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REVIEW ARTICLE

SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL: A GENERAL STUDY

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Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the State of West Bengal: A General Study

Mr. Santanu Biswas

Research Scholar, Department of Education, A.M. School of Educational Sciences, Assam University, Silchar, Assam

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India being a democratic country has made the elementary education a fundamental right of all citizens. The Supreme Court of India has also felt the needs of elementary education and in a judgment held that all citizens have a fundamental right to education up to the age of 14 years. Then the Govt. of India has introduced 83rd Constitution Amendment Bill in Parliament in 1997 to make education a fundamental right of all children up to the age of 6 to 14 years. Thus to enrich the field of elementary education the Govt. has introduced Universalization of Elementary Education. It's a constitutional provision as well as a national commitment. The Directive Principles of State Policy envisage UEE as one of the major goals to be achieved and mandated in a timeframe of 10 years. But it's a matter of regret that till date the goal has not been achieved. And that is the point from where the SSA has been come into existence to provide education for all. The World Declaration on Education For All (1990) adopted in Jomtein, Thailand gave fillip to national commitment for reaching basic education for all, particularly in the most populous countries including India accounting for more than 50 percent of the world's population. It decided to initiate action to see that every child in each of those countries had access to education through formal or non-formal modes. Its a scheme to pursue UEE in a mission mode which was evolved from the recommendation of the State Education Minister's Conference held in October, 1998. SSA was approved by the cabinet on 16th November, 2000 and was started in 2001. The aims of SSA were to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the age of 6 to 14 years group by 2010. Now the objective of the study is to find out whether the SSA could achieve the desired goal or not, and if not – why? The data used in the study have been collected from the secondary sources. Thus the present paper will depict a present scenario of SSA in West Bengal. SSA is a clear time frame for universal Elementary Education. It is the gateway to promote social justice through basic education. SSA is an effort to effectively involve the Panchayati Raj Institutions, School Managing Committees, Parents' Teaches' Association, Mothers' Teachers' Association, Tribal Autonomous Councils

and other grass root level structures in the management of Elementary Schools.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF SSA

SSA means education for all. Thus to achieve UEE is the basic aim of SSA. Below we have discussed some of the major aims and objectives of SSA:

1. SSA aims to provide useful and relevant Elementary education for all children in the 6 to 14 years group by 2010.
2. It aims to bridge social, regional and gender gapes with the active participation of the community in the management of the school.
3. SSA aims to provide value-based learning that allows the children an opportunity to work for each other's well-being rather than to permit more selfish pursuits.
4. SSA could realize the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education and hence aims to provide free and compulsory education up to 14 years age.
5. SSA aims that all children would complete 5 years of primary schooling by 2007 and 8 years of elementary schooling by 2010.
6. It focuses on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for all.
7. It aims to bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary level by 2010.
8. SSA also aims for universal retention by 2010.

SSA has two parts - (a) Providing wide convergent framework for implementation of elementary

education schemes and (b) Working as a programme with budget provision for strengthening vital areas to achieve UEE. SSA working as a programme has taken the following strategies:

1. Institutional Reforms

It includes educational administration achievement levels in schools, financial issues, review of State Education Act, status of education of girls etc. where the state as well as the central government would take the matter under consideration as a part of the SSA programme.

2. Sustainable Financing

To enrich elementary education there is an urgent need of sustainable financing and that could be done in collaboration of State Govt. with Central Govt.

3. Community Ownership

If we consider school as a miniature of the society then the community participation is a must. And it can be augmented by involvement of women's groups, Village Education Committee's members and members of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

4. Institutional Capacity Building

SSA conceives a major capacity building group for national, state and district level institutions like NCRT, NCTE, DIET etc.

5. Improving Mainstream Educational Administration:

It can be done by institutional development, adoption of new approaches and methods suitable to the needs of the present education system.

6. Accountability to Community

SSA envisages co-operation between teachers, parents as well as accountability and transparency to the community.

7. Priority to Education for Girls:

Education for girls of rural areas as well as of SC/ST and minorities would become one of the principal concerns in SSA.

8. Role of Teachers:

SSA recognizes the critical and central role of teachers and advocates a focus on their development and needs.

9. Thrust on Quality:

To improve the quality of elementary education SSA has made provision for in-service teachers training, changes in curriculum etc.

10. District Elementary Education Plans:

To achieve UEE SSA has launched DEEP. To achieve elementary education SSA has also paid to way to Public-Private Partnership. It provides financial support to the elementary education where Mid-day-Meal is one of the major assistance provided by SSA. It's a district intervention with food grains and specified transportation cost being made by the center and the cost of cooked meals being made by the state government. Again the funds to be used for up gradation maintenance, repair of schools and teaching learning equipment and local arrangement to be transferred to VECs, SMC, Gram Panchayat or any other village or school level arrangement for decentralization adopted by that particulars state or the Union Territories. Hence for the development of elementary education SSA intervenes financially in many areas like 'teacher' where 1:40 ratio should be maintained an every class must have a teacher in upper primary level. SSA places great emphasis on preparing the teachers for teaching, by building there capacity through a series of training programmes. SSA provides for regular 20-day in service training for every teacher every year, along with facilities for 30 day training for newly recruited teacher and 60 days training for teachers that have not received pre service training. The training of teachers can be done in ODL mode also and it has already been implemented in West Bengal since May 2013.

West Bengal is one of the 29 states in India with an area of 88752 Sq. Km. There are 20 educational districts in the State. At present there are three Divisions – Jalpaiguri, The Presidency and Burdwan. Besides these 19 districts, Siliguri is treated as a separate educational district. These districts are divided into 66 Sub-division. The number of Panchayat Samiti is 341. 3358 Gram Panchayats have been constituted with 45,195 Gram Sansads. There are altogether 127 municipal bodies i.e., statutory towns in the State to look after the civic administration of the concerned urban areas. The 127 Municipal bodies have Primary School Council, functions as the Chairman, SSM Committee, Kolkata. At the sub-district level, there is a Circle Resources Centre (CLRC), fully organized academic and administrative resource Centre of SSA activities. Sub-Inspector of schools of the circle function as Circle Project Coordinator (CPC) of the concerned CLRC in addition of his/her normal duties. Circle is the lowest administrative set up a Sub-district level. The Cluster Resources Centre (CRC) is headed by one CRC Coordinator. CRC mainly looked after the quality of education within the area and co-ordinates all agencies in the field of primary education under the guideline of CPC. The Government of West Bengal established on 2nd February, 1995 a registered society named 'Paschim Banga Rajya Prathamik Siksha Unnayan Sansita' as an autonomous and

independent body for implementation of the West Bengal Elementary Education Project and to function as a societal mission for bringing about a fundamental change in the basic education system. The implementation of SSA in the State was entrusted to this Sansita on 14 March 2002 with some alterations when the name of SIS was also changed to 'Paschim Banga Rajya Prathamik Siksha Unnayan Sanstha' (PBRPSUS). The name of PBRPSUS was again changed to 'Paschim Banga Sarva Siksha Mission' on 31st October 2006. It has already been mentioned that SSA provides financial assistance may be for development of infrastructure facilities, but it's a matter of regret that some of the districts could not even utilize the amount provided by SSA for the development of Elementary Education. In this regard we can cite the example of Mursidabad and South 24-Parganas where in Mursidabad out of the approved overall outlay for the SSA activities for the years 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 amounting to Rs.10,311.27 lakh, Rs.14,864.63 lakh, Rs.14,537.46 lakh and Rs.14,598.69 lakh, the District Authorities could not be utilized 63.27 percent, 42.23 percent, 22.71 percent and 72.76 percent (up to November 2008) representing Rs.6,523.87 lakh, Rs.6,276.62 lakh, Rs.3,301.03 lakh and Rs.10,621.58 lakh (upto November 2008) respectively. Again in South 24-Parganas the same case happened.

The District Information System for Education (DISE) is the store house of data for the planning and implementation of SSA. But while drawing up annual plan, the district officers usually make the little use of the DISE data. In West Bengal, the ratio of the number of primary schools to that upper primary is the highest in among all the states and it has been pointed out time and again by the Centre. The DISE data of West Bengal also could not provide a clear-cut picture of this ratio. On inquiry with the Management Information System it has been found that in most of the schools, the space for this information is either left blank or is filled with absurd numbers. The teacher-pupil ratio is another determinant of quality education, but in most of the districts, the District Project Officer is not even informed about the latest situation in this regard. Though one of the major concerns of SSA is to strengthen the field of girls' education, but till date it could not achieve its goal as particularly in West Bengal, early marriage is present especially in rural areas. As a result, the areas generally backward in terms of the female literacy rate in 2001, have also lagged behind in terms of school infrastructure even in 2007-08 whereas during this period the average level of infrastructure was satisfactory. This problem of unevenness in school infrastructure is more serious in Hoogly, Nodia, Birbhum and Murshidabad. According to the DISE, 2008-09 report, in some blocks like Rajnagar of Birbhum, the pupil-teacher ratio and student classroom-ratio are rather low, but 25% of the primary schools are single teacher school. Regarding the plan for additional classrooms, sometimes the

engineer of the DPSE fails to inspect all the sites in the entire district within a reasonable time which causes delay in the sanction. In this connection we can cite the example of Nadia district where the Govt. grant has been successfully utilized during the recent years. Again, the RTE Act focuses on the bringing of out-of-school children (OOSC) back to school and in this case Murshidabad demands a good record as during the year 2010, 37699 students were brought to school in the age group of 5+ to 8+ and 8077 in the age group of 9+to 13+. But the Annual Report of the School Education of the same district reported OOSC figure as 12909. As far as teachers' training is concerned the Government of West Bengal is paying more attention both in the primary and secondary section. The West Bengal Board of Primary Education has been providing the in service teachers training for primary teachers in ODL mode also since May 2013 and for the the secondary teachers NSOU has taken the initiative in this respect since October 2013. Hoogly considered as the first district in providing primary teachers' training has done a tremendous job has completed training for all the newly recruited teachers. Thus it can be said that the DIET can take play a dynamic role in imparting in service teachers training.

To conclude it could be said that SSA is a positive initiative taken by the Govt. of India to promote quality education at the elementary level and for the development of elementary education SSA has been trying its level best. But in this case to achieve the desired goal of SSA the states have to take the same responsibility as like SSA. Hence, if the states become responsible and follow the rules of SSA then only the scheme of SSA will achieve its goal.

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