

## **Policies and Programmes to Improve School Education in Rural India - A Critical Evaluation**

**H.D.Dwarakanath**

Education is the catalyst factor which leads to Human Resource Development (HRD) comprising better health, nutrition, improved socio economic opportunities and more congenial and beneficial natural environment for all. The directive principles of the Constitution gave a mandate to educate all children up to the age group of 14 by 1960. However, it is a sad commentary on the progress of primary education in rural India that even after a lapse of 50 years of Independence it does not seem to be any hope of fulfilling the constitutional directives. The Noble Laureate Prof, Amartya Sen rightly observed that primary education is continued to remain as a gray land despite the substantial progress made by the higher education in India . The UNICEF in its report on "State of World Children 1999" stated that India would be most illiterate country in the world by 2000 AD, a disgraceful distinction. Every third illiterate in the world is an Indian. Half of the school going primary school children in the age group of 5 to 11 years in our country are out of schools. According to 1993 estimates of the 142 crore children in the age group are eligible to enroll in primary schools in which 9.8 crores are actually enrolled of them only 6.3 crores remained in school of which nearly 70 per cent of girls are out of schools<sup>2</sup>.

Over the last five decades the country has taken long strides in the development and spread of educational facilities especially during the plan periods. As a result during 1961 only 13 per cent of our people could read and write with understanding. During 1991 the percentage rose to 52%. In vast heterogeneous country like India it is no mean

Dr. H.D.Dwarakanath, Principal, Siddhartha Degree College, Vikarabad, Ranga Reddy District, Andhra Pradesh

achievement when compared with almost similar situations like China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Brazil and Mexico, our educational and literacy level is lagging far behind from the angle of quality. However, we in India are still not able to provide all our children in the age group of 6 - 14 years free and compulsory education. The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the United Front Government at the centre is committed to make education a competing goal aiming for the nation to become fully literate by 2005. Some years back similar commitment made at New Delhi, talked about Education For All (EFA) by 2000. However, no significant progress is observed even today. Universalization of primary education is the epic centre of structural adjustment policies integrated with a social programme to improve the welfare of the children, women, poor and deprived people. Even today nearly half of our people are illiterate comprising 40 per cent males and 46 per cent females. They are concentrated more in villages than in towns and cities. Besides the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the other backward classes too have them in large number. The literacy movement at the national and regional levels therefore requires to be under taken on a war footing in order to achieve sustained economic development in rural India .

Even though, Indian official policy is "Education to All" there are glaring disparity in achievement among special categories. The literacy rate among women is 39.4 (It is 63.9 for men). The literacy rates for SC and ST are very low and they are further lower in the case of their women. The enrollment rates in classes one to five, six to eight and nine to eleven reveal an extremely low state of education of the literate population as a whole. The National Policy of prescribing a uniform curriculum and emphasizing competitive achievement has failed to provide a universal school system in India, compared to traditional adult education and Literacy Programmes that never succeeded in Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) and there are lessons to be learnt not only in the area of literacy but in basic education .

### **Literacy and Large Scale Dropouts**

Literacy and population size are essentially the basic ingredients for achieving rural development. It is therefore, important to categorically analyze the status in the areas and to suggest what steps should be taken to achieve the goal of the universalisation of primary education by 2005. After Independence India achieved significant progress in almost

all sections including higher education. However, all the achievements put together could not yield the desired impact mainly due to unchecked population growth and the lack of basic education amongst a majority of the people living in rural areas. All measures taken in making basic education available to all citizens could not succeed mainly due to two factors.

1) The position of the class based power structure with a strong desire to strengthen its own position and prevent every attempt to educate the masses; 2) the absence of political will and encouragement. As a consequence, basic education always retained a low profile, while higher education became extensively popular among the elite. According to an estimate that largest number of illiterates in the world will be found in India by the turn of the present century.

**Table - 1 : Progress of Literacy (1951-91) Figures in percentages**

Year	Male	Female	Total	Rural	Urban
1951	27	9	18		
1961	40	15	28	13	24
1971	46	22	34	28	34
1981	57	30	41	34	65
1991	64	39	52	45	73

Source: Registrar and Central Commissioner of India, Social and Cultural Table, Delhi 1965 and Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, India's Social Sector, Mumbai.

In our country among the children, between 5 to 9 years, only 1/3 of them know how to read and write while twice their number do not go to school and remain illiterate. In the age group of 10 to 19 years, 40 per cent are illiterate. Thus, most of the rural children in our country do not know how to read and write, and easily become the victims of the underworld. More than one third of our children dropout even without completing the primary level after enrollment and more than half of them do so before reaching VIII class. Among the dropouts there are more girls than boys and a significant proportion of them come from the vulnerable sections of the society. Acute poverty, economic inequalities and disinterest form the basic reasons for dropping out of the children .

The literacy level is not uniform all over the country. Among the major states each with the population of one crore and above, Kerala tops the first rank with the literacy rate of 90 per cent. Compared to other states

Kerala claims the highest female literacy rate of 86 per cent (vs. male 94 per cent). On the other hand, Bihar with the literacy rates of 39 per cent is at the bottom, where 61 per cent female are illiterate and where poverty and disease add up to their misery and suffering. The states below the All India Average Literacy Level include Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, where half of India's population resides. It may be emphasized that wherever female education has improved, the over all literacy level has also shown improvement. The condition of primary schools in our country especially in rural areas is reported to be quite dismal. About one third of primary schools have only one teacher. Often many schools have no facilities to meet some of the basic needs such as safe drinking water, latrines, urinals and playgrounds. As a result 1/5 of the children in the age group of 5 -10 years remain out of school .

**Table 2: School Dropout Rates in India (percentage)**

Class 1 V	1990-91	1993-94
Boys	42.00	35.10
Girls	47.60	38.60
Total	44.30	30.30
Class I-VIII		
Boys	69.60	50.00
Girls	67.60	56.80
Total	63.40	52.80

Source: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy - India's Social Sectors, February, 1995, Mumbai.

### **Rural Education Findings**

The National Sample Survey (1987) report states that nearly 69 per cent of the female and 43 per cent of the male aged 6-10 years in rural areas have never enrolled in any educational institution . The report of the Indian Statistical Institute pointed out that approximately 75 million children between the age group of 6 -14 did not attend school during the year 1986-87.

**Table 3 : Literary Levels among Major States in percentage**

State	Male	Female	Total	Rural	Urban
Kerala	96.3	86.2	89.8	89.9	92.2
Maharashtra	76.6	52.3	64.9	55.5	79.2
Gujrat	73.1	48.6	61.3	53.0	76.5
Punjab	65.7	50.4	58.5	52.8	72.0
West Bengal	67.8	46.6	57.7	50.5	73.2
Karnataka	67.3	44.3	56.0	47.7	74.2
Haryana	69.1	40.5	55.9	49.9	73.7
Tamil Nadu	67.2	41.8	54.6	5.6	78.0
Assam	61.9	43.0	52.9	49.3	79.3
Orissa	63.1	34.7	49.1	45.4	72.0
Madhya Pradesh	57.4	28.9	44.2	35.9	70.8
Andhra Pradesh	55.1	32.7	44.1	35.7	66.3
Uttar Pradesh	55.7	25.3	41.6	36.7	61.0
Rajasthan	55.0	20.4	38.6	30.3	65.3
Bihar	52.0	22.9	38.5	33.1	67.9
All India	64.1	39.3	32.1	44.7	73.0

Source: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy - India's Social Sectors, February, 1995, Mumbai.

Based on the NSS data and Census of India data it was estimated that in 1995 more than 78 million children aged between 6-11 years were not attending schools. During 1993-94 academic years the gross enrollment ratio among boys at the primary school level regardless of age of the students between 6-11 years exceeded 100 per cent in 26 out of 31 states and union territories. Among the more populous states this ratio varied from 93 per cent in Punjab to 150 per cent in Tamil Nadu. Similarly among the girls the enrollment ratio in primary schools exceeded 100 per cent in 15 out of 31 states and varies from 54 per cent in Bihar to 141 per cent in Tamil Nadu. There are quite a few states where the ratio is considerably lower viz., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Meghalaya. At the upper primary stage in addition to above states Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Sikkim have gross enrollment ratio lower than the national average. Thus, there is a strong regional dimension of the universalisation of elementary education. However, gender disparities are conspicuous with regard to enrollment and retention. The girls enrollment has grown at primary stage from 5.4 million in 1950-51 to 47.4 million in 1995-96 and at the upper primary stage from 0.5 million to 16 million, but their

enrollment declines progressively as they move from primary to secondary level of schooling .

### **Facilities at Primary Level**

Since 1990, around 48000 children have been adding to the country's population per day i.e., 275 lakh every year. For this added population the implementation of the universalization of primary education would require additional infra-structural facilities.

According to data available the total number of primary schools rose from 5.51 lakh during 1980-90 to 5.91 lakh during 1995-96. Presently on an average the number of students in a primary class is about 24. So even if a class with 36 students is to be planned we need to create at least 1,330 classes per day, for the additional 48,000 children. Since, there are five classes in a primary school here is need to set up 225 primary schools per day. Going by the existing rural school scenario there has been a shortage of 90,000 schools every year since 1989-90. To provide basic education facilities to all the children under the age group of 14 as stated in the Common Minimum Programme of the United Front government, it will be necessary to cover the shortage and requirement will be 90,000 primary schools.

According to the annual findings (1996-97) of the Ministry of Human Resource Development accessibility of schooling facilities is no longer a major problem. About 8 lakh habitations covering 94 per cent of the country's population have now schooling facilities with in one KM distance at the primary stage. At the upper primary level also 726 lakh habitations covering 83.98 per cent of the rural population have a school with in three KMs distance. The enrollment ratio is 104 for primary stage (class I to V) and 67 for upper primary stage (Class V - VII). The Fifth All India Education Survey stated that of the total primary schools in the country 54.49 per cent were running in pucca buildings and 8.1 per cent in the open areas. The survey also found that 25.83 per cent primary schools were in need of one extra class room 28.64 per cent two and 22.26 per cent require three class rooms .

**Table 4 : Elementary Education in India Progress of Enrollment (in lakhs)**

Year	Primary Level (Age 6-11yrs)	Middle Level (Age 11-14yrs)
1968-69	545	125
1970-80	716	196
1982-83	785	236
1984-85	856	262
1986-87	900	288
1987-88	929	300
1988-89	957	309
1989-90	973	322
1991-92	1016	345
1992-93	1054	387
1993-94	1082	399
1995-96	1097	410

Source: India - A Reference Annual 1995, Ministry of HRD, 1996-97.

According to NSS results it was estimated that in 1995, more than 78 million children aged between 6-11 years were not attending schools. During 1993-94 the gross enrollment ratio among boys at the primary school level exceeded 100 per cent in 26 out of 31 States and Union Territories (UTs), Among the more populous states this ratio varied from 93 per cent in Punjab to 149 per cent in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, in case of girls the enrollment ratio in primary schools exceeds 100 per cent in 15 out of 31 states and Union Territories and varies from 54 per cent in Bihar to 141 per cent in Tamil Nadu. There are quite a few states where the ratio is considerably lower this includes Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Meghalaya. At the upper primary stage these states in addition to Orissa and Sikkim have gross enrollment ratios lower than the national average.

Thus there is a strong regional dimension of the universalisation of elementary education. Gender disparities are conspicuous with regard to enrollment and retention. Girls enrollment has grown at primary stage from 5.4 million in 1950-51 to 47.4 million in 1995-96 and at the upper primary stage from 0.5 million to 16 million. However, their enrollment declines progressively as they move from primary to secondary level of schooling .

**Table 5 : Growth of Schools and Teachers (in lakhs)**

Year	Primary Stage (Class I-V)		Upper Primary Stage (Class V-VIII)	
	Students	Teachers	School	Teachers
1950-51	2.10	5.28	0.13	0.36
1995-96	5.90	17.4	1.70	11.65

Source: Annual Report (Part-1), Ministry of HRD.

The World Bank report released recently on primary education stressed that despite a steady increase in the enrollment rate for primary education, about 32 million school children have not seen school. The report said that India's average level of education attainment has not yet reached the critical threshold where benefits are greatest and high economic growth rates are sustainable. The report indicated the examples of Karnataka and Nagaland, where teacher absenteeism, retention rates and overall quality of primary education showed a remarkable improvement after the local government started monitoring village level schools directly. Contrary to this in Bhagwaniyon Kidani a village in Rajasthan's Barmer district where literacy rates is an abysmal 18.8 per cent worse at 7.7 per cent for women.

#### **Plan Expenditure on Primary Education**

Though the budgetary allocation for education has been stepped up the government has tried to move in too many directions, at the same time with no clear focus on defined strategy on primary education, over the years there has been a steep decline in budgetary allocation for elementary education in, various states. The plan out lays on primary education show that the states provided 91 per cent of the total expenditure on primary education in the sixth plan period and this came down to 68 per cent in the Eighth plan. On the other hand central government's financial allocation to primary education has gone up from 9 per cent to 32 per cent. The rise in the centre's financial allocation to primary education has been in the form of sanctions to regularize its schemes like operation black board, non-formal education, teacher's education and midday meal programme. The per capita state spending on primary education varies widely from one state to another Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have been spending between Rs.96 and 113 lakhs while in

Karnataka and Kerala the spending is Rs.168 and 184 lakhs respectively. The states, which have neglected primary education, will find it increasingly difficult to allocate additional resources. The World Bank study reported that Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal which account for 75 per cent of primary school age children, who are not in school .

**Table 6 : Plan Expenditure on Elementary Education**

Plan Year	Million rupees	Percentage of Education
First Plan	50	56
Second Plan	950	35
Third Plan	2010	34
Fourth Plan	2390	30
Fifth Plan	3170	35
Sixth Plan	8360	33
Seventh Plan	28490	37
Eighth Plan	92010	42
Ninth Plan	400000	62

Source: India - A Reference Annual, 1995, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Approach to Ninth Plan.

### **Primary Education and Ninth Plan**

Despite all initiatives taken for achieving universalisation of primary education the backlog has continued in enrollment and dropout rate is still high. Two major initiative has been taken during Eighth Plan are the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Nutrition Support to Primary Education (Midday Meal Programme) with a view to addressing the problem of equality, access retention and quality at primary state. During the VIII Plan the enrollment of girls and children for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes has shown an increase at the primary stage. The dropout rates have also shown a declining trend. However, there is still a long way to achieve the goal of universalisation of primary education.

The Ninth plan apart from carrying out the directions given by NEP(1992)<sup>12</sup>- is committed to making the nation fully literate by 2005 AD; keeping in view the declaration of education as an aspect of Fundamental Right. The Midday Meal Scheme will be implemented in all the states to ensure regular attendance and retention in primary and

middle level schools. Further substantial funds will be earmarked for imparting technical and vocational skills and training in order to turn out more employable and self employed youth. National Literacy Mission (NLM) will achieve the average of 100 million adults by 1998-99 with special attention and effort for the special literacy. The Midday Meals Scheme implemented in all the states to encourage regular attendance and retention in primary and middle schools added to this unfinished task of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) will be completed with special focus on the backward states/districts. The Open Learning System (OLS) will be strengthened for providing education from the elementary stage and above to meet the needs of those who are unable to seek education through full time institutional system.

### **Observation & Evaluation**

The current scenario of primary education clearly reveals that universalising primary education by 2005 AD is a very complex process and needs considerable and tremendous efforts to achieve the desired goal. It has not been appreciated that for bringing about social change and social justice thrust should be on primary education. The constraints of the huge number of children and the large number of money involved should not come in the way of launching a nationwide campaign for eradicating illiteracy. Unless we give 'right to education' to every citizen we cannot accelerate the rate of literacy. Our planners should therefore make vigorous effort to spread education in rural areas so that the present inequalitarian character of the society is corrected. The non-formal education sector of education needs to be given due priority in the present situation of vast illiteracy .

The government at the centre needs to muster the political strength as also to mobilize all agencies to rejuvenate the educational system for the benefit of the masses. There cannot be two opinions that Indian economic and social development should include areas of education, health, cultural values and welfare. The ultimate goal of development is essentially the enrichment of quality of life for all sections of the society. However, appropriate guidelines and action plans for effective operation of the programme in rural areas need to be evolved and suitable monitoring and evaluation systems to be ensured. The Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayats should be given more powers and made responsible for the successful implementation of the programme. Due to financial constraints

primary education was not taken care by Panchayats. Hence, sufficient funds should be provided as a means to the Panchayati Raj Institutions for opening and the maintenance of new schools, so that the Panchayats can play a vital role in achieving the targets by creating literacy awareness among the rural people .

Our planners should therefore make more efforts to spread education in rural areas, so that present inegalitarian character of the education system is corrected. Unless we give right to education to every citizen, we can not accelerate the role of literacy to improve primary education. Therefore a planned social change through education serves as a major instrument for bringing about drastic changes in primary education. The concept of social change involves the transformation of society from traditionalism to modernism, from pathetic ignorance to active enlightenment

It is unfortunate that for various reasons the education of girls has not made much progress among the rural society. In recent years there has been a great importance to women education through out the country. But the observation reveals that though several attempts are made to motivate the rural parents to enroll their children in the schools, certain rural areas are still largely unaffected by the literacy movement due to poverty, ignorance and lack of motivation. Eradication of illiteracy is essential ingredient for development of the country. We can not achieve the take off stage as long as people are illiterate and ignorant of social change . In the ultimate analysis what is more important is that parents attitude towards child's education and the states responsibility towards fulfilling the universalisation goal. The seven-point guideline worked out by the government in consultation with States/Union Territories to achieve the objective of universalization of primary education, is worth mentioning.

- I Finding the problems of school dropouts and identifying suitable measures on retention and achievement rather than on enrollment,
- II Identifying educationally backward districts rather than the states to implement the programme of universalization of education.
- III Providing universal access to education facilities to goals, socially backward groups, drop out school children ana working child labour,
- IV Implementing various universalization projects for upgradation of class room environment, competence of teachers, their training and motivation.

- V Participative approaches should be practiced more in the process of mobilization and motivation in the over all planning and management of universalization of primary education. Converting different schemes of universalization of primary education and related services such as, early childhood care, education, health and nutrition
- VII Implementation of non-formal education system for working children, rural girls, socially backward and marginalized sections of the society

The need of the hour is that these points be implemented with a certain degree of flexibility that would go a long way in helping the state to achieve its objective of universalization of primary education in rural areas.

### **Conclusion**

After the formation of Zilla Parishad and Mandal Parishads the local bodies have made considerable progress in providing educational facilities among the rural community. Undoubtedly there has been remarkable increase in the total number of educational institutions and enrollment of students under Panchayati Raj institutions. The objective of primary education is to educate rural children with all necessary teaching techniques available. The selected functionaries of rural organization have failed to create the minimum facilities without which a teacher cannot inspire love of learning among rural children whose background is miserable. Moreover the economic conditions of the teacher and the atmosphere prevailing around him are not conducive to bring any radical change in the rural schools.

There is much talk about schools being made more attractive to rural children. Such attraction should be based on awareness of the practical officer and monitoring staff and teachers organizations should strive hard with dynamism to improve the quality of life of the rural masses it is not possible to bring qualitative improvement in the field of primary education. Prof. Anil Sadgopal, Head Department of Education, Delhi University has advocated that nothing will work in this vast country if our geo-cultural plurality not recognized as the basis of decentralized and regulated curriculum development<sup>18</sup>.

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