Challenges in Elementary Education in India: Various Approaches

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Abstract

Education is a vital means for the potentialities of a human being to emerge in a positive direction so that a man can live in society with full of dignity and can mould the habits, tastes and character of individuals living in society by imparting knowledge and information. Therefore, in a democratic country like ours the government has felt the needs and importance of education and has an onerous responsibility to implement plans and programmes for democratization of education in the country. Now, education is constitutionally recognized as a birth right of the citizens of the country. So, to make *education accessible to all* has been a mission of the government and many targets like the Millennium Development Goal by 2015, India Vision by 2020, have been identified including that of Inclusive Growth by the government. It is appropriate for us now to assess and evaluate the progress and the prospect of the approaches which are being implemented for ensuring the universalization of elementary education in India.

Key words: Education, various approaches and its achievement

1. Introduction:

Education is a life long process. Education makes people superior to other forms of living things. It develops the power for critical thinking and improves the power of rationality towards life. In fact, education makes people educated, acquaints them with some need- based skills and, finally, it develops in them certain level of efficiency in the performance of the work they do. Thus, education is a pre-requisite for the acquisition of knowledge, enhancing skills, developing attitudes and values etc. Therefore, as human beings, we need education because it provides us with knowledge and skills to lead a meaningful life. Actually, in today's society there is an increasing demand for growing human capital and enhancement of manpower. Education creates the human capital for the benefit of the society or for the country as a whole. In this context, it is an urgent need to make education as accessible as possible to all the citizens of the country. By realizing the importance and value of education, the government of India has made education a fundamental right and it has become a birth right for every one living in the country. In a democratic country like ours, we have access to human rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Elementary education is a ladder, on the basis of which learners are able to attain secondary and higher education. Therefore, this stage of education is called a period of basic foundation for all other courses in life. In this unit, we are going to discuss why education is important, what the educational provisions in Indian Constitution are, and finally what are the challenges facing in the universalization of elementary education in India.

For an effective role of governance, the citizens or people, in particular, should be very conscious about their rights and duties constitutionally given to them. Education is a vital means to make people conscious of their duties and rights. To make the people educated and to promote the welfare of the society as a whole, it is imperative to make education available for all the people of the country.

Objectives of the study: Keeping this picture in mind an attempt has been made:

- To study the relevance of education
- To analyse the growth and applications of various approaches in ensuring the universalization of elementary education
- And finally, to examine or assess the progress and the various hurdles being faced in making universalization of elementary education in India.

Methodology or Data Source: The paper is solely based on secondary information collected from different sources like books, journal articles, reports of various government organization and commission, articles published in national and local news papers etc.

2.   Concept of Universalisation of Elementary Education:

Already it has been mentioned that primary or elementary education is the foundation of the entire educational system. Children normally enroll in elementary education at the age of six. It is this stage where the child starts going to a formal institution and thus the formal education starts. The education the child receives at the elementary stage lays down the foundation for his or her physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and social development. This stage of education should be linked with the functional literacy that makes the people literate with the application of practical knowledge, which is the basic requirement for economic development, modernization of social structure and effective functioning of democratic institutions. Therefore most of the educationally advanced countries of the world have made elementary education as one of the most important stages compared to other stages of education. It is imperative for our country in providing the free universal and compulsory elementary education to all the citizens without any kind of discriminations.

Education is considered the bedrock of all socio-economic developments of the country. In order to promote education to all children irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex and others and also for realizing democratization of education as a birth right to all, the government of India has made several attempts from time to time to achieve the universalisation of education for all.

Universalisation of primary or elementary education basically involves three important things i.e. Universalisation of Provision, Universalisation of Enrolment and Universalisation of Retention. *Universalisation of Provision* means that school facilities should be provided to all the children between the age group of 6-14 years in the country. The school should be easily accessible within the walking distance of a child. *Universalisation of Enrolment* means that all children between the age group of 6 to 14 years must be enrolled. The provision has demanded to introduce the compulsory legislation act and under the legislation, parents can be finding for not sending their children to schools. *Universalisation of Retention* retains a child who joins the primary school where he or she should remain there till he or she completes all 8 classes.

In order to make education accessible to all, various provisions have been made under the Directive Principles and Fundamental Rights of the Constitution. While implementing provisions for the citizens, the responsibilities are shared by both the Centre and the State governments. India being a federal state, the relation between Union and States is of vital importance and both the Centre and the states are equally responsible for conducting a programme whether it is under the plan sector or non-plan sector in a state. Education is a subject where both the Centre and the States have the joint responsibility for running smoothly the education programmes in a state.

Whenever we are talking about the educational provisions in the Indian constitution, it has been seen that under the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 45, states the following regarding the Free and Compulsory Primary Education: "The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." It means that free and compulsory elementary education can be accessed by all children before they complete the age of fourteen, where the target period was only for 10 years.

But after the Eighty Sixth the Amendment, 2002 (Article 21 A) of the Indian Constitution, education as a subject became one of the Fundamental Rights in PART III of the Indian Constitution from the Directive Principles of State Policy which is dealt with in PART IV of the Constitution. Thus education turns into a birth right for each and every citizen of the country. In our country the Right to Education Act came into the effect from 1st April 2010. The right to education is now a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Thus, the government will be responsible for providing education to every child up to the eight standard, free of cost, irrespective of class and gender. It has paved the way for building a strong, literate and empowered youth of this country.

3. Various Approaches for Universalisation of Elementary Education

From the above discussion we have come to know about the constitutional provisions in "Article 45" and 'Article 21 A' and the subsequent legislative provisions made in India for expansion and improvement of elementary education in order to make education accessible to all, various approaches and schemes have been implemented by the Government. Let us discuss the measures adopted by the Government of India to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years.

3.1 National Policy on Education In 1968

The Education Commission (1964 – 66) had recommended that the Government of India should issue a statement on the National Policy of education which should provide guidance to the State Governments and local authorities in preparing and implementing educational plans. Accordingly, the Government of India issued a Resolution on National Policy on Education in 1968. The NPE (1968) observes that "Strenuous efforts should be made for the early fulfillment of the Directive Principle under Article 45 of the Constitution seeking to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. Suitable programmes should be developed to reduce the prevailing wastage and stagnation in schools and to ensure that every child who is enrolled in schools successfully completes the prescribed course"

3.2 National Policy on Education In 1986

A variety of new challenges and social needs make it imperative for the Government of India to formulate and implement a new education policy for the country in 1986.The New Education Policy in 1986 emphasises on -

- Universal enrolment and universal retention of children up to 14 years of age.
- Substantial improvement in the quality of education.
- Systematic efforts to provide non-formal education to educate school dropouts, children from areas without school, working children who are unable to attend the school during daytime.
- Implementing "Operation Black Board" scheme to provide essential facilities in the school.

3.3 District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

To evaluate the effectiveness of the New Education Policy 1986, a committee was appointed by the Government of India in 1990. A review of NPE, 1986 was conducted during 1990 – 1992. The Programme of Action, 1992 stressed the need of development of education in backward districts. Accordingly, the Government of India formulated the "District Primary Education Programe" (DPEP) scheme in 1993. DPEP is an effort to decentralise educational planning at the district level. It is planned in such a way that it suits the educational needs and demands of the district concerned. Initially district projects were prepared in 44 districts in eight states: Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Gradually it was followed in 273 districts spreading over

18 states. The objectives of DPEP were basically for:

- To provide access to all children of primary education (Class I to IV/V)
- To reduce dropout rates to less than 10 percent
- To increase learning achievement at primary level by 25 percent
- To reduce gender gaps and differences in Social group to less than 5 percent.

DPEP was different from earlier schemes in several ways:

- DPEP adopted a holistic approach with emphasis on convergence of existing programmes and resources.
- It adopted area specific approach with district as the unit for planning and implementation.
- Plans were prepared at the district level through a participatory process involving district and sub district functionaries, teachers, parents and community members.
- Equity was a major concern of DPEP.
- Capacity building through training extension and other means was given priority.
- DPEP resources were additional to the existing budgetary provision for education.

3.4 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Its Attempt

Education for children of the age group of 6-14 years has become a fundamental right after the 86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002. The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan has been designed by the Government of India as a scheme to provide elementary education to all the children of the age group 6-14 years. Now after being acquainted with the concept of universalisation of elementary education, our attentions are going to focus on the Government's efforts to achieve the universal retention. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is one of the comprehensive approaches or missions of the government which was introduced in India 2001. As a holistic and convergent approach, SSA covers all the States and Districts of our country, where the main attempt is to provide an opportunity to all the children in the age group of 6-14 irrespective of caste, creed, sex and religion by 2010, for improving their capabilities through the provision of community-owned quality education. The basic motto of SSA is to reduce dropout, capture all the students of the target group with the aim of providing improved scholastic and co-scholastic environment. SSA also aims at setting the umbrella for children for turning them into respectable citizens capable of constructive contribution towards a better society in the field of science, technology, literature, administration and so on. It has also some efforts to decentralize the whole process of curriculum development from the grass root level to the district and the State level. Child-centred and activity-based learning has been attempted. Learning by doing, learning by observation, work experience, art, music, sports and value education have been made an integral part of the learning process. Appropriate changes have been made in the evaluation system, where the performance of children has to be constantly monitored in consultation with parents. As a mission approach, the main objectives of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan include:

- All Children in School, Education Guarantee Centre, Alternative School, Back to School camp by 2003
- All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007
- All children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary level by 2010.
- Universal retention by 2010.

Today, like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Department of School Education and Literacy of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the Government of India has also made an attempt

in the process of launching *Rastriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)* with an aim to achieve Universal Access and Quality Secondary Education.

3.5 National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level

It is being implemented in educationally backward blocks, where the percentage of enrolment of girls are comparatively poor than the national average and the gender gap is more than the national average. About 3286 educationally backward blocks are covered under the scheme in 25 states.

3.6 National Programme of Mid Day Meals in School

The programme provides a mid day meal of 450 calories and 12 grams of protein to children at the primary stage and later it is extended to the elementary level. During 2009-10, about 11 crore children were benefitted by the scheme.

3.7 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

It was launched in July 2004 for setting up residential school at upper level for girls belonging predominately to SC, ST, OBC and other minority communities.

3.8 Thrust for Female Literacy (Saakshar Bharat)

The National Literacy Mission has been launched recently as Saakshar Bharat in which at least 7crore non-literates will be made literate to achieve 80% literacy and to reduce gender disparity in literacy from 21% to 10%. 365 districts in the country, with adult female literacy rate of 50% or less, have been identified for the implementation of Saakshar Bharat.

4. Challenges taken into account:

After going through the various approaches of the Government in making universalization of elementary education let us have a look at the progress of the education system and also highlight on the various problems considering as hurdles in making the universalization of elementary education in India.

- In terms of literacy India has 74.4% literacy rate in Census 2011 whereas it was 18.33 in the Census Year of 1951.(Note 1)
- The Number of schools has significantly increased. In the year of 1950-51 the number of schools was 0.23 million which increased to 1.28 million in the year of 2005-06.
- The Gross Enrolment Ratio in elementary education increased to 96.62% in the year of 2005-06 whereas it was 32.1% in 1950-51.
- The gender gap in the literacy rate is slowly decreasing. In 1950-51, the Gender Parity Index at elementary level was 0.38 whereas it was 0.92 in the year of 2005-06.
- In India, 99% of the rural population had a primary school within 1km in 2009-10.
- In 2007-08, Gross Enrolment Ratio in 6 -14 age group was 114.61 at primary level and77.50 at elementary level.
- The Pupil Teacher Ratio is 46:1 at primary level and 35:1 at elementary level and 10.22 lakh teachers were recruited by December 2009.
- 29.57 lakh children were identified as special children and from the among them 24.77 lakh children enrolled in school by 2009-10.
- 11.19 crore children were covered by the National Programme of Mid-day Meals in 2009-10 at elementary level.

   Although the target in accessing the elementary education to all is in progress yet the success rate is far from reaching the target. The objectives of Srava Shiksha Abhiyan regarding all children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007and eight years of elementary schooling by 2010 have not seen come

into reality. Still there are a significant number of drop outs at the elementary level. The following factors are cited as responsible for hindering the desired success rate.

- The rate of drop out has been found at primary level was 24.93% whereas it was42.25% at elementary level in the year of 2008-09.
- Shortage of trained teachers will be one of the major challenges in implementing the Act. There are over 12.6 lakh vacancies of teachers a cross the country. Besides, 7.72 lakh untrained teachers constituted 40% of the total number of teachers in 1.29 million recognized elementary schools in the year 2010.
- 53% schools followed prescribed norms regarding the Pupil Teacher Ratio i.e.1:30 under the Act in the year 2010.
- Separate arrangement of toilets for the boys and the girls is an important component for motivating the children in the school. But still in India 46% schools do not have such facilities and as a result some parents are not willing to send their children to schools.
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) conducted a base line survey all over the country and published its report entitled '*Learning Achievement of Class V Students: A Baseline Study'* in 2006. This study tried to measure learning achievement of the class 5 students across the country. Three subjects like Environmental Science (EVS), mathematics and language were chosen for the baseline study. In all India average, the mean percentage of the achievement of Class V Students in the three subjects i.e. EVS, mathematics and Language was 50.30, 46.51 and 58.57 respectively.
- Many other challenges also create hurdle in making the universalization of elementary education. Parents in the low income group have the willingness to send their children to work for adding to the family income rather than to school. Early marriages, migration of people for the sustenance, preferential attitude to the boys than the girls, taking care of the siblings at home, lack of infrastructure in schools, requirements of additional schools, single teacher school and finances are some other responsible factors for hindering the universalization of elementary education in India.
- Weak administrative policy is also responsible for wastage at the elementary level. In school the prescribed rules are not always strictly followed. Admission in school continues throughout the year. A large number of students leave schools in the middle of the session. Teachers remain absent from duty without prior information. The number of supervisors is inadequate and supervision work irregular and loose.
- Training is considered one of the most important interventions for smooth running of the education system and it can help realize the universalization of elementary education. The actual implementation in terms of training the teachers varies from state to state and region to region within the country. Even the recruitment procedure is also not uniform across the country.

Thus it is a right time for the government to take the action for removing these barriers in order to achieve the democratization of education. Besides we are heading towards the target year of Millennium Development Goals, where accessibility of education to all is a major concerned. But thing is that the education must be cater the needs of the learners that can produce the functional literate and enhance the life skills of the learners. The government is responsible for providing education to every child up to the eight standard, free of cost, irrespective of class and gender. It has paved the way for building a strong, literate and empowered youth of this country.

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Note1: The following points illustrate the success so far achieved in universalization of elementary education in India.

1. The Following table shows the rate of literacy in India from the Census of 1951 to 2011.

    Table 1: Percentage of literacy rate in India

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-Female literacy gap
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16	21.70
2011	74.4	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India 2011

From the table it has been seen that only 18 people out of 100 were literate in 1951. It has taken another 60 years for literacy to increase from a meager 18% to 74.4%. Female literacy has increased from a very low of 8.9% in 1951 to 65.46 in 2011 where the female literacy is increasing by eight times while male literacy is increased by three times from the Census of 1951 to 2011.