



NEWSLETTER-10

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Editorial Communication

Dear comrades, friends and well-wishers,

On 15 August this year we have entered the 75th year of our Independence from colonial rule. A solemn occasion indeed! We need to take a retrospective view right now of where the journey of the nation through all these years has brought us and to map our way forward! A most bloody and dark map of the route ahead has been provided by our Prime Minister in his Independence Day speech.

The lesson to be learned from the trauma of communal conflict and the pain of partition which accompanied Independence is to ensure that we may never be divided again among ourselves; but Modispeak turned this lesson upside down and converted the occasion into one for breast-thumping and muscle-flexing against possible 'enemies' within and without who may happen to criticize his fascistic demonstrations of power. His speech is calculated to establish that the route ahead is through hatred, domination and destruction! Just see how his plan for the 'Central Vista' consists in destroying what should have been preserved as heritage! He does not mind ruining our national treasures and assets purely in order to allow his cronies in the corporate world to make profits!

We women have an important role in ensuring that he does not succeed in taking us down this route. Our predecessors fought an unremitting battle against colonial rulers in their own time to bring Independence. Let us not fail them. Mere formal celebrations of this year are not for us. Let us use the occasion to propagate a culture of resistance against the traps of fear and hatred that our rulers are setting in front of us. While we are organising this let us also not forget our neighbours in Afghanistan, more than ever under the shadow of fear and hatred at present.

US imperialists have withdrawn their armed forces from the country, the government set up by them has collapsed and the Taliban have returned intensifying the atmosphere of dread and uncertainty for women, ethnic minorities and democratically-minded people in general. How imperialist intervention on one hand and the rule of religious fanaticism on the other can ruin a country is amply evident there. Acts of terror are being committed right now and Biden is calling for revenge; but the scenario remains utterly chaotic and the distress of the people is unbounded. The Hindutva forces in our country instead of demonstrating true humanitarian concern for a neighbouring country are already using this scenario to stir up Islamophobia.

While demanding that the UN-led international community must ensure that whatever government is formed in Afghanistan is formed through negotiations and not force of arms and that it is committed to protect the rights of women and ethnic minorities, we have to provide protection and support to Afghan citizens, particularly students, who are now in India irrespective of religion. In the 75th year of our Independence let us also strengthen and broaden our campaign against all forms of fundamentalism whether represented by the *Manuvadis* or the Taliban.

Malini Bhattacharya, President, All India Democratic Women's Association

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AIDWA Supports September 25 Bharat Bandh Call

**Reclaim India Unitedly from the Clutches of the Modi-Shah-Ambani-Adani
Unholy Nexus!**

-Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary, AIDWA



The historic farmers' struggle has completed nine months and is still going strong. Nearly 600 farmers have lost their lives. Lakhs, including large numbers of women, are sitting in the indefinite blockade at the Delhi borders. The people of the country are slowly but surely realizing the enormous danger that the BJP-RSS has posed to the lives of millions of Indians. This pro-corporate, communal and fascistic force must be defeated to save our secular, democratic nation and the Indian Constitution. This anti-national, Manuwadi coterie has to be prevented from selling our national assets and our entire country for a pittance!

In its 74 years of existence as an independent country, India has never seen a government as irresponsible, uncaring and arrogant as the BJP-RSS government in power now. It unabashedly refuses to withdraw the three Farm Laws and the four Labour Codes that will destroy the lives of farmers and workers. It is callous about the absolute devastation caused by the on-going pandemic. Rising prices, massive increase in hunger, unprecedented unemployment, collapsing health and education systems, growing indebtedness, the problems of children orphaned during the pandemic, violence against women – these are all invisible to PM Narendra Modi.

Women are running from pillar to post to keep the home fires burning. Women suffer the most in an exploitative, patriarchal system. They eat the last in the house and hence eat the least, if anything remains. Loss of livelihood has pushed crores of the poor into the deep abyss of indebtedness. With no help from the government, women are in despair as they know it will be impossible for them to repay this money. This will surely lead to a spurt in suicides.

Lakhs of children from the marginalised sections have been thrown out from the educational system. This is the Modi government snatching the pens and pencils from children's hands, just like the cutting off of Ekalavya's thumb. This conforms to the Manuwadi ideology of the RSS. The bane of child labour, trafficking, child marriages are all increasing. Children are being robbed of their childhoods. There is no plan by this heartless government on how to address these problems and save Indian children.

All these issues were discussed at the National Convention held by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) on August 26-27 at the Singhu Border. The enthusiasm and unity seen here was very inspiring. More than 2000 delegates from hundreds of organizations of farmers, workers, agricultural labourers, women, students, youth, Dalits, adivasis etc from 22 states took part.

The SKM has given a clarion call for a Bharat Bandh on September 25 and a massive Rally at Muzaffarnagar on September 5, to inaugurate its 'Mission Uttar Pradesh-Uttarakhand'. The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) has been organizing struggles on all the above issues and has drawn thousands of women on the roads. It will wholeheartedly campaign for the Bharat Bandh. All its units will actively mobilise thousands of women all over the country. This is a struggle of all Indians to unitedly reclaim India from the clutches of the Modi-Shah-Ambani-Adani unholy nexus! We shall Fight! We shall Win!

What are the Social Implications of the Uttar Pradesh Population Control Bill?

-Dr. Arathi Presenna Madhavan, Assistant Professor, School of Indian Legal Thought, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala



Chief Minister Ajay Bisht aka Yogi Adityanath presented THE UTTAR PRADESH POPULATION (CONTROL STABILIZATION AND WELFARE) BILL, 2021 in the legislative assembly last week. The preamble of the proposed Bill states: “A Bill to revitalize efforts and provide for measures to control, stabilize and provide welfare to the population of the State by implementation and promotion of two child norm and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto.” The Bill gives three rationales for implementing two child norm:

Limited economic and ecological resources which includes primary necessity of the people such as affordable food, safe drinking water, decent housing, access to quality education, economic/livelihood opportunities, power/ electricity for domestic consumption etc.

Second concern is promotion of sustainable development and equitable distribution of skewed resources of the State;

Third concern is to ensure availability, accessibility and affordability of quality reproductive health services to achieve the goal of population control, stabilization and its welfare in the State through healthy birth spacing measures.

Section 3(11) of the Bill defines two child norm - "means an ideal size of a family consisting of a married couple with two children". The proposed Bill intends to implement it mainly through measures of incentives and disincentives. Chapter II of the Bill elaborately discusses these conditions. Incentives offered to the public servants include two increments, a subsidy towards buying a house site, soft loans at nominal interest rates to construct or buy a house, a rebate on charges levied on utilities, maternity leave for 12 months with full salary and allowances, 3 per cent increase in employers' contribution to the National Pension Scheme, and free health care and insurance to the spouse.

Disincentives or revocation of incentives (Section 8-12) consist of : Debarring from benefit of Government sponsored welfare schemes, Limiting ration card units to four members, bar on contesting local body elections, bar on applying for government jobs and promotion in government service, denial of government subsidies.

Studies on the success of India's southern states in containing population growth indicate that economic growth as well as attention to education, health and empowerment of women work far better as incentive to smaller family size than punitive measures. In areas with high poverty, low economic growth and fewer educated women, fertility levels tend to be higher. Studies clearly indicate further that any population policy based on punitive measures tends to doubly exclude the poor and the marginalised sections in a multiply stratified society. Empirical evidences across the globe as also studies on fertility transitions in India agree with the growing evidence that Indian women, across economic and social strata, would have fewer children if they could exercise their choice fully. Any government interested in supporting fertility decline, then, must go to work on the education and empowerment of women, providing them with reproductive choices.

Changes in the agrarian sector in the last two decades, through neo-liberal policies, have led to an acute yet unnoticed deprivation in rural India. This deprivation rooted in the growth- led developmental ideology has impacted the agrarian sector severely, reducing the size of cultivable land, migration to urban location and has influenced the fertility choices of married women. The different components of power structure and their confluence (intersectional dynamics) influence the participation of women in the decision- making process regarding the number of children. Therefore, it varies from region to region. Scholars like Prof. Kancha Ilaiah and Sylvia Karpagam observe that Dalit and Adivasi women, consigned to the bottom of the caste, class and gender hierarchies, suffer multiple forms of discrimination from patriarchal structures within their own families and society at large. The proposed Bill is going to intensify existing discriminatory structures and will impact the health of women from marginalised sections.

The availability of contraceptives is limited and method of spacing became expensive due to private provision in India. Male/rich/upper caste- centric policies which are only seemingly gender responsive and caste- neutral are dominant and camp approach for family planning is one such policy. Institutional and structural failures and restricted demands for their resurrection contribute to the weakening of social justice mechanisms and legal capacity to resist expansion of deprivation and disparities. This has created a situation of skewed choice for rural poor women who have little option but to seek the only available method of population control, female sterilization, and that too provided in the mass sterilization camps often violating all the national and international prescribed standards. The proposed Bill focuses on sterilisation and the language of the Bill clearly indicates the same (the government employee receiving incentives is referred to as “him” and “his spouse”)

However, it has remained primarily a programme of controlling numbers rather than an assertion of reproductive and human rights that India had affirmed at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 and in its National Population Policy (NPP), 2000. Though as policy, both these documents speak about doing away with targets and incentives in FPP, in practice, it still continues despite major tragedies in the past. The ambitious goals of family planning policies and counting numbers, not people and their lives, encourages coercion of women and compromises on quality. India's commitment to family planning 2020 is based on the argument that to provide contraceptive service to 48 million couples there is no other way for the policy makers but to continue with crude camp approaches, targeting more and more vulnerable women. The aforementioned bill clearly emphasizes the same path and may lead to more tragedies in the name of population control.

We have to analyse this specific Bill in the context of another regressive law to have a comprehensive understanding. On 24th November, 2019, Uttar Pradesh became the first Indian state to promulgate an ordinance, the *Unlawful Religious Conversion (Prohibition) Ordinance, 2020* making ‘forced conversion for marriage’ punishable with ten years imprisonment and fine. This too is linked with the argument of ‘demographic aggression.... of over-populating Muslim’ disproven by the decadal census data itself. Irrespective of hue and cry in media, Hindu population decline is but marginal and in a decadal projection does not have much demographic significance. If one examines closely the previous two rounds of census data it clearly shows the discrepancies in this argument and very well indicates how politically manipulative it is.

The content and tone of the Bill have a distinct anti- Muslim bias. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has stated that it not only aims to bring fertility levels down, but also, notably, to “ensure there is a population balance among various communities”. Uttar Pradesh where the ruling BJP has not held back from communalising issues

like inter-faith marriage, conversion or citizenship rights putting them to political use, is not alone in bringing about such policies. The BJP-led government in Assam, too, plans to implement the two-child norm.

Judiciary also has sometimes given sanction to Malthusian population policies enforcing two-child norm irrespective of its blatant violation of fundamental rights ensured by the Constitution of India. This is evident in judgements in cases like *Javed and Ors v. State of Haryana* (2003) and in *Rameshwar Singh and Ors vs State of Haryana* (2018) by the apex court in continuation of National Population Policy 2000, yet another brain-child of the earlier Vajpayee-led BJP government.

Women's movements in India had made it clear to all governments that family planning targets, coercive methods, and invasive and hazardous family planning methods were unacceptable given the toll they took on women and the girl child. International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994, declared that "development was the best pill". The resolution adopted by 179 countries including India, stated that there was a need to focus on human lives rather than on demographic targets. Ignoring the voices of women's movements and moving towards coercive population control measures calls for intensification of struggles against the authoritarian government and its anti-women and anti-poor policies. It is also important to develop political and ideological resistance against:

A. Malthusian political propaganda of conceiving people as burden not as human resource and a need for equitable distribution of wealth and natural resource conservation.

B. Use of the false thesis of "demographic aggression" for communal polarisation and 'othering' of the Muslim community in contemporary India.

Cubans recognize the enemy: Understanding the protests in Cuba

-Surangya, AIDWA, Delhi



Cubans demonstrate to defend the socialist government and the revolution.

On July 11, protests broke out in different parts of Cuba. The people came out on the streets demanding answers for legitimate problems — insufficient access to food and medicines, frequent electricity outages, etc. The pandemic is a major factor fuelling this social crisis. The main culprit, however, is the crippling economic blockade imposed by the US which restricts sharply the Cuban government's power to purchase the basic necessities that the protestors were demanding.

However, when the Western media reported these protests, it blamed the unrest on people's discontent against the country's socialist government. The narrative being created by the US government and President Joe Biden was that the demonstrations took place because the people of Cuba want to overthrow the government. While Biden proclaimed that he stands with the people of Cuba, not once did he talk about the 243 unilateral sanctions that have been imposed on the island nation by the US, and the impact they have had on the lives of the people.

What are these sanctions and what do they mean for Cubans?

The US- imposed embargo on Cuba is now 60 years old. It has cost Cuba \$147.8 billion over these years. If this blockade was to be removed, it would allow Cuba to provide much-needed essential goods to its people.

The policy behind imposing this crippling blockade dates back to 1960, when US State Department's Lester Mallory wrote a memorandum on Cuba saying most "Cubans support [Fidel] Castro" and there is "no effective political opposition. ... The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship."

Even today, the US continues the blockade for the same reasons — to create a situation of desperation among the people which could lead to the overthrow of the socialist government and the Cuban revolution.

The blockade was tightened further under former president Donald Trump's policy of maximum pressure. The coercive measures brought in by Trump restrict not just the trade between US and Cuba, but also do not allow Cuba to trade with other countries. Johana Tablada from the Cuban Foreign Ministry says, there are 63 oil companies that do not sell to Cuba as they do not want to challenge the US embargo.

This blockade also restricts how much money Cuban Americans can send as remittances back home. Because of the trade embargo, Cuba is largely dependent on tourism- related activities for income. The pandemic has meant this income also has been stifled. In this situation, the remittances have been an important source of sustenance for Cuban families.

These Trump-era measures have continued in Biden's term. In his 8 months as president, Biden has not made any move to ease any of these restrictions on Cuba. Despite stating his intention of normalizing relations with Cuba during his campaign, Biden has failed to address entirely what these sanctions mean for a country already suffering due to the pandemic.

The blockade on Cuba hits women the hardest

A recent Oxfam report shows that women in Cuba carry the heaviest burden of sustaining daily life and meeting the needs of their families. The material shortages caused by the US embargo directly impact their ability of being able to do so, thereby increasing stress and reducing the quality of their lives.

It also impacts women in the public sphere as many sectors where women constitute a significant part of the workforce are hit hard by the sanctions. For

instance healthcare (around 71% of Cuba's medical professionals are women) and education (in 2019, women made up over 60% of education workers).

The Cuban health force responding to the COVID crisis also consists of a majority of women. Cuba's remarkable response to the pandemic amid the shortages arising from the sanctions is a testament to the efforts of these health workers.

Cubans recognize the enemy

The small protests on July 11 against the social and economic problems being faced by the people were portrayed by Washington and its media as Cubans desiring change — change of government, change in the revolutionary process. But the Cuban people understand well these tactics of the US and Western media. Shortly after the limited demonstrations (which were reported as ranging from hundreds to thousands of people depending on which corporate media outlet you get your news from), tens of thousands of Cubans took to the streets in defense of the revolution.

They did so because they recognize the enemy. They recognize that it is the US and its criminal sanctions which are responsible for the crisis Cuba finds itself in, not the revolutionary processes instituted by the socialist government. They recognize it is these revolutionary processes that in fact have enabled Cubans to deal with the social and economic challenges as well as they have.

The shortages in food have meant people have to stand in long lines and their diet has been limited, but there have been no famines. In response to the shortages in medicines, Cuba has taken to manufacturing much of the supplies it needs. In addition to sending its doctors as part of medical brigades to countries across the world to help respond to the pandemic, Cuba has also developed five vaccine candidates, two of which have already shown remarkable efficacy in trials.

It is this revolutionary process that Cubans were defending when the Western media attempted to create a picture of discontent that does not actually exist. On July 12, Biden issued a statement saying, "We stand with the Cuban people and their clarion call for freedom." This statement did not fool the people of Cuba who knew that if indeed Biden stood with them, he would remove the 243 coercive measures that the US government has imposed against Cuba.

These measures are not considered criminal by just Cubans, but by most countries of the world. On June 23, 184 countries in the UN General Assembly

voted to end the US blockade on Cuba. Only the US and Israel voted against the resolution.

“Even if Biden does nothing, we will still pull through,” said Johana Tablada. “It may cost us a bit more, but we have a plan, we have a strong social consensus. None of these plans include giving up socialism. The ordinary Cuban—all of us—is capable of sacrificing our individual interests because we know that it is essential for us to have a sovereign homeland [that is]free [and] independent, and that might be as far as we go.”

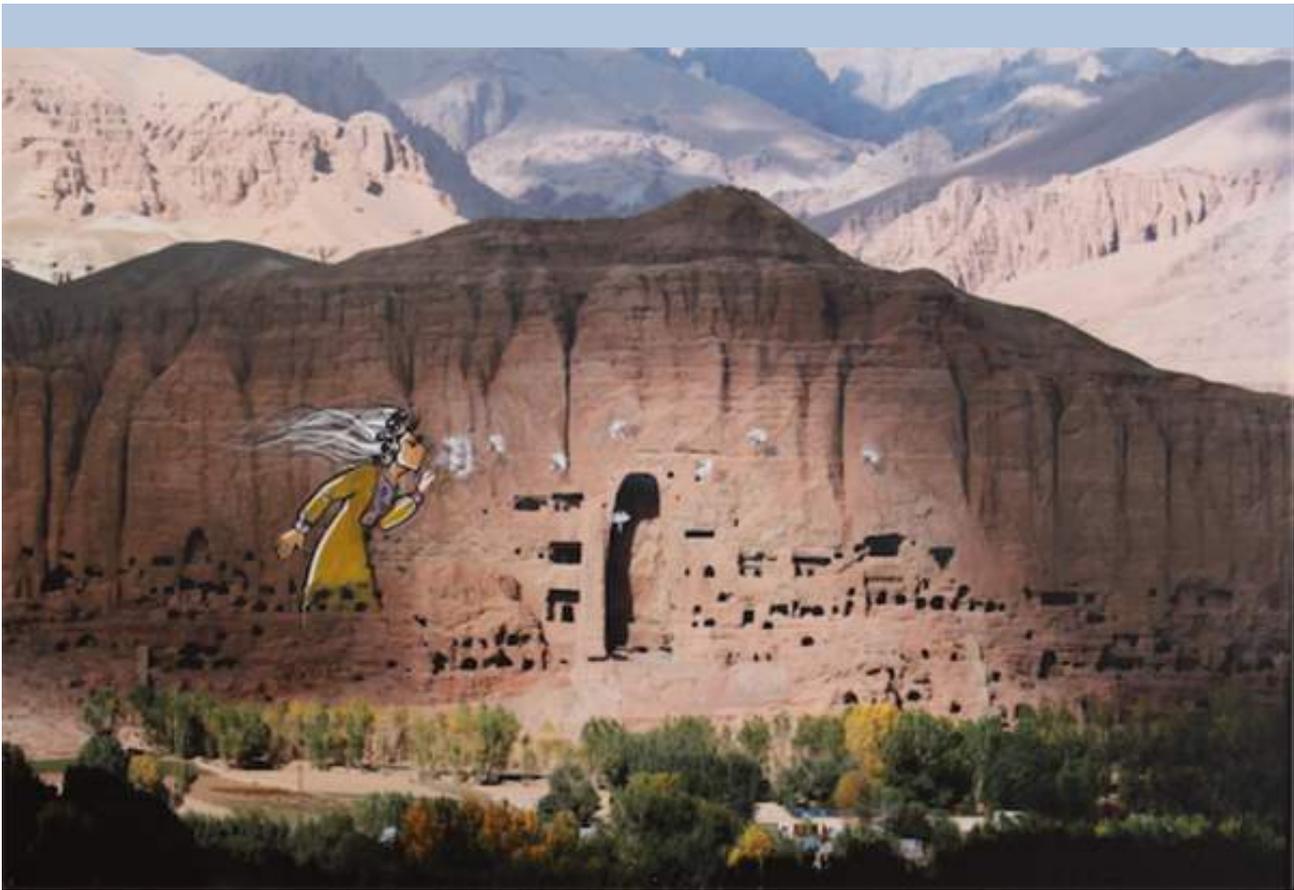
Women in Afghanistan Today

-Artwork by Shamsia Hassani

These artworks by Shamsia Hassani, possibly the first and the only woman street artist in Afghanistan, and also a fine arts lecturer and associate professor in Kabul University, articulate the fear and uncertainty faced by Afghan women today.







What Happened to Access to Digital Education during Lockdown?

[This is an extract from a report entitled '*A Pandemic that Ended Education for Many: A Report by the Indian Researcher*' Published by the Student Federation of India's *Indian Researcher*, on 10 August 2021, pp. 24-26. Selected by Professor Archana Prasad.]

- More than 38 per cent of School-going children had no access to smart-phones in rural India. This divide is further pronounced by the type of school management. A little more than 43 per cent of students from public schools had no access to smart-phones during the lockdown period of 2020 (Pratham, Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020, Wave I, 2021).

Table 2.3. Access to Smart-Phones Among Enrolled School Children in 2020, Rural India

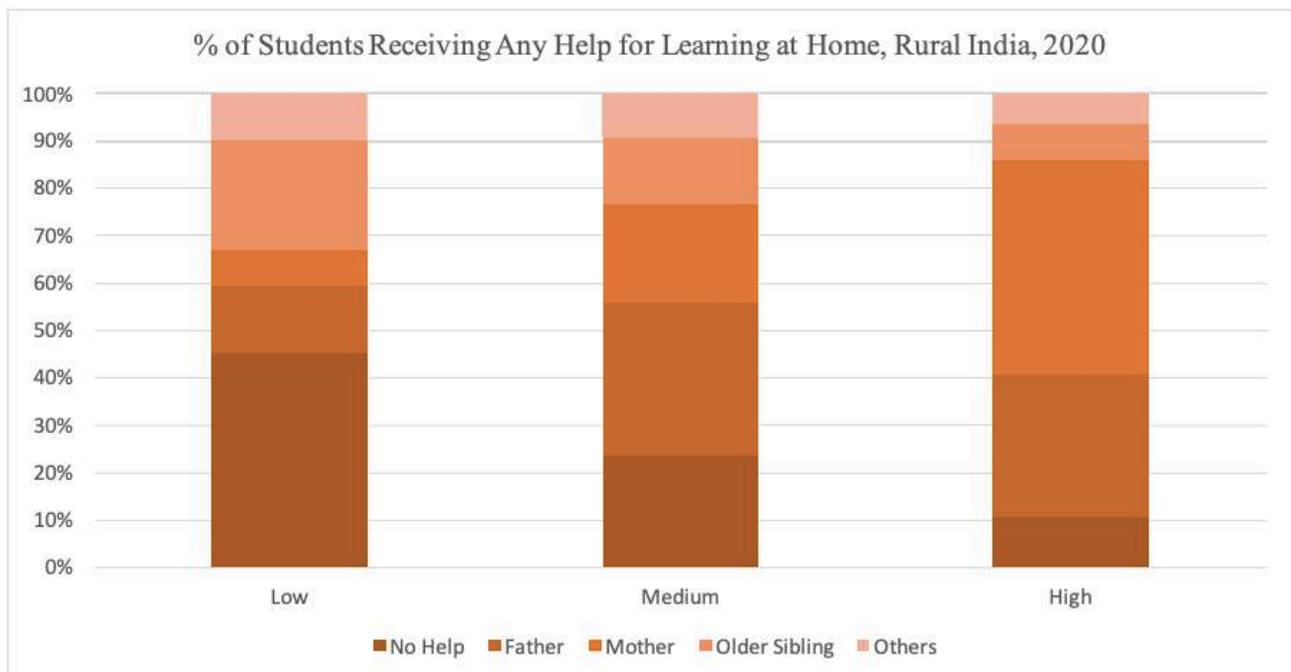
School Type	No Smart-Phone in Household (%)	Only 1 Smart-Phone in the Household (%)	More than 2 Smart Phones in the Household (%)	Total
Govt. School	43.6	43.6	12.8	100.0
Private School	25.8	50.3	23.9	100.0
All Schools	38.2	45.6	16.1	100.0

- We also observe a worrisome response, when the parents of the students from rural sections were asked about lack of access to educational material during the reference week of the ASER First Wave Survey. A Parent could report more than a single reason for not receiving learning material from school, therefore the row totals can add up to more than 100 per cent here. Almost one in four parents reported not having access to smart phone in rural India and one in ten parents reported no internet access (ASER 2020, Wave I).

School Type	School Not Sending Material (%)	No Internet (%)	No Smart Phone (%)	Connectivity Issues (%)	Other (%)
Govt. School	68.5	10.7	25.8	5.1	4.3
Private School	66.9	11.6	20.4	5.2	6.0
All Schools	68.1	11.0	24.7	5.1	4.8

Widening the Socio-Economic Divide in School Education: Broader Impacts of Digital Divide in Rural India

- If we assume a proxy of education level of parents for the socio-economic position of the households, then the current socio-economic divide of the 'digital education' becomes much more prominent. More than 45 per cent of students with low parental education (i.e. less than primary level education for parents) gets no help in learning at home. (ASER Wave-I, 2021). This improves with levels of parental education, and most importantly, 45 per cent of the students whose parents are under 'High' category of education, receive help from their mother.



- Micro-level village based studies also conform to the same pattern. Access to alternative forms of classes and assistance from parents or any other family members are closely linked to the socio-economic status of the household in rural India. A Telephonic interview based study conducted by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, report, *"...All students in India, and perhaps in many parts of the world, have suffered during the lockdown, but the worst-hit were those who did not have any place to study other than school itself."*

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