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Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Rise up against design of destroying education in the name of universalization

After nearly sixty years of the capitalist rule since independence, the condition of primary education in the country is, to say the least, shocking. Even today, India, boasting of its nuclear power and fast-rising economy, remains a country with half the illiterates of the world. The picture has not changed over the years, though high-flown phrases and false promises were never lacking; people's money draining down alleys of corruption and misuse was never in dearth. Yet, the target of free compulsory education for all children remains a far cry. In fact 40% of the children have not yet been brought under school education, as has been pointed out in the CAG report in course of its

severe criticism of the latest government project, i.e., the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (herefrom referred as SSA), introduced five years back.

While funds flowing in from the World Bank, the Department for International Development (DFID), European Commission (EC) and others amount to some billion dollars and the media take up the charge of whipping up the tempo in favour of this project, those concerned with education of children of the country, guardians, teachers, educationists and others cannot but get more and more aggrieved and apprehensive about the ground reality, the bleak future that stares in the face of this vital aspect of people's life. In fact, with the government embarking upon

one project after another, primary education seems to be heading for an ultimate, all-out disaster, posing thereby a threat to the future of millions of children of the country. We will soon look at the ground reality. Before that we should take a stock of what is the background on which the project is launched and what it aims at or how it plans to work.

Globalization-privatization remain the target : market the vehicle : NPE '86 the starter!

At the outset it must be emphasized that though the education policy of the country, drawn out essentially to serve the ruling capitalist class, has remained

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SUCI strongly condemns fake encounter killings in Jammu & Kashmir

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in course of a statement issued on February 5, 2007, strongly condemned the cold-blooded planned systematic murder of many people in several places including military barracks and police stations in Jammu and Kashmir at the hands of local police and military who are pretending these serial killings as encounter deaths. Such dastardly killings and rape of women to terrorize the local people have been going on for quite some time in the state, observed Comrade Mukherjee. He demanded an immediate end to such inhuman barbaric acts as well as stringent punishment of those having committed such a horrendous crime.

Comrade Mukherjee also urged upon the people of the whole country to rise in severe protest against such ghastly acts of the men in uniform that is striking at the very root of democracy and militating against democratic norms and values and thereby compel the governments, both central and state, to immediately give up unleashing worst state terrorism in the name of combating terrorism.

in shocking disparity in sex ratio in many states today, including UP, Bihar, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, speaks volumes about the prevalent attitude towards women.

Today as kindness and compassion are dying out in families, women are abused, battered, their property taken away; they are tortured both physically and mentally and even killed or driven to suicide. Lacking economic independence they are helpless victims, suffering in silence and shame, beatings, torture, rape, taunts and torments. Such is the

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Domestic Violence Act, 2005

How far in defence of women?

On 25 October, 2006 the Indian Parliament passed the Domestic Violence Act 2005. Receiving wide coverage in the media, this Act was hailed as path-breaking by some, and decried as draconian by others. Most of the women's organizations welcomed it. Some even went a step further and held that it provides a panacea for all the ills of domestic violence that our women encounter at home today. No less vocal have been those opposed to it, some citing possible misuse. But most have done so from a patriarchal point of view. For a correct appraisal of this Act, what is needed is an objective, scientific approach. To that end we have to give deep consideration to some pertinent

points concerning this Act and centring round the socio-cultural background in which it was enacted.

Violence against women is spiraling

Whatever has come in the media about the phenomenal increase of atrocities and violent crimes committed against women has deeply perturbed right-thinking people. Women, young and old, and even girls barely a few years old, are increasingly molested, sexually assaulted and raped. It is well-known that once they leave their home, nowhere are they safe, be it in public places, in trains, at workplace, in fields. Even in school and college premises they are

molested now-a-days and sometimes raped. Every 6 minutes a woman, a girl, is raped. Often they are brutally murdered to wipe off all evidence. But what about their homes, how safe are women there? There is no denying the stark reality that in their home also women are not safe either. They have to contend with rampant domestic violence and abuse that is endangering their health and life. In the treatment meted out to them, at every step they have to face the glaring inequality and social discrimination, the very breeding ground of violence against them. The fact that female foeticide and infanticide, among others, are so widely practiced that it has resulted

Discredited NPE'86 and DPEP stand out as precursors of SSA

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the same over the sixty years of independence, the NPE'86 or the National Policy on Education introduced by the central government under Rajiv Gandhi of Congress in 1986 marked a major stage in the course. It envisaged : " A major new perspective in the Policy is that education is no more looked upon as a social welfare activity... education is a unique investment ... this principle is the key to the formulation of the Policy" (*The Challenge of Education : emphasis ours*). The implication was clear and dangerous. It involved a change in outlook on education; it insisted that, education was no longer a social welfare activity that should embrace one and all of the nation; on the contrary, the government must relieve itself of any responsibility of providing education to people and must make room for private capital, monopoly of the soil as well as abroad to make their investment, already identified by the government as 'unique'. No doubt, it was unique. For investment in education is hardly to face any drying up of market. People will always want their children to get education at costs and demands, for which they may have to stretch their limits to the maximum. In other words, the policy made the door of privatization and commercialization of education wide open and prompted the government to shirk its responsibility.

Though primarily, a scheme for higher education, the NPE '86 set the pattern for and thus came down heavily upon primary education, too, through introduction of 'non-formal education', 'operation blackboard' and the like measures. Disaster was evident in fast deteriorating condition of government-run or aided educational institutions. They lost funds, teachers, infrastructural facilities and thus ultimately students, as it was evident from even the records of the HRD ministry, Government of India, published by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. Instead, those run by private capitals rose in number and student strength, as such schools mushroomed in cities and towns, hunting for as much profit as they can. In virtually all the states enrolment in government schools slumped down. The

apprehension came true. the NPE'86 became the path-finder for rampant privatization and commercialization.

Close to follow was DPEP, introduced by the central government in 1994, in phases in different states of the country and in face of strong adverse opinion of people. It was a programme for South East Asia, originating out of the World Conference on EFA (*Education For All*) held in Jomtien in March 1990 with the sponsorship of the 'World Bank, along with UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO' and was to be funded by the DFID at the behest of the World Bank. Both were agencies that are controlled by and that serve the interest of the imperialists. Their fundings were also extended only through long-term loans at high rates of interest, which naturally have to be borne by none other than people of the country themselves. But it was even more. DPEP in India was a collaboration between the World Bank and the Government of India, in which the latter agreed that " It will not make changes to the DPEP or DPEP Guidelines" (DPEPII, Clause 5.1.p.54). So, it was not just funding by the imperialists and their funding agencies. It was at the same time, a commitment to them to go by their dictates.

DPEP was rolled on in the same tune as that of the NPE'86. It proclaimed clearly : "Some words become the catch phrases of particular decades. *Globalization and privatization* are certainly among the most frequent encapsulation of the 1990s. *The market is 'in', the state 'out.'*" (DPEP Calling, 1995 November issue: Riddel, AR in the publication of the international conference on "Globalization and Learning" held at Oxford in September 1995; Dr RVV Ayyar, the then Joint Secretary of the Education Department of the Union Government expressed the same theme in a different language in his article 'Basic Education and Human Rights' in the September 1996 issue of DPEP Calling : emphasis added). Evidently the message was clear. We will see later, the SSA does not fall back; only it changes the garbs of phrases.

DPEP-SSA clamours for education for all, but equity, not equality !

'Education for all' or 'universalization of education' were

the other catch phrases. And what is meant by this EFA or universalization? First, it does not mean that every children of the country must have education from schools. The vast majority of them, obviously those who will not be able to meet with the financial demands, must be prepared to have the taste of this education from non-formal devices. Second, as DPEP declared, " Students are different. *It is not our aim to make them equal*— on the other hand by providing suitable environment paving the way for developing each one's abilities is what is needed." (Teachers' Handbook, 'KINGINI' Class III, 1998, p.5) Again, 'Everyone is not exactly alike, *to insist on equality of outcomes would work against the rights of others*' (Dr RVV Ayyar in DPEP Calling, September 1996) So, "separate yardsticks should be fixed for the children from each social life", namely, tribal, villages, urban, poor sections, linguistic minorities etc. In summary, necessities of students from different sections of society, advanced or backward, rich or poor, will be judged on 'separate yardsticks'. And that should be done in such a way that it does not 'work against the rights of others'. In other words, privileged advanced learners will be provided with more advanced methods and materials of teaching, better teachers to train them up. Those backward are not to be burdened with that advanced education; they should be provided with the education they can easily grasp. Attempts to bring students of backward or poorer sections to equality with those of advanced or rich sections are unwarranted, because it will mean 'working against the right' of the latter, since it will require equitable distribution of available resources and thus curtailment of privileges the latter may be enjoying. So such attempts are not welcome; the two sections must be nurtured in 'suitable environment paving the way for developing each one's abilities'. The advanced, the privileged, the richer sections must have the right to get education in the environment they are already set in and need to develop, whereas the poorer section, the backward will have to remain satisfied with the demands and conditions of their own environment; the shepherd of a village, for instance, should be content with learning about the

fodder for his herd, and at most how to maintain his pasture or how he may use his herd for earning more. He must not be vexed with the knowledge of how and to what extent science has developed these days or such others. Obviously, this keeps him tied to his environment, without any scope for a breakthrough; and that will plainly keep on increasing the gap, the difference between the two sections more and more and for all time to come. Proper education, that is meant to develop each and every child of the country with the best of knowledge of the land and abroad, into a well equipped, well-groomed asset for the nation, a man of character and ability to face the vagaries of life and help the society to advance against odds, to stand erect with head high against all injustice and discrimination, will always allure the poorer sections; the privileged, too, will have an education based on the unjust, immoral discrimination that can only instill a 'catch-as-much-as-you-can' sort of self-centredness in them. So universalization of DPEP tantamounts to introduction of two kinds of education, one for the privileged and the other for the backward. Its sum and substance is such that the difference is not eliminated, rather the discrimination is widened and deepened. In the same tune, DPEP suggests, "...schooling for all should not be interpreted as indicating a priority concern for formal schooling" (Monograph III, p.61). Naturally, those privileged who are already enjoying the advantage of getting their education in highly equipped schools cannot be asked to opt for forsaking their 'formal schooling'; by DPEP concepts, that would encroach upon their right to education. On the other hand, the poorer section of the cities and villages, who yearn for a good school, should remodel their dreams and be satisfied with non-formal schooling. DPEP holds for abolition of pass- fail system with a view to 'reducing repetition and dropout rates to reduce the cost per student' (Primary Education In India, p.8). Such orchestrated reduction of 'repetition and dropout rates' with reduction of 'cost per student' only leads to the students wade through their schooling without any check on what they are learning and whether at all.

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SSA picks up the cue of decentralization and privatization from DPEP

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DPEP desires teachers to act as managers, not character-builders!

Even such an education must be imparted to students, DPEP holds, by persons who will be 'facilitators', not 'instructors', 'class room managers' and not 'teachers'; 'the teacher should not teach anything, the child should learn whatever it likes on its own', this was how DPEP approached the process of educating a child. Not to speak of the fact that such an approach strikes at the very root of the hard-earned concept of teaching and teachers, serving as the man-making, character-building pillars of the society, the concept that the humanity developed through ages in one country and another without exception. On the contrary, it reduces teachers to commercial bread-earning 'managers'. Such a ridiculous approach only smacks of infesting teaching with go-as-you-like anarchy. What does a 'class' or a 'grade', in a school, stand for? Is it not an agglomeration of individual students, broadly requiring a particular standard of rearing up fitting with their age, mental and emotional capability? Who, on the earth, can best understand and judge this requirement of the students : a teacher or the students themselves only beginning to learn their life and around, or a corporate executive hunting for profit and manpower to make use of ? DPEP never answered these questions; but people from experiences of their life do have the answer and thus never accepted the DPEP approach.

DPEP had its philosophy, a "new philosophy of education" (COE, p.15). It says : "A small number of people with *higher qualifications* and a large work force with *limited qualification*" (COE, p.109) is what UNESCO envisages and our government has agreed to. So, it sets up double standards, namely: "Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) recommended by the EFA Conference for the work force and an "Optional Level of Learning (OLL) for the gifted children. expected to reach a higher level" (COE, p.147). What is left out is that, the 'gifted' ones must also have born with silver spoon in mouth! Amply self-evident, it is a perfect justification of their

advocating for equity and not equality, for their brand of education based on discrimination! Anybody conversant with the history of human civilization would not fail to find that this philosophy, the approach to education mocks at, rather strikes at the very root of the concept of democratization of society and hence education, that envisaged equal right and opportunity to education for everybody in the society as fundamental tenet for progress of mankind against the autocratic, discriminatory rule and privilege prevailing in the feudal society. It is on this concept that the modern educational system of different countries of the world, including ours was built upon. Now DPEP, at the behest of imperialists-capitalists strike at the root of this. And even for such a truncated education of MLL for the vast majority of the population, the DPEP has more prescriptions. It holds : "In line with the changed relationship between the citizen and the state, encourage the understanding that citizens need to take responsibility for their actions, including their choices about education, work and life style." (Report of the World Bank) So, not only the "market is 'in', the state 'out'". Since the state or the government is relieved of its responsibility of educating its people, it is the headache of the parents themselves to look for ways and means for the education of their children, in this market-controlled, market-oriented ambience. One can easily visualize that in a poverty-stricken country, where the vast masses of people wake up every morning to think of every means to earn the minimum level of sustenance, just a square meal, how will they meet the demands of even the 'minimum level of learning' for their children, which is shackled in the ever-tightening grip of privatized, commercialized educational system reigned supreme by the profit-hungry corporate sharks, out to find out how to reap the maximum profit from this unique investment opportunity. In other words, education will simply recede beyond their reach.

Now, under cover of all its loud proclamations for EFA or education for all, what DPEP could finally bring about, is a virtual disaster in primary education of the country. Kerala, the most literate state of India, was the most enthusiast in

implementing DPEP and thus had the bitterest taste of it. Naturally, that evoked strongest resentment and condemnation that took shape in massive sustained resistance movement involving people, coming from all walks of life and society demanding withdrawal of DPEP.

At the turn of less than a decade, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), again a scheme for primary education, was launched as a "flagship programme" by the union government in 2001 to universalise primary education in Classes 1 to 5 by 2007 and elementary education in Classes 1 to 8 by 2010. The scheme, like its predecessor, DPEP, is funded by the World Bank, and it comes at a time when DPEP has already earned enough ill-reputation and strong disapproval from the education-minded people of the country. SSA succeeding DPEP is added to the fray. The question that automatically follows: Is it an old wine in a new bottle meant to hoodwink people once more and accelerate the process that has already devastated primary education in the country, or does it bring in any change? Let us now probe it in details.

SSA, a policy for structural adjustment for speedy implementation of discredited DPEP

SSA stands for ensuring phased universalisation of primary, or rather elementary, education by 2010. And that universalisation is based on the same concept of 'equity, not equality' as dished out by DPEP. SSA pledges to bring all children 'in schools, alternative schools, education ensuring centers, 'Come back to school' camps' etc.' We will see through the ground reality in later section. Now, it suffices to say that SSA pledge only means that non-formal education, given the momentum in the NPE'86, is viewed as an important, if not the dominant, component in this drive for universalisation. And that is to be done in a decentralized manner. SSA intends to work through "P4 — public, private, panchayat partnership", that is for effectively involving Panchayat Raj Organisation, namely Village Education Committee or School Development & Management Committee (SDMC)/Gram Panchayat Education Committees, School Management Committees,

Mother-Teacher Associations, Parent-Teacher's Associations, and other Basic Education co-ordination organizations. We must not lose sight of what DPEP concluded : "Decentralization and privatization are curious be-fellows" (AR Riddell in DPEP Calling, November 1995). In keeping up with this concept, SSA suggests pulling in 'resources by decentralizing the entire primary education', thus absolving the government of funding it.

And how is that decentralization visualized ? SSA decides that 'districts should plan policies to improve basic facilities at school'. It holds that the schools will improve if 'community participation' is ensured and for that 'the concept of community ownership should be clearly understood' and 'created'. As people are the owners, in future they should look after funding the schools; even 'teachers should mobilize pencil, blackboard, teaching aids' from the community. And who are these people funding for schools, who are the community owners? Obviously, not the hapless daily wage earners or the other poorer sections of the masses; by no means, they can fund the schools. It then simply means that the private businessmen, the local rich community should invest in these schools and they should own them! Already the corporates like Infosys, Wipro and others are on the prowl. They are adopting schools under SSA. The policy meetings deliberating on different aspects of implementing and monitoring SSA are being organized and attended by none other than their representatives. For example, a discussion on 'Quality in Education' was held as 'A Times Foundation Initiative' at the Times House, Mumbai on April 27, 2006, in which the basic objective was to bring forth suggestions and views for the use of the funds granted for SSA. It was attended by the financiers of this initiative, namely the representatives of DFID (Department for International Development), World Bank and EC (European Commission) and members of different NGO's and others. At the same time, if, judging it nonviable, that is non-profitable, 'no such private businessmen or members of the local rich community find interest in coming forward to own schools, wherefrom will people of that locality have

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SSA creates corruption, ruins infrastructure, devastates education for people

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education for their children?

On teachers, SSA approach subscribes to DPEP approach, even rises above that. It holds that education must be 'child centered, and not school centered'. We have already discussed on how teachers play a role in rearing students to become worthy humans, on what is their role in a 'class' or a 'grade'. Here we will pose the questions: Whom is a school for? Is it not for students? Then, how does child-centredness become different from school-centredness? SSA asserts: "The society/ community should have the right to question teachers and schools if their results are not up to the mark" and there should be prepared a Teacher Learning Material (TLM) of high quality, meant to ensure proper understanding of children. To this end and in keeping with its doctrine of decentralization and privatization, SSA desires corporates, NGOs and such others to adopt schools and monitor their functioning, provide material on best learning practices as well as for auditing, converting schools which are not in use into resource centres and so on, as well as to conduct training programmes and workshops for the teachers and even parents. In the name of this 'Ensuring learning', there have been prepared detailed objective questionnaires on every lesson. Teachers have to fill them everyday, individually; they are asked to maintain finance records and to give thought to infrastructure development. As mentioned earlier, they are also supposed to find ways for procuring "pencil, blackboard, teaching aids" from the community. With all these assignments for a teacher, what other could be the casualty than teaching itself? The proponents of DPEP-SSA do, however, stand truthful to what they profess: for a classroom manager, who should not teach, teaching should be the last priority!

Thus SSA appears to have come out to drive the last nail to the coffin of this brand of education for common people, prescribed by DPEP. It has not denounced, nor rejected or deviated, from the approach and philosophy of DPEP. Rather, added to these, it has stood out strongly for decentralization of administrative powers. It has

directed the government to formulate legislation to decentralize powers. It is then a project precisely following the DPEP in its conceptual aspects or content; where it differs is on the operational aspects. The fear that will loom large is: is it then a policy to make the necessary structural adjustment for the speedy implementation of DPEP or such World Bank sponsored programmes!

The Ground Reality ! Funds dwindle, corruption galore!

The above discussion at length brings out clearly the devastating effects on education at primary level, that the two programmes, DPEP and SSA have brought about. SSA has not yet been able to implement the programme and all its measures in full. Yet, even short of that, SSA has cast its menacing spell on primary education of the country. The crisis is fast engulfing the whole system throughout the country. Teachers and education-loving people find it in horror that even the minimum amount of education that was possible to cater in the prevailing much-faulted system, is on the verge of being wiped out without trace. Teachers, now viewed as managers, and handful in respect to the necessity, are being increasingly compelled to duties and assignments other than teaching and beyond the four walls of classrooms, as discussed above. Recruited largely on contract and thus their job hanging in thin air, they are robbed of all democratic rights to protest and resist. Every aspect of infrastructure namely building, classrooms, textbooks, adequate number of teachers, toilets and drinking water — all present a fast deterioration. With government-run or aided schools thus left without teachers to attend, and students dropping out in masses, government-run or aided schools stand with empty classrooms, buildings dilapidated or finding use for some other purposes, not even healthy in cases. Students and their guardians face either of the two options: Forget about education, or seek for it from private schools at exorbitant costs! Naturally guardians and education-loving people at large earnestly long for getting rid of this suffocating condition. Different teachers'

organizations from all over the country have already raised strong demands for immediate withdrawal of the programme. Hence the apprehension that deepens fast is: if partial implementation of the scheme leads to such devastation, what will remain of the government-run or -aided primary education, as and when the scheme is implemented in full.

To comprehend the impending danger further, we may now mention a few facts of stark reality that even the proponents of the schemes, the governments and other official sources cannot deny. It will be found there that even in 2006 more than one crore or 40% of children in age group 6-14 remain out of schools (vide finance minister's budget speech 2006), when the target was to bring all such children of that age group to school by 2007. Notwithstanding this failure, there have been financial irregularities to the tune of Rs 472.51 crore or rampant draining out of funds in different states over items no way connected to education. They included purchase of utensils or LPG connections for running mid-day meal scheme kitchens, or performing rituals like *bhoomipujan* for a Research and Training Centre, or on fruitless agenda of 'teachers' orientation' and so on. There was no accountability, no effective supervision and monitoring at any levels. Added to this, was shameless squandering of money, whose total amount will always remain hardly known. In many cases from different states, a meager portion of the allotted huge funds were actually spent, while the rest simply vanished, unaccounted for ever.

Ground reality : failure to address the problem of developing infrastructure

Secondly, in spite of all tall claims of developing primary education, there has been no change in already miserable condition of infrastructure without which development remains a utopia, a hoax. No attention has been paid to building or repair of adequate premises, to recruitment of teachers or providing students with textbooks at proper time, providing schools with adequate classroom equipments and such others.

An important aspect of infrastructure of formal education is

the student-teacher ratio. The Tapas Majumdar Committee appointed in 1999, recommended at least three classrooms, three teachers and a 30:1 student-teacher ratio in every primary school (up to class IV). It also proposed for an allocation of Rs.14,000 crores in addition to the existing budgetary allocations every year for the next 10 years. With all tall talks, SSA has not bothered about these minimum recommendations towards development of infrastructure. The dismal scenario is further apparent from the following facts. For lower and upper primary schools, the student-teacher ratio varies from 20 to 85 in different states and union territories. In several states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, the ratio exceeds 50. Taken all the states and union territories together, percentage of schools in good conditions of their buildings never reaches 90% and is often below 50%; that of schools with separate toilet for girls and those with drinking water facilities reach as low as 14-20% and 70-75% respectively in some states. Absence of toilet is a main reason that compels girl students to drop out from schools. The wretched condition of school premises becomes evident from a recent tragic incident, in which the tin-roof of a government sponsored free primary (GSFP) school building collapsed during school hours to trap and kill at least 6 students.

How far governments implementing SSA are serious in developing infrastructure is made apparent from Dr. Raja Ramanna Committee Report 2000 on the state of Karnataka. The report says that one teacher for one class is an ideal condition! In that case the government should immediately appoint at least 1 lakh extra teachers (in Karnataka there are 48,716 schools and 2.10 lakhs of teachers). Taking the desired teacher-student ratio for Lower Primary Schools to be 1:30 and for Higher Primary Schools 1:40, the government will have to fill up 63,000 teachers immediately! According to the report itself there are 2,885 single teacher schools and on an average there are only 4 teachers per school (if we take that there are only 7 classes from class 1 to 7)! However, in spite of pointing out these real

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Putrescent class and gender exploitation in capitalism drives on violence against women

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horrifying scale of domestic violence that countless young married women are burned, beaten to death or driven to commit suicide. Even pregnant women are not spared. In an investigation carried out by the International Centre for Research on Women in collaboration with independent researchers it was found that 50 per cent of Indian women interviewed reported being kicked, beaten or hit while they were pregnant. Seventy-five percent of those who reported repeated violence have attempted to commit suicide. (*Info Change News and Feature*, March, 2006).

But it is not only in India that there has been a devastating increase in sexual crimes and domestic violence; this is happening in many countries of the world. Though we do not have information about every country, from available facts and figures, it is clear that this is the general trend, and even women in the developed countries, who are in a relatively better position than their sisters elsewhere, are facing this problem. To mention but the fact that nearly one third of American women (31%) reported being physically or sexually abused even by a husband or lover at some point in their lives, according to a 1998 Commonwealth Fund Survey. And that is ever increasing. Already back in 1996 eighteen states in the USA reported a 20 per cent rise of complaints filed against domestic violence in the preceding three year period. In South Asia 50 million women are reported 'missing' because of the increasing number of cases of foeticide, dowry deaths, honour killings and other acts of violence being inflicted on them. And India has the ignominious distinction of being in the forefront of crimes against women.

Domestic violence—rampant in all sections of society

It is well known that patriarchal domination and attitude towards women remain deeply entrenched in our society and women languish under age old oppression, especially the poorer sections. But domestic violence is not confined to the poorer sections of people. Even among the educated, the so-called enlightened, elite section of society with apparently modern outlook and upbringing, women too become

victims of rampant abuse and domestic violence, of dowry-demands-disputes and unspeakable torture. And what is most stunning of all is the way we find the indiscriminate killing of women becoming a common feature. And this is spreading like wildfire. Today domestic violence has become endemic, all pervasive; it is cutting across all communities and classes, and increasing at a rate of 40 % every year. So much so that the families themselves are actually becoming crime centres as the perpetrators of these heinous crimes generally get away scot-free. For, most of these incidents are not even reported, and of those that have, a dismal 5 per cent have ended in conviction of those guilty under the anti-dowry law. What really stands out today is the barbarity and ferocity of the domestic violence unleashed against women and the impunity with which they are killed not only outside but even inside their home. On witnessing this heartbreaking plight of women the question is tormenting the mind of every right thinking man and woman, why is this, what is the reason for it?

Decadent capitalism breeds violence

During the Western Renaissance when capitalism was a rising force, in its revolutionary, its progressive phase, it came with the slogan of liberty, equality, fraternity. Though capitalism could not implement this ideal because it too is based on exploitation of man by man, to some extent, it did liberate women from oppression and shackles of feudal society and religious superstition, and did establish democratic rights and norms in society at that time. As a revolutionary force capitalism brought forth the humanist values and extolled concepts like dignity of labour, dignity of womanhood and aesthetic motherhood, etc. decrying feudal existence or way of life for women and old feudal virtues as undignified, as inhuman. Dignity of womanhood signifies that it is not her outward appearance but her intrinsic human qualities that count; it is the virtues like compassion, kindness and understanding, sense of obligation to society, the role played by woman and her unyielding spirit against social injustice that define her dignity.

Similarly, as against conventional motherhood where motherly love is regarded as a mere instinctive, bodily virtue, and blindly showered on issues of one's own, the concept of aesthetic motherhood upholds the beauty and nobility of true motherly love and affection, based on judgment and reasoning, for any child of society.

Putrescent capitalism dishonours women, destroys its own achievements

In no time, however, capitalism lost its progressive character and entered in its moribund stage, whence it has been spreading its putrid fallout to every sphere, including the sphere of culture and values. Festering from ever worsening market crisis, created by its own exploitative system, all that capitalism has been capable is to attack and destroy its own achievements, to curtail liberty and democratic rights, to trample democratic norms, to trample the very concepts, the very values it had once extolled, giving rise to most vulgar bourgeois individualism. And after the breakdown of the socialist camp, capitalism, relieved of the need to don a benevolent mask, has been busy dismantling social welfare measures and redoubled its ruthless exploitation, bringing on nothing but ruin, poverty, unemployment, disease and war globally. To prevent the realization from dawning on people that it is capitalism itself which is enslaving both men and women it is desperately promoting and flooding the market with fascist culture that caters to base instincts and vile tendencies, it is spreading obscurantism and whipping up racial, communal and ethnic hatred and strife. With the result that women are the worst sufferers.

And today the capitalist class, to whom everything is a commodity, who looks at everything from the point of view of profit – regardless of the consequences to humanity and our planet — is promoting the attitude, the idea that it is smart to push one's self interest at the cost of others; it is unashamedly extolling the virtue of profit, it is aggressively fostering and promoting dehumanizing consumerist outlook and 'culture'. Family relations, too, have not escaped its poisonous fallout, bringing out glaringly the

truth of Marx and Engels's observation that "...the bourgeoisie ...has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment"...It has resolved the personal worth into exchange value..., and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation." (*Communist Manifesto*)

The capitalists have commercialized everything, including woman; her body, her physical beauty, everything has become but a tool to capture the market, robbing her of her dignity, honour as a human being. In the process woman is being projected as a mere object to provide gratification, polluting the minds of young and old and breeding moral depravity. In this way capitalism is trampling in the mud the concepts of dignity of womanhood and aesthetic motherhood, the very concepts it itself had once brought forth, and is spreading its venom of putrid decadence. Thus, there is no denying the stark reality that all this is at the root of growing sexual crimes and mounting domestic violence which in capitalist countries is increasingly devastating the life of women. If at least women did enjoy economic independence it would have helped them somewhat to confront this problem. But with unemployment and impoverishment growing to ever more catastrophic dimension worldwide, the majority of our sisters cannot hope to achieve it, especially in the less developed countries.

Women's liberation linked with overthrow of capitalism

This is all the more true in our country where domestic violence is at its most virulent. Moreover, in India the Renaissance started when worldwide capitalism had become reactionary. Being plagued by the fear complex of proletarian revolution, the national bourgeoisie in our country had played a reformist oppositional role against imperialism and made compromises with feudalism and religion. As a result, the national bourgeoisie did not and could not carry out, in the main, the task of cultural and social revolution essential for democratization of society. Therefore women, too, have continued to languish, by and large,

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Develop countrywide movement to thwart catastrophically designful SSA

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figures, the report has stooped to a compromise; it suggests that the government should immediately fill up only 10,000 posts! In some other states, of 51,000 government-run or -aided primary schools 2000 have been closed down; of the promised 10,000 new schools to come up, none has seen light. There schools with classrooms in good conditions are 44.45% as against the national average of 71.03% with 308 schools without any buildings, those with girls toilet are 35% and with drinking water facilities 78%; student-teacher ratio in the primary level stands at 50%, single teacher school being about 6%. For the total number of 25,781 posts sanctioned for the primary sections, only 9318 para-teachers have been recruited, all this pointing to the lack of seriousness of the state governments towards primary education for masses.

Ground reality : Attempts at reducing drop-out rates have beaten about the bush

Undeniably, a stumbling block to universalization of education is the high rate of drop-out. The governments, union or state, thought out a number of steps to counter this trend. They introduced mid-day meals to allure students; they launched a campaign to bring children to schools: Special Enrolment Drive; they decided to groom teachers, as mentioned earlier in this article, with special training and such others. And what was the fate of all these measures?

The mid-day meal scheme, introduced during the regime of Congress government under Narasimha Rao and later revamped by the Pratichi Trust of Amartya Sen, started with providing students with 3 kg. of rice per month per student. It was assumed that students properly fed at home, will find interest in school-going. When it did not work, the scheme was changed to providing students with mid-day meals prepared at school premises. Now, we can briefly visualize the common scene to be found there. Teachers, who are to prepare the meal often, are off from their teaching exercise while cooking; incidentally, in most cases, where schools do not have adequate space, they do not also have any separate kitchen too; children, who

are asked to bring their own utensils wait eagerly for their lunch to relish the fragrance of the lunch; it makes them glued to what is happening there and how long they may have to wait; so they take it upon themselves to go as they like, play on their utensils, quarrel or make merry; finally after the lunch they are asked to have their wash from the nearby pond or elsewhere; often that marks the end of their school-hours; they do not find it worth to return for further studies; teachers are also relieved after their teaching-cum-cooking ordeal. Thus the meal at the mid-day brings an end to the school day. Add to this, the problems that crop out in villages where the religion and caste of who is cooking and for whom may assume grave importance; there are reports that guardians have refused to accept food cooked by somebody not to their choice. Besides, water for cooking is often hard to find. Rarer, but more tragic incidents also occur, as a school in Tamil Nadu caught fire from the kitchen and students were burnt alive instead of finding their meals. All this has made this scheme a farce that has only affected the minimum extent of teaching that could have been provided in the already rickety schools.

Next, we may take up the case of Special Enrolment Drive. Official figures will indicate a fall in the drop-out rates through the decades. Partly that is due to the measures like mid-day meals, providing uniforms to girl students, free supply of study materials etc. But the real figure is far from that shown. This is evident also from the admission of Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the deputy chairman of Planning Commission, who commented in his Tarlok Singh Memorial Lecture that while "enrolment rates for primary education are high at almost 50% of the total age group, (large percentage of) those enrolled drop out of school midway". To what extent drop-out is affecting their programme is clear from the instance of Madhya Pradesh. The number of out-of-school children in Madhya Pradesh increased from 428,000 in 2004-05 to 472,000 in 2005-06; that is in one year there might have been more than 40,000 drop-outs, as admitted by the

officials of the state. Faced with this increase in the number of children not going to school, the state government kicked off a fortnight-long campaign, including plays and door-to-door visits, across the state to get drop-outs back to school.

In fact, similar campaigns were taken up by other states. Called Green Card campaign, in it teachers were asked to move to the village to find out children not coming to schools and issue them green cards. The only real effect of this campaign was that teachers were further distracted from their primary assignments of teaching, without any perceptible change in the inflow of students on account of this campaign. So dismal is the outcome of this much-hyped campaign, that in a major state like West Bengal Special Enrolment Drive since 2001 could only bring about an annual decrease in the number of 'Out of School Children' by 20 to 35%, in one of the states, far from the target of bringing all children to education.

The third step to combat drop-out relates to teachers' training. SSA stipulates that money cannot be used for appointing permanent teachers. So there will be no permanent teachers; they will be precisely on hire, on contract to be paid from the contributions of community owners. A teacher can never be sure of his fate, if and when the community owners may turn disinterested to investment in education and withdraws their funding. However, even such teachers will not be adequate in number, leave aside the question of reaching the optimum level. So they need to be trained, that is groomed and oriented, to become efficient 'classroom managers': as envisages SSA. And thus appointed and groomed, when they will be sitting on the chair, their tasks will be to plan for and execute those plans for recruiting 'learners' (as DPEP calls students) and procuring the requirements for schools from the community; in addition, they are also to maintain accounts, to think about future infrastructure development and to fill up a point-by-point questionnaire everyday so as to let the community owners have a check on their performance and accountability; they may also have to contribute their labour and time

towards preparing mid-day meals! Over and above, in states like West Bengal teachers are often engaged in programmes and projects like the Census, updating of electoral lists and so on. Who on the earth will believe that after all this the teachers will have the energy and desire to spend for teaching. But, after all, they are not supposed to teach, as DPEP- SSA define their assignments! The effect will be as it is found now: the governments are more interested to show on record, often on fictitious figures of admission to schools, the success of their programme of universalisation in terms of enrolment of students. Surely, that will fetch more funds, but the casualty will be the education only, the victims are always teaching and students in government-run and aided institutions, which were supposed to provide education to the vast masses of poorer, common people. Thus in spite of all efforts and measures like mid-day meal, automatic promotion etc., drop-out was 73% in West Bengal at the end of 2004; government's own figures reveal that whereas 28 lakh students were there in class I, there were only 6.5 lakh students appearing for the Madhyamik Examination at the end of class X.

With all these measures, the bare fact that is ignored is that universalization of education cannot be made meaningful, until and unless one recognizes that ours is a country, where about 70% of common people, continuously fleeced by capitalist exploitation since independence, live below poverty line. They are forced to engage their children to bread-earning, rather than going to schools. Mocking at all tall talks and legislations, child labour has thus assumed a painfully menacing form. Schemes of universalization remain hollow exercises, if they do not take this fact into account, do not realize that the more there will be capitalist exploitation, further will the masses be impoverished, more and more children will be forced to work to eke out their livelihood. In fact such schemes will always come down to cunning attempts at keeping the real menace of poverty, as the root cause of drop-out, out of sight of people. And it is for this reason that no

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Deception behind rights granted to women by Act

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under patriarchal domination and feudal oppression, while many feudal concepts, habits and religious superstitions have remained dominant in the cultural sphere. Despite this, patriarchal oppression of women had so long not taken on that brutal, violent form as it is doing today. This is because the appeal of humanist moral values, to whatever little extent it had worked in society, and even the appeal which the old religious values still had held for the poorer section of people, all had exerted a somewhat restraining effect. But today this is fast dwindling in the deep all-embracing crisis engulfing our society, as all sense of values are breaking down. Today not to speak of religious values, even the appeal of bourgeois humanist values are completely exhausted, historically impossible to revive. But the new moral values based on nobler ideals, on a higher revolutionary ideology are yet to spread their influence adequately in society, and in the resulting vacuum the door is left wide open for decaying capitalism to spread its deadly venom to every

aspect of life and dealing a death-blow to the last vestiges of moral values and finer human qualities. This is the reason for the horrifying increase of sexual crimes and domestic violence against women.

Clearly, any solution to the devastating problem of domestic violence, the cruel torture, the degrading, violent abuse they are subjected to at home under capitalism is inextricably linked with overthrow of capitalism. Only socialism can emancipate women from all sorts of patriarchal and social oppression-discrimination, from stultifying and tortuous conditions of life. By socializing means of production, abolishing profit motive and exploitation, socialism creates the material base for equality, equal opportunity in social and family spheres and a position of honour and dignity for women. Under socialism, where state and society help to free women from domestic drudgery, and in the conducive conditions and atmosphere for nobler and finer human qualities and sense of values to grow and flourish, men and women are in a position to maintain

a relationship based on love, respect and understanding. And socialism will actively foster the ideal of merging personal and social interest which will ensure the happy flourishing of true brotherhood and friendship in society all around, and free both man and woman from enslavement in every sense.

With this objective in view what we need is, apart from growth of conscious political power of the people, a social and cultural movement inspired with new ideals and based on higher ethics, culture and higher moral values encompassing all aspects of life. This alone can combat the horrifying cultural degradation that has set in, in our society and ultimately pave the way for revolutionary transformation of society. And that social and cultural movement is emerging today, slowly but surely, and is growing stronger. It has met with wide response and support from the women themselves. And as part of this the organized movement, the voice raised against domestic violence, against atrocities and crimes perpetrated on women has created pressure on the government to do something. It is a result of this pressure thus created that the Domestic Violence Act 2005 has been enacted in Parliament. But how far will it be effective in redressing this situation? Let us first recall the salient features of the Act.

Salient features of the Act

- i) The Act defines the expression 'domestic violence' to include all forms of actual abuse or threat of abuse that is physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic that can cause harm, injury to, endanger the health, well-being, safety and life. Harassment through dowry demands would also be covered under this definition.
- ii) The Act covers those women who are married to or have been in a relationship with the abuser, where both parties have lived together in a shared household. Even those women who are sisters, widows, mothers, single women living with the abuser are entitled to legal protection under the Act.
- iii) It provides for the rights of such women to secure housing. It also provides for the right of the women to reside in her matrimonial home or shared

household.

- iv) It empowers the Magistrate to pass protection orders in favour of the aggrieved person to prevent the respondent from aiding or committing an act of domestic violence or any other specified act.
- v) It provides for appointment of protection officers and registration of non-governmental organizations for providing assistance to the aggrieved person with respect to her medical examination, obtaining legal aid, safe shelter etc.

The Act also enables her to go directly to the Magistrate, and on her behalf others can also report to the Magistrate. Further, according to the Act her sole testimony is enough to convict the abuser and she is given more rights for possession of children. Also the husband cannot sell the property without her consent and he has to pay for her residence, medical treatment etc. The court has to take up the case within three days of complaint being filed and finish the case within 60 days. And punishment can range from a jail term of up to one year and/or fine of up to Rs 20,000.

Act has serious fallacy

As mentioned before, this law has been enacted as a result of the pressure created by organized movement. Through this popular gesture the ruling parties, the servitors of the ruling bourgeois class hope to derive mileage in the elections. This Act raises high expectations, it makes tall promises of rights granted to women, but when it comes to the question of their concrete fulfillment, the ladder is removed and one falls flat. Because, for all the promises the Act makes, all the relief it has granted women on paper, where are the concrete provisions to implement it, without which it will remain a mere scrap of paper? In reality it has not provided women with any concrete means to avail themselves of their rights. For no provision has been made for maintenance of the afflicted women, for their sustenance, their protection or rehabilitation. In our country where patriarchal domination and attitude remain deeply ingrained, our women are taught and trained from girlhood days to bear with abuse, beatings and assaults. A

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programme, no scheme, such as DPEP or SSA are, have been able to make any headway with reducing drop-out rates.

Thus virtually total destruction of the ambience of learning-and-teaching in government-run and –aided institutions has led to springing up of private institutions, as desired and designed by DPEP and SSA, which are running a parallel system of education in the country. People are being increasingly compelled to shift their children to these institutions often going beyond their financial limits and constraints. Those who cannot afford to, are left to the lurch. Education of their children fast vanishes beyond their reach and even vision.

Frustrate the heinous design of capitalists-imperialists

This attack on education bringing such a catastrophe is never an isolated phenomenon. It is a pre-meditated, continuous and very deliberate attempt to see to it that the vast masses of common poorer people are left without education.

Education-loving people have noted it with concern that since independence, the ruling capitalist class has brought down attacks on education.

Governments, irrespective of their shades and working at the behest of the ruling class adopted one scheme after another towards curtailing higher education. Now the attack comes heavily on the primary education itself, in an unprecedented magnitude. To thwart this all-out attack, it is needed to develop a countrywide massive sustained movement on the strength of realization that education is the backbone of the nation. Under no circumstances, it can be afforded to be destroyed. On the other hand, to make such a movement really effective, it must be organized at all levels, in all sections of the society, students, teachers, guardians and common people at large. We would earnestly look ahead for such a massive movement to build up and consolidate all over the country, to successfully thwart any further implementation of catastrophic programmes like SSA or any such others.

Integrate socio-cultural movement against domestic violence with struggle for overthrow of capitalism

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woman decides to complain about it only when it crosses all limits. And once she decides to do that, then even if she is not forced out of the house by the husband, it is circumstances that will force her out, and the right to stay under the same roof becomes meaningless for her. Where will such women go? To a shelter home, the Act says. The Act has stipulated that the husband should pay for the residence of his wife. But in a country where the majority of the population still lives in village areas and the men do not find stable jobs with definite income, how will such an amount be extracted from the husband? Even in urban areas where men are engaged in daily labour or small business without definite salary how can this provision be implemented? Naturally it is the government that should bear the responsibility to set up safe shelters and provide for the maintenance of the woman. So, except for a few affluent women, the vast majority of women will not dare to avail themselves of the rights granted to them in this Act. For who will take care of their maintenance? Obviously there is a serious deception at work. But what is surprising is that those who call themselves 'Left' and boast of sizeable representation in the Parliament did not even raise this point, nor did the different women's organizations. Except for All India Mahila Sanskritik Sangathana (AIMSS) we have not heard of any other organization criticizing this serious fallacy. But unless this is remedied the Act will remain on paper only that may sound very good but which will have no impact whatsoever.

Moreover, experience shows that even when there is a law, it is the strong and powerful, those with money and clout who get away scot-free, no matter how serious a crime they commit. Our women know well from bitter experience that the police and the administrative set up are admirers of the strong, and the oppressed class cannot hope for justice at their hands. Still then, if sufficient pressure can be created on the government to address this serious fallacy of the Act, some provision

would stand in the interest of the people.

Therefore, what is urgently needed is a strong organized movement to create further pressure on the government to redress the fallacy of the Act and to strictly apply it. For, even though a real solution to the menace of mounting domestic violence is not possible under capitalism, it has to be combated with all possible means. But even if that fallacy should get redressed in principle, so long as the Act is not backed by a strong socio-cultural movement it will remain on paper only as has happened with so many other laws, including the anti-dowry law. Besides, just look at the fate of the Family Courts Act: even today 22 years after it was enacted in 1984 with the avowed purpose of providing less intimidating, more sensitive surroundings for settlement of matrimonial disputes and help women air complaints of domestic violence, these courts have still not been set up in 18 states and union territories, including Delhi. And in places where they have been set up the less said about the attitudes with which women meet there, the better. Similarly, there are other Acts passed under pressure which are not being implemented at all.

Broad-based socio-cultural movement— need of the hour

Hence, the need of the hour is a social movement against domestic violence that blights woman's life and endangers her physical security – a movement to unite the different sections of women and organize them by building up their own struggle committees. Committees that will further strengthen the movement and provide the oppressed women with a protective umbrella in defence of their legitimate democratic rights. And these committees should be steered in such a way so as to elicit the moral support of men themselves. For it is only a broad-based socio-cultural movement with the involvement and active participation of all sections of toiling people, based on consciousness and higher values conducive to anti-capitalist revolution that can exert some

pressure on social surroundings that inhibits violence against women and creates an atmosphere conducive for reconciliation. And if that should fail, so that, as a last resort, women can avail of the protective umbrella of organized committees. At the same time, it is precisely through such a movement that the scope for misuse of the Act which some apprehend exists, can be minimized. Moreover, only when both men and women unite to make common cause against common oppression by capitalism can this movement become truly successful and advance further towards its ultimate

objective of emancipation of both men and women. The AIMSS is striving to organize women along that line with that ultimate goal. It is to be expected that the different women's organization will come forward and unite in this struggle against domestic violence. At the same time we appeal to all sections of the toiling people to come forward and unite in a broad-based socio-cultural struggle based on higher values that alone can create conducive conditions that will pave the way for ultimate emancipation through overthrow of capitalism.

Netaji Anniversary in Little Andaman

Little Andaman Educational and Cultural Committee observed the 110th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on 23rd January last at Ramkrishnapur (15 km) Community Hall. The impressive gathering of around 1000 was addressed among others by

eminent local citizens like Paritosh Kumar Mondal, Subrata Roy, Mahadev Sardar, Gyanendra Gharami and Dipa Bal, local Panchayat member, who highlighted various educative aspects of life and philosophy of Netaji.

SUCI protest rally at Jaunpur

Jaunpur District Committee of SUCI organized a massive protest rally in front of the DM office at Jaunpur on 17th January last demanding stringent punishment of police officials responsible for brutal attack on SUCI-led demonstration

on 30th December, 2006, condemning pre-planned execution of President Saddam Hussein by the US imperialists. Leaders of different parties like CPI, RSP, CPI(ML) and mass organizations also participated in the rally.

Monsanto workers achieve victory

Following a protracted movement led by Comrade Somashekharan, Karnataka state secretary, UTUC (LS), nearly 300 workers working under contractors with Monsanto India Ltd., a multinational seed company at

Bellary, Karnataka, achieved a significant victory in wresting many of their long standing demands like regularization of service, PF, gratuity, leave, OT allowance, bonus and other statutory benefits.

First State Conference of Jharkhand AIMSS

With much enthusiasm, the first state conference of Jharkhand AIMSS was held at Ranchi from 29th to 31st January. The open session at Jaipal Singh stadium, Ranchi, on 29th, was addressed among others by Dr. Ramesh Sharan, well-known intellectual and professor of Ranchi University, Dr. M. K. Hasan, former vice-chancellor, Ranchi University, and

Comrades Chhaya Mukherjee and H.G. Jayalakshmi, President and Secretary of AIMSS. Comrade Hem Chakraborty, State secretary, SUCI, addressed the delegate session on the following two days at Marwari Dharamshala. A 19-member strong executive committee with Comrade Sarala Mahato as President and Comrade Keya De as Secretary was elected from the conference.

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