

Development of Elementary Education in Post-Independence India

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Education is both a constituent and major component of human development. It can act as a powerful tool for reducing poverty and unemployment, improving health and nutritional standards, and achieving a sustained human development-led growth. (World Bank, 2004). Education is one of the most important instruments for socio-economic factor for enhancing human efficiency and overall quality of life. A well educated population adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to sustain economic growth, but also pre condition for growth to be inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to gain most from the employment opportunities which growth will be provide. Within the purview of overall education, primary education is recognized as a basic human right, vital both to the development of individuals and societies (UNESCO, 2008).

Initiative towards Universalization of Elementary Education in India 1950-1960

In Indian Constitution, education has been a state subject and, therefore, for many years after independence provision for education in the Union Budget has been minimal and more importance has been given to higher education. Within the overall amount allocated for education, spending on primary education has been much lower. In 1957, the Planning Commission of India in its meeting in Puna, determined that the introduction of universal, free, and compulsory education for all children of the age group 6-11 should be given top priority and this objective must be achieved by 1965-66. The Indian Constitution made a commitment to make elementary education (for students ages 6-14) free and universal by 1960. Despite the Central Government's assistance and emphasis, at the highest policy level the progress in education even in literacy and achieving the objective of Universalization of Elementary Education was far from satisfactory. In 1961, about three-fourth of the population was illiterate and the gross enrolment rate in class I to V was 62.4 per cent and in class VI to VIII, 22.2 per cent. (Census of India 1961 Office of Registrar General, India).

1960-1980

Importance attached to primary education started to increase in this phase and got reflected in constitutional reforms, policy initiatives, and allocation of funds in the different Union Budget. In 1964, Govt. of India, appointed the Education Commission, to examine the entire gamete of education system. This Kothari Commission suggested making elementary education a constitutional right of each and every child, developing common schooling system and investing 6 per cent of GDP on education. In 1976, education was put under the 'Concurrent List' of the Constitution, denoting joint responsibility of the central and state governments. However, by 1980 only 83.6 per cent children of 6-11 years of age and 40.2 per cent children of 11-14 years were enrolled in school (Census of India, Office of Registrar General, and India). Across states more than 80 per cent out of school children were in the educationally backward states-Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. It was estimated that 70 per cent of the out of school children are girls. It was agreed upon that 'No Detention Policy' will be followed up to VIII.

1980-1990

In this phase, number of significant policies and programmes has been adopted by the government of India. The second National Policy of Education (NEP) has been declared by the Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in 1986. The policy has given three aspects in relation to elementary education: universal access and enrolment, universal retention of children up to 14 years of age, and a substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all

children to achieve. The NPE of 1986 itself has suggested not only periodic reviews of the policy but also a revision in the long-term. It was also a major departure from the national policy adopted on the recommendations of the Education Commission under Professor D.S Kothari, which in 1964 had called for a common school system as well as for a Plus-Two stage of schooling beyond Class X.

In pursuance of the NEP 1986 Operation Black Board (OBB) launched to provide essential minimum facilities to all primary schools of the country. It aimed at providing at least two rooms in all primary schools and one room in upper – primary schools (grade VI to VIII), along with two teachers in the former and a minimum of one teacher in the latter. Additionally, there was also provision for teaching-learning material (TLM) which teachers can use.

In 1987-88, primarily with the help of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the program on Non-Formal Education (NFE) was launched for children who had either dropped out of school or were not able to attend school as they were involved with work in the household or elsewhere. In this scheme, classes were conducted at a centre for two hours, mostly in the evenings. However, due to low remuneration, rigidity in implementation, and inadequate supervision and management support, NFE had limited success.

1990-2000

In 1994, at the initiative of the central government, one of the most ambitious projects, ‘District Primary Education Plan,’ (DPEP) was launched in 42 districts in 7 states, which was later expanded to 214 districts in 15 states, covering about 60 per cent of the primary schools in the country. DPEP is an externally aided project. 85 per cent of the project cost is met by the Central Government and the remaining 15 per cent is shared by the concerned State Government. Some of the unique features of DPEP were the autonomy provided to districts in planning, implementation of the programme through respective state governments, and an emphasis on a holistic approach to universalization of elementary education. Objectives of DPEP are i) to reduce differences in enrollment, dropout and learning achievement among gender and social groups to less than five per cent.(ii) to reduce overall primary dropout rates for all students to less than 10 per cent. iii) to raise average achievement levels by at least 25 per cent over measured baseline levels and answering achievement of basic literacy competencies and a minimum of 40 per cent achievement levels in other competencies, by all primary school children.iv) to provide access for all children, to primary education classes (I-V), i.e. primary schooling wherever possible, or it’s equivalent non formal education. V) to strengthen the state and district capacities for planning, management and evaluation of primary education.

In 1995, the Government of India launched a new ‘centrally sponsored scheme’—the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education. Under this programme, all government and government-aided primary schools were expected to provide cooked mid-day meal.

Another scheme, ‘National Child Labour Project’ (NCLP), was launched in 1998-99, specifically to educate the children who were engaged as labourers. Through 85 projects in 10 states, this scheme covered more than 1, 80,000children.

2000 and after

National Campaign for Education for All (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) launched in 2001-02. **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** is a significant step towards achieving the long cherished goal of universalization of elementary education through a time-bound integrated approach, in partnership with States. The SSA which promises to change the face of elementary education aims to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children in the 6-14 age groups by 2010. The SSA is an effort to improve the performance of the school system and provide community owned quality elementary education in the mission mode. It also visualizes bridging

of gender and social disparities of elementary level of education. SSA has special focus on educational needs of girls, SCs and STs and other children in difficult circumstances. The objectives of SSA are : (i) all children in schools, Education Guarantee Centres, Alternate Schools, 'Back to School' Camps by 2003; (ii) all children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007; (iii) all children complete eight years of schooling by 2010; (iv) focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life; (v) bridge all gender and social disparities at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010; and (vi) universal retention by 2010.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan aims to bridge social, regional and gender gaps, with the active participation of the community in the management of schools. The SSA programme is an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities of all children, through the provision of community-owned quality education in a mission mode.

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 empowers children belonging to the backward section of the economy to free and compulsory education. The Right to Education Act was earlier termed as The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act came into function after Gopal Krishna Gokhale's famous impassionate plea to the Imperial Legislative Council for introducing free and compulsory primary education throughout India. The Right to Education Act made compulsory all government and private sector schools across India to provide 25 percent reservation to children between the age group of 6 and 14 belonging to the weaker section of the country access to free and compulsory education. India became one of the 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child, when the act finally came into practice in April 2010.

The Right to education Act is a fundamental right which allows every child between the age group of 6 to 14 to have access to free and fare education. It requires all private and government schools to reserve 25 percent of the seats for children belonging to weaker sections of the society. The act also separates the fraudulent schools and donations and concessions have been rolled back. The act also states that no child shall be expelled, held back or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education. There is also a special training of school drop-outs to bring them up at par with students of the same age.

The Right to Education act stretches to 18 years of coverage for children with disabilities, and other provisions covered in the act range from infrastructure development, teacher-student ratio and faculty are mentioned in the act. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights is an autonomous body set up to monitor the implementation of the act along with commissions set up by the States. The body in question was formed in the year 2007.

The Right to education act has met with a lot of criticism such as being called a draft that was rapidly prepared, there was not much consultation made on the quality of education, on excluding children under the 6 year age range. Many of the schemes have been compared to that of the Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan and DPEP of the 90's which was criticized for being ineffective and corrupted. The Right to Education Act also seems to have left out the orphans, since during the time of admission a lot of documents are required, like that of birth certificate, BPL certificates and the orphans deprived of such documents are not eligible to apply.

The Constitution Bench of Supreme Court of India on 6 May 2014 upheld the Constitutional validity of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. In its decision, the apex court said that the Act is not applied to unaided minority institutions.

The five-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court in its decision also upheld the provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2010.

Review of the Progress of Elementary Education in India

Undoubtedly, there has been an impressive increase in elementary education during the last 68 years after our independence. The number of primary schools increased from 209,671 in 1950-51 to 858,916 in 2013-14; the corresponding increase in upper primary schools was from 13,596 to 589,796. During the period 1950–51 to 2013–14 universal provision of education has been substantially achieved at the primary stage. Fifth AR India Education Survey (1986) shows that, 94.5 per cent of the rural population had schools within a walking distance of 1 km. and 83.98% of the rural population has an upper primary school within a walking distance of 3 km. The survey estimated that there were 31,815 habitations in the country which had a population of 300 or more but did not have a primary school within the walking distance of one kilometer. Most of these habitations are situated in educationally backward states such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Literacy rates

Literacy adds value to a person's life and plays a crucial role in his/her overall development. It also adds tremendous value to society at the macro level. There is a strong correlation between lack of literacy and poverty, both in the economic sense and in the broader sense of deprivation of capabilities (UNESCO2006). Female literacy, in particular, is of vital importance for the future of the nation, as a child's health is crucially linked to the mother's literacy. The latest census of 2011 had recorded the literacy rates in India at 74 percent with a 9% increase to that in 2001. For one, the pace of progress in literacy rates, as revealed by decennial censuses, is very slow in India (Table 1). Between 1961 and 1991, a span of thirty years, literacy rate has gone up by a mere 28.2 percentage points, from 24.0 in 1961 to 52.2 in 1991. In other words, on an average, the literacy rate rises by approximately 8 percentage points in a decade. National Sample Survey (NSS) estimates that literacy rate has increased by about 8.6 percentage points in a period of ten years, from 65.4 in 2001 to 74 per cent in 2011. This steady increase in literacy has been largely caused by massive growth in primary and upper primary schools and enrolments; particularly in rural areas. This is terribly low compared to the performance of many developing countries, all of which had started their planned development in the second half of this century.

The numbers of literates and illiterates aged seven and above in India as per the provisional population totals of census 2011 is 778, 454, 120 and 272, 950, 015 respectively. There has been a marked improvement in the proportion of literates in the last decade. Literates in 2011

Female literacy rate (All areas) grew by 10.97 percentage points (from 53.67 per cent in 2001 to 65.46 per cent in 2011) from 2001 to 2011. Female literacy rate (rural areas) grew by 11.8 percentage points (from 46.13 per cent in 2001 to 57.93 per cent in 2011) from 2001 to 2011. Female literacy rate (Urban areas) grew by 6.25 percentage points (from 72.86 per cent in 2001 to 79.11 per cent in 2011) from 2001 to 2011). 1991 and 2001, literacy rates for males, aged seven years and above, increased from 64.13 per cent to 75.26 per cent, the decadal increase in literacy rate being 11.2 percentage points. The literacy rates for males, aged seven years and above, further increased from 75.26 per cent in 2001 to 80.89 per cent in 2011, the decadal increase in literacy rate being 5.63 percentage points. Thus, approximately four out of every five males in the country were literate in 2011. The literacy rate for females aged seven years and above, increased from 39.3 per cent in 1991 to 53.7 per cent in 2001 and to 64.6 per cent in 2011. The decadal increase in literacy rate during 1991-2001 was 14.4 percentage points while the decadal increase in literacy rate during 2001-2011 was about 11 per cent. Thus, approximately two out of every three females in the country were literate in 2011.

Table 1: Trends in Literacy Rates in India (Percentage) from 1951 to 2011

Year	Rural			Urban			Combined		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
1951	4.87	19.02	12.1	22.33	45.6	34.59	8.86	27.15	18.35
1961	10.1	34.3	22.5	40.5	66	54.4	15.35	40.4	28.31
1971	15.5	48.6	27.9	48.8	69.8	60.2	21.97	45.96	34.45
1981	21.7	49.6	36	56.3	76.7	67.2	29.76	56.38	43.57
1991	30.17	56.96	36	64.05	81.09	67.2	39.29	64.13	52.21
2001	46.7	71.4	59.4	73.2	86.7	80.3	53.67	75.26	64.83
2011	58.75	78.57	67.8	79.92	89.67	84.1	65.46	82.14	74.04

Source: Census of India, Office of Registrar General, India.

Table2: Gender gap in Literacy from 1951 to 2011

Census year	Person	Male	Female	Literacy gap
1951	18.33	27.6	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16	21.70
2011	74.04	82	65.46	17

Table 3: Gender Gap in Literacy from 1951 to 2011:

Year	Rural			Urban		
	Female	Male	Gender gap	Female	Male	Gender gap
1951	4.87	19.02	14.15	22.33	45.6	23.27
1961	10.1	34.3	24.2	40.5	66	25.5
1971	15.5	48.6	33.1	48.8	69.8	21
1981	21.7	49.6	27.9	56.3	76.7	20.4
1991	30.17	56.96	26.79	64.05	81.09	17.04
2001	46.7	71.4	24.7	73.2	86.7	13.5
2011	58.75	78.57	19.82	79.92	89.67	9.75

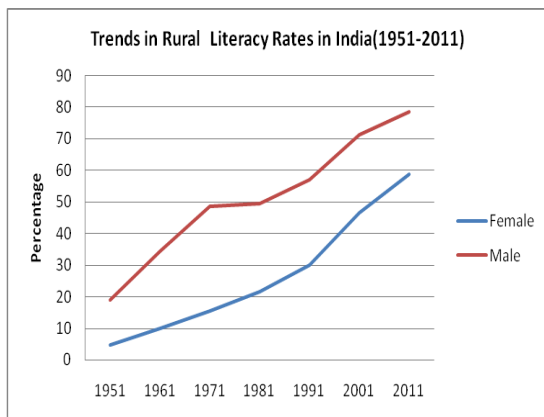


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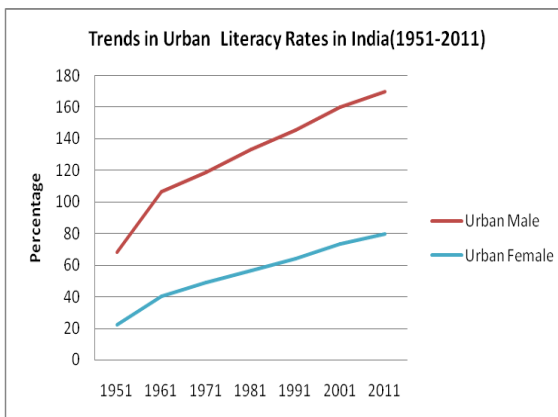


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Table-4 Differences in Literacy among the States (1991-2011)

Year	1991		2001		2011	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
A&N Island	65.5	79.0	75.2	86.3	82.4	90.3
Andhra Pradesh	32.7	55.1	50.4	70.3	59.1	74.9
Arunachal Pradesh	29.7	51.5	43.5	63.8	57.7	72.6
Assam	43	61.9	54.6	71.3	66.3	77.8
Bihar	22	51.4	33.1	59.7	51.5	71.2
Chandigarh	72.3	82	76.5	86.1	81.2	90.0
Chhattisgarh	27.5	58.1	51.9	77.4	60.2	80.3
D & N Haveli	27	53.6	43.0	73.3	64.3	85.2
Daman &Diu	59.4	82.7	70.4	88.4	79.5	91.5
Delhi	67.0	82.0	74.7	87.3	80.8	90.9
Goa	67.1	83.6	75.4	88.4	84.7	92.6
Gujrat	48.6	73.1	58.6	80.5	69.7	85.8
Haryana	40.5	69.1	45.7	78.5	65.9	84.1
Himachal Pradesh	52.1	75.4	67.4	85.4	75.9	89.5
Jammu & Kashmir	NA	NA	43.0	66.6	56.4	76.8
Jharkhand	NA	NA	38.9	67.3	55.4	76.8
Karnataka	44.3	67.3	56.9	76.1	68.1	82.5
Kerala	86.1	93.6	87.9	94.2	92.1	96.1
Lakshadweep	72.9	90.2	80.5	92.5	87.9	95.6
Madhya Pradesh	29.4	58.5	50.3	76.1	59.2	78.7
Maharashtra	52.3	76.6	67.0	86.0	75.9	88.4
Manipur	47.6	71.6	60.5	80.3	72.4	86.1
Meghalaya	44.9	53.1	59.6	65.4	72.9	76.0
Mizoram	78.6	85.6	86.8	90.7	89.3	93.3
Nagaland	54.8	67.6	61.5	71.2	76.1	82.8
Orissa	34.7	63.1	50.5	75.4	64.0	81.6
Pandicherry	65.6	83.7	73.9	88.6	80.7	91.3

Punjab	50.4	65.7	63.4	75.2	70.7	80.4
Rajasthan	20.4	55.0	43.9	75.7	52.1	79.2
Sikkim	46.7	65.7	60.4	76.0	75.6	86.6
Tamil Nadu	51.3	73.8	64.4	82.4	73.4	86.8
Tripura	49.7	70.6	64.9	81.0	82.7	91.5
Uttar Pradesh	24.4	54.8	42.2	68.8	57.2	77.3
Uttarakhand	41.6	72.8	59.6	83.3	70.0	87.4
West Bengal	46.6	67.8	59.6	77.0	70.5	81.7
India	39.3	64.1	53.7	75.3	65.5	82.1

Source:

The differences in literacy rates among the states (table-4) are also extreme. Kerala has the highest female literacy rate, with over 86 percent of women literate in 1991 which rose to 92 percent in 2011. On the other hand, there are several states that have literacy rates of less than 60 percent, including Bihar, Jharkhand, J&K, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Together Bihar and Uttar Pradesh states have over 73 million illiterate women. As with India as a whole, many states have large rural-urban differences in female literacy. Finally, there again exists a wide disparity among the various regions/states in India vis-à-vis their literacy rates. At the top of the hierarchy, lies the state of Kerala which has an exceptionally high literacy rate of 94 percent in 2011 (census 2011). For the least literate state i.e. for Bihar, the literacy rate is much lower at 61.8 percent (census 2011).

Enrolment

There has been an impressive growth in elementary education in India during the post-independence period. Enrolments in elementary education have increased by nine times from 22.3 million in 1950-51 to 198.9 million in 2013-14 (Agrawal, 1993-94). Official estimates on gross enrolment ratios have increased, from 42.6 per cent in primary and 12.9 per cent in upper primary education in 1950-51 to 101.4 per cent in case of primary education and 89.3 per cent in case of upper primary education by 2013-14, according to statistics published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in India. Both of which together constitute the Constitutional goal of universal elementary education. According to the present Survey, at primary stage total enrolment is 132.4 million which includes 63.6 million girls and 68.8 million boys. These figures show that 48.03% are girls and 51.96% boys. There are 66.5 million children enrolled at upper primary stage. At upper primary stage, total enrolment includes 34.2 million boys and 32.3 million girls. These figures show that 48.50% is girls and 51.4% boys.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

The gross enrolment Ratio at the primary and upper primary levels improved significantly between 1950-51 and 2013-14, from 42.6 to 101.4 in the case of primary levels and from 12.7 to 89.3 for upper primary levels.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females at the primary level stood at 102.65 compared with 100.20 for males in 2013-14. At the middle class level, the GER for females has been reported as 92.75 against 86.31 for males and at the higher secondary level, 51.58 and 52.77 is the Gross enrolment ratio for females and males during 2013-14. There were 93 girls per 100 boys in primary classes, 95 in middle classes during 2013-14 against lesser ratios in the earlier decade (EFA Review Report 2014).

The Net Enrolment Ratio

The Net Enrolment Ratios (NER) obtained by subtracting the number of underage and overage children enrolled in grades I-V and VI-VIII, were significantly lower than GER in the case of both boys and girls. The NER for boys and girls was 87.02 per cent and 89.26 per cent (2 per cent higher than that of boys) respectively at the primary level in 2013-14. The overall NER at the primary level was 88.08 per cent, which suggests that at least 12

per cent of children in the 6-10 age group continued to remain out of school in 2013-14.(*Source: U-DISE, NUEPA*)

Drop out

Even though India has almost 100 per cent access to school for its children at the primary level, it has high 40 per cent drop-out rate at the elementary level, according to 2011 census. The country has failed to meet the target set in the 11th five year plan that is reduction in dropout rates from 50 per cent to 20 per cent at the elementary level. Drop out had come down marginally to 27 per cent at the primary level and 41 per cent at the elementary level.

India is, thus, suffering with serious problems of inadequate access, quality and inefficiency in the schooling system. In 2013-14 the dropout rate was estimated at 27% at the end of lower primary classes and 41% at the end of upper primary. There are wide disparities among the different states in the number of children completing primary and secondary school from less than 20% to more than 80% (central statistics from the Ministry of Human Resource Development).

Out of School Children

Estimates of children not enrolled in schools have been a matter of controversy. The country has the uncertain distinction of having the largest number of illiterates and out of school children in the world, 30% of the world's adult illiterates (300 million) and 21.87% of out-of-school children. At least 24 million children in the age group 6-14 are out of school of which about 60% are girls; about 121.3 million are adult illiterates in the age group 15-35 of whom about 62% are women (P.R.Panchamukhi, 1989, *Reforms Towards Equality and Relevances*, Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay, pp. 38).

According to official figures, for instance, in 2000, there were an estimated 35 million children out of school across India.5 million children between 6–11 years and another 30 million between 11–14 years. An examination of state-wise estimates of out-of-school children is quite revealing. According to official figures, there are no out-of-school children in the 6–11 year age group in Orissa and Rajasthan, whereas there are some in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Similarly, it is hard to reconcile that the number of out-of-school children between 11–14 years in Gujarat (1.12 million) is higher than in Rajasthan (0.54 million) and Madhya Pradesh (0.5 million).

Conclusion

The study represents a very significant growth in elementary education in India since independence. On the other hand, elementary education is also associated with very serious problems of high rates of dropout, low pupil-teacher ratio, poor quality of education, and low levels of student achievement in learning. Although the enrollment has increased at a faster rate but the rate of increase in literacy is rather slow.

Along with improvements in literacy, India has witnessed a significant increase in primary as well as upper primary enrolments. The recent data suggests that there has been a considerable increase in the participation of girls in school because of an increase in enrolments and decline in drop-out rates over the years. The numerical strength of girls as well as boys has increased rapidly during the last few decades and in particular since 1990. The gap between the number of boys and girls has also reduced during this period. At the primary and upper primary levels enrolment of girls is increasing at a faster rate than that of boys. This trend still continues. On the whole, there has been a steady increase in school enrolment starting from 1990. The acceleration in enrolment in recent years is reasonable, given a number of schemes such as the recruitment of local teachers, increasing closeness of schools, serving of hot-cooked meals in schools, and incentives for girls do encourage children to enroll in schools. However, official figures on enrolment are often unreliable.

India is, thus, suffering with serious problems of inadequate access, quality and inefficiency in the schooling system. There are wide disparities among the different states in the number of children completing primary and secondary school from less than 20% to more than 80%. In spite of the above mentioned efforts, many children in India are still out-of-school for various reasons and their voices have never reached their own parents nor heard by

any other stakeholders. A basic problem is the lack of clarity about the role of government, community and parents about the children's future. In effect, top down policy and parental will and commitment are still among the significant barriers to achieve Universal Primary Education.

Rural development will still be undermined unless efforts are focused on education for rural people, particularly the children who are considered as the future assets for nation building and economic development. Until and unless both capitals (physical and social) were addressed improvement of the livelihood and economic development of India will not be achievable.

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