of the selected government and private school. The details regarding various aspects focused under each method are as follows:

Observation

This was the primary method adopted during the fieldwork which was supplemented with other methods. It furnished data regarding the teaching methods (Teacher-centred, learner-centred, dominative, participatory), medium of instruction, participation of students, teacher-pupil interactions, classroom atmosphere, values inculcated in the class, teacher-student ratio, initiatives encouraged and rewarded or restricted, rewards and reprimands, and so on. This method was also used to collect data on infrastructural facilities, peer group relationships, examinations, teachers and students outside the classrooms, and so on. This method also furnished data regarding the daily school routine, morning assembly, co-curricular activities, and importance given to creativity, freedom, and play.

Structured Interviews

Structured interviews with the help of detailed standardized schedule were conducted with the MEO (Mandal Education Officer) regarding the profile of school education in the mandal. Principal and teachers of the schools were interviewed regarding internal structure of the school (administrative and academic system), vision/goal of the school, roles and responsibilities of principal and teachers, hierarchy of power and authority, teacher recruitment, processes that determine the advancement of the teachers, student admissions, examination system, opinions regarding differences in academic performance, importance given to co-curricular activities, and infrastructural facilities in the schools. The school personnel were also interviewed to collect data regarding their socio-economic profile.

In depth (Informal) Interviews

These interviews were conducted without any standardized schedule as the aim was to understand the viewpoints and attitudes of the informants, though a set of topics were chosen on which the data was to be gathered. The questions asked were mostly open-ended, and thus, resulted in many discussions. Teachers were interviewed regarding their freedom of choice in the school, decision making in the school, teaching load and duties of teachers, their attempts in making their teaching innovative, recognition of their work, their perceptions of the school, principal, students and their differential academic performances. Students were interviewed regarding their family background, daily routine, the difficulties they face while learning in the school, rewards and punishment, their perception of a good teacher and teaching, their career goals/choices, and their likes and dislikes about their school. Interviews with parents were conducted to understand their attitude towards the school, their involvement in school activities and the reasons behind enrolling their children in private or a government school.

Case Studies

Case studies proved to be very useful in collecting personal and intimate information like attitudes, awareness, opinions, intentions,

and past experiences. Case studies of some teachers were taken to understand specific dimensions like termination of teachers, reasons for continuing in the same school for a long time, and so on. Detailed case studies of students who were doing economic activities to support their families were taken into account. Apart from this, case studies of those children who showed gradual decline in their academic performance were also taken to understand the reasons behind it.

Focussed Group Discussion (FGD)

A couple of FGDs were conducted in the school which provided the data regarding the perceptions of teachers on students and on government and private schools. The discussions were also conducted on students to understand their likes and dislikes about their teachers, their school, and so on.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources comprised of readily available studies and reports which includes Census 2001 reports, NCERT (2006) survey, PROBE team survey, DISE flash statistics (2008-09), books, published articles from various journals and anthologies. These sources proved important to draw certain reflections pertaining to the study.

VII

CHAPTERIZATION

The present study is organised into seven chapters:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter starts with a brief note on the emergence of anthropology of education and discusses the major trends and debates in the sub-field in the west as well as in India. After mentioning the shortcomings in the existing literature, the research problem is discussed which reflects on the ongoing debate between government and private schools. This is followed by the objectives of the study and conceptual framework used for the analysis and interpretation of the data. A

detailed account of the methodology used in the research has been discussed and finally the chapterization is mentioned.

Chapter II: Education system in India

This chapter starts with a diachronic view of the education system and various policies introduced in pre-independence India. It then chronologically gives an account of the various educational policies and acts proposed and enacted right from the independence till date. The statistical overview of education in India is discussed next followed by the educational statistics of Andhra Pradesh and the mandal level statistics with special reference to the extent of privatisation that has taken place in the recent years.

Chapter III: Organisational structure: The physical reality of the schools

The third chapter discusses the internal structure of the school and how both ZPHS and NMHS operate. It also gives a detailed account of the hierarchy of power within the school, decision making, teacher and student recruitment, daily routine, fee structure in NMHS, teacher and student strength and the academic system in both the schools. Furthermore, it discusses the various government schemes that are being implemented in the ZPHS.

Chapter IV: Teachers' work culture and their perspectives: The social reality of the schools

This chapter brings out the teachers' voices, which is mostly lacking in earlier studies. It starts with the demographic and socio-economic background of the teachers which gives an idea of the social as well as educational background of the teachers. It then discusses about teachers attitudes towards the school management, the work culture and working conditions, freedom of choice, problems they face in the school, and their overall perception towards the school.

Chapter V: Negotiating between family, peers and school: Understanding the students' world

This chapter first discusses the socio-economic composition of the students in the studied schools. It then gives an in-depth account of

the changes which students experience during the transition from primary to the high school. Their perspectives on the school, the criteria they adopt for liking or disliking a teacher, their economic activity, their daily routine and the problems they face in the school are subsequently discussed. The chapter also gives an account of the parents' attitude towards the school and the reasons for admitting their child in a private school.

Chapter VI: Understanding the teaching-learning process

This chapter examines what exactly happens inside the classrooms of ZPHS and NMHS. It also reflects on the academic atmosphere, examinations, assessment, classroom practices, routine teaching procedures, disturbances in the academic calendar etc which form an integral part of teaching-learning process. Apart from these, it also discusses the way teachers perceive the students in both the schools.

Chapter VII: Summary and conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the major findings by examining the kind of culture each school exhibits. It then attempts to understand the influence of school culture on the quality of education. Finally, it elaborates on the kind of education that children receive from their respective schools.