

## Elementary Education in India

### Status, Progress and Prospects

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Education has become an article of faith and it has been increasingly being realized that the key to human development squarely depend upon the investment in education. Economic development and empowerment of people especially the marginalized can only be possible if education can reach to nook and corner of society. Economists long since have advocated that the investment in education has the highest return and the development of human capital is essential for achieving better living standards and an equitable world. In fact, it was this realization that pitch education into the core of millennium development goals. The importance of basic education in transforming human lives was the force that led to the movement of 'Education for All' and Universalization of Elementary Education. The Delor's Commission's report (Learning the Treasure within, UNESCO, 1996) that emphasized on 'lifelong learning' addressed the issue of continuous skills development through education in order to face the challenges of globalization. The Millennium Development Goals Report (2012) mentioned that poverty of nations is related to as much lack of resources as it is to their lack of access to knowledge. It actually denotes to the education's ability in equipping learners with and competency necessary to respond to various challenges.

Education is coming to occupy an ever larger place in people's lives as its role among the forces at work in modern society increases. Basic education is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and training. Elementary education empowers and equips individuals with analytical capabilities, instills confidence and fortifies them with determination to achieve goal-setting competencies. It,

therefore, plays a pivotal role in improving the socioeconomic condition of the nation. For any country to grow, it is imperative that it has in place a strong elementary school driven education system.

The value of education so highly extolled in the classical tradition and literature of India too has its resonance in the policy documents and planning of the post-independent India. The Constitutional commitment under the directive principles of state policy guided much of post-independent India's approach towards educational development and found solid legal status in the form of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009. However, much before things took a concrete shape educational development at least the elementary level meant increasing access to schools, creating infrastructure, setting of educational goals and emphasizing on enrolment. The most crucial dimension that was missing in these schemes of things was the comprehensive policy to include access, retention and quality in one whole. Without the necessary policy framework to unite and activate all these dimensions together it was impossible to improve the overall educational scenario in multicultural and diverse social setting of India.

These years of piecemeal approach to educational development primarily based on the assumption of 'tickle down' theory has had its success in terms of structural growth and at times qualitative change in some clusters but it was largely fragmented and uneven. For example, in the case of poor, segregated, marginalized populations where education becomes a third or fourth priority much after food, clothing, shelter and health, this approach had little or no meaning. In fact, on the contrary these spasmodic and sporadic educational interventions further marginalized and excluded children of disadvantaged sections such as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities etc. in the era of stiff competition and better learning outcomes from the advantageous sections. The inherent structures of inequality and discrimination have their own forces to deprive these marginalized sections from the fruits of education and skills which in turn could allow them to overcome the difficulties and free them from the vicious cycle of poverty, illiteracy and deprivation. Now the challenge is to ensure equal access and provision to all sections of society in general and children from marginalized sections in particular essentially in the context of RTE 2009. The present paper makes an effort to map these dimensions.

It is generally claimed that since independence India has shown a deep commitment towards the achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education and has strived hard to provide equal opportunity to all at the secondary and higher secondary level of education. The Constitutional obligation compounded with various policies and programmes in implementing the commitment undoubtedly depict the efforts and seriousness of the government. However, despite all these efforts in making education

accessible to all sections of society, certain groups of individuals and communities have remained outside the ambit of education. The basic issue is that with the considerable growth in the number of educational institutions and teachers, is the access to quality education available to all the children? Are the children able to complete elementary cycle of education and if not what are the reasons responsible for this? What special measures have been taken by the government to address the equity issue and improve the educational status of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, girls and minorities? What kind of administrative and management reforms have been introduced to revitalize the school system? Does the additional support and funds provided by the Central government by launching centrally sponsored schemes have helped to achieve the target of UEE?

In the above context, the present paper focuses on the status and progress of elementary education in terms of access, enrolment and teacher since 1950s and also presents the future challenges to meet the target of UEE in the light of recently passed Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

### **Policy Framework for UEE**

To fulfill the constitutional commitment, various commissions and committees have been constituted by the Government of India from time to time, which determine the educational priorities and accordingly formulate the policies. While some of the committees concentrated on specific education sector or a specific focused group, a comprehensive review of education was taken by the Education Commission in 1964 which culminated into National Policy on Education, 1968. In order to achieve the goal of equalization of educational opportunity, and bring national consciousness for social and national integration, NPE 1968 advocated for 'Common School System (CSS)' that would serve all sections of the society living in a common neighborhood. The CSS implies that all the children should be entitled to comparable quality of schooling irrespective of socio-economic background. NPE, 1968 reiterated free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14 years. For improving the quality of education, it recommended that school complexes need to be established. Each upper primary school should be integrally related to ten primary schools that exist in its neighborhood.

### ***National Policy on Education (1986)***

By mid 1980s it was realized that the desired progress had not been achieved in education sector and the need was felt to revitalize the education therefore National Policy on Education was (NPE) formulated and adopted in 1986 followed by another document known as 'Programme of Action' (POA) which focused on details of the implementation of this policy. The NPE, 1986

emphasized a cardinal principle that education is a unique investment in the present and the future, therefore all the children be given an equal opportunity to receive quality education. It focused on the National System of Education, removal of disparities and to equalize opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far. The NPE, and its Programme of Action emphasized on decentralization of education by restructuring the planning and management of education. It put a new thrust on elementary education emphasizing on two aspects (i) universal enrolment and retention of children upto 14 years, and (ii) a substantial improvement in the quality of education.

### **Special Programmes and Schemes towards UEE**

Sustained efforts are being made to fulfill the educational goal set by the Constitution and the priorities defined by the NPE. This is evident from the number of programmes and schemes launched at the national as well as state level to achieve the target of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). This endeavour got further impetus due to the developments at the international level. The world declaration on Education for All in 1990 at Jomtien and at Dakar in 2000 brought to the centre stage the need for viewing elementary education as a fundamental right of citizens. The Dakar framework set six major 'Education for All (EFA)' goals and proposed twelve strategies. Beginning from early childhood and extending throughout life, the declaration emphasized high quality educational opportunities to all and these opportunities must neither exclude nor discriminate any child on the basis of sex, caste or religion. Concomitant to the international resolutions and commitments, Indian Government launched several state-specific/district specific programmes to reduce the regional, spatial, social and gender disparities. During 1980s and 1990s a large number of educational projects were initiated to improve the access and quality in educationally backward areas in different parts of the country e.g. Andhra Pradesh Basic Education Project (1983), Shiksha Karmi Project in Rajasthan (1987), Bihar Education Project (1991), Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan (1992) and Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project (1993). All these projects emphasized on the local level planning and involvement of community in reducing the gender disparities, improving access, enrolment and retention, the prerequisites for achieving the target of UEE.

The experiences gained from the state level projects led to the launching of District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in 1994 with the objective of providing access of primary schooling facilities to all children thereby reducing gender gap in enrolments and dropouts and improving learning achievement. It was initiated in 42 districts spread over 7 states and later spread to 285

districts in 18 states. The DPEP emphasized on need-based and area-specific planning so that each district could concentrate on its weak areas. The programme components included construction of classrooms and new schools, opening of Alternative Schooling centers, appointment of new teachers etc. The DPEP attempted to promote decentralized management with the involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), grassroots functionaries, Village Education Committees and the Community.

### ***Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)***

Although compulsory education from Grade I to Grade VIII was envisaged as one integrated unit in the Constitution of India, yet in practice it had been segregated into two distinct stages of primary and upper primary. For the first time in 2001, the SSA was initiated nation-wide emphasizing on achievement of UEE by 2010. SSA is an integrated, comprehensive scheme to achieve UEE in partnership with the state governments, the local self governments, the community and the civil society. While quality still remains an area of concern, the SSA has been able to improve the schooling facilities and boost the enrolment, retention and reduce dropout of females as well as of various socially disadvantaged groups.

Against this background, the ensuing section discusses the progress and growth in access to schooling facilities, number of schools, teachers and students at elementary level of education over a period of time.

### ***Universal Access and Enrolment***

Universal access in the Indian context implies that primary schooling facilities are available within 1 km. of each and every habitation where as upper primary schooling facilities are available within 3 kms of every habitation. It is reported in the 7th All India Educational Survey conducted by NCERT (2002) that 87 per cent of habitations were having primary schools within 1 km., whereas 78 per cent of habitations were having upper primary schools within 3 km. Data from Annual Report (2008-09) of Ministry of Human Resource Development reveal that across the country 99 per cent of the households has schooling facilities within 1km and 93 per cent to an upper primary school. It implies that universal access at the primary level has almost been achieved whereas access at the upper primary level has considerably improved but it further needs to be extended. Ensuring universal access to all the habitations and population is being addressed through progressive expansion of educational institutions with a special focus on the unserved/underserved areas.

### ***Access to Educational Facilities***

Accessibility of a school in the neighbourhood or within the walking distance

is the minimum requirement for the child to regularly attend the school. Access not only connotes the availability of physical facilities but also overcoming the economic and social obstacles. As per the national norms, habitations having a population of 300 or more and not having primary school within a walking distance of 1 km, are eligible for opening of formal primary schools and similarly habitations having population more than 500 and not having upper primary schools within a walking distance of 3 km, are eligible for opening of formal upper primary schools. Further relaxation has been made in the case of difficult/hilly terrain and areas with ethnic minority population. Table 2.1 reveals the progress made in this direction.

**Table 2.1:** Habitations/Coverage (percentage) by Primary Schools / Upper Primary Schools/Sections

Particulars	6th Survey	7th Survey
	1993	2002
% of habitations served by primary schools/ sections within 1 km	85.36	86.96
% of rural population served by primary schools/sections within 1 km	93.76	98.53
% of habitations served by Upper Primary schools/ sections within 3 km	76.15	78.11
% of rural population served by Upper Primary schools/sections within 3 km	85.00	86.14

Source: NCERT All India Educational Surveys, (Various Years).

As per the All India Educational Survey conducted by the NCERT, the number of having a primary school/section within a radius of one kilometer improved from 85 to 87 per cent between 1993 and 2002. This implies that nearly 13 per cent of rural villages/habitations do not have a primary school within a radius of 1 km. In absolute terms, as many as 1,60,549 villages/habitations (total rural habitations are 12,31,391) do not have a primary school within a radius of 1 km. in 2002-03.

Though, access to upper primary schooling has improved over the years, yet the number of villages/habitations not having upper primary schools within the village/habitation continues to be large. Around 78 per cent of habitations had upper primary schools within the radius of 3 km in 2002-03. NSSO data shows that the access to schooling facilities has improved significantly in both rural and urban areas as depicted in Table 2.2.

Data from the above table reveal though access to upper primary level of education has increased over the years, yet it continues to be a problem in some parts of rural India. This clearly suggests that the states, indeed, need to open new schools in all villages/habitations that are not served or served only by schools located at far away places. Particularly, the expansion of upper

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**Table 2.2:** Availability of Schooling Facility

Sector	Level	Distance to Nearest School					Total
		D < 1km	1km < 2km	2km < 3km	3km < 5km	D > 5km	
Rural	Primary	91.7	6.5	1.2	0.2	0.1	100
	Middle	61.6	17.1	12.2	5.8	3.1	100
Urban	Primary	92.3	6.7	0.9	0.1	0.0	100
	Middle	82.5	14.1	2.5	0.7	0.2	100

Source: NSSO 64th round.

primary stage and also secondary stage needs to be given a new impetus to achieve universal access and enrolment.

### Growth in Educational Institutions

The growth of primary and upper primary schools has been estimated for different points of time based on increase in the educational institutions over the period of time. The growth of upper primary schools in India is influenced by the expansion of primary education and growth in the completion of primary education by the children. The number of primary schools in India increased from 2,09,671 in 1950-51 to 748547 in 2010-11 an increase of more than three and a half times. The upper primary schools have grown around 33 times during the same period. The number of upper primary schools has gone up from 13,596 to 447600 between 1950-51 and 2010-11. There has been an increase of 79855 schools in the years 2010-11 from the preceding year which could be due to the implementation of RTE 2009.

**Table 2.3:** Growth of Educational Institutions: Primary and Upper Primary

Year	Primary	Upper Primary
1950-51	209671	13596
1960-61	330399	49663
1970-71	408378	90621
1980-81	494503	118555
1990-91	560935	151456
1995-96	593410	174145
1999-2000	641695	198004
2003-04	712239	262286
2004-05	767520	274731
2005-06	772568	288493
2006-07	784852	305584
2007-08	787827	325174
2009-10	823162	367745
2010-11	748547	447600
Increase (times) since 1950-51	3.6	32.9

Source: (MHRD) Selected Educational Statistics, New Delhi.

**Type of School Management**

Government is the main provider of education at the elementary level, though the share of private sector has been steadily increasing over the years. Around 83 per cent of the primary schools in 2010-11 are managed by the Government and local bodies put together and around 7.3 per cent are run by the private management. However at the same time the share of government at the upper primary level accounted for 77.3 per cent whereas around 13 per cent were managed by the private sector.

**Table 2.4:** Percentage Share of Primary Schools under Different Managements

Year	Govt.	Local Body	Govt. + Local Body	Private Aided	Private unaided
1973-74	50.88	42.47	93.34	5.01	1.64
1978-79	38.96	55.03	93.99	4.42	1.59
1986-87	41.37	51.71	93.08	4.34	2.57
1993-94	44.63	47.47	92.10	3.78	4.12
1996-97	47.78	43.88	91.66	3.34	5.00
2001-02	47.45	43.47	90.92	3.07	6.01
2002-03	55.77	32.98	88.75	3.63	7.63
2003-04	42.60	48.08	90.68	2.85	6.48
2004-05	43.33	46.87	90.20	2.55	7.24
2005-06	42.60	46.51	89.11	3.09	7.79
2006-07	44.21	44.96	89.17	3.08	7.75
2007-08	58.25	28.48	86.73	5.76	7.51
2009-10	62.85	22.96	85.81	6.57	7.62
2010-11	54.8	29.0	83.8	8.9	7.3

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, MHRD, New Delhi.

**Table 2.4a:** Percentage Share of Upper Primary Schools under Different Management

Year	Govt.	Local Body	Govt. + Local Body	Private Aided	Private unaided
1973-74	50.71	26.86	77.57	17.75	4.67
1978-79	40.31	38.13	78.44	16.90	4.66
1986-87	42.79	32.33	75.12	16.30	8.58
1993-94	45.94	33.51	79.45	9.53	11.02
1996-97	46.41	29.13	75.54	10.25	14.20
2001-02	47.36	29.05	76.41	7.81	15.77
2002-03	45.37	27.19	72.56	7.37	20.07
2003-04	39.75	32.56	72.31	6.68	21.01
2004-05	42.96	29.24	72.20	6.41	21.39
2005-06	43.17	28.80	71.97	6.14	21.88
2006-07	44.02	27.05	71.07	6.65	22.28
2007-08	55.78	17.82	73.60	9.30	17.10
2009-10	57.32	15.79	72.11	10.68	16.21
2010-11	60.8	16.5	77.3	9.9	12.7

Figures in Tables 2.4a make it clear that the share of government and government aided has increased considerably in 2010-11 from the 2006-07

which could be due to the new schools being opened in the unserved/underserved areas.

### **Improvement in Infrastructure Facilities**

School-wise information collected through District Information Systems for Education (DISE, for various years) reveals that around 3.6 per cent of the primary schools and 6.5 per cent of upper primary schools were without school building in 2006-07 which have slightly increased to 5.8 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively for primary and upper primary level in 2007-08. But in case of toilets, 46.3 per cent of primary schools and 41.9 per cent of all schools did not have any toilet in 2006-07 that have decreased to 37.2 per cent and 33.2 per cent in 2008-09. Research indicates that the availability of toilet especially for girls help to boost the enrolment and retention in the school. Similarly there has been improvement in respect of other physical facilities like boundary walls, drinking water, electricity, computers and separate toilets for girls at both primary and upper primary levels during 2006-07 and 2009-10. However, in many of the institutions, though the infrastructural facilities are available but the information is not available on whether the toilets or taps, computers and electricity provisions are in working condition or not. The micro level studies suggest that in large number of institutions they are not found to be in working conditions. Table 2.5 presents details on the non-availability of physical infrastructure.

**Table 2.5: Schools without Basic Infrastructural Facilities**

% without the facility of	Primary					All Schools				
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Building	3.6	5.8				6.5	7.1			
Toilets	46.3	41.4	37.2			41.9	37.3	33.2		
Boundary walls	58.0	57.2				50.8	49.8	49.0	48.5	
Drinking Water	17.6	15.8	14.7			15.1	13.2	12.2		
Electricity	78.6	78.6	76.4	72.3		69.5	72.4	64.4	61.1	
Computers	93.5	94.0	94.2	93.5		85.4	70.6	71.7	66.6	
Separate Toilet for Girls	65.9	58.0	55.6	49.1		47.7	49.5	47.4	41.2	

Source: Analytical Report, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07 & 2007-08, DISE, NUEPA, New Delhi.

### **Quantitative Expansion in Enrolment at Elementary Level**

Increased schooling facilities and growing awareness among the communities have created tremendous demand for elementary education. The enrolment in

elementary education in absolute numbers has increased steadily since independence but it increased enormously during 1980s. This trend has continued well into early 1990s. Figures in the table below suggest that the absolute increase in enrolment at elementary education has been in the range of 25-30 lakhs per annum with the exception of a few peak as well as low years. During 1999-2000 through 2010-11, enrolment in the elementary education increased substantially, more with respect to the upper primary stage. Both in primary as well as upper primary stages, proportionate increase in girls' enrolment were higher than boys'.

**Table 2.6:** Growth in Enrolment at Primary and Upper Primary Levels

(Figures in million)

Year	Primary			Upper Primary		
	Boys	Gxirls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-51	13.8	5.4	19.2	2.6	0.5	3.1
1960-61	23.6	11.4	35.0	5.1	1.6	6.7
1970-71	35.7	21.3	57.0	9.4	3.9	13.3
1980-81	45.3	28.5	73.8	13.9	6.8	20.7
1990-91	57.0	40.4	97.4	21.5	12.5	34.0
1995-96	60.9	46.2	107.1	22.7	14.8	37.5
1999-2000	64.1	49.5	113.6	24.3	17.0	41.3
2000-01	64.0	49.8	113.8	25.3	17.5	42.8
2001-02	63.6	50.3	113.9	26.1	18.7	44.8
2002-03	65.1	57.3	122.4	26.3	20.6	46.9
2003-04	68.4	59.9	128.3	27.2	21.5	48.7
2004-05	69.7	61.1	130.8	28.5	22.7	51.2
2005-06	70.4	61.6	132.0	29.0	23.4	52.4
2006-07	71.1	62.6	133.7	29.9	24.6	54.5
2007-08	71.1	64.4	135.5	31.1	26.2	57.3
2009-10	70.8	64.8	135.6	31.8	27.6	59.4
2010-11	70.4	64.8	135.3	32.8	29.2	62.0
Growth (times) since 1950-51	5.0	12.0	7.0	12.6	58.4	20.0

Source: (MHRD) Selected Educational Statistics (Various years), Govt. of India, New Delhi.

### Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

A perusal of the GER over a period of time reveals that the same, irrespective of boys and girls, has improved consistently. At primary stage, starting with 42.6 in 1950-51, it improved to 113.9 per cent in 2007-08, to 115.4 per cent in 2010-11. For upper primary, the same was as low as 12.7 per cent in 1950-51 this improved to 78.1 per cent in 2007-08, to 85.5 per cent in 2010-11. The GER of girls in 1960-61 was as low as 41.4 per cent and that of boys 82.6 per cent, thus showing a differential of about 40 per cent. At the upper primary level it was 11.3 per cent for girls and 33.2 per cent for boys, depicting a

differential of about 22 per cent. In 2010-11, GER for girls at primary level was 116.7 per cent whereas for boys it was 115.4 per cent, showing the differential of 1.3 per cent in favour of girls. At the upper primary level it was 87.7 per cent for boys and 83.1 per cent for girls, with a differential of 4.6 per cent. Table 2.7 depicts the improvement in GER both for boys and girls at the primary and upper primary levels.

The figures make it clear that GER has tremendously improved for girls which indicate increasing participation of girls in elementary education. However, the GER does not represent the true picture of participation levels of corresponding age groups in education as they include the overage and underage children. Therefore GER provides estimation of the participation level of children in the relevant grades irrespective of age. Besides it is claimed that teachers often inflate the data on enrolment to avoid transfers and protect their placement (see Table 2.8).

### **Growth in Number of Teachers**

The quality of education is predominantly related to the availability of teachers as well as competence of teachers both in the subject as well as in classroom interaction. As far as the availability of teachers is concerned, the number of teachers has grown significantly especially since 2000-01. The teachers account for more than 10 per cent of the government employees in India. The growth in the number of teachers has not kept pace with the growth in enrolment resulting in progressively higher Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR). The PTR has increased from 24 to 43 at primary level and from 20 to 33 at upper primary level between 1950-51 and 2010-11. As per RTE 2009 norms, high PTRs at both the levels needs to be further improved especially at the primary level of education (see Table 2.9).

### **Inclusive Approach to UEE**

Educational progress is uneven and varied among different social groups. A large chunk of population of socially disadvantaged groups has remained excluded from formal education for a long time and a sizeable proportion of their population is still educationally backward. These groups include SCs, STs and Muslim minority comprising 37 per cent of the total population of the country.

The concern for empowerment of these groups through elementary education stems from Constitutional commitments and policy directives. Article 46 of the Constitution of India clearly outlines that, the state shall "*promote with special care the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society, and in particular of SC, ST and girls.*" The National Policy on Education (1968) called for strenuous efforts to correct regional

Table 2.7: GER at Primary, Upper Primary and Elementary Level in India

	Primary				Upper Primary				Elementary			
	Boys	Girls	Total	Gender Parity Index	Boys	Girls	Total	Gender Parity Index	Boys	Girls	Total	Gender Parity Index
1950-51	60.6	24.8	42.6	0.41	20.6	4.6	12.7	0.22	46.4	17.7	32.1	0.38
1960-61	82.6	41.4	62.4	0.50	33.2	11.3	22.5	0.34	65.2	30.9	48.7	0.47
1970-71	95.5	60.5	78.6	0.63	46.3	20.8	33.4	0.45	75.5	44.4	61.9	0.59
1980-81	35.8	64.1	80.5	0.67	54.3	28.6	41.9	0.53	82.2	52.1	67.5	0.63
1990-91	94.8	71.9	83.8	0.75	76.6	47.0	62.1	0.61	100	70.8	86	0.71
1995-96	97.1	79.4	88.6	0.82	67.8	49.8	59.3	0.73	86.9	69.4	78.5	0.80
2000-01	104.9	85.9	95.7	0.82	66.7	49.9	58.6	0.75	90.3	72.4	81.6	0.80
2003-04	100.6	95.6	98.2	0.95	66.8	57.6	62.4	0.86	87.9	81.4	84.8	0.93
2004-05	110.7	104.7	107.8	0.95	74.8	65.8	70.5	0.88	97.6	90.6	94.2	0.93
2005-06	112.6	105.8	109.4	0.94	75.4	66.5	71.15	0.88	98.50	91.05	94.92	0.92
2006-07	114.6	108.0	111.4	0.94	77.6	69.6	73.78	0.90	100.4	93.5	97.1	0.93
2007-08	115.3	112.6	113.9	0.98	81.5	74.4	78.06	0.91	102.4	98.0	100.3	0.96
2009-10	115.6	115.4	115.5	1.00	84.5	78.3	81.5	0.93	103.8	101.1	102.5	0.97
2010-11	115.4	116.7	116.0	1.01	87.7	83.1	85.5	0.95	104.9	103.7	104.3	0.99

Source: (MHRD) Selected Educational Statistics (Various years) and DISE, 2007-08, NUEPA, New Delhi.

**Table 2.8:** Net Enrolment ratio at All India Level

	GER at Primary Level	NER at Primary Level
2005-06	103.77	84.53
2006-07	110.86	92.75
2007-08	113.94	95.92
2008-09	115.31	98.59
2009-10	115.47	NA
2010-11	116.0	NA

Source: Elementary Education in India: Progress towards UEE, Analytical Report 2008-09, NUEPA

**Table 2.9:** Teachers and Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)

Year	Primary Level		Upper Primary	
	Teachers (in 000)	Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)	Teachers (in 000)	Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)
1950-51	538	24	86	20
1960-61	742	36	345	31
1970-71	1060	39	638	32
1980-81	1363	38	851	33
1990-91	1616	43	1073	37
1995-96	1734	43	1182	37
2000-01	1896	43	1326	38
2003-04	2097	45	1592	35
2004-05	2161	46	1589	35
2005-06	2184	46	1671	34
2006-07	2323	44	1717	34
2007-08	2315	47	1780	35
2009-10	2480	42	1912	34
2010-11	2100	43	1887	33
Increase (times)	4.3		20.7	

Source: (MHRD) Selected Educational Statistics (Various years).

imbalances and inter-group disparities in education. Reinforcing the 1968 resolutions, the National Policy on Education, 1986 and Programme of Action, 1992 laid emphasis on the removal of disparities and equalization of educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far. Both the policies have dealt with the educational needs of the SC, ST and Muslim minorities in great details.

Based on the Constitutional commitments and policy directives, planned efforts have been made since independence to promote educational development in equitable manner. The government is the main provider of education and other welfare inputs for the SC, ST and Muslim minorities. They have been identified as special focus groups in a large number of centrally-sponsored educational programmes including SSA. These

programmes provide for development of context specific strategies and interventions for education of these groups. SSA has identified and targeted geographical areas in districts and blocks with predominance of SC, ST and Muslim minority population for allocation of funds and school infrastructure to promote education of these groups. In order to increase literacy and education among the SCs and STs, students from these groups are provided incentives like stipends, scholarships, free tuition, monetary aid for books, stationery and free accommodation in hostels. Efforts to extend the educational facilities to SCs, STs and Muslim minorities have been further strengthened since 1990s following the renewed focus on UEE. The DPEP and SSA laid a lot of stress on equity besides laying special focus on districts with large population of SCs, STs and Muslim. Consequently, there has been a good deal of improvement in educational condition of the socially disadvantaged groups. With the adoption of protective discrimination policy participation of children of SCs at primary level has increased from 11.0 million in 1980-81 to 27.1 million in 2010-11. During the same period, ST enrolment at primary level has increased from 4.66 million to 14.8 million. It is worthwhile to note that at primary level, the enrolment of SCs and STs has grown at much higher pace by 2.7 and 3.2 times compared to 1.8 times increase in the enrolment of all categories between 1980-81 and 2010-11. It is observed that SC and ST enrolment has registered higher growth rate at upper primary level than the primary. SC enrolment at upper primary level has increased from 2.22 million in 2000-01 to 11.2 million in 2010-11 and for STs, it increased from 0.74 to 5.4 million during the same period. The figures (Figs. 2.1 to 2.4) below depict the trends in enrolment for SC and ST children.

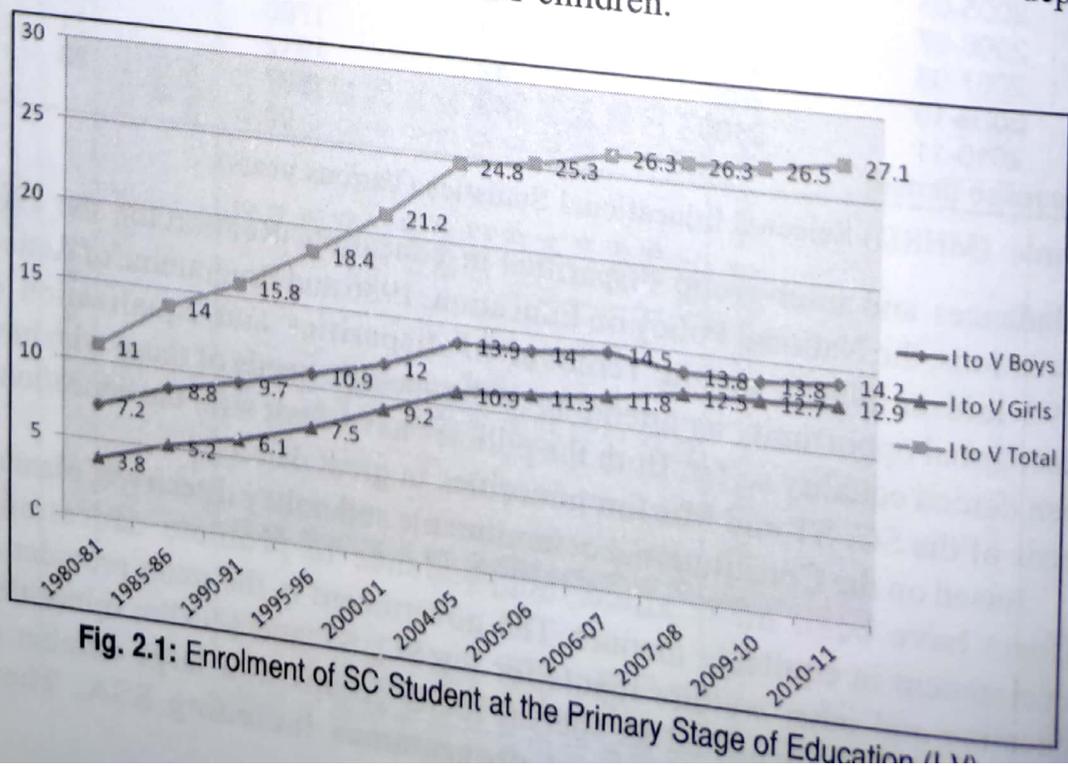


Fig. 2.1: Enrolment of SC Student at the Primary Stage of Education (I to V)

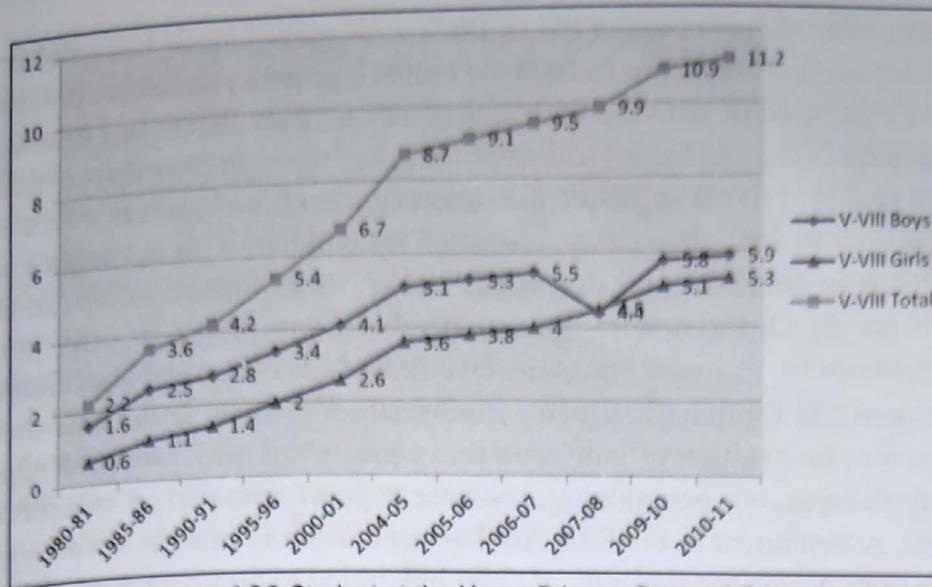


Fig. 2.2: Enrolment of SC Student at the Upper Primary Stage of Education (VI-VIII)

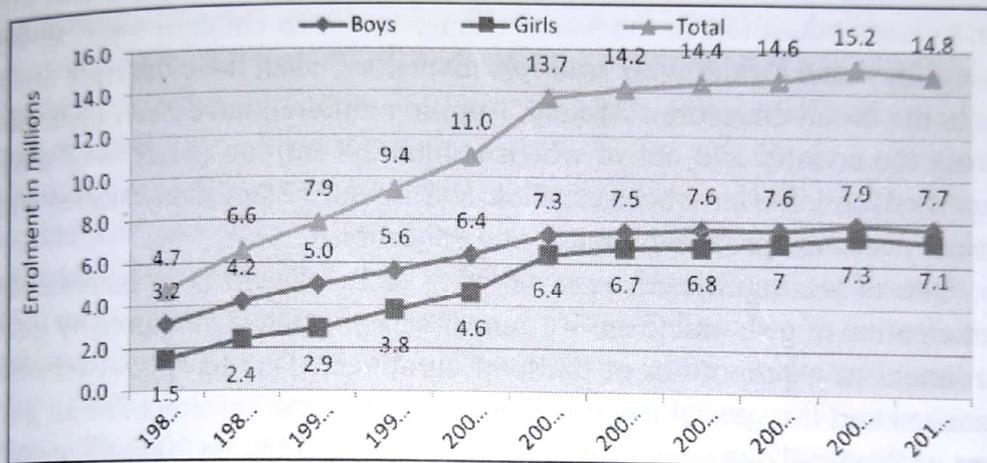


Fig. 2.3: Enrolment of SC Student at the Upper Primary Stage of Education (VI-VIII)

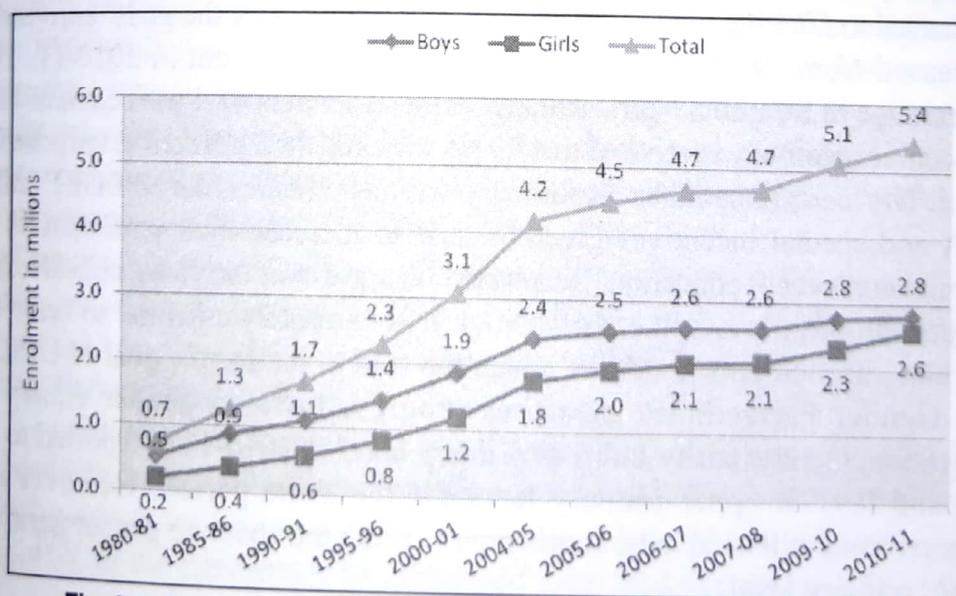


Fig. 2.4: Enrolment of ST Student at the Primary Stage of Education (I-V)

The educational needs of the children with special needs have also been provided due and emphasis. In 2005 the Indian legislation included a provision for the education of children with special needs in its elementary education policy, stipulating that a child with disabilities had the right to receive schooling within regular private or public classrooms through inclusion in education. This access to free elementary education by children with disabilities was mandated in India for the first time. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan also education of children with special needs is one of the priority areas. Interventions for inclusive education include early detection and identification, functional and formal assessment, appropriate placement in the educational institution, preparation of individualized educational plan, provision of aids and appliances, teacher training, resource support, removal of architectural barrier. Amendment in the RTE Act has been made to include children with disabilities within the meaning of child belonging to disadvantaged group. It mentions that child with disability shall have the right to pursue free and compulsory education in the same manner in which children with 'severe disabilities' and a child with 'multiple diversities' shall have the right to opt for home based education. Around 3 million children have been identified across the country and out of which around 2.3 million (81.25% of those identified) children have been enrolled, and around 77 thousand children with special needs are provided homebound education.

One of the significant ways to bring inclusiveness is to increase the participation of girls and to ensure gender parity which is measured by girls' enrolment as a proportion of the total enrolment. Due to special schemes launched and the special incentives given to girls the enrolment of all girls even of the disadvantaged groups has increased steadily. In 2000-01, around 43.7 per cent of the students enrolled in primary classes (I-V) were girls which increased to 50.3 per cent in 2010-11. For upper primary the girls' enrolment increased from 39.26 per cent in 2000-01 to 48.7 per cent in 2010-11. The percentage of SC and ST girls at upper primary level is 47.1 per cent and 47.8 per cent respectively compared to 47.9 per cent and 48.3 per cent at the primary level. The increase could be attributed to various schemes like NPEGEL under SSA and special incentives given to girls to increase their participation at elementary level of education. Despite the increase over the years, considerable proportion of girls is still out of school. It is extremely essential to bring all the non-enrolled girls under the education fold to realize the goal of UEE.

Gender Parity Index measures progress towards gender equity in education. Gender parity Index at primary level in 2010-11 is reported to be 1.0 and 0.91 at upper primary level for the same period. However the interventions still need to be augmented to bring the absolute gender parity at upper primary level.

The framework for implementation of SSA acknowledges the need for special measures to improve the educational status of children belonging to Muslim communities. Various initiatives have been undertaken to increase the participation of children belonging to Muslim communities such as 121 districts with high Muslim population have been identified for targeted interventions under SSA. Around 1470 new primary schools and 445 upper primary schools have been opened in these identified areas and 45,541 new classrooms have been constructed. 32,728 new teachers have been recruited in the schools during 2011-12 (Education for All, status and Trends, MHRD, 2012). With these interventions there has been reduction of out of school Muslim children from 2.1 million in 2005-06 to 1.1 million in 2008-09 from 9.97 per cent to 7.67 per cent of the Muslim population of children in the age group 6-14 years (SRI-IMRB Survey, 2009).

### *Trends in Dropout*

The dropout is one of the perennial problems inflicting Indian education system across all levels and this condition is more acute at the elementary stage till now. Many children who enter schools are unable to complete even the primary level of education and multiple factors are responsible for the children to drop out of the school. Risk factors begin to add up even before students get enrolled in the school which includes: poverty, low educational level of parents, the weak family structure, pattern of sibling, and the lack of pre-school experiences. Family background and domestic problems create an environment which negatively affects the value of education. Further, students could drop out as a result of a multitude of school factors such as uncongenial atmosphere, poor comprehension, absenteeism, attitude and behaviour of the teachers, and failure or repetition in the same grade, etc. It is important to carefully design the preventive measures and intervention strategies that could be adopted in order to help all young dropouts. SSA specifies reduction of dropout rate by 5 percentage point each year as a benchmark outcome indicator. By adopting special measures like no detention upto elementary level, remedial teaching, bridge courses etc. the dropout rates have reduced considerably over the years but still remain significantly high (*see* Table 2.7).

The dropout rate for general category children decreased from 64.9 per cent in 1960-61 to 27 per cent in 2010-11 at primary level. The corresponding figure for elementary classes is 78.3 per cent for 1960-61 which decreased to around 40.6 per cent in 2010-11.

The reduction in dropout rate is quite significant at primary classes for SCs and STs—from 50.4 per cent for SCs and 62.5 per cent for STs in 1990-91 to 26.7 per cent for SCs and 35.6 per cent for STs in 2010-11. The dropout rate for SC at the elementary level reduced from 50.4 per cent in 1990-91 to

**Table 2.7:** Dropout Rates at Primary and Elementary Levels

Year	Classes I-V			Classes I-VIII		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1960-61	61.7	70.9	64.9	75.0	85.0	78.3
1970-71	64.5	70.9	67.0	74.6	83.4	77.9
1980-81	56.2	62.5	58.7	68.0	79.4	72.7
1990-91	40.1	46.0	42.6	59.1	65.1	60.9
1995-96	41.4	43.0	42.1	56.6	61.7	58.8
2000-01	39.7	41.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7
2002-03	35.9	33.7	34.9	52.3	53.5	52.8
2003-04	33.7	28.6	31.5	51.9	52.9	52.3
2004-05	31.8	25.4	29.0	50.5	51.3	50.8
2005-06	28.7	21.8	25.7	48.7	49.0	48.8
2006-07	24.6	26.8	25.6	46.4	45.2	45.9
2007-08	25.7	24.4	25.1	43.7	41.3	42.7
2009-10	30.25	27.25	28.86	40.59	44.39	42.39
2010-11	28.7	25.1	27.0	40.3	41.0	40.6

Source: Selected Educational Statistics for various years.

52.5 per cent in 2007-08 and for ST from 78.6 per cent in 1990-91 to 62.5 per cent during the same period.

At elementary level of education the dropout rate in 2006-07 for boys of General category is 43.7 per cent and it is encouraging to observe that the dropout rate for girls is less than those of the boys, though still it is quite high with 41.3 percent. More than 50 per cent of SC boys as well as girls (53.6% for boys and 55% girls) dropout at elementary education. Dropout rate remains to be the highest for children belonging to ST communities with 62.6 per cent for boys and 62.3 per cent for girls. The issue of dropout is related to the quality in education and educational reforms at the schools as well as system level are being tried out to improve the quality of education (*see* Figs. 2.5 and 2.6).

Aforesaid analysis reveals that despite the significant progress achieved, all the children were not having equal opportunities to quality basic education. Considering the significance of basic education for the national development and individual growth, a movement towards making elementary education a fundamental right began in mid 1990s and resulted into the landmark Bill of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. The Act marks a new phase in the history of education for children to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

#### **RTE: Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education: Access with Equity and Quality**

Following the enactment of Right to Education Act 2009, the elementary education consisting of 8 years of schooling has become a fundamental right

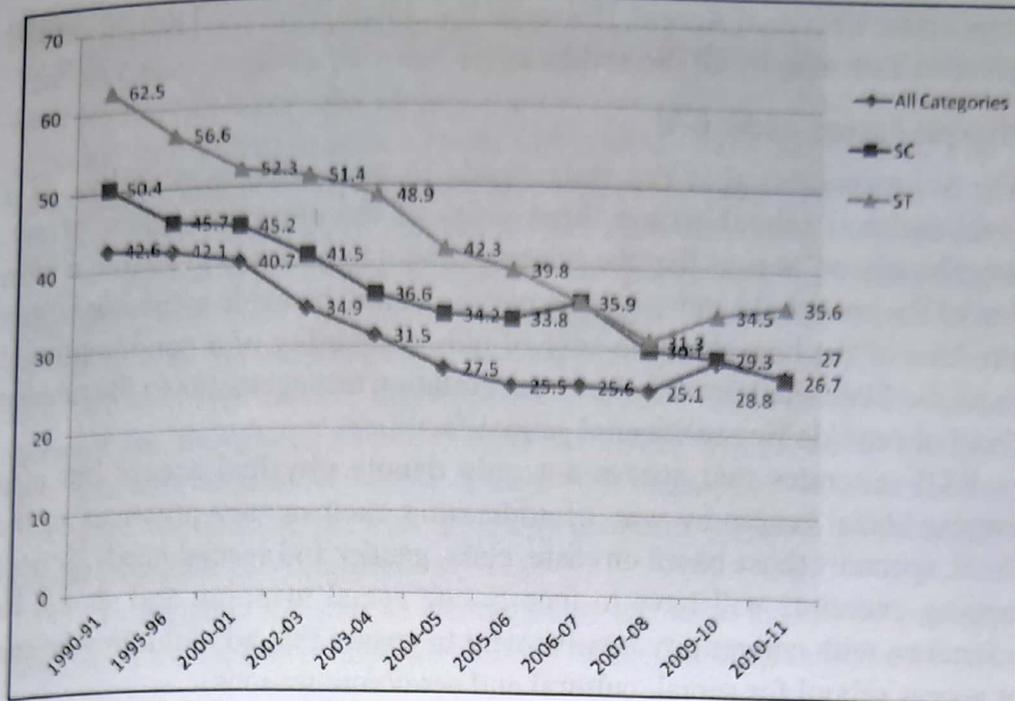


Fig. 2.5: Drop-out Rates at Primary Level: All Categories, SC and ST

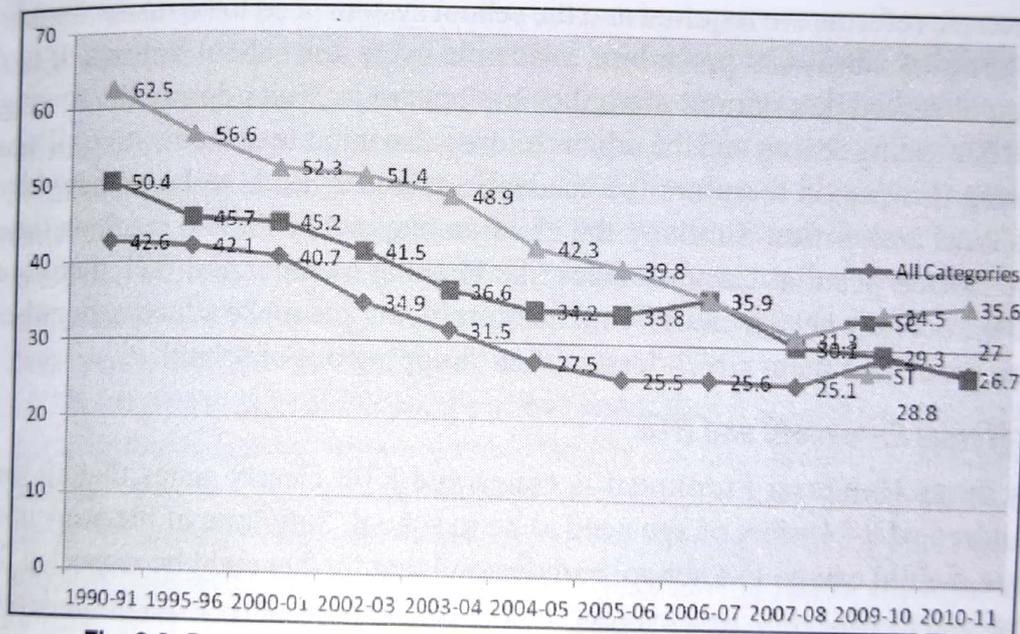


Fig. 2.6: Drop-out Rates at Elementary Level: All Categories, SC and ST

for all children aged six to 14. The enactment of Act is expected to bring fundamental shift in making public policies relating to education particularly of elementary education. The act makes it incumbent on Government to provide free and compulsory education to all children of 6-14 years of age; ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child of the age of six to fourteen years. Equality, Equity and Quality are the fundamental principles of RTE Act 2009. The spirit behind the mandate is the attainment of Universalisation of Elementary Education which has four

components: Universal Access, Universal Enrolment, Universal Retention and Universal Learning by all the children.

### ***Universal Access under RTE***

RTE Act stipulates that the state needs to guarantee availability of a neighbourhood school within three years of the commencement of act. 'Neighbourhood' means that the primary school to be made available within 1 km of the household and upper primary school to be made available within three kms of the household. In case of non availability of a neighbourhood school the State shall provide free transportation arrangements to the nearest school or provide free residential school/facilities.

RTE reiterates that access not only denote physical access but also ensuring social access by way of addressing exclusionary practices in the school, specially those based on caste, class, gender and special needs. School mapping exercises will have to incorporate social mapping and should be undertaken with community involvement to ensure that all children who can not access school for social, cultural and economic reasons.

Emphasising on the 'Right based Approach', RTE reinforces that the systemic reforms are required and the school system need to be made flexible in terms of admission procedure, academic cycle and school timings. It has been observed that in rural areas the children are irregular during the sowing and harvesting season and the urban children also migrate to their native village during this period therefore the academic calendar needs to be prepared by the local authorities. Similarly the children may not be able to reach on time due to their peculiar circumstances like fetching of water and fuel, therefore the school may need to understand their problems and make adjustment rather than punishing them which lead to their dropping out of school.

### ***Universal Enrolment and RTE***

As far as Universal Enrolment is concerned RTE clearly states that all the children of 6-14 years of age need to be in school. Any time of the academic year, a child can go to a school and demand that his/her right be respected. It also makes education free in order to give equal opportunity to all the children to attend school and the expenses should not become a hindrance in pursuing or completing elementary education. The act also mentions that each child is given age appropriate education which implies that children will be enrolled in the class that corresponds to their age. For example if nine year old has not been to school or dropped out earlier, he/she will be enrolled in class IV. To enable the 9 year to cope in class IV 'special training/ bridge course' will be provided on the premises to bring the child upto the age appropriate level.

### **Universal Retention and RTE**

The Act also ensures that the State should facilitate the completion of elementary education and clearly directs that no child shall be held back, expelled or required to pass a board examination until completion. The Act specifically addresses equity issue and requires the appropriate government and every local authority to "ensure that the child belonging to disadvantaged groups are not discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education on any grounds." Various practices followed by the school like separate seating arrangements in the classroom, calling them by different names, discriminatory attitude of teachers etc makes it difficult for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Minority students to complete the elementary levels of education. It forbids capitation fee/screening procedure for child or parents. It strictly prohibits physical punishment and mental harassment of children.

RTE suggests number of strategies at the local level like pre service orientation of teachers, curricular reforms, to be practiced to make the schools inclusive for all the children.

### **Equitable Quality**

RTE stipulates that each child is entitled to quality education and not only insists on adequate infrastructure, teaching aids, number of teachers but also on the processes and the classroom interaction. For the successful completion of the elementary education the Act lays down the norms and standards relating to, *inter alia*, Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTR), infrastructure including school building, learning equipment, school working days, teacher working hours etc. School infrastructure (where there is a problem) is to be improved in three years, else recognition is cancelled.

In respect to school building the Act states that it should be safe, having drinking water facility, separate toilet facility for girls and boys, kitchen for Mid day meal and playground secured by boundary wall. As per DISE data (2009-10) around 92 per cent of the schools were having drinking water facility and only around 31 per cent boys' schools were having toilets and around 59 per cent girls' schools were having toilet facility. Therefore the huge funds are required to build the toilets, additional rooms in those schools which do not have adequate infrastructure.

For effective teaching-learning to take place, the teacher needs to have manageable children and the Act specifies that teacher-student ratio of 1:30 at primary level and 1:35 at the upper primary level to be met within a given time frame. The primary school must function for 200 days and upper primary school to function for 250 days. The teachers are required to work for 45 hours a week.

To regulate the adequacy of teachers in each school, the Act clearly directs rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school, rather than as an average for the State or District or Block. It lays down strict criteria for the qualification of teachers. School teachers will need adequate professional degree within five years or else will lose job.

### ***To Make Learning Effective***

RTE rests the onus of ensuring learning on the State whereas earlier this burden was often placed on the child and the children were accordingly categorized as 'brilliant' or 'slow learner'. 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.

### ***Equity and RTE***

Protecting the rights of the socially disadvantaged groups as is enshrined in our Constitution it directs the State that the children belonging to weaker section or to disadvantaged groups are not discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education on any grounds. Moreover, the specific needs and predicaments of the traditionally excluded categories-the SC, ST, Muslim minority and other disadvantaged groups should be understood and school should be made accessible to these children. Seeking the cooperation and partnership of the private sector in fulfilling the target of UEE, the Act mandates unaided private schools to reserve upto 25 per cent of the seats for students from weaker sections. The Act clearly prohibits donation or capitation fee on admission; and interviewing the child or parents as part of the screening process.

### ***Decentralized Management and RTE***

Besides focus on equity, efficiency and quality improvement the RTE stress on the decentralisation and has many provisions for ensuring accountability through decentralisation including the creation of School Management Committees (SMC) empowered to make plans and monitor school-level expenditures. SMCs comprising local authority officials, parents, guardians and teachers will prepare the School Development Plans. RTE also mandates the inclusion of 50 per cent women and parents of disadvantaged children. Parents will comprise three fourth of its members with special representation from those belonging to weaker and deprived section and remaining twenty five per cent would be from amongst the elected members of the local authority, teachers and local educationist. SMCs would be responsible to monitor the working of the school, prepare school development plan, and monitor the

utilization of grants. Other major functions of the SMCs are to ensure the enrolment and continued attendance of all children from the neighbourhood in the school; monitor the maintenance of the norms and standards like adequate physical infrastructure and number of teachers in the school; identify the needs of school; monitor the implementation of the Mid-day Meal in the school. Such community participation will be crucial to ensuring a child friendly "whole school" environment.

The school Development Plan will provide details related to the estimates of class-wise enrolment for each year; requirement over the three year period of the number of additional teachers, physical requirement of additional infrastructure and equipment, entitlements of children such as free text books and uniform. It appears that the expectations from the SMCs are too high considering the fact that the parents in the governments' school may not be well informed and too occupied to participate actively and efficiently.

### ***Teachers at the Center Stage***

Recognising teachers as the backbone of the education system the Act lays down duties and responsibilities of teachers in specific terms to ensure quality education to all children. The Act clearly prohibits physical punishment, expulsion or detention of a child and deployment of teachers for non-educational purposes other than census or election duty and disaster relief. The teacher has the duty to transact and complete the curriculum, regularly assess the learning level of each child, provide supplementary instruction if required and apprise every parent/guardian about the progress of learning and development of the child. Teachers are prohibited from giving private tuitions.

### ***Responsibility of the Centre, State and Local Authority***

The Act also specifies that the Central Government and the State Government shall have concurrent responsibility for providing funds for carrying out the provisions of Act. The Central Government shall provide to the State Government as grants-in-aid of revenues, in consultation with the State Government.

The Act not only defines the responsibilities of State but also that of the local governments. They must maintain records of children up to the age of fourteen years residing within their jurisdiction, to ensure admission of children of migrant families, monitor functioning of schools within their jurisdiction and decide the academic calendar.

### ***Monitoring of the Implementation of RTE Act***

The Government is taking necessary steps to implement the Act. The National

Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), the State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights shall in addition to the functions already assigned also (a) Examine and review the safeguards for rights provided by or under this Act and recommend measures for their effective implementation; (b) inquire into complaints relating to child's right to free and compulsory education; (c) Take necessary steps as provided under sections 15 and 24 of the said Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act.

Proper implementation of the Act calls for collective efforts on the part of the Center, State Governments, schools, teachers and civil society to ensure every child of 6-14 years of age in school. Besides the enactment of RTE Act, since independence number of initiatives have been undertaken to achieve the target of UEE; few of them are discussed below.

### **Key Interventions in Elementary Education Sector**

Education being a concurrent subject since 1976, Central government has launched various centrally sponsored schemes to enhance the access, enrolment and retention of children in the school.

#### ***National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education***

National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education [commonly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme] was launched as a centrally-sponsored Scheme on 15th August 1995. Its objective was to boost "universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously impacting on nutrition of students in primary classes". Apart from enhancing school attendance and child nutrition, mid-day meals have an important social value and foster bondage and equality. As children of diverse background eat together a common meal, it tends to break caste barrier and class inequality. Moreover, at the household, the boys are given preference therefore girls are more affected by hunger. Mid-day meal can improve the educational and nutritional status of the girl child.

The programme originally covered children of primary stage (Classes I to V) in government, local body and government-aided schools, and was extended in October, 2002, to cover children studying in Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) Centers also. The programme was extended to upper primary education level from 2008-09 onwards.

#### ***Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)***

The KGBVs was launched in July 2004 for setting up of 750 residential schools with boarding facilities at upper primary level for girls, predominantly belonging to the SCs, STs, OBCs, and minorities in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) characterized by low female literacy rate and high gender gap

in literacy. A minimum of 75 per cent of the enrolment in KGBVs was reserved for girls from the target groups and the remaining 25 per cent was open for girls belonging to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category.

### ***National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)***

NPEGEL is an integral but distinct component of SSA was launched in 2003 in educationally backward blocks. NPEGEL is aimed at enhancing the education of underprivileged and marginalized girls at elementary level through intense community mobilization, development of model schools in clusters, gender sensitization of teachers, preparation of gender sensitive learning materials, early childhood care and education facilities and provision of need based incentives like escorts, stationery material, work books and uniforms.

### ***Teacher Education***

The centrally-sponsored scheme of Teacher Education was launched in 1987-88 as a follow up of the recommendations of the NPE, 1986. It aimed at creating an institutional infrastructure to provide academic and technical resource support for continuous education and training of school teachers. District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) set up under the scheme provide academic resource support to formal and non formal elementary school teachers, Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) and Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (ASEs) have been given the responsibility of organizing pre-service and in-service training of secondary school teachers.

### ***District Information System for Education (DISE)***

NUEPA has created a comprehensive database on elementary education in India known as District Information System for Education (DISE) which covers both primary and upper primary schools/sections of all the districts of the country. It is providing vital information related to school infrastructural facilities, enrollment of children in the schools as well as on teachers profile. In the current year 2008-09 12, 85,576 schools imparting elementary education across 633 districts are covered under DISE.

For the last four years, NUEPA has been computing educational development Index (EDI) which is largely based on the data collected through DISE. A set of 21 indicators have been used in computing EDI which are re-grouped into four sets of sub-groups namely; Access, infrastructure, teachers and outcome indicators. This index helps to determine the status of schools in different states and what kind of further improvements are required.

### ***Emerging Issues and Challenges***

Indian education system has made significant improvement in increasing access and narrowing social and gender disparities especially at the elementary level

of education. In spite of enormous progress, still large inequalities exist among different regions and social groups, which needs to be addressed. There is also the challenge of bringing the last 6-7 per cent children who are "hard to reach" into the fold of education. The issue of quality of primary and elementary education and enhancement of learning levels of students still persists and has to be addressed squarely. Bridging gender and social gaps in educational attainments and reducing inter-State, inter-district and inter-block disparities also pose a serious challenge. The biggest challenge is the implementation of right to Compulsory and Free Education Act.

### ***Bridging the Disparities: Regional, Social and Gender***

It is worthwhile to mention that notwithstanding the success of SSA, large variation is observed across the states and union territories in terms of accessibility to schooling facilities, participation rates, retention rate and dropout rates. Issue of universalisation of elementary education has to be seen in disaggregated terms. Huge disparities not only exist among the districts but also with regard to various socio-economic groups. Children belonging to Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes and minorities are lagging behind as far as enrolment in schools are concerned which needs to be addressed especially in the context of Right to Education Act. Though the participation of the girls has increased over the years but still the gender disparities is one of the major areas of concern which needs the attention of educational planners and administrators.

### ***Improving Quality in Education***

Research and survey findings indicate that around 30 per cent children completing primary education are not able to achieve the competencies equivalent to Grade II. Children from poor socio economic background generally do not have academic support from their families, thus are primarily dependent on the school and teacher for learning. Poor infrastructural facilities, uncongenial atmosphere and low motivation of the teachers tend to create disinterest in students leading to their dropping out of school even without completing the primary education cycle. Therefore the biggest challenge is to improve the quality in education in order to enable children to retain in school and complete the elementary education cycle as well as to achieve competency level corresponding to their grade. Improving quality in education denotes improving the basic physical infrastructure facilities, teacher competence, classroom interaction and processes, revising the curriculum in such a way as it relates to child's experiences. This must be accompanied by a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes.

### ***Decentralized Planning and Management in Operation***

Over the last few years there has been shift towards decentralization and the

effort is being made to involve the local bodies such as Village Education Committees/ward committees, School Management Committees, Parent-Teacher Association and Community in the planning and implementation of elementary education programmes. Though in most of the states and blocks these structures have been put in place but their functioning is still in question. The challenge is to strengthen these institutions and provide them the financial and administrative powers to help them to discharge their functions more effectively.

### ***Addressing Imbalances and Inequities in Teacher Provision***

Though there has been an impressive increase in the number of primary and upper primary school teachers in India in the last two decades, the imbalance in teacher allocation between states, districts and within districts, between rural and urban areas continues to be a major concern. Large number of school still remains single teacher school.

### ***Implementation of RTE 2009 at the Ground Level***

Making education a fundamental right is surely a step in right direction to address the anomalies and disparities of elementary education in India. It gives legislative framework through which we can question and improve the education system. Nevertheless the proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation of improving quality of government schools, enhanced public-private participation, enhancement of access and adequate quality of education to all children is a big challenge that needs to be addressed. Availability of sufficient number of teacher in each school is another major challenge.

Mobilizing resources and funds to implement the RTE Act is another big challenge. Major portion of the allocations are earmarked for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which is according to the Government, the main vehicle to implement the RTE Act. Government allocation to the SSA has increased by only 10.53 per cent, the majority of which comes from the 2 per cent education cess on central taxes. The allocation in 2011-12 is Rs. 20999.28 crores over last year allocation of Rs. 18999.10 crores at the revised estimated stage. The allocations for SSA from other sources other than Education cess have gone down from Rs. 7769.10 crore (Revised estimate 2010-11) to Rs. 7096.15 crore (Budget estimate 2011-12). Insufficient budget therefore remains one of the biggest hurdles to proper implementation of the Act.

The School Management Committees are entrusted with large number of responsibilities but are not given sufficient administrative and financial powers therefore they may not be able to function efficiently. Capacity building of SMC members, teachers, planners is a huge task that needs to be undertaken for the proper implementation of the RTE.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion a few policy options need to be considered:

- Government shall focus on achieving universal access with greater emphasis on expansion of upper primary schools so that on the one hand, the norm of each habitation having upper primary school within 3 km. is achieved and the national norm of ratio of 2:1 for primary and upper primary schools is achieved.
- Transfer of plan and non-plan resources through planning and finance commission and also design of central and centrally-sponsored schemes must address the needs of these educationally backward states.
- Children from the disadvantaged and socially backward groups need special attention. Children of these groups are out of school due to demand driven factors like poverty, low educational attainment of the parents, large family size as well as supply related constraints like poor accessibility to schooling facilities, overcrowding in the school, low motivation of teachers, poor teaching etc. Hence, the provision of physical facilities may not automatically address the social and economic constraints faced by disadvantaged sections belonging to SC, ST and Muslim minority groups in attending the school. These children may also be provided monthly stipend, free uniform and free stationery items to overcome their financial constraints.
- The focus on the most vulnerable groups of children who are still out of school would require partnership with NGOs and a commitment to a rights-based, equity oriented approach.
- Teachers are the pillars of any education system and they can play a major role in the qualitative improvement of schools there by facilitating bridging of disparities between social groups. They need to actively participate in the enrolment drives and be continuously monitoring the activities of the child to avoid their exclusion.
- Equally important is improving the quality in education especially of the government schools. This involves improvement of infrastructure facilities as well as the teaching learning process in the schools. More focus need to be given on individualized attention to each child and use of appropriate materials and methods for teaching children with special needs or children who come from a different language background.
- The NCF 2005 and the syllabus prepared by NCERT should become the guiding document for States and UTs to work on revising their curricula and syllabi.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion a few policy options need to be considered:

- Government shall focus on achieving universal access with greater emphasis on expansion of upper primary schools so that on the one hand, the norm of each habitation having upper primary school within 3 km. is achieved and the national norm of ratio of 2:1 for primary and upper primary schools is achieved.
- Transfer of plan and non-plan resources through planning and finance commission and also design of central and centrally-sponsored schemes must address the needs of these educationally backward states.
- Children from the disadvantaged and socially backward groups need special attention. Children of these groups are out of school due to demand driven factors like poverty, low educational attainment of the parents, large family size as well as supply related constraints like poor accessibility to schooling facilities, overcrowding in the school, low motivation of teachers, poor teaching etc. Hence, the provision of physical facilities may not automatically address the social and economic constraints faced by disadvantaged sections belonging to SC, ST and Muslim minority groups in attending the school. These children may also be provided monthly stipend, free uniform and free stationery items to overcome their financial constraints.
- The focus on the most vulnerable groups of children who are still out of school would require partnership with NGOs and a commitment to a rights-based, equity oriented approach.
- Teachers are the pillars of any education system and they can play a major role in the qualitative improvement of schools there by facilitating bridging of disparities between social groups. They need to actively participate in the enrolment drives and be continuously monitoring the activities of the child to avoid their exclusion.
- Equally important is improving the quality in education especially of the government schools. This involves improvement of infrastructure facilities as well as the teaching learning process in the schools. More focus need to be given on individualized attention to each child and use of appropriate materials and methods for teaching children with special needs or children who come from a different language background.
- The NCF 2005 and the syllabus prepared by NCERT should become the guiding document for States and UTs to work on revising their curricula and syllabi.