

Education for All : Myth or Reality ? An Indian Perspective

Abstract

Education is one of the major indicators or rather; the barometer of a country's growth and prosperity-It reflects a nation's progress towards overall economic development. With the opening up of the economy by the liberalization policy of 1991, there have been vast advancements in the field of Education-In a way India has become one of the meeting ground of students from all over the world as well as giants from the academia. The international interface has aided the establishment of quality institutes like the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Management. Yet, the increase in population and the growing poverty levels have posed a real threat in spreading education amongst the masses. Moreover, the great gender divide and the social mindset have added to the troubles faced by educationists. Various measures have been implemented, but, this service sector is not without its profound gaps. The paper seeks to seep into the pores of these gaps and attempts to delve into the different nuances of our education system.

Sumana Shome

Lecturer
George College
Kolkata

Amrita Basu

Student
George College
Kolkata

Introduction

India is a fast growing developing nation. The Indian soil yields people with high talent and potentials. But the need of the hour is to nurture them properly. Education is the basic requirement of all individuals - It aids in self discovery by making a person aware of his or her latent capabilities, talents, creativity and competency. Moreover it enhances ones knowledge skill, analytical ability and equips him with spiritual and moral knowledge which makes the man a perfect human being.

When a country makes enough endeavor to cultivate all these virtues in their countrymen it is only then that the people get motivated to serve for the better interest of their country. For these a country needs to ensure abundant infrastructural facilities – good quality schools, colleges, universities in ample quantity and a uniform education system.

India only has a handful of good and prestigious institutions which imparts quality education, so only a few sections of the society can afford or actually get access to all such institutions. Indian students possess a quite progressive mind but due to the want of adequate facilities, they have to step in the soils of countries like - the USA, the UK, Australia, etc. Moreover the current education system prevailing



Sruti Management Review

Vol.- IV, Issue-I, Jan-2011
pp. 75 - 80
ISSN 0974 - 4274

in the nation suffers from immense drawbacks which resists the upcoming exploration of new talents.

The major drawback is that all states in India do not receive equal quality of education. The sector of education in some places finds greater impetus whereas in some other places it is the most neglected area. Some of the cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, etc have become a migration zone for the students from the eastern and north eastern states. Moreover though some attention is given towards the urban areas but the education in rural areas has actually gained very little significance through ages. Lakhs and crores of money are granted every year in the budget but very little of it actually reaches to the spot. This inequality in the education quality gives rise to inequality in income distribution. Moreover, the wide disparity in the marks statistics reflects the above notion. If education is really meant for all, on an equal basis, then there would not have existed the vast disparity in income levels as well as personal individual growth. The procedure of admissions also raises eyebrows – Till date the state-of-the-art schools and colleges have resorted to huge amounts of donations for the sake of admissions. However, recently, the Supreme Court has ruled this out and is now being put under strict surveillance. It can be understood that the education system in India is symptomatic of our overall demography as well as the socio-cultural and socio-economic scenario of our nation.

Unhealthy Strides

With education being the yardstick for overall development of a nation as well as a human being's well being, it has been one of the primary concerns of our government. The Indian Constitution states that :-

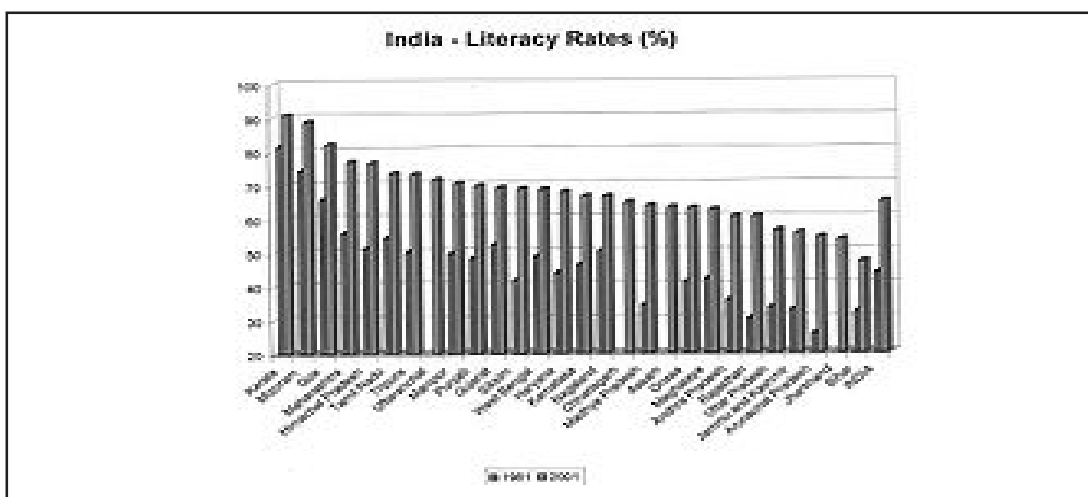
“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine”. (1)

Since independence, there have been a lot of efforts made towards the field of education – It has been a major task to universalize elementary education in every state, in equal manner. India is a land of people from different cultural backgrounds and myriad tastes. Catering to each section of people at a personalized level, so to say, becomes all the more difficult. Moreover, owing to the increasing population, the divide between the urban and the rural has only increased. The educational exchange between the different countries, though, has been a boon for India – The legacy of the British Raj has aided in the growing urban taste in the western education system. As this great divide between the rural and the urban widens, the levels of education meted out also has its lacunae. It has been a matter of pride for India to have the state-of-the-art institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Management. Yet, the root of basic elementary education remains in a grey area at the very grass root level.

In its initiative to reach out to the mass the government came out with the well known programme ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’ (SSA), the frontrunner of which was our ‘then’ Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Bajpai. The major objective of the sarva shiksha abhiyan has been to universalize the cause for elementary education. The ‘Back To School’ advertisements were designed to promote the noble cause of sarva shiksha, which meant, equal education for all, for both the boys and the girls, thereby bridging the gap between genders. To quote Mahatma Gandhi :-

“Real education has to draw out the best from the boys and girls to be educated. This can never be done by packing ill-assorted and unwanted information into the heads of the students.” (2).

Owing to our conventional and orthodox mindset, the gender gap in India, is now, the most disturbing issue. The very idea that boys are given birth to earn and girls are given birth to light the hearth has induced a sense of disparity between both the sexes. Two-thirds of the women of our country are still illiterate, even after sixty years of independence. One of the major causes of failure of the sarva shiksha mission is that even now the girl child is married off at a much tender age – The girl child in northern and northern eastern Indian states are still now neglected. Needless to say, that with this inequality, we are still now in the nascent developing stage. The only district which reached 100% literacy level has been Ernakulam It will be alarming to know that Kerala has the highest female literacy rate of 85%, leaving behind Rajasthan with a meager percentage of 20%. The overall statistics, as per the census report of 2001, in educating the masses also reveals that Kerala has the highest literacy rate of 90.86 % with Bihar lagging far behind with only 47%. With a large section of our Indian population being agrarian, the need for education in the rural parts has still not been recognized at its fullest. The overall drop-out rates have also been on a high.



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy_in_India

The going is tough – yet, mass awareness campaigns have been organized to promote the cause for education for all – women, minorities, backward classes, et al. The character of ‘Meena’ was designed to personalize the female child and the need for her education – ‘Meena’ symbolized the rural girl child. Television serials like *Kaashi* (NDTV Imagine) also hit the nail by portraying the girl child, the social mindset of the people and the need for her education. Again, with a view to reinforce the rural people and encourage them to send their children to school, the Mid Day Meal Scheme has been a welcome move. It is a known fact that ideas do not ever click with an empty stomach. The people would rather work to earn for a living rather than schooling and learning. Parents send their children to work to earn for a day’s meal – Sensing this serious issue, under the Chief Ministership of K. Kamaraj, the mid day meal was started in Cheranmahadevi in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. Even though the programme has been a huge hit in Tamil Nadu, there were tremendous drawbacks that lay beneath. The outcome of the programme reflected one of the most serious issues facing our country, the glaring truth of poverty. With poverty levels at its peak, the mid day meals arranged for the students became the

only reason to go to school other than learning. The free of cost meals became the rescue of the starved. Moreover, the quality of the cooked food came under question after forty students in Vishakapatnam and two hundred students in parts of Andhra Pradesh fell ill after consuming the mid day meal served in schools. It became the food for thought regarding the major quality aspect. Food hoarding scams also became prominent within this programme. In 2005 the Delhi police had red handedly caught about eight truckloads of rice, meant for the mid day meal scheme, being carried from the Food Corporation of India, in the Bulandshahar district of Uttar Pradesh, which were then stolen and hoarded. Again, residents of Pembong village claimed that the students of their district did not receive any mid day meal since the last eighteen months. The lacunae don't stop here. The Constitution of India promises education for children aged from five to fourteen and removal of child labour from the country – yet, due to poverty and mal nutrition, children have been forced to earn a living for their families. The question still remains as to who is answerable for the irreconcilable gaps in serving our country?

A Vision to Beachieved

As pointed out by our honorable Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Eleventh Five Year Plan is the 'Education Plan'. In its endeavour to make its place in the global arena, India must seek to educate its masses first. The Planning Commission has a long vision to achieve. The task promises India of 30 new universities, 8 Indian Institutes of Technology and 7 Indian Institutes of Management, with the ultimate learning experience infrastructures. But, the truth remains that even in 2009 the literacy growth rate had been 79.9% - Which still makes India the country have the largest illiterate population. It has been pointed out that about one third of the country's population is still in the grey. It should be remembered that the urban picture of India is not its true and real picture.

The ultimate learning experience can be enhanced by the ultimate service excellence. Both the rural and the urban institutions must have amicable amenities to provide the expected learning experience. The first step, in this case would be to train the teachers accordingly so as to personalize the experiences at both the levels. Trainer's module and motivational techniques for the would-be teachers could serve as an icing on the cake to lower absenteeism of teachers, which is quite prevalent in our country. Care should be taken so as to make innovations in the overall teaching methodology. At the plus three level, colleges must be so equipped so as to enhance learning through case studies, projection techniques, role-playing and other application oriented modules. Students must get hands on experience about the practicability of the theoretical processes. Vocational training can be enhanced through the medium of pilot projects. The urban-rural divide is hard to reconcile. Hence, the teaching methodology at both the levels requires being different for different sections. The most important factor to be kept in mind while formulating policies would be to tackle the problem of brain drain. Due to enormous opportunities overseas, brilliant and intelligent Indian students seek the curriculum of the West with other vibrant opportunities. Therefore, it requires to be pointed out that even our course curriculum could be made more practical oriented rather than theoretical oriented. Moreover the investments made for the cause of education are to be honestly meted out.

Now coming to the most crucial aspect, at the very first instance, it requires to be mentioned that the mindset of the people is very difficult or rather next to impossible to change. The critical gender norms and social perception have had a negative effect on the penetration of education throughout the masses. The society of India is stratified – Not in just one layer but in umpteen layers. The divide between the mainstream and the marginal is irreconcilable. The levels of

minorities, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes and others pose a greater threat to the universalisation of education because the needs of the different communities tend to be all the more different. What if there was no such division amongst communities, the existence of the two bipolar opposites, that of the mainstream and the marginal – Perhaps, only then, there would be equanimity in society giving rise to equanimity of opportunity. Even though the number of female literacy has increased over the years, it is still far below as compared to that of the males. The division between the male and the female child, with respect to providing education, has been basically due to the alarming poverty levels. The very first step of our government (both at the Central and the State levels) must be to eradicate poverty, which is the root cause for the overall degradation – It is poverty in India that neutralizes every development that is made. It is only through literacy and a hard core education system with which the government can fight more critical issues of terrorism, religious communalism, underdevelopment and other social evils.

The overwhelming perceptual gender biases would perhaps never change – In such situations the noble ventures crafted out by the government should be carried out efficiently, so as to reflect the credibility and the trustworthiness of such programmes. The loopholes in the mid day meal scheme could well be tackled by honest implementation – Proper surveillance and monitoring requires to be maintained at every suspected areas. Cleanliness, being one of the issues, is of major concern. In order to realize the dream of ‘education for all’ we require quality assurance and committed people at every level. Therefore, management of the human resource involved in such critical areas is of crucial importance. Teaching incentives, employee incentives on checking malpractices can go a long way in supporting this noble cause. It would perhaps be more appropriate to implement the PDCA cycle (Deming’s Wheel) at every point - The Plan-Do-Check-Act would inevitably put a check on the gaps of the service providers. At every ‘Check’, the gaps in the processes could be recognized and then ‘Act’(ed) upon again. It would require to put an eye on the *Chance Causes* – Those causes that cannot be identified and hence cannot be removed; and the *Assignable Causes* – Those causes which can be identified and therefore can very well be rectified. For instance, man-made malpractices such as stealing and hoarding food grains, which are meant to be utilized for the purpose of mid day meal, can inevitably be caught and taken to task and a new process followed. It is to be borne in mind that when the gap between the standard set and the actual met becomes large, then the zone of tolerance in an individual widens and this exudes the notion of a negative experience.

Not only government initiatives and the employees who are involved in promoting such a cause, but the students must also be involved in nurturing good habits and try to retain themselves even during tough competition. They must imbibe intrapreneurial qualities within them to become more organized and goal oriented. In fact, even we as citizens of our country must take on the initiative to encourage the masses – One of the noble steps towards involving every individual for the cause has been the ‘Teach India’ initiative by the Times of India – The motto of the campaign is ‘Each One Teach One’, with the crux being on the educated individuals to take a step forward and teach. This could, in a way, at a macro level, become the national culture which would set us apart from other developing nations of the world. Every learning institution is an organization in itself – Hence, at the micro level, this could well become the organizational culture which would eventually set it apart from all other organizations.

References

- Bhat K S (2007), *Quality Management*, Himalaya Publishing House, Mumbai.
- Zeithaml V A, Bitner M J and Gremler D D (2006), *Services marketing: Integrating customer focus across the firm*, 4th Edition, McGraw-Hill Irwin, Sydney.
- Das Gupta A R and Das Gupta K.S (2003), *Education Scenario In India*, http://www.ias.ac.in/meetings/annmeet/69am_talks/ksdgupta/img11.html.
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mid-day_Meal_Scheme.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarva_Shiksha_Abhiyan.
- Express News Service (2003), "Mid-day Meal: Food Poisoning Minor Problems for Andhra CM", *Indian Express*, <http://www.indianexpress.com/oldStory>.
- Government of India, Department of School Education and Literacy, http://www.education.nic.in/ssa/ssa_1.asp.
- Ministry Of Human Resource Development Department Of School Education And Literacy, <http://www.educationforallinindia.com/11thfiveyearplanchapteronelementaryeducation.pdf>.