CHAPTER VII

DEPENDENCE OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT
ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND
HOME ENVIRONMENT

It has become increasingly clear with the progressive growth of research in Education that the child is subject to the influence of experiences emanating within and without the school. The out-of-school experiences may supplement or complement school experiences; they may also thwart or blunt the desirable school experiences.

It has been proved difficult to evolve a reliable technique to study the overall impact of environmental factors on education. Although the correlation technique can be used to show the extent of such relationship as may exist between academic attainment on the one hand and any particular influencing factor on the other, the existence of a relationship by itself does not necessarily imply that the relationship is causal. Even where a causal relationship does exist, it provides no clue as to which one represents the cause and which the result. However, an attempt is made to study some of the factors, as discussed in this and the two subsequent chapters, that are generally considered relevant in the field of school education. Let first of all school-attendance, poverty and some other important home conditions of the students be looked into.
A. School attendance:- One of the most important reasons for poor school attainments is absence from school itself. Absence, however short, breaks the continuity in the sequential development of different subjects in the school courses and this greatly impedes the child's education. Due to absence, students suffer most in subjects like Mathematics which, more than any other, demands continuity of attendance.

Adverse effects on the child, traceable to his absence from the classroom at different times, accumulate but as the damage done during each event of absence is relatively small and almost imperceptible, it tends to escape the notice of the teachers and the parents. Unfortunately, when the teachers, and for that matter the parents, wake up to the surprise one day that the child is unexpectedly backward in matters relating to his education, it is usually too late. The school and the family, therefore, need to remain constantly beware of the detrimental effects caused by absenteeism and accordingly they must take proper care to ensure that the child attends school regularly.

To ensure regular school attendance would pre-suppose an inquiry into four central problems:

(a) how well do pupils attend school?
(b) what are the likely causes of non-attendance?
(c) what are the discernible effects of non-attendance?
and (d) how should a school and home endeavour to improve attendance?

In order to understand and analyse these problems relevant
data were collected from school records. Moreover, opinions of teachers and parents were elicited and observations made of school and various out-of-school situations to which pupils are continually exposed.

**TABLE 7.1**

**PATTERN OF ABSENTEEISM IN SIX CLASSROOMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of students (N)</th>
<th>Total working days (M)</th>
<th>Total number of absent days for all students (X)</th>
<th>Total number of absentees per day</th>
<th>Average absence percent per day</th>
<th>Mean of Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>17.26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>10.47</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>7.41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, in order to scrutinise the pattern of absenteeism, the total number of absent days, during a period of about six months, for each student belonging to class IX in six different schools were ascertained from the attendance registers. From these, average absence percent per day were calculated, separately for boys and girls. The data are summarised in Table 7.1 from which it
is clear that, on the average, in a boys' class 22.7% of the students remain absent every day. The corresponding figure for girls is 20%.

Pattern of absenteeism, as it is clear from the table, is not identical in all the concerned classrooms. The two boys groups, viz., B2 and B3, and the two girls groups, viz., G1 and G2, belong to two prestigious single-sex schools of the town where admission is given primarily on the basis of merit. While admitting students at the lower-most class, these two schools (along with one or two more in the town) receive roughly about three applications for each seat and they can, therefore, always choose the best out of these applicants. Families of high socio-economic and socio-cultural levels, both of the town and the neighbouring areas, generally wish to send their children to these two schools. The rejectees of these schools then have to go to other schools of the town. The groups B1 and G3 on the other hand, belong to such type of schools where they have to absorb students who come to them not out of any positive attraction or preference but merely because of their inability to obtain seats in the preferred schools. The inferior students consequently lowers the relative personality of a school in this category and often the problem of maintaining discipline becomes more acute.

It is seen from the table that the average absence percent per day in groups B1 and G3 are considerably higher than the corresponding figures in the other two schools. Lower academic calibre of the students and their relatively poor economic and
cultural home situations — all seem to contribute their shares to higher average absence in these schools.

The causative factors of absenteeism are manifold, what is more, subjective and objective conditions are intricately laced together making the impact of particular causes obscure and difficult to investigate. As a preliminary investigation, some thirty school teachers, working in boys' and girls' schools, were asked to state as to what they considered to be the most important causes of absenteeism. They were asked to write the causes as elaborately as they could and without any prior consultation among them. In fact, they were not told until the last moment as to what they would be required to write about. The investigator intentionally avoided giving the teachers an opportunity for preliminary consultation lest it might bring into play an unconscious bias. Their recording, therefore, was based entirely on their general experience with students, their parents and their families. The opinions of the teachers are summarised in table 7.2.

TABLE 7.2
REASONS FOR ABSENTEEISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Percentage of occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance of social functions</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School phobia</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy household duties</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed reasons</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Under the given circumstance, it was striking that their views on the nature and operation of various factors as well as the conclusions were in close accord, even though, from the statistical angle it was not possible to obtain satisfactory evidence on inter-rater agreement.

The various reasons mentioned in table 7.2 are obviously not mutually exclusive, therefore, each reason mentioned by the teachers was very carefully gone through before assigning it to the category considered most relevant for it.

How the different factors actually work is an interesting study. Based on the teachers' descriptions and the investigator's own observation of schools, homes, and related situations, an attempt is made to know more fully the modus operandi of the factors mentioned above. It is discussed later in this chapter.

How is non-attendance related to academic achievement? In order to get an answer to this question rank-difference coefficients of correlation were computed between academic scores on the one hand and number of absent days on the other for groups of students belonging to different classrooms.

As discussed earlier in Chapter III, the academic marks were converted to standard scores. Now, the students were assigned ranks first in respect of the academic marks as expressed in standard scores, and then in respect of the total number of days on which they remained absent from class, over a period of about six months. Rank-difference coefficients of correlation were computed
according to the formula given in 4.6 of chapter IV. The actual scores and the computation procedure are shown in appendix I. The values of these coefficients along with their significance are shown in table 7.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of students (N)</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom (N-2)</th>
<th>Coefficients of correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+ .35*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>+ .37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>- .15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>- .52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>- .34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>- .30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at .05 level
** Significant at .01 level

The results obtained, as shown in table 7.3 above, are inconclusive. In case of the first two groups the correlation is found to be positive, that is, those who are superior in academic standing have, in general, greater number of absent days and, on the other hand, the academically inferior ones tend to be more regular in attendance. This situation can be explained by the tendency of some good students to develop intellectual complacency.
and consequently to take occasionally the pleasure of remaining away from the classroom. Yet another explanation of this situation is that sometimes the academically bright students come in close association of naughty boys in whose view it is more manly to profess a distaste for books and lessons, and a scorn for the class teacher. Despite absenteeism, such students may still be capable of maintaining superior intellectual position in the class, although unfortunately, their intellectual level in the absolute terms deteriorates. They always remain inferior to what they could be if they were regular. Comparison in such matters is obviously not with others but with one's own potentiality.

In case of the remaining four groups the correlation is found to be negative. This means that those who are more regular are also academically better, and those who are irregular are academically poorer. Such a relation, though in accord with our common sense belief, need not be taken as indicative of the existence of a perfect cause - effect relationship. Because there are students who inspite of being extremely regular are poor academically, and similarly, there are others who are academically good inspite of their irregularity. If everyone were regular, then with all other factors remaining constant, every one would be academically better than what they really are. The truth of this can neither be established in theory nor demonstrated experimentally since it entails the comparison of the real situation with a hypothetical one.

Apart from affecting education, non-attendance, truancy to
be more specific, may have extremely pernicious effects on the
behaviour and character of the child. From table 7.2 it will be
clear that truancy, which may be defined as wandering away from
home or school without the knowledge, consent and approval of the
authorities concerned, is fortunately not very widespread. There
may, of course, be more cases of 'hidden truancy' as has been
mentioned by Galloway¹, caused by children who attend school until
the daily register has been taken and then leave the class
surreptitiously. Official records show that they are present but
actually they are not.

The boy who plays truant has of necessity to cover up his
movements by prolonged and hardy lying. Having shirked one lesson
with impunity he would easily take the risk of missing the second.
Attraction of life and things outside gradually becomes stronger
for him than his interest in the classroom activities. He becomes
a habitual truant.

Truancy is often the first step on the downward stair to
crime. It is indeed unfortunate that many manifestations of the
early misbehaviour of the young adolescents elude the eyes, the
ears, and the comprehension of teachers as well as parents. From
close observation of some families it has become clear to the
investigator that many parents often fail to foresee the disastrous
effects of their remaining indifferent to the early signs of

¹. D. Galloway, 'Size of school, Socio-Economic Hardship,
Suspension Rates and Persistent Unjustified Absence From School'.
The British Journal of Educational Psychology. Vol. 46, part I.
A stitch in time saves nine is a saying worth remembering in this context.

A blind impulse of roam and travel, a hunger for new scenes and experiences is never indicative of a criminal character. Even the most normal boy may sometimes wander away from school just for the sake of wandering. But if his early tendency is not checked by appropriate measures he may ultimately become a habitual truant afterwards. To lock him indoors and to screw him down to the school bench is to aggravate rather than to remove his spontaneous restlessness. The school must endeavour to make the classroom more attractive than outside entertainments, otherwise even many non-truants will apply subtler forms of escape from the classroom.

Though physically present and looking at teacher or text, such students do not pay any attention to what goes on in the classroom. In the language of Skinner they remain 'hysterically deaf'.

Another important cause of irregularity which can be laid at the door of parental connivance or neglect and which is largely preventable is the attendance of social functions. From table 7.2 it is seen that the teachers are of the opinion that of all the causes of absenteeism this particular cause accounts for one fourth. In most of our social functions like marriage celebration etc, a large number of guests are usually invited. Many school-going children attend these ceremonies even at the cost of missing their

classes and the parents are often blissfully ignorant of its evil consequences. The students miss classes which is bad enough, but what is more detrimental is that they develop a false sense of proportion and priority and are attracted by the light and frivolous side of life thereby gradually losing their capacity to put in sustained effort which is so essential in academic pursuit.

Before leaving the discussion on school-attendance, the following case-study may be looked into as it sheds light on a particular factor responsible for absenteeism. It reveals how utter poverty makes it impossible for some students to be regular in their class-attendance notwithstanding their sincerity and basic propensity for learning.

The influences of the causes on absenteeism in all probability differ from school to school and from area to area. But poverty appears to be one of the chief causes of absenteeism almost everywhere in our country. Even in a rich country like U.K., D. Galloway\(^3\) observes, 'persistent absenteeism is closely associated with socio-economic hardship in the schools' catchment area', though, he admits, 'there is reason to suppose that variables within individual schools also influence the figures'.

**Case study 6:** U is a 15 years old girl in class IX. As a student she is below average in her class. She is thin, dark-skinned and somewhat sickly-looking. Nevertheless, she has some

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amount of poise and grace about her. She appears to be intelligent and talks quite enthusiastically.

U belongs to an extremely poor family. Her father, who is about 40 years old, earns his livelihood by working as a salesman in a grocery shop. He earns about Rs.150.00 a month. With this meagre income he has to maintain his family of six including himself. His wife and U, the eldest of the four children, have to do most of the household work. Of the other three children, one boy is in class VI, another boy in class II and the youngest, a girl, is yet to attain school going age.

Their house is a small hut made of bamboo, reeds and mud. The thatched roof leaks here and there. The unplastered walls made of reeds have no windows in them, whatever light and air comes into the house comes through the small openings in between the unplastered reeds. In a gloomy day without the sun, the inside of the house is completely dark even in the day time. The total space inside the house is hardly one hundred square feet, that is, about sixteen square feet per person.

While visiting this family along with one teacher of U's school, U described the unsatisfactory living conditions of their dwelling and wanted the investigator to appreciate the impossibility of making satisfactory school progress under such terrible circumstances. She at one point looked up at her teacher and asked in a pleasant voice 'is it possible, sir, to do homework in such circumstances?'
The extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, to do homework or any worth-while study in the given circumstances was too obvious. In the morning U has to help her mother with cooking and tend to the younger siblings. She has to go to the nearby river to wash clothes and utensils before taking her stand in the long queue to collect their daily requirement of water from the roadside water tap. All this U does without grumbling, and, in fact, without any bitterness. Nevertheless, the rigours are bound to circumscribe her mental growth and perspective. Most of U's neighbours are also like them. There is little in her home and the neighbourhood environment to promote or sustain intellectual curiosity and zeal. It is only her youth that still sustains a smile on her face, despite utter poverty. Youth is fleeting and so is her smile. U's home conditions do not permit her to attend classes regularly. Her loyalties have to be divided between household duties and school work.

In one of the schools that the investigator visited during the course of his research the number of students like U, both boys and girls, was found to be pretty high. The teachers of such students must know how to treat and handle them appropriately. For irregularity in class-attendance if the same kind of disciplinary action is meted out indiscriminately to everybody, it would obviously prove to be extremely harsh, even cruel, to students like U the endemic cause of whose irregularity can be eliminated only through sympathetic understanding and constructive planning, not by punishment.
The schools can perhaps do something to ameliorate the lot of such poverty-stricken students like U on its rolls although the problem is part of the larger socio-economic milieu. They can make provision for exempting such students steeped in absolute poverty from paying school fees. Text books from the school library can be given to such students in greater numbers and for relatively long periods. From the economically rich students a monthly or yearly fee may be collected to create a common fund from which the very poor students may be given from time to time school uniform and some other necessary stationeries. Such help should not, however, be ritualistic but sustained, nor should the quantum of help be so small as to be inconsequential. The school authorities can perhaps think of arranging and organising part-time employment for the needy students which, besides being a financial help, will go a long way to foster in them a sense of dignity of labour. Although the resources of a school are limited, well-conceived and pragmatically implemented schemes within its resources would not fail to make a positive contribution towards the solution of the problem.

B. Poverty and other home conditions:- Broadly, poverty may be defined to mean levels of earnings insufficient for the maintenance of bodily health for all the members of the family. But very often, the word poverty is also used in a vague and imprecise sense to highlight relative economic deprivation in society characterised by wide income disparities. Thus, in a prosperous
locality a person may be dubbed poor if he is unable to afford certain consumer durables which are beyond any imagination of the absolutely poor. For our purpose, poverty is taken in its absolute sense. In order to eliminate from the definition ambiguity and subjectivity five categories in respect of material condition are differentiated on the following criteria:

(i) Very poor: Those whose earnings are extremely small and at the same time irregular and who consequently are in constant want of basic essentials of life like food, fuel, clothing, shelter etc. People belonging to this category have to beg at times in some form or other.

(ii) Poor: Those who have small but assured earnings and hence can have a hand-to-mouth living without at least having to beg.

(iii) Above the poverty line: Those whose earnings are just sufficient to meet the basic necessities of life and who can provide their children with reasonable clothing, other small requirements and fees without default.

(iv) Well-to-do: Those whose earnings are enough to give their children full facilities for health and education and who can enjoy occasionally small luxuries of life like movies, a pleasure trip for the whole family once in three years or so and the like.
(v) Very Well-to-do: Those whose earnings are sufficient to have lot of luxuries. People belonging to this category may not do any manual labour as they can afford servants.

Such categorisation was found helpful in gauging the relationship between poverty (or well-being) and school progress. The girl in the case-study discussed earlier in this chapter belongs to the very poor category.

In the questionnaire given to the students there were three items requiring each student to rate his/her family on a five-point scale in respect of its ability to provide with (i) books and stationeries required for school work (ii) school fees and (iii) proper dress. One extreme of the scale (point 1) represented the most hard-pressed or deprived while the other extreme (point 5) represented the most affluent. The information obtained on the basis of such a rating scale, however, cannot be accepted as wholly reliable because many students were actually found to be inclined to rate themselves high, presumably in order to appear before the investigator in favourable light as regards the material status of their parents, while there were others who had the opposite tendency of projecting the 'poor' image which intended as a hedge of excuse to evoke sympathy and 'understanding' for lack of performance in schools. With such actual situation, the investigator had to check the entries in the questionnaire with the general records that the schools maintain on the family background of the students on the one hand, and actual observation of economic conditions of a large number of families in course of the investigator's visits, on the
other. With the background of this additional knowledge, the students were then placed in the five categories of very poor, poor, above the poverty line, well-to-do and very well-to-do. Inspite of this cross-checking the category of very well-to-do appeared to be somewhat over represented. Table 7.4 shows the percentages of students in the respective categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home conditions</th>
<th>Occurance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual number of families</td>
<td>In percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above the poverty line</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-to-do</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well-to-do</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to ascertain the relation between poverty and academic achievement, the corresponding achievement scores of the students were arranged in five groups according to the five economic categories. The groupings are shown in appendix J. For each group the mean achievement - scores were determined and these are shown in table 7.5.
Table 7.5

Achievement Scores of Students Belonging to Different Economic Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic categories</th>
<th>Mean achievement scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>41.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>46.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above the poverty line</td>
<td>47.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-to-do</td>
<td>48.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well-to-do</td>
<td>52.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Along with poverty, other relevant factors like intelligence, motivation etc., severally and jointly, constantly play their roles affecting academic achievement and, as such, basing on the above figures of the table alone one cannot conclude that academic achievement is directly associated with poverty. A definite conclusion is difficult to arrive at because of the large number of variables involved. Nevertheless, the steady rise of average achievement scores from very-poor to very well-to-do has to be noted. A perusal of appendix J will reveal that the highest score is 79.3, whereas in the very-poor group, no student is getting score higher than 48.7; the margin of difference is significantly wide. In the next higher category - that is, poor - the highest score is 65.2. In the other three groups, viz above the poverty line, well-to-do and very well-to-do, high and low scores are all mixed up reflecting the interaction of the influencing variables.
In relation to school progress, poverty distinctly appears to operate in two main directions. First, it tends to impair health. The poor families cannot provide proper and sufficient food to their members, cannot maintain hygienic and proper conditions in and around their dwellings and are in no position to afford necessary and timely medical care. In the result, the child's physical vitality is impoverished and his capacity to learn severely handicapped. Secondly, poverty limits the opportunities for acquiring general knowledge. In a seriously circumscribed horizon, the child is deprived of that preparatory background of socially crystallised essence of lore and culture that most schools take for granted. The poor child is invariably in a disadvantageous position in a group where the other children, although of identical age, have economically superior home conditions.

Although poverty is clearly an unfavourable condition for academic progress, yet poverty, and for that matter any other relevant environmental factor, cannot be ordered along a single continuum from 'favourable' to unfavourable'. An environment which may be quite favourable for the development of, say, independence and self-reliance may differ in significant details from an environment that is favourable for the development of social conformity or abstract thinking. There are poor but culturally refined families while there are rich families without similar undertone of refinement. Inability to attain academic excellence is, consequently, not confined to children from poor
homes alone. Even where the family is comfortably off, the children may suffer equally from a lack of required educational motivation. If within the home there be a general attitude of laxity, irregularity, evasion and an absence of seriousness of application, the child is likely to imbibe all such negative attitudes and be a failure at school. Poverty or well-being, the moral attitudes, the cultural background, all combine to make up what may generally be termed 'home conditions'.

On the basis of observation during the visits to the families, it could be conclusively ascertained that in all aspects of education, parental attitude towards education and well-being of the children plays more vital a role than the material conditions of the home barring, of course, the case of extremely poverty-stricken families. The relatively poor homes with favourable parental attitude were again and again found to be more conducive than homes with better material conditions but unfavourable parental attitude.

Favourable attitude alone, however, cannot push a child far up in the educational ladder if supporting material conditions are altogether lacking. There appears to exist a certain range of material conditions within which, other factors remaining constant, the school progress is more or less proportional to the material facilities. But both above and below the limits of this range the proportionality relation does not hold. In this context the research findings of Marjoribanks are relevant. She, in her

paper on 'Environment as a Threshold Variable: An Examination' 

discovers that there exists a curvilinear relation between the 
environment and cognitive performance such that after a certain 
environment level has been reached, further environmental 
 improvements are associated with decreasing increments in per- 
formance. The finding of the present study in this regard that the 
highest score in the very poor group is only 48.7 may, perhaps, 
be taken as an indication of the existence of a minimum poverty -
line below which all the children lose their motivation completely 
and, consequently, their intelligence, even if high, becomes 
inoperative. Basic intelligence, as it appears, also needs at-
least some minimum environmental facilities to make it blossom 
without which it languishes. Further research in this line in 
societies with incidence of poverty and marked disparities in 
economic conditions would throw more light on the subject.

During the course of the present study the investigator 
visited certain slum areas in the town inhabited by extremely poor 
people. Quite a large number of students come to schools from 
these slums.

In most families poverty deprives the children of proper 
sleep not to speak of proper food, reasonably adequate clothing 
and proper housing as distinguished from mere shelter. In the 
conditions under which they live, it is not possible to keep their 
odies in full working order. Continued malnutrition leave the 
mind of these children permanently enfeebled.

The breadwinners in most of these families are ill-educated
and engaged in work with very low income. Some of them are third- and fourth-grade railway employees, some work on daily wages, and others are petty traders or artisans like salesman, peddlers, hawkers, blacksmiths and masons.

The houses, huts actually, in these slums are damp and insanitary. The rooms are too overcrowded and shut off from fresh air and ventilation generally. Small children urinate and defecate in the open drains. A stink pervades the air all the time. Such conditions are apt to engender a perpetual state of ill-health. Even when the children are down with illness of any kind the parents usually have neither the resources nor any feeling of urgency to secure proper medical treatment. Small wonder these children fail to rise up to the teachers' expectation in academic matters. Heavy domestic duties do not permit the children to go to bed in time. Even when they go to bed relatively in time they may not get to sleep until late in the night, when elder ones, who share their bed or bedroom noisily turn in at a late hour. Even if the child is in bed for the requisite number of hours, restful sleep is generally out of the question. Morning finds the child un-refreshed by inadequate sleep and when after doing the household duties he arrives at school he is already tired. He is unresponsive to the teaching in the classroom and he is prone to dozing off.

If one sits through for the whole day in a school attended largely by such children, one would find many students, one after another, requesting the authorities for permission to leave.
school before the end of the day's work. They give in their written applications convincing excuses for making such requests but, in reality, in most cases the students want to go home as they are hungry and half-starved. Children who came to school hungry and half-starved are in no fit condition to wrestle with intellectual tasks.

The existence of a large number of children coming from families of the above description is indeed a great challenge to the educational authorities of the country. The Education Commission\(^\text{5}\) (1964-66), while dealing with the various causes of inequality of educational opportunities, specially mentioned poverty as one of the main causes. 'To overcome these handicaps' the Commission observed 'it is desirable to abolish fees progressively, to provide free books, stationery and even school meals and uniforms. In addition it is necessary to develop a large programme of scholarship'.

In the educational history of India the question of tuition fees has been reviewed several times. The foundation of the present system of education in the country has been largely laid by Wood's Educational Despatch of 1854. This Despatch, on two grounds, recommended that some fees, however small, should be charged in all educational institutions. One argument was that people would not value anything given free, and the other

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that the payment of a fee would be an indication of the seriousness of purpose on the part of a student or his guardian. The considerable financial resources realised through levying a fee following the implementation of this recommendation soon came to be viewed as a permanent source of revenue for supporting the schools and it did account in fact for a substantial part of the total educational expenditure of schools. Following the attainment of independence the heavy dependence on fees to support the schools is diminishing and Government is assuming an increasing burden by subsidising education.

In fact, the Constitution requires the provision of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. However, neither the 'compulsory' part nor the 'free' part of this directive has yet been completely fulfilled in all states.

The question of levying fees at the secondary school stage is, however, somewhat different. Two arguments are put forward in favour of collecting fees at the secondary stage: (a) the expansion of secondary education still largely remaining restricted to the middle and upper classes of the society, the abolition of fees will be more in favour of the 'haves' than of the 'have-nots', (b) the revenue from fees collection at the secondary stage being substantial the abolition of fees would be neither feasible nor desirable from the resources point of view. But purely from the educational point of view the Commission seems to agree with neither of these arguments. It observed that

'the levy of fees in secondary schools prevents several children from the poorer classes of society, and particularly girls, from receiving education and it is mostly among these groups that the expansion of secondary
education will have to take place in the next two decades. The abolition of fees at the secondary stage is thus intended mainly for the benefit of such underprivileged groups who are now entering secondary education in large numbers.

Total abolition of fees or free-studentship for the poor students is always desirable. Alongwith this, formulation and implementation of schemes for part-time productive employment for the poor students will go a long way to meet the challenge.

The social scientists all over the world are constantly engaged in studying with rigorous objectivity the complex and inter-related problems relevant to an understanding of how children from depressed backgrounds could be motivated for maximum academic achievement. During the sixties, a number of books dealing directly or indirectly with the problem of education of children in depressed urban centres, specially in America, have been published. Among the more important of these books are James Conant's Slums and Suburbs, Frank Riessman's. The Culturally Deprived Child and Patricia Sexton's Education and Income. These authors stress the necessity of providing equal educational opportunity to the deprived children without which the academic potential of a vast majority of children will be lost.

It is the responsibility and duty of the educational authorities to find ways and means for realisation of the full intellectual potential in all our children. Human intelligence is
a creative resource and hence it should be harnessed wherever it is found. Such creative intelligence would not be found in sufficient abundance in the privileged minority. The imperative of the educational authorities assuming more responsibility in providing greater educational stimulation and evolving techniques for raising the aspirations of the deprived children is inescapable.

Regarding tapping of human resources, Patricia Sexton observes:

> though we have discovered how to release energy from the atom by fission and fusion, we have not yet discovered how to release the great untapped power of the average human mind, a power which in its collectivity might create miracles reaching far beyond hydrogen fusion.⁷

The truth that children from urban slums cannot compete with the children of the elite is not necessarily because of any inherent deficiency of talent or ability of the former but because the elitist milieu give the latter a head start; the schools catering to this class compound the endemic advantage by providing them with superior educational facilities of many kinds. As a result the elite of wealth and the elite of the educated remain identical.

The general attitude of teachers towards the educationally deprived children would seem to require a major re-orientation. Throughout the present investigation it was found that most teachers considered the educationally deprived children as being...

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incapable of profiting from a normal curriculum. These children, they say, are intellectually inferior and, therefore, not capable of learning. Such a negative attitude aggravates and postpones indefinitely the solution to the problem. If the teacher pre-supposes that a child is incapable of being educated, it is more than likely that this belief would be communicated to the child through one or more of the many forms of contacts in the teacher-pupil relationship. This is most unfortunate as the children coming from homes and residential centres which are bereft of academic stimulation and attendant cultural poise are totally dependent upon their teachers for every kind of initiation for self-esteem, academic interest and stimulation. Some of, being hypersensitive are desperate in their craving for acceptance. In such situations, handling with a measure of empathy is called for. If, on the contrary, they are cold-shouldered by the teachers it is easy to imagine how terribly their hopes and aspirations are likely to be shattered and to what extent it might affect their educational achievement adversely having regard to the fact that they are already so ill-equipped to begin with.

The teacher must, therefore, have adequate appreciation of the serious constraints of such children. Nothing that is given them would be of help if it comes with contempt, however concealed or inarticulate it may be. Barring exceptions, teachers generally do not seem to understand the mental frame that impoverished homes and surrounding contribute to make in these children. A major source of manpower and creative talent thus remains greatly neglected.
If the traditional attitude is shed the teacher would discover that a little thoughtful attention and careful handling of those students considered unworthy of academic pursuits, is generally well rewarded.

It should be remembered that the achievement test scores do not reflect the basic intelligence to the full. They reflect only such intelligence the exercise of which is conditioned by the general social and cultural milieu of the children and the specific educational opportunities to which they have been exposed. The children who do not get intellectual stimulus at home or in the community or in school will definitely have low scores. Without an objective assessment of the basic intelligence, to label a child from a deprived background as uneducable would be unwarranted. If he is treated as uneducable because he has a low achievement test-score, then as a result of this wrong assumption and the nature of the subsequent treatment given him, he might really become uneducable eventually, and his low test-score would thereby be reinforced. If a child scores low on an intelligence test because he cannot read and then is not taught to read because he has a low score, it would mean wrong prescription on wrong diagnosis.

The technique of evaluating academic achievement on the basis of test scores may be a sound one. However, corrective measures, as suggested by such scores, would have to take into account the constellation of diverse factors bearing on the academic achievement or lack of it through the technique of the scores, the mix of corrective measures would vary according to the weights of the affecting factors in respect of different students.
It is generally said that one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It may be impossible to bring a child of low IQ up to a high level of academic excellence. His hereditary endowments always set limits to his potential achievement and there is no denial of this fact. But it would be wrong to suppose that all educationally deprived children who may get low test scores are of low IQ.