

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Bihar and the role of Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC)

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Introduction

India is one of the largest democratic country in the world. For the development of the every nation the quality basic education is sin qua non. So the human being without education becomes an animal. Education is a constant process of development and innate powers of man which are natural, harmonious and progressive. In the 21st century a nation's ability to convert knowledge into wealth and social good through the process of innovation is going to determine its future. The future of the nation is in the hands of young generation. That's why the quality and overall education at primary level is very essential. It is the foundation of the education and more focus on primary education is needed. India having one of the largest education system in the world. But in another side the highest illiteracy was found in India it shows the inability of our government to utilize programme like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and National Literacy Mission. On other hand the countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand these country achieved the better literacy in very short period.¹

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After India getting independence the government attempted to extend the primary education to masses in the rural areas. The universalization of the elementary education accepted as a national project. The root of education in India probably traced from Veda, Purana, Ramayana and Mahabharata era and then after kings, Moguls and British administration. But in these administrations, education was limited only to privileged classes of the society. The Vedic education was fully capable of character building, development of the various branches of knowledge and which lead to economic prosperity. Post-Vedic period extends between 1400 and 600 B.C. from the end of Rig Vedic period to the beginning of Buddhism and Jainism. The practical and useful subjects in post-Vedic

¹ Malik Pal Krishna: Right to Elementary Education, Allahabad Law Agency, Law Publishers, Faridabad, page no. 3

period increased the importance of Brahmanic education. The Post-Vedic education was only for the sake of life. During the time of Woods dispatch the position of the primary education was very bad because the company's attention was diverted towards the university education. Again the Indian education commission 1882 was established to assess the position of primary education and to give the suggestions for its reforms and to evaluate the work of all the missionaries in the field of education. The Hunter Commission appointed for the purpose of primary education. After the independence the Government of India had done the expansion of the primary education because it was the emerged need of free India.² The Government took active and sincere steps to make the primary education free, universal and compulsory. The principal of compulsory education was declared through Article 45 of the Constitution of India i.e. the state shall endeavor to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution for free and compulsory education between the age group of 6 to 14 years. Board of National Education was established on this basis. The government takes efforts to expand compulsory primary education in all corners of the country. The Supreme Court had given the guideline for the free and compulsory education. The government made the 86th amendment 2002 it becomes a fundamental right under Article 21A i.e. the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 to 14 years.³

Role of Bihar Education Project Council:

Home to more than 104 million people, Bihar is geared towards educational transformation. Over the last one decade, the state has witnessed progress on key education indicators due to political will and commitment. Net enrollments at primary and upper primary level have increased for both girls and boys. While in 2004-05, there was one classroom for 90 students whereas by 2014-15, 1 classroom has been ensured for 53 students (UDISE). Similarly, the progress of PTR is also commendable which now stands at 50. Over the years, Government of Bihar has been able to establish requisite number of schools for children to ensure children's enrollment and teachers have been recruited on a large scale.

² Sharma R. N. and Sharma R. K.:History of Education in India, AtlanticPublishers& Distributers (P) LTD, New Delhi.

³ Ghosh Suresh Chandra, The History of Education in Modern India 1757-2012, Orient Black Swan Publication, Hyderabad, page no. 178.

Bihar has witnessed phenomenal expansion of school education system in recent years. Effective monitoring of such a vast system spread over diverse geographies and contexts that characterize different districts the state demands comprehensive data base. National University for Education, Planning and Administration (NUEPA) has been pursuing the goal of creating a reliable system of statistics on school education during the last two decades through the Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE) which provides the basis for assessing the status of elementary and secondary education. Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) is committed towards improving quality of U-DISE data and also towards promoting its better use for planning and monitoring.

The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC), popularly known as Bihar Education Project (BEP) is an organization dedicated to achieving Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the State of Bihar, India. Launched in 1991 with the purpose of bringing about quantitative and qualitative improvement in the Elementary Education system in Bihar. Primary education has been focus area during the implementation of BEP & DPEP-III programmes till 2001-02 and was subsequently extended to Elementary level with the launching of programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL). Being the State Implementing Society (SIS) of these prestigious programmes, the project emphasizes on the education of deprived sections of society, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Minorities and girls of Bihar.

The goals of the BEP quintessentially is "to bring about a driving force in the State of Bihar through educational reconstruction as a change in the educational situation will then bring improvement in all spheres, and the atmosphere of despair, cynicism, and violence will give way to a firm determination to deal with the environment, social, cultural and gender issues".

Specific objectives of Bihar Education Project Council are:

1. Universalization of Elementary Education, as a composite programme of Universal Access, Universal Enrolment, Universal Retention and Universal achievement.
2. Drastic reduction in illiteracy.
3. Modification in the educational system to serve the objects of equality for women & their empowerment.
4. Inculcating Equity & Social Justice in educational endeavors.

5. Relating education to the working & living conditions of the people.
6. Laying special emphasis on all educational activities on science and environment.

Our experience has further reinforced our "belief" in the "framework" and "specific objectives" of BEP. We now more firmly hold that in order to achieve "tangible" results under any programme of UEE, it will have to be formulated and implemented within the "contours" of the stated "framework" and "specific objectives" of BEP.

It is, thus, obvious that the goal 'social reconstruction through education' for which BEP strived all these years, lay in a distant future where immediate tangible achievements were small milestones. The strength of BEPC remained in the processes through which the goals were attempted to be achieved rather than the quantitative target realization alone.⁴

Programmes run by Bihar Education Project Council

The Parishad is implementing following programmes towards its continuous effort to bring the power of education to rural and semi-urban masses, specially to girls, disabled and children of deprived and downtrodden section of the society of the State of Bihar:

1. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)
2. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)
3. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGVB)
4. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)
5. School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE)
6. Bihar Education Quality Mission (BEQM)

1. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an effort to universalize elementary education by community - ownership of the school system. It is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country. During the year 2000 there was a conscious effort towards convergence of programmes and approaches concerning realization of the goals of Education for all - the country has launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This provides the umbrella under which all the programmes pertaining to Universalisation of Elementary Education have been merged. A number of new initiatives have proposed to improve the access to and participation of children in elementary education

⁴ http://www.bepcssa.in/en/about_us.php

as well as for improving the quality of education provided in the primary schools. The proposed Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will be implemented by the Government of India in partnership with the State government with a long term perspective on cost sharing and through district level decentralized management frame work involving local bodies.⁵

This Act is focused on to improve the quality of elementary education. However, this highly ambitious programme spread all over India including Bihar. While this Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has following objectives:

- a. All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007;
- b. All children complete eight years of schooling by 2010;
- c. Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life;
- d. Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010;
- e. University retention by 2010.⁶

2. National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was introduced in 2003 as an amendment to the scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) for providing additional components for education of girls at elementary level. NPEGEL had been formulated for education of under privileged/ disadvantaged girls from class I to VIII as a separate and distinct gender component plan of SSA. The gender component is necessary to achieve UEE for girls in educationally backward areas.

In subsequent years, several changes were brought in the NPEGEL interventions. With the RTE Act, 2009 coming into force with effect from 1st April 2010, and the SSA Framework of Implementation being revised to correspond to the RTE Act, the NPEGEL component of SSA would also be implemented in the overall context of child rights and child entitlements and in harmony with the spirit and stipulations of the Act.

There exists significant gender gap in enrolment at the elementary level, which is very acute for girls belonging to the Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes and other disadvantaged groups. Reduction in the gender gap would require a concerted focus on the hard-to-reach groups. Therefore, it is necessary to include certain interventions addressing the specific education needs of girls. The objectives of NPEGEL are:

- a. To provide for block-focused projects for girls at risk and girls in difficult circumstances with clearly defined outcomes.

⁵ https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/115320/10/10_chapter%201.pdf

⁶ <file:///SarvaShikshaAbhiyaninBiharAchievementsandFailure.pdf>

- b. To develop and promote facilities to provide access, facilitate retention of girls and ensure greater participation of women and girls in the field of elementary education.
- c. To improve the quality of elementary education through gender specific interventions and to stress upon the relevance and quality of girls' education for their empowerment.

Programmatic Norms

1. NPEGEL interventions will supplement and support girls' education over and above the investments for girls' education through SSA interventions.
2. All strategies and interventions must target all the 6 to 14 year old girls within the block.
3. Focus of interventions should be on retention of girls and improvement in the quality of learning. Detailed action plans for the target group of girls and the specific strategies to be adopted in the block are spelt out, with defined and measurable outcomes.
4. While preparing block-specific plans, these activities need to be shown against any of the appropriate activities listed in the norm.
 - a. Nutrition and School Health: Health remains a critical issue for girls' education. Greater malnutrition among girls and lower family priority towards their health affects their learning capacity. School health would involve general health check up with a more intensive follow up of such girls who require special attention. On sanctioning of a Model Cluster School for Girl Child, a list of such schools mentioning the nearest Government Hospital or Referral Hospital or PHC Centre to the school will be provided to the concerned State Health Department under intimation to the Department of Elementary Education & Literacy who will request the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare for providing necessary services to the Model Cluster Schools. A synergy for this would be built with the Department of Health. Similar synergy will be developed for convergence of Mid-day Meal Schemes run by the Department of Elementary Education & Literacy.
 - b. Community Mobilization (Mobilization for enrolment, retention and learning): At the District and cluster (a group of about ten villages) level, mobilization activities including the training of teachers and educational administrators, mobilisation of the community, including formation and training of resource groups (Mother Teacher Associations (MTA), Women Motivator Groups(WMG), Mahila Samakhya (MS) Sanghas etc.), activities

by resource group like enrolment, retention, talking to parents etc., training & review of resource group, community follow up of enrolment, attendance, achievement etc shall be carried out.

3. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme was launched by the Government of India in August, 2004 for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minorities in difficult areas. The scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) of the country where the female rural literacy is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is above the national average. The scheme provides for a minimum reservation of 75% of the seats for girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC or minority communities and priority for the remaining 25%, is accorded to girls from families below poverty line. The KGBV has been merged with the SSA programme as a separate component of that programme during the XIth Five Year Plan since 1st April, 2007. The objective of KGBV is to ensure access and quality education to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools at upper primary level.⁷

The scheme is being implemented in 27 States/UTs namely: Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Dadar & Nagar Haveli, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

In Bihar, the MS run KGBV schools have developed an effective and enriched curriculum. A conscious effort has been made to include physically challenged girls as well. The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) has drawn upon the local NGOs and Mahua Samakhya Bihar besides the Vidyalaya Shikshan Samitis (VSS) at the Block level to implement the scheme.⁸

4. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

The updated NPE of 1992 provides for key strategies of Decentralization with the district as the unit of planning for implementation of elementary education and increasing reliance

⁷ Evaluation Study on Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) by NITI Aayog, PEO Report No 228, 2015, page no. 4

⁸ KGBV Providing access to girls in the education system 13864, Department of School Education & Literacy, MHRD, Government of India.

on social mobilization to promote basic education.

The Bihar Education Project was the first major new initiative taken in the direction of operationalizing this new approach to primary education. The District Primary Education Project (DPEP) which was approved as a Centrally sponsored scheme was another major initiative designed to promote a challenging, holistic planning and management approach to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE).

In a State like Bihar which had low enrolment and very high dropout rate, especially among the disadvantaged groups and girls in particular, DPEP was intended as a gender sensitive project which can address the problems of access, retention and above all quality in primary education. DPEP was characterized by an area specific approach, which was contextual and sensitive to local conditions. It was committed to reducing gender and social disparities with regard to enrolment, retention and achievement of all children in the primary school level.⁹

Bihar is one of the most educationally backward states in India. The state has the lowest female literacy rate in the country. A major education program, known as Bihar Education Project (BEP) was launched in the 7 districts in undivided Bihar in 1991. Although the BEP was operational in only selected blocks of these 7 districts, the experience provided a base for DPEP III launch. However, there were significant differences between the two, the most critical being that of scale. The scale of operations was much larger in DPEP III as compared to BEP. Moreover, majority of the districts in DPEP III was new ones with no exposure to implement such project. A number of factors impacting educational participation have social overtones and require a longer time frame for achieving any substantial change. DPEP III was conceived as a five-year project. The project was formally launched in October 1997 and completed its terms in September 2003. The project was further extended for two years and finally came to an end in March, 2006. This does not contain any request for additional fund support as the state proposed to utilize the unspent project funds for the extension period and price escalation due to change in Dollar exchange rate.

The District Primary Education Project (DPEP) was being implemented in 11 educational districts (which have now become 20 as educational districts were made co-terminus with

⁹ <http://www.bepcssa.in/en/dpep.php>.

revenue districts) in Bihar. The project was identified for IDA credit under DPEP III, this being the third phase of the program at national level. Total number of districts under DPEP III was 17 but 6 districts became part of the newly carved state, Jharkhand, after Bihar was bifurcated in 2001. DPEP covered educational districts include Bhagalpur, Bhojpur, Darbhanga, Gaya, Munger, Muzaffarpur, Purnea, Rohtas, Sitamarhi, Vaishali & West Champaran.¹⁰

5. School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE)

School is important for cognitive, creative and social development of children. So is the School Sanitation and Hygiene Education, necessary for the safe, secure and healthy environment for children to learn better and face the challenges of future life. This understanding is very much a part of the policy of Government of India (GoI). From policy to programme, School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE) has now become a reality of school centric development action being realized by most of the schools. Government of India has launched this programme integrating with broader sanitation program to ensure that all the schools especially rural schools in the nation have basic sanitation and drinking water facilities and good hygiene practices are taught to the children. The SSHE programme is participatory in nature and an important component of the national reforms programme for rural water and sanitation sector. Many of the challenges, which the programme in India faces, are similar to those of other countries. Approach, strategy, and mode of implementation may differ but the vision associated it remains the same. Sharing these may offer insights and serve as a starting point for cross-learning and further improvement of the programme.¹¹

In Bihar, CEE has partnered with UNICEF and Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) to promote Child Friendly Schools and Systems (CFSS) in 100 schools of Vaishali district, Bihar. This initiative focuses on demonstration of 'Swachh Vidyalaya -Swasth Vidyalaya' education ensuring a set of functional and well maintained water, sanitation and hygiene facilities along with improvisation in overall school's teaching learning environment, thereby making the school environment a 'child friendly learning' space.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ School Sanitation and Hygiene Education in India Investment in Building Children's Future, SSHE Global Symposium "Construction is not Enough" Delft, The Netherlands 8-10 June, 2004.

Child friendly schools and systems covers child friendly quality education system, activity based learning, proper function of SMC, MTA, Child Cabinet, Meena Manch with clean & green environment of school, proper (WASH) sanitation and hygiene practices by students and safe and nutritious MDM. School sanitation and hygiene depend on a process of capacity enhancement of teachers, community members, SMCs, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and education administrators. A key feature of this 20 months long campaign is to ensure that these 100 schools are developed into a 'Swachh Vidyalaya Swasth Vidyalaya' campus ensuring a set of functional and well maintained water, sanitation and hygiene facilities along with improvisation in overall school's teaching learning environment, thereby making the school Environment a Child Friendly Learning space.¹²

Conclusion

In 2010 when the Right to Education (RTE) Act came into force, Bihar had three years to get its own act together. It had to provide enough schools, enough teachers, enough classrooms, enough toilets and enough drinking waters for 8.60% of the school going population of India. And above all this, Bihar one of the poorest and most populous states- was to ensure that the kids actually learn in these schools. The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) published by an NGO has yet again shown Bihar in poor light. Briefly, it says that a sizeable number of students in elementary schools that they surveyed across Bihar have abysmally low reading, writing and mathematical skills.

The three-year compliance period for the RTE Act is over. True, the state has not been sleeping. The chaps whose job it is to deliver elementary education have been burning the midnight oil. Through the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) that runs the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the state government initiated several measures and passed almost all the necessary statutory orders to ensure effective implementation of RTE rules. The number of government- run elementary schools jump from 50,375 to 69,772 during the period. In 2007, they were 23 lakhs children who were 'out of schools'. Today the number has gone down to about 28000.

Visits to schools to ascertain the impact of the Bihar Education Quality mission, setup in 2011 revealed there are several things happening at grass roots levels that are hardly ever

¹² <https://www.ceeindia.org/water-and-sanitation-programmes-bihar>

reported. Primary school teachers now have learning facilitation manuals that help them with classroom transactions and to access the student competencies. Morning assembly has become a regular feature in all schools, and one can see the students lined up and reciting the pledge or singing an inspirational song in practically every government, primary and middle school.

The best way for capacitating these schools would be for the government and the public functionaries to stop jostling at the gates of highly priced teaching shops and began enrolling their kids in government schools. After all, would not the village schools head mistress be specially alert if the district magistrates daughter or the education minister's grand son was studying in her school?