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Banish homework in primary schools: Sen

Staff Reporter



Nobel laureate Amartya Sen addressing mediapersons at the release of the Pratichi report II in Kolkata on Saturday . Photo: Sushanta Patronobish

Pointing out that an ‘overloaded’ curriculum in the primary education system is responsible for developing a perception of dependence on private tuition among parents that again gives rise to class-division and subsequently inequality, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen on Saturday recommended a rethink on the curriculum load so that basic education could be completed in school itself.

He was speaking at the release here of “**The Pratichi Education Report II, Primary Education in West Bengal: Changes and Challenges.**”

While attendance, the success of the mid-day meal system, parents’ satisfaction with teaching quality and their wards’ performance in schools and the ability of students to read and write had “noticeably increased” in West Bengal over the last eight years, the dependence on private tuition had also increased with a “higher proportion of parents thinking that it is essential,” Professor Sen said.

The report has been released by the Pratichi (India) Trust, founded by Prof. Sen with part of his Nobel Prize money. It focusses on advancing primary education and elementary healthcare in eastern India.

A survey was done by the Trust in 2001-02 in randomly selected primary schools from six districts of West Bengal. A resurvey has been done in the same schools to check how things have changed since then.

Coming down heavily on the system of homework in primary schools, Prof. Sen said: “A somewhat counter-productive overloaded curriculum, incomplete education during school hours and necessity of homework are the reasons that there is a perceived necessity of private tuition since the parents try to supplement at home the education which could not be completed in school.”

He recommended “re-examination of the curriculum and banishing the necessity of homework at the elementary level” to overcome the situation.

Prof. Sen also emphasised the deep social impact the system has among the economically disadvantaged sections.

“It [the problem of class division] applies particularly to the first-generation school-goers, whose parents remain illiterate ... the parents can neither help their children with their homework nor can they afford a private tutor. So then, instead of removing inequality through education, we perpetuate inequality between the haves and the have-nots.”

Caste-based categorisation

Drawing attention to the conventional caste-based categorisation of society that excludes a large proportion of Muslims in West Bengal, Prof. Sen said there was need to go beyond such categorisation by incorporating the Muslim population also in the list — since for historical reasons, they were also ‘disadvantaged’.

Keywords: [Amartya Sen](#), [The Pratichi Education Report II](#), [Primary Education in West Bengal: Changes and Challenges](#), [mid-day meal system](#), [primary education](#), [homework](#), [first-generation school-goers](#)

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