

## **Literacy and Primary Education in West Bengal**

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IDSK launched a research programme on *Literacy and Primary Education in West Bengal* in 2002 with the aim of constituting a research group that would enquire intensively into both the micro and macro aspects of achievement of universal literacy and elimination of the phenomenon of children of school-going age not attending school.

Research proposals were invited from young teachers, scholars and researchers, focusing on different aspects of literacy and primary education in West Bengal. Through a rigorous process of screening, ten proposals were selected and small research grants were offered to the researchers to carry out their proposed research.

Prabhat Datta and Dipankar Sinha of the Department of Political Science, Calcutta University, were in charge of research supervision and helped by the faculty of IDSK at various stages. The researchers also drew on the advice of a group of experts at various stages of their research through workshops organized by IDSK, and all ten of them have completed their studies and submitted reports.

Out of these ten reports, two have been published as *Working Papers* of the Institute. These papers are *Primary Education Among Low Income Muslims in Kolkata: Slum Dwellers of Park Circus* by Zakir Husain and *Impact of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) on Primary Education: A study of South 24 Parganas* by Suman Ray.

The problem of dropout at the primary stage for good reason has been the central theme in almost all the studies. Several studies have confirmed that the demand side problems, such as compulsions of work to supplement family income, are rather less serious than the supply side bottlenecks.

Most parents from low-income households literate or illiterate – do realize the value of education, and many of them spend a very high proportion of their income on their children's education. Ironically, the high cost of 'free' education to poor families seems to be a major deterring factor. Many children drop out because their parents cannot afford to pay for private tutors.

In recent years various efforts have been made to improve the situation. Researchers have found that Sishu Siksha Kendras (SSK) and the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) have made some contribution in this regard, but the effort has to go further and embrace many dimensions that apparently lie outside the narrow domain of education.

The following themes were covered in the research project:

- Qualitative and Quantitative Impact of District Primary Education Programme on the Target Group in 24 Parganas.
- The Status of Primary Education and Literacy among the Low Income Muslims in Kolkata.
- Dropout from Primary Schools: An Analysis of Causality in Paschim Midnapore.

- Literacy and Primary Education among the Sericulture Workers in Murshidabad.
- Impact of Caste and Class Divisions on the Dropout Rate in the Rural Schools in Burdwan.
- The Role of the *Preraks* in the Continuing Education Programme in Howrah.
- Land Reform, Child Labour and Primary Education in North Bengal.
- Continuing Education Programme in the Sunderbans.
- Development, Displacement and Dropouts from Schools: A Study on the Relationship between Loss of Land and Loss of Education in Paschim Medinipur.