Chapter II

An Overview of Literature
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II.1. Introduction:
A plethora of literature has appeared during the last two decades on the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the organization, monitoring and maintenance of rural facilities such as education, health and other social amenities. The period reviewed here pertains to early 1980s till the recent. Inspite of the geographer’s preoccupations with micro and multilevel planning, role of Panchayat in this context has not been examined in detail. The existing literature on Panchayati Raj in West Bengal can be broadly divided into two categories- appraisals of performances of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, emphasizing the formidable gains thereby and those that have been skeptical about it. Most of the studies have dealt with the structural and functional aspect of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the context of rural development programmes in the state. A few have also examined the political aspect of Panchayati Raj focusing on the question of people’s participation in decision-making process. These studies are quite revealing but no micro level studies in the context of education in rural West Bengal have been done attempted so far. Recently a few studies i.e. Ghatak and Ghatak (2002) and Acharya (2002) have appeared on this dimension. These studies though significant leave several questions unanswered. The survey of literature on various aspects of elementary education and Panchayat therefore includes the works done by scholars from all disciplines. The literature have been classified on the basis of the following themes: (i) socio-economic, cultural and political factors in the process of decentralized governance (ii) school related factors and role of Panchayat Raj Institutions (iii) linkages between school and community (i) decentralization, community participation and role of Panchayat in context of education (iv) Influence of grassroots political processes on education (v) government policies and interventions. Finally an attempt has been made to identify the gaps emerging from the overview with respect to theoretical and methodological issues of knowledge.

II. 2. Process of Educational Development: Socio-economic and Political linkages
The studies, which appeared so far, pertain to out-of-school children tried to highlight some of the general socio-economic problem. Attempt to examine the socio-economic, cultural and political factors in the process of decentralized governance were rarely attempted.

Nevertheless, a few researchers have seriously attempted to explore the problem of primary education through empirical studies. Studies from the perspective of geographical pattern or regional points of view are very limited, where location specific problem could be explored.

The present overview of literature includes the studies, which are general in approach but help in understanding of the problems. It will throw light on extent and causes that contribute to the incidence of the out of school children in the socio-economic and political set up. Lot of studies has tried to determine the social, economic and cultural characteristics of household and school related factors as reasons for children not going to school.

Earlier economic reasons like poverty and child labour were cited as main reason for children not attending school particularly in official circles. Sachdev, Malhotra and Murthy (2001) using state level data demonstrated the fact that the states with lower income levels, high poverty ratios have high incidence of dropouts\(^{14}\). A study done by NCAER (1994) in 15 states found that drop out rate to be 4 times higher from poor families than affluent household in 1992-93.\(^{15}\) According to Annual Report 2003-2004, the lower income groups in rural West Bengal had high percent of never enrolled children. Public Report on Basic Education (1999) on the basis of field survey in north Indian states noted that even in the backward Hindi speaking areas 98 percent of the poor parents felt education important for boys while for girls 89 percent of the parents felt so. Kiran Bhatt\(^{16}\) had rightly stressed that factors like opportunity cost of schooling and direct cost of school needed examination in order to access the extent to which poverty constrained on schooling of children.

A few mentioned that work as a factor often constrained schooling of children (Sudha Despande 2001; Public Report of Basic Education 1997; Abid Burki and Lubna Shahnaz 2001; Cigno and Rosati 2001 etc.). Sachdev, Malhotra and Murthy (2001) also found high correlation between drop out rates and incidence of child labour in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. Similar findings was observed in West Bengal by Sengupta and Guha


\(^{15}\text{NCAER (1992), 'Non -Enrolment, Drop Out and Private Expenditure on Elementary Education: A Comparison Across States and Population Groups', New Delhi, 1992.}\)

They found that in West Bengal 50 percent of the working girls were likely to drop out from school. Income earning activities raised five times the probability of drop out of girls (Sengupta and Guha 2002: 1634). Bhatti (1998) stressed that the relationship is not straightforward as has been believed commonly.

Lot of literature says that opportunity cost of children's time is high in poor families. Kulkarni (1996) argued on the basis of rural surveys conducted by NCAER in six villages of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh that girls were the main victims of domestic work who had to take responsibility for younger siblings and household work. Pande's study (1996) in the hills of Uttar Pradesh found that collection of firewood from long distance act as constraint for girl's access to school. Debi's (1996) study in Orissa found that larger the dependency ratio, higher was the percentage of out of school children. Contrary to these findings, few scholars did not found any relationship between children not going to school and their engagement in household duties.

Most of the literature had highlighted on the parental education as a major factor in promoting children to go to school. It was argued that inter-generational transmission effect of educational attainment of parent motivated children to go to school. Sengupta and Guha (2002) found parental especially maternal education influence girls' schooling. Lack of motivation as a cause for children not sent to school was one of the contentious issue in the literature. Public Report of Basic education (1999) stated that although parent's had positive attitude for both boys and girls' education, motivation for education of girls was lacking. Dreze and Sen (1995) argued that low perceived value in terms of economic and non-economic returns attached to female education in much of North India determined motivation of parents. Thus access to education for girls was often culturally by theses scholars. Relevance for formal education was determined largely by the societal normative structures and expectations (Channana 1990: 65; Bhatti 1998; 1861). Mehrotra (1995) in her study in Uttar Pradesh found that parents perceived education in terms of personal benefit for daughters after marriage (also Bhatti 1998: 1863). Parent's demand for education was determined not only by their attitudes but also by their assessment of the cost and outcome of education choices particularly for the girls. Increasingly, several scholars had stressed the role of the direct cost of cost as a reason for 'parents to withdraw

children from school'.\textsuperscript{22} The government expenditure per child at the primary level in West Bengal was found to be Rs 1,302.\textsuperscript{23} Tilak (1995) using NSSO 42 Round data on 'Participation in Education' found that a large number of students paid tuition fees, examination fees etc. even in government schools that pose burden on families. Sengupta's (1998) study in West Bengal also found direct cost of schooling imparted in providing girls with uniform, books, learning materials and tuition fees compel girls to drop out. Kumar (1989) had extensively analyzed the socializing process of children to perceive poverty as a consequence of social and economic relationships. He suggested for identifying the problem of poverty, identifying the cause of poverty, converting Fiere's methods into neutral classroom technique without politics.\textsuperscript{24}

Naik (1999) pointed to the weakness of the formal system of education and mentioned that the benefits accrue to the minority elite class.\textsuperscript{25} He advocated for strong vocational core of education and family life education according to the local needs and needs of the youth in rural areas. An important suggestion is of course is the community participation involving the youths, educational institutional agencies, agricultural universities imparting education in agriculture, industrial-training Institutes imparting in industry.\textsuperscript{26}

II.3. School related factors:

Recently, significant changes in the analytical framework had taken place in the literature in exploring the reasons for children out of school. Emphasis was laid on aspects of school related factors and institutional provisions. Annual Report (2003-2004) of West Bengal related the low ratio of attendance in schools to the sheer physical lack of schools in the vicinity. It stressed on the lack of basic infrastructural facilities as the major bottlenecks for proper growth of primary education in West Bengal.

\textsuperscript{22} Mehrotra's study in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in 1995, p.6; Panchamukhi's study in 1990 in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Rajasthan; Public report on Basic Education in India 1999; Sinha and Sinha's study in Bihar in 1995.
\textsuperscript{23} West Bengal Human Development Report (2004): Government of West Bengal, Development and Planning Department.
\textsuperscript{25} Naik J.P. (1999): 'Non formal Education in India' in B.M. Samkhder (ed), \textit{Education System from India's Independence to the Present Day}, Deep and Deep, Delhi.
Literature by few scholars pointed to the appalling picture of elementary schooling facilities. Public Report of Basic Education revealed that most of the village schools in north Indian states were with dilapidated school buildings, inadequacies in terms of classrooms, blackboards, playgrounds, teaching aids, toilet and drinking water (Probe Report 1999: 40, 41). Distance of school was viewed as a bigger problem for girls as parents felt unsafe for girls to cover long distances in West Bengal (Sengupta and Guha 1998: 1634; Dreze and Sen 1996: 73).

Researchers and policy makers highlighted on the cost-effective school input that would help in reducing drop-outs. A few studies revealed that poor quality of schooling was the reason for children not going to school. Similar findings also appeared in the works of Dreze and Gazdar (1996) and Bashir (1994). Bhatti (1998) and Tilak (2000) opined that 'lack of interest' in education of children may be due to low quality of schooling facilities (also Dreze and Sen 1995: 130). Sengupta (1998) found in West Bengal that one-fifth of the girls dropped out because of poor quality of schools. Belly's (1971) definition of school 'quality' was important as it reflected a dynamic perspective focusing on actors and actions involved in school functioning rather than passive material input available in school. Four dimensions related to 'quality' each being distinct from each other were infrastructural facilities, teachers, teaching-learning process and learner achievement that, needed examination in order to promote enrolment and sustaining of children in schools.

A few literature points to the lack of teachers and teaching time responsible for which there was high drop out from school. Public Report on Basic Education (1999) found high proportion of primary schools have single teacher resulting in high child-teacher ratio in schools. Chronic problem of teacher absenteeism mainly in government schools had appeared in few studies as another reason for which parents do not send children to school. The serious problem absenteeism of salaried teachers in rural public schools in West Bengal was pointed by (Bardhan 1996:4; Ghatak 2002: 45). This pattern was found even in cases where school infrastructure in terms of classroom and teaching aids, teacher-pupil ratio were good. Govinda and Varghese (1993) in their empirical study of Madhya Pradesh had tried to establish the relationship between academic

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background of teacher, particularly, average numbers of years of education and number of
years of pre-training education in achievement level of students. Pal (1993) and Sharma
(1998) noted out that the language used in the textbooks was highly challenging for
younger children, especially underprivileged children for which children were not
interested in going to school.\(^{32}\)

A few scholars have pointed out the issue of inadequate public expenditure on primary
education that was highly responsible for the dismal state of education scenario in West
Bengal. The Education commission (1966) recommended that two-thirds of the total
budget should be invested in school education. Yet only half of the budget was being spent
on elementary education (also Tilak 1993: 51; Varghese 1990). According to Tilak, public
expenditure on elementary education was only 1.8 percent of GDP in 1990-91. The
problem was more in those states with lower educational attainment.\(^{33}\) They recommended
that at least two-thirds of the total educational budget should have been earmarked for
elementary education. Dreze and Sen (1995) also stressed that "Educational expenditure
has declined in real terms in many states" since 1991 and this was reflected in decline in
absolute number of teachers (also Tyagi 1993: 84). Annual cost per student was found to be
lowest in West Bengal (Rs.192) in 1995-96 (Shariff and Ghosh 2000). They pointed to the
decline of the quality and standards of education over the decades.\(^{34}\) Earlier expenditure
requirements for primary education were estimated by Reports of Finance commission
(ninth and tenth), which attempted normative estimation of education requirement. Those
estimates were limited by the fact that they estimate unit expenditure per enrolled child
(officially which were highly inflated) and did not target the children who are not attending
school. Later, Ramachandran (1996) used modified Colclough and Lewin method to
calculate investment requirement for universal education. This was a better method in the
sense that they took attending and non-attending school children in age cohort 6-11 years
and various norms. This method provided the chance for further improvement depending
and pooled for six years from 1992 to 1997-98 to estimate normative expenditure levels.
They found that West Bengal lags far behind in terms of public expenditure per intended
beneficiary population group in primary education.

\(^{32}\) Also Veena Kulkami 1996; World Bank 1997.
\(^{34}\) Shariff A. and P.K.Ghosh(2000): 'India Educational Scene and the Public Gap', Economic and Political
Weekly, Vo. 35, No.16, pp. 1465-1469.
Several empirical studies explored the positioning of private schools vis-a-vis government schools in influencing schooling status of children. Nambissan (2001) in field study in Alwar found that the cost of private schooling was far greater than government schools and these could not give incentive of any kind to any category of children (also Majumder 2001:365; Pande 2001; Acharya 2001:78). According to Tilak (2001) private schools in India was favored on few theoretical backgrounds including quality, efficiency and job market relevance. Dreze and Sen (1995:126) viewed that the benefits of private education accrue to elite only and higher education.

II.4. Decentralization, Community participation and Role of Panchayati Raj Institution:

In the mid 1980s decentralization was recognized as an important component of the educational reform and change process. The National Policy of Education and its Program of Action 1992 suggested for decentralized management of education at all level (districts, subdivision and Panchayat levels) and involvement in the decision making process. The National Policy of education (NPE) 1986 and 1992 recommended not only promoting participation of the community in primary education but also movement towards empowering the local community to take major management decisions in this regard. It proposed adopting the Eleventh schedule of constitution, which provided, among other things, for entrusting with pinhead bodies “education including primary education and secondary education, adult and non formal education, literacy and cultural activities”. The subsequent 72nd and 73rd Constitutional Amendments gave a further impetus to this move towards decentralization and community participation in the management of education. It recommended the delegation of authority related to education, including primary and secondary schools, technical training and vocational education, adult education and non-formal education, and spread of literary and cultural activities to Panchayati Raj bodies (Article 243G of the Eleventh Schedule).

Alongside these developments at the policy level, a lot of literature had appeared with the programs of primary education in different states, particularly during last ten years. These programs also had the promotion of community participation as a major thrust areas in their activities. Keeping with Central Advisory Board of Education Committee guidelines that intend to universalize elementary education in a contextual manner, District 35

Primary Education Program (DPEP) was conceived as a distinct national program. District Primary Education Program also stressed on the participatory process whereby the local community facilitated participation, achievement and school effectiveness. By the term community, DPEP technically implied institutions like Village Education Committees (VEC), Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), Mothers Teachers Associations (MTA), Mahila Mandal etc. Accordingly, VEC (Village Education Committees) was envisaged as a key institution for community mobilization, participation, empowerment and influence schools.

All of these studies pointed to the experiments occurred in Kerala, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where democratic steps of moving departments of control to local bodies and involving them in the planning process have resulted in significant development in the field of elementary education. Micro experiments have demonstrated that effort from the community side does lead to better participation of children in schools. Kumar (2001) found in Himachal Pradesh and Mizoram the role of community participation has helped to universal access to primary school. Externally funded by World Bank, the District Primary Education Programme programme used mainly survey methodology. It is a demand fulfillment model and did not analyze the cause and the effect behavior in the community. Though the programme focus on equity issues in order to reduce the gaps in terms of gender and tribal children, it did not address the problem of the out-of-school children and lacks the structural understanding of what makes them. Moreover, it did not examine the relationship between the Village education committee and Panchayat, other institutions like Mahila Mandal etc. In Madhya Pradesh under the ‘Lok Sampark Abhiyan’, Panchyat by doing door to door survey methodology in identifying in identifying the out of school children, map the gap in access to school and created an alternative people’s information system on elementary education. Gram panchayat thus became the key agency to respond to the demand.

One of the recommendations by Central Board of advisory committee about the panchayat’s basic function is to ensure development planning adaptable to regional and local needs of the population. It has been realized that because of alienation between community in general and education system, efforts towards ensuring larger enrolment

retention, improving teaching learning process have not succeeded substantially. It also recommended that panchayati Raj have important role to play in the reconstruction of the education system.

II.4.(i). School at Centre Stage:-

During 1990s with research methods assigning greater role to school, school was been viewed as a distinct form of social organization. Sergiovanni (1991), Glickman (1993) and Lieberman (1988) advocated school as moral community. He provided for moral connections among teachers, principals, parents and students. Mohanty (2002) advocated school as a community centre and teacher as the actor. It was therefore felt important to study the role of teachers in community (Sinha 1998). The authors rightly stressed on teachers influence in school and community through informal leadership that could facilitate in bringing children to school.

Recently, few scholars hade tried to evolve strategies for bringing community and the school closer, and also to involve community members in a significant manner in the process of primary education development. In order to look at the context of school as a component in the educational development, some amount of research on the direction of progress of school education is necessary. An attempt has been made to explore how school can be reached through the panchayat in comprehending the process of universalisation of education.

In order to examine the role of Panchayati Raj Institution, it is imperative to understand the ways the Panchayati Raj Institutions influence the factors that contribute the incidence of out-of-school children and the direction of interactions.

II.4.(ii). Role of Panchayat Raj Institution in School Context:

II.4.(ii).a. Appointment of teachers:-

Only few literatures has appeared very recently that discusses the role of panchayat in recruitment of teachers. The Ramamchandran (2003) and Kumar (2001) had made valuable contribution in presenting a critical view of the inclusion of the model of "para-teachers" in the education system. They viewed the government officials to be more preoccupied with this model and paid little attention to identify the local youth from the community. Gopalakrishnan and Sharma (1998) in their study of the Education Gaurantee

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Scheme in Madhya Pradesh launched in 1997 found how Panchayat Education Committee was empowered to determine teacher’s qualification, service condition and appoint local unemployed educated youth at minimum cost and could bring desired results. (Sharma 1999) explains that being recruited by the decentralized elected bodies para-teachers and according to Sharma (1999) the process of Siksha Karmis being recruited at block level as against district level and for a particular school helped solve the problem of transfer. It ensured closer link with elected bodies, had knowledge of local language were more accountable to the community. Similar views were given by Haq and Haq (1998). He mentioned that similar attempts were found successful in hiring women teachers in BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advanced Committee) in Bangladesh, the Society for Community Support for primary education in Baluchistan (Pakistan), Lok Jumbish in India. According to Ghosh (2002) managing committee selects the local women teachers and had prescribed educational qualification on contractual basis after 1997 in West Bengal.

II.4. (ii).b. Role of Panchayat Raj Institution in designing curriculum:-

A lot of debate appeared in the literature about the role of Panchayat Raj Institutions in designing curriculum. In no state curriculum, development was delegated to these bodies on the ground of insufficient technical expertise. Differential curriculum was not desirable under unequal educational opportunities. The point of contention is that it is important to recognize contextual curriculum around the felt needs based on flexible experiment action approach in community and aware national level.

II.4. (ii).c. The role of Panchayat in management:-

Literature appeared so far have analysed the question of the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions with respect to the management of schools. Role of Panchayat in management in most cases was viewed as peripheral. Ghosh (2002) had pointed to the deficiency on the part of management in West Bengal. Pareek (1982) had stressed on the self-management model. He emphasized on the availability of resources at local level at which action was required to be taken rather than preconceived education models. In Kerala, community institutions played active role building up public accountability and sense of ownership in expanding education.

43 Ibid, p.1851.
44 Also Krishna 1994; Santha 1994; Ramachandran 1996.
II.4.(ii). d. Role of Panchayat in supervision and administration:-

Central Advisory Board of Education committee recommended the role of Panchayat in exercising supervision. The system of centralized school inspection was proved to be quite ineffective in much of rural India (Dreze and Sen 1995: 105; Prasad 1987: 75). In Rajasthan and Gujarat the supervision of schools was vested in Panchayat. Study by Crook and Manor in rural areas of Karnataka found that supervision by Panchayats had considerably reduced teacher absenteeism (Crook and Manor 1994: 37; Swaminathan 1991: 2989). However, in West Bengal Ghosh (2002) mentioned that the Panchayats were never given the power to manage schools.\(^{45}\)

Govinda (1997) in his study in Sri Lanka showed how School Cluster system and Block Resource Centre system could tackle the problem of administration and supervision at the local context and condition in which the school functions. According to Ghosh and Ghatak (2002) West Bengal lagged behind other states in terms of devolution of power, finances and functions to Panchayats.\(^{46}\) Poromesh (1996, 2002) and Ghosh (2002) had rightly concluded that there was lack of coordination among different layers particularly of local bodies and other higher levels in the hierarchical system of education (Government of West Bengal, 1995). Echeverri- Gent (2000) argued that the failure of fiscal decentralization was due to lack of participation of village or gram Panchayats in mobilizing revenues locally, which could impart autonomy.

II.5. Linkages between School and Community :-

Cunnigham (1990) noted that needs of children were not satisfied by school alone. Given the context in which they are situated, systematic school- community relationship was a prerequisite for the success of education to become universal (Paranjpe 1998). Mohanty (2002) advocated for two-way interaction process between school and community. In this context, Puspanadham’s (2002) conceptual model of school- community relationship seemed noteworthy, where school was at the Centre stage of the convergent framework. Sarba Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) was been conceived in 2001 that also explored the ways of bringing communities closer to school. Unlike District primary education programme, which focused only on primary level, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) was superior as it focused on elementary education and school- community relation. But it also had

methodological limitations. It envisaged habitation as unit of planning, but was not clear how this could be done. Habitation plans could be effective where innovative programmes had been already initiated as happened in Andhra Pradesh. It would be better to develop district-specific plans with block as basic unit of planning. Gopalakrishnan and Sharma’s (1998) discussion on the Education Guaranteed Scheme in Madhya Pradesh showed how successfully organic link between school and the community can be created by mobilizing panchayats.

Literature showed that in Tamil Nadu and Kerala provision of school meals and related incentives had been used with good effect that boost school attendance. Dreze and Sen (1995) found that in West Bengal the local government institution has failed to implement noon meals in schools. So far no attempt has been made to examine empirically the success and failure of the noon meals in West Bengal. There appeared no study on how Panchayat could intervene in the process. In a recent study by the Pratichi Research Team, the rate of attendance in the schools with the cooked programmes was found to be 74 per cent (also Government of West Bengal and UNICEF 2003).

II.6. Influence of Political factors on education:

Literature on the political process of panchayat appeared so far was limited by the fact that they had not examined its influence in the context of the education system at micro level in West Bengal. Dreze and Sen (1996) have found political factors as being responsible for absence of schools in villages of rural Uttar Pradesh. They found that the privilege background of most of the political leaders, absence of strong political demand for elementary education continued to neglect educational reform. Critics have alleged that decentralization process in West Bengal had led to political capture by middle peasants and rural elites (Crook and Sverrisson 1999). Kannan and Das (2000) examined in terms of planning and implementation process, the selection of beneficiaries took place along political lines under the control of political parties. He criticized the Panchayat system for so called politicization. Narain (1994), Rudolph and Rudolph (1972) mentioned that

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49 Dreze and Sen, Op.cit, p. 194
schoolteachers form a major group of Panchayat members. All these studies did not looked the influence of these factors on the educational development. Bhattacharya’s (2001) study was an attempt to look at the impact of teacher’s politics on education in West Bengal. He discussed how the CPI(M) party utilized the special position of teachers in civic community and penetrates within the unorganized West Bengal’s political society. Schoolteachers act as conduits between civic community and political society. He found in 60 to 92.5 percent of rural primary teachers in CPI(M)’s teacher association in 1990s in Midnapore district. He discussed how the managerial role of teachers in organized political sphere overshadows their role as trustees of social capital in the village society. Recent study by Ghatak and Ghatak (2002) highlighted some aspects of reforms in Panchayati Raj system. He examined the participation of people in planning process through village constituency meetings since 1998. Educational reforms did not find place in this study.

II.7. Government Interventions and criticism:

The Central advisory Board of education had played a very important role in shaping the development of policies for the management of education in India. The proceedings and resolutions of the Central advisory Board of education Committee clearly indicated the efforts at expansion of the school system and also highlighted the resource constraint under which the school system was operating. The recommendations of the 1964 included better paid teachers, better qualified, better trained teachers, suitable text books and other text books, suitable buildings, equipment and teaching aids, improvement in teacher pupil ratio, development of school health programme, more effective inspection, full development of state Institutes of Education and expansion of extension service centers. Studies contended that most of these recommendations were not followed by the West Bengal education system.

The Kothari Commission on Education (1964-66) strongly advocated a common school for all children and also suggested a significant increase in public provisioning for education. The commission suggested for common school open to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic conditions, or social status; that access to good education will not depend on wealth or class, that it will maintain adequate standards in all schools and no tuition fee will be charged, that it meets the need of the average parent

so that they do not send children to outside village schools. Another important suggestion given by Kothari Commission was inculcating work experience. The Education Commission (1964-66) remarked: "As another programme to relate education to life and productivity, we recommend that work experience should be introduced as an integral part of all education - general or vocational. We define work experience as participation in productive work in school, in the home, in a workshop, on farm, in a factory or in any other productive situation". The literature appeared so far had given more space in explaining the influence of socio-economic factors on the incidence of out of school children. Little or no attention was paid in incorporating the recommendations made by Central Advisory Board of Education committee and Kothari commissions. Sinha (1998) contended that the implementation of policy however, remained highly ornamental and school systems continued to concentrate much on learning skills as opposed to the life skills. It appeared that all the subsequent policies have shifted emphasis towards improving access and learning achievements, whereas the curriculum and content issue continued to be ornamental.

The National Policy of Education 1986 and the 1992 Program of Action focused on the issues of gender and achievement measurement to meet the needs of education For All. It had shifted the focus towards district specific projects, specific activities, clearly defined responsibilities etc. It suggested for the micro planning through involvement of teachers and community in order to design and implement a family wise, child wise plan of action for universal access/ enrolment and participation, linkages between programmes of preschool and primary education, improvement of school facilities, modification of teacher training programmes in view of changed strategies and programmes. Seventh Plan had envisaged the formations of District Institute of Education and Training (DIET). The failure of the state governments to fill up posts in the District Institutes of Education and Training underlines the low priority that training institutions receive. The State Finance Commission of West Bengal under the chairmanship of late Sen (1995) recommended all the district sector activities and plan funds should be transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions. But the state government did not appear to have taken action to

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implement the above recommendations. The Committee and The Comptroller and audito General (CAG) observed that the existing guidelines for functioning of the Panchayats were not being properly followed, especially with regard to supply of materials and formation of beneficiary committee.

One of the most important development was that Ninth Plan regarded education as the most crucial investment in human development. Elementary education was given the highest priority in sub sectoral allocations within the education sector. It indicated a strong reiteration to achieve the goal of Education For All during the Plan period. It had stressed on the decentralization of planning, supervision and management of education through local bodies at the district, block and village levels. It advocated for social mobilization of local communities for adult literacy through campaigns and promotion of primary education, provisions of opportunities for non- formal and alternative education for out-of- school children in the most unreached segments of the population in response to local needs and demands, universal participation and retention. It emphasized on the people's participation in the provision of basic services with four main objectives - effectiveness, efficiency, empowerment and equity.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched towards the end of the Ninth Plan to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education through a time- bound integrated approach, in partnership with the states. The programme aimed at all children to complete five years of primary schooling by 2007, all children to complete eight years of schooling by 2010, bridging gender and social disparities at the primary stage by 2007 and at the upper primary level by 2010, universal retention by 2010 (Planning Commission, Five Year Plans, 2002-2007).

The Approach paper to the Tenth Plan rightly reiterated that mere establishment of schools and hiring of teachers would not lead to an improvement in education if teachers remained absent in the rural areas. But it did not stress on the transfer of the control of schools to local bodies. While the decentralization of governance through 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment has facilitated the transfer of the management of schools to panchayats/local bodies. It is an effort to improve the performance of the school system and provide community-owned quality elementary education. It gives the highest priority to

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57 Functioning of Panchayats- some basic issues, Prepared by research team, Panchayati Raj, Indian Institute of Social sciences, 1997, New Delhi.
58 Planning Commission (2002); Five Year Plans, 2002-2007, Sectoral Policies and Programmes Vol. II.
59 Ibid, p165.
community monitoring, transparency in the programme planning and implementation in the capacity building. The shift in planning and management strategy did not keep pace with reorientation of the government functionaries and their perception of roles.

The tenth plan also targets universal access, universal enrolment, universal retention, and equity aspects. However the policy framework has not stressed on the provision of free and compulsory education upto the age of 14 years, as stipulated in the National Policy on Education. Further down the hierarchy, Village Education Committee, Mother-Teacher Associations and Parent Teachers Associations were not given formal role in the management of schools in the village. It did not emphasize on identifying the problem areas and formulating separate strategy for each area, under the umbrella of the Sarva Shiksha Avhiyan. It laid less emphasis on the upper age group children particularly the never enrolled children, reasons for their staying away and strategies to be taken. A Supreme Court in 2001 made it obligatory for the states to provide cooked meals under the mid day meal scheme. It emphasized on the teacher’s involvement in the programme of supervision activities. This has led to increase of overload work on teachers. The goals of these interventions in terms of universal enrolment were laudable in themselves as they were not relevant according to needs of the different socio-economic sectors. The Tenth plan also did not stress on the teacher’s education that had resulted in the historical deficiencies in teacher’s education and training. It did not focus on the pedagogic improvements and adoption of child-centred methods, which was developed in the programmes like District Primary Education Programme. However, the Tenth plan acknowledged Early Child Care Education through Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) as the first step in the education ladder.

II.8. Research gaps:

There were a number of studies on various aspects on primary education and panchayat’s role in various aspects of rural development separately done by researchers. Recently, empirical studies and field investigations (National Sample Survey 50th Round NSS, National Council of Applied Economic and Research 1999 NCAER, National Family Health Survey -2 1998-99) explored issues like enrollment/non-enrollment/drop-out level and relate them to ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ related reasons. Earlier analytical framework tends to give much weightage to household characteristics where the household invariably makes the decision in school participation. Certain recent studies like Public Report on
Basic Education Report (1999), Dreze and Sen (1997) pointed ‘supply’ of education as the main reason for non-participation of children in school. ‘Lack of Interest’ in education was been cited by NCAER-HDI study (1999) as a major factor among parents and children. This cannot be treated as an independent factor, but may due to combination of many factors like poverty and school environment that has not appeared from these studies.

The gap may again exist in terms of examination of the spatial pattern of the elementary education situation. The role of Panchayat and related aspects in the different socio-economic, cultural, bureaucratic, political and physical settings was not examined by theses studies as there were vast inter district variations. Most importantly, the studies have rarely tried out to find the linkages between the various factors influencing education and Panchayat’s role in influencing those factors at the micro level.

Other major gap areas are:

1. How far traditional patterns of gender and caste based inequities among social groups operating in rural setting create conditions for which school age children remain out of schools and how far Panchayati Raj Institutions served the target groups. Making local bodies ‘institutions of self government’ in a society without socio-economic reforms cannot make elementary education effective.

2. In order to understand the conflict between work and schooling, it is necessary to examine the nature of each type of activities the children remain engage, the actual time and the duration of time per day spent in these activities and whether they coincide with the school hours in rural settings that have policy implications. In order to understand the work activities of the out-of-school children, it is necessary to examine how children who attend school and also participate in the household duties reschedule their school timings.

3. Whether schools being kept at the centre stage of the society, provide a state where children from different social groups and gender are treated at par in the rural setting.

4. Most of the empirical studies address the issue of the primary school. It is necessary to examine the problems of the upper primary schools and intervention of panchayat in order to universalize the elementary education.

5. How the procedures of accountability and effective management can be built in community, schools and bureaucracy to ensure that school function remained gap areas.
6. So far as democratic participation is concerned, it is necessary to examine whether disadvantage groups can voice their demands and effectively participate in decision-making process in the panchayats, schools and community.

7. The study on role of panchayats in influencing programmatic changes on enrolment of children is very limited in West Bengal.

The study, is therefore is an endeavor to explore some of these neglected aspects of education in West Bengal, particularly, role of the Village education committee and panchayat in promoting enrolment. At the backdrop of the above analysis, it is necessary to examine the status of elementary education in West Bengal that will be presented in the next chapter.