Children are indeed the future of any country and the progress of a nation depends on the education of its generation. School is a very special place, which plays an important role in all domains of a child’s development. The prevalence of out of school children is one of the most important problems confronting the world at large, especially developing countries such as India. The term ‘out of school children’ refers to a group of children who should be in school but are not because of various reasons. Educational deprivation is not only a hindrance in the national development but tends to have long term effect on the growing children and his/her family also.

The current study has been designed to present a comprehensive picture of educational deprivation faced by the children of Kathua district of J&K State. The major objectives of the present research are to: (i) analyze the causes of educational deprivation among children; (ii) study the life conditions of educationally deprived children; (iii) assess the psycho-social development of the sample children; (iv) study the role of state (S.S.A schools) in ensuring right to education; and (v) plan and implement intervention programs for sample children.

The core sample comprised 300 out of school children in the age group of 10-14 years, half of who were males and rest females. These children were selected in equal numbers in three categories namely, withdrawn, eliminated and excluded. Withdrawn children are those who have deliberately been taken out of the school system by parents/ life circumstances. Eliminated children are those children who are pushed out or dropout of the education system. Lastly, excluded children are those
children who have never been enrolled at school ever. Apart from them, 100 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan personnel (50 males and 50 females) working with the scheme in the District for at least past 2 years; and a supplementary group of 60 community leaders and heads were also included in the sample group. Multistage sampling technique was used for the selection of the requisite sample. Community leaders and SSA personnel helped locate areas where there were high incidences of educational deprivation and then the sample children were drawn. The tools used included: (a) Interview schedules for out of school children; SSA personnel; and community members, (b) Observations of the sample children, (c) Psychological test for out of school children.

Results of preliminary analysis reveal that the sample out of school children were more or less equitably distributed from 10 to 14 years of age and most of them lived in nuclear families (54.7%). Most of these children (33.3%) were completely illiterate and had not acquired any academic skills. Computation of $\chi^2$ reveals significant difference in the literacy status of the children according to their category, as all excluded children fell in the completely illiterate category as compared to most withdrawn (40%) and eliminated (49%) children who were able to read and write. Overall, only 5.3% had reached secondary school before leaving education incomplete. Most children of withdrawn category (44%) and eliminated category (46%) had left school when they were 6-8 years old. These results highlight that the children had left school in the early years itself. Also, most of these children before withdrawal or elimination were enrolled at government schools.

The sample children cited multiple reasons for being out of school, and these can be classified into two major heads- family and school related reasons. Among the
family related factors, the children reported that they were required for domestic activities such as cleaning, washing, cooking, care of cattle etc. 37.6% reported that it was because of poverty that they did not attend school. 30% of them reported that due to illiteracy among their parents, they were not sent to school. These parents reportedly failed to understand the importance of schooling and education. Among the school related factors the most predominant were poor infrastructure (66.6%), lack of separate toilet facility (60.3%) and distance from home (47%), apart from student irregularity or teacher irregularity. Calculation of $\chi^2$ reveals significant difference in the reasons of educational deprivation cited by the children according to the category, with excluded children reporting more familial reasons while, the other two category children cited both family as well as school related reasons. Majority of the children’s parents were either illiterate or had acquired basic reading and writing skills only.

Regarding their life conditions it was noted that most of these children led harsh lives with getting up early in the morning and being engaged in various activities since early to late in the evening. A significant percentage of these children were engaged in financially gainful/wage earning activities; while others were required to work outside home sometimes and inside home always. The respondents further, reported they did do not get enough time for herself/himself because of their busy life schedule and poverty. Most children felt that their families were happy about them being involved in work and it was mostly the parents who selected the kind of work children would be involved in. None of the sample children were satisfied with their family condition or their psychological status. These children reported that their families were poor and hence they could not enjoy their childhood. They further,
reported that they were unhappy about their circumstances and had constant anxiety about the future. Majority of the sample children encountered various problems while being involved in work at home or outside as usually they felt stress, pain in back and suffered from physical fatigue.

Most of these children across categories and sex were well aware of the contribution of education in making the future more secure but at the same time also found going to school burdensome. Most children held the perception that school is an institute where they can obtain higher education, also helps in making life better/secure and it contributes to personality development. After being out of school the respondent’s perception towards school going children was positive, they felt that school going children had better future and usually felt inferior in front of school going children.

As far as their psychosocial profile was concerned majority of the sample children (40.6%) had low self-acceptance and low self esteem (43%). These children were generally not happy about their living conditions were mostly conservative, dependent and narrow in interest. They were also found to be more shy, self-abasing, passive in action and were followers rather than leaders. However, at the same time most of these children were socially adjusted (53.3%), they were able to adjust to new situations and people and had accepted the reality and displayed no negativity towards others. Majority (45.6%) of the respondents also had average social maturity implying that these children had basically been able to adjust to their social roles and responsibilities. Chi-square analysis reveals no significant differences between withdrawn, eliminated and excluded children’s levels of psychosocial development.

**Out of school children**
but significant difference were found in the level of self acceptance between males and females.

The awareness of school personnel about **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Scheme** (SSA) and its importance in reducing incidence of educational deprivation was assessed. The results reveal that most SSA personnel had in-depth knowledge about the scheme. They felt that it is a potent tool for removing educational deprivation among children. According to them the meaning and aim of SSA is to provide education for all children in the 6-14 years age group and the major objectives of this scheme was to achieve 100% literacy rate. Majority of the respondents (41%) felt that Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme is able to fulfill its objectives and 42% respondents also indicated that the benefit of this scheme is to increase the literacy rates. Mostly of the teachers (61%) used teaching learning material to improve enrollment rate which included charts, maps and plastic alphabets etc. Measures suggested to reduce school wastage include provision of teaching-learning material, mid day meals and financial help. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan personnel also reported that Government provided free textbooks, mid- day meals to student who studied under SSA scheme. Overall, the state through SSA scheme was trying to get all eligible children to school and the staff/personnel were well aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Educational deprivation was also analyzed in its **social context** by the inclusion of community members/leaders in the sample design. They were in the age group of 30-70 years and most of them were either primary pass (30%) or graduates (23.33%). The male respondents were found to be comparatively more qualified than
the females and some of them community heads were completely illiterate. All the community members seemed to be well aware of the importance of education but held different perceptions towards it. Though most of them understood that making the child work since their childhood could have negative influence on their development but at the same time they felt that if the family circumstances/conditions are not congenial, it is acceptable that children be retained at home and assist in household activities or other parental activities.

Community members cited multiple reasons for children to be out of school especially in their community. Among school and teacher related reasons, the reasons for dropping out of school included neglect by teacher, lack of teachers, irregular classes, absence of female teachers, punishment by teachers, poor school environment and distance from home to school etc. Most of the respondents showed dissatisfaction with the school in their community and felt that if school related facilities are improved the incidence of educational deprivation can be reduced. However, at the same time they also acknowledge the presence of parent/home related factors also such as, poor discipline by parents, illiteracy, gender bias and neglect by parents. They also felt that there are some intrinsic factors among the children themselves also such as early marriage, fear of punishment and disinterest in studies, poor academic achievement and feeling of inferiority which interfere with education. Most community members felt that NGO’S, governmental agencies and even community based initiatives are all required to address the problem of educational deprivation.

**Intervention** was also planned and executed for the sample children on the basis of the felt needs. Awareness generation activities were executed for a total of
120 out of school children, their parents and community members (Two events of a day each). A panel of experts comprising of educationists, academicians, researcher/voluntary workers conducted the intervention and gave information regarding various schemes run by Govt. to fulfill the generation gap such as EGS Center, SSA schools, alternative Innovative Education and Mobile School for migratory children and scholarship for SC/ST/OBC children. Awareness about importance of maintenance of good physical and psychological health and hygiene was also imparted to children, parents and community members. The Intervention Programme yielded a positive response as all the respondents with who this programme was carried out were satisfied and clarified their queries regarding “Education and schooling”. A pre-prepared performa was also distributed among the attendees to assess their level of awareness about different aspects of schooling and education. Analysis of this performa revealed that the intervention activity fulfilled its objectives and made the sample children more sensitized and aware about the need of schooling.

In short multiple factors come into play to make a child educationally deprived and hence, there is a need to synergize the efforts of all in addressing this issue on an urgent basis.