

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BIHAR: NEW CHALLENGES AHEAD

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ABSTRACT:

Since its inception it became a guiding force in the form of Article 45 for providing basic education for all the children up to the age of fourteen years in our constitution. The entire analysis is based on the District Information System for Education (DISE), 2006-07 data base of its published analytical report, flash statistics and state report cards which is collated and published by the National Educational University of Planning and Administration (NEUPA). Importance of an Educational Management Information System (EMIS) was reiterated when Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched in 2001. central and state governments have been expanding the provision of elementary education through formal and non-formal education to realize the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), Operation Black Board (OBB), Bihar Education Project (BEP), Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project (UPBEP), Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP), Janshala, Mahila Samakhya, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and on-going Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Indicators of development of primary education are-Socio-Economic Profile of Bihar, Educational Development Index, Steps forward towards UEE, Enrolments Based Indicators, Infrastructure Based Indicators. The analysis of the data reveals that in order to universalize elementary education for all in respect of Bihar much more needs to be done in terms of the infrastructure, as it has got a high student classroom ratio of 91. There has been an advancement in teachers' recruitment in Bihar in recent years, bringing their strength to about 4.33 lakh. However, the total requirement of elementary school teachers in Bihar is at least 7.28 lakh, implying a shortfall of about 40.5 percent. The average of 609 districts in 2006-07 indicates a GPI of 0.93 in primary classes and 0.87 in case of upper primary classes.

Key-Words:- Educational Development Index (EDI), Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), District Information System for Education (DISE), Operation Black Board (OBB), Bihar Education Project (BEP), National Educational University of Planning and Administration (NEUPA), Gender Parity Index (GPI).

INTRODUCTION

Indian Constitution since its inception it became a guiding force in the form of Article 45 for providing basic education for all the children up to the age of fourteen years. Even after more than 60 years of independence some states in India are still struggling to achieve Universal Enrolments, retention and quality education. Indian states are still struggling to achieve the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) for all. The entire analysis is based on the District Information System for Education (DISE), 2006-07 data base of its published analytical report, flash statistics and state report cards which is collated

and published by the National Educational University of Planning and Administration (NEUPA). The article has been divided into two parts, the first part deals with the development of DISE in India as a whole and its implications regarding elementary education. It stresses upon Bihar's progress in achieving the goal of UEE. District Information System for Education (DISE) was developed by NEUPA. Importance of an Educational Management Information System (EMIS) was reiterated when Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched in 2001.

Since independence, the central and state governments have been expanding the provision of elementary

education through formal and non-formal education to realize the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). A number of initiatives have been made in order to achieve the UEE. Some of the major interventions to achieve UEE are Non Formal Education (NFE), Operation Black Board (OBB), Bihar Education Project (BEP), Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project (UPBEP), Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP), Janshala, Mahila Samakhya, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and ongoing Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Since the beginning of the human society Bihar was the centre of basic education system in Ashrama to various world famous centres of higher education.

It is the land which once flourished during as early as 5th century; this is where Nalanda, a centre of excellence, had existed; and a scientist of Aryabhata's stature had pursued his mathematical and astronomical interests in this land. In the arena of statecraft, it was the kingdom where the royal messages used to be conveyed to the public through edicts which, according to Jawaharlal Nehru, "speaks to us in a language that we can understand and appreciate". Even after the destruction of Nalanda, the connection of the land with academic activities had indeed continued Abul Fazal-i-Allami, in his monumental work *Ain-i-Akbari*, mentions "Good paper is manufactured here at Rajgir". With this glorious history, would it not make Yudhisthira wonder how this land of profound academic tradition is now reduced to a state where more than one-third of its population is simply devoid of letters? Even more painful is to see that nearly half of the women suffer from that basic infirmity. Among all the Indian states, it is Bihar where the literacy rate is the lowest. The 2011 census has recorded the literacy rate to be only 63.8 percent, compared to 74.0 percent for the entire country. What makes the literacy scenario even worse is the wider gender disparity in literacy rates. While for the entire county, the female literacy rate (65.9 percent) is 16.2 percent less than the male literacy rate (82.1 percent), for Bihar the gap is 19.2 percent (73.4 percent for males and 54.2 percent for females). The only ray of hope in this otherwise depressing scenario is the faster spread of literacy in Bihar during 2001-11 than in India as a whole. The overall literacy rate in Bihar has increased by 17 percentage points during the last decade, compared to 9 percentage points for the entire country. But in spite of this better performance during the last decade, literacy rate is still the lowest in Bihar. If Bihar is able to maintain its present momentum in educational

progress, it will hopefully achieve total literacy in about two decades, simultaneously with the rest of the country. The depressing situation about the state of literacy in Bihar is the accumulated impact of long neglect of education by the government. During the British rule, Bihar was one of the major seats of First War of Independence in 1857 and, consequently, the colonial rule was more oppressive here than in most parts of India. The neglect of education by the colonial administration in Bihar was one part of that oppression. The problem was further compounded because, in their eagerness to avoid anything colonial, the people of Bihar had also avoided formal schooling which was first started by the British administration, albeit on a limited scale. In addition, the entrenchment of the feudal forces through the institution of Permanent Settlement by the colonial administration had also severely deterred the spread of education in Bihar. The feudal lords, interested as they were only in collection of rent, were not interested even in economic development of their respective areas leave alone any social development through spread of literacy. Unfortunately, even after independence, the colonial trend was allowed to continue through a development strategy which, instead of reducing, had indeed enhanced regional economic and social disparity through resource allocations that favoured the already-developed regions, pushing the disadvantaged states like Bihar further behind, both economically and socially. In the context of educational development, one might note that even for the country as a whole, its pace has been very slow. During the first 50 years after independence, the literacy rate in India has increased by only 48.1 percentage points —from 16.7 percent in 1951 to 64.8 percent in 2001, an increase of hardly one percentage point every year. In Bihar, the progress was even slower. This trend probably suggests that education has generally been a neglected field both in Bihar and India as a whole. Among the factors that caused such neglect, it is probably the planners' perspective on education - that is why education is important - that stands out as the most relevant one. Broadly speaking, this perspective characterises education to be a social welfare programme, to be shouldered by the state till economic development reaches a sufficiently high level, enabling people to arrange and pay for their own educational needs. Obviously, within this flawed perspective, the government has been shouldering that responsibility rather reluctantly, and education, as such, received a much less priority than was necessary to transform the sector whose earlier development was dictated by

colonial policies. There seems to have been some change in that perspective in recent years and, consequently, the central and state governments together are paying an enhanced attention to the education sector, particularly promoting elementary education for the children in 6-14 years age-group through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This changed perspective can possibly be attributed to two important dimensions of education. First, education has now been recognised as a great equaliser of opportunities between rich and poor, and between men and women. This is a welfare gain of education which could make substantial contribution towards making growth an inclusive phenomenon. Secondly, it is also now realised that by providing adequate education and health services a developing country can raise its human development to a level where it is able to 'propel' economic growth, not just sustain it once it has been generated by other forces. As a logical extension of this possibility, it is necessary to favour human resource investment 'beyond' what would occur in the natural course of development. Fortunately, apart from SSA, which was started in 2000-01 throughout the country including Bihar, the elementary education system had received another fillip in the form of Midday Meal Scheme (MDMS) which had become universal in 2005. Although these two ambitious programmes had provided substantial additional support to different states for strengthening their elementary education systems, it had hardly made any impact in Bihar for various reasons: particularly lack of political will. However, after the installation of a new government in 2005, some serious efforts to strengthen the elementary education system in Bihar had started in 2006-07. The intention of the new state government was first expressed through the constitution of a Commission on Common Schooling System in August, 2006. The objective of the commission was to prepare a plan of action for implementing a Common Schooling System in the state which will ensure Universalisation of Elementary Education by 2012-13. The commission had submitted its report in June, 2007. Apart from recommending norms and standards for equitable quality education for all children in the state and a system of teacher education, the report had also estimated the financial resources needed for implementing the Common Schooling System. The distribution of schools by types of building shows that 68.96 percent primary schools have pucca (permanent) buildings as compared to 4.68 percent having partially pucca and another 0.78 percent having kuchcha (temporary) buildings. In fact small percentages are

also functioning in a tent (0.04 %). Efforts should be made to provide all schools a pucca school building. The percentage of single-classroom schools during 2006-07 was 8.61 percent. Unfortunately, the state government did not accept the recommendations of the commission, one of the reasons being that its financial resources were not adequate to implement those recommendations in total. But starting from the year 2006-07, the state government had made a number of major interventions in the elementary education system and some encouraging results were reported after about two years by the Bihar Education Project (BEP) which manages the elementary education system in the state. The findings of 2011 census also substantiate those encouraging results, the state recording an increase of 17 percentage points in overall literacy rate and 21 percentage points in female literacy rate. The present momentum in the progress of literacy in Bihar can be maintained only when the elementary education in the state is widened and strengthened further. It was, thus, desirable to undertake a study not only to know the current status of elementary education in Bihar, but to identify its crucial deficiencies as well. In this background, the present study, based on primary data collected from rural areas, is an attempt to:

- (a) prepare an operational profile of primary and upper primary schools in Bihar in terms of their resource base (physical and manpower) as well as reach and quality of their services; (b) identify the organisational, social and infrastructural constraints that are operating on the elementary education system; and
- (c) analyse the role of various stakeholders of the elementary education system in promoting education in the state. The field survey for the study was carried out in five sample districts of Bihar — Bhojpur, Gopalganj, Bhagalpur, Madhubani and Katihar, and the details about the choice of districts and sampling design are presented later.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF BIHAR:

With a population of 103.8 million in 2011, Bihar is the third most populous state in India, next only to Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. If we compare the socio-economic profile of Bihar with two of its neighbouring states - Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal - it clearly emerges that the state is highly disadvantaged in many respect. First, the huge population of Bihar would not have been a problem if some of its other demographic characteristics were to its advantage. But that is not the

case. For example, the density of population here is very high, as it is for Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, since they are all in the fertile Gangetic plain; but whereas West Bengal has already been able to lower its population growth rate in the last two decades, both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are yet to experience any demographic transition. During 2001-11, the decadal growth rates for population in these three states were 25.1 percent (Bihar), 20.1 percent (Uttar Pradesh) and 13.9 percent (West Bengal). In terms of urbanisation, Bihar is again highly disadvantaged; only 10.7 percent of its population is living in urban areas (2001 census). Indeed, the status of urban infrastructure is so poor in Bihar that many of the smaller towns are indeed large villages. Consequently, urbanisation level in Bihar (as indicated by the census figures) is a rather over-estimate. As per 2011 census, Bihar also suffers from a low sex ratio, only 916 Females per 1000 males, compared to 940 for the entire country. However, the child sex ratio in Bihar (933) is much higher than the national figures (914). As regards the social composition of the population, one notes that of the three socially disadvantaged population groups — Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes — the last category is nearly absent in Bihar. The combined share of these three groups is 33.1 percent in Bihar, compared to 39.8 percent in Uttar Pradesh and even higher at 53.7 percent for West Bengal. From these figures one is attempted to conclude that the burden of highly disadvantaged social groups is relatively less in Bihar. But from the data on the occupational distribution of workers, it emerges that nearly half of the workers in Bihar (48.0 percent) are landless agricultural labourers; the corresponding shares for Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal are 24.8 and 25.0 percent, respectively. While in Uttar Pradesh a large portion of workers are cultivators (41.1percent), West Bengal has its relatively larger industrial sector to accommodate its workers (37.6percent). Thus, the share of disadvantaged population in Bihar, taking into account landlessness and religious/caste background both, is very high, certainly higher than in Uttar Pradesh.

Gender Parity Index (GPI) and percentage of girls' enrolment in primary and upper primary classes reveal that there is consistent improvement both in GPI and girls' share in enrolment. The average of 609 districts in 2006-07 indicates a GPI of 0.93 in primary classes and 0.87 in case of upper primary classes. In 2004-05, GPI respectively in primary and upper primary enrolment was 0.91 and 0.83. GPI in primary

enrolment indicates that the index is above 0.90 in 28 states. The overall gender parity index for India in the year 2006-07 is 0.93. In Bihar for the year 2006-07 the gender parity index is 0.82 . The improvement in girls' enrolment is also reflected in girls share to total enrolment. In primary classes, the share of girls' enrolment in 2006-07 was 48.6 percent compared to 45 percent in the previous year. Girls share in total enrolment at upper primary level is 40.3 percent; it was 35 percent in 2005-06. At the primary level, the share of SC and ST enrolment with respect to total enrolment works out to 17. 6 and 13.1 percent respectively. OBC enrolment in the primary and upper primary classes is 59.4 and 58.4 percent respectively.

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT INDEX:

Based on the DISE data, an effort has been made to compute Educational Development Index (EDI) separately for primary and upper primary levels of education as also the composite index for the entire elementary education. The EDIs can play a significant role in assessing progress towards UEE as well as in deciding the future course of investment on elementary education. About 23 indicators were used which were further re-grouped into four sub-groups, namely access, infrastructure, teachers, and outcome indicators. The major findings of EDI showed that the Bihar ranked at 35 in case of composite primary and upper primary levels of education with an EDI as low as 0.321 which is much lower than the same compared to the top ranked states. Bihar had lower EDI values in 2006-07 than in 2005-06 which is by and large (barring upper primary) true for both primary and composite primary and upper primary level.

Steps forward towards UEE:

Even though the educational scenario has shown considerable changes, but there are significant disparities in attaining UEE among states in India. An attempt has been made to compare the educational development in two Indian states, i.e. Bihar and Kerala. Bihar is situated in the northern part of India, with an average literacy of 47%, out of which male literacy is 59.7% and female literacy rate is 33.1%. Till date the state has not achieved the goal of UEE and considered one of the most educationally backward states in India. The state is less industrialized and less urbanized. Due to one or other reason educational scenario has not improved significantly in the state. On the other hand Kerala has shown remarkable improvement in

education despite all the barriers. The state possesses a literacy rate of 90%, out of which male literacy rate is 94% and female literacy rate is 87%.

Enrolments Based Indicators:

There is significant progress in enrolment in the elementary schools mainly because of the different innovative strategies adopted under SSA. The special enrolment drives in the beginning of each academic year attracts children to register at schools. The incentives like free text book, uniform, stationeries and free mid-day meal draws more new entrants to the school education system. If we compare the repetition rate and drop-out rate of the states of Kerala and Bihar, it shows a significant difference.

Similarly if we compare the drop-out rate of students at elementary grades the difference is noteworthy. At class one 3.8 % of the students are leaving the school system in Bihar in contrast to absolute '0' students from Kerala. This clearly signifies the lack of Bihar education system to retain its all children to continue to the next grade. The other reasons might be the enrolment duplication or fake enrolment figures. A striking difference is noticed again at the completion of class V which is a transition phase from primary to upper primary education in Bihar. It shows 31% of the students leave the school just after completing the primary level of education. The reason behind may be due to the problem of getting an access to upper primary school. The aggregate primary level drop out of both the states reveals that around 9.3% students leave the education system in Bihar in contrast to 2% students in Kerala.

INFRASTRUCTURE BASED INDICATORS:

Infrastructural resources are pre-requisites to provide an opportunity to quality learning. As per the recommendations of National Policy on Education, 1986, the Operation Black Board scheme was launched in many parts of the country. Though significant changes have been observed in the school premises, but even then there are several hindrances in providing meaningful quality teaching learning at school level. The minimum basic facilities are necessary requirements for enhancing the learning environment in a school. There is significant difference in terms of the basic facilities in both the states as well.

The above analysis reveals that there are on an average six class rooms in a primary school and ten

classrooms per upper primary school in Kerala in contrast to average two class rooms in primary and four classrooms per upper primary school in Bihar. It shows Bihar still struggles to provide a good number of classrooms for each grade. Bihar has a depressing figure of 2800 schools at primary schools and 15 upper primary schools without a classroom. Similarly 11% primary schools are single class room schools in Bihar, in contrast to 0.8% schools in Kerala. Again 0.5% of primary schools are single teacher school in Kerala whereas 6.8% schools in Bihar are managed by single teacher for five primary grades. Along with the other official administrative work quality education to the enrolled children must be distant dream for them. It directly focuses on the problem of inadequacy of teachers in primary schools of Bihar in comparison to primary schools of Kerala. The above analysis reveals that there are on an average six class rooms in a primary school and ten classrooms per upper primary school in Kerala in contrast to average two class rooms in primary and four classrooms per upper primary school in Bihar. It shows Bihar still struggles to provide a good number of classrooms for each grade. Bihar has a depressing figure of 2800 schools at primary schools and 15 upper primary schools without a classroom. Similarly 11% primary schools are single class room schools in Bihar, in contrast to 0.8% schools in Kerala. Again 0.5% of primary schools are single teacher school in Kerala whereas 6.8% schools in Bihar are managed by single teacher for five primary grades. Along with the other official administrative work quality education to the enrolled children must be distant dream for them. It directly focuses on the problem of inadequacy of teachers in primary schools of Bihar in comparison to primary schools of Kerala.

DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION:

- A. The availability of schools has now been doubled — number of schools per one lakh population has increased from 60.2 in 2005-06 to 107.3 in 2008-09.
- B. The overall enrolment ratio in elementary education is found to be extremely high — 98.1 percent for all children (6-14 years). Nearly 95 percent of the students are enrolled in government schools, the backbone of elementary schooling system in the state.
- C. There has been an advancement in teachers' recruitment in Bihar in recent years, bringing their strength to about 4.33 lakh. However, the total requirement of elementary school

teachers in Bihar is at least 7.28 lakh, implying a shortfall of about 40.5 percent.

- D. Average attendance in a day is 61.6 percent of enrolment (as per the school level data) and 85.0 percent (as per the household survey). Based on these estimates, it appears that the average attendance rate is about 70-75 percent. It is an improvement over the past, but this needs to be improved further.

CONCLUSIONS:

The analysis of the data reveals that in order to universalize elementary education for all in respect of Bihar much more needs to be done in terms of the infrastructure, as it has got a high student classroom ratio of 91 (against the all India figure of 36). More than

17% of schools have got a single teacher teaching for more than 100 pupils. Further much more needs to be done for providing technology-enhanced-learning opportunities to the children in Bihar as only about 3% schools have computer facilities. The State also needs to make an initiative in providing electricity to all the schools as the figures of schools with electricity connections are quite dismal. The provisions as well as utilization of elementary education facilities across the country have been increasing after interventions made under SSA. Much more needs to be done in the State of Bihar in terms of improving infrastructure, investing in more teachers and improving their quality. The underlying reasons for lagging behind in educational achievement, gender gaps in terms of enrolments and achievement need to be identified. For this suitable measures need to be taken up at grassroots level.

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