

## ISSUES IN SCHOOL EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY KERALA

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A paper prepared for UNICEF, New Delhi

April 2001

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### *Acknowledgements*

K. Jayakumar IAS gave generously of his time for interviews and gave full access to documents and information on school education from the Education Department and DPEP. C. Ramakrishnan (Co-ordinator, Educational Research Unit, Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad), P.K. Michael Tharakan (Director, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur) and T.M. Thomas Isaac (Member, State Planning Board and Associate Fellow, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram) gave us detailed interviews and information on school education in Kerala and comments on the findings. A.K. Shiva Kumar of UNICEF, New Delhi provided us with all-India data; he commented on a draft of this report and provided much encouragement. We also received help and information from K. Narayanan Nair and P.R. Gopinathan Nair of the Kerala Research Project on Local Level Development, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Ms Prema of the DPEP and G. Manamohan of the State Planning Board, Government of Kerala.

We are deeply grateful to all of them; we could not have written this report without their generous help.

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By the late 1980s, it was clear that Kerala had not only achieved mass literacy, it had also been able to ensure that the overwhelming majority of its children entered school. Although residual problems of access remained, social and political attention in Kerala in the 1990s turned to other issues in school education: the retention of children in schools, the quality of education and new forms of community participation in school education.

This paper deals with issues in school education in contemporary Kerala. In particular, it deals with

- levels of public investment in school education;
- issues of access to school education, the retention of pupils in the school system and the state of physical infrastructure in schools; and
- issues related to course content, pedagogy and community participation in school education.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The paper does not deal with the important issues of special facilities for school education of the handicapped or special education for children with learning difficulties.

1.

### BACKGROUND

A cardinal feature of culture and society in Kerala and of Kerala's political and economic development is the high proportion of literate and educated persons in the population. Literacy - in particular, female literacy - is an essential (and is often regarded as *the* essential) facilitator of Kerala's achievements in the spheres of health and demographic change. Literacy is a foundational feature of Kerala's political culture, crucial in the creation of public opinion and essential to the consciousness of individual and political rights that is so conspicuous a feature of social and political life in Kerala.

With regard to the proportion of persons in the population who are literate, Kerala and the other states of India are in different leagues (see Table 1). In 1991, there was mass literacy among men as well as among women. Although the proportion of literates in the population of the northern districts at the Census of 1991 was lower than in the rest of the State, the gap was smaller than before. National Sample Survey data from the 42<sup>nd</sup> Round (1986-87) on age-specific literacy show very high rates of literacy in the younger age groups - over 97 per cent among males and females in each age group between 6 years and 24 years, in rural areas and urban areas. In every age group below 34, even the *rural female* literacy rate in Kerala is higher than the *urban male* literacy rate in India as a whole (Table 2).

Table 1 *Proportion of literate persons in the population: Kerala and India, 1961-91 (per cent)*

Year	Persons		Males		Females	
	Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
1961	46.8	24.0	55.0	34.3	38.9	12.9
1971	60.4	29.5	66.6	39.5	54.3	18.7
1981	69.2	36.2	74.0	46.7	64.5	24.9
1991	78.1	42.9	80.9	52.6	75.4	32.4
1981	<i>81.6</i>	<i>43.6</i>	<i>87.7</i>	<i>56.4</i>	<i>75.7</i>	<i>29.8</i>
1991	<i>90.6</i>	<i>52.1</i>	<i>94.5</i>	<i>63.9</i>	<i>87.0</i>	<i>39.4</i>

Notes:

1. The state of Kerala was formed in 1956.
2. Numbers in italics represent the number of literate persons above the age of 7 as a proportion of all persons above the age of 7.

Sources: Censuses of India.

Table 2 *Proportion of literate persons in the population, by age group, India and Kerala, 1986-87 (per cent)*

Age group (in years)	Rural				Urban			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala
6-11	64.7	97.4	48.9	97.4	81.5	97.0	77.3	97.9
12-14	75.3	99.5	54.5	99.1	89.2	98.6	81.7	99.7
15-24	69.3	98.4	45.3	97.2	88.6	99.1	76.0	97.2
25-34	60.6	96.1	32.5	91.3	86.2	98.8	66.4	95.2
35-44	54.7	92.1	24.9	80.9	81.3	97.8	57.6	86.5
45-59	46.0	86.7	18.7	69.3	76.0	92.5	47.8	78.5
60 & above	38.5	81.0	14.9	53.1	71.2	90.5	33.9	70.2
All <sup>a</sup>	52.4	84.1	31.6	79.6	74.0	88.7	59.0	84.8

Note: <sup>a</sup> Including persons in the 0-5 age group.

Source: NSS (1993).

The median number of completed years of schooling in Kerala is much higher than in the rest of India, and the difference between male and female achievement in this regard is much narrower than in the rest of India (Table 3). Table 4 shows educational achievement in terms of the

median years of completed schooling in 1992-93 and 1998-99 by age groups. The age groups cover persons who were of Class 10 age in the reference year (i.e., were 15-19 years old in 1992-93) to persons who were of Class 10 age in the mid-1970s (i.e., were 30-34 years old in 1992-93). The data show two trends. First, it can be inferred that the median number of years of schooling rose steadily over recent decades, to 10.3 years for the age groups 15-19 years and 20-24 years in 1998-99. Second, the gap between median years of schooling among men and women closed over the different age groups, and was actually marginally higher among women than among men in the age group 15-19 years in the reference year.

Literacy and education are, of course, of intrinsic importance, that is, they are important in and of themselves. The experience of Kerala is an excellent example of how literacy and education are also of immense *instrumental* importance in social development.

To take the impact of education in one sphere of social development, health and demographic change, it is clear that education, particularly female education, has a fundamental influence on health and health-seeking behaviour (and on socio-cultural consciousness that influences attitudes to health). There are strong correlations between life expectancy and literacy. The lower infant and child mortality are, the higher is the

Table 3 Median number of completed years of schooling, all persons above 6 years, by sex, Kerala and India, urban and rural, 1992-93 and 1998-99 (years)

Region	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
(a) NFHS, 1992-93									
Kerala	6.7	6.1	6.4	7.7	7.2	7.4	7.0	6.4	6.7
India	3.6	0	0	7.7	5.0	6.3	4.8	0	2.5
(b) NFHS, 1998-99									
Kerala	7.8	7.4	7.6	9.2	8.7	9.0	8.1	7.6	7.9
India	4.6	0	2.6	8.3	5.8	7.3	5.5	1.6	4.0

Sources: (i) IIPS (1995a), Table 3.8, pp. 49-51.  
(ii) IIPS (1995b), Table 3.7, pp. 31-33.  
(iii) IIPS (2000), Tables 2.7 and 2.8, pp. 26-28, 30-31.  
(iv) IIPS (2001), Table 2.6, pp. 20-22.

Table 4 Median number of completed years of schooling, all persons above 6 years, by sex, Kerala and India, urban and rural, 1992-93 and 1998-99 (years)

Age group (in years)	Rural						Urban						Total					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I
(a) NFHS, 1992-93																		
15-19	9.4	7.8	9.5	0	9.5	5.7	9.4	9.4	9.7	9.1	9.5	9.2	9.4	8.3	9.6	5	9.5	7.1
20-24	9.4	7.9	9.4	0	9.4	4.2	9.4	10.1	9.8	8.6	9.6	9.5	9.4	8.7	9.5	0	9.5	5.9
25-29	9.1	5.9	8.8	0	9.0	0	9.4	10.0	9.4	7.8	9.4	9.1	9.2	7.6	9.1	0	9.1	4.8
30-34	8.4	5.0	7.4	0	7.8	0	9.3	10.1	9.0	7.1	9.1	8.8	8.8	6.6	7.7	0	8.2	3.8
(b) NFHS, 1998-99																		
15-19	10.2	8.1	10.3	5.5	10.3	7.1	10.5	9.3	10.5	9.3	10.5	9.3	10.3	8.5	10.4	7.0	10.3	7.9
20-29	10.3	8.2	10.2	0	10.2	5.4	10.6	10.4	10.8	9.4	10.7	10.1	10.3	9.0	10.3	4.5	10.3	7.2
30-39	8.9	5.6	8.0	0	8.4	2.1	10.0	10.2	9.9	7.3	9.9	9.0	9.3	7.3	8.7	0	9.0	4.8

Notes: K - Kerala; I - India.

Sources: (i) IIPS (1995a), Table 3.8, pp. 49-51.  
(ii) IIPS (1995b), Table 3.7, pp. 31-33.  
(iii) IIPS (2000), Table 2.7, pp. 26-28.  
(iv) IIPS (2001), Table 2.6, pp. 20-22.

level of maternal schooling. At given levels of income, schooling increases the ability to improve nutrition; it contributes to the ability to initiate earlier and more effective diagnoses of illness and contributes to hygiene and the prevention of illness. Education also influences the reduction of survivorship differentials between males and females in a society. Table 5 contrasts the performance of Kerala with that of the rest of India in respect of certain crucial demographic indicators. Once again, it is clear that Kerala is in a different league from the rest of the country.

Table 5 *Selected demographic indicators, Kerala and India*

Indicator	Kerala	India
(a) Expectation of life at birth, 1990-92, in years		
Males	68.8	59.0
Females	74.4	59.4
(b) Birth rate per 1000, 1997	17.9	27.2
(c) Death rate per 1000, 1997	6.2	8.9
(d) Infant mortality rate, 1997, per 1000 live births	12	71
(e) Females per 1000 males in the population, 1991	1040	928

Sources: SRS (1998), Ramachandran (1996).

The impact of female education on progressive health and demographic transition in Kerala has been recognized widely. Female literacy and girls' schooling are critical factors in Kerala's performance in respect of child health and health conditions in general. Caldwell and Caldwell

(1985) identify girls' schooling as "the single most important influence" on survivorship differentials; they also note that the historical record does not show "examples of economic development leading to low mortality levels where low levels of female education continue". Mari Bhat and Irudaya Rajan (1990) identify female literacy as the "single most important factor explaining the demographic transition in Kerala" and, in an earlier paper, P.G.K. Panikar writes that "the spread of education, especially among women in rural Kerala, was a crucial factor contributing to the high degree of awareness of health problems and fuller utilisation of health facilities" (Panikar 1979).

Other factors relating to female empowerment and education and relevant to Kerala's better performance in child and general health than elsewhere in India, that have been discussed in the literature are: higher average age at marriage, higher rates of female employment in the organised sector, higher levels of health information among women and maternal utilization of the health system, and the greater decision-making role of women in Kerala households.

The spread of education has also had profound implications - not easily captured in statistics - for political mobilization, for creating and sustaining demands for social and economic entitlements in the spheres, for example, of education, health, food security and liberation from caste oppression. Owing to the prevalent levels of literacy, the dissemination of information by means of the written word goes much deeper in Kerala than elsewhere in India; this has

important implications for the quality and depth of public opinion, and of participatory democracy in the state. The circulation of newspapers in Malayalam per thousand speakers of Malayalam in 1989 was 61, and the corresponding figure for all newspapers in all languages and speakers of all languages in India was 28.

Although public provisioning in education in Kerala has been more effective than elsewhere, and better distributed between the sexes and between social groups and regions, traditional patterns of inequality have not entirely been eliminated. There are still social groups that are substantially behind the rest of the population in terms of education and other development achievements. These include people of the scheduled castes and tribes, the traditional coastal fishing communities, and the underclass of Tamil migrant workers in the State. The persistence of different forms of deprivation among these three groups is an important cause for social concern and calls for greater attention from state authorities and political movements.

The historical processes by which Kerala established itself as a frontrunner in education are complex; nevertheless, their main features can be enumerated fairly simply. Kerala got ahead because

- first, the link between mass education and mass schooling was recognized early;
- second, social movements recognized the value of school education and worked to overcome the three great

obstacles to mass school education in India, those created by class, caste and gender discrimination; and

- third, efforts to build schools were supported by the state, which also made the investments necessary for mass schooling.

In the early nineteenth century, school education was an important component of the activity of Christian (particularly Protestant) missionaries in Kerala. Their schools served as exemplars: they focussed on the poor and children of the oppressed castes, they encouraged the education of girls and, in addition to the religious aspects of education, they introduced courses of secular instruction.

Missionaries also influenced the state in Travancore. In 1817, the young ruler of the state, Rani Laxmi Parvathi Bai, issued the justly famous Royal Rescript that said:

The state should defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the state might be enhanced thereby.

The Rescript was remarkable because it declared universal education, paid for by the state, to be an objective of state policy. It was also remarkable for the fact that it was issued as early as 1817, in a princely state (no comparable statement was made, in the nineteenth century or the twentieth, by any government in British India, since

universal education was never British policy), and by a young - 15 years old at the time - woman ruler.

Nevertheless, for all the progress that was made in terms of educational policy during that period, there was no mass literacy at the end of the nineteenth century. Even in Travancore - where Christian missionaries were most active and where the nineteenth-century state was most interventionist - less than a quarter of all males and less than 5 per cent of all females were literate. Although official policy in Travancore and Cochin created what Richard Franke calls an "official environment of support for education", it required female education, organized movements of people of the oppressed castes and, later, the left movement, to establish comprehensive schooling and mass literacy.

To take the caste question first. Some of the worst forms of untouchability and distance pollution were practised in Kerala, and one of the most important reasons for Travancore pulling decisively ahead of Malabar in respect of literacy in the 1920s was the spread of education among people of the Izhava caste, the upper tier of Kerala's (roughly speaking) two-tier system of untouchability. The change in literacy levels on a social scale came in the 1930s, with higher levels of education among people of the Izhava caste, and the change occurred when the Izhava social reform movement became a large-scale mass movement, more than four decades after Sree Narayana Guru began his public mission. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a rapid expansion in enrolment, in educational investment and in affirmative action - in the form of scholarships, fee concessions and unrestricted access

to primary schools - that consolidated the basis of mass education.

The emphasis on schooling in the social movements of the oppressed castes is remarkable. At the first meeting of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, the main organization of the Izhava community, its leader Dr Palpu declared: "We are the largest Hindu community in Kerala...Without education no community has attained permanent civilized prosperity. In our community there must be no man or woman without primary education." The most striking feature of the early history of the Izhava social reform movement is the movement to gain access to primary education for all boys and girls, and to higher education as well. The great leader of the Pulaya masses, Ayyankali of Travancore (1863-1941), also placed education, including schooling for girls, at the centre of his programme of social liberation.

Female literacy leads to mass literacy; Robin Jeffrey, in his work on Kerala, refers to the old wisdom that "literate men have literate sons; literate women have literate children" (1986). Jeffrey illustrates his argument on the role of female literacy in achieving mass literacy in Kerala by comparing it with Baroda. Baroda was another princely state with similar levels of male literacy at the beginning of the century, and where the princely government declared a policy of mass primary education. It nevertheless lags far behind Kerala in respect of literacy in the contemporary period. Kerala got ahead because Kerala's culture and socio-political movements in the State fostered *female* literacy.

For all the favourable conditions, however, mass literacy in Kerala as a whole is recent. When the State of Kerala was formed in 1956, the main priorities of its first government were land reform, food security, education and health. Land reform empowers the rural poor and helps facilitate their access to education. The extension of mass literacy to the rural poor, particularly the rural poor in Malabar, took place after 1956. This was also the period when literacy spread decisively to backward districts in the State. The gap between Malabar and Cochin and Travancore in respect of literacy widened during the period of British rule in Malabar, and mass schooling in Malabar was established after the formation of Kerala.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first strike actions of agricultural labourers in Kerala was organized by Ayyankali in 1914.<sup>3</sup> Ayyankali attempted to gain admission for a dalit girl in a government school in Oorottambalam village in Neyyatinkara taluk near Thiruvananthapuram. The people of the upper castes of the area began a campaign of violence against the Pulayas for this act and, after violent clashes, burned the school down. Ayyankali organized a strike of agricultural labourers, and work stopped in the fields of the upper castes. Government intervened, and after a magistrate's inquiry, the strike ended in success for the workers. In retrospect, this stirring and deeply significant historical event encapsulates the diverse components of Kerala's struggle for mass

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<sup>2</sup> In his foundational work on the history of school education in Kerala, Michael Tharakan lists the commercialization of agriculture and the part played by the left movement in mobilizing oppressed communities as factors crucial to the progress of school education in Kerala (see Tharakan 1984, 1994, 2000b).

education, involving as it did elements of class struggle, struggle against caste and gender discrimination, and an assertion of the people's right to state-supported schooling.

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<sup>3</sup> See also George (1990) and Saradamoni (1980). Alex George's research suggests that a strike of Pulaya agricultural workers in 1907 also had school entry as one of its demands (pers. comm., April 10, 2001).

*PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN SCHOOLING*

A necessary condition for the relative success of mass schooling in Kerala has been the commitment of the State's governments to public investment in school education. The Governments of Travancore and Cochin spent a substantial part of total public expenditure on school education.<sup>4</sup> After the formation of the State of Kerala and the establishment of the first Communist Ministry, levels of public investment in education have been high relative to the all-India average, and rose substantially after the 1960s. A comparison with UNESCO data on public expenditure as a proportion of GDP in selected countries shows that Kerala's performance in this respect is impressive by international standards as well.

Education is, of course, on the Concurrent List of the Constitution of India, which means that the responsibility for public provisioning in this sphere lies with the Central and State governments. In practice, however, State governments, supported by some schemes that are financed by the Centre, have to take on the tasks of universalising school education and widening the reach of all levels of education. The bulk of finances for school education have to be laid out by State governments. State governments, it follows, have to play the major part in the task of raising

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<sup>4</sup> For data on public expenditure on schooling from 1867-68 to 1942-43 in Travancore and Cochin, see Ramachandran (1996), p. 320. For a comparative analysis with other states, see pp. 321-23.

national expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP from its current all-India level of 3 per cent to the official target of 6 per cent.

While the universalisation of school education is dependent on public action from below and from above, it is quite clear that the goal of universal school education of good quality cannot be achieved without adequate public expenditure. Public expenditure in Kerala is characterized by a rare commitment to school education. Public expenditure on education and on primary and secondary education has risen consistently in real terms over the last four decades (Figure 1). As long ago as 1960-61, total government expenditure on education in Kerala was 3.74 per cent of State Domestic Product (SDP) and expenditure on school education was 3.2 per cent of SDP (Figure 2). That ratio was the same as the ratio of educational expenditure to GNP for India as a whole in as recent a year as 1997. Starting at close to 4 per cent of SDP in the early 1960s, expenditure on education by the Government of Kerala rose to a peak of 6.5 per cent in 1986-87, and has fluctuated between 5.5 and 6.5 per cent since then, along a marginally declining trend.

Figure 1 Real Expenditure (revenue account, deflated by SDP deflator) on different levels of education in Kerala, 1960-61 to 1996-97

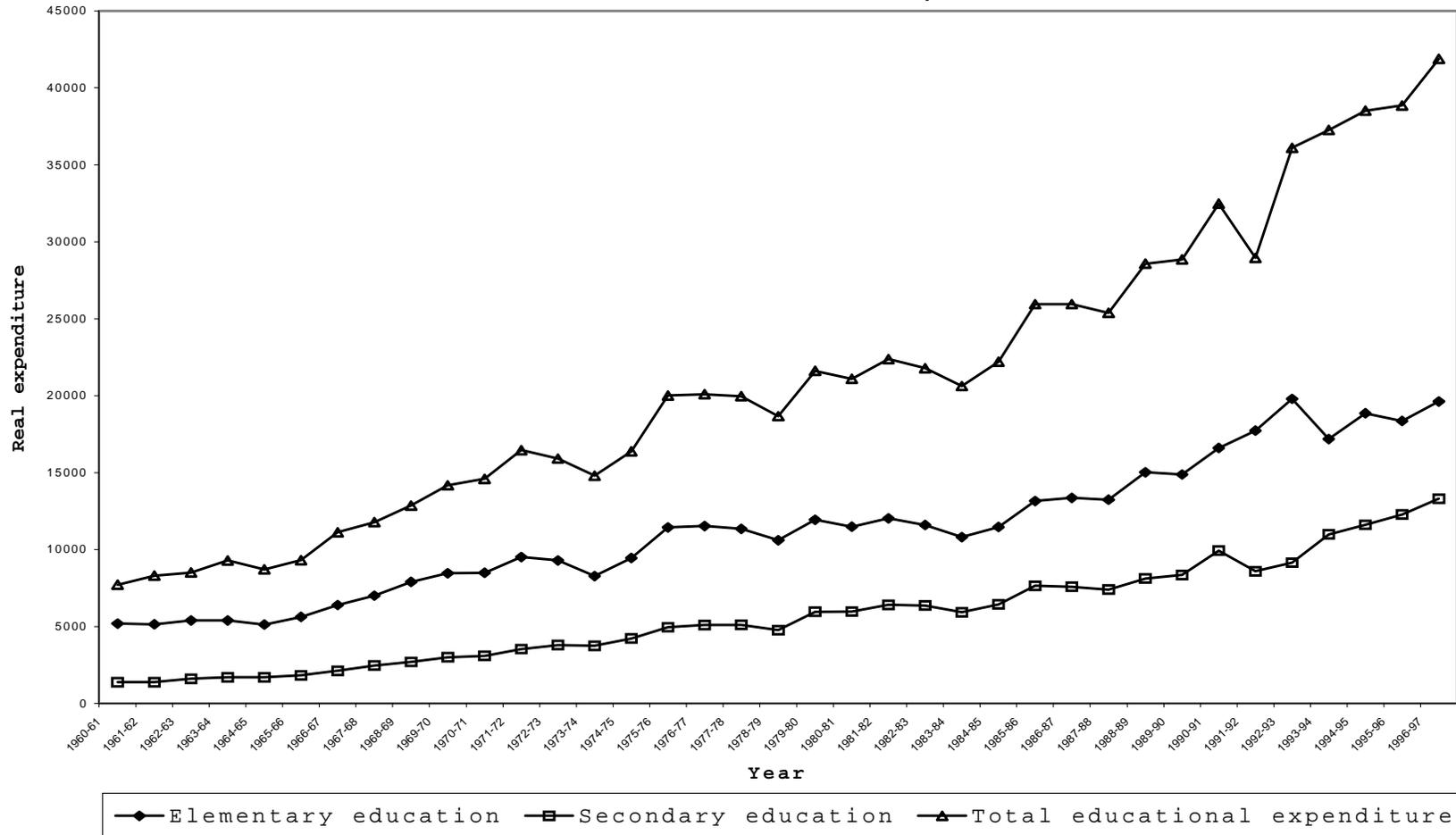
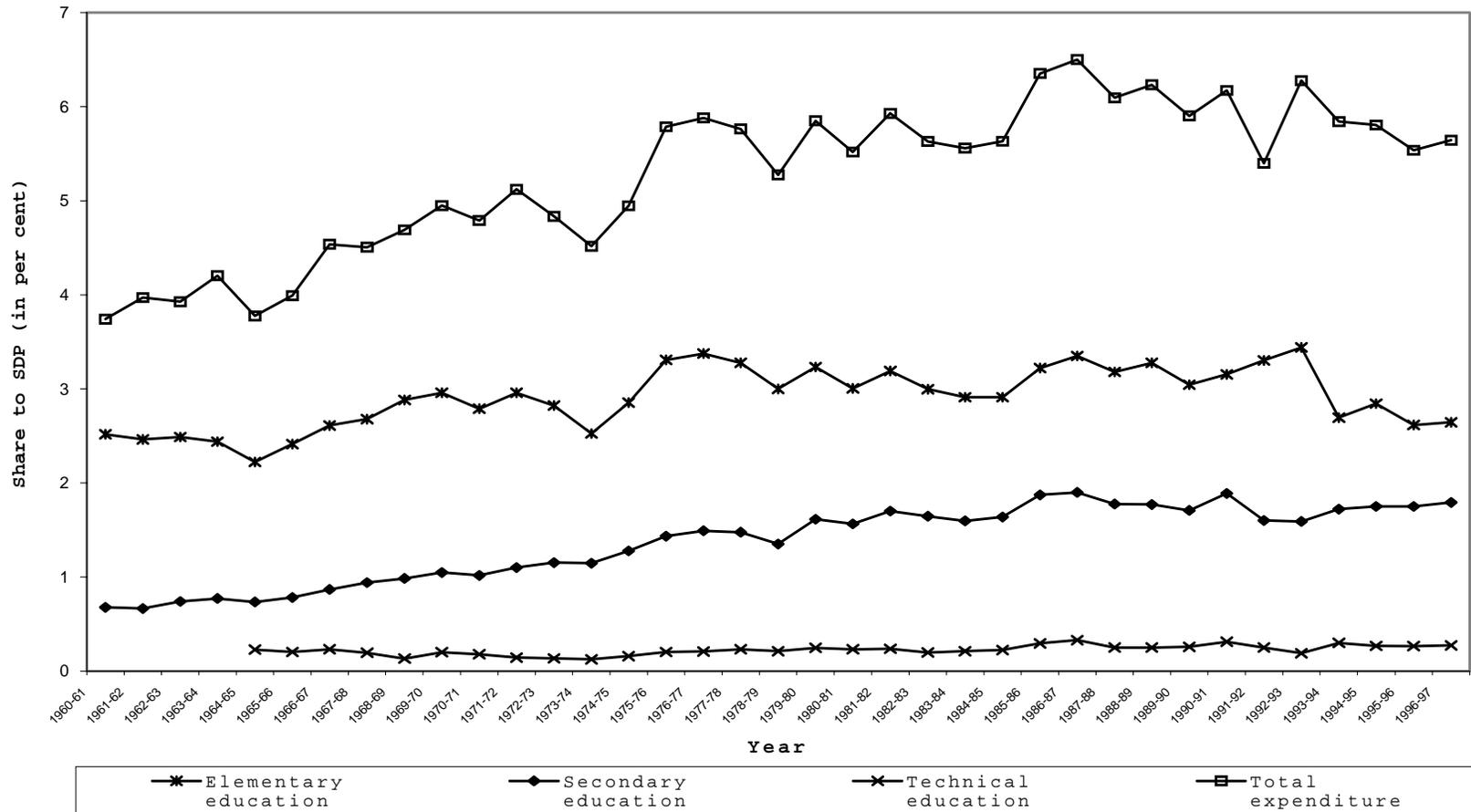


Figure 2 Share of expenditure on different levels of education to GDP in Kerala, 1960-61 to 1996-97 (per cent)



Such levels of investment are noteworthy by international standards as well (Table 6). Kerala's record compares with some of the best performers among developing countries in this regard, including Kenya, Cuba and Costa Rica, and betters the record of most developing nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The ratio of educational spending to GDP in Kerala in 1975 was more than twice the ratio of educational expenditure to GDP in South Korea, China, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. While expenditures in these countries rose over the next twenty years, Kerala was - even in 1996 - way ahead of these countries in terms of public educational expenditure relative to the size of the economy.

Much of this expenditure in Kerala has been on school (elementary and secondary) education (Table 7). On average, between 1960-61 and 1996-97, about 81 per cent of total expenditure on education was directed to school education, with the figures for most individual years falling between 72 and 91 per cent.

The shares of expenditure devoted to elementary and secondary education have changed substantially over time. While more than 60 per cent of total expenditure on education was directed to elementary education in the early 1960s, that share fell to 55 per cent in the late 1970s and further to around 47 per cent by the mid-1990s. It is to be expected that as access to elementary education becomes universal and the percentage of students entering the secondary level increases as a result of better pupil retention at the elementary stage, investment in secondary

Table 6 *Total expenditure on education as percentage of GNP/SDP (per cent)*

Year	Egypt	Kenya	Costa Rica	Cuba	Mexico	Brazil	China	Indonesia	Korea	Malaysia	Sri Lanka	Thailand	India	<b>Kerala</b>
1970	4.8	5.0	5.2	4.2	2.3	-	1.3	2.6	3.4	4.2	4.0	3.2	2.6	4.8
1975	5.1	6.3	6.9	5.7	3.5	2.9	1.7	2.7	2.2	6.0	2.8	3.5	2.7	5.8
1980	5.7	6.8	7.8	7.2	4.7	3.0	2.5	1.7	3.7	6.0	2.7	3.4	3.0	5.5
1985	6.3	6.4	4.5	6.3	3.9	3.6	2.5	-	4.5	6.6	2.6	3.8	3.5	6.4
1990	3.8	7.1	4.6	6.6	3.7	3.8	2.3	1.0	3.5	5.5	2.7	3.6	3.9	6.2
1991	4.7	6.7	4.5	9.7	3.9	4.5	2.2	1.1	4.0	5.6	3.3	3.6	3.7	5.4
1992	4.4	6.7	4.4	-	4.4	-	2.0	1.3	4.2	5.5	3.3	4.0	3.6	6.3
1993	4.7	6.5	4.6	9.5	5.1	-	1.9	1.8	4.4	5.1	3.1	4.1	3.6	5.8
1994	4.7	7.1	4.6	7.5	4.7	-	2.4	1.4	3.7	5.2	3.2	3.8	3.5	5.8
1995	4.8	6.7	4.6	6.8	4.9	5.1	2.3	1.4	3.7	4.7	3.0	4.1	3.3	5.5
1996	-	6.5	5.4	6.7	-	-	2.3	1.4	-	5.2	3.4	4.8	3.2	5.6

Sources: UNESCO (1996), GOI (1995).

Table 7 *Expenditure on school education (primary & secondary) to total expenditure (per cent)*

Year	Egypt	Kenya	Costa Rica	Cuba	Mexico	Brazil	China	Indonesia	Korea	Malaysia	Sri Lanka	Thailand	India	<b>Kerala</b>
1970	79.6	80.8	70.1	-	-	-	86.2	81.4	87.4	74.5	85.8	73.5	64.8	<b>79.5</b>
1975	70	84.2	59.6	-	-	56.3	85.2	-	87.8	-	84.5	79.3	66.6	<b>81.9</b>
1980	69.1	79.3	49.6	70.3	57.8	51.9	61.9	-	83.1	69.1	91.1	83.6	64	<b>82.8</b>
1985	-	77.5	57.4	68.2	58.3	53.7	62.7	-	83.7	74.8	90.2	79.5	63.3	<b>80.2</b>
1990	64	69	-	64.7	61.9	55.7	67.1	-	78.6	68.8	84.3	77.8	65.9	<b>81.7</b>
1991	62.9	74.7	59.8	64.3	67	-	-	-	83.1	68.8	85.7	75.8	66.5	<b>90.9</b>
1992	63.5	73.6	57.6	64.3	61.3	-	69.2	-	82.8	76	81.6	-	66.5	<b>80.2</b>
1993	64.7	78.6	60.9	65.6	63.1	-	73.2	76.6	80.9	73.2	76	75.4	65.7	<b>75.6</b>
1994	64.3	-	61.5	66.1	80.7	-	68.4	72.5	79.9	76.6	72.1	74.3	65.5	<b>79.1</b>
1995	64.6	-	61.6	65.2	82.8	73.8	-	72.9	82	71.7	72.7	74.6	66	<b>78.9</b>
1996	66.7	-	64.5	64.8	-	-	69.6	73.5	-	72.8	74.8	70.3	-	<b>78.7</b>
1997	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	63.3	-	-	-	<b>85.3</b>

Notes:

1. In some cases expenditure on pre-primary education is included.
2. Data for Mexico for years 1994 and 1995 are not comparable for previous years.
3. Data for Kerala is for financial years.

Sources: UNESCO (1996), GOI (1995).

education has to increase to meet the growing demand for secondary school facilities.

With improvements in access to elementary education, the ratio of expenditure on elementary schooling to GDP in Kerala declined from 3.35 per cent in 1986-87 to 2.65 per cent in 1996-97 (Figure 2). This reduction was not so much the result of diversion of funds to secondary education; the ratio of expenditure on secondary education to GDP remained more or less constant at 1.7 to 1.8 per cent. It was the result of the diversion of funds by a fiscally squeezed government into areas other than education. The ratio of total educational expenditure to GDP declined from 5.25 per cent in 1986-87 to 4.47 per cent in 1996-97.

About 96 per cent of all schools in Kerala are funded by the state (Table 8). The Government of Kerala funds two types of schools. The first are schools established, owned and run solely by the State government. Together, they constitute around 36 per cent of all schools in Kerala. The second type is "aided" schools, which are owned and managed by private agencies. The government meets the major component of their annual expenditure, namely, salaries. Aided schools also receive grants-in-aid from the State government for buildings and establishment, teaching and instructional material (including libraries and laboratories), and recreational facilities. This category covers 60 per cent of schools in the State and predominates at all levels of schooling. The last category, fully private schools, covers only about 4 per cent of all schools in the State.

In contrast with other States of India and many developing countries, the challenge of increasing public expenditure on school education has been met in Kerala. The government has matched its commitment to provide universal access to schooling with a substantial allocation of funds from its budgets for the purpose. The challenge now is to ensure the effectiveness of such spending, to meet the school education needs of disadvantaged social groups, and to improve the quality of school education in the State.

Table 8 *Structure of the school system in Kerala, 1998-99*

Level of schooling	Government schools	Private aided schools	Unaided schools	Total
Lower primary	2555 (37.83)	4039 (59.79)	161 (2.38)	6755 (100.00)
Upper primary	962 (32.43)	1871 (63.08)	133 (4.48)	2966 (100.00)
High school	976 (37.76)	1394 (53.93)	215 (8.32)	2585 (100.00)
Total	4493 (36.51)	7304 (59.35)	509 (4.14)	12306 (100.00)

Source: GOK (2000), p. S-175.

An important conclusion emerges from this analysis of Kerala's experience: a high level of expenditure on education has been a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for the realization of its educational achievements. This conclusion has implications for any assessment as to whether Kerala's achievements are

sustainable and whether they can be replicated in other States.

A much-noted feature of public finances at the State level in India is the sharp increase in the budget deficits of State governments in recent times (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2000). These deficits are caused by the inadequacy of the volume of statutory transfers of resources to the States relative to their growing financial commitments. This inadequacy, in turn, is caused by the declining tax-GDP ratio at the Centre, and by the Centre periodically resorting to non-sharable forms of resource mobilization, such as surcharges.<sup>5</sup>

Even as these factors serve to increase the gap between revenues and expenditures at the State level, the pressure to reduce such deficits is growing, as part of the structural adjustment or economic 'reform' programme<sup>6</sup> being adopted by the government. The Central government is virtually tying the hands of the States (see Chandrasekhar 2000b), directly and through statutory bodies like the Finance Commission, by linking resource transfers to success with fiscal adjustment (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2000). Past experience shows that the burden of fiscal adjustment falls mainly on capital expenditures in general and on current expenditures on the social sectors, particularly education. If this trend persists, the ability

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the impact of economic reform on the Centre's finances, see Chandrasekhar (2000a) and Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2001).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the macroeconomic framework underlying structural adjustment programmes, see Chandrasekhar (1994).

of a State like Kerala to protect and improve upon its educational achievements will be substantially weakened. In other States, where progress on the educational front has been moderate or poor, fiscal adjustment could dampen, even abort, efforts to ensure quality universal schooling.

Evidence of such a link between structural adjustment and progress on the schooling front has been found in other developing countries as well. Studies conducted as far back as the early 1990s (Kakwani *et al.* 1990) made a direct link between adjustment and declining public resources allocated to education: education's share of the public budget and GDP increased in all country groups except intensely adjusting countries after 1980 (see Noss 1991); gross primary enrolment rates increased in all country groups except intensely adjusting countries from 1970 through 1985; the rate of growth of primary enrolments declined in intensely adjusting countries after 1980.

Another cross-country analysis found that:

In countries that have undertaken World Bank-supported adjustment programmes, a slow-down in the increase in average female combined first- and second-level gross school enrolment rates is observed between the pre-adjustment and adjustment phase. Furthermore, there has been an absolute decline in female enrolment rates in a number of adjusting countries over this period. The gap between male and female enrolment rates has narrowed on average for ... countries that have undertaken adjustment programmes and for the control group that have not. For the adjusting group of countries, however, the closing of the gender gap is due to the average male enrolment rate falling toward the lower average female enrolment rate, whereas for the non-adjusting

group of countries the gap has narrowed due to an increase in the averages of both male and female enrolment rates. (Rose 1995, p. 1931)

The need to press the political demand for expanding public action, and public investment, in the sphere of education is particularly acute during periods of so-called structural adjustment.

*ISSUES OF ACCESS AND RETENTION OF SCHOOL PUPILS AND THE  
PROVISION OF THE PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SCHOOLING*

The first tasks in the field of school education in India are to overcome the socio-economic and political barriers to school education for all children, and to provide the basic infrastructure for their schooling. In Kerala, today, the general perception is that the first-generation problem of access to schooling has, in the main, been overcome.

*School attendance*

The two main sources of large-scale data on school attendance, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of 1992-93 and the National Sample Survey of 1993-94, indicate that about 95 per cent of children in Kerala in the age group 5-15 years were in school (Table 9). There are two important features of the comparative data on school attendance in Kerala and the whole of India. The first is that school attendance in Kerala was much higher than in the country as a whole: 95 per cent of children in the age

Table 9 Children attending school as a proportion of all children in the qualified age groups, by sex, Kerala and India, rural and urban, 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1998-99 (per cent)

Age group (in years)	Rural						Urban						Total					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I	K	I
(a) National Family Health Survey, 1992-93																		
6-10	94.9	71.4	95.0	55.0	95.0	63.5	95.8	86.2	97.1	81.8	96.4	84.1	95.2	75.0	95.5	61.3	95.3	68.4
11-14	94.8	73.4	93.6	47.9	94.1	61.2	93.0	84.2	95.4	75.7	94.3	80.1	94.3	76.3	94.1	55.3	94.2	66.2
6-14	94.9	72.2	94.3	52.2	94.6	62.6	94.5	85.3	96.3	79.2	95.4	82.4	94.8	75.5	94.8	58.9	94.8	67.5
(b) National Sample Survey, 1993-94																		
5-14	92.5	70.3	93.9	55.4	93.2	63.3	95.5	84.5	93.0	80.0	94.3	82.4	na	na	na	na	na	na
(c) National Family Health Survey, 1998-99																		
6-10	na	83.2	na	75.1	na	79.3	na	91.7	na	89.1	na	90.4	na	85.2	na	78.3	na	81.9
11-14	na	78.5	na	61.6	na	70.4	na	85.1	na	82.8	na	84.0	na	80.2	na	67.0	na	73.9
6-14	na	81.4	na	69.7	na	75.7	na	88.7	na	86.3	na	87.6	na	83.1	na	73.7	na	78.6
6-17	89.7	75.8	89.8	61.7	89.8	69.0	95.6	83.0	94.5	80.0	95.0	81.5	91.0	77.6	90.8	66.2	90.9	72.1

Notes: K - Kerala; I - India; na - not available

Sources: (i) IIPS (1995a), Table 3.10, p. 56.  
(ii) IIPS (1995b), Table 3.7, p. 33.  
(iii) NSSO (1997), Table 4.3.1.  
(iv) IIPS (2000), Table 2.9, p. 33.

group 6-14 years in Kerala attended school in the NFHS reference year, while only 68 per cent of children in the same age group in India attended school. Second, there is no difference in rates of attendance between boys and girls in Kerala; in India, however, NFHS data indicate that while 76 per cent of boys in the age group 6-14 years attended school, only 59 per cent of girls in the same age group attended school.<sup>7</sup>

In section 1, we identified certain pockets of deprivation in Kerala society, sections of the population among whom levels of achievement in education were distinctly lower than among the population as a whole. These included people of the scheduled castes, fisherfolk communities, people of the scheduled tribes, particularly in northern Kerala, and migrant workers, particularly from unirrigated regions of southern Tamil Nadu. Leaders and activists of the People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning (henceforth People's Campaign) were clear in their assessment that while problems of retention of children from dalit, adivasi and fisherfolk families remained, the problem of initial access to school education and actual enrolment and attendance in primary school among these children had been overcome.<sup>8</sup> With respect to children from migrant-worker families, whole-family migration by manual workers is, in Kerala as elsewhere, disruptive of children's schooling. Many Tamil migrant children are out of school; enrolment among them

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<sup>7</sup> On access to school education, see Nair (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Preface to SPB (1998), interviews with Thomas Isaac and C. Ramakrishnan (November 5 and 6, 2000).

rises when their parents settle and establish homes in Kerala.<sup>9</sup>

Micro-level studies confirm that rates of enrolment and regular attendance at the primary stage are high (see, for instance, Salim 1999a, Thomas 1996). Thomas's data, which were from villages in Malappuram and Palakkad districts in the mid-1990s, show that the proportion of children aged 7 enrolled and attending school varied from 94.4 per cent to 100 per cent. The exception to the trend is from a survey of scheduled tribe households in Panamaram, Wayanad district (Krishnan 1999a, 1999b): 15 per cent of boys and 22 per cent of girls (or, together, 18 per cent of children) in the age group 6-14 years had never attended school. Micro-level studies also show that the occupation or economic status of parents have little influence on enrolment rates, particularly at the primary level (Salim 1999a, pp. 33-35), and that, although parental literacy influences enrolment and retention in the schooling system, illiterate parents too are very concerned about children's schooling (*ibid.*, p. 3). A micro-level study in Wayanad district shows the enthusiasm for schooling in an adivasi-dominated region, and notes that social taboos that prevented girls from adivasi households from being sent to school have "mostly vanished" (Krishnan 1999a, p. 43).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Interview, C. Ramakrishnan. Michael Tharakan believes that the category of language minorities should be included in this list (pers. comm., March 30, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> On this, see also Thomas (1996).

### *Retention of school pupils*

Data on the retention of school pupils in the schooling system illustrate the importance of schooling in social life in Kerala. They also show that the rates of retention among dalit pupils and adivasi pupils, especially the latter, are lower than among all school pupils, and that the rates of retention are marginally higher among girls of all social groups than among boys.

The index of retention is calculated in the following way. The total number of pupils enrolled in Class 1 in any year  $t$  is indexed at 100. The total number of pupils enrolled in Class 2 in year  $t+1$  is indexed with  $t$  as the base year, and successive indices are computed until  $t+9$ , for which year the total number of pupils enrolled in Class 10 is indexed. The index series we have defined is termed the retention index for the school cohort covering the period  $t$  to  $t+9$ . The index should show the extent to which the members of a batch of pupils entering Class 1 remain in the school system of every successive year until Class 10. In practice, however, a problem with the data is that some pupils stay back (or are detained) for an additional year in certain classes. We understand that about 10 per cent are kept back between Classes 2 and 6, and about 20 per cent in Classes 8 through 9.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the figures do provide certain broad trends in aggregate retention, and separate retention indices for girls and boys and adivasi and dalit children help track social differentials in educational attainment.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, C Ramakrishnan.

These indices do not provide information on the access that children in a population have to school education, since they track children who enrol in Class 1 in the first place (it is not difficult to imagine a case where a small minority of children join school and stay in school through to Class 10). In the case of Kerala, however, we know that, from the late 1980s onwards, about 95 per cent of children of school-entry age and elementary-school age actually go regularly to school. For that reason, the retention index in Kerala for recent cohorts is a measure that tracks the educational attainments of almost all children.

Tables 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 are detailed tables showing the rates of retention among all school children in the State (from 1956-57 through 1999-2000, Table 10), among boys and girls (from 1980-81 through 1999-2000, Table 11), and for all pupils, boys and girls, by social group (from 1981-82 through 1999-2000, Tables 12, 13 and 14).

Some major conclusions follow from indices of retentions in the school system.

1. There has been a sharp increase in the overall rate of retention of pupils in the school system between 1956-57, the year the modern State of Kerala was formed, and 1999-2000 (Table 10). Almost all children in the most recent cohorts remained in school until Class 7 and Class 8, against less than half in the early cohorts. The index of retention in Class 10, which was 28 in the first cohort, rose to 75 in the most recent cohort.

Table 10 *Index of retention in the school system, all children, Kerala, 1956-57 to 1999-2000*

Cohort covering the period	Index of retention in									
	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	Class 8	Class 9	Class 10
1956-57 to 1965-66	100	86.27	78.26	75.41	67.98	54.37	48.06	45.24	37.06	28.31
1957-58 to 1966-67	100	87.42	78.22	74.98	59.32	52.31	46.65	41.95	35.67	26.79
1958-59 to 1967-68	100	87.71	77.83	72.39	60.61	53.17	45.34	40.31	35.47	26.93
1959-60 to 1968-69	100	92.71	82.00	78.75	49.77	57.43	50.04	45.27	39.01	29.54
1960-61 to 1969-70	100	90.85	84.12	79.66	65.30	56.25	49.21	46.05	40.40	26.84
1961-62 to 1970-71	100	87.95	81.99	77.83	62.80	53.62	47.83	44.91	38.92	24.23
1962-63 to 1971-72	100	90.16	85.37	79.22	64.44	54.78	48.21	45.35	39.48	23.97
1963-64 to 1972-73	100	90.89	85.21	80.14	65.32	55.80	48.14	45.75	39.12	23.14
1964-65 to 1973-74	100	89.72	82.93	75.35	64.71	53.53	45.41	43.33	37.13	29.90
1965-66 to 1974-75	100	90.06	84.32	77.08	65.61	54.87	47.56	45.99	46.81	44.74
1966-67 to 1975-76	100	88.87	82.87	78.13	65.26	54.94	47.29	36.77	29.17	22.91
1967-68 to 1976-77	100	88.80	83.91	79.63	67.43	58.16	54.99	47.05	40.99	30.51
1968-69 to 1977-78	100	88.58	83.90	79.86	70.09	62.01	58.03	51.04	44.53	33.96
1969-70 to 1978-79	100	90.35	85.32	81.31	70.82	64.10	59.69	51.74	47.49	36.09
1970-71 to 1979-80	100	89.71	87.08	83.42	73.05	65.99	61.46	55.14	50.16	37.93
1971-72 to 1980-81	100	114.41	104.54	98.28	83.91	74.09	69.17	60.64	54.43	41.60
1972-73 to 1981-82	100	105.70	102.68	101.39	91.33	84.81	82.06	73.38	68.11	53.41
1973-74 to 1982-83	100	104.81	100.66	98.64	91.53	85.70	83.86	76.32	70.87	55.68
1974-75 to 1983-84	100	101.64	96.08	95.33	87.91	82.77	81.55	74.74	69.14	54.25
1975-76 to 1984-85	100	100.97	97.39	95.85	88.75	84.33	84.34	76.36	70.50	52.34
1976-77 to 1985-86	100	102.05	97.32	95.84	88.93	84.96	84.62	77.33	70.39	47.82
1977-78 to 1986-87	100	101.32	96.61	94.35	89.44	85.89	85.85	78.69	70.23	46.26
1978-79 to 1987-88	100	102.87	98.50	98.14	93.63	90.92	88.40	81.28	74.59	49.03
1979-80 to 1988-89	100	101.03	98.43	97.04	93.72	90.82	86.47	81.09	75.11	58.77
1980-81 to 1989-90	100	103.41	99.89	98.64	97.30	93.54	89.80	84.45	77.95	62.22
1981-82 to 1990-91	100	101.68	98.41	97.76	96.10	92.76	88.30	82.28	77.20	61.13
1982-83 to 1991-92	100	102.22	100.97	101.70	99.62	96.97	97.10	90.87	83.85	66.58
1983-84 to 1992-93	100	107.30	107.19	104.23	104.17	100.79	102.45	96.03	89.49	72.58
1984-85 to 1993-94	100	110.36	106.60	105.05	102.35	100.82	101.95	96.51	89.31	70.73
1985-86 to 1994-95	100	108.70	106.36	104.75	103.86	101.49	103.00	97.21	88.59	69.71
1986-87 to 1995-96	100	111.84	109.23	107.45	107.39	104.68	107.12	100.97	92.60	72.64
1987-88 to 1996-97	100	104.03	101.96	101.05	101.60	100.05	103.39	98.00	90.15	71.32
1988-89 to 1997-98	100	103.46	101.75	101.16	101.85	100.42	103.97	98.99	92.04	73.32
1989-90 to 1998-99	100	103.50	101.81	100.82	101.62	100.55	104.16	99.95	93.09	74.58
1990-91 to 1999-00	100	103.90	101.31	100.65	101.26	99.91	103.31	99.52	93.19	75.46

Sources: Educational Statistics, various issues, Department of Public Instructions, GOK.

Table 11 *Index of retention in the school system, by sex, Kerala, 1980-81 to 1999-2000*

Cohort covering the period	Sex	Index of retention in									
		Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	Class 8	Class 9	Class 10
1980-81 to 1989-90	Boys	100	103.90	100.11	99.17	98.36	94.43	89.33	83.93	76.53	59.60
	Girls	100	102.90	99.66	98.08	96.20	92.60	90.30	84.99	79.44	64.96
1981-82 to 1990-91	Boys	100	101.33	98.13	97.80	96.78	92.61	87.31	81.56	75.19	57.68
	Girls	100	102.06	98.71	97.72	95.38	92.91	89.35	83.03	79.33	64.78
1982-83 to 1991-92	Boys	100	102.28	101.29	102.13	100.49	97.82	97.71	91.05	82.59	63.39
	Girls	100	102.16	100.65	101.26	98.71	96.09	96.45	90.68	85.16	69.90
1983-84 to 1992-93	Boys	100	107.47	107.18	104.50	104.82	101.12	102.53	96.46	87.57	66.56
	Girls	100	107.12	107.20	103.95	103.49	100.44	102.36	95.58	91.51	78.91
1984-85 to 1993-94	Boys	100	110.51	107.51	105.56	103.05	101.29	102.03	96.00	86.71	65.93
	Girls	100	110.20	105.65	104.52	101.61	100.33	101.86	97.04	92.04	75.76
1985-86 to 1994-95	Boys	100	109.80	106.98	105.62	104.73	102.18	103.26	96.70	85.51	64.17
	Girls	100	107.57	105.72	103.84	102.95	100.77	102.72	97.74	91.80	75.47
1986-87 to 1995-96	Boys	100	112.53	110.13	108.07	108.29	105.52	107.66	100.91	89.47	66.67
	Girls	100	111.12	108.30	106.80	106.46	103.82	106.55	101.04	95.85	78.84
1987-88 to 1996-97	Boys	100	105.20	103.04	102.25	103.31	101.33	104.36	98.16	87.59	65.63
	Girls	100	102.81	100.85	99.81	99.82	98.73	102.38	97.83	92.79	77.23
1988-89 to 1997-98	Boys	100	103.84	102.43	101.67	102.92	101.49	104.71	99.00	88.78	67.36
	Girls	100	103.05	101.04	100.62	100.73	99.30	103.19	98.97	95.43	79.55
1989-90 to 1998-99	Boys	100	104.04	102.61	101.68	103.02	101.58	105.31	100.18	90.57	69.01
	Girls	100	102.95	100.97	99.92	100.17	99.47	102.96	99.72	95.71	80.40
1990-91 to 1999-00	Boys	100	104.44	101.86	101.10	102.32	100.84	104.32	99.69	90.70	69.80
	Girls	100	103.34	100.72	100.18	100.15	98.94	102.26	99.33	95.79	81.35

Sources: Educational Statistics, various issues, Department of Public Instructions, GOK.

Table 12 *Index of retention in the school system, by social group, Kerala, 1981-82 to 1999-2000*

Cohort covering the period	Social group	Index of retention in									
		Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	Class 8	Class 9	Class 10
1981-82 to 1990-91	All pupils	100	101.68	98.41	97.76	96.10	92.76	88.30	82.28	77.20	61.13
	Dalit pupils	100	102.79	101.17	98.14	97.94	87.96	81.28	73.54	67.82	48.93
	Adivasi pupils	100	105.66	96.51	97.73	86.68	75.58	62.73	58.18	47.63	33.62
1982-83 to 1991-92	All pupils	100	102.22	100.97	101.70	99.62	96.97	97.10	90.87	83.85	66.58
	Dalit pupils	100	104.99	101.47	100.58	98.12	90.85	88.29	82.64	74.08	55.10
	Adivasi pupils	100	95.39	96.92	89.56	87.29	74.19	71.24	64.34	54.39	37.95
1983-84 to 1992-93	All pupils	100	107.30	107.19	104.23	104.17	100.79	102.45	96.03	89.49	72.58
	Dalit pupils	100	108.64	107.30	106.48	104.89	97.51	98.03	91.02	84.65	60.64
	Adivasi pupils	100	105.39	98.68	90.70	81.29	72.04	70.85	64.54	56.71	37.52
1984-85 to 1993-94	All pupils	100	110.36	106.60	105.05	102.35	100.82	101.95	96.51	89.31	70.73
	Dalit pupils	100	111.16	109.69	105.21	100.89	97.56	98.02	93.91	84.11	61.70
	Adivasi pupils	100	101.52	93.23	86.81	81.03	71.52	69.34	62.35	50.81	37.04
1985-86 to 1994-95	All pupils	100	108.70	106.36	104.75	103.86	101.49	103.00	97.21	88.59	69.71
	Dalit pupils	100	110.03	105.94	101.10	99.41	95.68	97.05	90.17	81.73	57.23
	Adivasi pupils	100	104.25	96.66	90.78	82.41	75.85	70.26	59.71	53.18	36.75
1986-87 to 1995-96	All pupils	100	111.84	109.23	107.45	107.39	104.68	107.12	100.97	92.60	72.64
	Dalit pupils	100	109.19	105.45	102.55	100.18	98.02	98.86	92.27	80.95	58.93
	Adivasi pupils	100	109.61	102.41	96.71	89.66	78.56	73.43	68.49	57.50	39.14
1987-88 to 1996-97	All pupils	100	104.03	101.96	101.05	101.60	100.05	103.39	98.00	90.15	71.32
	Dalit pupils	100	103.48	101.65	100.74	100.25	96.38	98.63	90.10	81.76	58.52
	Adivasi pupils	100	100.45	93.84	94.08	80.35	69.78	70.79	63.38	52.20	35.50
1988-89 to 1997-98	All pupils	100	103.46	101.75	101.16	101.85	100.42	103.97	98.99	92.04	73.32
	Dalit pupils	100	105.51	103.48	102.30	100.43	98.89	101.36	94.83	84.52	61.77
	Adivasi pupils	100	98.71	96.15	87.72	78.34	71.63	70.50	62.81	52.38	35.09
1989-90 to 1998-99	All pupils	100	103.50	101.81	100.82	101.62	100.55	104.16	99.95	93.09	74.58
	Dalit pupils	100	105.73	105.40	104.93	103.40	100.52	103.82	96.16	87.25	64.00
	Adivasi pupils	100	106.61	93.95	89.62	80.34	72.28	68.75	63.11	52.53	38.00
1990-91 to 1999-00	All pupils	100	103.90	101.31	100.65	101.26	99.91	103.31	99.52	93.19	75.46
	Dalit pupils	100	105.32	102.96	102.73	101.36	99.04	101.20	96.05	86.76	63.61
	Adivasi pupils	100	96.21	88.38	83.82	75.22	66.88	64.46	57.77	47.62	35.10

Sources: Educational Statistics, various issues, Department of Public Instructions, GOK.

Table 13 *Index of retention of girl pupils in the school system, by social group, Kerala, 1981-82 to 1999-2000*

Cohort covering the period	Social group	Index of retention in									
		Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	Class 8	Class 9	Class 10
1981-82 to 1990-91	All pupils	100	102.06	98.71	97.72	95.38	92.91	89.35	83.03	79.33	64.78
	Dalit pupils	100	102.29	100.29	97.04	96.43	86.64	81.45	74.69	70.64	52.07
	Adivasi pupils	100	108.47	98.85	100.30	86.44	72.77	63.45	62.03	48.71	35.82
1982-83 to 1991-92	All pupils	100	102.16	100.65	101.26	98.71	96.09	96.45	90.68	85.16	69.90
	Dalit pupils	100	104.66	101.66	101.21	97.23	90.69	88.94	84.40	77.66	58.77
	Adivasi pupils	100	97.53	96.72	90.53	83.53	73.58	71.73	64.73	57.67	40.72
1983-84 to 1992-93	All pupils	100	107.12	107.20	103.95	103.49	100.44	102.36	95.58	91.51	78.91
	Dalit pupils	100	108.40	106.68	105.93	102.95	97.59	98.42	92.11	87.51	66.49
	Adivasi pupils	100	105.72	98.17	90.99	77.68	70.47	70.33	64.03	58.83	41.14
1984-85 to 1993-94	All pupils	100	110.20	105.65	104.52	101.61	100.33	101.86	97.04	92.04	75.76
	Dalit pupils	100	109.08	107.12	102.57	98.24	95.63	96.13	94.07	86.58	66.48
	Adivasi pupils	100	103.96	95.74	90.45	83.64	74.78	74.00	66.06	54.43	41.94
1985-86 to 1994-95	All pupils	100	107.57	105.72	103.84	102.95	100.77	102.72	97.74	91.80	75.47
	Dalit pupils	100	107.88	104.55	99.65	98.14	94.73	96.18	91.35	85.98	63.49
	Adivasi pupils	100	104.94	97.82	92.65	84.02	79.31	70.92	63.33	57.64	42.20
1986-87 to 1995-96	All pupils	100	111.12	108.30	106.80	106.46	103.82	106.55	101.04	95.85	78.84
	Dalit pupils	100	109.37	104.77	101.78	98.71	97.23	98.35	93.13	85.40	65.63
	Adivasi pupils	100	109.71	103.17	97.10	89.32	79.82	75.76	68.82	60.88	44.03
1987-88 to 1996-97	All pupils	100	102.81	100.85	99.81	99.82	98.73	102.38	97.83	92.79	77.23
	Dalit pupils	100	103.20	101.68	99.80	98.78	95.38	99.04	91.66	86.46	65.52
	Adivasi pupils	100	100.38	94.17	94.41	80.10	70.37	71.16	64.49	54.69	39.77
1988-89 to 1997-98	All pupils	100	103.05	101.04	100.62	100.73	99.30	103.19	98.97	95.43	79.55
	Dalit pupils	100	105.11	102.60	100.98	98.77	97.23	100.59	95.38	88.85	68.31
	Adivasi pupils	100	98.95	94.97	87.05	78.26	71.23	70.04	63.26	56.13	39.79
1989-90 to 1998-99	All pupils	100	102.95	100.97	99.92	100.17	99.47	102.96	99.72	95.71	80.40
	Dalit pupils	100	104.74	104.21	104.76	100.99	98.76	102.15	96.05	90.99	70.17
	Adivasi pupils	100	106.66	93.41	90.88	81.27	73.94	70.61	64.87	58.35	42.90
1990-91 to 1999-00	All pupils	100	103.34	100.72	100.18	100.15	98.94	102.26	99.33	95.79	81.35
	Dalit pupils	100	104.69	101.63	101.38	100.11	97.71	100.11	96.21	90.94	70.37
	Adivasi pupils	100	96.31	88.92	84.64	74.95	68.23	66.25	60.47	51.92	41.07

Sources: Educational Statistics, various issues, Department of Public Instructions, GOK.

Table 14 *Index of retention of boy pupils in the school system, by social group, Kerala, 1981-82 to 1999-2000*

Cohort covering the period	Social group	Index of retention in									
		Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	Class 8	Class 9	Class 10
1981-82 to 1990-91	All pupils	100	101.33	98.13	97.80	96.78	92.61	87.31	81.56	75.19	57.68
	Dalit pupils	100	103.27	102.01	99.19	99.38	89.22	81.12	72.44	65.14	45.94
	Adivasi pupils	100	103.14	94.42	95.42	86.88	78.10	62.09	54.74	46.67	31.65
1982-83 to 1991-92	All pupils	100	102.28	101.29	102.13	100.49	97.82	97.71	91.05	82.59	63.39
	Dalit pupils	100	105.31	101.29	99.98	98.95	91.00	87.67	81.00	70.70	51.65
	Adivasi pupils	100	93.46	97.11	88.69	90.68	74.73	70.79	63.99	51.45	35.45
1983-84 to 1992-93	All pupils	100	107.47	107.18	104.50	104.82	101.12	102.53	96.46	87.57	66.56
	Dalit pupils	100	108.87	107.87	106.98	106.69	97.43	97.66	90.01	82.00	55.20
	Adivasi pupils	100	105.08	99.14	90.44	84.57	73.47	71.33	65.00	54.78	34.22
1984-85 to 1993-94	All pupils	100	110.51	107.51	105.56	103.05	101.29	102.03	96.00	86.71	65.93
	Dalit pupils	100	113.16	112.18	107.75	103.44	99.42	99.85	93.74	81.73	57.09
	Adivasi pupils	100	99.40	91.04	83.63	78.75	68.69	65.28	59.13	47.66	32.76
1985-86 to 1994-95	All pupils	100	109.80	106.98	105.62	104.73	102.18	103.26	96.70	85.51	64.17
	Dalit pupils	100	112.08	107.27	102.48	100.62	96.57	97.89	89.04	77.68	51.27
	Adivasi pupils	100	103.62	95.59	89.07	80.94	72.68	69.65	56.38	49.09	31.75
1986-87 to 1995-96	All pupils	100	112.53	110.13	108.07	108.29	105.52	107.66	100.91	89.47	66.67
	Dalit pupils	100	109.02	106.09	103.28	101.58	98.76	99.34	91.45	76.73	52.56
	Adivasi pupils	100	109.53	101.75	96.37	89.96	77.45	71.37	68.20	54.51	34.82
1987-88 to 1996-97	All pupils	100	105.20	103.04	102.25	103.31	101.33	104.36	98.16	87.59	65.63
	Dalit pupils	100	103.75	101.63	101.63	101.62	97.32	98.24	88.63	77.35	51.95
	Adivasi pupils	100	100.52	93.54	93.78	80.57	69.24	70.46	62.37	49.93	31.61
1988-89 to 1997-98	All pupils	100	103.84	102.43	101.67	102.92	101.49	104.71	99.00	88.78	67.36
	Dalit pupils	100	105.89	104.32	103.57	102.04	100.48	102.10	94.29	80.36	55.48
	Adivasi pupils	100	98.47	97.27	88.35	78.42	72.01	70.93	62.38	48.84	30.64
1989-90 to 1998-99	All pupils	100	104.04	102.61	101.68	103.02	101.58	105.31	100.18	90.57	69.01
	Dalit pupils	100	106.69	106.56	105.10	105.71	102.21	105.42	96.26	83.66	58.07
	Adivasi pupils	100	106.56	94.45	88.47	79.49	70.75	67.04	61.49	47.20	33.52
1990-91 to 1999-00	All pupils	100	104.44	101.86	101.10	102.32	100.84	104.32	99.69	90.70	69.80
	Dalit pupils	100	105.93	104.24	104.03	102.57	100.32	102.26	95.90	82.73	57.10
	Adivasi pupils	100	96.13	87.90	83.08	75.46	65.66	62.84	55.34	43.75	29.72

Sources: Educational Statistics, various issues, Department of Public Instructions, GOK.

2. This increase in retention (and achievement of near-universal retention until Class 8) has occurred over a period in which initial enrolment expanded. The final cohorts, unlike the early ones, cover a period of near-universal initial enrolment.
3. Indices for the recent period show a sharp fall in Class 10. School pupils appear for their final school examinations (these are also the first public examinations written by them) at the end of Class 10. The high rate of departure from the school system at this stage clearly reflects the fact that schools detain children after the secondary stage (particularly in Class 9) in order to inflate the pass percentage in the SSLC examination. A second reason for this fall in retention is that many pupils decide to quit school before receiving their school certificate because they are not confident of facing the final examination. As we shall see later, the index of pupils who enter Class 10 and appear for the final examination is lower still.
4. For all reference years, the index of retention for girls is roughly equal to the index for boys (Table 11). A very interesting feature of the data is that, for every cohort, girls pull ahead of boys in Class 9, and the index for girls is significantly higher than the index for boys in Class 10. If there is a gender problem in respect of the retention of school pupils in Class 10, it lies in ensuring that more boys remain for what should be their final year in school.
5. The most disturbing feature of the data on retention is the very large disparity between retention rates for all school pupils and dalit pupils, and the still larger disparity between retention rates for all pupils and

adivasi pupils (Table 12). The disparity between the general index and the index for dalit pupils begins to widen significantly in Class 8 and above (and is widest in Class 10). The disparity between the general index and the index for adivasi pupils shows up early on, and is particularly wide in the senior classes.<sup>12</sup>

6. The index of retention among dalit pupils has risen (although with some fluctuations) over the reference period. The index of retention among adivasi children, however, does not show a consistent increase over the reference period.<sup>13</sup>
7. A common feature of the general index and the indices for adivasi and dalit pupils is that in all three categories, the index for girls in the higher grades is higher than the index for boys (Tables 13 and 14).
8. As we have noted at different points in this paper, the national-level data, teachers and others suggest that initial attendance in school from the late 1980s and the early 1990s has been almost universal. Given this, the tasks of identifying the causes - social, economic and school-system-based - for the low rates of retention of dalit and adivasi children in school and of rectifying present problems in this regard are particularly important in Kerala today.

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<sup>12</sup> On problems of schooling and retention of adivasi children in the schooling system, and on poverty and ill health in adivasi households as obstacles to joining or staying on in schools, see Krishnan (1999a, 1999b).

<sup>13</sup> It is possible that the relatively low retention rates among adivasi children reflect an expansion of the base of enrolment among adivasi children.

### *Drop-out rates*

The drop-out rates for different levels of schooling are computed as follows. For primary school pupils, the drop-out rate is the difference between the number of students enrolled in Class I in the year  $i=1$  and the number of students enrolled in Class V in the year  $i=5$ , as a percentage of the number of students enrolled in Class I in the year  $i=1$ . The numerator does not include the number of students who fail and repeat Class V in the year  $i=5$ . Thus, the formula is given as

$$DR = \{(a-c)/a\} * 100$$

where,

DR = drop-out rate in per cent; a = number of students enrolled in Class 1 in the year  $i=1$ ; and  $c = (b - r)$ ,

where,

b = number of students enrolled in Class 5 in the year  $i=5$ ;

r = number of students repeating Class 5 in the year  $i=5$ .

The major conclusions from the data on the drop-out rates in schools in Kerala are as follows (Tables 15 and 16).

- Drop-out rates for boys and girls in the primary and upper primary sections are relatively low.
- These rates have been declining over the 1990s among boys and girls, among dalit and adivasi pupils, and among all pupils in the primary and upper primary sections. In high schools, drop-out rates remained more or less constant over the 1990s.

Table 15 *Drop-out rates in India, 1997-98, State wise (per cent)*

State	Class I to V			Class I to VIII			Class I to X		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Andhra Pradesh	44.61	47.03	45.74	72.27	74.92	73.43	76.50	79.09	74.07
Assam	40.87	42.43	41.56	64.53	68.70	66.39	76.84	75.66	76.31
Bihar	58.28	62.00	59.65	75.32	80.48	77.13	81.74	87.68	83.78
Gujarat*	22.52	33.96	27.75	56.77	64.70	60.32	68.12	72.24	69.96
Haryana*	14.30	15.59	14.90	27.09	35.56	30.91	40.74	53.02	46.26
Himachal Pradesh	31.20	31.03	31.12	19.95	26.42	23.04	47.73	53.90	50.65
Jammu & Kashmir*	34.40	33.63	34.08	29.39	43.38	35.18	60.83	69.28	64.29
Karnataka*	33.50	33.46	33.48	53.76	60.95	57.13	64.84	68.10	66.42
<b>Kerala*</b>	<b>-11.06</b>	<b>-6.83</b>	<b>-9.00</b>	<b>-0.84</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>-0.40</b>	<b>31.58</b>	<b>19.78</b>	<b>25.81</b>
Madhya Pradesh	19.79	27.89	23.27	43.13	59.76	50.36	60.78	76.88	67.68
Maharashtra	19.82	25.73	22.64	36.93	46.35	41.35	55.36	64.75	59.78
Manipur*	51.42	53.90	52.59	71.74	72.04	71.88	76.39	76.62	76.49
Meghalaya	61.07	63.77	62.44	48.25	46.81	47.57	63.19	64.39	63.75
Mizoram*	51.60	52.08	51.82	71.82	70.57	71.23	71.65	70.10	70.92
Nagaland	36.71	35.09	35.94	45.61	35.80	41.70	62.83	68.60	65.69
Orissa*	50.74	47.90	49.61	51.49	62.85	56.17	71.58	77.40	74.00
Punjab	25.21	21.82	23.62	26.56	30.50	28.39	46.89	50.10	48.37
Rajasthan	53.78	57.99	55.30	59.74	69.73	62.99	86.44	89.25	87.34
Tamil Nadu*	13.99	16.18	15.05	25.94	34.64	29.99	57.04	65.74	61.06
Tripura*	50.28	53.91	51.95	72.56	74.21	73.32	79.11	83.54	81.13
Uttar Pradesh*	45.98	55.98	49.85	49.87	57.28	52.45	52.85	71.69	59.50
West Bengal	46.17	54.15	49.92	67.47	71.11	69.08	79.39	88.70	83.52
<b>India</b>	<b>38.23</b>	<b>41.34</b>	<b>39.58</b>	<b>50.72</b>	<b>58.61</b>	<b>54.14</b>	<b>67.65</b>	<b>72.67</b>	<b>69.33</b>

Notes: For Orissa and J & K, the data is for 1996-97.

\* Values taken from Sixth All-India Educational Survey, 1993-94.

Source: *Annual Report, 1998-99*, Ministry of Human Resources Development, Department of Education, Government of India, New Delhi, Statements 8, 9 and 10, pp. 142-44.

Table 16 *Drop-out rates for Kerala, 1990-91 to 1996-97 (per cent)*

Year	Lower primary								
	All communities			Scheduled castes			Scheduled tribes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91	1.9	2.0	1.9	2.1	3.2	2.7	na	na	na
1991-92	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.8	1.9	1.8	11.4	11.5	11.5
1992-93	1.6	1.6	1.6	2.7	2.3	2.5	10.4	8.3	9.4
1993-94	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.3	2.3	1.8	7.3	6.7	7.0
1994-95	1.3	1.4	1.3	2.1	2.0	2.1	9.5	8.7	9.1
1995-96	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.6	2.8	1.8	7.9	10.6	9.2
1996-97	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.5	1.2	6.1	4.1	5.1

Year	Upper primary								
	All communities			Scheduled castes			Scheduled tribes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91	6.1	5.5	5.8	8.6	8.2	8.4	13.2	9.3	11.3
1991-92	6.1	4.7	5.4	7.5	5.0	6.3	14.2	14.2	14.2
1992-93	5.8	4.1	5.0	9.3	6.9	8.1	19.0	13.8	16.5
1993-94	5.7	4.2	4.9	8.0	5.4	6.8	9.3	9.9	9.6
1994-95	5.5	3.5	4.6	9.2	6.5	7.9	13.3	10.7	12.0
1995-96	5.1	3.3	4.2	8.7	6.5	7.7	12.6	10.4	11.6
1996-97	4.5	2.7	3.6	6.8	4.7	5.8	12.8	10.1	11.5

Year	High school								
	All communities			Scheduled castes			Scheduled tribes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91	15.8	11.9	13.9	20.4	16.6	18.5	25.4	18.1	21.9
1991-92	15.8	10.9	13.4	17.4	14.5	16.0	22.9	18.6	20.8
1992-93	16.5	9.3	12.9	22.3	15.7	19.0	28.3	23.8	26.1
1993-94	17.4	11.7	14.3	20.8	14.2	17.5	21.6	15.6	18.5
1994-95	17.7	11.2	14.5	24.3	16.9	20.6	26.6	18.7	22.7
1995-96	17.3	10.0	13.7	23.2	15.2	19.2	28.0	18.7	23.6
1996-97	16.5	10.3	13.4	21.4	14.0	17.7	29.4	19.1	24.2

Year	Total								
	All communities			Scheduled castes			Scheduled tribes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1990-91	3.7	3.2	3.4	4.6	4.7	4.6	5.8	4.6	5.2
1991-92	3.7	2.7	3.2	3.6	2.9	3.3	11.3	11.2	11.2
1992-93	3.9	2.4	3.2	5.7	4.1	4.9	12.2	9.5	10.9
1993-94	3.7	2.8	3.3	4.4	3.4	3.9	6.9	6.6	6.7
1994-95	4.1	2.7	3.4	6.0	4.3	5.7	10.2	8.5	9.4
1995-96	3.7	2.2	3.0	5.5	4.0	4.8	9.9	9.4	9.7
1996-97	3.0	1.8	2.4	4.3	2.9	3.6	9.2	6.4	7.9

Source: Data collected from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Government of Kerala, Trivandrum.

- Drop-out rates, as can be expected, rise with the level of education for all sections of school pupils.
- There continue to be differences in drop-out rates between different social groups: the rate is lowest among all pupils, higher among dalit pupils, and higher still among adivasi pupils.
- Nevertheless, the gap between all pupils and dalit pupils in respect of drop-out rates narrowed over the 1990s. The gap between all students and adivasi students in respect of drop-out rates narrowed among pupils in the upper primary sections.
- In 1997-98, drop-out rates averaged -11.06 per cent among boys in Class I to Class V and -6.83 per cent for girls in Kerala. This compares with 38.23 percent and 41.34 per cent respectively for boys and girls at the all-India level. Drop-out rates in States other than Kerala varied between 5.41 and 61.07 per cent in the case of boys, and 12.75 and 63.77 per cent in the case of girls.
- The drop-out rate among adivasi girls at all levels of school education in Kerala is far, far lower than the drop-out rate among boys in every other State of India (Table 14).

### *School infrastructure*

The quinquennial All-India Educational Survey conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is the major source of comparative data on the infrastructure of schooling in India. The tables show that

Kerala is ahead of other States with respect to the distance between pupils' homes and schools, with respect to the types of buildings (pucca, semi-pucca, kachcha, etc.) in which schools are housed, with respect to drinking water facilities in school, and with regard to the provision of toilets in schools (Tables 17 through 22). C. Ramakrishnan, a teacher and leading writer on education in Kerala, notes that "in respect of infrastructural facilities, the proportion of trained teachers and organizational and administrative structures, Kerala is undoubtedly ahead of other States".<sup>14</sup>

New data from Kerala show that there is one primary school per square kilometre in the State and one secondary school for every four square kilometres.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, problems of inadequate school facilities persist. Micro-level studies continue to show that many government and government-aided schools (particularly the former) lack enough classrooms and classroom space, teachers' rooms, playground space, room partitions, toilets, furniture and blackboards. Schools surveyed in micro-level studies invariably showed that library and laboratory facilities were poor, as was the provision of supplementary teaching aids.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ramakrishnan (1999, pp. 15-16).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 15 and SPB (1998, p. 15).

<sup>16</sup> C. Ramakrishnan (1999, pp 17-18); Salim (1999b, pp. 47-48), Salim (1999b), DPEP survey cited in Krishnan (1999a) and Thomas (1996).

Table 17 *Average number of rooms per school, Kerala and India, rural and urban, 1993*

School category	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
Primary	7.2	2.5	7.6	5.6	7.3	2.9
Upper primary	14.4	5.6	13.5	9.7	14.2	6.5
Secondary	28.4	9.9	32.8	16.1	29.5	11.6
Higher secondary	36.0	19.3	36.4	27.6	36.1	23.5

Source: NCERT (1998), *Sixth All-India Educational Survey*, National Tables, Volume II: Schools and Physical Facilities, Tables 1S 32 - 1S 39, pp. 98-113.

Table 18 *Proportion of schools with facilities for drinking water, Kerala and India, rural and urban, 1993 (per cent)*

School category	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
Primary	75.7	41.4	77.9	67.2	76.2	44.2
Upper primary	87.4	58.3	86.1	83.2	87.1	63.5
Secondary	93.8	79.7	97.7	93.6	94.8	83.5
Higher secondary	92.7	90.3	92.2	96.9	92.5	93.7

Source: NCERT (1998), *Sixth All-India Educational Survey*, National Tables, Volume II: Schools and Physical Facilities, Tables 1S 53 - 1S 56, pp. 143-170.

Table 19 *Proportion of schools with urinals and separate urinals for girls, Kerala and India, rural and urban, 1993 (per cent)*

Category	School category	Rural		Urban		Total	
		Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
Urinals	Primary	81.6	14.0	80.7	58.5	81.4	18.9
	Upper primary	93.1	40.6	91.0	78.7	92.6	48.4
	Secondary	98.6	71.2	98.9	92.6	98.7	77.0
	Higher secondary	99.5	88.6	97.8	96.8	99.0	92.8
Separate Urinals for girls	Primary	49.6	5.5	56.5	33.9	51.0	8.7
	Upper primary	75.3	24.5	74.1	58.7	75.0	31.5
	Secondary	92.5	56.9	87.8	78.0	91.3	62.6
	Higher secondary	95.1	76.0	90.0	79.8	93.6	78.0

Source: NCERT (1998), *Sixth All-India Educational Survey, National Tables, Volume II: Schools and Physical Facilities, Tables 1S 53 - 1S 56, pp. 143-170.*

Table 20 *Proportion of schools with lavatories and separate lavatories for girls, Kerala and India, rural and urban, 1993 (per cent)*

Category	School category	Rural		Urban		Total	
		Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
Urinals	Primary	38.6	6.4	47.1	46.9	40.3	10.9
	Upper primary	59.4	20.0	58.3	68.1	59.2	30.0
	Secondary	86.2	47.0	92.6	85.3	87.9	57.4
	Higher secondary	83.9	69.5	94.4	92.3	87.1	81.1
Separate Urinals for girls	Primary	10.3	2.4	19.0	27.0	12.1	5.1
	Upper primary	22.8	9.3	27.1	47.6	23.8	17.2
	Secondary	63.7	30.6	72.4	68.6	66.0	40.8
	Higher secondary	65.4	51.9	78.9	73.4	69.5	62.9

Source: NCERT (1998), *Sixth All-India Educational Survey, National Tables, Volume II: Schools and Physical Facilities, Tables 1S 53 - 1S 56, pp. 143-170.*

Table 21 *Proportion of schools housed in different types of buildings, Kerala and India, rural and urban, 1992-93 (per cent)*

School category	Category	Rural		Urban		Total	
		Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
(a) Primary	Pucca	77.6	64.2	81.0	72.1	78.3	65.1
	Partly Pucca	18.9	18.7	16.6	18.5	18.4	18.7
	Kachcha	1.2	9.5	0.6	5.3	1.1	9.0
	Thatched huts	2.2	3.2	1.8	1.5	2.1	3.0
	Tents	0	0.4	0.1	0.2	0	0.4
	Open space	0.1	4.0	0.0	2.3	0.1	3.8
(b) Upper primary	Pucca	82.2	65.7	78.1	79.5	75.3	68.5
	Partly Pucca	25.2	22.5	18.9	14.2	21.9	20.8
	Kachcha	1.2	7.9	1.7	4.5	1.2	7.2
	Thatched huts	1.8	1.7	1.3	0.8	1.5	1.5
	Tents	0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0	0.1
	Open space	0	2.1	0.0	0.8	0	1.8
(c) Secondary	Pucca	78.1	63.7	84.1	82.0	79.6	68.6
	Partly Pucca	17.8	25.7	12.7	14.0	16.5	22.5
	Kachcha	1.8	8.4	1.6	3.2	1.7	7.0
	Thatched huts	2.2	1.6	1.6	0.6	2.1	1.3
	Tents	0.1	0.1	0	0.1	0	0.1
	Open space	0	0.5	0	0.1	0	0.4
(d) Higher secondary	Pucca	74.1	78.5	90.0	89.2	79.0	84.0
	Partly Pucca	22.9	17.9	10.0	9.0	19.0	13.4
	Kachcha	0.0	2.7	0	1.2	0	2.0
	Thatched huts	2.9	0.5	0	0.3	2.0	0.4
	Tents	0	0	0	0.1	0	0.1
	Open space	0	0.3	0	0.2	0	0.2

Source: NCERT (1998), *Sixth All-India Educational Survey*, National Tables, Volume II: Schools and Physical Facilities, Tables 1S 18 - 1S 21, pp. 54 - 69.

Table 22 *Proportion of population living in rural habitations with and without primary schools/sections, Kerala and India, Distance wise (per cent)*

School category	Region	Habitations with schools/sections at a distance (in km.) of					Total
		Within the habitation	< 0.5*	0.6 - 1.0	1.1 - 2.0	> 2.0	
(a) Primary	Kerala	76.67	7.40	5.61	5.99	4.33	100.00
	India	77.81	7.69	8.27	4.24	2.00	100.00
(b) Upper primary	Kerala	50.54	16.97	24.33	5.8	2.36	100.00
	India	37.02	19.89	28.09	9.7	5.30	100.00
(c) Secondary	Kerala	29.63	33.11	29.98	5.61	1.67	100.00
	India	18.29	27.16	32.45	12.15	9.94	100.00
(d) Higher Secondary**	Kerala	5.74	20.40	15.03	26.46	32.36	100.00
	India	5.36	15.24	15.48	27.52	36.40	100.00

Notes: \* Not within the same habitation.

\*\* Higher Secondary category includes intermediate/junior colleges and PUCs.

Source: NCERT (1998), *Sixth All-India Educational Survey*, National Tables, Volume I: Educational Facilities in Rural and Urban Areas, Table V 13, pp. 26 - 28, Table V 22, pp. 44-47, Table V 31, pp. 62-65, Table V 37, pp. 77-80.

*ISSUES IN SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE 1990S*

The period from the late 1980s to the present has been one of intense activity - of public discussion and action - in the field of school education in Kerala. The major agencies of activity in the field have been the People's Campaign for Democratic Decentralization, the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), teachers' organizations and the Education Department of the Government of Kerala. They have worked independently and sometimes, with success, together.

The very poor overall performance in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examination, which students write at the end of Class 10, has been an important motivation for the movement to improve the quality of school education in Kerala.

As we saw in Section 3, a significant section of students do not enter Class 10 at all; they are either detained or leave school. The number of students who actually write the examination is higher than the number who enrol in and attend Class 10; this is because many students repeat the examination. The data show that the number of students who finally get a school-leaving certificate is less than half the numbers who write the examination (Table 23). K.N. Ganesh and C. Ramakrishnan cite a curriculum document of the State Council for Educational Research and Training

Table 23 *Index of retention from Class 1 to SSLC examination, Kerala, 1983-84 to 1997-98*

Cohorts		Class 1	Class 9	Class 10	SSLC exam candidates	Passed candidates
1982-83 to 1991-92	Number	626296	525154	416980	549375	284467
	Index	100	83.9	66.6	87.7	45.4
1983-84 to 1992-93	Number	602800	539443	437517	555299	285222
	Index	100	89.5	72.6	92.1	47.3
1984-85 to 1993-94	Number	617681	551678	436898	562050	280297
	Index	100	89.3	70.7	91.0	45.4
1985-86 to 1994-95	Number	630639	558709	439617	538707	272366
	Index	100	88.6	69.7	85.4	43.2
1986-87 to 1995-96	Number	614636	569137	446466	543817	266081
	Index	100	92.6	72.6	88.5	43.3
1987-88 to 1996-97	Number	630053	567963	449381	559435	284554
	Index	100	90.1	71.3	88.8	45.2
1988-89 to 1997-98	Number	608642	560172	446282	550322	287418
	Index	100	92.0	73.3	90.4	47.2
1989-90 to 1998-99	Number	594548	553439	443417	543478	287692
	Index	100	93.1	74.6	91.4	48.4

Note: Index for SSLC exam candidates is higher than Class 10 enrolments due to the presence of second-time candidates.

Source: Educational Statistics, various issues, Department of Public Instructions, GOK.

(SCERT) that says that the current pass percentage is at the present level only because grace marks are given after the papers are marked. If there were no such "moderation", the pass percentage would be in the region of 35 per cent (Ganesh and Ramakrishnan 2000, p. 4).

Ganesh and Ramakrishnan summarize the concerns that have been raised by these figures. First, the data and the information in the SCERT document taken together suggest that only about one-third of the pupils who enrol in Class 1 finish school with the skills that the school certificate examination requires of them at the end of 10 years of school: "the majority of children joining schools do not acquire the knowledge or skills required for meaningful social existence" (ibid.). Second, the proportion of pupils who do not pass the SSLC examination is higher in government and government-aided schools than in elite private schools, in some of which the annual pass-percentage is regularly 100 per cent. The majority of income-poor children and children from educationally deprived social groups go to government and state-aided schools, and the SSLC results show that disparities in educational achievement based on differences in the social and economic backgrounds of students persist (ibid.).

The general consensus among the various agencies involved in public action in the field of school education is that the roots of mass failure in the SSLC examination can be traced back to the quality of early school education. The problem of mass failures has to be solved not merely by intervention at the Class 10 level but by reform that attempts to improve the quality of school education (and

make it more meaningful to diverse social and economic groups) from the primary school stage upwards.<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1990s, the results of an NCERT survey also served to increase the concern about levels of learning at the primary school level in Kerala (see Varghese 1999). The study was conducted in different parts of India as part of the preparatory work for the DPEP. The Kerala study was based on a sample survey of primary school children, teachers, headmasters and headmistresses in three relatively backward districts, Kasargode, Malappuram and Wayanad.

With respect to Kerala, the study concluded that "although Kerala has made significant advances in creating educational facilities (and) enrolling and retaining children in primary schools, its record in terms of student performance is not significantly different from other States" (ibid., p. 387). This result was sought partly to be explained by the fact that primary education is near universal in Kerala and drop-out rates much lower than in other States. The data are consistent with the conclusion that, in other States, a smaller proportion of school pupils, a section that is relatively privileged, are likely to reach the terminal stage of primary education, thus raising levels of performance in these States.

A further result of the study was that variations in performance between children in Kerala were greater within schools than between schools; the reverse was true of other

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<sup>17</sup> See Ramakrishnan (1999), Nair (1999), Mohankumar and Sasikumar (1999).

States (ibid.). The general results of the study, as we have noted, contributed to the discussion among educationists, administrators and others on the need for change in school education in Kerala.

Given the consensus on the need to reform early school education, policy intervention in school education in Kerala in the 1990s focussed on the following areas:

- the devolution of school administration to local bodies;
- building school infrastructure;
- creating and strengthening parent-teacher, particularly mother-teacher, associations and their participation in the school system;
- introducing new curricula and new textbooks;
- introducing new teaching methods;
- introducing programmes of remedial education;
- strengthening in-career teacher training; and
- changing the system of evaluation of classroom performance.

It is still too early to assess the impact of policy, and public action in general, on levels of learning and school examination results. This section attempts a review of policies that are now in the process of implementation.

The first interventions by the government and activists attempted to identify children in primary school who needed help with their school work. The programmes paid special attention to helping them do better in school. One of the earliest experiments of this kind, called *Aksharavedi*, was

conducted in Velland in Thiruvananthapuram district in 1981-82.<sup>18</sup> In the early 1990s, some District Councils implemented programmes that attempted to link the Total Literacy Campaign with schemes for quality improvement and help for students who were not doing well in class (Ganesh and Ramakrishnan 2000).<sup>19</sup> The aim of these programmes was to "remove illiteracy among primary school children, improve the mathematical ability of children and make science education an enjoyable experience" (ibid., p. 2).

In 1966, the Kothari Commission proposed the establishment of "school complexes", one high school in a region with a set of primary and secondary schools acting as feeders nearby (GOI, 1966). The Sivapuram school complex project of the Kannur District Council, begun in 1992-93, was one of the first attempts in Kerala to implement the Kothari Commission's proposal.<sup>20</sup> There were some difficulties in establishing the complex. As feeder schools were located within more than one panchayat, the establishment of the complex interfered with the panchayat planning process; the experience led to the understanding that the basic unit for the location of a school complex should be the panchayat (Isaac 2000, Ramakrishnan 2000).

Panchayat-level school complexes were established in the next phase of experimentation with the school complex programme. In 1992-93, school complex projects were

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<sup>18</sup> See SPB (1998).

<sup>19</sup> Initial programmes were organized in Thiruvananthapuram district (*Vijnanavedi*) in 1992-93, Malappuram district (*Ammathan Manikuttan*) in 1993-94, and in all other districts (*Aksharapulari*) in 1993-94 (Ramakrishnan 2000).

implemented in Kaliassari (Kannur district)<sup>21</sup> and Madikkai (Kasargod district). Similar experiments in other districts followed: some well-known examples were the projects in Dharmadom and Kayyur-Cheemeni (Kasargode district), Perinjanam (Thrissur district) and Sreekariam (Thiruvananthapuram district) (Ramakrishnan 2000). These projects were important because they also served as training-ground for activists who undertook similar projects in all districts after the People's Planning programme began in 1996-97.

While there have been no detailed studies on the impact of these experiments, there are data on changes in school performance in schools covered by them and on new facilities created by them.

In Kalliasseri, the proportion of students who passed the SSLC examination rose from 29 per cent in 1987-88 to nearly 80 per cent in 1998-99 (Tharakan 2000a). In Kayyur-Cheemeni panchayat, the Kayyur Government High School building, damaged by the 1996 monsoon, was repaired in one month by the school's Parent Teacher Association, which mobilized building material and voluntary labour for the task (Balakrishnan 2000). The cost of building was 90 per cent less than the estimate and the new building accommodated more children than before (Tharakan 2000a). The school complex programmes generated much public enthusiasm in the areas where they were implemented (SPB 1998; Tharakan 2000a), and helped convince officials in the Education

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<sup>20</sup> In this experiment, Sivapuram High School was made a central unit with twenty-seven neighbouring schools acting as feeder schools (Ramakrishnan 2000).

Department and activists that community effort could bring about "meaningful interventions in the formal educational process" (Tharakan 2000a, p. 4).

Major policy interventions from the mid-1990s in the field of school education have been made by the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and the People's Campaign for Democratic Decentralization.

#### *District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)*

The DPEP was commissioned in India in 1993-94 as a centrally sponsored programme with financial assistance from the World Bank and other external agencies.<sup>22</sup> It aims at universalising primary education in all the States through stimulating "community participation" in educational planning (Menon 2000). DPEP in Kerala began with enormous advantages compared to other States. Enrolment was almost universal, a series of interventions to improve the quality of school education had been tried out, and the People's Campaign had just begun mass mobilization on issues of development planning.

The differences showed. DPEP in Kerala was able immediately to turn its attention to the substantive issues of textbook revision, improving instructional methods, teacher training and issues of gender in school education. The Department of

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<sup>21</sup> For a description of the Kalliasseri experiment, see Tharakan (1996).

<sup>22</sup> DPEP was to cover 132 districts in 14 States. The external funding agencies are the European Union, International Development Association (IDA) and the Overseas Development Authority (ODA) (KSSP 2000). The assistance to Kerala amounts to Rs 400 million, to be spent in six districts over a period of seven years (Krishnakumar 1999).

Education, Government of Kerala, was the implementing agency for the project in the state.

The first major activity of the DPEP in Kerala was a project to revise textbooks (DPEP 2000b). This was followed by a project on changes in pedagogy (DPEP 2000a). The project to revise textbooks built on earlier efforts in Kerala in this direction (KSSP 2000).

In 1993-94, the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) had begun to revise textbooks as part of the Minimum Level of Learning (MLL) project. These were used by Class 1 and 2 pupils in twenty schools in each district in 1995-96 (DPEP 2000a). In 1996, in response to certain directions from the NCERT, the Government of Kerala decided to begin a major revision of all school textbooks in the State (KSSP 2000). New textbooks for Classes 3 and 4 were introduced in twenty schools in each district in 1995-96, and in 100 schools per district in 1996-97 (DPEP 2000b). Resources available through DPEP during this period were used by the State to finance the larger programme. Although DPEP was originally intended to be implemented in only six districts, the textbooks prepared through DPEP were prescribed for schools in all districts of the State. Although DPEP focuses on primary education, the curriculum revision undertaken by DPEP covered all grades, from Class 1 to Class 12 (KSSP 2000).

DPEP has also attempted major changes in pedagogy. The major features of these changes have been "child-centred, activity-oriented teaching, teacher training and empowerment, new evaluation methods [and] revision of

curriculum" (DPEP 2000a, p. 2). The implementation of the scheme is to be monitored; this includes public monitoring at the panchayat level.

The *Kinginikoottam* programme, introduced in 1998, brings together a selection of differently performing students from Class 1 through 4 and teachers, for a sixteen-day training programme that focuses on the special learning problems of "slower" children. The principal aim of the programme is to improve the teaching skills required to handle a multilevel learning environment. The DPEP has also been concerned with the special problems of disadvantaged children of the scheduled tribes.

There has been much debate in Kerala on the new curricula and pedagogical methods and the content of the teacher training that accompanies them.<sup>23</sup> On one side are the Education Department, the KSSP and others, who believe that the new methods served decisively to raise levels of learning and creativity in the school system. On the other side, a major campaign against the new policy has criticized it on the grounds that the new curricula and pedagogical methods lower learning requirements, and thus educational standards, in schools in Kerala.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion, see Krishnakumar (1999).

<sup>24</sup> See Tharakan (2000a) for a discussion of the issues in the debates and also Krishnakumar (1999) for an account of the implementation of new teaching methods in classrooms. See also Gurukkal (1999) and KSSP (2000) for the opinions of participants in the debate. Those who were opposed to the new DPEP methods alleged that the World Bank-sponsored scheme would create two streams of school education in the State and perpetuate social inequality. The first stream is an elite stream, consisting of children who work towards school certificate examinations conducted by all-India boards, and the second a dumbed-down stream run by the State government.

We believe that three points emerge from the debate concerning the DPEP experience and its content. The first is that there is public support for change with respect to teaching methods, classroom practices, textbooks and teaching material, and community participation in the school system. Second, the decision to tackle the perceived crisis of large-scale failure in Class 10 by reforming content and practice in school education at all levels of schooling (including the primary stage) is a correct one. Third, while reforming pedagogy, classroom practices, textbooks and so on, school education authorities should not lose sight of the objective of providing rigorous school education of the highest standards of quality to all children in the State. Reform should not, in other words, compromise on content in the interests of easy communicability.

#### *Gender and DPEP*

The achievements of girls and women in Kerala with respect to education and health are well known.<sup>25</sup> As we have seen in this paper, girls do no worse (and in some cases better) than boys in terms of the median number of years of schooling, retention in the school system and drop-out rates in Kerala. Another important feature of social life in Kerala is the general acceptance of a woman's right to work. Women do not, in general, face opposition from their parents when they want to go out of the house to earn an independent income, as is the case in many other parts of

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<sup>25</sup> On female education in Kerala, and female education in Kerala as an instrument of wider health and demographic change, see Ramachandran (1996).

India. As a leading scholar of education in Kerala told us, "When parents put their daughter in school, they do so in the hope that she will, one day, get a job and earn an income."<sup>26</sup>

While the extraordinary historic gains of women in Kerala cannot be underestimated, there are still important spheres in which women's equality has not been achieved, and in which discrimination persists. Representatives and supporters of the women's movement in Kerala express the opinion that socio-political and economic advance among women in recent years are not commensurate with the historic achievements of women in the spheres of education and health. Although work participation in the organized sector is higher among women in Kerala than in other States (Ramachandran 1996), general work participation rates among women are low (and lower than in India as a whole), rates of unemployment are very high, and gender differentials in the labour market persist across caste, income and education categories. A substantial section of the women's labour force is concentrated in traditional occupations - coir-work, cashew processing, bamboo-work, for example - that are now stagnant or in decline. Representation of women is very low in elected bodies - Parliament, the Legislative Assembly and local bodies - and in trade union executives, even in trade unions in occupations where most workers are women. The women's movement in Kerala has drawn attention to dowry-related deaths in Kerala and to sexual harassment and other crimes against women.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Tharakan, pers. comm., Nov. 6, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> On these issues, and for further references, see Ramachandran (1996).

Part of the programme of DPEP in Kerala is to address questions of gender and education. A DPEP document on gender issues in school education in Kerala recognizes that issues of access and retention have substantially been overcome, and suggests that policy be directed at "gender disparities that persist" despite the advances (DPEP 2000c, p.6). DPEP authorities note that "enrolment and retention alone do not automatically result" in providing girls "with the capability to analyse their situation, expose them to new roles, build up aspirations and see a different future" (ibid.).

A series of consultations for meeting these objectives were organized by DPEP authorities from January 2000. The conclusion from the discussions was that changes were needed in classroom practices and that textbooks had to be rewritten to combat gender stereotyping.

Changing classroom practices included changing teaching practices, teachers' attitudes and the organization of routine classroom activity. Gender discrimination and a division of duties based on gender affect different aspects of routine classroom activity, for instance, teachers' responses to student behaviour, seating arrangements and assigning duties to children. The DPEP document gives examples of such discrimination: all cleaning tasks were assigned to girl pupils, girls were given the task of serving school lunches, seating arrangements restricted interaction between boys and girls, and teachers generally assigned class leadership tasks to boys (DPEP 2000c, pp. 13-14).

There is now a new awareness of the need to rewrite textbooks in a gender-sensitive way and to include success stories about girls and women in school syllabi.

### *The People's Campaign*

The People's Campaign for Democratic Decentralization has made progress in four areas in the sphere of school education. The first is in the area of school infrastructure development, improvements in school buildings and facilities made by panchayats with funds allotted to them under the new programme of financial devolution. The second is the decentralization of school administration. The third is the part it has played in mobilizing parents into parent-teacher and mother-teacher associations. The fourth achievement derives from the character of the campaign as a people's movement in contemporary Kerala: the enthusiasm for creative grass-roots participatory social activity that the campaign has created serves as a catalyst for the success of any attempt to mobilize people to improve facilities and quality of school education in the State.

After its initiation in 1997-98, activists of the Campaign began to formulate a Comprehensive Education Programme (CEP) for every panchayat (see Isaac 2000; SPB 1998). There were two stages in the initial programme: first, each school prepared a 'school plan' that listed the requirements - infrastructural, academic and non-curricular - for comprehensive development of the school (SPB 1998). Second, panchayats created a Panchayat Education Document based on the individual school plans.

School projects were formulated, implemented and monitored by a Panchayat Education Committee (PEC), chaired by the Panchayat President. A Panchayat Academic Committee monitored the academic aspects of the projects including quality improvement, teachers' training and evaluation. A School Development Committee, which implemented and monitored projects, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) and Mother-Teacher Associations (MTA) were established in every school (SPB 1998).

Under the new scheme of decentralization, the administration of all recognized schools has been transferred to local bodies. From 1997-98 onwards, 35 to 40 per cent of the Plan outlay of the Government of Kerala is spent on projects planned and implemented by local bodies (Isaac 2000). In the first year of devolution, 1997-98, panchayats and other local bodies spent 3.22 per cent of their total outlay on primary and secondary education. This amounted to about Rs 394 million spent on primary education and Rs 165 million on secondary education.<sup>28</sup> In 1998-99, the corresponding share of total outlay was 2.42 per cent, with Rs 278 million spent on primary education and Rs 188 million on secondary education.<sup>29</sup> The expenditure by panchayats on schools was mainly directed to improve school facilities and upgrade physical infrastructure (ibid.). While data are now available on absolute levels of expenditure by local bodies on schools and schooling, an analysis of the significance and sustainability of such

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<sup>28</sup> Data collected from the State Planning Board, Trivandrum. See also Harilal and George (2000).

expenditure requires more data than are available to us at present.

Beneficiary committees of teachers and parents, headed by elected panchayat representatives, were responsible for construction work. These beneficiary committees brought down the construction costs and time by mobilizing voluntary labour and other resources from the locality.<sup>30</sup>

The People's Campaign, DPEP and activists in the field of education have been involved in a range of activities concerning schools and schooling (Ramakrishnan 2000; Tharakan 2000a; Ganesh and Ramakrishnan 2000). Teacher training camps were organized in many panchayats, often during the vacation. Parent-teacher and mother-teacher organizations have become active. This is the first experience of such involvement by parents in schooling on a mass scale, and we learned that the mother-teacher association meetings are very well attended, the average attendance being around 90 per cent.<sup>31</sup> Of these associations, a leading functionary of the Educational Research Unit of the KSSP said:

In the past, the only times that parents visited their children's schools was when school authorities called them to admonish them for the bad behaviour of their children. It is hard to describe the joy of parents today when they are called to school to look at their children's achievements - to look at their paintings on classroom walls, and to see them at work and play

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<sup>29</sup> Data collected from the State Planning Board, Trivandrum. See also Harilal and George (2000).

<sup>30</sup> Tharakan (2000a) provides a review of some successful projects on the construction of school infrastructure.

<sup>31</sup> Interview, C Ramakrishnan.

and participating in the cultural activities of schools. (ibid.)

There have also been projects to improve libraries, to provide in-school remedial teaching, and to bring children together to publish handwritten magazines and participate in Children's Sabhas.

We note once again that it is still too early to measure the results of the last five years of activity in the field of school education in Kerala. New policies must eventually be measured in terms of improvements in levels of learning at different stages of schooling and performance in school certificate examinations. Nevertheless, it is clear that this phase of change in school education policy has been received with enthusiasm, and has shown that if educational interventions are to be successful, they need to focus on quality and to be integrated with efforts at local-level planning and mobilization.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Ramakrishnan (1999), Isaac (2000), Tharakan (2000a) and Ganesh and Ramakrishnan (2000). Mohan Kumar and Sasi Kumar (1999) provide a useful case study of successful attempts to involve parents, elected local government representatives, teachers, school authorities and educational activists in efforts to improve the quality of education in two schools in Thiruvananthapuram. On remedial teaching in four schools in the same district, see Haridas (1999).

*CONCLUDING NOTES*

This paper has dealt with major issues in school education in Kerala in the 1990s, in particular, with issues of state investment in schooling, the retention of students in the school system, and movements to bring about change in the quality of school education in the 1990s and to the present day.

Although the historical processes by which Kerala pushed ahead of the rest of India in respect of school education are complex, their main features are clear. The link between mass education and mass schooling was established early in Kerala. Social and political movements worked to overcome the three great obstacles to mass school education in India, those created by class, caste and gender discrimination. The state began to make the investments necessary for mass education.

While the component parts of Kerala, particularly Travancore and Cochin, were ahead of other parts of India in respect of school education in the 1950s, it was because of public action after the formation of the State in 1956 that the gap between different parts of the State in respect of school education began to close, and mass school education became a reality.

Increased expenditure on schooling by State governments is a necessary condition for the universalisation of schooling

in India. State governments in the country as a whole have failed to meet the challenge of public investment in school education; public expenditure in Kerala, by contrast, is marked by the commitment of the state to investment in schooling. Expenditure on education in Kerala as a proportion of State Domestic Product was close to 4 per cent in the early 1960s, rose to 6.5 per cent in 1986-87, and has fluctuated between 5.5 per cent and 6.5 per cent since then. Between 1960-61 and 1996-97, about 81 per cent of total expenditure on education was on school education. About 96 per cent of schools in Kerala are either wholly state-run or are very largely supported by the state.

Public expenditure on education as a proportion of SDP in Kerala was higher than the share of expenditure on education in most less-developed countries. Kerala has been, for a sustained period, ahead of countries such as China, South Korea, Indonesia, South Korea and Sri Lanka in terms of public expenditure on education relative to the size of the economy.

In India as a whole, the initial tasks in the field of school education are to overcome the social (including caste and gender) and economic barriers to school education for all children, and to establish the basic infrastructure for schooling. It can fairly be said that these first-generation problems of school education have, in the main, been overcome in Kerala.

By the early 1990s, 95 per cent of children - boys and girls - in Kerala were attending school regularly. The corresponding figures for India were 76 per cent of boys

and 59 per cent of girls. The figures for Kerala are confirmed by micro-level studies. The rates of retention of school pupils in the school system have increased and retention until Class 8 is almost 100 per cent.

Retention rates among dalit and adivasi children remain consistently lower than for all children; among adivasi children there has been no consistent rise in retention rates in the 1990s.

Striking features of the data are that retention rates among boys and girls in schools are roughly equal until Class 9, and that retention rates for girls pull ahead of retention rates for boys in Class 10.

As is implied by the data on retention, drop-out rates are much lower among school children in Kerala than in other States. Drop-out rates in Kerala in the primary and upper primary sections declined in the 1990s, and although drop-out rates among dalit and adivasi pupils are higher than among all students, the gap between social groups narrowed in the 1990s. To put matters in an all-India perspective, the drop-out rate even among adivasi girls in Kerala at all levels of education is far, far lower than the drop-out rate for all boys in every other State of India.

While Kerala is ahead of the rest of India in respect of school education infrastructure, the problem of inadequate school facilities persists.

Three features of school performance in Kerala in the 1990s drew a great deal of public attention. The first was the

sudden drop in retention rates at the Class 10 level. While data showed that about 93 per cent of those who joined Class 1 remained in the school system until Class 9, only 75 per cent remained in school a year later, in Class 10. For dalit children, the retention rate in Class 10 for the same cohort (1990-91 to 1999-2000) was 64 per cent, and for adivasi children, the retention rate in Class 10 was only 35 per cent. The high rate of departure from the school system at this stage is clearly because students are not confident of passing the Class 10 school-leaving-certificate examination. The second was the high rate of failure in the Class 10 examination. Barely 50 per cent of examinees pass the Class 10 examination; the number would be lower still if those who pass because of "moderation", or the award of grace marks, were excluded. The third was that research suggested that the levels of learning achieved by children at different stages of the school system, particularly in backward areas of the State, were unacceptably low.

School education policy in the 1990s to the present can be seen as a response to these three features of schooling in Kerala. The general consensus among government officials and activists in the field of education was that the situation had to be reformed not by means of measures that were designed merely to get students to pass the Class 10 examination. Changes in the educational system had to begin with primary schools and policy had to concentrate on the reform of school administration, textbooks and pedagogy. It had to help improve school infrastructure and help achieve greater participation by local communities, particularly parents, in school education.

The period after 1996 has been one of intense government- and people-supported activity in the sphere of school education. While experimental schemes for improving the quality of education began in the 1980s, large-scale organized efforts in this direction were underway by the second half of the 1990s.

The District Primary Education Programme has built on Kerala's historical advantages in the sphere of school education. It has concentrated on textbook reform, on changing teaching methods in classrooms, and on forming parent-teacher and mother-teacher associations in schools. It has drawn attention to gender biases in textbooks, pedagogy and routine classroom practices. It now has plans to introduce computer education at selected levels of the school system.

The most important event in development administration in Kerala - and in India - in recent years is the People's Campaign for Decentralized Development. This is not the place to discuss the monumental effort and mass mobilization that has gone into the Campaign; suffice it to say that the Campaign has used Kerala's historical advantages in respect of land reform, and education and health achievements, to devolve decision-making and financial powers to local bodies in a way and to an extent unheard of in the rest of India.<sup>33</sup> The enthusiasm and mass socio-political participation generated by the Campaign is

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<sup>33</sup> Isaac (2000), Tharakan (2000a), Ganesh and Ramakrishnan (2000).

crucial to the success of any reform of school education in the State.<sup>34</sup>

The People's Campaign for Democratic Decentralization has been active in school education in different ways. First, local bodies have used funds allocated newly to them to improve school facilities. Second, the system of school administration has been reorganized. Third, the part played by the Campaign in community participation in schooling, particularly in activating and sustaining parent-teacher and mother-teacher associations, has been invaluable.<sup>35</sup> Voluntary efforts, particularly of the Educational Research Unit of the Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad, have been a very important factor in mobilizing teachers and public opinion, and in implementing school education reform in the contemporary period.

If the efforts to improve school education are to succeed, a complex set of policies - combined with mass action - needs to be sustained. We draw particular attention to these component parts of a programme to ensure that such efforts continue and bear fruit. First, the State must continue its policy of allocating relatively high levels public expenditure to school education. Past experience has shown that, in the period of economic 'reform', the burden of fiscal adjustment falls mainly on capital expenditure and current expenditure on social sectors. If the trend persists, Kerala's ability to protect and improve on its

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<sup>34</sup> See Tharakan (2000a). Indeed, it is clear that there is a wide range of development schemes - including education, general infrastructure development, the provision of drinking water or the mass dissemination of information technology - that will only make real progress if they are integrated with the movement for democratic decentralization.

educational achievements will seriously be undermined. In States where educational progress has been moderate or poor, structural adjustment will turn the clock back on efforts to ensure quality universal schooling.

Second, the efforts of the different agencies involved in school education reform - government, the people's planning movement, mass organizations of teachers, voluntary organizations and concerned members of the public - must continue. Experience has shown that the work done by these different agencies succeeds best when they work in co-ordination.

Third, the State Government must make special efforts - in terms of investment in infrastructure and better teaching methods - to ensure that children from traditionally deprived communities have better access to schooling, and that rates of retention in the school system and levels of learning among them improve.

Kerala is still far from establishing a school system where every child has access to a school of high quality, equipped with classrooms, libraries, laboratories and playgrounds - a school that has, in general, all the facilities for study and play that all parents wish for their children. There is no doubt, however, that the present government and people's movements in the State are concerned with this issue, and are working on school reform that attempts to make such a change. Kerala once led India in universalising school education; today it has taken the

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<sup>35</sup> See Tharakan (2000a).

lead in attempting to improve the quality of mass school education. The social and economic policies of the Central and State governments and the mass movements in Kerala will determine the success of this effort in the years to come.

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