

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PROBLEMS OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

In Indian context, the fundamental role of education in nation building, progress, social and economic development has been recognized from outset. In the Constitution as originally adopted by the Constituent Assembly in November, 1949, Article 45 Stated that ; “ 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.” The Right of children to free and compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act), giving every child the right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme for universalization of education for All, along with the no detention policy, has resulted in a significant enhancement both in the Gross Enrolment Ratio as well as in the enrolment of girls. In 2014-15, there were 14 lakh schools in the country imparting elementary education, with a total enrolment of 19.77 crore. Of these, Government schools numbering 11lakh accounted for an enrolment of 11.9 crore at the elementary level: while 3 lakh private schools catered to 8.56 crore students. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at the primary level (grades I-V) was 100.1%; it was 91.2% at the upper primary level (grades VI-VIII) in 2014-15. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) was 87.4% at the primary level and 72.5% at the upper primary level. Large number of children continues to leave the school before completing elementary education. Currently, two large- scale nation –wide learning assessment surveys have been conducted in India at the elementary stage- National Achievement Surveys and Annual Status of Education Report. While the Gross Enrolment Ration (GRE) is satisfactorily high, the quality of education, in terms of learning outcomes, is undeniably poor, particularly in the government school system. This is a matter of serious concern, since approximately 80% of all recognized schools at the elementary stage are government run or supported. ASER 2014 found that nearly 20% of children in class 2 did not recognize numbers till 100. More disturbingly these proportions have grown progressively and substantially since 2010, indicating that learning outcomes are deteriorating rapidly at the primary stage.

Keywords: Educational Policy, Elementary Education, Gross Enrolment Ratio, National Knowledge Commission

Introduction

“Change does not necessarily assure progress, but progress implacably requires change. Education is essential to change, for education creates both new wants and the ability to satisfy them.”

Henry S. Commager. {1}

Compulsory education at the elementary level is essential if the country is to have an intelligent citizenry, able to understand and contribute to modern technological advances and the complex needs of a modern society. It is also indispensable for the proper identification of those talented young people who should be encouraged to continue their education to more advanced stages which develops manpower for different level of the economy.

On August 15, 1947 India attained independence and Indian people got the first fullest opportunity to mould their educational policy according to the needs of the nation in the fast changing times. But this opportunity was not free from heavy responsibilities that lay ahead for re-orienting the entire system of education. The most important problems in the field of education before the national government were the expansion of facilities for mass compulsory elementary education, reform of the secondary and university educational systems, to develop vocational and technical education at various levels, to encourage women education and also to reorganize the structure of education administration.

Since the country's independence in 1947, the Indian Government sponsored a variety of programmes to address the problem of illiteracy in both rural and urban India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first Minister of Education, envisaged strong central government control over education throughout the country with a uniform educational system. The union government established the university Education Commission (1948-1949), the secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) and the Kothari commission (1964-66) to develop proposals to modernize India's education system.[2]

Education System in India after Independence

Soon after gaining independence in 1947, making education available to all had become a priority for the government. As discrimination on the basis of caste and gender has been a major impediment in the healthy development of the Indian Society, they have been made unlawful by the Indian Constitution. The 86th constitutional amendment has also made elementary education a fundamental right for the children between the age group 6 to 14.[3] In India, the literacy is the main foundation of social and economic growth. In 1947, the literacy rate was just 12%. Over the Years, India has changed socially, economically and globally. After the 2011 censuses, the total literacy rate in India is 74.04%. Compare to the adult literacy rate here the youth literacy rate is about 9% higher. Though this seems like a very great accomplishment, it is still a matter of concern that still so many people in India cannot even read and write. The numbers of children who do not get education especially in the rural areas are still high. Though the government has made a law that every child under the age of 14 should get free education, the problem of literacy is still at large.

According to 2011 census, the female literacy rate is 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%. So we see that the female literacy rate is lower than male literacy rate.[5] In India, many parents, especially in rural area, do not allow their female children to go to schools. They get married off at a young age instead. Though child marriage has been lowered to very low levels, it

still happens. Again, many families believe that having a male child is better than having a baby girl. So the male child gets all the benefits. The literacy rate in India has always been a matter of concern but many NGO initiatives and government aids, campaigns and programs are being held to spread awareness amongst people about the importance of literacy. According to 2001 Census, the total literacy rate in India was 65.38%. The female rate was 54.16% and male rate 75.3%. So India literacy rate has shown significant rise in the past 10 years. The gap between rural and urban literacy rate is also very significant in India. According to 2011 census literacy rate in rural areas is 71% compared to 86% in urban areas.[4]&[5]

According to S.K.Kochhar, at the time of independence, the total enrolment in the age group 6-11 was 141 lakhs, which meant hardly 35% in this age group in the primary school. There were 5000 secondary schools with enrolment of 870000 or 4% of the children of the 14-17 age groups. The 19 universities and 400 colleges had an enrolment 250000. The total expenditure on education was Rs 57 crores or 0.5% of the total revenue of the government.[6] Independent India opened new avenues of economic development, social change, and democracy which required skilled and well-informed people and also afforded learning opportunities to these who could participate in the development process.

After Independence India needed immediate reforms in education system which is important instrument for social change and national uplift. Several committees and commissions were required to review the educational problems and make recommendation in order to adjust it to the changing needs, aspiration of the people, structure and strategy of education. And also free India needed effective Constitution to provide Justice, Liberty, and Equality and off course to provide free education to the people of India.

Some of the articles in the constitution deal with five aspects of Indian Education:[3]

- Free and compulsory primary education in the country—Article 45 of the Indian Constitution explain that the state shall Endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years.
- Religious instruction—Article 28(1), Article 28(2), Article 28(3) and Article 30 of the India Constitution safeguard the Secular Education. India is a secular state and every religion has got the right to popularize and spread its religious ideals.
- Equality of Opportunity in Educational Institutions- Article 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the minorities certain cultural and educational rights to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, whether based on religion or language.
- Education of the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes of Citizens—Article 15,17 and 46 safeguard the educational interest of the weaker sections of the Indian community, that is, socially and educationally backward classes of citizens and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
- Language and Educational Safeguard—Article 29(1) explains that any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part there of having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to construe the same.

The above mentioned articles popularize the education among Indian citizens and provide maximum possibilities to get education with minimum expenditure. The immediate action taken by Government of India after independence was the formation of university Education Commission in 1948 under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radha Krishnan. It was a major landmark for enunciating the goals and objectives of higher education in independent India.

On September 23, 1952, the government of India appointed the Secondary Education Commission Under the chairmanship of Dr. A.L. Swami Mudaliar. The commission studied the various problems of secondary education in the country.[2]

Two Narendradeo Committees were set up to suggest reforms in secondary education. The First Narendradeo committee was set up in 1939 during the first Congress Ministry in U.P. and the second committee was set up in 1952-53. These committees gave some suggestions for Basic Education and secondary Education.[2]

However, the recommendations of university Education Commission and the Secondary Education Commission could not be implemented in their entirety. Consequently the defects in the area of education persisted. For removal of these defects the Government of India appointed an education Commission in 1964 under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S.Kothari. The Commission is known as 'Kothari Commission'. The Commission asserted that the progress of the country, development of finance, social security and welfare activities could be ensured only through education. According to the report submitted by Education Commission or Kothari Commission, the state and national level machineries to define, revise and evaluate national standards of education. It also suggested for setting up of a National Board of School Education to channelize the school education in proper way. So on the basis of Education Commission report, the Government of India declared the National Education Policy in 1968.[2]

Number of programmes was included in NEP 1968 viz free and compulsory education, development and protection of all the Indian languages, equality of education opportunities etc. One of the most important achievements of this NEP was the acceptance of a common structure of education throughout the country and the introduction of the 10+2+3 system by most of the states.[2]

After 20 years of implementation of National Education Policy 1968 Government of India made some change on it. In 1986 the Government of India declared the New Education Policy called National Policy on Education 1986 and its Programme of Action (POA). To fulfil the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education, elevation of poverty, national integration, promotion of women's equality and education for women, the National Policy on Education was modified in 1992. The implementation of revised National Education Policy has passed about more than three decades, but its success is not yet up to satisfaction. The national goals of education have still remained unfulfilled and sincere efforts are to be made by all concerned at all levels for efficiency and effectiveness of education. Besides different Constitutional rights provided by Constitution of India, commissions and Committees work for development of Education in the land of free India, the four UN Agencies UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIP and the World Bank joined to sponsor Project 'Education for All' for meeting the basic learning needs of the world community.[2]

The National Knowledge Commission was constituted on 13th June 2005 as a high level Advisory Body to the Prime Minister of India. The Vision of NKC was articulated in the address of Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India, “ The time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capacity building.” The report is a compilation of recommendations submitted by NKC till 2007 on reforms relating to education. These include Viz. Right to Education, English language, Vocational Education etc.[2]

Former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had termed the 11th five-year plan as “India’s education plan”. The 11th Plan, approved at the meeting of National Development Council in December 2007, places the highest priority on education as a centered instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth. In order to attain the objective of Universalization of Elementary Education, The Government has enacted the Right of Children to free and compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, which provides for free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years. The RTE Act has come into force with effect from 1.4.2010. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which is the main vehicle for implementation of RTE Act also seeks to attain the objective of universalization of Elementary Education in the age group of 6-14 years in a time bound manner. [2]

Progress and Achievements

From the report of Census of India 2001, 2011, Educational Statistics At A Glance (2013), Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development Bureau Of Planning, Monitoring and Statistics, we get the following achievements---

- The literacy rates has increased gradually after independence but the total population of the country has also increased along with the increase in the literacy rates, which further increase the illiterate person because of population is higher than Increase in literacy rate.
- At 1951 , GDP at current price (at factor cost) was 10080crore and total expenditure on education was 64.46 crore where GDP was 1925017 crore and 7266967 crore on 2001 and 2011 respectively and total expenditure on education was 82486.48 crore and 305431.50 crore respectively.[7]
- Number of school (primary , upper primary) was increased gradually from 1951 to 2011. Similarly the rate of enrolment was increased gradually. But From the report of ASER ,2014, nearly the half of the grade V students were not able to read the grade II level and nearly same proportion of grade V students did not have the basic arithmetic skills, which they should have learned by the end of grade II.[8]

The main problem of elementary education especially in rural India, is drop out.

The following factors are responsible for drop out –

Poverty and child labour, household decisions, School quality and school related factors, village factors. To provide equal, effective and quality education to every children of the country and to achieve 100 percent enrolment and zero percentage dropout and to fight against the factors which are responsible for the low enrolment and high drop out rates the Central Government of India implements different kind of policies and schemes on education sector. Some important Act, schemes and policies are as follows:

- National Programme of Mid-day Meals in Schools- Centrally Sponsored Scheme Launched in 15th August 1995 with a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children.
- The Right to Education Act 2009 became operational in the country on 1st April 2010. The constitution of India guarantees the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education to every children of the country without any discrimination of sex, religion, and caste under Article 21A.
- Model Schools Scheme- it was launched in November 2008 with the objectives of providing quality education to talented rural children by setting up of 6000 high quality model schools as a benchmark of excellence at the block level at the rate of one school per block.
- Saakshar Bharat – Launched on 8th September 2009 by Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh which is mainly focus on female literacy.
- Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSSs)- This programme provide vocational training to non-literates, neo-literates as well as school drop-outs by identifying skills. In the selection of beneficiaries, priority is given to women, SCs, STs, OBCs, Minorities and other economically weaker section.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)- Launched in 2001 with the goal of i) All 6-14 age children in school. ii) Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary level by 2010 iii) Universal retention by 2010 and iv) Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.[4]
- National Programme for education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)- This Scheme is a holistic effort to address to girls' education at micro level through flexible, decentralized processes at the decision making.

Conclusion

Operation Black Board, Mid-Day Meal Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan able to increase the demand and importance of basic education among rural and urban citizen as well as illiterate parents and guardians. To fulfill the aim of universalization of Elementary Education, the Government of India formulates lots of schemes, policies and Acts to develop the education system to increase the literacy rate, to improve the quality of education. Government will implement the policy for the betterment of individuals but it's a responsibility of every Indian to use it on a proper way for the social development.

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