Chapter 5
SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOLING

This chapter analyses the data from in-depth interviews with the children who are currently studying in primary, upper primary and secondary level, those who are drop-outs and with parents of different categories of students. Observation data from schools and the community settings are also analysed here. In this chapter, I seek to understand how the education of the children belonging to different groups are influenced by various contexts, conditions, culture and their social world and space where education takes place. The social world comprises of some sites or fields, each with a specific structure, based on the differentiation and distribution of various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1985b, 1986).

The discussion in the previous chapter indicates that there are clear-cut socio-economic and cultural differences between different social groups: Santals, Mundas, Sountis and Mahantas. Underlying these visible and invisible differences between the various groups, I have attempted to explore how the social position and family background of the children have influence over their school experience and educational attainment. Further, it is important to understand how these factors helped them to meet the teacher's expectation in the classroom drawing upon the perspectives of various scholars (Lareau, 2000; Lareau and Weiner, 2003; Calico, 2012 and Pollard and Filler, 2007). This chapter also highlights how parents belonging to different groups evaluate the extent of the available resources with them and pass on their cultural resources, material resources and their friendship networks, which are provided accordingly to get appropriate schooling and further to improve the career of their children.

The family background, which includes household income, parent's education and parental income, provide the children with social relations (social capital) and cultural resources (cultural capital) to promote advancement (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990, Lareau and Lamont, 1988, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Further, an attempt is made to locate how the teachers perceive both the children and their parents and also their community members.

The findings in this chapter are presented to reveal how the children participate in the process of schooling. Further, the participation in school is also discussed by observing different measures of cultural capital such as academic qualifications of the parents, cultural dispositions, a person's demeanour, speech and manners, attitudes,
behaviour, knowledge, and other interactions and books, artefacts, the dressing styles and lifestyles used by different groups.

5.1. Socioeconomic Contexts

As discussed in the previous chapter, economic differences exist between different groups in the village. The feature of migration is found among all the groups although the purpose of migration varies between different groups. Apart from dependence of people on agriculture, people from different communities also migrate to nearby cities and outside the state to accumulate money to invest on their basic needs or education of their children. With regard to resources, Bourdieu (1986, p.243) discusses three different kinds of capital: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital (discussed in chapter Two). Studies point out that families invest different kinds of resources including time and money to provide education for their children, but the way these resources are used determine the educational advantage of the children (Bourdieu, 1986 and Coleman, 1988). In this section, I will go on to highlight how the differences in social and economic circumstances of different social groups determine participation in schooling. I will also discuss how differences in the attitudes displayed by families of different groups and community support characterise the differences in school participation. This section discusses how hunger, non-availability of school uniform and medicines at times severely affect the nature of absenteeism and schooling participation.

5.1.1. Access to Basic Amenities

Lack of adequate resources is cited as one of the major reasons for those who remain absent in schools and participate less in the teaching learning process in the school. Poverty is found to have a negative effect on school attendance in general and for female children in particular (Jayachandran, 2002). In this section, an attempt has been made to discuss whether poverty acts as a decisive factor for participation of children in education with focus on explaining how children belonging to different communities have access to food and maintain the rules and cultural prescriptions of the school. Most Munda and the Santal families are more prone to the incidence of poverty and some of them struggle to meet basic needs like food and clothing for their children and maintenance of the school uniform. Most of the Munda children have poor attendance record in the schools because not only their school
uniforms are unclean but also the children do not get the extra push from their parents or from their siblings as parents of other communities are able to do.

This is not true to say that Munda parents are not persistent in their efforts to get their children to attend school, that they show little interest or concern about the well-being of children or that they are not aware of the benefits of education like the Mahanta and the Sounti parents. Rather, most of the Munda and the Santal parents being entangled in the vicious circle of poverty have to make extra efforts to earn more income. Both husband and wife work on agricultural land of their own or others. At times, they go to work about 10 to 15 kilometres away from the village for the construction work. For most of Munda and Santal families, the issue of hunger of their children and other family members is the most important concern. Thus, both their time and plans are occupied with work from morning to evening to arrange finances for buying food grains and meeting survival needs.

Bhramar Munda, one of the Munda parents, whose two sons and daughters are studying in Class II. The family possesses with no prominent assets neither a bicycle nor even a plastic chair to offer to the guests. He says:

“I have a small agricultural land, which produces food grain that feeds my family only for a month. Therefore, we go outside for agricultural work and also take whatever work we get inside the village working all day. So, there is no time left with us to see whether our children attend school or not although we tell them to attend school. So, it is up to them to decide whether they intend to attend school. Otherwise we do not have other options because if we remain in the home even for one day to ensure that children attend school, we lose one day of work. So, there are chances that we may not be able to buy the food grains for family members, arrange pocket money and some urgent expenses. Work opportunities are scarce and each day’s work is important for us and we cannot remain in the home just to push the children to school”.

Gurei Munda, one of the parents said, “She has to wake up early morning and go for wage labour. So, she does not have time to check whether they go to school or not. If they are willing to attend, they attend school. What can we do if they are not interested for school?”

Jagati Munda, who discontinued in Class IX says, "No one ever pushed me to attend school. When I wake up from bed in the morning, I rarely see my parents in the home. In the absence of parents, if I feel to attend school, I go to school. Sometimes, my parents ask me to stay at the home to take care of younger siblings.”
Tuna Majhi says, "Me and my wife go to work from morning to evening. We do not have other options. So, the children go to school based on their will."

Pan Majhi who discontinued education in Class IX says, “I have seen very rarely that my parents pushed me to attend school. They were mostly busy in their own world and go for work in the morning and return home only in the evening. Parents have often asked me to remain in the home to take care of my younger siblings or watch the home”.

The principal source of income of both the Munda and the Santals is from working as wage labour. Therefore, they are more dependent upon other's decisions and timings when to reach the field and when to leave the agricultural fields and construction sites etc. The reasons for chronic non-attendance of children in schools can be traced to the subsistence economy, which is more particularly found among the Mundas. They have difficult circumstances in their homes. Munda children generally do not have sufficient clean clothes to wear to school. Wearing dirty clothes results in punishment by teachers. Being identified, isolated and ridiculed in the public space of school assembly acts to discourage them from going school.

At school, the teachers often ridicule the students belonging to Munda tribes and often punish them in front of other children either for their untidy shirts or for their overgrown nails. These actions degrade the self-esteem of students. In the morning assembly, the cleanliness of the children is often evaluated and a child chosen as student leader, usually from the Mahanta community, inspects them after the prayer. It was found that one or other Munda child becomes the victim of this exercise. They are so habituated with the system of punishment that they accept it without questioning the rights and wrongs of the decisions. On the other hand, the teachers do not interfere in these rituals of supervising the cleanliness and deciding the level of punishment to be given.

The psychological conflict of attending school or choosing to be absent works in the minds of Munda children. This fact emerged clearly in a discussion with Heera Munda, a Class II child from the Munda community:

"I have only one uniform for attending the school. If it is not clean, there are chances that I will be punished in the class in front of all the teachers and students. So, I choose to remain absent until it gets clean."
Another child Biren Munda said,

"If my school dress is not clean, I will be beaten. So, I don't go to school."

Children are conscious of such situations and therefore, avoid such events where there are chances of being punished, mocked and taunted by teachers and peers. Heera Munda’s father emphatically mentioned that the crucial issue is that of moneys. If they have sufficient money in their pocket, they can solve the problems of the children with regard to absenteeism from the school because of their unclean clothes. Most of them do not have sufficient earnings and so, they do not have the option to spend money out of their savings:

"Since we don't have sufficient income, arranging a soap or detergent for cleaning school uniforms becomes difficult. Since my earning is not sufficient for living from hand to mouth, I can arrange soap only after working for a day. The government only provides two school uniforms for the whole year and we do not have the capacity to buy more for them. These school uniforms are black and white or in plain colour, and become dirty very soon. They don't remain clean even for a week."

Even though the children and parents belonging to the Munda group know that the school has a norm of going to school with clean uniform, still they do not have any suitable options. Munda children are found wearing the school uniform even after the school hours is over, whether the children are at the home or at the playground; parents are not able to afford more clothes for them. There is no clean place available at home to keep school uniform of children safe and clean. Further, unlike the Mahanta and the Sounti households, there is no proper safe place or almirahs in Munda households where they can keep their clothes. Thus, children keep their clothes wherever they can in the house.

The children belonging to other social groups rarely remain absent because of this reason. School uniforms of these children are kept clean by their mothers, or they are cleaned by the children themselves on the weekends. The children studying in higher classes inform their mothers if the uniforms are dirty or else their mothers clean these on their own. Further, the children who belong to other communities are asked by their parents to change the school uniform when they reach home from school. Most of the Mahanta and Sounti families ensure that their children maintain the same attitude of cleanliness as they do. The parents or guardians of these children consciously pass on the traits of being clean to their children through continuous persuasion or sometimes by giving them strict instructions. In these families, there are strict restrictions that
children should use the school uniform only when they are in the school. It was reported that Mahanta and Sounti children rarely remain absent in the school due to the school uniform being unclean. Only in one case I came across that Mahanta children missing school and this was because these two children went to a picnic and did not report that their uniform had got dirty.

Apart from clean uniforms, access to food emerged as one of the prominent factors affecting the education of children. Children and parents share stories of hunger and how this has impacted their education. The school Mid-Day Meal programme of the Government of India aims to improve the nutritional status of school-going children and encourages children to attend school. However, it does not fully address the needs of many of the Munda and the Santal children whose families experience acute scarcity of food. This has resulted in the poor educational participation of children of the Munda and Santals.

Reflecting upon his inability and incapacity to provide sufficient food to children, Bhramar Munda states,

"Sometimes, the children remain absent because it is not possible to offer food to them. Since we have the only land to produce food grain to meet enough for one month, most of the time I have to depend upon daily wages to buy food grains from others at high prices. If there is no work or I remain ill, I cannot buy food grain. Thus, my children remain on empty stomach during the day time or we give them food little late. We cannot send them to school on empty stomachs."

Sombari Majhi (dropped out in Class X): "We are 15 members in our family including 7 brothers and 5 sisters but our family income is meagre. We bank upon the income of my father and very meagre income of my brother. Most of us were at the school going age and therefore, we were not able to contribute much to the family income. So, we are unable to get the food in time and skip one or the other meal. Sometimes, we are not able to have food in the morning time and have to wait till the evening. So, without any option, I skip going to school due to lack of food."

The Mid-Day Meal provided at the school would have met their basic needs of food in the afternoon time. No doubt, children attending school across the social and gender category eat food in the school. But most of the Munda children have complained that amount of food provided at the school is not sufficient. Reacting to the provision of the Mid-Day Meal, one of the Munda parents mentioned:
"My child often comes home sometimes after the mid-day meal is over and asks for rice to satisfy his hunger. He says that since the amount of food served to him in school is less, he feels hungry."

Concerning the complaints made by some children and parents, one of the teachers reacted,

"Some of the Munda children particularly boys usually go outside the school roam here and there after lunch time. No one can control them after they take the mid-day meal. Since they eat less at home, they feel hungry but the school has many students and catering all of them is important. So, we cannot give them more food every time although we manage to serve them more at some point of time."

On the other hand, Mahanta and Sounti children do not have complaints about the amount of the Mid-Day meal served to them. Mahanta families, who have sound income and highly conscious of education of their children are very particular about the food to be served to their children. In the morning time, parents prepare chakuli pitha, a traditional flat rice-based fried cake, made of rice flour, black gram, refined edible oil and salt are used.

Some of these children have boiled rice, dal and some curry before they go to school. At night, the children take rotis or boiled rice with curry. They rarely take pakhala (rice water), which is very common among the Munda, Santal and Sounti communities. Pakhala is an Odia dish mostly made from of cooked rice soaked and fermented in water.

Nrusingh Mahanta said,

"My mother never offers pakhala as she thinks I may feel sleepy and I may not devote time for studies. I drink more water before I go to bed at night, so that I will feel like going to toilet in the morning which wakes me up. This leads me to start my studies early."

Unlike Munda and Santal families, Mahanta and Sounti families rarely face any problem of feeding their children in time. For Sountis, there is no particular emphasis on food items to be eaten by the children. The children eat the same food as adults. Most of the Munda and Santal families having limited income, and mostly depending on wage labour, struggle to feed their children and thus children's participation in schooling is fully or partially affected by it. They do not have any choice; availability of work and chronic hunger are major issues in their lives.
Research points to the fact that poor nutrition has severe adverse effects on a child's success in school (Buxton, 2011, Govinda and Mukhopadhyay, 2011, Sood, 2011,). Mahanta families having familiarity with dominant cultural codes i.e. preferences and attitude towards healthy eating, access more educational opportunities than the Munda and Santal children who do not have the material resources for adequate nutrition. These attributes of cultural capital are transmitted to the children via their parent's experience (Sullivan, 2001) and thus, they are able to opt for healthy eating habits. This observation pertaining to food preferences among the Mahanta families seems to be congruent with the study of Fismen et. al. (2012), which posits that cultural capital than material capital of different groups is the strong predictor of the regular eating of meal. Further, the study points out that difference in cultural capital point to the differences in nutritional knowledge and social support for healthy eating among families with different socio-economic status. Munda and Santal families affected by material deprivation give their children whatever food items are available within their limited income. Munda and Santal children were often found taking water rice with either one piece of dry fish or a locally grown green leafy vegetable called ‘Saag’.

Photo of Munda child taking meal during Lunch Time

The response of a lady teacher in the primary school who narrates the socio-economic state of Munda parents echoed Lewis (1961) culture of poverty paradigm and
perceives it as one of the prominent factors affecting the education of Munda children. The culture of poverty paradigm states that poor people remain poor largely due to a variety of cultural attributes that block them from escaping poverty. In Lewis (2005) characterisation of culture of poverty, the list of attributes includes lack of orientation towards the future, substance abuse, violent tendencies, and a lack of a sense of history and disinterest in education. The lady teacher shares:

"The Munda people take the locally made rice beer every day. Whatever they earn they spend on buying this. They rarely spend on education of their children. Most of the Munda children do not have pen or note book for number of days but their parents spend money for taking local made rice beer every day. They do not give due importance to education of their children."

It was found that most of the Munda adults took 'handia' (country liquor prepared from rice) in the evening. I was alerted many times by other groups of people in the village not to go to Munda homes in the evening time or walk on the village roads at night. Elder male members of some families also drink 'handia' in the daytime and sleep in the home with the expectation that the earning of their young boy child would help in meeting the daily household expenditure. These young children instead of attending school are engaged in daily wage-earning activity either in agricultural wage labour or construction related work.

Jeevan Munda's wife described that her husband does not go for any kind of work, which would have added income to the family. He drinks liquor during daytime and does not ask the children to go to school. Rather he encourages them to go for wage labour and sleeps in the home after taking the locally made liquor. It is for consideration whether consumption of the locally made beer can be portrayed as the cause of poverty (that affects the education of children) since it is part and parcel of their culture and lifestyle. But it is true that they spend a considerable amount of their income on consumption of 'handia' and other kinds of liquor. On the other hand, these parents are unable to comply with many of the cultural expectations of the primary school such as sending children with clean school uniforms and sending them to school on time due to inability to provide them proper meals. Once they fail to attend the first ritual of the school i.e. attending the prayer class, they skip going to school.

Tribal children, particularly those belonging to the Munda and the Santal communities get less benefit from schooling opportunities due to health-related problem. In fact, the benefits of education are highly conditioned by the child's health
status (Santos, 2011). Heera, who is a Class II student, said that he remained absent for a week as he suffered from malaria. He was given medicine after four days since his parents were penniless.

The poor financial condition does not help them to get medicine on time. The children wait for 1-2 days to get medicine and sometimes they do not have sufficient doses to get cured. These children not only remain absent from the school for the day when they are ill but their absenteeism continues even after 1-2 days due to weakness. So, once they fall ill, they remain at home for 5-6 days.

While taking the interview of Pushpalata Munda, a Class IV child, and of her father, who depends on wage labour and struggles to feed his children, it was revealed that the child remained absent for five days as she was suffering from fever. She got the medicine after two days since the hospital is 5 kilometres away from the village. He was unable to provide medical treatment due to lack of finances.

Tribal children mostly remain ill during the rainy season. Thus, they remain absent during this period. Bhramar Munda, one of the tribal parents, said,

"We don't have an umbrella to save our children from rain. They get wet frequently while going to school or going to shop. The children also intentionally get wet during rains to seek fun and enjoyment. So, the children suffer from cold, cough and fever. Since the hospital is far away, we also struggle to go to the hospital due to torrential rains. We are also busy in cultivation work and wage labour from morning to evening. So, we are unable to take care of the children and provide medical attention in time. Unless we earn money through daily wages, we cannot feed our children and give them medicine. So, it has become a mere compulsion to attend to agricultural work for 1-2 days and then attend to the children's illness."

Some of the Santal parents and children, despite their economic deprivations, are more conscious about education. Therefore, they plan not to skip the school until the illness is serious. Mili Majhi, a Class X girl child, whose mother supports financially, and partly supported by her uncle admits:

"I have to wait for 2-3 days to get medicine when I am ill. I know that my mother cannot go for a long distance to get medicine for me. My uncle helps us to get medicine. However, I manage to go to school when I find my illness was not serious. But I stop going to school whenever it becomes hectic for me to attend school. Because it becomes difficult for me to follow the teaching-learning process once, I remain absent in the classes. I don't have any other
Some Santal parents rely on traditional healers when they find it hard to cure through expensive allopathic medicines.

Sabitri Majhi discontinued her education in Class VI. She has five brothers and four sisters. Being influenced by a Sounti family, who sent their girl child to a residential school, the family members persuaded Sabitri to take admission in a tribal residential school in Muktapur, which is 40 km from the village. The decision of sending Sabitri to residential school was also influenced by the perception of her family that the school located in the village does not provide space for a meaningful learning and fails to promote their levels of knowledge and understanding.

Interaction with her mother and sister revealed that the family’s desire to provide better education for Sabitri remain unfulfilled when she fell ill. She was given medicines after 2-3 days. but the treatment did not yield any result and her family members did not consult good doctors. Her illness continued for 20-30 days and her health worsened. After some days, her family members took the help of a traditional healer, who told them, that the existence of a graveyard near the school was the main reason for her illness. With a thought that resending her to school may again lead to severe illness, they did not attempt at all to encourage Sabitri to continue schooling. She remained at home for 2-3 months and lost touch with her books and study material. In an emaciated condition, she is unable to make plans for her education.

The duration and frequency of absenteeism due to illness among Sounti and Mahanta children are less than other groups of children. They get proper medication on time. Understanding that each day's absence from school is a crucial loss to their children, the Mahanta and the Sounti parents take utmost caution in providing medicine in time and taking care of the children. Sarojini Das, a Sounti mother of three school-going children said:

"We give medicine or consult doctors as soon as we find our children are sick. Else the doctor will get angry with us. The child may also suffer from acute health problem. It will also be a loss to the children's education. We have also got stock of medicine at home for cold, cough, fever and minor illnesses and we administer these as per need".
Most of the Mahanta families, in addition to their financial resources, are also able to channelise their social capital, i.e., support through community networks towards providing medical care and attention to their children on time. Some of the Mahanta families have motorcycles, or if not, borrow from community members to reach to the government hospital. Through their community networks, the children and parents are also able to access medical care. Rashik Chand Mahanta, a Class V student, explained:

“I rarely remain absent from the school due to illness. I got the medicine from the ASHA27 worker, who is staying in the neighbourhood. Since she is our relative, we get easy access to medicine”.

Bhagirathi Mahanta, father of a Class VII student also said, "If my son falls seriously ill, he stops going to school. If the illness is minor, the child takes medicine and attends school. If he is absent, teacher ascertains from us the reasons for not attending school”.

Tuna Majhi, father of three girls and two boys, said, "When my children suffer from minor diseases, I try herbal medicine. If they did not get cured by using thisicence, I take them to the hospital”.

These excerpts clearly reflect that insufficient income, lack of saving and dependency upon daily wage labour and further absence of health care facilities in nearby areas are the primary reason for the delay in treatment and care of the Munda and the Sounti children. As Sujatha (2002) has discussed, poor health is one of the major hindrances in promotion and participation of tribal children in education. Munda and Santal children mostly remain absent due to illness and bad health condition influenced by the state of impoverishment. On the other hand, when they go back to school, a vital link with learning is cut.

On the other hand, most of the Mahanta and Sounti parents are conscious of the health of their children. Because of their adherence to dominant achievement ideology and cultural norms; i.e. cost of being absenteeism in school for academic success in school, they try to minimise the chances of absenteeism of their children using their material resources and community networks through accessing each other's resources in the neighbourhood.

27Accredited social health activists (ASHAs) is community health workers instituted by the government of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) as part of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). ASHA, is selected from the village and is trained to work as an interface between the community and the public health system.
5.1.3. Household Obligation and Labour

Most of the children attend to some work in the village in response to the demands of the household. Boys help in agricultural labour, ploughing and grazing cows. The girls are engaged in household chores such as cooking, caring for their siblings and taking care of the family as a whole. Although boys are also asked to assist in household work, girls across the communities were frequently asked to remain absent from school to do the unpaid and home-based labour either at the time when the mother is engaged in agricultural work or goes to relatives. At these times, girl children assume responsibility for childcare and perform household chores such as cooking and cleaning clothes, sweeping and fetching drinking water.

The opportunity costs of sending children to school is very high for Munda families. The reason is that most of them do not have the capacity to engage labour from outside. Absenteeism is high during the farming season (July-September and December –January). Many studies have found that families with low socio-economic status consider the opportunity costs of sending their children to school high as they wish their children to assist in tending the land and livestock rearing, especially during peak working times (Bhalotra and Heady 2003; Basu, Das and Dutta, 2003).

Bhola Munda, father of two school going children, said:

"I ask my children to be absent from the school to help me during the cultivation work since I am alone and I don't have sufficient money to seek someone's help or engage labour. Further, we have to add more earnings during this time because there are fewer chances to add earnings from wages apart from this time. These gains will help us to arrange food grain for the entire year."

Mangulu Munda said, "My father asks me to work in the fields during cultivation period. I have go to collect the rice at subsidised rates from PDS shop, which is 5-6 kilometres away from my village. So, without any options, I skip going to school".

A similar view was shared by Alok Majhi, a child who completed Class X in 2014:

"I remain absent because I don't have the option to be present in the school when my family needs my presence in the agricultural field. I do the ploughing, planting, cutting and other kinds of farm work, which require considerable

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28Public Distribution System' means the system for distribution of essential commodities to the ration cardholders through the fair price shops, such as rice, wheat, sugar, edible oils, kerosene and such other commodities as are notified by the Central Government under clause (a) of section 2 of the Act.
energy. After the work is over, I am tired and have to take some rest. Unless I take rest for a day, I cannot concentrate on studies”.

Most Munda and Santal families struggle with income from extremely low landholdings. Therefore, they exercise the option of combining whatever source of earning available including farming, livestock rearing, the collection of forest produce and manual labour to survive. Further, since the agricultural produce is less, there is pressure on the families to accumulate food grain for the entire year within the scope of employment avenues available in their reach. Therefore, the poor parents take the alternative route of asking their children to help them in farm labour or other occupations. Having been assimilated to the world of work and being alienated from the school culture and peer groups, the children soon lose interest in school. The case of Biranchi Munda is presented here.

“Biranchi Munda belongs to a poor family and his two brothers are severely polio affected. He has stopped going to school from Class IX. Biranchi is physically fit and had been performing well in examinations. In my third visit to the field, I went to his home. I found that he is not attending the school nor he is in the position to listen to his parents. When enquired upon the reason of his frequent absenteeism from the school, his father replied that he is engaged in some work and has stopped going to school although he has pressurised him to continue his studies.

“Earlier he was regular in the school. But once he had fever and then, discontinued going to school. He was given medicine after 2-3 days of having fever but it took a long time to recover from illness. He did not go to school for 15 days. After that, he did not feel like going to school. He went to his maternal uncle for a week. Although he was absent, none of his family members persuaded him to attend school. Then, he was asked to work here and there and earn some money to support his family. Being frequently absent in the school, he not only failed to understand what was being studied in the school but also felt insulted not being able to perform. On the other hand, having an exposure to financial perspectives and using these finances to advantage, he became more interested in work than study”.

As far as the engagement of children in household work and focus on studies concerned, Sh. Mahanta, Headmaster of the High School, said,

"Parents expect that the child may remain more engaged in work rather than studies. They ask girls to help them in household work and boys to assist them in agricultural work".
Mr. Sethy, Headmaster of the Upper Primary School mentions:

“\textit{In the month of June-July and November-December, most of the children, even those who regularly attend school, remain absent for 4-5 days. These children help their parents in agriculture related work. However, the duration of absenteeism is more among the Munda children as they help their parents in wage labour after working on their land}”.

Some Sounti and Mahanta children also fail to attend school particularly during the peak period of cultivation although nature of the involvement of these children varies. Subhash Naik, a Sounti child in Class X, told me,

"\textit{I stopped going to school sometime during the cultivation period. Although admission. My father asked me very rarely to support him in agriculture related work. I carry the lunch box to the venue where my father is working. I also help my father during the period of harvest}”.

However, there are some Sounti and Mahanta families who discourage their children to attend to any household chores. They stress on the education of children and persuade them to focus more on studies as they realise children's future and whole family's future is dependent on their children's education, a passport to secure job and betterment of family status:

Harihar Das (a Class VIII student in 2014-15 session belonging to Sounti Community):

"\textit{I never remain absent because of any work to be done at home. My parents and grandfather do agricultural work. They always persuade me to engage in studies}”.

Anjana Das (studying in Class V in 2014-15): “\textit{I was rarely absent in school unless something is very urgent. I was not ever asked not to attend school because I have to do household work}”.

A Mahanta father who had completed Class XII is very conscious about the education of his children. He has reservations about sending his children for any kind of work. Neither he nor any of his family members ever persuaded his children to do any job. He said,

"\textit{I never ask my child to do anything. Even when my wife or I fall ill, we manage to do things ourselves. They are children and need to focus more on studies}".
The interaction with children and parents supports that Munda and Santal families, affected by acute poverty, have no option but to engage their children in any labour through which they earn some money. They are surrounded by the vicious circle of fear and insecurity that their income would be insufficient to satisfy even the basic needs of hunger and illness. There is also a feeling that they may not have next opportunity to earn money. So, they engage their children, the future adults, in the family farm not only to compensate the labour that they would have hired due to the paucity of money but also work in other's farm whenever they get any job opportunities to earn more money to meet their future needs. No doubt, the Sounti and the Mahanta families also ask for help from their children. But these kids mainly support their parents in agriculture related work on family fields. However, labour of these children does not directly generate earning to the family. As far as girls are concerned, their participation is primarily affected by their engagement in household work. The parents consciously or unconsciously attempt to engage girls in such work partly as an opportunity for socialising them into the expected social roles that they have to perform in the social worlds after marriage.

5.2. School Context

The school as the contextual space provides a longer duration of stay after the family and thus, has a paramount role in preparing the child for adult roles. Schools are positioned to play a vital role in helping the children to develop social, emotional and educational competence to succeed in the society. But it is imperative to see how the school enacts its role in socio-economic development and combating inequalities. In this section, I discuss whether school’s policy, value system and rituals provide adequate space for schooling for each group of children uniformly or not. I also tried to explore how families of different groups adopt strategies to secure the advantage of a ‘good’ education when there is a general perception that the teaching learning process in the school holds little relevance for their children. Further, I emphasised on to show how friendship networks also help to promote or hamper the chances of participation in school.

5.2.1. School Policy- Admission, Retention and Repetition

Schools, like other public spaces stand as spaces of possibilities (Bourdieu, 1993) for most Sounti and Mahanta families. Others consider it a space for passing time for their children as the teaching-learning process hardly produces any beneficial
impact for them. The unique background combination of gender influences, family practices and language development and social capital shape the child's attitude towards schooling.

For Mundas, the school's dominant value system and rituals do not provide much space for their children to learn. For example, the school has a norm of giving admission to the children those who have attained the age of 6 under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE,2009). The child below the age of 6 neither officially nor unofficially is given permission to attend school. There are two Anganwadis in the village. However, there is no scope of learning opportunity for children in these anganwadis. Many parents are interested to send children below five years to school. However, the teachers are more inclined to follow the bureaucratic norms than devising any local strategies to get children to school. It is mainly due to their customary habits of abiding by the rules and regulations and also for the reason that food supplied under the Mid-Day Meal programmes to the school is as per number of students officially admitted to the school. One of the Munda parents shared his views:

"School do not have space for children below five years of age, they enrol the children who have attained five years of age. Earlier children below the age of five years used to go (with their elder siblings) to the school. Thus, they were able to get an acquaintance with the school environment and were able to adjust with system after going to the school for some period of time. But now school prevents them to send such children to school. School should understand that our (Munda) children cannot learn all of a sudden. They need some time to settle their minds in school".

In most of Mahanta and Sounti families, the children, who are at the stage of attending the school for the first time, got the scope to learn the alphabets and at least the opportunity to sit with their elder siblings in their home and community for quite some time before they attend school. This gives them a sense of what learning is and also act as a mode of school readiness before they enter school. On the other hand, Munda and Santal children, having no scope of exposure to any kind of school readiness conditioning atmosphere neither in the home nor in the community or Anganwadi centre, enter the school campus all of a sudden and thus takes the time to adjust to the school's teaching-learning environment. Therefore, most of the Munda and Santal children gain less skills in the early stages of schools than their peers belonging to the Sounti and Mahanta communities, who had the opportunity to learn at home.
Following the RTE 2009, the school follows a no detention policy\textsuperscript{29}. Except for very few children, many children in the school, particularly among Munda group fail to acquire the basic level of class appropriate learning.

"In Class V, students were asked to read a paragraph from their English book. Only one out of twelve students were able to read the section. Only one Mahanta girl was able to read the lesson. Similarly, when the students were asked to read one section from an Odia book, seven of the twelve students including four out of five Mahanta children, two out of two Sounti children and one of five Munda children were able to read the paragraph. Five students, two boys and two girls belonging to Munda, and only one Mahanta boy was not able to read the paragraph written in Odia language". (Field notes, 22/09/2014).

\textsuperscript{29}The no-detention policy, introduced under the Right to Education Act, automatically promotes students up to Class VIII.
The school headmaster of the Upper Primary School also shared the same experience. He mentioned that many of the students, particularly Munda children have taken admission in Class VI but many of them were not able to write the alphabets or simple numbers, do basic mathematic calculations taught to Class III. They are being given remedial classes\textsuperscript{30} so that they also learn something and follow at least what is being studied in Class VI.

The system of no detention policy has affected the Munda and Santal families as they perceive that their only source of information about the children’s academic performance is now gone. Some of the poor and less educated parents belonging to Mahanta communities were also affected by the no detention policy. Parents have the notion that their children are moving to the next class but unsure of the child's level of learning. Mahanta and the Sounti parents, who regularly monitor their children or they are being tested and retested by their elder siblings to know how they perform in different subjects. Thus, the school's ritual of promoting the children without assessment, whether they are fit for next stage of learning or not, affects the children of the families who are poor and uneducated and they do not have other means to assess or promote their children's level of learning. The remedial class or quality teaching learning process would have been effective in gaining adequate skills in these children.

\textsuperscript{30}These remedial classes are conducted by school teacher themselves in late afternoon or on Saturday classes without any payment provision.
Unfortunately, lack of these facilities disadvantaged and widened the gap between children belong to Munda, Sounti and Mahanta communities at subsequent stages of education.

5.2.2. Teachers’ Availability and Teaching Learning Process

The authority and centrality of roles of teachers of teaching in the school for educational success and preparing children for the future world of work and transmitting knowledge has been under constant interrogation. In the primary school of the village, the deficit in the role performance of the teacher has brought the parents in a serious thought whether to send their children for initiating school education in the village or not. The reason is that they perceive the teaching and learning in the primary school as abysmal, affected by low infrastructure, multi-grade classrooms and lack of commitment and interest of the teachers towards the classroom teaching. The villagers saw little benefit in sending their children to these schools. As Velaskar (2006) reports, "In Dalit (and tribal) dominated schools, the generalised pattern is that the problem of the inadequate number of teachers has been compounded by the problem of de-motivated teachers, mostly result in teacher absenteeism and irregular attendance, especially teachers of non-Dalit background". Further, adoption of boring and uninspired teaching methods make for unsatisfactory teaching learning and thus is seemed to be no value addition to the knowledge and skill of the children.

Parents, mainly belonging to the Munda community, are less confident about the outcome of sending their children to primary school. They are led by the understanding that teachers are less interested in delivering teaching to the learners. But there is no practical alternative for them since they cannot bear any expenditure beyond this. Bhramar Munda, a father of a Class II child, sends his children to school but he is doubtful about its benefits. He has a perception that the teaching-learning process in the primary school is not up to the standard and the same is not going to help in improving the educational level of the children. Therefore, he was thinking of sending the children to private tuition. However, lack of finances did not permit this although he was ready to arrange finances to educate one of his sons. No one is ready to act as tutor in his locality for Munda children.

"There are no facilities in the school. We are not able to offer them any teaching-learning material. Though we are sending our children to school but we don't think there is any scope for meaningful learning in the school. The reason is that the teachers are not teaching properly in the school. Even if the
children are at the school for a long time, they are not able to write even an alphabet. Only for the sake of sending to school, they are sending but in the real sense they are learning nothing. The teachers don't control them for teaching. They just sit in the class. Instead of teaching to our children, they are being instructed to steal vegetables from others' land”.

As far as student population of the primary school concerned, Munda children and Mahanta girls constitute the large majority. Mahanta parents send their girls to school although they know that this school is not a place for meaningful learning. One of the reasons of sending the girls to school is that it does not cost them much. However, they prefer to send their boys to some other school at their relative’s place or in nearby village. Some of the poor Mahanta families also send their boys to the schools located in the village

Many of the parents and guardians realise that most of the teachers do not have the qualities that a teacher needs to uphold. Sankar Mahanta, one of the guardians shared,

“Teachers are not interested to know what is the learning level of the children and whether these kids are following whatever is being taught in the class or not. They are not even interested to know the children those who attended the classes in the morning, are sitting till the end of the class. Many children return home after the lunch is over. But the teachers do not pay attention to them. Even they do not learn anything in lower classes, progress to the next classes. A Class V child even does not know the simple arithmetic and how to read the simple text ”.

Children studying in the secondary level also admit that they are not able to perform better in some subjects like Mathematics, English and Science now because they were not taught well when they were in studying in primary school. Alok Majhi, who completed Class X in 2014 said,

“I did not score well in subjects like Mathematics and English. Since the teachers were rarely teaching us anything in primary schools, my basics in English and Mathematics were weak. I did not get any scope for tuition like other children due to the financial problem. So, I was able to understand the teaching in Mathematics and English less than other students and my performance got affected by it”.

Classroom observations and further examination of the students’ responses reveal that except some of the Mahanta and the Sounti children, who are given tuition
or instructional support by their parents, others are not able to perform as they are expected to. As discussed earlier, in Class V in primary schools, when the children were given the task to read, except one child belong to Mahanta group, none of the children were able to read English. Except one girl child, whose father is conscious about the education of his children and even arranged private tuition for her, none of the Munda children are able to read even a full sentence from the textbook written in Odia language. A similar situation is also recorded in the lower classes,

“In a classroom, which is sitting space for students of Classes III-IV, the interaction was held with students to know their reading and writing skills. Except one Munda child, four to five children were not able to write their father and mother’s name in Odia language”. (Field notes, 23/09/2014)

My observation revealed that the most of the Mahanta children studying in Class III have better reading and mathematical skills than children belong to the Munda community studying in Class IV.

Alok Majhi, a Santal boy, who just passed secondary level of education, feels that he would have performed better if proper facilities would have been in place:

“Teachers never address our difficulties. They are always focusing and interacting with the students those who are performing well. Even if we ask the teachers, they mock and question our competence. Teachers tell that it is so easy but I am very weak to understand”.

The above experiences shared by the parents and children are similar to the observation by Cullingford and Morrison (1997), when they state that the formal aspects of school while remaining separate from the social world of children's culture, the child looks for alternative form of support. In the studied village, mainstream schooling practices where the children have to be regular in school and are expected to possess all required skills such as reading and writing skills for academic accomplishment, some children mostly among Munda communities and some cases among Mahanta communities, are not able to perform these academic and social skills and thus get the recognition and identity of being non-performer. As in the above cases, it was found that most of the Munda children being frequently absent and not having the skill to perform reading or writing tasks are punished by the teachers. Some of them also experience boredom due to the incapacity of understanding the knowledge transacted in the classroom.
Being continuously rejected by the teachers, the main official actors in the school, the children are forced into a situation where they question his/her place and identity inside the school. Pollard defines this process as ‘Socially fulfilling process' which occurs when the strategies of the teacher mesh with those of the children. This results in a type of 'secondary differentiation' whereby the social consequences of teacher strategies are intensified by the children themselves.

Parents across communities are dissatisfied with the performance of the teachers. Hare Krushna Naik, one of the influential persons in the village, who was in the position of President of the School Management Committee of the primary school since the last 12 years said,

"Ethi Niti Niyam Kichii Nahin; Certificate khali Naba Katha, Pathara quality kichhi Nahin; Pathara mana danda bahut kharap (Odia version")

"The school doesn't follow any rules and regulations. Education provided in the primary school doesn't have any quality. The teachers come to school as per their convenience and also leave the school as per their wish. They do not follow school timetable. Lady teacher doesn't teach at all. She does not have the capability to teach. It is very unfortunate that she is teaching in Class I and II. where children are expected to acquire basic level of learning. Even as the children move to higher grades, they do not know writing alphabets, reading Odia books etc."

On the other hand, another teacher who teaches in Class III and IV conveyed that I cannot do anything if the children do not learn. I have to complete my task of what is to be done in Class III and IV. I cannot teach them alphabets which should be taught in lower Classes. Villagers have made many attempts for transfer of old teachers and addition of new teachers in the school. But there is no change in the fate of primary school.

Hrushikesh Naik (Sounti Tribe), who was earlier president of School Management Committee shared,

"I had an opportunity to share the issue regarding school’s abysmal teaching learning process with state administration in one of the events organised at state level by the Peoples’ Cultural Centre (PECUC), a NGO, which is working in some villages of Kendujhar district. After hearing from the state administration, the education officials from the district also visited the school and had interaction with the villagers. District Project Coordinator and sub-
collector wanted to transfer the lady teacher. But the teacher is not transferred yet.

In another attempt, the School Management Committee tried to shift the responsibility among teachers regarding the allocation of Classes. The reason is that if another teacher can teach in Class I and II, there might be chances that the children will learn alphabets and acquire basic level of learning, which will help the children acquiring some meaningful learning. But the effort did not see the success. The sub-inspector of the schools said that the class allocation cannot be changed.

The village folk has also given the proposal to appoint a young contract teacher in place of these three teachers who are teaching since years. But the request is not yet approved and there is also no optimism about the approval since the teachers have the strong alliance with the higher officials at the district level”.

While the parents with better socio-economic status arrange private tuition for their children or if possible, they send their children to private schools nearby the villages. Munda parents, without any alternative send their child to school run by ineffective teachers. On the other hand, many of the Sounti and Santal parents have kept their option open for sending their children to tribal residential ashram schools through their social networks. The ineffective teaching learning process has intensified the existing historical and social divide and perpetuates social inequality between these social groups and further their emancipator project of achieving something in life. The primary school has become just a window of despair. The situation which what Pathak (2002) says about the schools that are not English medium:

"And the schools where medium of instruction is not English tell an altogether different story. There is no trace of power or privilege; failure is all around. The funds are inadequate; the teachers are not stimulated to teach; the students are already demoralised, and parents too do not hope for much. There is no sincere effort to abolish this dual system of education. It has been taken for granted that Inequality should begin right from childhood”.

The headmaster of primary school said, "Since the Munda children do not learn in the lower classes, the gap is widened among the Mahanta and Munda children once they go to higher classes."

In the institutional space, the teacher along with the rules and rituals prescribed by the state play the central role of reproduction and maintain the pre-existing order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1998). It was found that most of the Mahanta and Sounti children have access to tuition and dominant cultural and educational capital at different sites such as
home and communities apart from the sites of school. On the other hand, the Munda and Santal children are doubly disadvantaged as neither they have access to any kind of educational resources in their home and community setting nor the school teacher helps them to gain knowledge as the teaching learning process in the school is very abysmal. Thus, unequal distribution of knowledge, partly due to the ineffective teaching-learning process in the school and partly due to non-existence of any mechanisms in the family and community for Munda and Santal children to compensate the poor teaching-learning process, has affected these children terribly. This observation echoed in the writings of Delpit (1997), which points out that the unequal distribution of knowledge and skills to working-class and minority students reflects their exclusion from the codes or rules of the culture of power operating in schools.

5.2.3. Friendship Networks, Social Identity and Peer Interaction

During my interaction and observation in the school setting, I found peer interaction as one of the broad zones affecting their education. Membership of peer groups during adolescence is found to be of paramount importance as an alternative form of cultural identity affecting their education. Sluckin (1981) points out that peer group interaction helps in the process of learning and acquiring social competence for a preparation of adult life through school experience. It also provides scope for pupils to learn various rules and rituals in the students' culture (where the hierarchy exists between pupils) to cope up successfully with potential and actual conflicts. For Cullingford and Morrison (1997), the peer group is quite significant as they help children define the world, by making sense of situations and in establishing an individual's identity. Peers are also vital, not only because they offer support and security in times of need but also because they help a person's sense of identity by reflecting, reinforcing and reciprocating valued aspect of self.

The norms of being in the peer group and further interaction are mostly governed by the rules linked to the identity of belonging to one's social group. Corsaro (1997) states that central value of children's peer cultures is "doing things together," and "the protection of interactive space. Peer culture refers to “a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share interaction with peers"(Corsaro, 1997). In primary school, the peer culture is centred on various organised and unorganised academic and non-academic activities such as prayer class, cleaning the school campus, taking the mid-day meal, play game and other activities.
The engagement of students in these activities defines how they share the social bonding or friendship with each other in role taking and role performance. The children's participation in these activities provide them opportunities for development of social networks. Student engagement refers to student's feeling about both extrinsic rewards that are attached to school work and intrinsic rewards that are derived from curriculum and manner and the way in which educational activities are structured. On the other hand, social bonding is defined as the social dimension that accompanies schooling such that students who are tied to others and who believe in the value and legitimacy of school will be less likely to be the drop-out.

The social bonding between peer networks was found to have considerable influence on academic and social behaviour of the students. The social and structural resources that are found within peer networks when accumulated and shared, mostly affected the state of education of the children and subsequent outcomes (Crosnoe and Needham 2004, Matsueda and Anderson 1998, Ream and Rumberger,2008). During interviews with the children and through observations in the school and the community settings, it was found that peer influences within their community facilitate or hamper children’s educational participation. When Bipin Naik, one of the Sounti students from Class X was asked how they maintain friendships and how it helps them, he said,

"Hemanta Das, (a boy from Sounti community), is my best friend. We go together to school and also sit beside each other. We help each other in the times of need. If book, pen or any other stationery are not available, we mutually support each other. I do not have English Grammar book but I adjust it taking help from my friend. We clear doubts on topics from each other".

Similarly, many children in the village use their friendship networks to compensate the lack of educational resources to achieve success in their studies. Mili Majhi, a Santal child, does not have any friends within the village to support her in studies. She tries to negotiate her friendship with children coming from the nearby village. Even when most of her classmates in the community did not visit the school to prepare themselves at home and focus on their studies, she has chosen to go to school so that she can take the help of her friends, those who are attending classes in reading the test paper/practice set for Class X examination.

Mahanta or Sounti children mainly work as monitors in school or members of school cabinet. This reinforces the fact that they are the natural leaders and can do whatever they like. They consistently attempted to show the increasing dominance over
others through varieties of actions like beating, rough behaviour and discriminating through gestures.

Observation in the school setting provided a sight into the helplessness of Munda children in the absence of support from teachers and peers:

“In Class V, when I was dictating five words and asking them to write these five words in Odia, some children were not able to write some of the phrases. After I had got the impression that they are not in the position to write these words, I gave them a clue that these words are written in the cloth Blackboard in which some instructions are written. They should search for it if they want to write these words. It gave these boy children an opportunity to play and make fun and in this process, the hanging cloth fell upon them. I was not able to guess what happened but I found one of the Mahanta children, Himanshu Mahanta and Sagar Pradhan, a Sounti boy beating Raja Munda, who was not at all complained to teacher and had not said anything to them. Raja Munda started crying (Field notes, 18th September 2014)”

"Just before the prayer begun, the children were busy cleaning the school campus. There are two children, nominated as the student leader in school cabinet, supervising these activities. While some students were found to involve themselves in these activities, others are roaming here and there. Suddenly, one of the students, Sagar Pradhan, nominated as School cabinet member, tried to run after one of the Munda children to make him engaged in the cleanliness activities. He started beating him with the small sticks very ruthlessly. But the Munda child did not complain to the teacher. It made me feel that giving the complaint to teacher has no meaning for the child"(Fieldnotes,22nd September 2014).

The differences in social practices that parents and communities rehearse in their every social life are mostly reproduced inside the school boundaries. There are clear cut boundaries set in the mind of the children regarding whom they should interact. The children in the School were found to interact and play with the particular peer group and a specific type of pupil, mostly belonging to their own social group. Most Mahanta and Sounti children are conscious about the social and educational bonding with the peer group. These instructions are coded and transferred to the children through family socialisation. One of the Class IX students, Nrusingh Mahanta, shared the instruction given by her mother:

"My mother used to tell me that most of the people in the village are our enemies. They do not tolerate us. She repeatedly says most of the children our
village are naughty. So, I should concentrate on my studies and not interact with them."

Similarly, one of the Mahanta parents also stressed that he instructs his children to be disciplined and to be careful about peer groups. Bhagirathi Mahanta said,

"I have told my son strictly not to fall in bad company. Else your career will be spoiled. Fortunately, both of my son and daughter spend most of their time at one of my seniors during school days, which belonged to our caste. He has two children, with whom my children study together in the tuition. They also play together nearby there."

Sombari Majhi, a Santal girl said, "Since I did not have the books, I took the help of one of my classmate from Mahanta community. But her father came to my home on the same day evening and took the book back from me".

The seating arrangement in the classroom is testimony to the fact that the children per share social identity. More than gender segregation in sitting arrangement, social segregation is more visible. In most of the classes in primary school, girls are found sitting with the boys belong to same social group. Mahanta children sit with their own group of children. Similarly, Sounti and Munda children were found to sit with their own group of children. In-group favouritism was quite noticeable among the children in many of the activities in the school. For example, the children were found to cooperate their own group members to complete the task given to them as it seems each group members are conscious of protecting their self-image of the groups in front of others. These children exhibit their identity in homework and exercises given to them.

In one classroom interaction, I gave an exercise to the children to know their depth of knowledge and how each one is helping other in solving the problem. They were given a task to answer mathematics questions:

"I took the role of the teacher in Class V since the Headmaster who teaches in Class V was absent on that day. I gave them a task of multiplication and instructed them to do the task on their own. I told them that If they fail to do the task, they can approach each other. At first, a Mahanta girl Sumitra, who stood first in completing the task, supported another Mahanta girl from her neighbourhood. Another Mahanta girl, who completed the task, just asked Sandhyarani to confirm her answer. One of the Sounti girls, who was sitting with Mahanta girls, submitted the answer. [One Munda girl took the support of another Mahanta girl sitting nearby and answer the question]. Two Munda girls were doing the task together although they were not able to answer it properly
and they did not dare to ask any of them for support to complete the task nor anyone came to support them. One Sounti boy, after finishing the task helped another Mahanta boy. At the end, two Munda girls were not able to do the answer. None of their classmates came to help them.” (Field notes, 18th September 2014)

The children develop affinity among themselves belong to their group as a result of increased space of interaction living in the same neighbourhood and further due to the networks among their parents. In the above cases, the children appear to learn through their already existing interaction between them and those who have better access to knowledge. The peer bonding between Mahanta children become stronger because many of the children attend tution. Further, being guided by skilled adult, most of the Mahanta children get the confidence and knowledge of what is right or wrong not only in teaching and learning but they also exhibit confidence in answering the questions in the class. On the other hand, most of the Munda children do not have the adequate access to any space, where they can avail guidance of a skilled adult for studying together and strengthen their bonding.

The positive peer support found to have considerably positive impact on schooling of the children as several studies reported students with positive peer support are more engaged than students who did not have positive support (Brophy, 1999,
Dishion, McCord and Poulin, 1999, Shin, Daly and Vera, 2007, Walker and Sprague, 1999). In the above cases, Mahanta girls having better interaction among themselves in their community and are more focused on their studies help each other in resolving the task given to them. Even they were found to sit silent and attentive in the classroom in comparison to the other social groups.

Jagati Munda, who was not able to cross the boundaries of secondary schooling and dropped out in Class IX, reflected on his life story. entered to secondary school, a new surrounding in Class VIII without any of his friends from his neighbourhood, who were accompanying him when he was in lower classes. In the absence of most of his peers from the neighbourhood to accompany him as a friend, he found Kalia Munda, as a good friend during school days at secondary level and both dropped out from the school.

There is a wide gap between values and norms expected inside the school and his peer world, fundamentally different from what are being practised, valued and accepted in the school and wider society. Most of his friends in the community skip classes, did not do homework and were involved in the activities which are contradictory to the practices for achieving success in school. As Jagati said,

"After going to school for some days after the admission to Class VIII, I found Kalia Munda becoming a close friend of mine. Both of us sat at the back. Like me, he was also not able to understand what was being taught in the school. Both of us had no interest in attending school. So, we skipped classes after some days. We went for fishing and roaming here and there in the village whenever we did not feel like attending school”.

Jagati admitted that his family never controlled his intentions of attending or being absent from school. He remained absent from school from Class VI onwards. Jagati Munda admitted that being frequently absent in class, he was not able to understand whatever being taught in the class. He was also beaten once because he was not able to read from the book. He said that they (Munda children) are being underestimated and hence, frequently absent in schools. In the process, they are not able to follow the instructions and sequence of understanding the subjects. Due to lack of guidance and knowledge in the lower classes, they are not able to grasp anything.

Jagati Munda also shared how the summer break after the term end examination helps their attachment to each other stronger. He said,
"The affinity between Kalia Munda and me become stronger after Class VIII terminal examination during vacation period. We started roaming here and there, fishing and playing cricket together. We went for wage labour and supported the family. We continue to spend part of our earning from wage labour on leisure time activities. Once we went to Kaila’s relatives of without informing our families. We were so much interested in these activities that when the school re-opened, we were not in the mood to attach ourselves to the regular disciplinary habit of school.”

According to Jagati Munda, “it was very difficult for him to stay in the school without understanding what is taught in the school. Further, returning from a vacation, sitting idle in class did not make a sense for him. He said,

"Teachers did not teach well. I was not able to follow what teachers were teaching in the class. Sometimes I had the competence to answer but did not answer thinking that people will laugh. I feel as I am a stranger in the class. I was always bored in the class. The boredom in the classroom made me miss adventurous fishing, roaming in the village and market places, accompanied by my friend Kalia Munda. After going to school for some days, me and Kalia Munda stopped going to school. Our parents did not put pressure on us to go to school Afterwards, they totally stopped going to school.”

Jagati’s description points to the alienation he and his friend felt in the school. Negligible interaction with other peer continuously puts him in the dilemma whether to remain inside or outside of the school. Even when he was frequently absent, none of the teachers took interest to enquire about him. Further, his identity as a valued member is accepted in his peer world, which he rarely feels in the school world. The children belonged to his community, those who no longer attend school but were sources of his enjoyment and interesting moments, also helped him to decide on being pulled him out of school. These experiences put together influenced Jagati Munda to drop out from school. In the process of schooling, many children like Jagati construct the self-image of being an outsider to the space of schooling.

When I was in the field, Bikram Munda, a Class V child and his brother Raja Munda had not attended school for 15 days. They remained irregular as none of them is interested in attending school; rather they are interested in fishing and roaming around the village. Since one of them is absent, the other child is also absent:

"Just around 9 am (before school hours), I started going to the habitation shared by Munda people to see how the parents are preparing the children or
children are preparing themselves for attending school. When I reached there, I found two children are preparing their fishing rods to go for fishing. I asked them whether they will attend school or not. After sometime, their mother tried to convince them but they were not listening to her. At last, she went with a stick to beat them and ran after them. Being unsuccessful in her attempts, she went to work. Both Bikram and Raja started preparing for their fishing and did not bother about school. (Field notes, 15/12/2014).

According to their mother, both children were regular in primary school. But after Bikram Munda joined Class VI, he stopped going to school regularly. Since he is not able to read the books, he is being punished in the school. Being afraid of being beaten in the school, he did not go to school. Similarly, his younger brother Raja Munda is also punished for unclean clothes and thus remain absent till his clothes are clean. If one remains absent, the other also does not go to school. They go together for fishing and engage in other kind of work. Like Jagati, these two brothers, being aware of their limits of reading skills or unclean clothes, which are not valued by schools, resort to chronic absenteeism. On the other hand, having an opportunity to seek enjoyment among their peer groups who are the outside the school, they would rather remain absent.

Photo: Enjoying time in the Pond during school time
There are also some Mahanta children like Prafulla Mahanta, a Class VII student, who rarely attends school. His father said that on average he attends school two days in a month. He shared that the children have a group. If one of them does not go to school, he also does not attend school.

Sebati Munda, a Class X fail student, also realizes how she was feeling isolated in the school. She said,

“The teachers never ask us anything while they ask to Mahanta children. My classmates rarely talk to me. Earlier when I was in primary school, she was friend with Kabita Munda (a girl from her neighbourhood) and was feeling comfortable in the school. She was promoted and took admission in upper primary school. I was alone and no-one helped me. Even during examination, no one helped me although some children were helping each other.”

The teacher believed that the Munda children are not comfortable in the class with majority of the children because of their frequent absenteeism. Since they are frequently absent, they are not able to develop friendships. This was reported in the interview with the teachers:

Headmaster: “Since the Munda children are irregular, they interact less with other children. On the other hand, Mahanta and Sounti children come to school in
group and they are regular. So, scope of interaction among Mahanta and Sounti children is more.

Mr. Dalei (A teacher): “Munda children feel bored because they are irregular and thus not able to follow what is being taught in the school like other children. Also, they do not talk to others since they rarely attend School”.

In the process, Munda children adopt the strategies to accompany the peer group with whom they are comfortable and stands contrast to other normal pupils as discussed by most of the children. But it becomes very difficult to sustain interest and stay focused on study when the children do not find the peers of his/her gendered and social background from their neighbourhood in a school boundary where she has to stay for long 10 hours’ duration. For example: Sebati Munda was able to manage her time with Kabita Munda when they were in primary school even though they were in different classes. After Kabita got promoted to Upper Primary School, she became alone and develops the feeling of being isolated. Jagati Munda also shared a similar experience.

Once they feel detached, children search for a group which is affirming, seek satisfaction and give out the freedom to do whatever they want. In this way, when the child finds that his/her identity is not valued by the majority they seek to perform their identity in alternative peer culture.

Interaction with children also accounts for the fact that positive relationship between pupils help in academic success even there are numerous problems at home and school. In the absence of supportive environment at home and rewarding relationships at school, when most of the peers are not intact with one or other peers, children balance the need for peer attachment with those, who share similar social and familial roots. In negotiating peer relations, consciously or unconsciously, they look at the commonalities exist between them at the family and community level. Chandan Munda, who successfully completed Class X in 2015, along with his friends, (both are the first from the Munda community to complete secondary level of schooling), said,

"We became friends since our early days. I attend school when my friend attends school. We play together. We share books and stationery since our families are unable to provide these. Sometimes, we help each other to clear doubts and understand concepts. We are very close to each other”.

The affinity between both the children also came to my notice during my interaction with them.
Alok Majhi, the first child in his family to complete secondary level of schooling revealed that Jian Majhi, his cousin brother who also temporarily stays in his family and is a classmate and helps him a lot. He consults Jiban Majhi whenever he is unable to understand concepts in Mathematics and English since teachers rarely help in understanding these concepts.

The narratives reveal that Chandan Munda, Alok Majhi and other children in their community lack economic and social capital to educate themselves. They have also faced an inherently difficult class identity in school among teachers and peer groups. However, they were able to resolve their educational difficulties through peer support. They engage themselves with various social and recreational activities to strengthen their bonding consciously or unconsciously. These help them to access educational resources, even when their parents are unable to provide these. The peer bonding with each other helps them to complete the schooling (although at times with low grades) and achieve ‘successes in education. While becoming, a successful learner is a difficult task in the setting where they are always encircled by the expectations to help their parents in household work and also insufficient educational resources, the peer support coupled with sense of developing social identities against the moments of exclusion and isolation, help some of the Munda and the Santal children to succeed in the process of schooling.

Studies point out that as social capital decreases, drop-out tendency increases (Carbonaro, 1998, McNeal, 1999 and Teachmen et. al, 1996). The access to available peer social capital decreases even one Munda child leaves the school, or joins the upper primary school or drops-out. Since peer networks of Munda community in school remained confined within their community and they are a small group, departure of even one member leads to low levels of peer social capital. Thus, they develop feeling of isolation and loneliness in the school. On the other hand, most of the Munda children promoted to higher classes are not able to develop the network of friends. Gradually, these children find school environment alienating and unpleasant and then, drop-out from the system. Unlike Mahanta and Sounti children, there is also no mechanism of tuition where the tutor encourages the student nor there also encouragement by the parents to stay in School.
5.3 Summary
In this chapter, I attempted to discuss how differences in social and economic circumstances of different social groups determine participation in schooling. Further, this chapter reflects on how various school factors influence education of children.

Compared to Munda and Santal children, the children of most of the Sounti and Mahanta families are more progressive and participate in schooling because of their sound economic and social background. The entitlement and better access to resources by Sounti and Mahanta families provide their children advantage to gain most from the school. The involvement of the parents in the education of the Mahanta and Sounti children are high and the children are supported by home tuition and peer involvement. Even some of the Mahanta and Sounti families do not have adequate financial assistance, their social capital such as community networks, peer support and cultural resources such as language and attitudes towards schooling enable them to avail more opportunities.

Munda and Santal children have different experiences in the process of schooling. As far as socio-economic context and its influence on schooling is concerned, hunger, unavailability of school uniform or unclean uniform and ill-health and also financial difficulties at times severely affect the nature of absenteeism and dropout among them. These, in turn, are directly related to the opportunity cost of sending the child to school. They rely on family labour and are expected to add to the income of the family through wage labour in the village. Migration pattern of adults also affects their schooling.

School's admission, detention and promotion policy were not conducive to the tribal children for acquiring appropriate level of learning. Besides, influenced by the performance of the teachers, parents had little confidence to send their children to school. Peer to peer interaction, as one of the broad zones, affects their education within the processes of schooling such as influence their focus, motivation and leading to asocial behaviour.

The next chapter will explore how the interplay of economic, social and cultural factors at home, school and communities affect school participation. The chapter will also discuss how cultural practices, language practices, parental involvement and child rearing practices at home facilitate or hamper the educational participation of children from different communities.