

# Broken Slates and Blank Screens

education under a lockdown



LOCKDOWN ON CIVIL LIBERTIES-III  
A PUCL (Maharashtra) Series

## **Lockdown on Civil Liberties - III**

The country-wide lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic and attendant issues have led to major violations of civil liberties and human rights in India. While some restrictions on rights may have been necessitated by the nature of the pandemic, we believe that a large number of violations were entirely excessive, arbitrary and totally avoidable. The impact of this curtailment of rights and of civil liberties has been felt across all sectors including the economy, education, health, media, prisons, employment, migrant workers, women, domestic workers, sex workers, prisoners and their access to justice etc.

Five months after, it has become palpably clear that the lockdown has also been used by the Government to push through undemocratic means laws and policies which are against the people.

In this context, PUCL Maharashtra has put together **‘Lockdown on Civil Liberties’**, a series of reports of the impact on these restrictions on various segments. While some of the reports focus on the situation in Maharashtra, others deal with a pan-India situation.

**“Broken Slates and Blank Screens: Education Under Lockdown”** is the third in the series. This report brings out the state of education in Maharashtra in context of the lockdown - its implications for the rights of children and youth. The analysis while focusing on immediate impact of the pandemic sets this in context of the systemic issues plaguing education. So while it highlights the main issues due to the lockdown, it raises questions about framing policies that violate the fundamental principles of federalism and constitutional rights and promise of “Education for all”.

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## Introduction

This report is concerned with the impact of Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, on Education in Maharashtra, particularly its implications for the rights of children and youth. It also looks at the Right to Education of the poor and the people who do not have access to the new means of educational delivery adopted by the State. Apart from the more obvious digital divide which will further widen, there is also a threat to basic anti-poverty measures whether it is the ICDS schemes or the mid-day meal programme, or services of teachers and anganwadi workers, or special education.

The Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (Maharashtra) wishes to reiterate the Constitutional commitment of ensuring education as a fundamental right, which was born out of the freedom movement in general, and more than a century-old struggle for the right to education, starting from Jyotiba Phule. In the present context the education envisioned by Phule, Tagore, Gandhi, and Ambedkar is a distant dream. It is this commitment that should govern the relationship between society and education particularly in times of crisis when the marginalised are more vulnerable.

**An absence of state supported Common School System and a well-subsidized higher education where diverse groups share common stake; the system as a whole lacks inner-strength and resilience to face challenges. Each one is affected by the Covid-19 pandemic but are left fighting their own battles often at cross-purposes.**

The pandemic has brought into foreground these perennial and developing issues that reveal the fact that education has been treated as a privilege or a commodity rather than a fundamental right. The lockdown has heightened existing injustices - malnutrition of children in the ICDS anganwadies and government schools, push-out of large number of children due to inward migration, exposing and deepening of the 'digital-divide', profiteering by private managements, child-labour and child-marriage, suicides, apathy of the legal system. Along with the children the teachers are also bearing the brunt; being made to serve on COVID duties at check-points, pressurized to adopt to new technologies in absence of sufficient support, working without remuneration and facing job-loss. Over and above this, the onslaught of ICT

technology-based market forces feed on the vulnerabilities of people, ultimately tightening their noose on individual freedoms.

In Higher education we see already a decrease in enrollment to professional courses further enhanced in the near future by the financial constraints faced by those particularly from marginalised backgrounds. Reduced funding to public universities and the growing emphasis on skill based learning in early years itself will further compound this trend. During the lockdown is also seen the political maneuvering and attack on federalism by the Centre disallowing States to take decisions about arranging centralized exams, and imposition of the ruling party's cultural agendas.

Ironically, rather than address these immediate challenges the Central Government is busy pushing epochal policy changes like the National Educational Policy 2020; without adhering to democratic processes.

While the report is not exhaustive it points at most of the above-mentioned issues that are symptomatic of an ailing society where inequality is a norm.

Education, in principle, has the potential to restructure society and make it equitable and hence is an aspiration particularly for those from the margins. This possibility has been ruined over the years with status quoist forces disallowing such aspirations; and unfortunately the pandemic has been used to perpetuate practices that solidify and widen the prevailing inequalities.



## II

### The Context

**It is useful before we provide today's educational context to layout the perspective that has informed educational agendas in this country.** Although the Constitution of Independent India did not recognise education as a fundamental right, Article 45 of the Directive Principles envisioned free and compulsory education for the age-group from 0 to 14 years. The Post-independence Indian state while it slowly expanded its public school network left it insufficient and incomplete. Gradually the middle-class abandoned state-run schools – preferring private/aided ones providing seamless schooling from class I to X.

The 1980s changed education in an altogether different direction. In 1986, the name of the Ministry of Education was changed to the Ministry of Human Resources Development that gave insights into the government's outlook towards education. The New Education Policy in 1986 was trying to plug a few basic loopholes in the seriously emaciated school system. But it was turned around in the 1992 Programme of Action (POA), following the 1990 Jomtin WB-IMF funded 'Education for All' conference. It introduced the so called Non-Formal Education (NFE) schemes for poor children denying them even eight years of full-time, quality schooling. The presence of the World Bank began to be established through schemes like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) beginning the era of 'accountability of the system' with stress on assessment and performance.

This is how things continued in the 2000s when in 2002 the Constitutional commitment was further diluted by denying protection of early childhood education to the age-group of 0-6 years. Over the decade expensive private schools began to be seen as a panacea and public schools left only for those who had nowhere to go.<sup>1</sup> In 2008 when the PPP model was introduced in Mumbai, it could be met with some opposition, but after the passage of RTE Act 2009, PPP is now legalised and it became impossible to oppose handing over 1300+ of Mumbai Municipal schools to corporate NGOs and CSR - the connection between market and education had begun in earnest.

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<sup>1</sup> As warned by the Kothari Commission in its epochal Report in 1966.





Over the last few decades funding dilution has steadily taken place in higher education and it is not possible for the ordinary person to acquire higher education easily. Since school education has no downward linkage to early childhood and lacks upward linkage to school completion (18 years) children from the socio-economically oppressed groups like SC, ST and girls in particular cannot even complete schooling. These students are not able to make use of reservation policies since reservation is only after class XII. One of the few progressive clauses of the RTE Act - the 'no detention policy' that ensured that no student fails till class VIII was withdrawn just a year ago and instead replaced by focus on 'skilling' to create poorly educated labouring classes to compete for cheap jobs with crores of others.

**In light of today's Covid-19 pandemic we need to understand a few issues that provide the contemporary context.** Education is a concurrent subject and we will try to understand the current issues in context of Maharashtra. The present situation of Covid-19 as discussed below sits on a cauldron of educational priorities (or lack of it), long in the making.



### III

## Maharashtra – The purse-strings tell the story

If we look at the expenditure the state allocates for education, we understand its vision. There has been a steady decrease in budgetary allocations since 2015. In 2020-21 the Budget Estimate (BE) has increased over the previous year's BE by 14.98%. But, BE as a percent of total state budget has decreased to 15.87% from 16.66% between 2019-20 BE and 2020-21 BE. The BE as percent of GSDP also dropped to 2.14% in 2020-21 from 2.34% between 2019-20.<sup>2</sup>

As per All-India Survey of Higher Education, enrolment in Primary education was 157.4 lakh and that in Secondary and Higher education was 66.1 lakh in 2018-19. During 2020-21 (BE), of the total expected development expenditure on social services, share of General Education is expected to be 43.21 (which had been reduced from 2019-20 BE i.e. 45.3) per cent. For 2020-21, the government BE on Primary Education is estimated to be around 31,841 Cr. and for Secondary Education to be around 24,698 Cr.

**The continuum of school education from Pre-Primary to Higher Secondary is essential for enrolment, retention, quality teaching and learning for those from diverse backgrounds – prerequisites for a good education. Lack of this makes quality schooling for the poor inaccessible, increases privatisation and makes education of the better-off 'emaciated' and myopic.**<sup>3</sup>

Here the government sector schools in the State are a non-starter to say the least. While the total number of government schools in the State are 66,946 as against a total number of 37,360 Private schools, the figures of enrolment are inversely proportionate. Despite the spread of government schools across wider geographies the enrolment in government schools is 57,18,528 as against the enrolment in private schools of 1,01,82,972 – almost 50% less! While the proportion of government schools is nearly twice the amount of private

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<sup>2</sup>Much of the data for expenditure that we are quoting in this report has been drawn from the extensive budget analysis done by Maharashtra state level civil society organisations coming together as “Jagnyachya Hakkache Andolan”. This exercise is done every year and looks at the budget utilisation the previous year and the money budgeted in the next. Education is one area which is extensively studied there.. These analysis are available at [http://ncasindia.org/wp-content/pdf/pub/pb/Peoples\\_Budget.pdf](http://ncasindia.org/wp-content/pdf/pub/pb/Peoples_Budget.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The JHA 2018-19 report is available at <https://aidindia.org/education-in-maharashtra-commentary-on-2018-19-budget/> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

schools; children enrolled in private schools are nearly double than those in government schools.

**The main reason for this lopsidedness is the failure of the government to provide the continuum for schooling as the data here reveals.** Total number of government schools in the State offering Primary to Higher Secondary



education are merely 339 as against 4,885 private schools in this category, and the total number of government schools with Primary to Secondary transition are 841 as against 8,260 private schools. For children from marginalised sections the possibility of continuation to Upper primary and Secondary schools is not at all assured as here too the availability of government schools providing

(subsidised schooling) is seriously poor i.e., government schools with Upper Primary and Secondary are a mere 328 as against private schools in this category being 5,851. .<sup>4</sup>

Reduction in school nutrition programme is a serious concern as it not only affects educational quality but creates endemic conditions of poor health particularly affecting the SC, ST and girls of all sections. Another serious issue here is the possible ‘push-out’ of large number of children due the massive school closure under the name of ‘rationalisation’ by the previous BJP-Sena dispensation. It is highly likely that the children affected by closer of 13000+ schools about three years ago are not in educational stream leading to drop-in actual number of enrolment leading to under-budgeting in school nutrition. The current government must thus make a white-paper available about these children/schools and plan remedial measures by re-opening closed schools.

Grants to private primary schools has been also increased from 48 Cr. in 2019-2020 to 53 Cr. in 2020-21. Along with that, the government has encouraged Non-governmental secondary schools by increasing their grant in aids from 18918 Cr to 19261 Cr and an increase in funds to open new Non-government schools from 189 Cr. to 209 Cr. This is a clear push for privatisation and active

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<sup>4</sup> Maharashtra Budget Analysis, Jagnyachay Hakkache Andolan, 2020-21

neglect of State-run schools. Instead of allotting largest share to non-government and 'aided' schools the State needs to add minimum till 10th standard in all schools with each academic year. Schools under the 'Mumbai Public Schools' initiative of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation is an example of drawing more enrolment and improving quality of public schools by taking such measures.

The increase in funding has been allocated in order to develop **Model Schools** in each taluka as announced. If the State is serious about improving standard of public education and draw more students it should allocate more resources to each school instead of spending on so called 'model' schools that will neither be sustainable nor replicable. The proposed idea of four 'model schools' per block can work only if the number of such schools is sizable per block (at least 20%) and only if there is a time-bound plan and financial commitment to increase such 'model' schools per academic year to achieve universal quality standard in the entire State in a given period.

**As is obvious from the above discussion, privatization gains as both access and quality of government elementary schools are neglected.** The latest Economic Survey of the state shows that more than half the children enrolled in primary schools do not reach class X.<sup>5</sup> DISE data (2016-2017) shows that number of government schools has decreased from 67,294 in 2015-2016 to 66,946 and Private schools have increased from 30,383 in 2015-2016 to 37,360 in 2016-17. Enrolment of Students in government schools has also decreased from 5,949,222 in 2015-2016 to 5, 718, 528 in 2016-2017 and enrolment in Private schools has increased from 10,019,040 in 2015-2016 to 10,182.972 in 2016-2017. The main reason behind this is lack of access to Secondary education. **The Secondary School sector** where the **RMSA** programme appears has only 1646 (7%) government Schools, while Aided schools are 14830 (63.08%) and Private Schools are 6323 (29.49%).

Another worrying trend that is consistently seen since last 3-4 years is gross **under spending**. Thus allocating marginally more resources and leaving them unutilised essentially points to the phenomenon of lack of priority for education. In last fiscal i.e. 2019-2020 year; 19.60% of the budget remained unused. Most of the underspent funds in 2019-20 were in schemes like Open Merit Scholarships (only 60% funds utilized), National Scholarships for Children in Rural Areas (60%), salaries of employees and diet charges of Government Secondary Schools (54.805 and 32.41% respectively), Grant-in Aid to local

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<sup>5</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/topic/Economic-Survey-Maharashtra-2018> dated 11 March 2018 accessed 11 August 2020

bodies for Secondary Education (54.16%), State Adult Education Program (55.84%).

In education, majority of budget is utilised towards salaries; thus allocation for new schools, special efforts to improve quality of education, retention and learning of children, teacher development, community outreach, educational research & innovation, and education of children with disabilities take back seat.

Thus while percent of the budgets for Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan have increased between 2018-19 and 2019-20, gross under spending has marked the sectors. Around 29% of the total funds allocated were unused.

**This is the overall context in which we see impact of Covid-19 on education in Maharashtra.**

## IV

### Impact of Covid-19

This report largely focuses on school education, with a brief addition on the higher education scenario.

#### 1. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Since the age group of 0-6 is not protected by a statutory law the most vulnerable and key stage of child development is grossly neglected even in normal times. It is argued often that the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare is “one of the largest integrated family and community welfare schemes in the world”.<sup>6</sup>

The state allocates about 3.5% of budget for Social Welfare and Nutrition (contributing its share to ICDS). However, since 2016 there has been decline in this with about 30% which was mitigated in the supplementary budget after annual protests from Anganwadi workers’ unions and activist organisations. As on 8<sup>th</sup> of march 2020, 31% of the budget was unspent.

##### 1.1 Anganwadis

While in rural and tribal areas there is usually a room for an Anganwadi in the local Zilla parishad school, in cities and metros these are housed in private residential spaces, community centres, or religious premises. The provision for rent being abysmally low most of these spaces lack ventilation, safe drinking water, toilets and even sufficient space for children to sit or move about.

Anganwadis are meant to provide nutrition (dry snack and cooked meal), immunization, educational support to children between 3 to 6 years as well as health and nutrition support to pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls. One Anganwadi worker assisted by a helper is responsible for all these tasks – there are about 28 task entries to be filled! The Anganwadi workers are

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<sup>6</sup> The preschool segment of the Indian education industry is dominated by unorganized sector. The organized sector comprises 17 % of the industry. Its penetration rate was expected to rise to 25 % by 2015, due to the rapid growth of preschools in Tier-III and Tier-IV cities. The preschool segment generated revenues of USD 750 million in 2011, estimated to increase to USD 3.24 billion by 2017 at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 27.33% from 2011 to 2017. This segment has enjoyed some major investments thanks to a limited regulatory framework and minimal infrastructure required to setup a preschool

usually educated up to 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade and are also not exposed to any pre-primary/early education teacher development course. The routine of a typical Anganwadi is to distribute dry snack, at the most sing a few songs and distribute cooked meals (pulses or khichdi or wheat porridge, etc.)

Teaching-learning is vital for this crucial stage of development – neuromotor and cognitive development (language, basic numeracy, spatial skills, etc.), negotiating the social world, sensory skill building, all of which are not part of an Anganwadi's routine. While periodically some teaching-learning material is given to Anganwadis it is not usually used in a planned manner. In short, the main purpose served by Anganwadis is to support immunisation, provide nutrition – weigh children to see appropriate weight, track them for malnourishment.

On 30th March 2020, at the beginning of the series of lockdowns with the onset of the pandemic, the State issued a circular to ensure that nutrition support in form of dry rations should be provided to all enrolled beneficiaries (without interruption) (Annexure 1). This has not been done diligently and systematically in a universal manner. A rapid informal survey in Mumbai (conducted in the second week of July 2020 by a group of volunteers) to understand the situation in Mumbai revealed a random, tentative picture (Annexure 2).

## 1.2 Tracking “nutrition”

**A crucial point needs mention particularly with reference to the pandemic and access to nutrition.** The state's ICDS scheme has 72 lakhs beneficiaries including children up to 6 years, Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM). As per its own admission the Maharashtra (WCD department) 'has no update on its malnourished kids since lockdown'.<sup>7</sup> **The tracking of children's health status which is done regularly by the Anganwadi workers is now at a stand-still.**

According to the ICDS website total number of beneficiaries enrolled for Supplementary Nutrition Program in the state are 72 lakh – children between 6 months to 3 years is 30,11,295, children between 3 to 6 years is 30,80,374 (the age group attending Anganwadis) and PW&LM is 11,13,572.<sup>8</sup> Thus the distribution of food items (which itself is not done regularly as found in the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/maharashtra-has-no-update-on-its-malnourished-kids-since-lockdown/articleshow/76971605.cms> dated 15 July 2020 accessed 9 August 2020



random data from Mumbai) is done on the basis of data till mid-March. The number of moderately wasted children (MAM) as per this data is 1,50,103 (3.48% of total children weighed) and number of severely wasted children (SAM) is 45,181 (1.05% of total children weighed). However, with closure of the Anganwadies, monitoring children's health and weighing them has not been done. Energy dense food meant for SAM children could only be distributed to 55000 of 600000 (9%) total children who require it.

On 1st July the state ICDS commissioner in her letter asked all Zilla parishads and ICDS officials to re-open Anganwadies (following sanitary measures) in order that children's health status/weight could be recorded. While the Anganwadies have remained shut since the second week of March, the Anganwadi workers have been on Covid-19 duties (mainly assisting in survey for a remuneration of 1000/- pm). While in some cases this move has been opposed by the Anganwadi workers unions citing danger of exposure to Covid-19, in most other instances family members of children are reluctant to hand-over their children to the Anganwadi workers for weighing.<sup>9</sup>

Such a complex situation demands that a fresh count is due for the following reasons resulting from the pandemic.

- Forced migration to villages due to loss of work with barely any means to survive: consequently children registered at state's Anganwadis rose by 7 lakh during the lockdown.
- Since there is no identification of MAM/SAM children the essential health and nutritional support is not being provided.
- A consequence of lack of nutrition and medical support leads to serious medical conditions and needs urgent medical care. Lack of timely measures can push a child to permanent disability or death.

### **1.3 Private ECCE/pre-primary education schools**

There are large sections of pre-primary schools of varied types catering to different pockets (from low-fee paying 'Balwadies', those attached to 'aided-schools', and others run by large multi-national chains). These are largely unregulated as there is no law for education of this age group.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/malnutrition-state-govt-resumes-growth-monitoring-of-babies-but-several-hurdles-for-anganwadi-workers-6520848/> accessed 9 August 2020

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019, a report by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation and The World Food Programme lists Maharashtra as one of the



With the beginning of the academic year during the pandemic and the enforced lockdown, some of these schools began ‘online’ classes for the young children, charging regular fees for the classes. Considering developmental age-appropriate pedagogical, psychological needs of the children, the adverse impact of technology on young minds, and financial exploitation of parents by schools, the state government on 15<sup>th</sup> June issued a circular asking schools to desist from running these classes or charging fees.<sup>11</sup> However; some of these schools approached the High court and the court ruled in their favour; compelling the government to issue a fresh circular (dated 22<sup>nd</sup> July) reversing its order and allowing 30 minutes screen time with parents for pre-primary children.<sup>12</sup>

As such the state’s efforts to regulate both unsound pedagogic practices as well as control exploitation by private players has met with resistance, with the courts ruling in favour of the private managements.

## 2. Schools

Schools had closed down towards the end of the academic year when majority of teaching work was completed and exams were not far away.

### 2.1 Issues related with government schools

The exodus of workers from cities has thrown-up many challenges. Children had left with their parents and given the uncertainty of the times it was not clear whether and when the families would return to the cities they deserted. To take an example from Mumbai, according to a survey by the Education

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six States with high levels of stunting and underweight. The State also has a prevalence of stunting and wasting. Here’s a look at the highlights of the report and overall malnutrition in Maharashtra.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/maharashtra-government-mulling-law-to-regulate-pre-primary-education/640625/> accessed 9 August 2020. The report states, “As per the Union HRD ministry report of 2010-2011, there were 56,145 pre-primary educational institutions in the state. In Mumbai the corporation has faced difficulties due to severely impacted areas and from 17 lakh 49 thousand required books about 90% have been distributed to children. The total 23,66,806 enrolment of students included 12,59,699 boys and 11,07,107 girl students. The enrolment of Schedule Caste students then was 3,78,578, whereas the enrolment of Schedule Tribe students was 2,69,412.”

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.lokmat.com/aurangabad/online-education-government-ban-pre-primary-second-class-school-silver-a320/> accessed 9 August 2020

Department, Mumbai Municipal Corporation, about 28.12% children from class 1 to 8 had left with their parents joining the exodus. In the category of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> out of 33,403 students 8,143 had left. The estimate is that about 30% students were not coming back. Online enrolment for current academic year is reduced by half. (The gender or caste/religion segregated data is not available.)

Out of about 2 lakh 14 thousand students in elementary schools only about 47.78% students have access to smart phones and 46.74% have remained connected to studies through various online learning initiatives of the department and the state government. The state government for its part has initiated a few measures to mitigate the challenges students face in the circumstances.

The Education Minister, in a webinar claimed that 9 crore 99 lakh textbooks have been distributed to children enrolled in class 1 to 10 – out of these 5 crore 73 lakh, 43 thousand are for students in class 1 to 8. About 1 crore, 51 lakh students have downloaded the books from Bal Bharti website.<sup>13</sup> But activists from remote tribal areas like Chikhaldara (Melghat area) note that obtaining textbooks without teacher support is not sufficient. Children in these areas for example speak the local language (mainly Korku) and need support to negotiate the texts as well as the formal set-up/routine of school. In absence of these conditions, children are found assisting in house-hold jobs (boys doing cattle grazing/fishing, girls performing domestic chores/caring for young siblings). With farming season in full-spurt the time children spend in planting is fairly long even in ‘normal’ times and is now likely to increase.

Another equally important issue is the distribution of **Mid-Day Meal (MDM)**. While there is some data and departmental follow-up about nutrition in Anganwadis, information on MDM in schools is not available. A rapid, random survey conducted after reopening of schools brings a very disturbing picture in and around Mumbai. (Annexure 3)<sup>14</sup> While the MHRD has made announcements of provisions, given the speed of transport in regular circumstances and hindrances during the pandemic, the situation is grim.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mumbailive.com/en/education/maharashtra-education-department-announced-online-class-schedule-53250> accessed 10 August 2020.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang-news/online-education-dd70-2220113/lite/> accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>15</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/school-closure-stops-mid-day-meals-for-kids-sc-sends-notice/articleshow/74699814.cms> accessed 10 August 2020

While the picture in Maharashtra is not promising, it may seem better than many other states. For those children who have returned to their original states with low performance indicators (like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal) it could mean missing one assured meal every day.

## 2.2 Fee Increase

**An additional issue is of those children who attend schools which charge fees.** Several parents reported **increase in fees as schools reopened.** As parents' grievances mounted the state issued a notification to prevent fee-rise during this academic year as well as to allow parents to make payments in reasonable instalments. However, private schools managements approached the High Court which chided the state for violating provisions of its own Act (Maharashtra Educational Institutions Fee Regulation Act 2011/14).<sup>16</sup> The court on 26<sup>th</sup> June stayed the state's order and asked the state to file its reply by 11<sup>th</sup> August. On 11th August the thirty petitioning parents pleaded for removal of the court stay and requested the court to direct the schools not to increase fees as well as to restrict the schools from removing students from 'online classes' due to non-payment as many have lost jobs, are working on severe salary-cuts or have suffered business loss due to the enforced lockdown.<sup>17</sup>

The case further went to the Supreme Court to re-consider the stay by the High Court but on 4<sup>th</sup> August the SC decided to 'not interfere' in the HC order and the stay on the Maharashtra state GR continues allowing schools to demand increase in fees.<sup>18i</sup>

This needs to be seen in the larger context in which education is perceived – changing from the duty of the state, or act of philanthropy to becoming a serviceable commodity to be sold for profit by private players. It also points to the limitations and failure of civil society/rights-based organizations to create a powerful pressure group to counter this commodification and corporatization.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/mid-day-meals-to-be-provided-to-students-even-during-summer-vacation-in-schools-mhrd/story-XjEKTWq5URmEcDJG8ulwhK.html> accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>17</sup> <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/coronavirus/news/school-removes-students-from-online-group-over-fees/articleshow/76884100.cms> accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>18</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/hc-stay-on-fee-hike-gr-no-sc-relief-for-maha/articleshow/77941096.cms>

A few organisations had attempted to bring forth the one-sided/pro-management nature of the bill regulating the fees when it was being introduced in 2011. However, these attempts had no traction and the Act, mentioned above, came into existence. At the onset of every academic year we witness instances of parents protesting against fee-rise and exploitation by school managements including cases barring children from attending classes if their parents do not comply/or continue to raise voices.

### **2.3 Education of Adivasi children and children of other marginal groups**

Besides the schools run by the Education Department there are also residential schools run by **Tribal Development and Social Welfare Ministry**. Children from these schools are now in their villages where access by road or electricity does not exist. **These children belonging to SC, ST categories are missing out on education, the meals and other provisions. The voices that represent them are also feeble and sparse.** With conditions of endemic poverty and social marginalization the situation regarding the future of these children will be alarming if immediate and impactful measures are not taken-up.

The Tribal Development Department has managed to reach textbooks to children and launched an app called ‘Unlock Learning’ for XIth and XIIth grade students with smart-phone/connectivity, a radio programme called ‘sangati’ (companion) and is said to be encouraging older qualified local youth to connect with children and continue studies. While these efforts need to be noted; their efficacy is not known. The ‘youth-volunteer teacher’ model also raises concerns about lack of understanding about role of professional teachers and possible concerns about children’s safety.

Similar to these children are **children of single mothers from socio-economically marginalized** groups. Maharashtra has more than 20% of such women-headed households (of vegetable vendors, domestic workers, agricultural/construction labourers). These families have been severely affected by the lockdown. Children of these women do not get identified in any common category and thus little is done to address their situation.

## 2.4 In the name of technology

Then we come to the issue that is much discussed and debated from varied perspectives ranging from equity in access, affordability, to pedagogy and quality provision – in this context of **ICT based or online/ remote learning**.

**First issue arising from this is access.** Here the issue is of **lack of accurate information about access to ICT**. There are contrary figures from the state authorities themselves. For example; the Honorary Education Minister in a web seminar claimed that 59% children studying in Mumbai Municipal Corporation schools have access to smartphones (65% children in private schools have access).<sup>19</sup> But a survey by Education Department, Mumbai Municipal Corporation puts this figure at 47.78%.<sup>20</sup> As per this study, out of about 2 lakh 14 thousand students in elementary schools only about 47.78% students have access to smart phones and 46.74% have remained connected to studies through various online learning initiatives of the department and the state government. As per a survey by the Maharashtra State Council of Educational Research and Training (MSCERT) 66.4% families in the state do not have access to smartphones, while accessibility to personal desktop and laptop is only 0.8%.<sup>21</sup>

Then there are issues related with access to electricity, internet connectivity and economic power to purchase the devices and data packs for purpose of children's education. To speak of the entire state of Maharashtra; out of the 1,04,971 state schools about 3,400 Zilla Parishad schools do not have electricity.<sup>22</sup> Of the total 1060 Ashram schools (of the Tribal Development Department) while they do have electricity, are in remote areas where access to electricity is erratic but since these residential schools also are not yet functioning children in most Adivasi areas are without access to 'online' learning.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (MHRD) in its advisory to states has suggested four 'distance education modes' depending on categories of families with access to resources<sup>23</sup>Fully

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang-news/online-education-dd70-2220113/lite/> accessed 9 August 2020

<sup>20</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/only-half-of-all-bmc-school-students-accessed-online-resources-amid-lockdown-6451441/> accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>21</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/maharashtra-for-access-to-online-classes-schools-take-to-crowdsourcing-for-gadgets-6524947/>

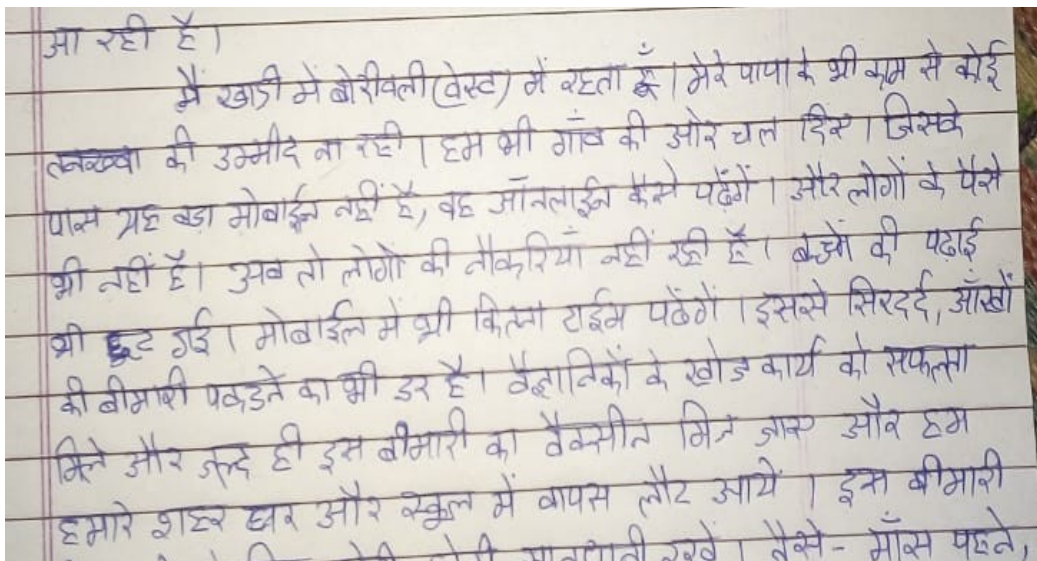
<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/pragyata-guidelines\\_o.pdf](https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/pragyata-guidelines_o.pdf) accessed 9 August 2020 accessed 10 August 2020

synchronous online classes – that mimic the classroom with live instructions, student response/participation (interactive audio-visual experience)

1. Partially online – a combination of synchronous and a-synchronous - with live instruction by teacher and off-line work submitted by students and graded by teachers (non-interactive, passive audio-visual experience)
2. Instruction through TV (completely passive intake of audio-visual content) and
3. Instruction by radio (completely passive intake of only auditory content).

These are options suggested keeping in mind access to technology which mirror the existing socio-economic status of families. This is where we need to consider the larger politics of ‘distance learning’ with serious pedagogic implications related with each of these options that are essentially discriminatory. Since it is incumbent on the parent to provide access it is irrefutably solidifying and deepening the technological/digital divide. (There are of course Adivasis in remote areas, street children and pavement dwellers without access to any of the above but the government seems to have discounted them.)



The pandemic has been a boon to IT giants like Google. Currently; it has offered its services free-of-cost to Maharashtra state to ‘train’ teachers and parents to develop technical knowhow. Its information hub ‘Teach from Home’ is meant to support this exercise. The vision of the state is indicative in a statement by the Chief Minister while announcing this initiative - “It has led us from the present to the future. All of us had questions regarding the future of education. We have come to a step closer to answering these questions due to the pandemic," said Thackeray.

This leads us to the next phase of developments.

## 2.5 PPP (private-public partnership) goes online?

The state besides using some of the public channels (Sahyadri) has partnered with private players – in several places, none other than JIO platforms. Students of class X and XII are to receive their instruction on Jio TV, Jio Sawan radio and follow the given timetable. However, only those with Jio smartphone can access this programming. In this context, we see a shift in the ‘cheapest plans’ offered by Jio. The two cheap options offered in February this year (Rs. 45 and 65) are now withdrawn and now the lowest on offer is for Rs. 75/-.<sup>24</sup> **Need we speak more about the idea of corporate philanthropy and the state’s understanding of PPP?**

There is also a case of programming by an NGO, Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited, MKCL (incorporated under the Companies Act with governmental coordination by the Department of IT under GAD, GoM) that launched a ‘free-to-air’ content on the public channel Sahyadri but used the ‘classes’ mainly as a teaser to promote its app that has detailed content, activities, assignments. This is merely a beginning, but every time one runs google searches about content on ‘online education’ a barrage of advertisements for apps/packages crowds the screen – signalling the booming business that online learning is!

Another major development and example of pushing the agenda of privatization by taking advantage of the lockdown is the the Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Program (STARS) project in partnership with the World Bank that was approved on 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> June 2020 without public consultations. This project is to be piloted in six states including Maharashtra. It is an ‘Output based project’ claiming to improve learning quality adequate for participation in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) rather than the inputs -committing public resources on sustainable basis. The project will have participation of non-state actors, NGOs, private schools, management firms like Ernst and Young, Boston consultancy. 85 % of the project’s cost would be borne by the Indian government, the rest would be financed through a World Bank loan.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.6 Curricular changes and Pedagogical Implications

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.loksatta.com/lifestyle-news/reliance-jio-discontinues-rs-49-and-rs-69-prepaid-plans-for-jiophone-users-sas-89-2222673/> accessed 9 August 2020

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/workingpaper/world-bank-funded-project-stars-critique>; <https://caravanmagazine.in/education/world-bank-disturbing-push-privatise-indian-education>



One drastic change choosing the Covid moment to bring in and that has been in public debate is the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education)'s slashing of key chapters from textbooks with the excuse of reducing learning/exam load. Important chapters from NCERT books about secularism, citizenship, gender and caste, federalism and others are the ones that have been slashed. Recently Maharashtra also has taken these similar measures by making the issue of 'farmer-suicides' not-compulsory to be taught.

## 2.7 Online Learning

The other similarly volatile issue is around **the pedagogical implications of ICT/online/remote teaching-learning**. Here are a few points to consider before we go into the various levels at which they are introduced. A school does much more than giving mere academic inputs. It is a space that fulfills vital socializing functions. Children spend a substantial period of their growing up years in school. They get to meet others who are often different from their own families; they learn to negotiate by give-and-take, learn empathy, camaraderie, in friendship and support from peers. While there is undoubtedly dominance of being part of class, caste, majoritarian religious groups, school is expected to be a secular space where ideas of diversity, equity, justice, freedoms are at least discussed as desirables. In a rush to cram and complete the academic work, the impenetrable screen of a smart-phone or computer cannot give these experiences to children.

Many psychologists also point at the stress caused by e-learning that creates a sense of isolation and academic pressure. The opportunities to play, to engage in creative acts of performance and arts together with other children are also denied in this mode. Online/ICT based learning also does not support motor development which is intrinsically connected with the cognitive domain. Children at the primary level in fact learn through concrete experiences through which they build abstractions. For the adolescents the developmental need to ask questions, argue with others, discuss things, listen to others, are not possible given the way 'online' education is being thrust on students. The effect of long screen time on physical health, particularly the stress on eyes is also not any less serious.

## 2.8 Anti-National to question 'online education'!

Given the hardship faced by the majority of students in access to technology and educational solutions in the name of 'online education,' a case was filed in

the High Court, Nagpur Bench. However, the Honourable court (Justice Sunil Shukre and Justice Shrikant Modak) questioned the bases of the petition and remarked that since the world is now rapidly moving to ICT based technological solutions, the pandemic has served as an opportunity to fast-track our children's education to 'e-learning'! Those raising issues against this would only be doing so with an 'anti-national' intent.<sup>26</sup>

The unseen forces behind the onslaught of 'online' education are easier to unveil if one looks at the economic force they represent. A report titled 'Online Education in India: 2021' brought out by KPMG and Google in 2017 highlighted the growing influence of the Internet on the education industry in India. It predicted that by 2021 online education industry will be a \$1.97 billion industry with a paid userbase growing at the rate of 6x. "The online education segment is set to become a multi-billion dollar opportunity in India. There are many factors driving this growth including the perceived convenience, increased reach and personalisation offered by online channels," said Nitin Bawankule, Industry Director, Google India."<sup>27</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic is for the ICT sector an added boon!

## 2.9 Gender

When we look through the lens of gender, the option of 'online' education seems even more challenging. Prior to lockdown, a report brought out in January 2020 by UNICEF and Centre for Budget Policy Studies revealed that 40% girls in the age group of 15-18 are out of school; 30% of these have never been to school!<sup>28</sup>

With the economic impact of the lockdown poorer families will be compelled to make hard decisions and education of girls will be the first casualty. This issue is linked to the study mentioned above as well as the overall available schools for secondary education as highlighted earlier. Large percentage of girls in the age group of 15-18 remaining out of school is due to absence of

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.loksatta.com/mumbai-news/anti-nationalists-questioning-the-decision-of-the-online-class-abn-97-2210614/>; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/citizen-questioning-govt-sop-for-online-edu-acting-against-nation-hc/articleshow/76863318.cms> accessed 9 August 2020

<sup>27</sup> [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/online-education-will-be-a-2-bn-industry-in-india-by-2021-google-kpmg/articleshow/58913744.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/online-education-will-be-a-2-bn-industry-in-india-by-2021-google-kpmg/articleshow/58913744.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst) accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>28</sup> <https://marathi.thewire.in/lockdown-and-girls-education> accessed 10 August 2020

government high schools after 14 years, and parents opt to fund boy's education in private schools thereafter. This percentage now is likely to increase many-fold.

Mobility and the relative freedom that girls had, to step-outside the domestic confines and experience childhood/adolescence with friends, is also being affected – now girls will need 'purpose' to step-out! This situation also mirrors itself in use of smart-phones – with boys being given priority while girls' use of phones is viewed with suspicion.

With **the loss of access to schools there is clear increase in incidence of child marriage.** For example in Beed district (which is perennially drought prone) 80 cases of child marriage were reported and with intervention of activists, 16 FIRs were filed.<sup>29</sup> But in the absence of active rights groups this trend can be said to go unchecked. Similarly there is no information on those who have migrated out of the state.

## 2.10 Disability and Education

As per Census 2011 there are 59,392 persons with disabilities in Maharashtra and that is 2.63 % of the total population of the state. Children in the age group 0 to 4 years are 1,41,926 and children and youth in the age group of 10 to 19 years are 4,84,883. Data about Maharashtra in context of the pandemic is not available but according to two surveys conducted by non-profit advocacy groups 43 lakh students with disability across states may drop out, unable to cope with online education.<sup>30</sup> Besides the immediate impact of being ejected from a system that is so difficult to negotiate, unemployment and poverty of their families is likely to take a permanent toll on their future and a denial of the right to life with dignity.

## 2.11 Increase in Child Labour

Following the lockdown the return of lakhs of migrant workers following shutdown in the cities and towns and subsequent loss of livelihoods, the dropout rates from the schools will see an increase in the upcoming months. The simultaneous dilution of Labour laws experts note, could put the families

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/other/maharashtra-80-cases-of-child-marriage-stopped-16-firs-filed-since-lockdown-enforced/ar-BB15LMC1> accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/43-lakh-disabled-students-across-states-may-drop-out-unable-to-cope-with-online-education/story-ZAg4a1nyWDluuq4BfV2VoK.html> accessed 10 August 2020

of workers into greater insecurities and further impoverishment. This would push more children into the labour market. “Government might dilute labour laws pertaining to working hours, maintenance of registers of workers, and so on. This would make the children who are already working as well as those who would be pushed into labour more vulnerable. We have appealed to the governments not to take such a step,” Manish Shroff, Maharashtra Convener of Campaign Against Child Labour said.

He also added that the post-Covid world is going to present scarcity of labour and lack of money, both of which would lead to child trafficking and labour. “The crisis and labour market shock can push millions of vulnerable children into child labour. Already, there are an estimated 152 million children in child labour, 72 million of which are in hazardous work. These children are now at even greater risk of facing circumstances that are even more difficult and working longer hours,” noted an ILO publication.<sup>31</sup>

As per Manish Sharma of Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), the traffickers have already begun spotting children going back to the villages. “We have sure-shot information coming from the field that human traffickers have begun contacting and extending support to the families migrating back home so that they could use their children as bonded labour in the time to come,” said Sharma. **“It will become very important to monitor the children of the unemployed families** who have gone back to their villages, and this could be done at the Gram Panchayat level,” as he mentioned that suggestions were being made to the government in this regard. He added, “Panchayats can maintain the data of the children through MGNREGA registers. The government can also track the e-passes issued to migrant families and those who travelled in Shramik Special trains to see to it that the children are in the system. The Panchayats can also ensure that all children in the village are enrolled at local schools.”

Intrinsically related with this is the dilution of the Right to Education Act that took place on 18th July 2018 during the monsoon session of the Lok Sabha, that passed the second amendment to the Right to Education Bill 2017 allowing states to make modifications in the norms governing Right to Education Act allowing the detaining children to repeat a grade after class V.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.indiejournal.in/article/campaign-against-child-labour-urges-governments-to-not-dilute-labour-laws/> accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>32</sup> The RtE 09 Act as per its section 16 barred a school from ‘failing’ a child and retaining her/him in the same std. to repeat the year. The second amendment to RtE 2018 now allows a school to do so from std.VI onward after giving a chance to re-appear for the exam within two months.

There has been a lot of concern expressed about the disregard for progressive pedagogy and socio-economic rights of children as a fall-out of this amendment.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that the Non-Detention Policy (Section 16) was perhaps one of the few positive provisions of the RtE Act (the other one being Section 23 about Curriculum and Pedagogy). That the Non-Detention Policy (NDP) is inalienable from progressive pedagogy and positively impacts learning outcomes has been acknowledged the world over. It recognises that all children are capable of learning and that they learn at their own pace. It also acknowledges that children's progress should be tracked comprehensively and cumulatively over a period of time as they develop different capabilities rather than relying *only* on term-end common exams mainly testing retention. It underplays comparison between children and gives a chance to the learner for recognising her own strength and weakness in different areas of cognitive, motor and psycho-social development. In Indian context it also has the bigger take-away of preventing school drop-outs of children from weaker sections. In fact even prior to RtE 09 many States adopted the No-Detention Policy and many sought-after schools catering to the well-to-do sections follow it rigorously.

It is imperative to ask here if this is how it's meant to be. Acquisition of knowledge is a costly affair, and assimilation and creation of knowledge commands a price! The market sustains by controlling distribution of certain knowledge streams and regulating the size of groups of 'knowledge creators' and those at the middle-level managing and executing their plans. Keeping the number of 'knowledge creators' and managers proportionately small is necessary as this class commands higher price, while the masses are pushed to the receiving end forced to eat the crumbs as consumers and labourers. The larger the labour-sector the cheaper and more vulnerable they come. (The growing joblessness in India in all sectors whether professional, technical, semi or unskilled is a result despite this planning as well as because of it and needs a separate analysis.)

As a preparatory step the children who 'fail' repeatedly in class VI and VII are to be given skill-based education within schools. A few NGOs and business houses are now taking-up skill-training in schools albeit for altruistic reasons. The State claims to have opened variety of skill training centres in different parts of the country. Massive resources are spent on media-campaigns. But the ground reality is otherwise.

Most of the training centres are either non-existent or functioning abysmally. Several courses also require certification till class XII largely unavailable to those willing to enrol in these centres. Studies and experience of Non-Government Organisations involved in this activity reveal another challenge. Those trained under the 'Skill India' initiative are neither given priority nor better wages by companies hiring them. The companies hire workers on apprenticeship basis, giving less than minimum wage and fire them at will. Some may argue that these are teething troubles, that conditions will improve as time goes by and 'Skill India' will help achieve the objectives of 'Make in India'.

But the key question will rarely be asked. What is the duty of the State? To nurture it's younger generation to explore their potential or to exploit public resources to ensure that the majority remains half-educated, adding to the vulnerable labour-force in the global market?

An important direction emerges from the second amendment to RtE (revising the NDP) and the pandemic. Poor educational standards and scrapping-off the NDP after class V will inevitably have large numbers of adolescents leaving school or stagnating. This vulnerable lot of children are bound to succumb to the economic demands of their poor circumstances – first enlisting as child-labourers and later as workers in the unorganised sector.

By keeping the majority of the young population away from higher education the age-old hierarchy of caste and patriarchy is being strengthened. Higher education has the potential to enable a person to be a knowledge-creator opening avenues for leveraging her socio-economic conditions. However, when elementary education itself is made unattainable for majority of young Indians, is it not necessary to investigate the possible links between 'failing' and 'skilling'?

## **2.12 The End of Things? Children's suicide: '**

In what can be seen as an alarming repercussion of the pandemic-induced lockdown, the state witnessed a spike in the number of child suicide cases during the period, raising concern over the mental and emotional wellbeing of children. Suicide has been identified as the third leading cause of death among

young adults. As per studies, a student commits suicide every hour in India.<sup>33</sup> While there are several unfortunate instances of children suicide from other states, Mumbai and Maharashtra too has seen such unfortunate instances.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.13 Teachers: Exploited and soon to be extinct**

Teachers in schools are under tremendous stress too. Those in non-government schools have been coping with the stress of ‘online teaching’ balancing house- work with teaching and problem-solving for students that goes outside office hours.

Those in the government system are much worse-off. Most schools function without clerical support and teachers routinely do jobs that have nothing to do with academic work. Due to the section 27 (Chapter IV) RTE Act teachers are called for election and census or disaster management duties. Thus, in this case too, the disaster clause was invoked and teachers were made to resume work in the month of May by the Bombay Municipal Corporation for example. (Letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020), and were posted in containment zones for monitoring, survey, administrating schools that were used as containment facilities, etc. Teachers in other parts of the state have been posted at ‘check-points’ to monitor/control vehicle traffic during lockdown between districts or given jobs related with ‘home-delivery’ to affected areas.<sup>35</sup>

While ‘online/distance education’ has been fast-tracked, there is no mechanism for building teacher-capacity to do their work in a satisfactory way so that teachers will feel fulfilment of their professional role and student learning will take place in a rational, satisfactory manner.

In fact; there is already a threat of school closure in large numbers of non-government schools, threatening teacher’s jobs.<sup>36</sup> The way technology has takenover the educational system during this period there is a serious threat of teacher redundancy in the near future.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/kochi/2020/jul/11/lockdown-blues-driving-kids-to-suicide-2168038.html> accessed 9 August 2020

<sup>34</sup> [https://divyamarathi.bhaskar.com/local/maharashtra/pune/news/pune-and-mumbai-children-commit-suicide-after-father-and-mother-scolds-for-using-mobile-phone-127539760.html?ref=inbound\\_More\\_News](https://divyamarathi.bhaskar.com/local/maharashtra/pune/news/pune-and-mumbai-children-commit-suicide-after-father-and-mother-scolds-for-using-mobile-phone-127539760.html?ref=inbound_More_News) accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>35</sup> <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/coronavirus/news/teachers-given-home-delivery-jobs-during-lockdown-in-beed/articleshow/76902770.cms> accessed 10 August 2020

<sup>36</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/maharashtra-with-fees-down-to-a-trickle-schools-face-a-survival-threat/articleshow/77099522.cms> accessed 10 August 2020



### 3. Higher education

Within the higher education sector, comprising colleges and universities, the immediate impact of the pandemic was projected by the media primarily in terms of the **uncertainty over several examinations** at entry and exit level. At the highest level the UGC (University Grants Commission) stepped in after states had declared all colleges along with schools closed during the series of lockdowns. On the one hand, this impacts the middle classes and the better-off, and particularly those who have aspirations to study outside India or enter professional streams like medicine, engineering, management, finance, etc. On the other, it also affects those from the socio-economically marginalized classes who have struggled to reach this far - there is uncertainty about being able to pay the costs with family incomes taking a hit due to the sudden unemployment crisis.

#### 3.1 Reduced Enrollment and Closure of Private Colleges:

Due to the general economic depression students aspiring to professional streams like engineering, management, pharmacy have had to make a tough choice of staying out, resulting in low enrolments and eventually closure of colleges. Several institutes that have government approval for 2019-2020 have not gone for renewal in 2020-2021. A total of 179 professional colleges have applied to the All India Council for Technical Education for campus closure across the country with 22 institutes located in the state. There was approval of 164 new colleges for 2020-2021 with an increase in capacity in 1,311 colleges but it is uncertain if most of these will indeed start this year. The Covid situation had hampered the processes of gaining approval for most of these institutes. This factor will also likely result in tougher competition for available seats; increasing further pressure on students.<sup>37</sup>

#### 3.2 Exam Pressure

The University Grants Commission (UGC) directed the States to conduct pending examinations by 30th September 2020 as per its revised guidelines of 6 July 2020. However; given the severity of the pandemic, Maharashtra (and the States of Delhi, Punjab, West Bengal, Odisha) have conveyed their inability

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<sup>37</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/179-professional-colleges-see-closure-approval-dropped-for-44/articleshow/77383176.cms> accessed 11 August 2020

to comply with the directions and several parties including teacher unions have approached the Supreme Court (SC) to intervene.<sup>38</sup>

Parties from Maharashtra, have stated that it is unable to conduct exams in physical locations as the impact of the pandemic is serious with ever increasing spread of Covid-19. And would prefer to grade students on basis of their average performance of earlier semesters. For instance, with the semester system the graduation course is divided into six semesters. The final marks would be calculated by calculating an average of all semesters. For the sixth and final semester there would also be internal evaluation. Thus the state government argued that instead of conducting sixth/final semester exam in times of the pandemic; it be allowed to give degrees on the basis of the first five semesters and internal assessment of sixth. It also clarified that if any student preferred to opt for the final exam it will arrange them at a future date – after the severity of the pandemic subsides. Meanwhile, the MHRD itself had supported UGC's position by invoking the powers conferred on it under Disaster Management Act to supersede the state's powers.

It was submitted to the court that given that majority of students do not possess laptops/desktops it would not be feasible to conduct online examinations as it is untenable to use smart-phones as hardware. The requirements of infrastructure, travel arrangements for students and staff, availability of staff for supervision, law-and-order machinery are not feasible to put in place.

The Supreme Court on 4<sup>th</sup> September dismissed the review petitions of the six States (filed on 17<sup>th</sup> August) in favour of UGC and MHRD compelling the States to make arrangements for conducting the competitive NEET/JEE exams. Aspiring students have been compelled to travel from far-off places incurring excess expenses and risking lives.<sup>39</sup>

### **3.3 Employment Prospects?**

The Corona crisis will have less of an impact on countries whose economies were formerly in good shape compared to others. India's economy on the other hand was itself in crisis before the onset of the pandemic. The unemployment rate was as high as 7.3%. Between 2018 and 2019, more

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/covid-19-ugc-objects-in-supreme-court-to-maharashtra-and-delhi-cancelling-exams/article32315313.ece> dated 10 August 2020 accessed 11 August 2020

<sup>39</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/supreme-court-rejects-plea-of-6-non-bjp-states-against-holding-of-neet-jee-exams/articleshow/77928470.cms>

suicides of unemployed people have been reported than farmers' suicides. According to a study by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate rose to a record high of 27.11% in May from 8.74% in March. With such a dire situation already existing, the employment prospects of the newly graduating youth itself portended gloom.<sup>40</sup>

### **3.4 Financial constraints**

A recent survey on the impact of the pandemic on higher education in Maharashtra has shown that 82 per cent students anticipate difficulty in funding their education in the new academic year 2020-21. Conducted independently by IIT-Bombay faculty B N Jagtap and education researcher Anand Mapuskar, the survey also posted gender disaggregated data with 80 per cent women and 84 per cent men students having expressed difficulty in funding their education. The urban-rural divide was also evident, as 78 per cent students from metro cities, 80 per cent from district headquarters, 83 per cent at taluka headquarters and 88 per cent from rural areas said they anticipated these difficulties.<sup>41</sup>

Another survey conducted by a students' association representing students from marginal social backgrounds in a city higher education institution, indicated that with the mode of learning being shifted to a remote mode and the financial burdens that the lockdown had imposed on families, students wished that the fees structure be revised, as well as provision for payment in a staggered manner via instalments.

### **3.5 Online Teaching-Learning**

Similar to schools, colleges and universities too will transfer their teaching 'online'. Premier institutions in Mumbai such as the IIT, TISS and colleges of the Mumbai University under orders from their central authorities issued instructions to teachers and students that they will ensue teaching in remote mode.<sup>42</sup> In this instance too, the issues students from remote areas and socio-economically weaker sections will face will be similar to those faced by school

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.siasat.com/corona-crisis-and-education-debt-1924171/> accessed 9 August 2020

<sup>41</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/82-students-in-maharashtra-anticipate-difficulty-in-funding-their-education-in-new-academic-year-survey-6501205/> dated 12 July accessed 11 August 2020

<sup>42</sup> Online Classes An Accessibility Report, Ambedkar Students Association, TISS, unpublished report, Mumbai 2020. h

children. But while there is at least a facade of the right to Education Act binding on the state, the university students lack any protection by law.

Highlighting the economic distress due to Covid-19 and the disarray following lockdown, the independent report by Jagtap and Mapuskar noted that 27 per cent students fear that chances of continuing with their studies in the academic year 2020-21 were “low to very low”. This fear has been expressed by 29 per cent male and 25 per cent female students. The percentage is almost uniform over urban and rural settings. Given the situation in their homes, 73 per cent students expect that they will have to financially support their families. Students reported that a number of options will be needed to be thought of to resolve financial constraints, including part-time jobs (51 per cent), participation in earn-and-learn schemes (18 per cent), and helping family agriculture/business on a part-time basis (9 per cent). In terms of the access to infrastructure, the primary source for internet facility for students is mobile internet with 79 percent availing online education and 91 percent using smartphones, while 32 percent have laptops or desktops and 6 per cent have no device.’<sup>43</sup>

The study by the students’ association representing students from marginal social backgrounds had similar responses to convey: only 60 percent households of students had laptops and desktops; further, while 37 percent students had only 8-12 hours of electricity supply, only 49 percent had internet access - indicating an extremely deep digital divide. The reflection of disadvantage was even more evident with mobile phones being the main source of internet, limitations on daily data availability, and sharing of device with family members.<sup>44</sup>

Most important was that being adult students in graduate and post-graduate programmes, the home environment are the least conducive with many members of the family confined to a small space, the likely conflicts due to adjustment issues, the lack of privacy to study, and the demands on them for household labour.

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<sup>43</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/mumbai-tiss-may-opt-to-go-online-for-entire-semester-6484132/> dated 1 July; <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/iit-bombay-scraps-face-to-face-lectures-till-year-end-coronavirus-6475023/> dated 26 June; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/mumbai-colleges-grapple-with-online-classes/articleshow/76864695.cms> dated 9 July 2020 accessed 11 August 2020

<sup>44</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/82-students-in-maharashtra-anticipate-difficulty-in-funding-their-education-in-new-academic-year-survey-6501205/> dated 12 July 2020 accessed 11 August 2020

Experts and academics also express a fear that the existing privatisation thrust of the state will see a sharp acceleration, to arrive at a situation where the online or digital mode of pedagogy will emerge as the default mode. This it is expected will only exacerbate the existing inequalities that have been put in place over the phase of liberalisation of higher education.

### **3.6 Cultural Agendas:**

The pandemic has gravely impacted the resources of the government but while for some areas (like industry and banking) the government has provided economic stimulus, education is not on its list of priorities. While self-financed institutions have been affected as noted above, Universities funded by the Central government are also facing financial crunch. These constraints have been expressed through certain 'cultural agendas'. The centrally managed Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya (Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University) located at Wardha, Maharashtra has decided to drop Urdu in the academic year 2020-21 citing funds crunch while retaining courses in Spanish, Japanese and French!

## V

### In conclusion

This report is an attempt to draw together issues in school education, impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with an effort to link these with higher education; but it is not an exhaustive picture.

One cannot but conclude with this news item of the Indian Express dated July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 ‘Schools Shut, no mid-day meal, children in Bihar village back to selling scrap’ with an evocative photograph of 15 primary school children’s probing eyes asking the camera, different questions our society may not care to address or know how to. This report is an attempt to flag some of these questions with a hope that this pandemic is a wake-up call to think about them first, when making policies, plans.

#### Post Script:

As this draft report concluded a big development has taken place which needs to be noted here. Another wave of the pandemic in Indian education unleashed itself on 29<sup>th</sup> July as the NDA Cabinet Committee approved and introduced the National Education Policy 2020. Commentary and analysis of the policy will require a separate space. What needs to be noted here is the manner in which such an important document has been introduced in the midst of the increasing spread of Covid-19 pandemic and climbing number of casualties. The complete lack of democratic processes is evident in the following:

- The process of drafting has been limited to the core-committee headed by a technocrat Dr. Mr. Kasturirangan and a select few groups/individuals – some news-items report that close consultations with the RSS and its affiliates have been part of this process.<sup>45</sup>
- The Cabinet Committee did not have any representation from opposition parties.
- The draft by the Cabinet Committee has not been tabled in the Parliament for wider debate – nor are such intentions clarified.

A revised NEP has been overdue after a gap of about 38 years. This vital document will set the stage for changes for decades to come. However not

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<sup>45</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/rss-affiliates-welcome-the-nep-say-over-60-of-their-suggestions-met/articleshow/77249418.cms> accessed 11 August 2020

just its content but also the timing and manner in which it has been brought in, is what is particularly reflective of total disregard for transparency, sidestepping democratic processes – but need we be surprised?



# Annexure 1



## एकात्मिक बाल विकास सेवा योजना आयुक्तालय, महाराष्ट्र राज्य, नवी मुंबई

(महिला व बाल विकास विभाग)

कार्यालयाचे पत्ता :- रायगड भवन, रिवर विंग, पहिला मजला, सी.बी.डी.बेलापूर - 400614

Email comicdsraigadbhavan@gmail.com व icdshnd2@gmail.com 022-27576388,322,323 Fax-022-27576324

क्र. एबाविसेयो/का-२/आवपो/2019-20/ 1351 , नवी मुंबई

दिनांक - 30 / 3 / 2020

प्रति,

1. जिल्हा कार्यक्रम अधिकारी (मबावि)  
जिल्हा परिषद ..... सर्व
2. बाल विकास प्रकल्प अधिकारी,  
नागरी प्रकल्प ..... सर्व

विषय :- पोषण आहार पुरवठा सुरळीतपणे ठेवणे बाबत

संदर्भ :- 1. या कार्यालयाचे पत्र क्र.एबाविसेयो/का-२/आवपो/१२७७/२०१९, दि.२० मार्च, २०२०

२. या कार्यालयाचे पत्र क्र.एबाविसेयो/का-२/आवपो/१२८१/२०१९, दि.२१ मार्च, २०२०

3. मा.सचिव, महिला व बाल विकास विभाग, भारत सरकार यांचे दि.३०.३.२०२० चे पत्र

उपरोक्त विषयान्वये आपणांस कळविण्यात येते की, या कार्यालयाचे संदर्भिय पत्र क्र.१ अन्वये राज्यातील अंगणवाडयांमधील लाभार्थ्यांना कोरोना साथीचा प्रादुर्भाव होऊ नये म्हणून प्रतिबंधक उपाय योजना करणेबाबत सविस्तर सूचना निर्गमित केला आहेत.

तथापि केंद्र शासनाच्या संदर्भिय पत्र क्र.३ नुसार आहारापासून लाभार्थी वंचित राहू नयेत यासाठी पर्यायी व्यवस्था करणेबाबत कळविण्यात आले आहे.

1. केंद्र शासनाच्या सूचनांप्रमाणे संपूर्ण लाभार्थ्यांना आहार मिळणे आवश्यक आहे.
2. आहार पुरवठा झाल्यानंतर आहार पुरवठ्याची डिलीव्हरी चलने अंगणवाडी स्तरावर जपवून ठेवावीत.
3. प्रत्येक प्रकल्पातील १ ते २ अंगणवाडयांचे आहार पोहचवल्याचे व लाभार्थीनी वाटप करतानाचे फोटो आपल्या जिल्हा कार्यक्रम अधिकारी व बाल विकास प्रकल्प अधिकारी नागरी प्रकल्प यांचे व्हॉट्स अॅप ग्रुपवर टाकावेत. तसेच प्रकल्प अधिकाऱ्यांनी त्यांचे व्हॉट्स अॅप ग्रुपवर जास्तीत जास्त अंगणवाडयांचे आहार पुरवठ्याचे व वाटपाचे फोटो जपवून ठेवावेत.
4. यापूर्वी या कार्यालयाचे संदर्भिय क्र. 2 च्या पत्रानुसार दिलेल्या सूचनांप्रमाणे आहार वाटप करतांना सेविका / मदतनीस यांनी हॅन्डग्लोव्हज व मास्क वापरणे बंधनकारक आहे. तसेच वाटपापूर्वी सॅनीटायझरने हत निर्जंतूक करणे अत्यावश्यक आहे.
5. अन्न सुरक्षा व स्वच्छतेच्या दृष्टीकोनातून केंद्र शासनाची दि. २४.१२.२०१३ च्या गाईडलाईनचे तंतोतंत पालन करण्यात यावे.

वरीलप्रमाणे सूचनांची तात्काळ अंमलबजावणी करावी व तसा अहवाल सोबत जोडलेल्या नमुन्यात या कार्यालयास सादर करावा.

(इंद्रा मालो भा.प्र.से.)

आयुक्त

एकात्मिक बाल विकास सेवा योजना  
महाराष्ट्र राज्य, नवी मुंबई

प्रत :- मा.सचिव, महिला व बाल विकास विभाग, मंत्रालय, मुंबई यांना माहितीस्तव सविनय सादर.

जिल्हा कार्यक्रम अधिकारी (मबावि), जिल्हा परिषद ..... / बाल विकास प्रकल्प अधिकारी, नागरी प्रकल्प .....

अ.क्र.	जिल्हयाचे / प्रकल्पाचे नाव	३ ते ६ वर्षे वयोगटातील आहाराचे पात्र लाभार्थी संख्या	कन्ड्युमर्स फेडरेशनकडे मागणीचा दिनांक	पुरवठा झाला आहे काय, असल्यास दिनांक	पुरवठा झाला असल्यास, लाभार्थ्यांना वाटप झाला आहे काय, असल्यास कोणत्या दिनांकापर्यंत	पुरवठा करतांना हॅन्डग्लोव्हज, मास्क व सॅनिटायझर इत्यादीचा वापर केला आहे काय

**Annexure 2**  
**मुंबई मधील अंगणवाडी मधून पोषक आहाराच वाटप याबाबत माहिती**

शहर	वस्ती	अंगणवाडी मधून पोषक आहाराच वाटप		अंगणवाडी मधून काय मिळालं	कधी	
		हो	नाही		एप्रिल ते जून	एकदाच
कुर्ला	कुर्ला-येथील आंबेडकर चौक आणि साईनाथ चौक	हो		५ वर्षांपर्यंतच्या मुलांना पुढील वस्तूंचे वाटप केले आहे. मारी बिस्कीट १नग, पाव किलो मीठ, तेल, मसूरडाळ, चणे, १किलो-तांदूळ आणि गहू तसेच १०० ग्रॅम लाल तिखट पावडर आणि हळद.इ.		मे महिन्यात एकदा
बांद्रा पूर्व	भारत नगर, बांद्रा पूर्व-पत्थर नगर आणि वाल्मिक नगर	हो		येथील अंगणवाडी सेविका यांनी पोषण आहार आणि काही वस्तू उदा- चवळी, चणे, १.किलो तांदूळ आणि गहू वगैरे साहित्य दिले आहे.		एकदाच
सायन कोळीवाडा	प्रतीक्षा नगर, सायन कोळीवाडा	हो		मसूर डाळ, चणे, तांदूळ, गहू, लाल मिरची पावडर, हळद पावडर, तेल हे साहित्य मिळाले.		मे महिन्यात एकदा
धारावी	धारावी	हो		डाळ, मसाला, साखर, मीठ असे २ ते ३ किलो पर्यंत सामग्री		एप्रिल महिन्यात
रे रोड	रे रोड विभाग	हो		मसूरडाळ, गहू, तांदूळ, हळद पावडर, मिरची पावडर इत्यादी		फक्त मे महिन्यातच दिले.
जोगेश्वरी	शक्ती चाळ, जोगेश्वरी पश्चिम	हो		तूर डाळ ६५० ग्राम, मूग डाळ ६५० ग्राम आणि मटकी ६५० ग्राम दिलं.		मे महिन्यात एकदा
सांताक्रुझ	श्रीराम पांडे चाळ,	हो		७५० ग्राम चणा,		मे महिन्यात एकदा

(पू.)	वाकोला सांताक्रुझ (पू.)			मटकी, तूरडाळ, मिरची पावडर, हळद, मीठ, तेल, १ किलो गहू, चवळी हे दिले.		
सांताक्रुझ (पू.)	वाकोला, एल. बी, एस, नगर	हो		१ किलो मटकी, गहू, हळद पावडर, मिरची पावडर, तेल, आणि मीठ दिले.		जून महिन्यात
गोरेगाव (प.)	प्रेम नगर	हो		सूरवातीला एकदा तूरडाळ, तांदूळ आणि गहू हे दिले नंतर काही नाही दिले.		एकदाच
मालाड	पी, एन, गांधी नगर	हो		५ किलो पीठ, ५ किलो तांदूळ, १ किलो मीठ, १ किलो डाळ, २ किलो साखर हे देण्यात आले.		एकदाच
मालाड (पूर्व)	कुरारगाव, पठाणवाडी, दिंडोशी विभाग	हो		दोन किलो तांदूळ पाच किलो गहू, मसूर डाळ, चणाडाळ, चणे, चवळी, तेल, साबण, मसाला, हळद, मीठ इत्यादी. तसेच गरोदर माता आहार पुरविण्यात आला आहे.	एप्रिल - जून	
घाटकोपर	घाटकोपर पारसी वाडी	हो		आझाद नगर मध्ये महिन्यात १ किलो तांदूळ, गहू, तूरडाळ, मटकी, हळद पावडर, मसूर डाळ इत्यादी	एप्रिल - जून	
बोरीवली (पू.)	कॉर्टर रोड नंबर ८	हो		तांदुळ, दाल, हळद, मीठ, मसाला, तेल इत्यादी जीवोपयोगी साहित्याचा वाटप करण्यात आले.	एप्रिल - जून	
गोरेगाव पूर्व	आरे कॉलनी २२ न.	हो		दोन किलो- तांदूळ, गहू, तूरडाळ, चणाडाळ सर्व दोन दोन किलो मिळाले.	दर महिन्याला	
गोवंडी	रफिक नगर	हो		१ किलो मुगडाळ, गहू, चणा, मटकी, हळद	दर महिन्याला	

				पावडर, मिरची पावडर, धने पावडर हे दिल. रफिक नगर मध्ये ५ वर्षाखालील आणि गरोदर बायकांना धान्य दिले आहे.		
चेंबूर	प.एल,लोखंडे मार्ग	हो		. १ किलो मूगडाळ, २ किलो गहू, मिरची पावडर, हळद पावडर, १ किलो चवळी. येथे ५ वर्षाखालील आणि गरोदर बायकांना धान्य दिले आहे	दर महिन्याला	
गोवंडी – चेबूर	शिवाजीनगर	हो		अपनालय सेंटर तर्फे ३ ते ६ वर्षांच्या मुलांमध्ये प्रत्येक महिन्याला २ किलो तूरडाळ, मुगडाळ, ५ किलो तांदूळ, ५ किलो पीठ, मसाला, हळद पावडर, मिरची पावडर, २ किलो तेल, २ किलो चणा, चवळी, साखर इत्यादी. तसेच मुलांना कलर, कंपास बॉक्स, पाण्याची बाटली हे ही दिल जातंय.	दर महिन्याला	
लिंबोणीबाग- शहाजी नगर	लिंबोणीबाग- शहाजी नगर	हो		तांदूळ, मसूरडाळ, चणा, गहू, मिरची पावडर, हळद पावडर, तेल हे सगळं ५ वर्षाखालील मुलांना आणि गरोदर स्त्रियांना दिल.	दर महिन्याला	

## Annexure 3

**ज्या शाळांमध्ये पोषक आहार (तांदूळ) मिळालं नाही त्यांची नावे.**

	मनपा मुंबईमधील शाळांची नावे
1	एस.एस.फुले मराठी, भायखळा
2	उंदेरीया उर्दू मनपा शाळा
3	टॅक बंदर उर्दू मनपा शाळा
4	वरळीनाका मनपा शाळा
5	सयानी रोड मनपा शाळा
6	माहीम पोलीस कॉलनी मनपा शाळा
7	वीर सावरकर उर्दू मनपा शाळा
8	आर.सी. माहीम उर्दू मनपा शाळा
9	दत्तपाडा मनपा शाळा
10-11	स्वामी विवेकानंद ( काजूपाडा) हिंदी व मराठी मनपा शाळा
12-13	कस्तूरबा हिंदी व उर्दू मनपा शाळा
14	सुपारी टॅकला इंग्रजी मनपा शाळा
15	कुलाबा मनपा शाळा
16-17	दिंडोशी 1 -हिंदी, मराठी मनपा शाळा
18-20	दिंडोशी 2 -हिंदी, मराठी, उर्दू, मनपा शाळा
21-22	लिबर्टी गार्डन- इंग्रजी, तमिळ मनपा शाळा
23	विक्रोळी पार्क साईट यु.पी.एस. इंग्लिश मनपा शाळा
24	नरिमन लेन, मनपा शाळा
25	संभाजी चौक, मनपा शाळा
26	संघर्षनगर हिंदी. मनपा शाळा
27	गोशाळा इंग्लिश एमपीएस, मनपा शाळा
28	गोशाळा मराठी मनपा शाळा
29	गुरु गोविंद सिंग मराठी, मनपा शाळा
30-32	दीनदयाळ उपाध्याय उर्दू, कन्नड व हिंदी मनपा शाळा
33	एलबीएस हिंदी, मनपा शाळा
34	दीनदयाळ उपाध्याय एमपीएस, मनपा शाळा
35-36	मुलुंड कॅम्प मराठी व इंग्लिश, मनपा शाळा

- टी वॉर्ड या विभागात व शाळेत तांदुळ मिळाले नाहीत तसेच एन वॉर्ड मध्ये रमाबाई मध्ये तांदुळ मिळाले नाहीत.
- शालेय पोषण आहार देण्यास संस्थेकडे शिल्लक जे साहित्य होत तेवढेच साहित्य वाटण्यात आले आहे .