Achieving the Goal of Universalization of Education: A Situational Analysis of Chhattisgarh State, India

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Abstract
Chhattisgarh is one of the developing Indian states that is yet to taste the fruits of development like other states of the country. The State's Human Development Index is 0.430, the lowest of all states and literacy rate is 71.04%, which is below the national average of 74.04%. Under the flagship program of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) the Indian government proposes for the Right to Education Act (RTE) as a part of Universal Education Program, which provides quality education to children (6-14 years) bridging the gender, social and regional gaps. In this paper, the author explores the implementation of SSA in Chhattisgarh state and with special focus on two districts of Chhattisgarh namely Raipur and Mahasamund. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to gather data from teachers, students, staff members, parents and community people, and District officials using Interview schedule and questionnaire. Observation and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to collect in-depth data. The author observed that under the scheme of SSA, both Primary and Upper Primary schools are within the reach of the students. Trainings are imparted to the teachers for upgradation of skills. However, challenges such as paucity of funds, lack of trained teachers, poor infrastructure and facilities, and unfavourable school surroundings were observed. The author suggests that regular trainings to teachers, proper financial allocation, regular monitoring of school activities and community participation can lead to making schools an integral part of the society.

Keywords: SSA, RTE, education

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Introduction and background

Chhattisgarh's Human Development Index is 0.430, the lowest of all states in the country, and literacy rate is 71.04%, which is below the national average of 74.04%. This reflects on the dismal status of the state. With a burgeoning population of 2.56 crores (Census, 2011), and a flourishing cache of resources, the state has not been able to raise the level of its people.

Universalization of Education: SSA and RTE

Education is indeed essential to the practice of democracy (Dreze and Sen, 2002). The focus on the universalization means that no single individual is marginalised and one and all receive education which is also considered a birth right (Dash, 2004).

There have been various Constitutional, legal and national statements for Universalization of Elementary Education. The constitutional mandate of 1950 states that "The State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of'14 years." In 1986, the National Policy on education emphasized that it shall be ensured that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality is provided to all children up to 14 years of age before we enter the twenty first century. The Constitutional, legal/ and national policies and statements have repeatedly upheld the cause of Universal elementary education. The National Committee's Report on UEE (1999) emphasized that UEE should be pursued in a mission mode with a holistic and convergent approach with emphasis on preparation of District Elementary Education Plans for UEE. Despite, all these efforts, the goal of UEE could only be partially achieved and a large number of children occupied the disadvantaged bracket.

Under the flagship program of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) the Indian government proposes for the Right to Education Act (RTE) as a part of Universal Education Program, which provides quality education to children (6-14 years) bridging the gender, social and regional gaps. Our constitution has laid a framework for Universalisation of Elementary Education to strengthen the social fabric by providing equal fruits to all echelons of the society. Art 21 inserted in the constitution through the 86th Amendment Act, 2002 provides free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6-14 years as a Fundamental Right. The Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009 represents the consequential legislation envisaged under art 21-A.

The salient features of the RTE Act 2009 as per the MHRD website are:

• Right of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighborhood school.
• It clarifies that 'compulsory education' means obligation of the appropriate government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the six to fourteen age group. 'Free' means that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.

• It makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.

• It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate Governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments.

• It lays down the norms and standards relating inter alia to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours.

• It provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school, rather than just as an average for the State or District or Block, thus ensuring that there is no urban-rural imbalance in teacher postings. It also provides for prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational work, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief.

• It provides for appointment of appropriately trained teachers, i.e. teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications.

• It prohibits (a) physical punishment and mental harassment; (b) screening procedures for admission of children; (c) capitation fee; (d) private tuition by teachers and (e) running of schools without recognition,

• It provides for development of curriculum in consonance with the values enshrined in the Constitution, and which would ensure the all-round development of the child, building on the child's knowledge, potentiality and talent and making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of child friendly and child centered learning. (http://mhrd.gov.in/rte)

The policy-makers, for a long time now have faced the challenge of poor enrolment rates and high drop-out rates. The incidence is high for girls, children belonging to the minorities, tribals, migrants and the differently abled.

SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of their kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. Hence, a zero rejection policy has been implemented wherein no child having special needs should be deprived of access to schooling and proper education and taught in an amicable environment suited to his/her learning needs.

Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh is relatively a new state with mainly half the population being tribal dominated who are known for their arts and crafts. The state has 16 districts and in this paper, the focus is on Raipur, the capital and its adjacent district Mahasamund. The literacy rate in Chhattisgarh has improved steadily from 42.91 per cent in 1991 to 64.7 per cent (Census 2001) to 71 per cent (Census 2011).

Objectives

In this paper, the author explores the implementation of SSA in the universalization of education in two districts of Chhattisgarh namely Raipur and Mahasamund with special focus on access to schools, Student Classroom ratio (SCR), Special training (Residential and Non –Residential) centres, Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR), availability of toilets and School management Committees.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to gather data from teachers, students, staff members, parents and community people, and District officials using Interview schedule and questionnaire. Observation and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to collect in-depth data.

The paper is part of MoRD project "Monitoring and Evaluation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Chhattisgarh State" during 2013-14. As per the project guidelines, 40 government schools (20 Primary Schools and 20 Upper Primary Schools) were randomly selected from each district. In this paper, the capital of Chhattisgarh, Raipur district and the district adjacent to it, i.e. Mahasamund have been taken up. Some of the factors selected are providing enabling conditions for universalization of education and in their absence; the goal becomes a challenge itself. Hence, some of the factors have been discussed in this paper that are considered crucial in the process of universalisation of education.

Data Analysis

The following tables show the states of enabling conditions such as access to schools, Student Classroom ratio (SCR), Special training (Residential and Non –Residential) centres, Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR), availability of toilets and School Management Committees

i.   Access

The first major point pertaining to schooling is access to schools. The rural areas in the country are still struggling for metalled roads so as to connect to the thresholds of developed areas. The schools were initially constructed at a distance and the children were found it tough to go to the schools, which resulted in regular absenteeism or heavy rates of dropouts. The way to schools were often not safe as children had to cross rivers, ponds, jungles, graveyards, fields or areas that were considered unsafe, especially for girls.
SSA ensures that schools are within close proximity hence the PS are within 1klm radius and the UPS are within 3 km radius from the habitation. This has consequently resulted in regular attendance and high enrolment, prevented dropouts and absenteeism.

Table 1: Access to schools in Raipur and Mahasamund		
Access	**Raipur**	**Mahasamund**
Primary Schools	25 (62.5%)	24 (60.0%)
Upper Primary Schools	15 (37.5%)	16 (40.0%)
Total	40 (100.0%)	40 (100.0%)

It was seen that in Raipur, 25 (62.5%) Primary Schools and 15 (37.5%) Upper Primary Schools were within 1 km radius and 3 km radius from the habitation respectively and in Mahasamund district, 24 (60.0%) Primary Schools and 16 (40.0%) Upper Primary Schools were in 1 km and 3 km radius from the students' houses.

ii.   Student-Classroom Ratio

As per the SSA norms, an ideal Student-Classroom Ratio is 35:1 in Primary Schools and 40:1 in Upper Primary Schools. A conducive and comfortable seating pattern not only enhances the concentration and focus of children but also helps in monitoring the children a in a better manner. A proper distance is maintained between children as they sit on jute mats rolled out on cement floors. It was seen that in Raipur district, the SCR in rural Primary Schools is 28:1 and in Urban Primary schools, it is 29:1. For Upper Primary Schools, in rural region, it is 53:1 and for urban Upper Primary Schools it is 51:1, while in Mahasamund district, in the rural Primary schools the Student Classroom Ratio is 29:1 and in urban Primary Schools it is 17:1. The monitoring team has observed that Student Classroom Ratio in rural Upper Primary School is 41:1 and in urban Upper Primary School it is 18:1.

iii.   Special training (residential or non-residential)

Under the SSA framework, the existing non-formal and alternate schooling (including home based- education) option for children with disabilities (differently abled) has been re-casted as "special training". Initially, alternative or non-formal education was aligned with RTE Act for Out of School Children (OoSC) to academically assist for admission to an age-appropriate class in a regular school. The RTE Act identifies an OoSC on the following definition: "*A child 6-14 years of age will be considered out of school if he/she has never been enrolled in an elementary school or if after enrolment has been absent from school without prior intimation for reasons of absence for a period of 45 days or more.*" So a provision of special training was formulated. It is also extended to the existing non-formal and alternate schooling (including home based education) option for children with disabilities (differently abled) has been re-casted as "special training". The Special Trainings are given to students who due to some reasons are unable to continue their schooling and consequently drop-out from the schools. Various factors such as migration, poverty, death in family, ill-health, strict teachers, or disinterest in studies are responsible for students opting out of school (Dreze & Sen, 1995; Miles & Singal, 2008). There are two types of special trainings provided under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. One is Special Residential Training Centres (SRTCs) and another is Non –Residential Training Centres or NSRTCs. Teachers as well as Education Volunteers are employed in these SRTCs and NSRTCs to provide education to the needy students that includes school dropouts and slow learners. While in the SRTCs, in accordance with SSA norms, certain entitlements are given such as lodging facilities, MDM, books, bags and uniforms, the classes in NSRTCs are conducted after school hours are over in the school premises itself.

In Raipur district, Special Residential Training Centers for admission of Out of School Children were seen. In some places, Non-Residential Training Centers are opened in the Primary Schools to provide Special training for the slow learners of the school. SRTCs had inadequate TLM and the appointed teachers had not undergone trainings in a while. The teaching method was traditional in nature and they lacked modern TLM as well.

In Mahasamund district, SRTCs were found to be functional and with good infrastructure facilities. On the academic front, it was seen that in one of the SRTCs untrained graduates were appointed as special trainers. About 150 children were found

to be enrolled with sample SRTC in Mahasamund. The SRTCs had good number of TLM that included toys, charts, maps, globe, microscope, and pictures.

iv.   Pupil-Teacher Ratio

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan recommends that number of students per teacher in Primary schools should be 30:1 and in Upper Primary schools, it should be 35:1. Smaller classes allow teachers to focus more on the individuals and the class size reflects on the social dynamics of the pupils. It helps teachers to concentrate on each student's needs and help him/her perform better. Regarding the Pupil-Teacher Ratio in Raipur, it was seen in Primary Schools, the PTR is 53:1 and in Upper Primary Schools, it is 68:1. The data shows that in Mahasamund, in Primary Schools, the PTR is 26:1 and in Upper Primary Schools, it is 35:1.

v.   Availability of Toilets

It is observed that unavailability of toilet facilities in schools is one major reason for the students to drop out of school, especially for girls. In Raipur district, 11 (44.0%) PS and 10 (66.7%) UPS has separate toilets for girls but only 2 (8.0%) PS and none of the UPS had incinerator facilities in girls' toilets.

Similarly, in Mahasamund district, 12 (50.0%) PS and 10 (62.5%) UPS had a separate provisions for girls' toilets but only 2 (28.6%) PS had incinerator in the girls' toilets. The lack of provision of running water in toilets is a matter of concern and often results in students opting for open defecation.

vi. Teaching learning Process

It is very essential that teachers focus on teaching process in a professional manner. It is essential that teachers use their live experiences in teaching in the class and cite examples to explain the concepts and make them even more interesting. It was seen that in Raipur district, teachers in 13 (52.0%) PS and 9 (60.0%) UPS were using live experiences while teaching in the class. Similarly, in Mahasamund, teachers in 10 (50.0%) and 10 (50.0%) UPS were found to be practicing the same.

Table 2: Teaching learning process in the sample schools											
Rural		**Urban**		**Rural**		**Urban**		**Total**			
Raipur	Mah	Rai	Mah	Rai	Mah	Rai	Mah	Rai	Mah	Rai	Ma h
PS	PS	PS	PS	UPS	UPS	UPS	UPS	PS	PS	UPS	UPS
Teacher using live experien ces 8 61.5%	7 41.2%	5 55.6%	1 14.3%	5 41.7%	3 33.3%	4 66.7%	5 71.4%	13 52.0%	8 33.3%	9 60.0%	8 50.0 %
Using of TLM in the class 7 53.8%	6 35.3%	2 22.2%	4 57.1%	6 50.0%	5 55.6%	2 33.3%	3 42.9%	13 52.0%	10 41.7%	4 26.7%	8 50.0 %

Note: The first column of the table is headed "Category".

The government provide Teaching Learning Material (TLM) in all schools provided by to help teachers take the class in a better manner and enhance the quality of education. TLM grant of Rs 10,000 per year is granted.

vii.   School Management Committees (Community Mobilization)

Under the RTE Act, School Management Committees are given immense importance. The SMCs are entitled with various roles that include preparation of School Development Plan, meaningful participation in school activities, etc. The SMC comprises of parents, local authority and school teachers. The RTE Act stipulates that fifty percent of the parents in the SMC will be women. The SMC is constituted within three months of the new academic year and reconstituted every two years.

The SMCs see to it that teachers are not engaged in non-academic pursuits. They also check that teachers maintain regularity and punctuality in attendance, organise regular meetings with parents to apprise them about their child's progress and do not engage in private tuition.

The SMC meetings are scheduled every six months positively but more than two meetings in a year may be organised for better monitoring and functioning.

Transparency and social accountability are maintained. Details of technical design, financial approvals, received and spent amount, muster rolls, books of accounts and any other information under RTI is to be shared in SMC meeting. Parents play a significant role in SMCs. They are the ideal unit for monitoring mechanism at the ground level. The SMC ensures the enrolment and attendance of all children. It makes sure that the children from disadvantaged and weaker sections are enrolled in schools, and do not face any sort of discrimination, and monitors that all not enrolled and dropout children are facilitated to participate in Special Training for age appropriate admissions. It sees to it that the differently abled children get proper admission and care. The SMC makes the School Development Plan and it helps in anchoring community awareness and participation efforts.

In Raipur district, it was seen that SMC is being constituted in all the sample Primary Schools and Upper Primary Schools. It was seen that in 12 (48.0%) Primary Schools and 5 (33.3%) Upper Primary Schools SMC members are familiar with their roles and responsibilities under RTE Act, 2009. They are familiar with their duties, which include participation and monitoring of school activities, checking MDM and participating in school functions. They were familiar with Data Capture Format, School Report Card and VER/WER. It was seen that in 12 (48.0%) Primary Schools and in 3 (20.0%) Upper Primary Schools, guidelines to prepare School Development Plan are given to SMC members. It was also observed that SMC members of 12 (48.0%) Primary Schools and 6 (40.0%) Upper Primary Schools are verifying teachers' attendance. Similarly, SMC members of 9 (36.0%) Primary Schools and 5 (33.3%) Upper Primary Schools are verifying students' attendance.

In Raipur district, it was seen that seen that 54.2% of the Primary Schools and 62.5% of the Upper Primary Schools have provided orientation on RTE to the SMC members. The roles and responsibilities are oriented through one-day training program. Effective functioning of SMCs huge capacity building activity has been

undertaken by the district and State, though they lack awareness about the same. Therefore, it is suggested that continuous training is to be organized at the school point and at Block level. The SMC members are given awareness about School Development Plan; they do not seem to be implementing it completely. They occasionally visit the school.

In Mahasamund district, it is seen that 54.2% of the Primary Schools and 62.5% of the Upper Primary Schools have provided orientation on RTE to the SMC members. Though the SMC members are given awareness about School Development Plan, they do not seem to be implementing it completely. It was observed that in 58.3% Primary Schools and 75.0%, Upper Primary Schools the SMC members verified the students' attendance and in 50.0% Primary Schools and 81.2% Upper Primary Schools they verified the teachers' attendance. SMC members hardly visited schools to monitor the school activities.

Discussion & Conclusion

SSA provides an opportunity for promoting social justice through basic education. It is an effort to recognise the need for improving the performance of the school system and to provide community owned quality elementary education in mission mode. The government of India has implemented various programs in the past for universalization of education such as Shiksha Karmi Project, Lok Jumbish, Operation Blackboard, and DPEP. Despite all policy initiatives and government efforts, the goal has remained elusive. The government set up various commissions/committees for fulfilling the goal and adequate budgetary provisions were made in all five-year plans. With various paradigm shifts, the government has been able to narrow down its focus which is mainly concentrated on access and enrolment. Once each child between 6-14 years is admitted in school, incentives such as MDM, free books, bags, stationary and uniforms are given to retain him/her in schools. Though the factor of retention is focussed upon, quality of education is ignored blatantly. The quality of education is affected by irregular attendance of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, ineffective teaching-learning processes, an inappropriate curriculum and dilapidated school buildings (AIF, 2011).

Power structures between Districts

The paper has highlighted the state of education in the capital of Chhattisgarh state i.e. Raipur and its satellite district, Mahasamund. To understand this phenomenon, Foucauldian perspective may be sought. Michele Foucault emphasizes upon relation between power and knowledge and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions.

Primary Schools at Mahasamund were observed to have school buildings but without the basic infrastructure such as a boundary wall, a ramp for CWSN, a CWSN toilet, separate toilets for boys and girls, a separate shed for preparing Mid-Day Meals, etc. Couple of schools had a pond nearby which posed a hazard to the little children. Schools that were next to a highway were also dangerous for the little ones. Some students had to cross fields/graveyards/forests to reach their school and all this rendered great challenge and possibly dropping out of schools in due course of time.

Both Primary Schools and Upper Primary Schools in Raipur were observed to be better in condition as far as the location of schools, its infrastructure, and functioning were concerned. By looking at the results, it can be inferred that the status of schools is better in the Raipur district but the SRTCs are better in Mahasamund district. Migration from Mahasamund has resulted in high percentage of dropouts but tracking by officials has shown that the students who had migrated from Mahasamund had taken Transfer Certificates from their previous schools and got admission in new schools accordingly. Most of this migration is to Raipur. The better situation of schools in Raipur is also because of constant monitoring and evaluation by government officials. There are periodical audits and monitoring by officials which keeps the status of schools in Raipur maintained and better looked after as compared to Mahasamund. It is suggested that regular trainings to teachers be given in their own blocks so that they may attend and upgrade their skills. Strict monitoring of quality and maintenance of infrastructure of schools at Mahasamnud along with monitoring of regular attendance of teachers in Mahasamund can definitely increase the efficiency of schools in Mahsamund too.

Challenges

Though the government is trying to implement the program in letter and spirit; certain challenges have slowed down the process. Firstly, the allocation of funds is a challenge in itself. Though the governments allocate budget every year, the distribution in different heads such as civil works, uniforms, stationary, Mid-Day Meal, etc. takes time. Sometimes, the salaries of teachers and cooks are delayed. Moreover, maintenance of transparency in expenditure is not maintained that results in problems in auditing. Secondly, lack of trained teachers is an issue. Most of the trainings are conducted in district headquarters and it is difficult for teachers from rural interiors to attend those meetings. The proposition of residential trainings fails too as it is difficult for women to absent themselves from household duties for five to seven days at a stretch.

The paper has highlighted the state of education in the capital of Chhattisgarh state i.e. Raipur and its satellite district, Mahasamund. In many places, especially at Primary Schools, mainly in Mahasamund, it was observed that a school building existed but without the basic infrastructure such as a boundary wall, or a CWSN toilet, separate toilets for boys and girls, a separate shed for preparing Mid-Day Meals,, a ramp for CWSN, etc. Couple of schools had a pond nearby which posed a hazard to the little children. Schools that were next to a highway were also dangerous for the little ones. Not only that, some students had to cross fields/graveyards/forests to reach their school and all this rendered great challenge and possibly dropping out of schools in due course of time. Both Primary Schools and Upper Primary Schools in Raipur were observed to be better condition as far as the location of schools, its infrastructure, and functioning were concerned.

Suggestions

By looking at the results, it can be inferred that the status of schools is better in the Raipur district but the SRTCs are better in Mahasamund district. Migration from Mahasamund has resulted in high percentage of dropouts but tracking by officials has shown that the students who had migrated from Mahasamund had taken Transfer Certificates from their previous schools and got admission in new schools accordingly. The better situation of schools in Raipur is also because of constant monitoring and evaluation by government officials. It is suggested that regular trainings to teachers be given in their own blocks so that they may attend and upgrade their skills. Proper financial allocation and social audit of expenditure should be maintained and the community should be made aware of its rights in functioning of the schools. Regular monitoring of school activities and community participation can lead to making schools an integral part of the society.

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