

## Challenges in Universalisation of Elementary Education in India: An Analysis of SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan)

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### ABSTRACT

*Education has an inherent value for the development of the society and it helps in the realisation of a better social order. Higher literacy and good quality elementary education enables an individual to make better use of available economic and other opportunities. Therefore, getting good quality education is the basic right of every child born in the country as its citizen. To fulfil this requirement several steps have been taken in India since its independence. Most importantly, such provision provides an opportunity to access equitable, quality based universal elementary education on principles of equity and non-discrimination for all children. In this series the affirmative justiciable legal framework that entitles all children between the age of 06 to 14 years with free and compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education across country i.e., the RTE (Right to Education) Act, 2009 and introduction of SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) programme in 2001-02 are considered as landmark steps in this direction. Further, the initiative has led to significant spatial and numerical growth of elementary schools in the country. However, it is also important to understand that to what extent these initiatives by the government for the cause of Universalization of Elementary Education with special reference to SSA, has been able to make a dent in the core of the problem. This paper has tried to develop an understanding of the concept of programme on Universalization of Elementary Education and analyse the challenges faced by SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) with the help of information and data available through the secondary sources and review of previous researches. Finally, the paper provides some workable suggestions and recommendations for the better performance of the programme.*

**Key words:** Sarva shiksha abhiyan (SSA); Right to education; Universalization of education; Elementary education.

**E**ducation is a critical indicator to assess the development of a country. It plays a remarkable role in the overall upliftment of the life of its citizens. Elementary education is core that defines and determines the quality of education at higher levels and further the worth of its products. Better elementary education lays foundation for future innovations, scientific discoveries, research, entrepreneurship and at a large, development of a knowledgeable society. This helps in boosting not only the growth but also prosperity of individuals and the nation. Under such circumstances “Universalization of Education” can help in increasing the coverage. Greater coverage of elementary education keeping its quality intact is the crux and this provides answers to

multiple problems that the country is facing today such as poverty, over population, unemployment, hunger, gross morbidity and mortality rates, etc.

**Sarva shiksha abhiyan:** To meet the objective of providing elementary education to each and every child between 06 to 14 years in the country the government of India launched its massive flagship programme entitled “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)” in the mission mode in year 2001-2002 in partnership with the State governments and Local Self Governments (Panchayati Raj Institutions).<sup>7</sup> Though providing free and compulsory elementary education and literacy was committed in the basic draft of our constitution but it was off late through its 86<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment of 2002 that led to

inclusion of a new Article 21-A in part III of Constitution of India, stating that the government of India could complete the promise of making free and compulsory elementary education for all the children in the age group of 06 to 14 years. The programme is aimed at attaining “Universal Elementary Education (UEE)” covering the entire country with a legal mandate of Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act, 2009) enacted as fundamental right on April 2010. It advocates access and retention of education as a birth right of every child of the country.<sup>7,8,10</sup>

SSA, thus has now become the primary Vehicle to deliver the Right to Education.

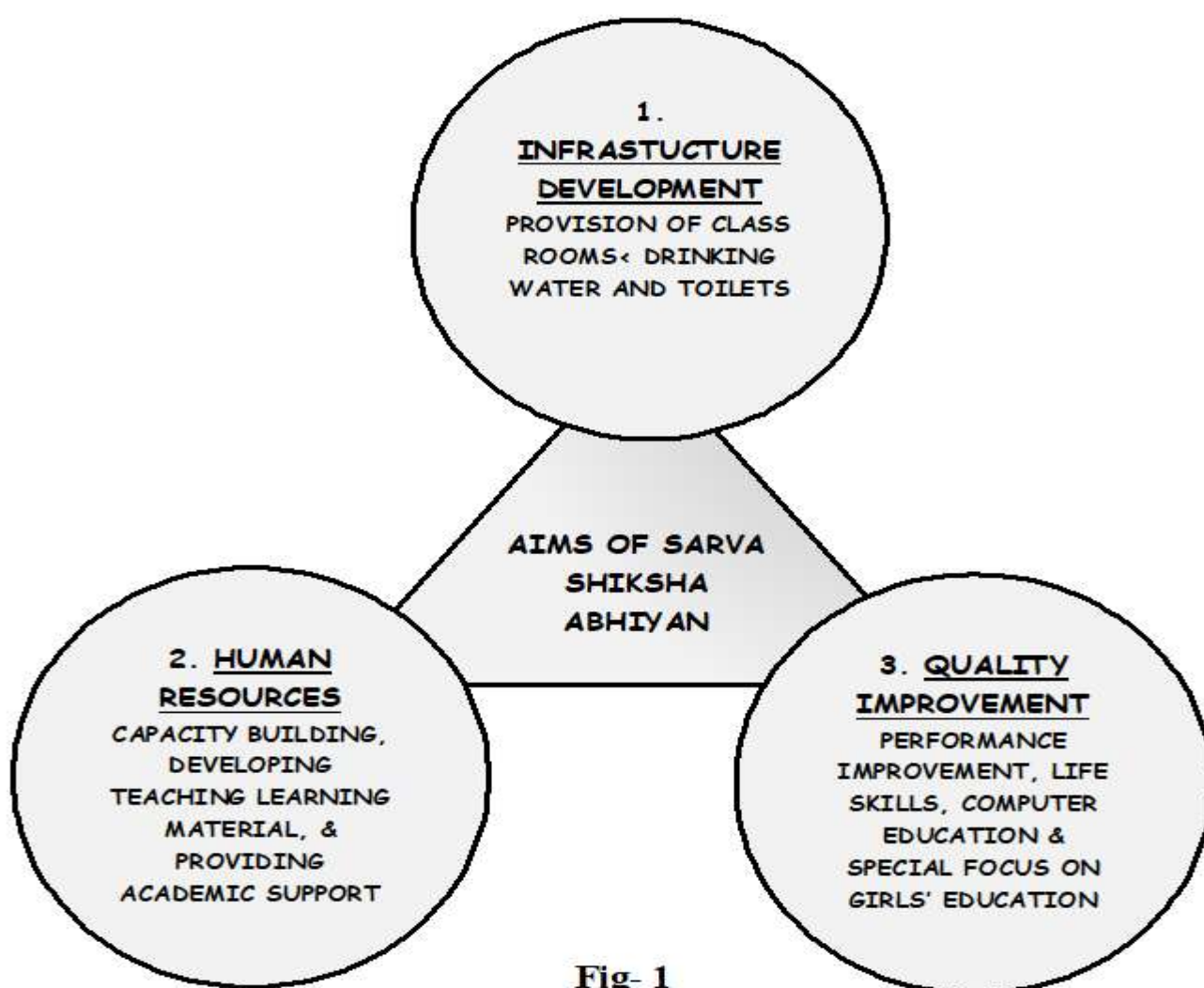
Objectives of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*

The objectives set in the initial programme document

were-

- All children to be in schools, Education Guarantee Scheme Centres, alternate schools, back- to-schools camps by 2003;
- All children to complete five years of primary schooling by 2007;
- All children to complete eight years of schooling by 2010;
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life:
- Bridge all gender and social disparities at the primary stage by 2007 and at the upper primary level by 2010;
- Universal retention by 2010.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Aims of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**



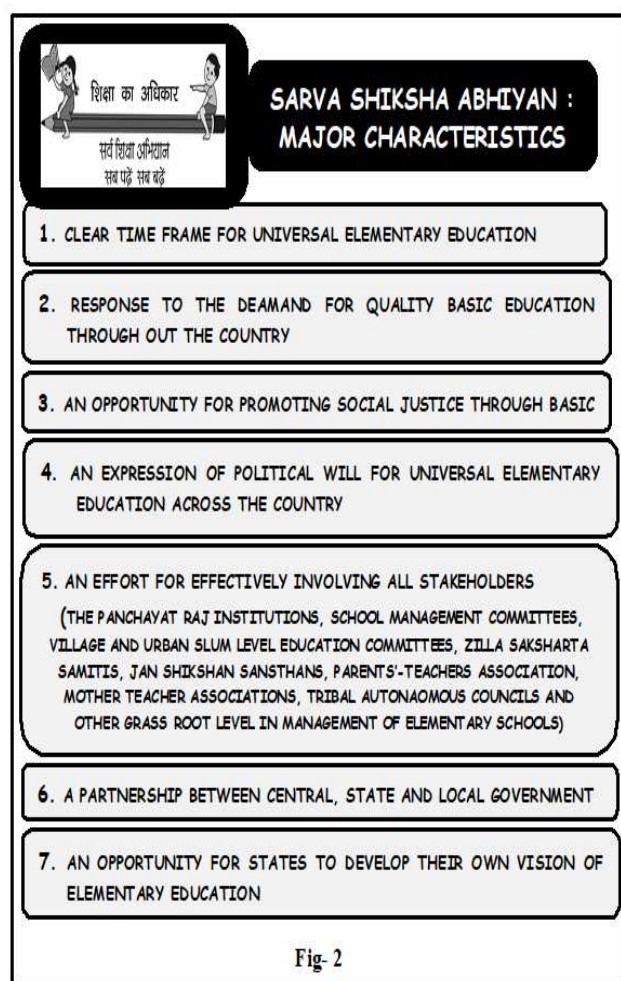
**Fig- 1**

**Source:** Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan -A programme for Universal Elementary Education, April, 2004<sup>10</sup>

*Need of the study* : Government of India, since then, has spent crores of rupees and resources for making the programme a success. The Budget brief based on Government data presented by Avni Kapur and Chowdhury (2012) found variations in the performance in different states and not so satisfactory performance in many States of the country”.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, it was felt necessary to identify major gaps and constraints that remained unaddressed or under addressed under this ambitious programme. The study is structured around following objectives-

1. To understand the concept and programme on Universalization of Elementary Education i.e., SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan).
2. To identify the challenges faced in the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
3. To provide suggestions and recommendations for the better performance of the SSA programme.



Major characteristics of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

## METHODOLOGY

This paper tries to analyse the challenges faced by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan with the help of information and data available through the secondary sources, review of previous researches. At the end an effort has been made to provide certain constructive solutions for getting better results under the programme in near future.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Educational development cannot be seen as a single object. It incorporates several elements and their corresponding indicators. Raju, K. B. M. and A. Singh, (2010) argued that, educational development cannot be measured with a single indicator as it is a multidimensional indicator and highlights the need for a composite index combining development in different dimensions”.<sup>15</sup>

*The real status and Gaps* : Problems found in various study on the implementation and achievement status of the programme-

Banerjee (2007) found “Local conditions that included teaching-learning environment in the classroom and allocation and use of resources as key factors need immediate addressal. He felt that these two factors need to be fixed for the fulfilment of universalization of elementary education”.<sup>3</sup>

A wide gap was identified between existing services and need of the teachers and students affecting the quality of education in a study by Tejaswini Adhikari, (2001). The researcher pointed “Inadequate infrastructure of schools including number of classrooms, availability of tables and chairs for teachers as major lacuna”.<sup>2</sup>

Manjula Raman, (2004) gave stress on the, “Greater involvement of teachers in decision making, setting accountability of teachers for results and providing more flexibility to the teachers for organising teaching learning in the school as need of the hour”.<sup>16</sup>

“A study by Indian Institute of Education, Pune, (2006) on the continuously troubling problem of dropouts not only in India but also in other developing countries pointed many valid questions and gave very constructive suggestions. Provision of local person as teacher for the school, incentives to encourage women to become teacher as well as bridging cultural gap between teachers and parents by increased participation of parents in school management were few of them”.<sup>11</sup>

A study on EGS (Education Guarantee Scheme) Centres revealed, poor state of these centres which were run in the morning 6:00 am to 9:00 am keeping the need of the working children in mind. However, most EGS centres lacked basic facilities like toilets, drinking water, sufficient sitting space, blackboards, etc. Children were not provided any learning material and enrolment was found low. Majority teachers were female but not trained though some of them were graduate (S. Lyngdoh, N. Paritan, W. Nikhla and B. Dkhar, 2006).<sup>15</sup>

T. Chakraborty and R. Khanna (2008) in their study listed “Inadequate use of facilities provided, migratory groups, disparity between male and female literacy as few of many reasons for the children dropout from elementary school and teachers’ absenteeism in rural and interior areas”.<sup>5</sup>

In his study done in Sahebganj district of Jharkhand N. Roy (2009) advocated that, “Adequate infrastructure and carrying out evaluation of education system is a pre-requisite for ensuring quality education to all the children”.<sup>20</sup>

Late release of funds, in adequate monitoring and lack of district level convergence of SSA with other allied scheme were identified as main reasons for poor and slow progress of civil works affecting the delivery of services (Prashant Kumar Acharya, Manoranjan Behra, 2004).<sup>1</sup>

V.S. Rao (2009) recommended that providing mid-day meal on daily basis and making drinking water available in the school premises, efficient use of teaching-learning material by the teacher and better infrastructure in the school may act as positive factors”.<sup>18</sup>

Mehta, Arun C., in his study (2010) suggested effective monitoring and efficient information system as two essential ingredients for the success of any educational programme<sup>14</sup>

Besides above factors related to the programme components, execution and management along with provision of basic amenities, several other factors such as poverty, gender gap, language etc., were also found to be crucial-

A study by Sujata Reddy in a study report for Azeem Premji Foundation (2004) observed that, “Poverty hinders enrolment and continuation of education in rural India” and concluded that, “Economic factors play an important role”.<sup>19</sup>

Language also plays an important role in rendering teaching-learning to the students. In a study carried out

in Assam found that Shiksha Mitras used local language i.e., Assamese in the centres as medium of instruction making language as a barrier in learning” (Sand Changkakati and A. Singha, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

*The other side of the coin* : It is not that nothing has been done and no achievement has been made. Several studies give a very encouraging picture of the impact the programme has made. They revealed another side of the story-

Some of the areas in the country did pretty well as shown in the findings of the study by Sand Changkakati and A. Singha (2009) conducted in Assam. “Not much difference between enrolment of girls and boys in most of the centres was seen rather the achievement of girls was found higher than the boys in some of the centres narrowing gender gap”.<sup>6</sup>

Another aspect focussed in the study was seeking community participation for making teaching-learning process effective. Sand Changkakati and A. Singha, (2009) stated that, “In few centres community took interest in generating resources from other sources to construct the school building”. This shows active involvement of the community and suggests that it could be replicated in many other centres in different parts of the country”.<sup>6</sup>

“It was seen that overtime involvement in supply of school, school infrastructure and facilities have been observed in India and near universal enrolment at elementary levels has also been achieved in many parts of India” Govinda and Bandopadhyaya (2008).<sup>8</sup>

Jain, S. and M. Mittal, (2011) determined that “Reduction in dropout rates and out of school children in the age group of 6 -14 years of age, and drastic increase in enrolment ratio at the elementary level shows considerable success of the programme”.<sup>12</sup>

“It is reported in several studies that despite being projected as a huge success of the flagship Programme of universalisation of primary education, the SSA leaves much to be done at ground level.

#### *Major Challenges :*

- Quality is the prime concern and the biggest challenge for SSA.
- Lack of any motivation to increase the commitment level of teachers.
- Economic constraints were observed as a major obstruction coming in the way for achieving objectives of the programme.
- Unfavourable local conditions such as teaching-

learning environment in the classroom and allocation and use of resources were found as a big challenge.

- Insensitive and casual attitude of administration and authorities towards providing basic amenities to the staff that are decent and hygienic.
- Lack of other infrastructural and smooth transportation facilities especially in remote area.
- Engaging teachers meant for teaching into other non-teaching activities was found one of the major issues. Involving teachers in other duties like election duty, assigning works like various government campaigns (like pulse polio drive) and other such activities (e.g., census survey) is a big obstacle in performing their main duty as a teacher. It not only hampers regular class and teaching- learning process but also demean their respect as a teacher in the society and affects their self-esteem.
- Capacity building at all levels is essential for making the programme successful, however, quality of training of the teaching staff was found a big issue.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation were observed as weak.
- Efficient information system was also found inadequate.
- Language of instruction could be one of the major barriers, especially in school where multi lingual students are available.

*Suggestions :* Now the question arises that what can be done under such situation to increase the penetration, reach and access as well as improve retention and decrease drop out levels.

- a. Since teachers are the backbone of any education system and a good and committed teacher can bring remarkable change in the system thus, first and foremost focus should be given on their need. If teacher is comfortable and happy at the work place, she will be willing to stay happily and willingly at the school and this will certainly have a positive impact on the retention of the students in the school.
- Good quality training of teachers must include some content focussing on enhancing teacher's moral responsibility and commitment levels to deliver the services. This should mandatorily have elements of skill and content up-gradation. Such trainings should be made a regular feature.
- Favourable local conditions (such as teaching-learning environment in the classroom and allocation and use of resources) need to be strengthened.

- Another important gap that needs to be filled is making infrastructure facilities and basic amenities favourable. These has to be made attractive, safe, and student friendly with proper basic amenities for the students to increase retention. This will certainly help in decreasing the girls' dropout rates.
- Insensitive and casual attitude of administration and authorities towards providing basic amenities that are decent and hygienic for the staff needs to be addressed immediately. This is especially crucial for the lady teachers such as clean and hygienic toilets with running water and working flush system, safe disposal of sanitary napkins and potable drinking water that are few utmost essential facilities. Shear negligence towards providing these facilities for maintaining the dignity as well as preventing morbidity of all levels these needs to be addressed urgently by the higher authorities. Frequent visits to the schools and keeping a close check on the conditions of these facilities along with stringent action in case of finding them inadequate or dilapidated would certainly improve the situation.
- Strictly there should be no engagement of teachers teaching in elementary education in any other non-teaching activities as it was found as one of the major impediments.

Thus, taking care of factors such as providing basic amenities, not engaging teachers in any activity other than teaching and related works along with appointment of local teachers are some of the suggestions that are expected to improve the punctuality and reduce the problem of absenteeism of teachers, especially female teachers.

- b. Effective monitoring and evaluation to be made a continuous but non- hindering exercise.
- c. Information system needs to be strengthened.
- d. Efforts to be made to remove all possible economic constraints.
- e. Proper and judicious utilization of available funds and other resources is imperative.
- f. Community support in some aspects of infrastructure building and making them a part of some of the activities and management related decisions of the school may help in improving the student turnout and attendance rate.
- g. Special efforts are required to avoid language to become a barrier in teaching- learning process.

## CONCLUSION

Today access and enrolment at the primary stage of

education has reached very close to universal levels. The number of out of school children has reduced significantly. The gender gap in elementary education has narrowed and the percentage of enrolled children belonging to scheduled caste and tribes has increased successively. Although progress in recent years has been seen in context of access to elementary education but still a lot remains to

be done on the front of access of elementary education in India (Beteille, 2002)<sup>4</sup>. But still there is a apparent gap between what government statistics claims and what the reports of other non- government agencies says. We are still very far from reaching the real goal of 100 percent coverage, ensuring the quality and producing really educated not merely literate citizens for the country.

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