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Run by the Bharuch Municipality**

Raj, Madhusudan

Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat.

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# State of Elementary Education in Public Schools of Gujarat: A Study of Schools Run by the Bharuch Municipality

By  
Madhusudan Raj

## Abstract

*In India the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments have given powers and responsibility of achieving the goal of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) to the local body governments. The present study has examined the situation of elementary schools run by Bharuch municipality. The evidence show that the situation of elementary education is unsatisfactory and in bad shape. The number of schools has declined rapidly, the learning levels of students are miserable, community participation is almost non-existent, private cost of so called “free” municipality education is high; and the state of the mid-day meal scheme looks very grim. Municipality schools are loosing ground in Bharuch city.*

# I Introduction

The importance of education for economic growth and development has been recognised since long by the economists, for example see, (Alan & Mikael, 2000; Barbara & Reneen, 2002; Paul, 2000). It is now well recognized that education not only helps countries to grow faster, but it also enables them to speed up their process of economic development. The importance of education makes it imperative for nation that it concentrate its efforts in developing the human resource by allocating more resources towards investment in education and improving governance.

Immediately after independence the Indian policy makers largely focused their attention on industrial sector but it was not possible to achieve desired economic growth<sup>1</sup> and the pace of economic development. The negligence of education sector has not only resulted in to economic problems but it has resulted in to many social, political, cultural, and religious problems<sup>2</sup>.

The Indian policy makers, in the recent past, have become more conscious and concerned about the importance of social sector and its infrastructure. The increased attention on education sector is reflected in initiation of various programs like Sarva Shikha Abhiyan, Mid Day Meal scheme and many other state level schemes like education guarantee scheme of Madhya Pradesh. It has also resulted into many amendments in the constitution e.g., (1) the declaration of elementary education as a fundamental right of every child (the 93<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment), and (2) the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments. The primary goal of all these efforts is to achieve the universal elementary education (UEE) in India which was promised at the time of independence and not yet achieved.

One of the important ways in which the central government wants to achieve the goal of UEE is by decentralising the education sector. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments are only for this purpose. The powers are delegated to local body governments to achieve the goal of UEE. To achieve the goal of UEE requires that the local bodies perform well in the local public education sector.

This study was carried out chiefly to evaluate the performance of one such local body government namely, the Bharuch<sup>3</sup> Municipality. In this study total of 36 elementary schools of Bharuch municipality were surveyed during August 2004 to September 2004. The study interviewed total of 156 parents and students who were selected from all 36 schools.

The main objective of the paper is to briefly present the major findings of this study. The first section introduces the subject of study. The second section discusses the growth of Bharuch municipality education, third section discusses the state of physical infrastructural facilities in the schools of Bharuch municipality, fourth section discusses the performance of mid-day meal scheme in the schools of Bharuch municipality, fifth section discusses the important aspect of student's learning levels which directly reflects the overall performance of Bharuch municipality schools, sixth section discusses the private cost of Bharuch municipality education, seventh section discusses the role of community participation in the management and administration of the schools of the Bharuch municipality. The eighth section concludes with discussion of major problems and some policy prescriptions to tackle those problems.

## **II Growth of Bharuch Municipality Education**

Table-1 presents the data of number of schools, number of students and number of teachers in the elementary schools of Bharuch municipality for the time period 1990 to 2004. It is clear from the data that the growth performance, in terms of number of schools, students and teachers, is very dismal. The number of elementary schools has initially increased from 53 schools in 1990 to 57 schools in 1994 but there after it has declined to 36 schools in 2004<sup>4</sup>. This data presents the aggregated picture about all elementary schools. But, Bharuch municipality elementary schools are divided into three different categories. These categories are primary schools which include schools with standards 1 to 4, upper primary schools which include schools with standards 5 to 7 and, primary schools with upper primary section which includes standards 1 to 7.

**Table 1: Total Number of Schools, Students and Teachers in Elementary Schools of Bharuch Municipality (1990 To 2004)**

Year	No. of Schools	No. of Students			No. of Teachers		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1990	53	na	na	na	na	na	na
1991	53	7418	7558	14976	89	303	392
1992	53	7377	7712	15089	88	292	380
1993	53	6936	7402	14338	82	294	376
1994	57	7195	6800	13995	75	285	360
1995	56	6422	7124	13546	72	277	349
1996	53	6263	6967	13230	69	269	338
1997	50	6106	6777	12883	65	266	331
1998	48	5889	6440	12329	61	256	317
1999	46	5647	6200	11847	57	254	311
2000	42	5258	5679	10937	44	245	289
2001	42	5098	5539	10637	45	234	279
2002	39	4643	4862	9505	40	219	259
2003	39	4167	4377	8544	35	204	239
2004	36	3326	3967	7293	36	190	226

na = not available

Source: Annual Statistical Statements (Various Years), Bharuch Municipal School Board.

Table-2 presents the disaggregated picture of growth performance regarding number of schools for the time period 1992 to 2002. From table-2 we can say that the overall number of schools of Bharuch municipality is declining rapidly because there is a rapid decline in the number of primary schools. The number of primary schools in 1992 was 30 which came down to 16 schools in 2002. The number of upper primary schools has also declined during the referred time period. The total number of upper primary schools in 1992 was 13 schools which declined to 10 schools in 2002. But the number of primary schools with upper primary section has increased during this time period. The number was 10 in 1992 which has gone up to 13 schools in 2002. So, from the disaggregated analysis it is clear that because of rapid decline in the number of *primary schools*, the overall number of elementary schools has declined.

**Table 2: Disaggregated Data of Bharuch Municipality Elementary Schools**

Year	No. of Schools		
	Primary	Upper Primary	Primary with Upper Primary
1992	30	13	10
1993	30	13	10
1994	31	13	13
1995	32	11	13
1996	29	13	11
1997	27	10	13
1998	27	9	12
1999	23	11	12
2000	19	13	10
2001	19	13	10
2002	16	10	13

Source: Compiled from Annual Statistical Statement (various years), Bharuch Municipal School Board.

The problem thus lies in primary section of Bharuch municipality schools. This is certainly a worrying situation because it shows that not many *new students* are enrolling themselves in Bharuch municipality schools. On the other hand, it also reflects the fact that Bharuch municipality is failing in attracting new students in to its schools. It will not be surprising, if this trend continues in future then in 10 to 15 years time all primary schools of Bharuch municipality will be closed because of zero enrolment, which will surely be a result of poor quality of education provided by these schools.

Table-1 also presents the total number of students in Bharuch municipality elementary schools. Again it is clear from the data that the number of students has declined during the referred time period of 1990 to 2004. The total number of student was 14,976 in 1991, which declined to 7,293 in 2004, a decline of more than 50 per cent in a decade. Table 1 also presents gender wise distribution of students. The gender wise distribution shows that the number of female students is higher than the number of male students in Bharuch municipality elementary

schools in all the years, except 1994. This data is very important because it may reflect *gender bias*. It is possible that boys are sent to private schools and girls are segregated in the public schools by the parents. Table-1 also presents the data of total number of teachers. Data in table-1 show that the total number of teachers also declined during the referred time period. This number was 392 teachers in 1991 which declined to 226 teachers in 2004. Table-1 also presents the gender wise distribution of teachers. This gender wise distribution clearly shows that in all the years the number of female teachers is far greater than the number of male teachers in the schools of Bharuch municipality. This fact is in contrast with the national level scenario where the number of male teachers is more than female teachers in elementary schools.

From the available statistics for the reference period, it can be said that Bharuch municipality has failed in attracting new students in to its primary schools and this has resulted in to continued decline in the number of schools, students and teachers.

The implication of this dismal growth can be very wide. One adverse effect of this can be inequality in the society amongst different strata of people. If these schools are closing down then the poor people who can not afford the costly private education will not be able to educate their children. These children will remain uneducated and the benefit of education will not accrue to them. Not only that, without education their quality of life will also be adversely affected. Moreover they may also remain educationally, socially, politically backward. On the other hand the rich people can afford to educate their child in costly private schools. So, their children will reap all the benefits of investment in education. And all this will contribute to widen inequality in the society. This result is exactly opposite to the kind of result government (state) wants to achieve i.e. removing inequality in the society, by assuming major role of basic education provider.

### III Physical Infrastructure

Earlier I discussed the quantitative assessment of the elementary schools of Bharuch municipality. But it is also argued that not only quantity of education is very important but the quality of education is also equally important. There are ample empirical evidences which suggest that quality of education is positively related with personal earnings and economic growth, for example see, (Hanushek, 2000, 2002). Economist measure the quality of education by using indicators like, score of mathematics and science on standardised tests, schooling inputs i.e. resources. One of the important components of inputs into schooling is the physical infrastructural facilities. Considering this fact, I tried to assess the physical infrastructural facilities in the schools of Bharuch municipality. The following indicators are used to assess the physical infrastructural facilities of Bharuch municipality schools,

1. School building,
2. Play ground,
3. Drinking water facility,
4. Instructional rooms,
5. Urinals (Separate for girls in the co-ed schools),
6. Electrification of Schools; and
7. Compound walls.

The data on these facilities were collected by the personal visits to these schools. Table 3 presents this data. The main results of this analysis are as follows: (1) It was found that out of total 26 buildings of Bharuch municipal schools all the school buildings were *Pucca*.



**Table 3 Physical Infrastructural Facilities in Bharuch Municipality Elementary Schools.**

Total Schools = 39																			
Cluster	Building		Play Ground		Drinking Water Facility#		Instructional Rooms				Electricity		Compound Walls		Common Toilets		Separate Toilets for Girls*		
	pucca	non-pucca	with	without	with	without	one	two	three to five	five or more	with	without	with	without	with	without	with	without	
1.Katopor	4	0	3	5	3	5	0	1	1	6	8	0	0	8	5	3	1	5	
2.Dandiya Bazaar	5	0	3	5	5	3	0	0	3	5	6	2	3	5	3	5	1	0	
3.Lal Bazaar	4	0	4	1	5	0	0	0	1	4	5	0	4	1	5	0	3	5	
4.Vejalpur	8	0	6	4	7	3	1	1	2	6	9	1	6	4	4	6	0	3	
5.Station Road.	5	0	6	2	6	2	0	0	6	2	8	0	2	6	8	0	0	8	
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>21</b>	
			56%	44%	67%	33%	3%	5%	33%	59%	92%	8%	38%	62%	64%	36%	19%	81%	

# Drinking water facility here includes some temporary facilities like watertank or "matka"also. Only those schools where such temporary facilities are also not available are excluded.

\*Only applicable to co-ed schools.

Notwithstanding this fact, the reality is that the condition of many school buildings was not very good and many of them required major repairs. Students complained about the dripping roofs of their classes during the monsoon season which make their studies miserable and sometimes impossible. (2) The schools do not have proper drinking water facility which is very basic necessity. With out proper drinking water facilities school cannot function well. With regard to the facilities for providing potable water, it was found that out of total 39 schools, 26 schools (67 per cent) had their own facilities of one or the other kind.<sup>5</sup> The most revealing fact is that 13 schools (33 per cent) did not have *any* drinking water facilities in their premises. Students and teachers in these schools bring their water from home, which was not enough for the whole day. Some teachers told during personal visit that because of this unavailability of water in schools they sometimes remain thirsty whole day. (3) The schools are also lacking in equally important basic amenity of toilet. With regard to this facility, out of total 39 schools, 25 schools (64 per cent) had toilet facilities. Here again like drinking water facility's case, 14 schools (36 per cent) were without the toilets. The worst part is that the available toilets were in unusable condition in many schools and in some schools toilets were usable but teachers locked the toilets because they feared that students would make the toilets unusable by using it in an improper way. This made the situation for students very pathetic. Many students go home for the toilets at the cost of

missing the classes for a while and sometimes students had to use the open areas surrounding schools as toilets. All these made the surrounding environment of the schools and the schools themselves very unhygienic, which can badly affect students' and teachers' health. (4) With regard to toilets it is important that co-ed schools provide separate toilets for the girl students because empirical work suggest that sometime girls refuses to go to school if the schools are not having separate facilities of toilets for them. When the world is concentrating on girl's education to empower them, it becomes important that schools do provide adequate toilet facilities for girl students. Data in table 3 shows that out of total 26 co-ed schools only 5 schools (19 per cent) had the separate toilet facilities for girls. 21 schools (81 per cent) had no separate toilets for girls. This can have adverse effect on girls' enrolment. One can imagine what difficulties the girl students face in this kind of municipal schools. (5) Instructional rooms have their own importance and can have influence on quality of education. Poor quality of instructional rooms can lead to fall in enrolment and lower learning ability of students as they find it difficult to concentrate properly on their studies. The data in table 3 suggest that, out of total 39 schools, 23 schools (59 per cent) schools had more than 5 instructional rooms which were adequate looking at the number of students in those schools. But the quality of those instructional rooms was poor. Majority of these instructional rooms were very dirty and dark and very few schools had proper sitting arrangements<sup>6</sup> for the students in those classrooms. 13 schools (33 per cent) had 3 to 5 instructional rooms and 2 schools were having only 2 instructional rooms. In one school - which was situated in a small and a slightly remote place of Bharuch city called *Kukarwada* - which only had 1 instructional room. This room was very small and without any basic facilities. This small class was used for teaching 3 standards together and thus it was really disturbing. (6) With regard to electricity, out of 39 schools, 36 schools (92 per cent) were having the electricity, but 3 schools did not have any electrification. Many students and teachers were suffocated because of lack of fresh air in these schools. They were complaining about the hot and humid condition of classrooms because of lack of electrification. (7) Compound walls are necessary for elementary schools, especially for those which are situated on road sides. A compound wall gives safety to

children. In Bharuch municipality elementary schools compound wall is also a part of deficient infrastructure. Only 38 per cent of schools had the compound wall, while 62 per cent schools did not have any compound wall surrounding the schools. (8) One of the most basic infrastructural facilities for schools is of urinals. With regard to this facility, total 36 per cent of schools did not have any Urinals. This is shocking. In these schools students have to use the open areas surrounding the schools. This makes the school surrounding very unhealthy. This absence of Urinals, like the absence of toilets, in schools creates a big problem especially for girl child. Many of the girl children don't go to schools because of this absence of Urinals. In co-ed schools there is a need for separate urinals for girls but here also out of total 26 schools only 5 schools (17 per cent) has this facility while remaining 21 schools did not have any such facility. This situation of urinals gives the idea of the kind of problems the children face while being in school.

Over all the condition of physical infrastructure is absolutely dismal in Bharuch municipality elementary schools and the Bharuch municipality urgently needs to allocate more resources to improve the infrastructural facilities. Unless the municipality does this job nicely, the goal of UEE looks illusive.

## **IV Performance of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme**

Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Education) launched the Mid-Day Meal scheme on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1995. The Scheme covers students of Class I-V in the Government Primary Schools / Primary Schools aided by Govt. and the Primary Schools run by local bodies<sup>7</sup>. The main objective of this Mid-Day Meal scheme is two pronged. One objective is to provide nutritious food to the children to improve their health standards and the other objective is to attract the students and their parents towards public elementary schools so that the enrolment in elementary schools can increase. This will help to fulfil the goal of UEE. In this section the performance of the scheme of Mid-Day Meal in the schools of Bharuch municipality is analysed.

The method which was used here to analyse the performance of Mid-Day Meal scheme is of directly asking the beneficiary of this scheme i.e. students and their parents, about this scheme's various aspects. These are the people who can give the real picture of performance of Mid-Day Meal scheme and not the administrators and their data. The personal observations of this scheme during the field work were also used for assessing the performance of this scheme. Specifically, one question - *are you satisfied with the meal given by the Bharuch municipality under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme?* – was asked to both the students and their parents. Table 4 below presents the analysis of the answers given by the parents.

**Table 4 Parent's Answer to the Mid-Day Meal Question.**

Answer	Number of Parents	%
YES	73	47%
NO	24	15%
DON'T EAT	49	32%
ONLY SUKHDI	4	3%
ONLY LAPSI	1	1%
DON'T GIVEN	4	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>100%</b>

As seen in table 4, out of total 155 parents who responded to this question, 73 parents (47 per cent) gave positive answers that they are satisfied with the Mid-Day Meal. 24 parents gave a negative answer that they were not satisfied with the Mid-Day Meal. Surprisingly, 49 parents said that their children did not eat or they did not allow them to eat the Mid-Day Meal given by the schools because of the poor quality of the food. Many parents told that they fear that their children will get sick after eating the food given in the Mid-Day Meal scheme and hence they did not allow their children to eat this food. They told that more often the food contains insects and stones. Apart from that the places where the food was prepared in the schools were also not hygienic. During personal visits to these schools it was confirmed that what parents were saying was right. Some students only eat some particular food like, *Sukhadi*<sup>8</sup> and *Lapsi* (both are sweet items). This is probably because children like sweet things. In all these 39 schools, one school was such where Mid-Day Meal was not given<sup>9</sup>. If we combine all the negative answers here for

the Mid-Day Meal then the total numbers of negative answers are 78 i.e. total 50 per cent parents were not satisfied with the scheme's performance. Many parents said that there were many malpractices going on in this scheme. Some parents told that the people who prepare the meal use to steal the oil and vegetables from the schools. Students were also not satisfied with the kind of food given in the schools. They also complained about the poor quality of food.

All this evidence shows that this scheme is by no means achieving any of its main objectives in the elementary schools of Bharuch municipality. It is neither providing nutritious food nor attracting students. Overall the performance of this scheme is far from satisfactory. Given this state of the mid day meal scheme, it requires drastic changes in the implementation of the scheme.

## **V Student's Learning Levels**

Economists consider the learning standards of students as one of the important indicator of the internal efficiency of an educational system. Quality of student is very important at the micro and macro level. Like quantity of schooling, the quality of schooling is also positively related with the labour market earnings and the economic growth. Economists use students' achievement levels as one of the indicators of schooling quality.<sup>10</sup> To check students' learning standards one small test of the interviewed students was taken because there is absence of any national level standardised tests for public school students. In the test, questions related to learning of Mathematics, Science, and three languages of English, Hindi and Gujarati were asked. The questions were framed differently for different standard students keeping in mind their syllabus and expected learning standards. The results of these different tests are discussed below.

### **1. Results of Language Test**

To test the learning ability of three languages, Gujarati (the local language of Gujarat state), Hindi and English, the students were asked to simply write their full names in these three languages. The results of this test are given in table 5 below.

**Table 5 Result of a Language Test**

Language	YES	NO	Total Students
Gujarati	112 (72)	44 (28)	156
Hindi	37 (31)	84 (69)	121
English	15 (19)	64 (81)	79

Note: Figure in parenthesis presents the percentage value.

As is clear from table 5, out of total 156 students, 112 students (72 per cent) could write their full name properly while 44 students (28 per cent) *could not* write their names properly even in Gujarati. Out of these 44 students many students were from class 7. It was very shocking to know that students from class 7 could not write their name in Gujarati, which is their mother tongue. The relevant question here is that - if this students can not even write their names in Gujarati then how did they progress up to standard 7? - especially when there is no system of automatic promotion in Bharuch municipality elementary schools. This gives some indication towards the limitation of examination and evaluation process that are conducted by these elementary schools.

## 2. Results of Mathematics Test

Mathematics test was conducted to check the basic mathematical skills of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Table 6 below presents the results of this test.

**Table 6 Result of Mathematics Test**

Mathematical Skill	Answers Given		Total Students
	YES	NO	
Addition	9 (7)	112 (93)	121
Subtraction			
(a) Complicated (3-4)	0 (0)	156 (100)	156
(b) Simple (8-3)	96 (62)	60 (38)	156
Multiplication	48 (31)	96 (62)	156
Division	36 (25)	108 (75)	144

Note: Figure in parenthesis presents the percentage value.

As seen in the table, out of total 121 students to whom the question of addition was applicable, only 9 students (7 per cent) could do the correct addition. 112 students i.e. 93 percentage of students were unable to do the given addition correctly. Same is true with an exercise of a bit complicated subtraction, i.e. subtraction 3 out of 4. No students could give the correct answer out of total 156 students to whom this question was asked. But with regard to a question of simple subtraction of '8 minus 3', 96 students (62 per cent) gave the correct answer while 60 students (38 per cent) could not give answer. The performance of the students' was also poor in multiplication. Many of them (62 percent precisely) could not solve the question. Same is true with Division exercise. Only 25 per cent of students could do the correct division, while, 75 per cent of students failed in this exercise too.

The overall assessment of the mathematical skills of the students suggests that students were very poor in doing mathematics. Bharuch municipality schools imparted very little mathematical skills to its students.

### **3. Results of Science test**

To test the science knowledge of the students, they were asked 4 questions. Two questions dealt with the scientific phenomenon of *Evaporation* and *Gravity*, while the other two questions dealt with the knowledge of *Planets* and *Body parts*. The result of this test is presented below in table 7.

As seen in table 7 students performance in science is also very weak. With the question related to planets in our galaxy, only 40 per cent of students could give the right answer. 60

per cent of students didn't know how many planets are there in our galaxy and what their names are. Majority of the students failed to answer the question of what is evaporation?

**Table 7 Result of Science Test**

Questions	Answers Given		Total Students
	YES	NO	
Planets	31 (40)	47 (60)	78
Evaporation	3 (4)	75 (96)	78
Gravity	2 (3)	76 (97)	78
Body Part Names	86 (57)	66 (43)	152

Note: Figure in parenthesis presents the percentage value.

Same is true regarding the question of, what is Gravity? Only 3 per cent students gave the correct answer of this question. Students performed slightly better with regard to question of names of the body part. 57 per cent students gave right answer. Over all performance of students in science was very weak.

Looking at the combined performance in very important subjects of mathematics and science one can easily see that students' knowledge is very poor. Bharuch municipality has not performed well in imparting these important skills to their students. Economists have empirically showed that subjects of mathematics and science are very important for economic growth of a nation [for example see (Hanushek, 2000)]. The strategic importance of these two subjects makes it imperative for Bharuch municipality that they improve the teaching standards, especially of these two subjects, in their schools.

After looking at the results it is clear that, If we take students learning standards as one of the important indicator of efficiency of schooling system (as economists have taken it to be) then it appears that Bharuch municipality schools are very inefficient because the quality of students is extremely poor in terms of students learning levels.



## VI Private Cost of Municipality Education

It is frequently claimed by the state officials that the public elementary education in India is *free*. The reason given by government official and policy makers behind making the elementary education free is of spreading the basic education to the poor people who otherwise in the absence of such free education can not send their children to schools. One of the primary goals of state is to minimise the inequality gap in the society. Following this objective of removing inequality from the society state has subsidised the elementary education. But the ground realities in this case are quite different then what is being claimed by the state officials. Many researchers have found that, public elementary education in India is in fact not *free*. For example see, (Banerji, 2000; Tilak, 1996, 2001, 2002). These research studies have found that households (even the most poor) spend considerable amount of their annual income on their children's basic education. This means that although government is not taking any tuition fees in their primary schools but parents have to incur other private cost. This study tried to estimate how much private cost the parents have to bear for sending their children in Bharuch municipality elementary schools. Table 8 below presents the data of per child private cost of Bharuch municipality education.

The data show that, Parents incur substantial cost for educating their children.

Overall, parents spend on an average annually rupee 1293.45 per child which is substantial portion of some of the very poor parent's annual income.

**Table 8 Per Child Average Annual Private Cost of Bharuch Municipality Education.**

Cost Category	Average Annual Cost (Rs.)
School Fees	0.00
Private Tuition Cost	161.83
Uniform Cost	81.64
Transportation Cost	0.64
Stationary Cost	453.24
School Pocket Money	479.42
School Meal Cost	95.29
Miscellaneous Cost	21.38
<i>Total Average Annual Cost</i>	<i>1293.45</i>

Such high cost of public education prevents many parents from educating their children. Parents annually on an average spent 453.24 rupees on school stationeries like, school bags, notebooks, pencils, study-guides, assignment books, water-bag etc. Surprisingly, parents also spent on an average 161.83 rupees on private tuitions. Another evidence here of the failure of government's Mid-Day Meal scheme is that, parents have to incur on an average, 95.29 rupees annually on their child's meal in the school, even when the government is providing mid-day meals. This is happening because parents don't trust the quality of food given in mid-day meal scheme and that is why they give money to their children to have some outside food during the lunch/recess time. Parents also incur rupees 81.64 on an average annually on their children's school uniform. Although Bharuch municipality provides school uniform to some reserved class students, not all the students get these free uniforms and thus their parents have to incur this cost. Many of the parents were not happy with this policy of government as they felt that despite of being poor and not in a situation of buying uniform for their child they are not given free uniform only because they don't belong to certain reserved caste category. They felt that even the people who are from upper caste but are really poor should also be provided free uniform. The point here in focus is that if there is at all any need of reservation then the reservation should be based on economic status of the people rather than on the basis of their caste, as it is happening in India. Parents incurred a meagre transportation cost as the schools are near by their homes. This is a good sign. Having proximity to school is an important factor for students' enrolment, especially for girl child. Many research studies have found that proximity of school is an important factor which affects the parents' decision to send their children to school. This factor plays a bigger role when the decision is of sending a *girl child* to school. Residence with far distance from schools results into child's non-enrolment or drop-out. This results into wastage of resources in education sector. By providing schools near to homes Bharuch municipality is avoiding these types of wastages.

The highest amount of money was spent on school pocket money. Parents everyday gives on an average 2 to 3 rupees to their children when they go to school<sup>11</sup>.

Overall the results of this exercise show that parents incur high cost for educating their children even in public schools. This high private cost is a likely retarding factor for many parents for not sending their children to school or for drop out.

## **VII Community Participation**

To improve the standards of education in the public schools, under the flagship programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Gujarat government has initiated steps of increasing community participation in the schooling system. For this purpose various associations of teachers and parents, like MTA (Mother Teacher Association) and PTA (Parent Teacher Association) have been formed by the local administration. The work of these associations is to let the community i.e. parents of the children, participate in the educational decision making process. Under this programme there are different arrangements like, the local education administration meets with the parents regularly and after the consultation with parents take the decision of improvements in the schools. The programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is implemented in the Bharuch municipality schools, so it is expected that the community participation programme is well functioning in these schools. This study tried to check whether the local community is participating in decision making through associations like MTA or PTA. The results of this exercise are discussed below.

To check that how the MTA and PTA are working in Bharuch municipality schools, parents were asked, whether they have been called upon by the Bharuch municipality administration for any meetings. The answers given by the parents are as following: out of total 136 parents who gave the answers, 112 (82 per cent) reported that they were *not* called for any such meetings. 11 parents (8 per cent) said they were called upon only once or twice in the year. 5 parents (4 per cent) said they were called upon twice or thrice in the year. 2

parents (2 per cent) said they were called upon five to six times, and 6 parents (4 per cent) said that they were called upon more than six times in a year by the Bharuch municipality school administration. The interesting thing about the parents who were called upon for MTA or PTA meetings was that, only 9 parents were asked to actually express their opinions regarding their children's schools. And more interestingly, only 3 parents out of those 9 believed that the management actually implemented the suggestions they have made for improvement in the functioning of the schools. Some parents told that they were only asked to *sign* the attendance register of MTA-PTA meetings (without even attending it!) by the local school administration.

The results of this exercise show that there is very little (almost non existent) community participation in Bharuch municipality elementary schools. Instead of running this programme successfully the Bharuch municipality is only interested in manipulating the data of attendance for showing the higher authorities that they are running the associations. The actual goals of community partnership of parents involving themselves in education decision making is never fulfilled here.

## **VIII Discussion of major Problems and Some Policy Suggestions**

The major picture that emerges after doing the analysis of the working of Bharuch municipality education system that the Bharuch municipality education system is malfunctioning and it has major problems. These major problems are discussed in this section. Here I will also discuss some of the policy suggestions to tackle these problems. The thing to keep in mind here is that many of the problems are inter related. If one policy improves one problem it is likely to have impact on other problems too with effect on quality of education.

The first major problem is of declining number of schools, especially primary schools. When the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment has conferred powers to local body education for expanding the basic education (and also improving the quality) then this negative growth of school is contradicting the policy of government. The ground realities are completely different from what the central authority is thinking. One major reason which this study has found out for this declining number of schools is the inferior quality of education in these schools. So the heart of the matter is that Bharuch municipality will have to improve the quality of education if they want to reverse this trend. Now to improve the quality of education Bharuch municipality can take series of steps like, (1) Developing a very good infrastructure is a prerequisite of a good schooling system. As seen above the physical infrastructure in schools is very poor. So the first thing Bharuch municipality will have to do is to develop a very good infrastructure in its schools. This will make these schools more attractive to students<sup>12</sup> which will help in increasing the enrolment in schools as well as improving the quality of education<sup>13</sup>. (2) Second thing is that if the schools are managed by skilled educators themselves, instead of bureaucrats /officers of Bharuch municipality who can not understand the real problems of education sector, then this will surely help in improving quality of schooling. Professional academicians are likely to understand very well the problems of schools and are thus likely to be more responsive. (3) Teachers are an important part in the fight against poor quality of education. Teachers should be given special training<sup>14</sup> so that they can understand the problems of different type of students.

The next major problem is of poor educational standards of the students. The study test shows that students learned almost nothing in the schools. Their achievement score on the sample test was very low on all the major subjects included in the sample test. This reflects the poor educational quality of these schools again. There is no single policy measure which will help in improving the educational standards of students. The one policy measure which we want to discuss here is related with teachers. During visits to these schools it is being found out that teachers hardly teach in these schools. Most of the times they are doing some

clerical work<sup>15</sup> or most of them are simply not interested in educating the students<sup>16</sup>. It is being seen that many teachers were doing their home chores in the schools. This neglect of teaching work has resulted into these poor educational levels of students. So the first thing Bharuch municipality can do to improve the standards is of putting into place an accountability system for teachers. All the teachers should be held responsible for educational performance of their students. To hold teachers accountable for their teaching work, administration can use the carrot and stick theory. Bharuch municipality can recognise the efforts of hard working teachers, who are improving learning standards of their students, by awarding them publicly. There should be awards (cash as well as public appreciation) like *The Best Teacher of the Year*. And teachers should be given disincentives in the form of annual fine of say one or two month's full salary if they are not making enough efforts in the classrooms. Another thing is that teachers should spend more time in classrooms instead of clerical offices doing administrative work. If teachers teach then student's educational standards will surely improve. The teacher must be given training periodically. And they should be evaluated periodically by neutral judges.

The problem of mid day meal scheme is also grave. The real objectives of this scheme of (1) attracting students to schools, and (2) giving them nutritional food, are not being fulfilled. To improve the performance of this scheme administration should involve all the stakeholders of this scheme in to management. Parents should be given responsibility of providing the ingredients for preparing food (here only those parents should be given the responsibilities who are interested in doing this job without any *big* monetary expectations). They should be provided the financial resources for carrying out this activity (only). This will help in improving the quality of meal. Because parents are directly involved in food preparation work they will keep a close eye on food quality simply because their children are also going to eat that food. Also, there should be regular checking of food by the teachers. If the cooks are found guilty of being careless in preparing meal or stealing the material like oil,

vegetables etc., then they should be punished financially. Their contract should be cancelled immediately.

The high private cost of Bharuch municipality education is another big problem. It is very likely that this high private cost is resulting in the decreasing demand for elementary schools. To tackle this problem the administration can provide educational products<sup>17</sup> (not only books and uniforms but also other items like notebooks, pencil-rubber, school bags, shoes, water bag etc.) to *economically and educationally backward parents*. Another thing that can be done is of improving educational standards. This will help parents in saving the private tuition fees, the cost of which is very high. Bringing down the private cost will result in more parents enrolling their children in schools, which will result in the achievement of the goal of UEE.

Last but not the least; complete absence of community participation is the problem which needs an urgent attention too. To improve the condition of community participation, parents should be made aware of their rights of taking active role in the school administration. They should be given more information regarding the functioning and importance of MTA, PTA or any other community association. Informed parents will become members of these associations and will actively participate in the decision making process of their children's schools. Enlightening parents is the key for improving performance of municipality schools.

In the end, on the basis of results of this study it can be said that on majority fronts Bharuch municipality has not performed its job well. Bharuch municipality has not carried out its responsibilities well and it has failed miserably in providing quality education. It is not at all contributing in the central government's effort of universalising elementary education in India. It is thus imperative that Bharuch municipality improve its education system by complete overhauling of its elementary schools. Bharuch municipality should give more priority to this important activity. The authorities should become more conscious about the importance of education in today's knowledge based world. It is now expected from Bharuch

municipality that it keeps education on top in its plan of action and try to improve the education sector of Bharuch city. I firmly believe that what is true of Bharuch municipality schools is also very likely to be true for most of the other local body schools in Gujarat. The improvement efforts are most urgent because the primary education is the foundation. And the foundation should never be weak.

Email: [madhusudan\\_raj@yahoo.com](mailto:madhusudan_raj@yahoo.com)



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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the average annual growth rate in the initial 30 years (1950-51 to 1979-80) of post independence period was only about 3.5 per cent.

<sup>2</sup> The recent violence in the state of Gujarat is one example of these religious problems.

<sup>3</sup> Bharuch is a small Indian city with a population of 148,391 (as of census 2001) situated between Surat and Baroda in the state of Gujarat. More information about Bharuch is available from the following Wikipedia entry - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharuch>

<sup>4</sup> On the other hand the number of private elementary schools has increased in Bharuch city during the time period 1991 to 2002. The number of private elementary schools has gone up to 38 in 2002 from 27 schools in 1991.

<sup>5</sup> One or the other kind means that, many schools had permanent drinking water facilities like water tap where as many schools were only had some temporary arrangements of drinking water like water pot (*Mataka*).

<sup>6</sup> Proper sitting arrangement here includes the benches.

<sup>7</sup> Taken from Department of food and public distribution's site at [http://fcamin.nic.in/dfpd\\_html/welfare\\_scheme1.htm](http://fcamin.nic.in/dfpd_html/welfare_scheme1.htm)

<sup>8</sup> *Sukhadi* is a sweet and very nutritious food made of Jaggery, Ghee and Wheat Flour.

<sup>9</sup> This school again was that remote Kukarwada School.

<sup>10</sup> Precisely they use students' score of standardized tests (mainly of subjects Mathematics and Science).

<sup>11</sup> State is not responsible for this cost. Parents surely give this money because they love and care for their children. But at the same time state can remove other kind of unwanted cost barriers which we have discussed above.

<sup>12</sup> Schools should be such were students like to spend more time instead of running away from it. Good infrastructure helps in making schools more interesting.

<sup>13</sup> Good infrastructure facilities like a well equipped computer laboratory with internet connection will help enormously in improving the quality of education.

<sup>14</sup> Preferably in *child psychology*.

<sup>15</sup> The major clerical work is of the central government's flagship program, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. During visits it is being seen that, teachers were always busy in giving different kind of school data for use of this program instead of going in class and teaching. In this way Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is doing more harm than help.

<sup>16</sup> It is being seen that some teachers were sleeping in the classroom!

<sup>17</sup> For immediate provision of these items resources should be provided by the state and central government if Bharuch municipality is not in a position to provide them. But, Bharuch municipality must try to provide these items on its own, after some period of time, by creating its own pool of resources. But the ultimate solution of this problem is of increasing the economic growth of Bharuch city so that parent's real income rises and then they can themselves afford the private cost of education.