

ALARMING STATISTICS!*

EDUCATION

A recent UNESCO report gave some grim statistics for India and placed the country close to the bottom in the list of nations in terms of eradicating illiteracy. The 2008 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, which provided projections for 127 countries in terms of the goal to achieve universal literacy by 2015, put India among the 15 countries with low “Education For All” (EFA) Development Index.

In *Elementary Education in India 2005-06 — An Analytical Report*, researchers of NUEPA (National University of Educational Planning & Administration), Delhi, have also included a unique Education Development Index (EDI) which ranks 21 major states and Union territories according to elementary education provision. The variables assessed to compute EDI 2005-06 numbered 22, clustered under four groups, *viz.*, access, infrastructure, teachers and learning outcomes. According to EDI 2005-06, Kerala tops the list and Bihar is at the bottom, while Punjab is at number 9.

PUNJAB POORER THAN THE POOR

The education scenario in the Punjab is pitiable. Thousands of schools lack teachers, classrooms, furniture or even drinking water. The Punjab Government’s own figures point to a very dismal picture. Out of the total 12972 primary schools 4448 are short of classrooms, 8577 lack proper mats for students; 9760 schools require dual desks; 4444 primary schools are without power; 1727 are without drinking water; 3371 do not have toilets and 3891 schools have no boundary wall.

* Compiled by Dr Birendra Kaur. E-mail <birendrakaur@yahoo.com>

ENROLLMENT IN SCHOOLS

As per the annual report of the Union Ministry of HRD for 2004-05 only 71.21 per cent of the age group of 6 to 11 years was enrolled for primary education in Punjab, whereas poorer states like UP and Bihar enrolled 91.25 per cent and 72.52 percent. A total of 36.52 *lakh* students are enrolled in the govt schools and 1.13 *lakh*s teachers are on their payrolls, with 30,000 posts of teachers still lying vacant. The dropout rate in these schools varies from 30 to 40 percent by the time these students cross the middle class. The other disturbing factor about govt schools is that there are 300 schools where the total strength of students is less than 50. These schools are mainly located in the districts of Amritsar, Bathinda, Mansa and Muktsar.

STAFF STATUS

Although 30,000 posts of teachers are lying vacant out of which govt professes to fill 12,000 posts in this year, but the teachers already in service and on the payrolls of schools are also least motivated to teach in their schools. On any given working day, 25% of the teachers are absent from the school duties and 50% out of those present do not prefer to teach on one pretext or the other. Out of the standard 180 teaching days in an academic session, teachers are put on non-academic duties such as preparing voters' lists, election duties, census data preparations, pulse polio programmes, taking students to political rallies and other odd jobs for 73 days on an average. In some remote and border areas, some ingenious teachers with a political clout have engaged contractual teachers on a salary of Rupees 1000 to 2000 and sublet their teaching jobs on leasehold basis. As per the latest figures published in *The Indian Express*, dated June 20, 2006, taken from the Education Department, Punjab, there are 84, 57, 54, 38, 36, 31, 23, 19 schools in the district of Ludhiana, Patiala, Muktsar, Ropar, Bhatinda, Moga, Faridkot and Fatehgarh Sahib, respectively, where there are no Principals to head these schools.

A sizeable number of serving teachers have been recruited on the basis of false degrees from the UGC blacklisted universities. Despite the detection of their fake degrees by the state vigilance department and their indictment by the Honourable Punjab and Haryana High Court, the Punjab School Education Board is still

shielding these tainted teachers and they are continuing in service. The dubious way in which these teachers have been appointed during the last few years is an open secret. Thus, from the point of appointment to the transfer of teachers, the whole process is vitiated. This has resulted in scarcity of teachers in rural schools and surplus teachers in urban schools than the sanctioned posts with the active connivance of political and administrative vested interests. Now with the passing of administrative control of primary and middle schools to the faction-ridden, semi-literate *panchayats*, the whole govt school system is likely to crumble and collapse totally.

SCHOOL RESULTS

The data on school results submitted by PHRO report in 2006 mentioned that the results of 79 senior secondary schools for 10th and 10+2 classes was 0%, of 219 similar schools was less than 10%, of 40 schools 10% for the last 10 years. These results have emerged despite the mass scale copying in these examinations in majority of centres in Punjab schools. A school system whose examination system and whose state school board has lost credibility in the eyes of the public and whose students are denied admission in colleges in some of the elite colleges of union territory and other states on one pretext or the other is doing an incalculable harm to the state of Punjab and its younger generation.

The findings of two studies conducted in Patiala Block III by the Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council (Regd.), New Delhi, were also shocking. A carefully selected sample of 384 students in Class VI from rural and urban secondary schools revealed that only 2% boys and 4% girls passed in Mathematics and only 12% boys and 14% girls qualified in Punjabi.

In May 2001, the Punjab Elementary Education Board Project Committee, Patiala, working under the aegis of the Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council, held a District Scholarship Test for all such children who secured 70% or more marks in the SCERT in Class V Annual examination, 2001. They had to select 20 students on merit basis for award of scholarships of the value of Rs.150/- per month for three years covering Classes VI to VIII. The results were dismal, as students who had secured 70% or more marks in their annual examinations through government schools managed to secure, on an average, a mere

4.7% in Punjabi, 2.3% in Hindi, 5% in Mathematics, 8% in Social Science and 2-3% in General Knowledge.

II. FEMALE FOETICIDE

The sex ratio in the country had always remained unfavourable to females, which is shown in the Table below that presents the trend in sex ratio since 1901-2001. It has shown a long term declining trend. At the beginning of the twentieth century the number of females was 972 against 1000 males and thereafter showed continuous decline until 1941. In 1951 there was a marginal increase of one point, but thereafter it again dropped for two consecutive decades to reach 930 in 1971. In fact, during 1961-71, the country saw the sharpest decline of 11 points in the sex ratio. Thereafter, it has fluctuated marginally around 930 in successive censuses.

Sex Ratio India: 1901-2001

Census Year	Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males)
1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	927
2001	933

Source: Census of India, 2001, Provisional Population Totals, Series 1, India, Paper 1, 2001.

CHILD SEX RATIO (0-6 YEARS)

However, the results of 2001 census shocked the whole nation by reporting a sharp decline in the child sex ratio (0-6 Years). The sex ratio has declined by 18 points, i.e., from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. The sharpest decline in the child sex ratio after independence has been observed during 1991-2001. Moreover, it is more prevalent in selected

parts of India, relatively in prosperous states such as Punjab and Haryana. In Punjab, the child sex ratio had gone down by 82 points, i.e., from 875 in 1991 to 793 in 2001.

Child Sex ratio of North/North-west States - India: 2001

S.No.	State	Sex Ratio (1991)	Sex Ratio (2001)	Decrease in points
1	Punjab	875	793	-82
2	Haryana	879	820	-59
3	Himachal Pradesh	951	897	-54
4	Gujarat	928	878	-50
5	Chandigarh	899	845	-54
6	Delhi	915	865	-50

Source: Census of India, 2001, Provisional Population Totals, Series 1, India, Paper 1, 2001.

There are total sixteen districts in the country, of which ten are from Punjab, five from Haryana and one from Gujarat where child sex ratio has been recorded less than 800. The Table below highlights the bottom ten districts according to the child sex ratio in the age group 0-6 in census 2001.

Bottom Ten Districts according to Sex ratio (0-6 age group) - India: 2001

S.No.	District	State	Sex Ratio
1	Fatehgarh Sahib	Punjab	754
2	Patiala	Punjab	770
3	Kurukshetra	Haryana	770
4	Gurdaspur	Punjab	775
5	Kapurthala	Punjab	775
6	Bathinda	Punjab	779
7	Mansa	Punjab	779
8	Amritsar	Punjab	783
9	Sonapat	Haryana	783
10	Ambala	Haryana	784

Source: Census of India, 2001, Provisional Population Totals, Chapter 6, Series 1, India, Paper 1, 2001.

Punjab, where the child sex ratio is lowest in the country, shares large variations at the district level in the state. Fatehgarh Sahib and Patiala, two districts of the Malwa region (a feudal region with late agricultural development); Gurdaspur of Majha region (bordering Pakistan) and Kapurthala of Doaba region (economically prosperous) share the lowest child sex ratio in the state as well in the country. These districts had the highest decline of more than 100 points during 1991-2001.

Furthermore, the shocking results have been recorded when analysis was made among various religious groups, as religion is one of the oldest socio-cultural characteristics associated with mankind and civilization. It exerts a great influence on people's values and attitudes. It has recorded that the Sikh population has the lowest child sex ratio of 786 preceded by Jains of 870 at the national level (census 2001). Christians have reported child sex ratio of 964 followed by Muslims at 950 and Buddhists at 942. Hindus have reported a child sex ratio of 925, which is slightly lower than the national average of 927 for the total population. Persons professing 'Other Religions and Persuasions' have recorded the highest child sex ratio of 976 at the national level.

District-wise Child Sex ratio (0-6 years) in Punjab - India: 1991 & 2001

District/state	Sex Ratio		Variations in sex ratio
	1991	2001	
Punjab	875	793	-82
Moga	867	819	-48
Ferozpur	887	819	-68
Ludhiana	877	814	-63
Nawanshahr	900	810	-90
Hoshiarpur	884	810	-74
Mukatsar	858	807	-51
Faridkot	865	805	-60
Jalandhar	886	797	-89
Roopnagar	884	791	-93
Sangrur	873	784	-89
Amritsar	861	783	-78
Mansa	873	779	-94

Bathinda	860	779	-81
Kapurthala	879	775	-104
Gurdaspur	878	775	-103
Patiala	871	770	-101
Fatehgarh Sahib	874	754	-120

Source: Census of India, 2001, Provisional Population Totals, Chapter 6, Series 1, India, Paper 1, 2001.

SEX SELECTIVE ABORTIONS

It is estimated that since the ultrasound machines has been introduced in India, one out of five foetuses with an estimation of ten million females have been aborted. According to a study conducted by the Lancet, a premier British Medical Journal, sex selection claims up to 5,00,000 female foetuses in India every year.

According to the UN Population Fund report for the year 2000, female infanticide has also increased dramatically over the past decade and infant mortality rates are 40 percent higher for girl babies than boys.

III. DOWRY DEATHS

Though prohibited by law in 1961 (Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, amended in 1984 and 1986, bans paying and receiving dowries), the extraction of dowry from the bride's family prior to marriage still occurs. The official records of dowry death incidents are low, because the family often reports them as accidents or suicides. In Delhi, a woman is burned to death almost every twelve hours. The number of dowry murders is increasing. In 1988, 2,209 women were killed in dowry related incidents and in 1990, 4,835 were killed. It is important to reiterate that these are official records, which are immensely under-reported. The lack of official registration of this crime is apparent in Delhi, where ninety percent of cases of women burnt were recorded as accidents, five percent as suicide and only the remaining five percent were shown as murder.

According to an article in *Time* magazine, deaths in India related to dowry demands have increased 15-fold since the mid-1980s from 400 a year to around 5,800 a year by the middle of the 1990s. According to Government figures, there were a total of 5,377 dowry deaths in

1993, an increase of 12% from 1992. Indian Government statistics show that nearly 7,000 women in 2001 were killed over inadequate dowry payments. Despite the existence of rigorous laws to prevent dowry-deaths under a 1986 amendment to the Indian Penal Code (IPC), convictions are rare, and judges (usually men) are often uninterested and susceptible to bribery.

In Punjab, dowry death figures rose from 55 in 1986 to 157 in 1997. These official figures are but a glimpse of the truth. A recent field survey by the Institute of Development and Communication (IDC), a Chandigarh-based policy think-tank, revealed that in 1995, although 59 cases were reported, a staggering 17,649 cases of dowry harassment were not. For every reported case, 299 go unregistered. According to sociologists, only 5 per cent of reported cases are legally pursued.

According to the Institute of Development and Communication, Chandigarh, the quantum of dowry exchange may still be greater among the upper classes, but 85 per cent of dowry deaths and 80 per cent of dowry harassment occurs in the middle and lower strata. 88 per cent of woman *panches* were unaware that a dowry demand is punishable by law.

A scientific study of causes behind unnatural deaths of 1,000 married women, aged 18 to 35, by the Punjab State Chemical Laboratory has revealed that, on an average, one woman falls victim to dowry every week. Out of 1000 registered (reported to police) cases, 176 related to dowry.

Earlier, there were frequent reports of bride burning; according to the study, poison was used in 85 per cent of the cases between 2002 and 2006, and 71 per cent of the dowry-related deaths were reported from villages. The problem lies with free availability of lethal insecticides used in the farming sector.

Poisoning was the alleged cause of death in 122 cases, but viscera examination revealed it had caused death in 149 of the 176 cases. Strangulation topped the “non-poisoning” category by accounting for 13 dowry deaths out of 27 caused by hanging, drowning, burns etc. Of the 11 victims allegedly hanged, five had traces of poison, the

study found. Similarly, nine women alleged to have died of drowning also had traces of poison.

Alarming, the chloro-compound group of insecticides used in farming accounted for 45 per cent of the poisoning cases (67 out of 149) and 38 per cent of dowry deaths. Sulphos, the wheat preserving chemical, caused death in 40 per cent cases (60 out of 149) and accounted for 34 per cent of dowry deaths. Organo-phosphorus compound pesticides – the sprays used in fields - caused 21 poisoning deaths out of 149. The insect killer carbamate group caused death in 2 per cent poisoning cases.

Further, of the total 176 deaths, 43 per cent (76) happened in the age group 23 to 26 - the prime age for marriage. Women aged 19 to 22 years were victims in 58 cases. “The group between 19 and 26 is the most vulnerable as 76 per cent victims (134 out of 176) are from this group,” the study states.

The incidence of dowry deaths was found to be higher in rural than urban areas, perhaps due to free availability of pesticides in rural households. Rural areas accounted for 71 per cent of the total dowry deaths (125 out of 176).

Now about geographical prevalence of the evil — Doaba, Punjab’s NRI belt, with 19.6 per cent of its population, accounts for 33 per cent dowry deaths in the state.

District-wise, Hoshiarpur and Gurdaspur top the list with 26 victims each out of 176 (14.8 per cent), though they house only 6 and 8.6 per cent, respectively, of Punjab’s population.

Percentage share of other districts is - Jalandhar, 17 dowry deaths (9.6 per cent), Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala, 13 deaths each (7.4 per cent), Sangrur, 11 deaths (6.3 per cent), Moga and Kapurthala, 9 deaths each (5.1 per cent), Nawanshahr, Muktsar, Bathinda, 6 deaths each (3.4 per cent).

In Malwa, Patiala tops the list of dowry deaths. The lowest deaths were reported from Faridkot and Ferozepur.

IV. DRUG ADDICTION

Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh top in the intake of opioid,

opium and heroin, in the country. The rate of intake in these areas is 3.4 per cent.

A study by the ministry of social justice and the United Nations International Doping Control Programme revealed that the residents of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh take drugs three times more than the national average, which is 1 per cent.

Besides, the rate of use of alcohol and tobacco is also substantial in the area in comparison to the national average. Against the national average of the use of alcohol (26 per cent) and tobacco (57.9 per cent), the residents of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh have 49.8 per cent for alcohol intake and 64.6 per cent for tobacco.

Amritsar city consumes more than Rs 1 crore worth of liquor, everyday.

80% of Punjabi youth takes drugs. The drug problem came to notice only few years ago. The spark was present since past many years, but the fire spread only two or three years ago, and it is destroying many houses in Punjab. According to our survey, 78% people say that users make their first contact with drugs through friends. The most popular drugs among students are:

Alcohol - reported by 38%

Smack - reported by 37%

Cigarettes - reported by 25%

67% of the rural households in Punjab have one drug addict, says a survey conducted by the Department of Social Security Development of Women and Children.

The report was prepared after a study in eight districts — Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar, Ferozepore, Ludhiana, Muktsar and Gurdaspur.

In Majha area, narcotics was being used rampantly, while in Doaba belt, the most common form of addiction were tranquilizers. The addicts use a variety of drugs, which included raw opium, smack, heroin, synthetic drugs like morphine, pethidine, codeine and psychotropic substances like diazepam.

Chemists along with quacks, drug peddlers and truck drivers have been identified as the main supply source of drugs in Punjab.

In the villages, the chemist shops, which are meant to be the lifeline for the villagers are one major source of illegal drugs for the village people. There is a major need to control the illegal sale of medicines. The chemists do not ask for a prescription, and they do not keep any inventory of the drugs sold. They even sell the medicine in bulk to individuals, without any doctor's prescription.

It may seem that drinking is alien to women folk; in fact this vice is steadily catching up among the youth of both sexes. Drunk drivers are a constant risk to passengers and passers by. Thrasher accidents during harvest are also a direct result of drug abuse.

DESPERATE YOUTH - WILLING TO DO ANYTHING TO GET HIGH

People try to get high in any way they could; glue fumes, cough syrup, uppers, downers, *bhang*/hash, etc., etc. There are too many drugs to even name! Some other practices adopted to get high are:

- Petrol - They dip a piece of cotton wool in petrol and keep it under their nose and inhale the air.
- Lizard - They kill and burn the lizard and eat it.
- Boot Polish - They rub the boot polish onto the back of their neck and turn it towards the sun.
- Petrol Pipes - They eat the dirt deposited on the leaking petrol pipe of vehicles and petrol pumps.
- Bhang in Cigarette - They rub the *bhang* leaf in oily hands until it turns into a small ball of dirt and they put that small ball into the cigarette and smoke it. This gives them more thrill/high than normal cigarettes.
- Iodex - Iodex is a pain relief balm. They use Iodex in place of Jam on a toast.
- Correction Fluid - It is a simple stationary item, which is used to correct writing or typing errors on paper. They cut it open and drink it.

V. FARMERS' SUICIDES

On average, one Indian farmer committed suicide every 32 minutes between 1997 and 2005. Since 2002, that has become one suicide every 30 minutes. Close to 1,50,000 Indian farmers committed

suicide in nine years from 1997 to 2005, official data show; over 500 farmers in the Punjab state committed suicide by jumping in front of trains, setting themselves on fire, or poisoning themselves. While Punjab was intended to be the paragon of the Green Revolution success story, farmers of the region face an estimated debt of Rs 10,000 crores.

Conservative estimates indicate that an average of 50 suicides take place in the Lehra and Andana blocks every year. If we were to even halve this number, the number of suicides in Punjab's 100 districts works out to over 2,500 per year. Villagers are selling off thousands of acres of land and the government is doing nothing to help them.

Village after village in Punjab is up for sale. Rural indebtedness has reached such alarming proportions that entire communities are being forced to 'distress-sell' their lands. Bhutal Kulan, a village in Sangrur district, comprising around 1,000 acres of land, is up for sale. Local farmers, heavily indebted to moneylenders and corporate banks, are selling their land holdings at a pittance. It's the same story in neighbouring Bhutal Khor, which has over 1,200 acres of land. Practically the entire village is up for sale.

□

*The Master is the tree of contentment,
Righteousness is its flower,
And enlightenment is its fruit.
It keeps ever fresh, juicy and green by joy in God;
And is ripened by the practice of meditation,
And performance of good deeds.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, 147

ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਰੁਖੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਫਲੁ ਫਲੁ ਗਿਆਨੁ ॥
ਰਸਿ ਰਸਿਆ ਹਰਿਆ ਸਦਾ ਪਕੈ ਕਰਮਿ ਧਿਆਨਿ ॥