CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

I. THE PROBLEM

From among the numerous and varied problems with which educationalists in India are faced today, one seems to be claiming priority of importance over the others. It is the fact that a large number of students abandon their studies half way through, thus causing a great amount of waste of both their own money and effort and of that of educational institutions and public funds as well.

The problem of wastage in education is not new nor exclusive in India. To a greater or lesser extent it has always existed in every period of history and in all parts of the world. However, it was the Hartog Committee that first drew the attention of educationists in India towards the existing "waste and ineffectiveness of the whole educational system". But this note of warning remained unheeded for some time, till in recent years the consciousness of educationalists has been aroused and their awareness to the problem has taken shape in a number of studies on

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1 Syed Nurullah and J. P. Naik, A History of Education in India (Bombay: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1951) p. 623
wastage at all levels of education.

However, studies on waste are not numerous, and, although there are indications that their number and importance will increase, yet, those so far available do not portray a picture of the problem in its entirety; for some of them are investigations conducted in individual institutions, and most of them limit themselves to the calculation of the statistics of wastage. And, important as these statistical figures are, there is still need for a further and more complete investigation. Statistics will only reveal the extent of the problem, but this will continue to exist and even grow until the causes that originate it are found out and adequate remedies applied.

The present study represents an attempt to bridge the gap in this field of investigation by enquiring into the causes of wastage in college education. No claims are made to have reached the final causes of the problem nor is there evidence that those found are valid for all colleges and universities in India. The findings reported in this investigation are only the results of an enquiry conducted among the students of the Arts and Commerce colleges of Ahmedabad city. It is hoped that studies on wastage in the other faculties will follow, in order to complete the work already started in this university, and that such studies will appear in other universities as
well, thus paving the way for a nation-wide campaign to minimise wastage in college education.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Wastage. "Wastage" is a very general term and it conveys the idea of useless expenditure to no purpose or for inadequate result. When used in reference to education it is susceptible of a variety of meanings but it conveys more its etymological signification if used in reference to elementary education. The term was already used by the Hartog Committee, in its report on the state of primary education in India. Referring to the prevalent diminution in enrolment from class to class, it asserted:

The diminution is mainly due to two causes, which we shall term 'wastage' and 'stagnation'. By 'wastage', ..., we mean the premature withdrawal of children from school at any stage before the completion of the primary course. There is of course a diminution in numbers from class to class due to natural causes, such as death and illness, but the mortality figures show that such diminution must be small compared to the total diminution.2

At the time when these lines were written, as the Report mentions, illiteracy was wide-spread, and so relapse into illiteracy was a common phenomenon even among those children who had already completed their primary education. It was therefore most appropriate to consider as absolutely

2 Ibid. p 671.
wasted all the money and efforts spent on those children who withdrew from school before attaining permanent literacy.

Circumstances have changed now in the country and with the spread of literacy ever on the increase relapse into illiteracy is no longer such a common phenomenon. Still, in many areas, especially rural, it can be assumed that any child who withdrew from school before acquiring the literacy skills can be considered as having entirely wasted all his money and efforts and that of his teachers.

The point can be discussed as to what period of time a child needs to master the literacy skills. Educationists do not agree in this matter. Chitkara would consider a minimum of five years as absolutely necessary. So he says:

The main objective of the Primary stage is the attainment of literacy for which a five-year schooling is considered necessary. Consequently a child who is withdrawn from school before reaching Class V is considered a case of wastage. 3

Desai and Desai consider a four-year period sufficient for the attainment of literacy, as they assume throughout the investigation that primary education ends with Standard IV. They explicitly affirm:

In primary education the wastage is absolute as the period spent before completing the lower primary stage is absolutely wasted in as much as the schooling during the period does not help the child in achieving permanent literacy.4

The Encyclopaedia of Educational Research reduces still further the period a child requires to attain the literacy skills as can be seen in the definition of wastage given therein:

wastage (first and second year drop-out before students have acquired permanent literacy skills) is specially serious.5

The number of years a child needs to acquire literacy, therefore, depends largely on the cultural level of the community in which he lives. Hence the different opinions of the authors. However, all these authors are agreed that the withdrawal of a child before the literacy skills are acquired constitutes a "wastage" of both effort and money, for such a child will inevitably relapse into illiteracy.

Wastage in Secondary Education. The withdrawal of a student from secondary school before graduation is not so serious. Once the literacy skills are acquired a

4 L. R. Desai and K. G. Desai, An Investigation into the Wastage in Secondary Education in Gujarat (Ahmedabad: A. G. Teachers College, 1957) p. 4

person can attain a certain degree of education even without the aid of further formal instruction. In the words of the authors quoted before:

The ... waste in secondary schools as per our definition is, however, not so absolute as that, as the partial schooling does give the child some benefit by way of knowledge, skill, etc. The child entering a secondary school is literate enough to be benefited by the new or the old subjects taught during the period. Hence, even if he leaves secondary school at an intermediate stage, he goes out as a better informed or better skilled person although he does not completely fulfil the cause undertaken.6

Still, formal education and even school graduation are such necessary prerequisites in our modern society that a person that has not acquired them is considered handicapped and is denied access to a good number of jobs and reduced to do only unskilled labour. In all truth, therefore, withdrawal of students from secondary schools before graduation can be considered a kind of "wastage" on the part of the individuals concerned. And so the authors conclude:

There is, however, no word which can connote better the unfulfilment of the desired goal and hence the term waste has been used.7

American educationalists do not use term "wastage" to signify the premature withdrawal of students from

6 Desai and Desai, loc. cit.

7 loc. cit.
secondary school. They refer to it as "drop-out" or simply "withdrawal".

**Wastage in Higher Education.** Withdrawal of students from college before graduation is proportionately as frequent and prejudicial as premature withdrawal of children from school; and, although radically different from the latter, it also entails a relative amount of waste of energy and money.

This parallelism between withdrawal at these two stages of education has led educationists in India to extend the use of the term "wastage" to signify the premature withdrawal of students from college before graduation. Thus Chitkara's definition of wastage includes all the cases of withdrawal from school or college: "By wastage is meant the premature withdrawal of children from schools or colleges". Chitkara p. loc. cit. 8 Ehanot defines wastage thus: "the premature withdrawal of a student from a pre-defined course of college instruction". I. V. Ehanot, "A Report on an enquiry into the occurrence of "Wastage" and "Stagnation" amongst University Students", The Maharaja Sayajirao University Statistics Series (Baroda: Faculty of Science, 1960) No. 1 p. 5. 9 Deshmukh and Kamat give a similar definition:

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8 Chitkara p. loc. cit.

By wastage we shall mean all those students who joined college in the first year class but for some reason or other could not or did not pursue college education to obtain the first degree in arts, science, or any professional course.¹⁰

In American educational literature, as was mentioned before, withdrawal from college is not referred to as "wastage" Iffert, however, admits that such withdrawals are "an alarming waste of our most competent manpower".¹¹ But the connotation of the term "wastage" is reference to higher education is only analogical and so Deshmukh adds:

While sounding the customary warning against identifying wastage in college education with failure in life, we shall clarify certain points about wastage by examples. X who leaves college without taking a degree to join defence services is considered a case of wastage. Y, a woman student, who joins college at the desire of her parents to pursue liberal cultural education before they find a suitable match for her, contributes to wastage if she leaves college before completing a degree course on account of marriage although her few years in college may have helped her parents to secure a good young man for her.¹²

Again Bhanot stresses the relative meaning of the term saying that the premature withdrawal of students from college can be called "wastage" "from the point of view of the teaching Institution only".¹³


¹² Deshmukh, loc. cit.

¹³ Bhanot, loc. cit.
In this study, following the tradition of educationists in India, "wastage" will be used to signify the failure of students to attain the ideal set before them in higher education, namely graduation in the faculty of first registration. However, since this is a very general term, other terms will also be used.

**Apparent Wastage.** The definition of wastage given applies only to those students who discontinue studies before their completion. But these are not the only students who contribute to wastage in higher education; even those who eventually graduate after a delay of one or more years contribute their share to wastage. Consequently, there is need for a more general term to include these two cases of wastage, withdrawal from college as well as retarded graduation. The term generally used is "Apparent Wastage". Desai and Desai explain the meaning of apparent wastage in secondary education thus:

All those who do not finish satisfactorily their secondary education in the prescribed period of seven years constitute waste. Thus a boy or a girl who fails once, twice or more at any intermediate stage will also be unable to finish his or her secondary education in seven years. He or she might, however, take additional one or more years to finish the course and pass the final examination. In this case, then, it is not a complete waste of effort and money. The apparent waste is due to detention or stagnation .... often, however, the term waste includes both the above types i.e. waste on account of early school-leavers and waste on account of stagnation. This we shall term **apparent waste.**

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14 Desai and Desai, op. cit. p. 3.
Bhanot also uses the term but in a slightly different connotation:

A mere comparison of the number of students who joined a course with the number who eventually failed in that course, is frequently regarded as providing a measure of wastage. To my mind, such a measure is too "crude" as it does not allow for the number of trials put in by different students, nor for the number of years spent by them. At the most, such a simple comparison would give us an Apparent Wastage.15

In the present study Desai and Desai's terminology has been adopted and thus the term "Apparent Wastage" will be inclusive of all cases of withdrawal as well as stagnation. In other words, all those students who, for one reason or the other, do not graduate in the course of four years from the faculty of first registration in the Gujarat University are considered cases of apparent wastage.

Clear Wastage. Wastage was defined above as the withdrawal from school or college before the completion of the predefined course. In order to distinguish clearly this type of wastage from the more general one just described, the term 'clear wastage' will be used. The meaning of clear wastage is explained by Desai and Desai thus:

The Clear Wastage constitutes only those cases of pupils who, for one reason or another, leave studies before the completion of their secondary education.16

15 Bhanot, op. cit. p. 4-5.
16 Desai and Desai, op. cit. p. 3.
In the course of this study clear wastage will also be referred to as discontinuance of studies.

**Stagnation.** The Hartog Committee Report gives the following definition: "By stagnation we mean the retention in a lower class of a child for a period of more than one year". 17

Strictly speaking, stagnation is the retention of a student in the same class on account of failure to meet the requirements of a particular examination. Thus Desai and Desai define stagnation saying: "The stagnation means those cases of pupils who are detained in a grade on account of unsatisfactory progress". 18 But students, and college students in particular, may be delayed in their progress towards graduation by other factors as well. A student may at the last moment decide to absent himself from the examination, or he may be debarred from appearing for the examination because of his irregular attendance to lectures, or because of other punitive measure, etc. There is an infinite variety of factors on account of which a student is not promoted to the next class and so has to repeat the course. All these cases are covered by the definition given by Bhanot: "Stagnation is the retention of a student

17 Nurullah, *op. cit.* p. 3.
18 Desai and Desai, *loc. cit.*
in a given class for more than one academic year". And Deshmukh says more explicitly:

By stagnation we cover the cases of those students who complete the prescribed course only after a delayed progress; they take a longer time to complete the course than the prescribed minimum period".

The term "stagnation" has been rarely used in this study as too general and vague. Instead all the cases of stagnation have been grouped under two main headings namely, "Failure" and "Interruption".

Failure. Failure in school is defined as "non acceptable work in a grade or course in consequence of which it must be repeated". Failure in college, however, does not always produce this effect.

A student may fail in one subject and yet be permitted to attend lectures for the next class. This system, very common in the colleges and universities of America has been partially adopted lately by the Gujarat University with the introduction of the so called A. T. K. T. (allowed to keep terms), whereby a student who fails in one subject in the university examination is allowed to register for the next class under certain conditions. However, during the period

19 Bhagat, op. cit., p. 2


under survey, failure in the examinations meant repetition of the same class as it was defined above.

**Interruption.** Interruption in the case of regular students is the temporary cessation of attendance in college, absence from the examination and consequent repetition of the same class. In the case of students who are exempted from attending lectures, such as external students and those who had already appeared for an examination and failed, interruption is understood in this study as the absence from the respective examination. It is presumed that the students who absent themselves from the examination have, for all practical purposes, interrupted their studies.

A further explanation regarding external students seems to be called for here. All university examinations can be given either from an affiliated college, as regular students do, or externally. However, while an external student can pass both the F. Y. and the Inter Arts Examinations in two years, just like any other regular student, he cannot appear for the B. A. Examination unless three years have elapsed since he passed the Inter Arts Examination, thus spending in the process one year more than the regular students.

Students who appeared externally for the F. Y. Examination without having previously registered in any
college for the F. Y. Course have been excluded from this study, while those students who started their college career as regular students and later appeared for the B. A. Examination externally, have been considered as cases of interruption of studies because of their delayed progress towards graduation.