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Problems of School Education in Rural Areas of West Bengal

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Education is regarded as the light which paves the way of brightness to human life. It is the apprenticeship for life. It helps in the all-round development of a child's personality and inclusion of healthy attitudes and good values. Thus the aim of education is to bring desirable changes in the behaviors of the learners. Hence, every society endeavors to make its citizens educated in the best possible manner. All over the world, education is regarded as a potential investment for the future. There is an age old proverb on education as, "If you are planning for one year, plant rice: if you are planning for five years, plant a tree and if you are planning for the future, educate your children." That means education is always considered as a ladder of development. Among various stages of education, primary education has vital role to play as its the seed of so called tree 'personality'. Regarding the importance of primary education we can cite the view of J.P.Naik, "The progress of primary education is an index of the general, social and economic development of the country as a whole." Thus Elementary Education deserves the highest priority not only on the social justice but also for raising the competence of the average works and initializing national productivity. Now- a-days the world has become ever more complex from economic, social and political context, the formalization of education through schools has become a ubiquitous phenomenon. And it is through this formalization that primary or elementary education has not indispensable but, also compulsory for all. India is a democratic country and under its constitution, education has become a concurrent list with sharing of responsibilities between the centre and the states. Management of schooling has been traditionally controlled by the mainstream states and district administration. Since the last two decades a number of education specific support institutions were launched to enhance both the primary and secondary education. Hence, the objective of the study is to find out the problems of school education to solve these problems. The researcher has used the documentary survey method and collected the data mainly from secondary sources.

Owing to such initiatives, though India has made significant progress in the field of elementary education but its a matter of regret that, UEE has not been yet achieved. A large number of causes are there behind this failure. Every education system is packed in so many problems, such as social problems, moral problems, population problems, environmental problems, dropout problems, problems of integration etc. Out of other stages of education, elementary education is the most crucial one as its the base of all education system. The study, in particular seeks to review the progress in elementary education especially in rural areas of West Bengal as West Bengal is one of the major cities of the country. The data used in this paper has been collected from the secondary sources.

Education is the doorway to the wider world and an exposition on rural infrastructure is incomplete without an assessment of the extent to which we have been able to open this door for the children of rural areas. Different components and progress that have been constituted rural education infrastructure are evaluated for their relative importance in the delivery of effective learning. Educational infrastructure broadly includes teachers, teacher's guide to the curriculum and syllabus, school buildings including water facilities etc. Thus, this study reveals that there are various problems of elementary education in rural areas of West Bengal which has been deteriorating the standard of education. The most crucial problems are discussed below:

(a) Teachers' Accountability:

It is essential to ensure that a teacher regularly spends five hours in the school in every working day. A teacher should also take classes as per schedule. Unit tests are not always conducted as per annual calendar. Class schedule compulsorily includes games period every week. But it is not followed in majority of the schools. Sometimes teachers take leave for long time without leave petition. Many teachers come from other areas or from cities are in a hurry to leave the school as early as possible.

(b) Teachers' Appointment and Transfer:

There are many schools with one/two teacher where the student enrolment demands appointment of more teachers. Concept of sanctioned post per school does not exist for the primary schools. The present practice of teacher-transfer, which does not follow the rule, is to be curbed. Another instance of irregularity is the service/drafting transfer (which is purely a temporary arrangement). Such temporary arrangement is renewed year-after-year to bypass the existing rules and thereby making it quasi-permanent. It has been seen that most of the teachers are not interested to work in rural areas. It may be due to communication problem, low standard of living of the rural people, lack other facilities needed for providing quality education. As a result the teachers are always in search of opportunity of transfer.

(c) Teaching and Training:

Classroom teaching gets hampered due to- (i) teachers involvement in census during working hours, (ii) teachers involvement in preparing payroll and other papers for other teachers to help the district office which often face staff-crunch; (iii) the present practice of compulsory 20-day-a-year training for every teacher. Teachers' training programmes are not well planned (e.g., same subject/topic is repeated in successive training programmes for a long time.) There are several agencies providing training. Many teachers do not attempt to implement the new pedagogy learnt in training in the class room teaching. On the other hand, many teachers feel that training is not always effective or relevant. Hence, teachers do not feel motivated to implement the methods and techniques learned in training programmes

(d) School Inspection:

Major functions of the School Inspectors are supposed to include inspection of schools, monitoring of classroom transaction and teaching effectiveness. Each SI, on an average, has more than 80 schools to supervise. Many SI positions remain vacant for long time. For example, in Murshidabad there are 100 schools per circle. Out of 41 circles in Murshidabad, 19 SIs posts are vacant. SI office is equally understaffed. For example, in Murshidabad, 14 group C and 12 Group D positions are vacant. SIs spend a lot of their time in attending various meetings, often in short notice (e.g., on health awareness programmes, disaster management etc.). These meetings are not organized during summers- these are organized throughout the year. This creates lot of problem in discharging day-to-day responsibilities. SIs need to fill-up a variety of evaluation forms, some of which are very cumbersome. SISs are also responsible for maintenance of service books of primary school teachers and disbursement of their salary and pension. A considerable time of theirs goes in managing the salary/pension and related queries. As a result, SIs fail to discharge their main function- inspection of schools. There are instances where an SI fails to visit most of the schools even once a year. SIs/AISs do not have any power to take disciplinary actions on errant teachers. SISs are not even given feedback on the action taken on their written complaints. As a result the authority of the SIs is very seriously eroded and the delivery system in the schools suffers almost beyond repair.

(e) Mid-day Meal Administration:

There has been a general consensus that mid-day meal scheme has achieved, to a very large extent, two major objectives- (i) improved attendance in the schools; (ii) removal of the caste/religion barrier amongst students and the community. Block Development Officer (BDO) is the executive head of mid-day meal scheme in a CD Block. However, SISs are required to monitor the scheme. There is lack of coordination between office of the BDO and SISs. SISs are not invited to any meeting concerning mid-day meal convened, if at all, by the BDO. Although, if any irregularity is observed, SI is supposed to file an FIR against relevant agencies. Many head teachers of schools complained that mid-day meal money/materials are not received regularly by school even after submission of regulation. The quality of rice varies between urban and rural schools. Another problem is that teachers are unable to retain students in the school after mid-day meal is served.

(f) Para-teachers and Sikshabandhus:

While the role and importance of para teachers is well accepted, the duties and responsibilities of Sikshabandhus are not very clear. Many sikshabandhus are not aware about their job description. Many SISs feel that Sikshabandhus' job is mainly to liaise between school and CLRC/DI office. However, Sikshabandhus believe that they can contribute more effectively in improving the learning environment in the school. Sikshabandhus claim that introduction of this cadre has improved teachers attendance in

the school- mainly due to moral suasion. Since Sikshabandhus are drawn from immediate locality, they understand local sensitivity and hence can help solve problems involving local community. However, Sikshabandhus face many infrastructural bottlenecks. Sikshabandhus have no separate room/ place to sit in the CLRC/CRC office. Wherever they have sitting place, they do not have adequate furniture (e.g., table, almirah). No formal training is imparted when a Sikshabandhu joins duty. The only training they get is about filling up of DISE data. Sometimes Sikshabandhus are asked to perform functions of group D staff. It is expected that Sikshabandhus would pay regular visits to schools. However, they are not given any transport facilities/ allowance. Even SISs, do not get any/adequate transport support.

(g) DPSC and DPO:

In most of the districts, DPO (District Project Officer) positions are managed by part-time DPOs. DPO offices are most often not co-located in DPSC office. The coordination between DPSC and DPO is poor.

(h) School Management Committees:

Managing Committees do not spend time on academic matters. The Committees spend most of the time on matters concerning physical infrastructure. VEC-level monitoring has been a failure. There are instances where parent teachers meeting/ Academic Council meeting is not conducted even once a year. However, MTA meetings are more effective and it is observed that where MTAs are active, the teaching quality in that school improves.

(i) Governance and Legal Matters:

The head-teacher or head-master in a school is not aware of latest government notifications. On many occasions these notifications/orders do not reach schools. The District offices are heavily burdened with court case dealings. The officers in the district office are not competent to handle legal matters.

(j) Language and Communication Problem:

In West Bengal, the most common languages are Bengali, Hindi, Santhali, Urdu and Nepali. Approximately 98% (or more) population of the West Bengal are covered under one or more of these five languages. It goes without saying that the primary level education and proper learning need a frequent communicative interaction between the teachers and the students that goes beyond the standard use of formal language of instruction in a classroom setting. It is well-known that along with the teacher- student interaction, the delivery system and different social factors also positively influence the enrolment rate, literacy rate and drop-out rate of the pupils. To be sure, the ease of communication between the teacher and the taught creates a conducive learning ambience in a school. As discussed in the Pratichi Report, 2009, in general, those teachers, who travel to the school from a distance, somehow fail to establish an interactive link with the 'local community'. The lack of organic communication is, however, not simply a matter of lack of physical proximity or geographical distance. It is, more often than not, a function of class that gets translated into the visible gap in terms of language barriers between the teachers and the students. Teachers' class backgrounds predispose them towards teaching in the mainstream and standard Bengali language which would generally be devoid of colloquial expressions and local/regional linguistic variations. This becomes acute in the case of tribal children and the children coming from the disadvantaged social backgrounds without much exposure to the formal system of schooling. According to the Pratichi Report (2002), teachers do not often understand the language spoken by the tribal or the so-called 'low-caste' (SC) students. Evidently, such differences in the use of language adversely affect the learning procedure. Besides, the students from these categories (for example, the 'Adivasis') usually face an uncomfortable situation in the class room which lowers their participation level in the learning processes. The languages of the tribal people (STs) have their own innate traits, resulting from their specific socio-cultural background. In West Bengal a large number of populations belong to the scheduled tribes like Santals. They surely face a difficulty in understanding the Bengali language. In spite of that, the Santali language is not used as the medium of instruction in the Santal-dominated schools of West Bengal. Even, the available textbooks on Santali languages are not studied in many schools.

(k) Teachers' Perception:

Consequently, the language problem has a direct and poor impact on the teachers' perception. Based on the report "The Delivery of Primary Education: A Study in West Bengal" (The Pratichi Education Report, 2002), Jha (2003) cites that most of the teachers, belonging to general caste category, reflect a 'poor opinion' concerning the education of the SC, ST and Muslim students. The teachers usually fail to recognize the language difficulties of these children. The same PR report cites that, a teacher in Birbhum opines that the Santali children can't just understand the instructions and study books, though the teachers interact with them for several times.

Secondary education plays an important role in the gamut of teaching learning process. It is the gateway to enter the field of higher education. School education begins with Primary education and ends in Higher Secondary education where Secondary Education works as a bridge between the Elementary Education

and the Secondary Education. That means Secondary Education is complementary to primary education. It has to play a vital role in any programme of education for the community. It provides teachers for both elementary and adult education and also prepares pupils for the universities and other institutions of higher education. Moreover, it is the stage which in all countries marks the completion of education for the vast majority. Even the minority which goes for higher education cannot make full advantage of the under opportunities offered by the universities unless they have received their grounding in a system of education. During 1835-1854, due to the initiative taken by Lord Macaulay, secondary education got its expansion. Then Wood's Despatch also contributed a lot in the development of secondary education in India during 1854-1904. Thus in this way before independence and after independence various Committees and Commissions were formed to enhance the field of education especially secondary education. But in spite of all these efforts till date a lots of problems are prevailing in the secondary education as well as in primary education also. Hence, the objective of the present study is to find out the problems of education at both the elementary and secondary education and to find out the solution to overcome it. Some of the major problems have been discussed below:

- (I) **Aimlessness:** One of the chief problems of secondary education is its indefinite aim. Though it is told that the aim of secondary education is to bring an overall development in the learners but it is only in theory as there is practical implementation of it.
- (II) **Irrelevant Curriculum:** The curriculum of secondary stage of education is developed on single track where all the students have to study the one prefixed curriculum. That means individual difference is not taken into consideration but it's just next to impossible to teach without considering the individual difference of the learner as when the level of I.Q. is not same then how can the same curriculum will meet everybody's need.
- (III) **Untrained Teachers:** The success of education depends to a great extent on the teachers, because if the teacher's presentation is unsatisfactory, then all the efforts will go in vain. To impart quality education efficient teachers are required. But we have lack of such teachers.
- (IV) **Defective Examination System:** Our examination system is knowledge based i.e. the other domains are neglected. Again there is less scope of skill development. There is the domination of matriculation examination over the whole secondary education. But examination is not the real test of knowledge.
- (V) **Overcrowded class room:** The Indian class room is not a suitable place of carrying out the teaching learning process. It is a tough job to pay due attention to individual learner and in such a situation the dream of quality education suffers.
- (VI) **Number of Teachers:** Teachers are the pillars of the so called building education system. No school can run well without an adequate number of teachers and in our Indian classroom situation there is dearth teachers.
- (VII) **Lack of Supervision:** There is no proper supervision system. It is due to either lack of inspectors as in the various districts of West Bengal like, Murshidabad and others the post of inspector is vacant or the inspectors are busy in other works.
- (VIII) **Lack of infrastructure facilities:** There are a number of schools in the rural areas of Bengal where the school could not provide sitting facilities to their students. The government might have given building but there is no proper implementation.
- (IX) **Defective Methods of Teaching:** The teachers not aware of modern methods of teaching and using their outmoded methods and as a result they fail to sustain the attention of the learner.
- (X) **Dearth of Teaching Aids:** Living in a technology dominated world, the teachers use the old modeled teaching aids and fails to motivate the learners.

The present paper examines the problems of rural education in West Bengal. So to overcome the aforesaid problems due attention should be given. Otherwise one day the entire system of education will suffer along with the human life. It is not only the responsibility of the government but as a citizen of a democratic country like India each and every individual should go ahead to solve this problem as there is a saying that 'unity is strength'.

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