

## Chapter II: Education

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### 2.1 Literacy and schooling

The observation that until the beginning of the present century West Bengal has had only moderate success in spreading elementary education among the masses is not much in dispute, and the record of Birbhum goes pretty well with the overall trend. 31.4 per cent of the state's population aged 7 years and above remained non-literate at the beginning of the present century, which is considerably lower than the all-India average (35.2 per cent). However, the percentage of non-literate in Birbhum is conspicuously higher than both West Bengal and all-India percentages (Table 2.1). At the beginning of the nineteen nineties more than half of the population in Birbhum could not read and write. According to Census 1991, only 48.56 per cent of total persons aged seven and above were literate. In 2001, however, the percentage of literate persons rose to 61.48. Although it continues to remain substantially below the percentage for the state as well as India, the gap with the state average slightly narrowed down over the nineteen nineties.

**Table 2.1: Literacy rates excluding 0-6 age group (in percentage) in Birbhum compared to West Bengal and India by sector, 1991 and 2001**

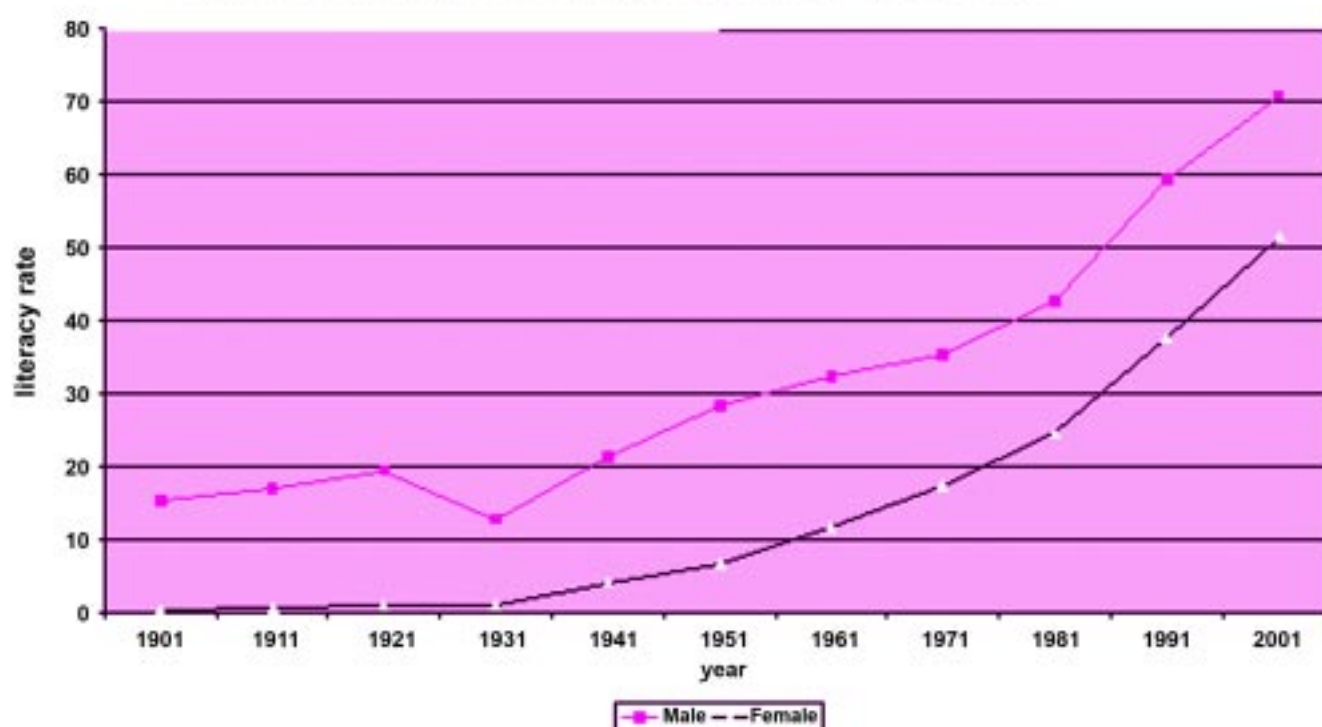
|             |       | 1991   |       |        | 2001   |       |        |
|-------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
|             |       | Person | Male  | Female | Person | Male  | Female |
| INDIA       | Total | 52.21  | 64.14 | 39.29  | 64.84  | 75.26 | 53.67  |
|             | Rural | 44.70  | 57.87 | 30.63  | 58.74  | 70.70 | 46.13  |
|             | Urban | 73.08  | 81.09 | 64.05  | 79.92  | 86.27 | 72.86  |
| WEST BENGAL | Total | 57.70  | 67.81 | 46.56  | 68.64  | 77.02 | 59.61  |
|             | Rural | 50.50  | 62.05 | 38.12  | 63.42  | 73.13 | 53.16  |
|             | Urban | 75.27  | 81.19 | 68.25  | 81.25  | 86.13 | 75.74  |
| BIRBHUM     | Total | 48.56  | 59.26 | 37.17  | 61.48  | 70.89 | 51.55  |
|             | Rural | 46.60  | 57.52 | 35.00  | 59.88  | 69.51 | 49.70  |
|             | Urban | 67.42  | 75.69 | 58.36  | 77.65  | 84.73 | 70.20  |

Source: Census 2001

A closer look at the literacy rates for rural and urban areas of the district vis-à-vis West Bengal reveals that a part of the gap can be attributed to the low level of urbanization in the district. As we mentioned in Chapter I, while 28 per cent of the total population of West Bengal lives in urban areas, urban Birbhum shares only 8.57 per cent of the district population. As a result the overall literacy

rate in the district carries an overwhelming weight of the rural literacy rate, which is generally lower than the literacy rate for urban areas. The gap between the literacy rates in rural Birbhum and rural West Bengal is almost half the gap between the overall average rates for the district and the state (see Table 2.1). In Birbhum, between the two censuses, while the urban literacy rate improved by about 10 percentage points, rural literacy rate improved by 13 percentage points indicating a narrowing down of rural-urban differential.

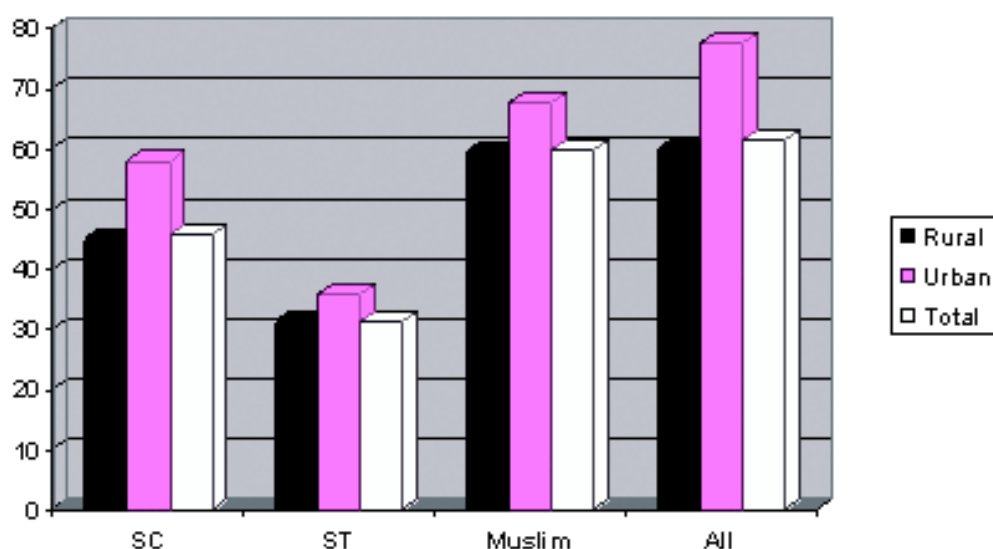
**Figure 2.1 Progress in literacy in Birbhum, 1901-2001**



The problem of low literacy rate is exacerbated by disparities across different groups. Going by the simple logic of average, overall literacy cannot approach 100 per cent so long as a substantial gap between male literacy and female literacy exists. The male-female gap in literacy in the district is slightly larger than that in West Bengal as a whole. The gap is more in rural areas than in urban areas. Over the entire past century (excepting the decade between 1921 and 1931) both male literacy and female literacy have increased, and the rate of increase even accelerated quite a bit in the past three decades. However, the reduction in the gap between male literacy and female literacy has been rather small as it is evident from Figure 2.1. The two trends show remarkably similar pattern with a remarkably stable vertical distance between the two.

A common finding of a number of village studies and household surveys across India is that education is widely perceived by members of socially and economically disadvantaged groups as the most promising means of upward mobility for their children. Yet the disparity in levels of educational achievement between these groups and others has not decreased as fast as it should. Interestingly, in the rural areas of Birbhum, there is not much difference in the rates of literacy between Muslims and others. In urban Birbhum, however, they differ significantly. The groups that really lag behind others in both rural and urban areas of the district belong to the scheduled tribes (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2: Percentage literate among social and community groups in rural and urban Birbhum, 2001**



The literacy rate among the women belonging to the scheduled tribes is slightly higher than one-third of the overall female literacy for the district and almost one-fifth of the male literacy rate in urban Birbhum (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2: Literacy rates among SC, ST and Muslims in Birbhum, 2001**

|                 | Rural  |      |        | Urban  |      |        | Total  |      |        |
|-----------------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|--------|
|                 | Person | Male | Female | Person | Male | Female | Person | Male | Female |
| Schedule Castes | 44.8   | 56.9 | 32.0   | 58.0   | 69.3 | 46.5   | 45.7   | 57.8 | 33.1   |
| Schedule Tribes | 31.1   | 44.1 | 18.0   | 35.8   | 46.2 | 25.7   | 31.2   | 44.2 | 18.2   |
| Muslims         | 59.5   | 67.9 | 50.6   | 67.6   | 76.4 | 58.3   | 59.9   | 68.3 | 51.0   |
| All             | 59.9   | 69.5 | 49.7   | 77.7   | 84.8 | 70.2   | 61.5   | 70.9 | 51.6   |

Source: Census 2001

To achieve total literacy in a short span of time the standard policy approach emphasises programmes for adult literacy and continuing education on the one hand and universalisation of primary school enrolment by improving school facilities, on the other. The current level of illiteracy can be thought of as the result of past non-enrolment and dropouts. For West Bengal as a whole, what is worrying is that universal enrolment even at the primary level has not been attained, which means total literacy in the near future remains unattainable unless a concerted effort is made to bring to schools all out-of-school children in the relevant age group.

Although significant efforts have been made in recent years towards universalisation of elementary education, the results are far from spectacular. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was implemented in 1997 in five districts of the state, and later extended to cover five more districts, with the overall objective of universalisation of elementary education. Birbhum was one of the five districts covered in the first phase. Rapid expansion in enrolment has been generally noted in the DPEP districts vis-à-vis the non-DPEP districts. However, the goal of universal enrolment is yet to be reached. In Birbhum, what is worrying is that total primary enrolment has in fact declined in the past three years (Table 2.5). Besides, according to the Child Census completed in December 2006, in Birbhum about 16 thousand children were found to be out of school, which constitute 5.8 per cent of all children in the age group 5+ to 8+. Furthermore, a cohort study of children who got admitted to class I in 1999-2000 found that by the end of the next four years 14.7 per cent students dropped out. If we combine these pieces of information it can be said that Birbhum will carry a substantial burden of illiteracy in the years to come.

In another study of 147 schools taken from all the circles<sup>1</sup> in Birbhum, conducted by the District Primary School Council (DPSC), it was found that among the students who passed out of Class IV, on average 17.24 per cent did not take admission in Class V. While for a good number of primary schools almost all those who pass Class IV go to Class V, there are a few schools from

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<sup>1</sup> Circles are the relevant units for district school administration. Even though all the schools in a block are roughly distributed between two circles, the circles include urban areas as well.

which a large number of students drop out after Class IV. In the sample of 147 schools, 26 schools produced 75 percent of total dropout.

At the policy level this requires distinct focus on several aspects of the process of universalisation. Instead of focusing on the averages, it is important to narrow down the focus on the schools that are lagging behind others in terms of certain outcome indicators. The DPSC study of dropouts helps identify those schools. The analysis then has to be taken to find out whether it is the lack of adequate school infrastructure or the wider socio-economic context that has greater influence. It is well-known that literate parents – mothers in particular – are more likely to send their children to school than the non-literate parents. The adult literacy programme, which was implemented in the early nineties in a campaign mode, eventually ran out of steam, leaving a substantial number of adult non-literates untouched. Even the positive gains from the programme could not be kept up as the neo-literates lost their literacy skills for the limited reach of the post-literacy and continuing education programmes. In Birbhum there are 2027 Continuing Education Centres (CEC) meant for 732257 illiterates in the age group 15 and above. If we assume that for every 20 illiterate persons there should be one CEC, then 36255 CECs are needed in the district. Clearly the actual number of CECs in Birbhum falls far short of the required number. Besides, in the absence of any system of assessment of the functioning of the CECs it is hard to judge how many of them are really functioning the way they should be. It seems that in the absence of financial allocation even for paying the honorarium that the *Preraks* and *Saha Preraks* are supposed to get, it is almost impossible to keep up their motivation. This problem is not specific to Birbhum as such. The CECs have almost ceased to be on the development agenda in West Bengal.

## 2.2 *School infrastructure*

There are 2372 primary schools, 76 upper primary, 204 secondary and 123 higher secondary schools in Birbhum. Besides, there are 650 Sishu Siksha Kendras (SSK) that enroll about 49 thousand children. Table 2.3 presents the distribution of schools across blocks and municipalities. What is to be noted from the table is that while in the municipal areas roughly for three primary schools there

is one upper primary/secondary or higher secondary school, in rural areas the ratio turns out to be close to 6:1. We shall take up this point again later.

**Table 2.3 Number of schools of different categories, including Sishu Siksha Kendras (SSK) across blocks/municipalities, 2007**

| Block/Municipality | Primary     | Upper Primary | Secondary  | Higher Secondary | Total schools | SSK        |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------------|---------------|------------|
| Bolpur Sriniketan  | 147         | 4             | 14         | 6                | <b>171</b>    | 45         |
| Illambazar         | 135         | 3             | 10         | 6                | <b>154</b>    | 40         |
| Nanoor             | 157         | 10            | 13         | 7                | <b>187</b>    | 33         |
| Labhpur            | 159         | 5             | 14         | 7                | <b>185</b>    | 24         |
| Suri-I             | 84          | 2             | 8          | 4                | <b>98</b>     | 22         |
| Suri-II            | 78          | 2             | 6          | 3                | <b>89</b>     | 15         |
| Sainthia           | 174         | 6             | 14         | 6                | <b>200</b>    | 37         |
| Md. Bazar          | 123         | 1             | 11         | 6                | <b>141</b>    | 48         |
| Rajnagar           | 92          | 3             | 3          | 4                | <b>102</b>    | 25         |
| Dubrajpur          | 139         | 2             | 10         | 4                | <b>155</b>    | 28         |
| Khoyrasole         | 122         | 3             | 11         | 5                | <b>141</b>    | 32         |
| Rampurhat-I        | 146         | 5             | 8          | 6                | <b>165</b>    | 27         |
| Rampurhat-II       | 116         | 3             | 12         | 6                | <b>137</b>    | 33         |
| Murarai-I          | 98          | 3             | 9          | 4                | <b>114</b>    | 42         |
| Murarai-II         | 87          | 3             | 10         | 3                | <b>103</b>    | 50         |
| Nalhathi-I         | 129         | 5             | 15         | 5                | <b>154</b>    | 43         |
| Nalhathi-II        | 67          | 3             | 6          | 4                | <b>80</b>     | 34         |
| Mayureswar-I       | 112         | 3             | 16         | 5                | <b>136</b>    | 33         |
| Mayureswar-II      | 88          | 3             | 6          | 5                | <b>102</b>    | 39         |
| Bolpur (M)         | 23          | 0             | 1          | 6                | <b>30</b>     | -          |
| Suri (M)           | 32          | 0             | 3          | 7                | <b>42</b>     | -          |
| Sainthia (M)       | 15          | 1             | 1          | 4                | <b>21</b>     | -          |
| Dubrajpur (M)      | 12          | 1             | 0          | 4                | <b>17</b>     | -          |
| Rampurhat (M)      | 23          | 2             | 3          | 4                | <b>32</b>     | -          |
| Nalhathi (M)       | 14          | 3             | 0          | 2                | <b>19</b>     | -          |
| <b>BIRBHUM</b>     | <b>2372</b> | <b>76</b>     | <b>204</b> | <b>123</b>       | <b>2775</b>   | <b>650</b> |

*Source: Sarva Siksha Mission and Office of DM, Birbhum*

Table 2.4 presents the cumulative growth in the number of all categories of schools over a period of 140 years. The highest growth occurred in the two consecutive decades – from 1941 to 1960. Roughly, 83 per cent schools were established during the period 1941 to 1980.

**Table 2.4: Cumulative growth of the number of primary and upper primary schools in Birbhum District, 1865 – 2006**

| Block/<br>Municipality | PERIOD       |               |           |           |            |            |             |             |             |             |               |             |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
|                        | Till<br>1900 | 1901<br>-1910 | 11<br>-20 | 21<br>-30 | 31<br>-40  | 41<br>-50  | 51<br>-60   | 61<br>-70   | 71<br>-80   | 81<br>-90   | 1991<br>-2000 | 01<br>-06   |
| BOLPUR SRINIKETAN      | 1            | 3             | 3         | 6         | 8          | 37         | 90          | 116         | 151         | 162         | 166           | 171         |
| ILLAMBAZAR             | 1            | 2             | 3         | 4         | 4          | 36         | 78          | 96          | 130         | 144         | 151           | 153         |
| NANOOR                 | 1            | 1             | 1         | 5         | 12         | 57         | 107         | 130         | 161         | 179         | 184           | 187         |
| LABPUR                 | 2            | 5             | 5         | 5         | 5          | 67         | 104         | 126         | 165         | 176         | 182           | 184         |
| SURI-I                 | 1            | 1             | 1         | 5         | 5          | 21         | 42          | 56          | 76          | 90          | 97            | 97          |
| SURI-II                | 0            | 0             | 2         | 4         | 5          | 16         | 51          | 59          | 75          | 82          | 85            | 89          |
| SAINTHIA               | 0            | 1             | 7         | 8         | 10         | 55         | 88          | 118         | 173         | 189         | 195           | 199         |
| MD. BAZAR              | 0            | 1             | 2         | 2         | 4          | 47         | 77          | 95          | 127         | 134         | 139           | 141         |
| RAJNAGAR               | 0            | 0             | 0         | 0         | 3          | 26         | 53          | 63          | 88          | 96          | 99            | 101         |
| DUBRAJPUR              | 0            | 2             | 2         | 3         | 8          | 44         | 78          | 100         | 136         | 147         | 152           | 154         |
| KHOYRASOLE             | 0            | 1             | 1         | 2         | 2          | 31         | 85          | 95          | 127         | 134         | 141           | 141         |
| RAMPURHAT-I            | 1            | 2             | 2         | 4         | 5          | 52         | 91          | 105         | 148         | 158         | 163           | 165         |
| RAMPURHAT-II           | 1            | 2             | 2         | 4         | 4          | 48         | 76          | 95          | 114         | 123         | 130           | 137         |
| MURARAI-I              | 1            | 1             | 2         | 2         | 7          | 26         | 56          | 67          | 98          | 108         | 112           | 114         |
| MURARAI-II             | 0            | 0             | 0         | 2         | 4          | 30         | 57          | 68          | 92          | 100         | 103           | 103         |
| NALHATI-I              | 1            | 3             | 6         | 7         | 7          | 52         | 87          | 108         | 141         | 151         | 153           | 154         |
| NALHATI-II             | 0            | 0             | 0         | 1         | 1          | 20         | 42          | 59          | 72          | 77          | 78            | 80          |
| MAYURESWAR-I           | 0            | 5             | 6         | 7         | 10         | 50         | 84          | 102         | 119         | 133         | 133           | 136         |
| MAYURESWAR-II          | 0            | 0             | 0         | 0         | 0          | 32         | 51          | 65          | 89          | 98          | 101           | 102         |
| BOLPUR (M)             | 0            | 1             | 1         | 2         | 2          | 4          | 11          | 15          | 27          | 29          | 29            | 30          |
| SURI (M)               | 3            | 4             | 5         | 5         | 7          | 8          | 15          | 22          | 36          | 38          | 39            | 40          |
| SAINTHIA (M)           | 0            | 0             | 0         | 1         | 1          | 5          | 11          | 13          | 16          | 20          | 21            | 21          |
| DUBRAJPUR (M)          | 0            | 0             | 0         | 2         | 4          | 6          | 11          | 13          | 13          | 15          | 17            | 17          |
| RAMPURHAT (M)          | 2            | 2             | 3         | 3         | 3          | 7          | 9           | 13          | 28          | 31          | 32            | 32          |
| NALHATI (M)            | 0            | 0             | 2         | 2         | 3          | 7          | 12          | 14          | 15          | 17          | 19            | 19          |
| <b>BIRBHUM</b>         | <b>15</b>    | <b>37</b>     | <b>56</b> | <b>86</b> | <b>124</b> | <b>784</b> | <b>1466</b> | <b>1813</b> | <b>2417</b> | <b>2631</b> | <b>2721</b>   | <b>2767</b> |

Source: SSM, Birbhum

In what follows we focus exclusively on the primary schools. In 146 schools (i.e. about 6 per cent) there is no drinking water facility and 177 schools (i.e. about 7.5 per cent) are without toilets. What is commendable is that between 2005-06 and 2006-07 the percentage of primary schools without drinking water has come down significantly from about 20 per cent to 6 per cent, and the percentage of primary schools without toilets has decreased from about 18 per cent to 7.5 per cent. Although these two indicators, together with information on school building and number of classrooms,

are used to assess school infrastructure, studies show that the indicators which have the most significant influence on education outcome are the number of classrooms and the number of teachers. The average number of classrooms per school is 2.63. But there are 335 single-classroom primary schools, which constitute about 14 per cent of all primary schools in the district (Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5 Progress in primary school infrastructure in Birbhum in recent years**

|  |        | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 |
|--|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of schools                            |        | 2367    | 2371    | 2372    |
| Enrolment                                    | Boys   | 173012  | 160960  | 154084  |
|  | Girls  | 165990  | 154617  | 148379  |
|  | Total  | 339002  | 315577  | 302463  |
| Teachers                                     | Male   | 6690    | 6516    | 6495    |
|  | Female | 1392    | 1390    | 1459    |
|  | Total  | 8082    | 7906    | 7954    |
| % of schools with no drinking water facility |        | 16.9    | 20.1    | 6.1     |
| % of schools without toilet                  |        | 50.4    | 17.8    | 7.5     |
| Average number of classrooms per school      |        | 2.48    | 2.51    | 2.63    |
| % of schools with single or no classroom     |        | 20.2    | 18.5    | 14.1    |
| Pupil teacher ratio                          |        | 42      | 40      | 38      |
| Pupil classroom ratio                        |        | 58      | 53      | 48      |
| Pupil teacher ratio 80 & above               |        | 4.3     | 4.2     | 3.5     |
| Pupil classroom ratio 80 & above             |        | 25.7    | 21.5    | 15.7    |

Source: District Information System for Education (DISE)

Birbhum is favourably placed in terms of two important indicators: the pupil-teacher ratio and the percentage of single-teacher schools. The pupil-teacher ratio for the district as a whole stands at 38.5, which is slightly below the norm (i.e. 40:1) and far below the average for West Bengal. Only 3.6 per cent of primary schools in Birbhum are single-teacher schools. This is significantly lower than most of the Indian states, which is commendable. This may be the result of the sensitivity of the education administrators to the need for reducing the number of single-teacher schools on a priority basis. The response has been to provide the single-teacher schools with at least one more teacher. However, what is often missed out is that even two teachers are not enough to maintain the quality



of teaching in a primary school. Evidence shows that significant differences exist in learning achievement of students studying in schools with two or fewer teachers and others (Chakraborty et al, 2005). In Birbhum, about 35 per cent schools have either one or two teachers.

Both pupil-teacher ratio and pupil-classroom ratio at the primary level have been coming down in Birbhum in the recent years. The percentage of female teachers has also increased marginally. But no improvement is observed on the other three indicators, viz. percentage of schools with single or no classroom, percentage of schools with two or fewer teachers, and the ratio of the number of primary schools to upper primary and secondary schools. The last indicator points at one of the most crucial factors in universalisation of elementary education, going beyond the primary. Unfortunately, West Bengal trails far behind all other states in terms of this important indicator i.e. the availability of upper primary or secondary schools compared to primary schools, and Birbhum is no exception. In Birbhum, roughly speaking, for every six primary schools there is only one upper primary or secondary school. Although none of the students who pass out of class-IV is denied admission to class-V, the relative shortage of upper primary and secondary schools must have a dampening effect on the students' desire to continue studies beyond class-IV. Existence of a high percentage of female teachers in schools is likely to encourage especially girl students to continue their studies. The record of Birbhum is rather poor in this regard. The percentage of female teachers at the primary level is only 18.7.

Predictably, there are large rural-urban gaps in some of these indicators. The ratio of primary to upper primary/secondary schools is 2.8 in urban Birbhum as against 6.2 in rural Birbhum. Similarly, the percentage of schools with two or fewer teachers is 16.8 in urban areas, but 36.1 in rural areas. In urban Birbhum, about half of the primary teachers are women, whereas only 16 percent teachers in rural areas are women. In Section 2.4 we discuss all these indicators for blocks.

### 2.3 Impact of mid-day meal

The Government of West Bengal introduced cooked mid-day meal first in 1100 primary schools in five districts and Birbhum was one them. Initially it was introduced in 200 schools in two blocks, viz. Suri-II and Sainthia. Over the past five years the programme has been gradually extended to all the blocks. To assess the impact of the programme, a study was conducted by the Pratichi Trust in 2004 that compared the schools where mid-day meal was introduced with those which were yet to introduce the programme. It was found that the attendance rate in the schools that provided cooked mid-day meal was at least ten percentage point higher than in the schools that did not introduce the programme. This is quite predictable. What is remarkable is that the impact of the programme was much greater on the children belonging to the disadvantaged groups, viz. scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslims. The impact has been the maximum on the girls belonging to the scheduled tribes (Table 2.6).

**Table 2.6: Improvement in attendance after mid-day meal was introduced**

|        |       | Average attendance of children in sample schools that introduced mid-day meal |                          |                               | Average attendance in sample schools w/o MDM |
|--------|-------|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
|        |       | Before MDM was introduced   | At the time of the study | Increase by percentage points |  |
| SC     | Boy   | 52.8  | 66.3                     | 13.5                          | 60.5   |
|        | Girl  | 57.4  | 68.2                     | 10.8                          | 58.7   |
|        | Total | 54.7  | 67.3                     | 12.6                          | 59.8   |
| ST     | Boy   | 55.7  | 72.6                     | 16.9                          | 53.7   |
|        | Girl  | 61.5  | 86.9                     | 25.4                          | 56.0   |
|        | Total | 57.0  | 76.9                     | 19.9                          | 55.2   |
| Muslim | Boy   | 58.6  | 73.9                     | 15.3                          | 18.8   |
|        | Girl  | 60.4  | 71.6                     | 11.2                          | 47.7   |
|        | Total | 59.6  | 72.8                     | 13.2                          | 39.8   |
| Others | Boy   | 68.1  | 70.2                     | 2.1                           | 72.2   |
|        | Girl  | 66.8  | 72.7                     | 5.9                           | 66.8   |
|        | Total | 67.6  | 71.4                     | 3.8                           | 69.8   |
| Total  | Boy   | 61.4  | 71.2                     | 9.8                           | 60.3   |
|        | Girl  | 62.4  | 72.6                     | 10.2                          | 61.0   |
|        | Total | 61.8  | 71.9                     | 10.1                          | 60.6   |

Source: Pratichi (India) Trust, 2005

It was observed that a good majority of the parents belonging to the 'other' category felt that the programme had no positive impact on schooling. However, the parents belonging to the disadvantaged categories generally shared the view that the programme had significant impact.

#### 2.4 Literacy and primary education across blocks

Between 1991 and 2001 overall literacy in rural Birbhum increased by 13.28 percentage points. However, this increase had not been uniform across rural blocks (Table 2.7). While in Nalhati-I and Nalhati-II literacy rates increased by 19.41 and 18.03 percentage points, respectively, in Nanoor and Khoyrasole they increased by about ten percentage points. What is worrying is that Murarai-I, which had the second lowest rate of literacy in the district in 1991, lagged behind thirteen other blocks in terms of decadal change in literacy. Inter-block disparity decreases if the blocks with lower rates of literacy make greater improvement. But the evidence is mixed, as far as Birbhum is concerned. There is no correlation between the 1991 literacy rates and the decadal changes in literacy, (correlation coefficient is -0.14). However, the overall disparity across blocks slightly decreased in the nineties, as it is evident from the value of the coefficient of variation that dropped from 11 per cent to 9 per cent, which is not worth reckoning.

**Table 2.7: Literacy rates and decadal changes (1991-2001) in literacy across blocks of Birbhum**

| Block         | 1991   |      |        | 2001   |      |        | Change |      |        |
|---------------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|--------|
|               | Person | Male | Female | Person | Male | Female | Person | Male | Female |
| Murarai-I     | 34.8   | 44.4 | 24.8   | 46.6   | 55.1 | 37.7   | 11.8   | 10.8 | 12.8   |
| Murarai-II    | 32.9   | 42.7 | 22.6   | 46.2   | 54.5 | 37.7   | 13.3   | 11.7 | 15.1   |
| Nalhati-I     | 44.3   | 56.0 | 31.9   | 63.7   | 73.2 | 53.7   | 19.4   | 17.2 | 21.8   |
| Nalhati-II    | 43.6   | 56.2 | 30.3   | 61.7   | 70.2 | 52.7   | 18.0   | 13.9 | 22.4   |
| Rampurhat-I   | 47.9   | 58.4 | 36.8   | 61.9   | 72.0 | 51.3   | 14.0   | 13.6 | 14.5   |
| Rampurhat-II  | 49.4   | 61.2 | 36.5   | 63.5   | 73.2 | 53.2   | 14.2   | 12.0 | 16.7   |
| Mayureswar-I  | 51.9   | 63.0 | 40.0   | 65.4   | 75.7 | 54.5   | 13.5   | 12.7 | 14.6   |
| Mayureswar-II | 51.8   | 63.9 | 38.9   | 62.8   | 73.1 | 51.8   | 10.9   | 9.2  | 12.9   |
| Md. Bazar     | 44.2   | 56.0 | 31.7   | 55.1   | 65.5 | 44.2   | 10.9   | 9.5  | 12.5   |
| Rajnagar      | 44.9   | 57.5 | 31.8   | 58.3   | 70.4 | 45.7   | 13.4   | 12.9 | 13.9   |
| Suri-I        | 49.5   | 60.2 | 38.1   | 62.5   | 72.3 | 52.0   | 13.0   | 12.1 | 13.9   |
| Suri-II       | 46.4   | 56.1 | 36.0   | 63.9   | 73.4 | 53.7   | 17.4   | 17.3 | 17.7   |
| Sainthia      | 50.9   | 61.0 | 40.1   | 64.4   | 74.0 | 54.3   | 13.6   | 13.1 | 14.2   |

|                        |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Labpur                 | 49.0        | 58.9        | 38.6        | 62.1        | 71.0        | 52.7        | 13.1        | 12.1        | 14.1        |
| Nanoor                 | 50.9        | 60.1        | 41.3        | 61.2        | 69.3        | 52.7        | 10.3        | 9.2         | 11.4        |
| Bolpur-Sriniketan      | 46.6        | 56.5        | 36.3        | 60.0        | 69.3        | 50.3        | 13.4        | 12.8        | 14.0        |
| Illambazar             | 48.1        | 59.2        | 36.2        | 63.0        | 72.3        | 53.0        | 14.8        | 13.1        | 16.7        |
| Dubrajpur              | 46.0        | 58.1        | 33.1        | 56.8        | 68.1        | 44.8        | 10.7        | 9.9         | 11.7        |
| Khoyrasol              | 50.2        | 63.6        | 36.0        | 60.6        | 72.2        | 48.0        | 10.3        | 8.6         | 12.0        |
| <b>Birbhum (Rural)</b> | <b>46.6</b> | <b>57.5</b> | <b>35.0</b> | <b>59.9</b> | <b>69.5</b> | <b>49.7</b> | <b>13.3</b> | <b>12.0</b> | <b>14.7</b> |

Source: Census 2001

What is more important is that female literacy rates increased more than male literacy in all the blocks indicating that the male-female gap in literacy has been coming down. The male-female disparity in literacy is sharper in the cases of both SC and ST communities in almost all the blocks, compared to the male-female disparity in the total population of the blocks (Table 2.8). In other words, not only that the females belonging to these groups suffer a double disadvantage for being female and for belonging to these groups, the disadvantage is further exacerbated by the effect of the latter on the former. Therefore, it is important to note that the lower degree of gender disparity in certain areas, such as work status and certain health indicators, which is observed among certain ST communities, does not necessarily imply absence of gender disparity in other dimensions, such as literacy and education.

**Table 2.8: Literacy among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes across blocks of Birbhum, 2001**

| Block          | Scheduled Tribes |       |        | Scheduled Castes |       |        |
|----------------|------------------|-------|--------|------------------|-------|--------|
|                | Person           | Male  | Female | Person           | Male  | Female |
| Murarai-I      | 21.72            | 32.70 | 10.97  | 31.83            | 41.52 | 21.39  |
| Murarai-II     | 27.25            | 37.94 | 16.73  | 29.75            | 38.63 | 20.36  |
| Nalhati-I      | 40.02            | 56.19 | 23.80  | 52.62            | 65.00 | 39.29  |
| Nalhati-II     | 25.57            | 35.48 | 16.67  | 53.10            | 65.01 | 40.38  |
| Rampurhat-I    | 31.67            | 44.65 | 18.80  | 48.84            | 61.05 | 36.11  |
| Rampurhat-II   | 38.84            | 50.74 | 27.24  | 47.15            | 60.19 | 32.95  |
| Mayureswar-I   | 28.08            | 39.24 | 16.65  | 52.04            | 64.46 | 38.95  |
| Mayureswar-II  | 26.47            | 37.90 | 14.88  | 46.84            | 60.11 | 32.90  |
| Mohammad Bazar | 29.17            | 42.11 | 16.33  | 42.35            | 53.99 | 30.07  |
| Rajnagar       | 31.17            | 45.44 | 17.09  | 42.79            | 56.43 | 28.55  |
| Suri-I         | 33.69            | 45.10 | 22.06  | 44.96            | 57.77 | 31.31  |
| Suri-II        | 32.66            | 47.42 | 17.48  | 50.68            | 62.59 | 38.10  |
| Sainthia       | 34.05            | 47.72 | 20.44  | 50.94            | 63.08 | 38.05  |

|                   |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Labhpur           | 32.04 | 44.10 | 18.99 | 43.42 | 54.79 | 31.42 |
| Nanoor            | 22.35 | 31.95 | 13.17 | 40.67 | 52.11 | 28.80 |
| Bolpur-Sriniketan | 32.23 | 45.29 | 19.35 | 48.35 | 59.90 | 36.16 |
| Illambazar        | 29.55 | 43.05 | 15.53 | 45.64 | 57.37 | 33.17 |
| Dubrajpur         | 28.10 | 40.92 | 14.69 | 34.81 | 48.22 | 20.81 |
| Khoyrasol         | 38.65 | 53.00 | 22.02 | 40.32 | 53.53 | 26.02 |

Source: Census 2001

Tables 2.9 and 2.10 present the profile of blocks and municipalities in terms of a select number of indicators of school infrastructure. The pupil-teacher ratios in most of the blocks in the district are below the 40:1 norm. However, the ratios in Murarai-I and Murarai-II are 59.91 and 61.57, respectively, which are not only much above the norm, they are even higher than the district average. In Murararai-I there are eleven schools in which the pupil-teacher ratio exceeds 100. In Murarai-II there are seven such schools. According to DISE 2006, in Banarampur Primary School, 464 children are being taught by only two teachers. The pupil-classroom ratios are also not very high in any of the blocks except Murarai-I and Murarai-II.

Although between 2005-06 and 2006-07 the total number of single-teacher schools has come down from 91 to 86, in Rajnagar it has increased from 8 to 15. Rajnagar has the highest percentage schools with two or fewer teachers (65.22). The same block also has the highest percentage of schools with single or no classroom (29.35) and the highest ratio of the number of primary to upper primary/secondary schools (9.2).

In Tables 2.9 and 2.10, we have taken six indicators, viz. pupil-teacher ratio, pupil-classroom ratio, percentage of female teacher, percentage of schools with single or no classroom, percentage of schools with two or fewer teachers, and the ratio of the number of primary to the number of upper primary/secondary schools. The last indicator indicates the opportunity for further education available to students who complete primary education. This ratio is the highest in West Bengal among all the states in India; and Birbhum also shows a very high ratio of the number of primary to upper primary/secondary schools. All the blocks have been ranked in Table 2.9 (municipalities in Table 2.10) in terms of each of the six indicators, and the rank order numbers for each block (and municipality)

have been added. The blocks (and municipalities) are then ranked according to the sum of the rank scores. The last columns in the two tables give the final ranking. While Bolpur-Sriniketan tops the ranking in terms of primary school infrastructure, Dubrajpur trails behind all other blocks.

**Table 2.9: Ranking of rural blocks of Birbhum in terms of school infrastructure**

| Block                  | Pupil teacher ratio | Pupil class room ratio | % of female teacher | % of schools with single or no classroom | % of schools with 2 or fewer teachers | Ratio of Primary/UP & Secondary | Rank |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|
| Bolpur Sriniketan      | 29.42               | 42.84                  | 27.08               | 13.61                                    | 21.09                                 | 6.13                            | 1    |
| Mayureswar-I           | 37.18               | 48.91                  | 16.31               | 8.93                                     | 25.00                                 | 4.67                            | 2    |
| Nanoor                 | 36.08               | 44.51                  | 18.20               | 9.55                                     | 28.66                                 | 5.23                            | 3    |
| Suri-II                | 34.56               | 44.55                  | 19.01               | 8.97                                     | 24.36                                 | 7.09                            | 4    |
| Mayureswar-II          | 28.94               | 39.74                  | 15.10               | 22.73                                    | 29.55                                 | 6.29                            | 5    |
| Nalhati-II             | 43.20               | 52.70                  | 12.70               | 5.97                                     | 22.39                                 | 5.15                            | 6    |
| Suri-I                 | 35.71               | 45.17                  | 21.66               | 15.48                                    | 33.33                                 | 6.00                            | 7    |
| Sainthia               | 31.39               | 44.25                  | 24.03               | 25.86                                    | 32.76                                 | 6.69                            | 8    |
| Rampurhat-I            | 35.61               | 41.89                  | 15.64               | 11.64                                    | 43.15                                 | 7.68                            | 9    |
| Labpur                 | 35.93               | 47.13                  | 20.04               | 18.24                                    | 35.22                                 | 6.12                            | 10   |
| Nalhati-I              | 39.75               | 48.93                  | 10.49               | 14.73                                    | 24.81                                 | 5.16                            | 11   |
| Md. Bazar              | 39.16               | 53.55                  | 15.26               | 9.76                                     | 26.02                                 | 6.83                            | 12   |
| Rampurhat-II           | 39.78               | 50.36                  | 11.55               | 10.34                                    | 30.17                                 | 5.52                            | 13   |
| Illambazar             | 38.02               | 41.80                  | 13.83               | 13.33                                    | 50.37                                 | 7.11                            | 14   |
| Khoyrasole             | 39.52               | 42.82                  | 9.85                | 11.48                                    | 54.92                                 | 6.42                            | 15   |
| Murarai-II             | 61.57               | 73.08                  | 9.70                | 2.30                                     | 48.28                                 | 5.44                            | 16   |
| Rajnagar               | 31.42               | 33.08                  | 8.22                | 29.35                                    | 65.22                                 | 9.20                            | 17   |
| Murarai-I              | 59.91               | 71.47                  | 12.30               | 15.31                                    | 33.67                                 | 6.13                            | 18   |
| Dubrajpur              | 43.03               | 43.03                  | 12.60               | 16.55                                    | 54.68                                 | 8.69                            | 19   |
| <b>Birbhum (Rural)</b> | <b>38.64</b>        | <b>47.72</b>           | <b>15.90</b>        | <b>14.29</b>                             | <b>36.09</b>                          | <b>6.24</b>                     |      |

Source: DISE, 2006

**Table 2.10: Ranking of Municipalities in terms of school infrastructure**

| Municipality           | Pupil teacher ratio | Pupil class room ratio | % of female teacher | % of schools with single or no classroom | % of schools with 2 or fewer teachers | Ratio of Primary/ UP & Secondary | Rank |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------|
| Sainthia               | 35.42               | 59.73                  | 51.16               | 0.00                                     | 6.67                                  | 2.50                             | 1    |
| Rampurhat              | 34.27               | 54.74                  | 53.91               | 13.04                                    | 13.04                                 | 2.56                             | 2    |
| Dubrajpur              | 53.04               | 65.37                  | 45.28               | 0.00                                     | 8.33                                  | 2.40                             | 3    |
| Nalhati                | 45.65               | 72.85                  | 52.00               | 7.14                                     | 0.00                                  | 2.80                             | 4    |
| Suri                   | 33.16               | 49.28                  | 38.99               | 9.38                                     | 15.63                                 | 2.91                             | 5    |
| Bolpur                 | 31.67               | 65.29                  | 59.70               | 17.39                                    | 43.48                                 | 3.29                             | 6    |
| <b>Birbhum (Urban)</b> | <b>36.56</b>        | <b>59.06</b>           | <b>50.00</b>        | <b>9.24</b>                              | <b>16.81</b>                          | <b>2.77</b>                      |      |

Source: DISE, 2006

Interestingly, even though Bolpur-Sriniketan block tops the block ranking, Bolpur municipality lags behind all other municipalities in terms of primary school infrastructure. However, it would be misleading if we put too much importance on the overall ranking. Tables 2.9 and 2.10 reveal a lot more than what the overall ranking does. From the two tables it is not difficult to see where the focus should be in order to reduce inter-block disparity in school infrastructure. While in Murarai-I & II more teachers and classrooms are needed overall, in Rajnagar and Dubrajpur the problem is of a different kind. In the latter two, the combination of high percentages of single-teacher and two-teacher schools with low percentages of pupil-teacher ratio and pupil-classroom ratio indicates that a good number of schools have such a small number of students that it is difficult to justify posting three or four teachers in those schools. This is a rather tricky policy issue. However, it is not generally true that single teacher schools have fewer students. Among the fifteen single-teacher schools in Rajnagar, five have more than fifty students each. What it means is that even within a block different schools may require different policy interventions.

No clear pattern can be observed on the correlation between various indicators of school infrastructure and the percentage of out-of-school children. Bolpur-Sriniketan – the topper in terms of school infrastructure – does not appear to have the minimum percentage of out-of-school children,

perhaps for the reason that schooling outcome is the result of the interaction of both supply side and demand side factors. Table 2.11 gives the percentages of out-of-school children in the age-groups 5+ to 8+ and 9+ to 13+ across blocks. Six blocks, viz. Dubrajpur, Khoyrasole, Sainthia, Labhpur, Murarai-I and Murarai-II share almost one-half of the total out-of-school children in the age-group 5+ to 8+. Dubrajpur has the highest number and Khoyrasole has the highest percentage of such children. In the age-group 9+ to 13+ Murarai-I has the dubious distinction of having the highest number and highest percentage of out-of-school children. In Table 2.9 Murarai-I ranks 18 among the nineteen blocks. In other words, this block lags behind others in terms of school infrastructure as well as an outcome indicator, viz. children out-of-school.

**Table 2.11: Number and percentage of children out of school in Birbhum, 2006**

| BLOCK             | Number<br>(5+ to 8+ yrs) | Percentage<br>(5+ to 8+ yrs) | Number<br>(9+ to 13+ yrs) | Percentage<br>(9+ to 13+ yrs) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| SAINTHIA          | 1198                     | 6.80                         | 2403                      | 12.09                         |
| BOLPUR SRINIKETAN | 919                      | 5.12                         | 2369                      | 11.34                         |
| DUBRAJPUR         | 1625                     | 8.95                         | 3783                      | 20.11                         |
| ILLAMBAZAR        | 982                      | 6.76                         | 2309                      | 14.44                         |
| KHOYRASOLE        | 1577                     | 14.01                        | 2280                      | 18.23                         |
| LABPUR            | 1113                     | 6.78                         | 2460                      | 13.28                         |
| MAYURESWAR - I    | 525                      | 4.38                         | 1462                      | 11.41                         |
| MAYURESWAR - II   | 405                      | 4.38                         | 922                       | 8.31                          |
| MD.BAZAR          | 1092                     | 7.56                         | 2494                      | 17.46                         |
| MURARAI - I       | 1350                     | 7.33                         | 4189                      | 23.50                         |
| NALHATI - II      | 118                      | 1.03                         | 1037                      | 8.24                          |
| NALHATI - I       | 375                      | 1.80                         | 2723                      | 11.47                         |
| NANOOR            | 1055                     | 6.04                         | 2650                      | 13.64                         |
| MURARAI - II      | 1151                     | 5.45                         | 2833                      | 13.45                         |
| RAJNAGAR          | 557                      | 8.81                         | 1319                      | 18.26                         |
| RAMPURHAT - II    | 202                      | 1.40                         | 2244                      | 13.07                         |
| RAMPURHAT - I     | 1030                     | 5.50                         | 2591                      | 12.55                         |
| SURI-II           | 223                      | 3.00                         | 1001                      | 12.90                         |
| SURI-I            | 758                      | 6.35                         | 1926                      | 14.45                         |
| BIRBHUM           | 16255                    | 5.81                         | 42995                     | 14.07                         |

Source: SSM, Birbhum



## 2.5 Concluding remarks

In terms of both overall literacy and female literacy Birbhum has lagged behind most other districts of West Bengal. To achieve faster improvement in literacy intervention in two distinct areas is needed at the same time: universalisation of elementary education for children by reducing the number of out-of-school children, and revitalizing adult literacy and continuing education programmes. We observe that there is some connection between the quality of primary school infrastructure and the percentage of out-of-school children at the block level. While certain parts of the primary school infrastructure has improved in recent years, a shortage of upper primary and secondary schools vis-à-vis primary schools poses a serious problem for transition from primary to upper primary. We further observe that there is significant variation in the incidence of dropout within blocks, which lead us to suggest that instead of focusing on the averages, it is important to narrow down the focus on the schools that are lagging behind others in terms of certain outcome indicators, such as high dropout rates.

The adult literacy programme, which was implemented in the early nineties in a campaign mode, eventually ran out of steam, leaving a substantial number of adult non-literates untouched. Even the positive gains from the programme could not be kept up as the neo-literates lost their literacy skills for the limited reach of the post-literacy and continuing education programmes. The scenario in Birbhum is no different from other districts in this regard, as the Continuing Education Centres (CEC) are now almost non-functional throughout the state.

Figure 2.3: Percentage of primary schools in Birbhum with single or no classroom, 2006

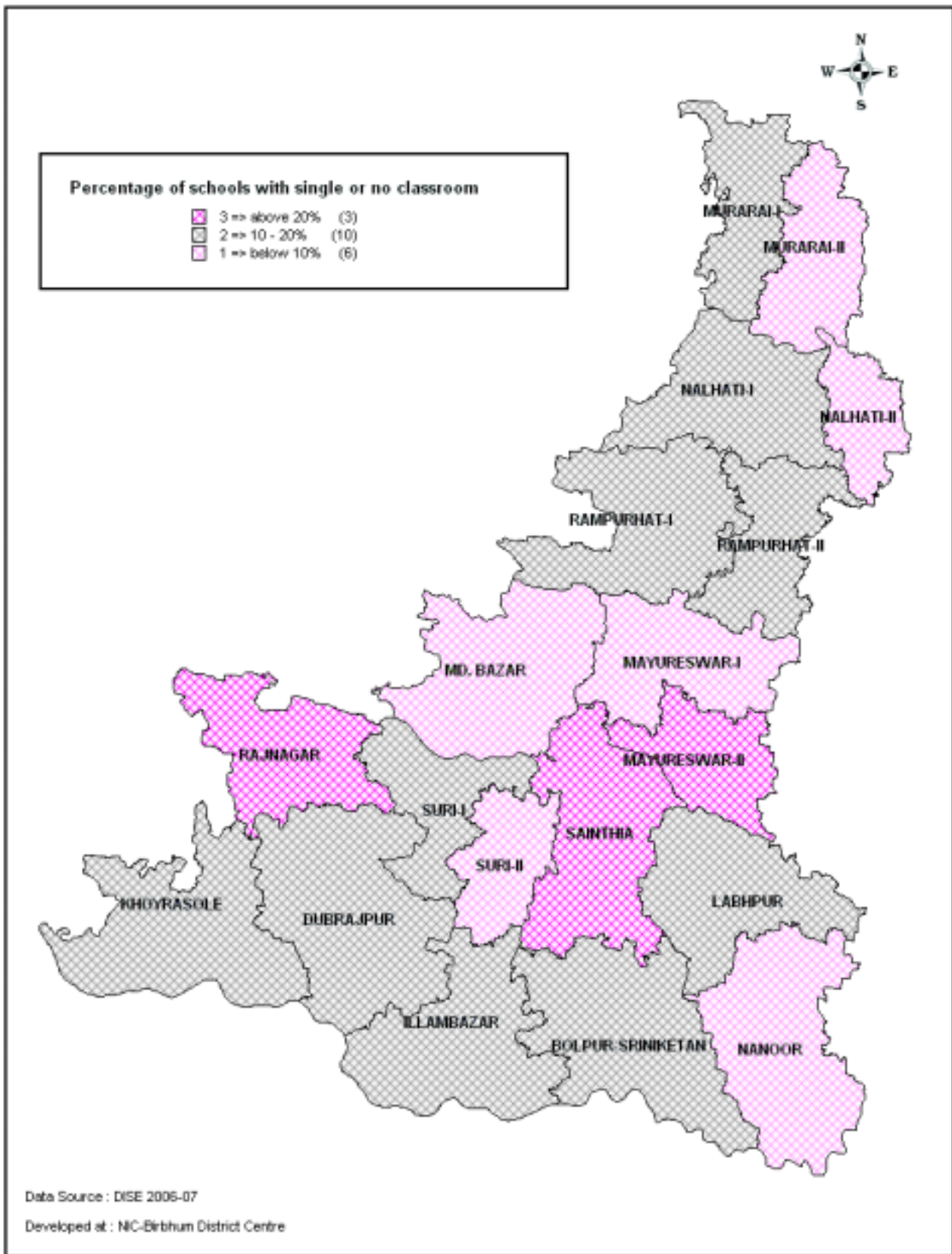


Figure 2.4: Pupil-teacher ratios in blocks of Birbhumi, 2006

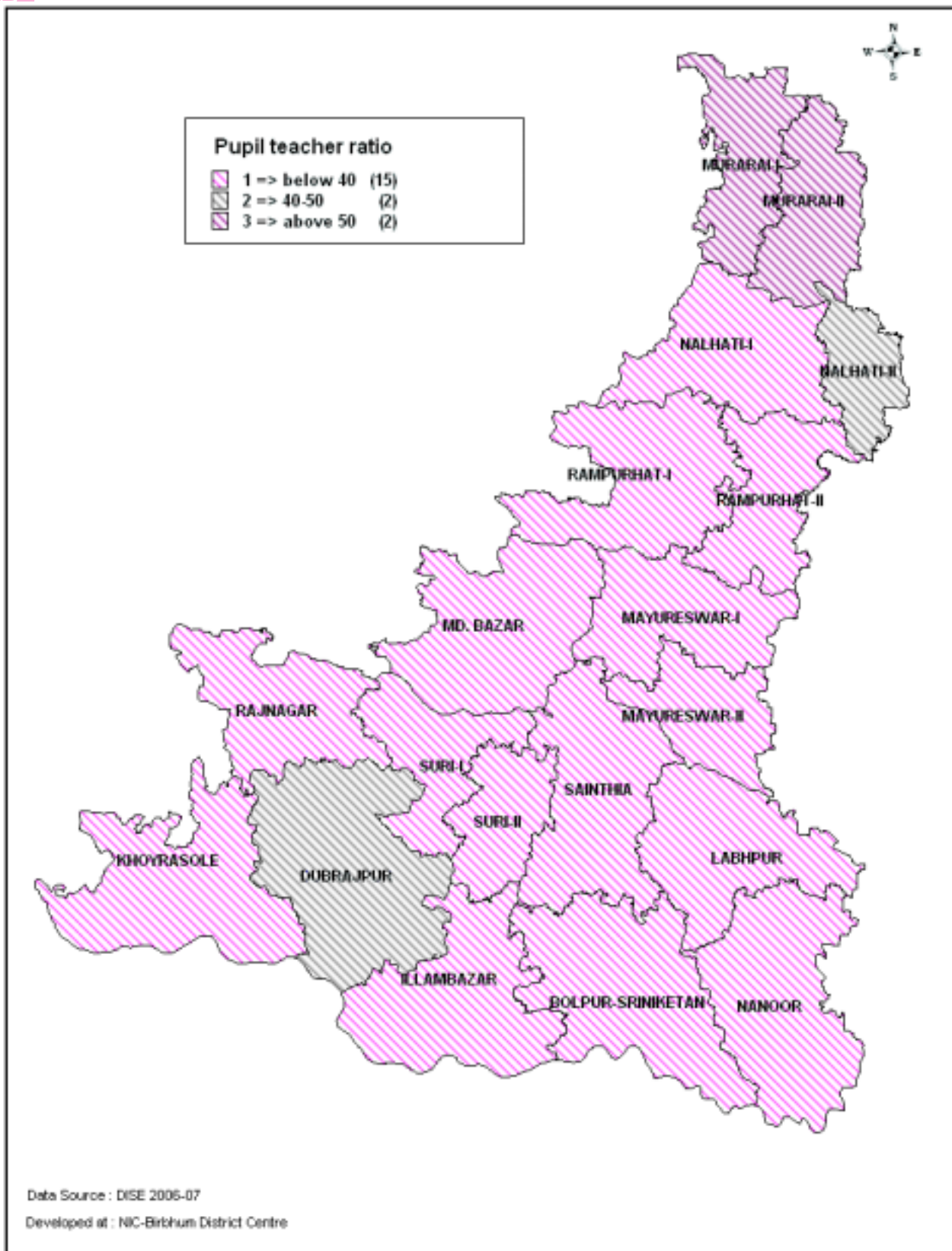


Figure 2.5: Percentage of primary schools in Birbhum with two or fewer teachers, 2006

