

**ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: AT A GLANCE****Dr. Saroj Bala**

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**Abstract**

Elementary education makes a significant contribution to national development and occupies a vital position in the system of education. The same is supported and strengthened by The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 which came into effect on April 1, 2010. But, we can observe and experience that there are so many major advances as well as the significant theoretical and experimental problems that have been accumulated in the field. Therefore, the present paper is an attempt to give a glance of the elementary education scenario of the nation like India. Hence, it is found that the expansion of teacher education, institutions and programmes during the past few years characterizes the teacher education scenario of today. Opening of Operation Blackboard, District Primary Education Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Universalization of Elementary Education increased school enrolments followed by increase in employment opportunities for learners and teachers.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Constitution (86<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of 6-14 years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. Article 21-A and the RTE Act came into effect on 1 April 2010. The title of the RTE Act incorporates the words 'free and compulsory'. 'Free education' means that no child, other than a child who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate Government, shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education. 'Compulsory education' casts an obligation on the appropriate Government and local authorities to

provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6-14 years' age group. With this, India has moved forward to a rights based framework that casts a legal obligation on the Central and State Governments to implement this fundamental child right as enshrined in the Article 21A of the Constitution, in accordance with the provisions of the RTE Act **(MHRD, 2015)**.

As far as, elementary education is concerned, it makes a significant contribution to national development, occupies a crucial position in the system of education. It admits mainly the children coming after completing pre-school education, children from educated families, first generation learners and from the neglected and oppressed sections of the society. It is the nursery of citizenship, value inculcation, and development of appropriate behaviour with the improvements in life skills. The impressions acquired during this stage often continue throughout the life **(University of Mumbai, 2013)**.

## **2. ELEMENTARY EDUCATION SCENARIO IN INDIA**

India is the home of over one billion people and accounts for more than 15 per cent of the world's population. Over 40 per cent of its population is aged 15 years and younger. Around 70 per cent of its population lives in more than half a million villages where the majority of children gain access to elementary education. The scale of India's system of elementary education is unimaginable to most education policy makers and planners around the world. Therefore, its diversity across a sub-continent with areas where nearly all children complete secondary schooling to grade 10 and other areas where less than 40 per cent complete grade 5 **(Little, 2010)**.

Four and a half decades ago, India had taken a pledge through our constitution that within a period of ten years from 1950, free and compulsory elementary education would be provided to all children up to 14 years of age. Since 1950, determined efforts had been made towards the achievement of this goal. Over the years, there have been very impressive increases in the numbers and spread of institutions as well as enrollment. Today, India has about 5,74,000 primary schools (Classes I-V) and 1,56,000 upper primary schools (Classes VI-VIII), the number of teachers in them being 1.705 million and 1.082 million, respectively. The enrolment at the primary and upper primary stages is 109 million and 40 million respectively. The Indian elementary education system is thus one of the biggest such systems in the world, providing accessibility within 1 km to over 8,25,000 habitations covering 94 per cent of the country's population. During the past one

decade the enrolment rate has grown close to 100 per cent at the primary stage (**Gopalan, 1998**).

The present educational system of India is an implantation of British rulers. Wood's Dispatch of 1854 laid the foundation of present system of education in India. Before the advent of the British in India, education system was private one. With the introduction of Wood's Dispatch known as Magna Carta of Indian education, the whole scenario changed. The main purpose of it was to prepare Indian Clerks for running local administration. Under it the means of school educations were the vernacular languages while the higher education was granted in English only. British government started giving funds to indigenous schools in need of help and thus slowly some of the schools became government-aided. Contemplating on the new system which was introduced Mahatma Gandhi expressed his anguish in following words, "I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished. The village schools were not good enough for the British administrator, so he came out with his program. Every school must have so much paraphernalia, building, and so forth. Well, there were no such schools at all. There are statistics left by a British administrator which show that, in places where they have carried out a survey, ancient schools have gone by the board, because there was no recognition for these schools, and the schools established after the European pattern were too expensive for the people, and therefore they could not possibly overtake the thing. I defy anybody to fulfill a program of compulsory primary education of these masses inside of a century. This very poor country of mine is ill able to sustain such an expensive method of education. Our state would revive the old village schoolmaster and dot every village with a school both for boys and girls." According to the Constitution of India, elementary education is a fundamental right of children at the age of 6-14 years. The statistics about population in India states that two third of school going age children of India are enrolled in schools but the figures are deceptive as many don't attend schools regularly. At least half of all students from rural area drop out before their completing schooling. The government has rolled out many plans to increase the percentage of elementary education. The plans such as Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), District Primary Education Program (DPEP), Operation Blackboard, Mid Day Meal have been successful to a great extent (**CEON Solutions Pvt Ltd, 2013**).

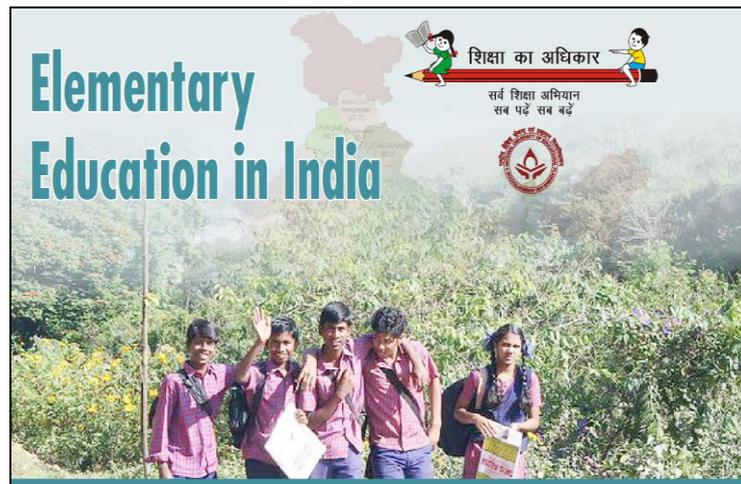
**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:** The main goal of this program is that all children of 6-11 years of age should complete primary education by the year 2007 and all children of 6-14 years of age should complete eight years of schooling by 2010. This plan covers the whole country with special emphasis on girl education and education of Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) children and children with special needs. The SSA centers are mainly opened in those areas which do not have any school or where schools are very far off. Special girl oriented programs include Girl education at elementary level, National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) and Mahila Samakhya Scheme (MSS).

**District Primary Education Program:** This program was launched in 1994 with the objective of universalization of primary education. Its main features are universal access, universal retention and universal achievement. It aims that the primary education should be accessible to each and every child of school going age, once a child is enrolled in school he/ she should be retained there. The final step is achievement of the goal of education. The main components of this program are: construction of classrooms and new schools, opening of non-formal schooling centers, setting up early childhood education centers, appointment of teachers and providing education to disabled children. The program has been successful to the large extent as 1,60,000 schools and 84,000 alternative schools have been opened under this program. And work is going on for the construction of new buildings of 52,758 schools. 4,20,203 disabled students have been successfully enrolled into the schools.

**Operation Blackboard:** It was started in 1987-88. The aim of this program is to improve human and physical resource availability in primary schools of India. According to this program every primary school should have at least two rooms, two teachers and essential teaching aids like blackboard, chalk, duster, etc. **(CEON Solutions Pvt Ltd, 2013).**

### 3. **TEACHER EDUCATION AT PRIMARY LEVEL**

India has now accepted a ten years general school system, divided into three stages such as pre-school education, elementary education and secondary education. There is further a provision for two year diversified senior secondary education with the subject oriented and disciplinary approach. The maturity level and psycho-social make-up of the students and curriculum requirements demand separate teacher education programmes for all the stages of the school education **(University of Mumbai, 2013).**



**Exhibit 1.1: Elementary Education in India (Mehta, 2010-11)**

The Indian government lays emphasis to primary education upto the age of 14 years. In spite of several efforts made by the government to enhance quality, levels of quality remain low. Therefore, the role of the teacher is most important. Teacher can play the role of manager by planning and delivering activities that meet student's needs and developing skills of time management, class-room management and material management. As facilitator the teacher facilitates learning by being creative and organized in planning daily classes and plans appropriate programme for exceptional students who need special help. In the capacity of evaluator, he/she continues to set and correct homework, evaluate students' progress and discuss results with students, parents and other teachers who participate in staff meeting, workshops for continuing professional development. In the role of guide and counselor, the teacher provides guidance for the development acts as a role model and prepares for secondary school. To play the abovesaid roles by a teacher in a best way, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has developed a competency based and commitment oriented teacher education curriculum focusing on quality and efficiency of teacher education. NCTE has identified different competency areas. These competencies are should be developed during pre-service teacher education firstly and then updated and strengthened during re-current in-service teacher orientation as well as continuing and self directed professional enhancement by individual teachers on their own. In view of the abovesaid competencies required of teachers at primary level with special reference to the ten competencies recommended by NCTE, the teacher must know the advanced teaching pedagogies. But, before implementing these techniques he or she must know the role of cognitive styles for creating awareness and understanding of multi-media learning achievements among the students **(University of Mumbai, 2013)**.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Beyond expectations, the expansion of teacher education, institutions and programmes during the past few years characterizes the teacher education scenario of today. Radically increase in school enrolments and the opening of Operation Blackboard, District Primary Education Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Universalization of Elementary Education also increased the demand of teachers who are trained in advanced teaching pedagogies. Therefore, the Government of India should focus on the development of advanced infrastructure having with advanced multimedia learning modules at all educational levels.

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