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WAY FORWARD IN INDIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract:

Education is viewed as one of the major catalyst for economic, social, cultural, and technological change in society. The role of education in driving a country's economic growth and propelling socio-cultural and political reforms is beyond doubt, well established. The experience of India is no different. India's progress in providing access to quality and relevant education to its children and youth is a story of mixed results, with some remarkable outcomes and some nonstarters. While India can boast of contributing a large number of human resources to the pool of the world's most educated, scientifically and technically qualified people, it is equally appalling that the same country accounts for more than a third of the world's illiterates also. The paradox lingers to within country variations — with some states having educational development comparable to many developed countries while others rate worse than many poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

INTRODUCTION:

It is not a surprise that the states that have more educated people have been able to address several social and health issues better — for example, states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh have better sex ratios and have reduced their fertility rates or infant mortality rates faster than the educationally backward States like Bihar or Rajasthan. Addressing the educational needs of its young population is critical for reaping the demographic dividends and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The goal of any education intervention is to ensure that the targeted beneficiaries participate in the programme and achieve the expected literacy and numeric skills, higher order mental skills related to thinking and reasoning abilities, life skills, values and develop emotional intelligence, While it is difficult to measure some intangible outcomes such as values or emotional intelligence, it is possible to gauge the progress in reaching out to the children and youth and their learning outcomes related to literacy and numeric skills, During the six decades between 1951 and 2001, India's per capita GDP increased three times, while literacy rates increased 3.5 times and Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at elementary education level increased 2.5 times. While India has made tremendous progress in improving its literacy rates and has better literacy rates than other countries in South Asia (except Sri Lanka) and Sub-Saharan Africa, it is a major concern that it is still below the world and developing country average. In providing school education to its millions of children, India's experience is one of mixed results. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at primary and upper primary level has improved from around 42% and 13% respectively in 1951 to more than 100% at primary and 70% at upper primary now. However, the enrolment rates at secondary (52%) and higher secondary (28%) is well below the desirable levels of universal secondary enrolments and that of other developed, and developing countries (for example, Secondary GER in China is 81%, Sri Lanka is 83% and in Brazil, 110%). The progress in elementary education enrolments in the last decade has been

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most remarkable. The number of out of school children in the age group of 6-14 years has declined from around 45 million in 2001 (Census 2001) to only around 8 million by the end of the decade (IMRB study, 2009). The improvements in enrolment at elementary, level has been most remarkable among girls, rural children, children from marginalized groups and children from economically poor backgrounds, and these improvements have been more prominent in the educationally backward States and districts, While more children are attending schools now, the share of those who complete their education is a matter of concern. The retention rate at primary level or the primary completion rate (till the last grade of primary) is 75% and the gross primary completion rate is 84%. However, only 55% of the 15- 16 year olds were found to have completed upper primary schooling in 2005. The indicators on learning outcomes at elementary level point to the real education achievements, The first and second round of learning achievement studies for Grade III, V and VII/VIII carried out by National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) as well as the Annual Status of Education Rural Report prepared year after year since 2005 by PRATHAM, a Civil Society Organization, show that children's mastery of Math and Language were well below the desirable levels expected at their grade levels, or even the Grade II levels. However, the annual or periodic improvements, though small in increments provide the silver line, as these improvements are achieved despite the increasing number of first generation school goers in the sample. While so far we do not have any nationally comparable learning assessments at secondary level, an analysis of Secondary School Board exams leaves much more to be desired. A study of secondary school children using international testing tools (TIMSS) in two of the most backward states of India shows that while a small proportion of children achieve mastery in Mathematics comparable to the best of children in the world, majority perform poorly, which is bound to affect their future prospects to study and perform in their jobs.1

Primary school education is most often referred to as elementary school, which is usually composed of grades one through six. The main purpose of primary education is to give children a strong foundation in the basics of a general curriculum, with an emphasis on reading and math. The following are some of the features related to primary education.

A primary education is for children who are approximately five to eleven years old, with an exception for children with learning disabilities and those in Special Education. There are no age restrictions in these instances. The subjects targeted by primary education are reading, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, and health. Subjects are not intended for intensive study; rather, they are meant to be taught for general exposure.

Universalization of upper primary education in India is normally discussed in terms of enrolling and retaining all children belonging to the age group 11 to 14. But all children of this age group (11 to 14) cannot be enrolled in upper primary classes unless they complete primary level of education. UNICEF had targeted that by 2015 all boys and girls should complete a full course of primary schooling. UNICEF advocates quality basic education for all, with an emphasis on gender equality and eliminating disparities of all kinds. Denying children access to quality education increases their vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and disease. Free primary school for all children — is a fundamental right to which governments committed themselves under the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Understanding the importance of education, the country has enacted an Act entitled “Right to Education Act” that makes right to education of every Indian child a fundamental right. It is a revolutionary step taken by Government of India in spreading education among children of the country. However, it is not a one-day affair as there has been persistent effort in the country for spreading education among masses. Among important events, 86th Amendment Act (2002) via Article 21A (Part III) of the Constitution of India seeks to make free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right for all children in the age group 6-14 years. In June 2005, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) committee drafted the 'Right to Education' Bill and submitted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development. More than six decades after Independence, the Indian government has cleared the Right to Education Bill that makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children between the ages of 6 and 14. Thus, it is a herculean task on the part of the government to ensure that all children in this age group receive education. Empowered Action Group States Versus Non- Empowered Action Group States:

Literacy rate in non-EAG states is higher than the literacy rate of EAG states but the change in percentage points of literacy rate between 2001 and 2011 is higher in EAG states compared to non-EAG states which shows that EAG states are also picking up with non-EAG states. It can be noted that the gender gap in EAG states is declining faster than the non-EAG states. The decline in gender gap between 2001 and 2011 is 5.92 percent in EAG states whereas it is 4.38 in non EAG states. It is really interesting to note that the percentage increase in number of literates is remarkable in EAG states between 2001 and 2011.

Literacy Rate and Gender Gap in EAG/non-EAG States												
	1991			2001			2011			Gender Gap		
	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	1991	2001	2011
India	52.21	64.13	39.29	64.83	75.26	53.67	74.04	82.14	65.46	24.85	21.59	16.68
Non-EAG States	60.09	70.34	49.20	70.64	79.25	61.53	78.24	84.76	71.42	21.14	17.72	13.34
EAG States	41.65	56.00	25.68	57.22	70.09	43.21	68.86	78.96	57.99	30.32	26.89	20.97

Source: Census of India

In the First Five Year Plan, the program of Social Education, inclusive of literacy, was introduced as part of the Community Development Program in 1952. The National Policy on Education in 1968 not only endorsed the recommendations of the Education Commission but also reiterated the significance of universal literacy and developing adult and continuing education as matters of priority. The formal elementary education program was supplemented by a non-formal education system. A multi-pronged approach of universalisation of elementary education and adult literacy has been adopted for achieving total literacy.

Major thrust of these programmes was on promotion of literacy among women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes particularly in the rural areas. The National Adult Education Program (NAEP) was inaugurated on 2nd October, 1978. The eradication of illiteracy from a vast country like India beset by several social and economic hurdles is not an easy task. Realizing this National Literacy Mission was started on 5th May, 1988 to impart a new sense of urgency and seriousness to adult education. After the success of the areas specific, time bound voluntary based campaign approach first in Kottayam city and then in Ernakulum district of Kerala in 1990, the National Literacy Mission had accepted the literacy campaigns as the dominant strategy for eradication of illiteracy. In 1989, the district-based Total Literacy Campaigns (TLC) emerged as a program strategy for the National Literacy Mission. The 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan', a flagship programme of the Government of India was started for achievement of universalization of elementary education in a time bound manner, as later mandated by the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory education to children of ages 6—14, as a fundamental right. Not Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is doing rounds in all the districts in most of the states for which there is huge fund allocation under 9th and 10th Five year plans. In the 11th Five Year Plan, by 2011-12, Planning Commission has targeted to increase literacy rate by 85 percent and reduce the gender gap by 10 percent.²

Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for all) following progress have been made in India:

99 percent of rural population has a primary school within one Km- 3,66,559 schools were opened till September, 2010;

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at primary level (5th) increased from 96.3 in 200 1-2 to 114.37 in 2008-09;

GER at upper primary level (8th) increased from 60.2 in 200 1-2 to 76.23 in 2008-09;

Gender Parity Index (GPI) improved from 0.3 in 2001-2 to 1.00 in 2008-09 at primary level;

OPT improved from 0.77 in 2001-2 to 0.96 in 2008-09 at upper primary level;

Drop out rate at primary level reduced from 39 percent in 200 1-2 to 25 percent in 2008-09;

Dropout rate for girls declined by 17 percent during 2001-2- 2008-09;

In 2008-09 pupil teacher ratio at national level was 44:1 for primary level and 34:1 for upper primary level by December 2010 in total 11.13 lakh teachers were recruited;

29.72 lakh children with special needs were identified and 24.59 lakh such children (83 percent of the identified) were enrolled in school by September, 2010.

Since inception 2,81,943 new school buildings and 12,77,072 additional classrooms were approved; out of these 2,54,935 school buildings and 11,66,868 additional classrooms were constructed by 2010-11.

1,90,961 drinking water facilities and 3,47,857 toilets were constructed by 20 10-11.

All children upto 8th standard are provided free textbooks in 2010-11 (by December) 9.93 crore children

were given free text books in the entire country.

Mobilizing political will and resources and targeting them is a challenge, even more challenging are the systemic reforms required to change the mindset of various stakeholders about the quality, pedagogy, governance and accountability. There are major challenges in education sector pertaining to the outcomes. India still has a large number of illiterates and neo-literates. If the programs that facilitate continued learning are not effective, there is a danger of the neo-literates lapsing their skills. While elementary stage of education has improved, there are the last-mile challenges in reaching out to the last child. The huge gaps in access, infrastructure and facilities in secondary education would require considerable efforts and funds. The quality of education currently imparted in all levels of education is a major concern.

One of the key factors that are important to education access and quality are the teachers, and there are concerns about the quality of teacher education and professional development. School governance and accountability issues are hot topics of discourse not only in academic circles, but also in civil society. Despite the increase in popular demand for education, there is a huge concern about the large number of children who do not attend school regularly; and the teacher attendance and efforts. Private provision of education has been increasing, either due to the failure of government systems in providing quality education as perceived by the general population or due to the huge aspirations of people to have English education, believed to provide the students with upward mobility both in terms of education and opportunities. However, the private schooling is of varying quality, both in terms of provision and outcomes and in terms of bridging gender and social inequalities. Skill development is also a major area that needs attention.³

In spite of these massive efforts by the Government, we are still lagging behind the world literacy rate of 84 percent. Many states have shown rising trend but even then major group of states lie in the average rank i.e. just above national level of 64.8 percent and below 80 percent. Jharkhand is still lying below the national average. But the stride towards a completely literate India has become surer and more confident. It is also clear that the individual and the community need to play active roles as stakeholders in this process and their role needs to be recognized and built upon for realizing the objective of a fully literate India.

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