



Ailing Primary Education System in Bihar: A Step Leading to Opportunity Loss and Moral Degradation

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Abstract: This paper primarily represents the status of primary education system in Bihar in the backdrop of nation's commitment and compulsion under Right to Education Act – 2009, backed by article 21-A of Indian Constitution. Primary education is the very first stage leading to accomplishment of the goal of a sustainable future. As such, children, during this phase of learning, learn the basic fundamentals of life at one hand and also identify their talents and potentials at other hand which altogether translate into cultural, social, economic, political and psychological development of an individual in specific and the nation as a whole. A very strong foundational base is very much requisite for construction of any infrastructure. Likewise durable and quality primary education, available to all, is the foremost requirement to eliminate some of socio-cultural and psychological evils from the society, such as poverty, ignorance, superstition, untouchability, etc.

Keywords - Basic Education, Elite Hangover, Human Capital, Moral Degradation.

Introduction

Since its independence, India has achieved spectacular performances in all areas of human development including universalization of primary education all across the nation but quality in primary education is such an area of concern which requires our utmost attention. As Aristotle said, educating the minds without educating the hearts is no education at all.

Education is a social engagement among two or more generations whereby more knowledgeable, skilled, experienced and value oriented individuals are entrusted the charge of sharing their knowledge, skills, experiences and values among newer generations in order to train-enough the

newer generations to cope with all challenges at any stage of life cognitively, reasonably and bravely.

Human beings are often considered either to be a valuable asset or a bane for any nation. This is because today's child is tomorrow's nation builder. The nation, which provides equal opportunities of education to her all children, has the greater probability of overcoming the intensity of backwardness as children with proper education get turned into productive human capitals whereas such nations which fail at this account often suffer with socio-cultural, economic, political and psychological backwardness because relative and chronic deprivation culminate into poverty, ignorance and social stratification which further translate into internal conflicts, political instability and economic failures as yesterday's children have today become burden on the nation. Thus, Maimonides quotes - Give a man fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

Primary education (also known as Basic education or Elementary education) is primarily meant for children of 06 – 14 years of age groups which expands from classes I to VIII. It comes in between pre-primary and secondary education whereby children learn basic foundational values of life along with basic numeracy mainly because children attain maximum cognitive learning in this phase only. Therefore, primary education acts as a foundational base for the entire education system of any nation.

Constitutional provisions

India, being a socialist, democratic. Federal and republican state, has put education as a subject in the concurrent list under article 246 of the constitution whereby both the union and state governments share the onus of educating the children without any discrimination on any consideration. Besides, 86th constitution Amendment Act, 2002 made Right to Education under article 21-A a fundamental right and also added article 51-A(K) under fundamental duties which bound both governments and parents respectively to provide equal opportunities to all children of 06-14 years of age right to compulsory primary education.

Statutory provisions

Being a socialist nation, Indian parliament has enacted the Right to Education Act-2009 to improve the modalities and regulation primary education system across the nation. It also requires from all private primary schools to reserve 25% of seats to poor children which is to be reimbursed by the state as a part of public-private partnership plan. It also requires proper monitoring of primary schools in neighborhood, identification of children of primary age group and improvement in physical infrastructures of primary schools.

Brief Profile of Bihar

According to 2011 census report, Bihar carries 104 million (10.4 crores) population making it the third largest state of India in terms of population. In addition, Bihar is the twelfth largest state in

terms of area as it is spread over 94,163 sq. km (36,357 sq. miles). Nearly 11.79 percent of India's total child population is located in Bihar. As such, every 12th child of age 06 -14 years of India lives in Bihar.

Bihar is one of the poorest states in India (so often considered as a BIMARU state) whereby nearly 33.7 percent population are below poverty line and is also predominated by about 88.7 percent of rural population. Being a land locked state with no access to sea, agriculture has emerged as the main source of livelihood for majority of population. As such, about 90 percent of population, directly or indirectly, depend upon agriculture which in turn depends upon the goodness of monsoon as nearly two-third of agricultural fields solely depend upon monsoonal rains for irrigation. Any discrepancy in monsoon often results into either flooding of agricultural fields during excessive rainfalls or famines due to longer dry spells which altogether bring financial hardships not only to farmers and their families but also affect government's development programs. In this scenario, children in age of 06-14 years have to priorities economic activities over education opportunities to earn additional income for their families. They are primarily enrolled in government's primary schools for the sake of some monetary and material grants.

On contrary, nearly 11.3 percent urban population are fortunate enough to access the quality primary education either at their own or government's aid. Those families which bear the expenses of their children's education from primary to higher level either in Bihar or outside, as a result, their children are achieving their dreams and making Bihar proud in the country and the international communities.

The dilemma with Bihar is that it is often identified as the land of learning and wisdom has emerged as it has emerged as the leading producer of civil servants, doctors, engineers, etc. in the country at the one hand. Nevertheless, Bihar is also cursed as the factory of migrants and manual labors across every nook and corner of the nation which are many times forced to work and sustain their lives in unhealthy environments and are also exploited by the employers or contractors due to lack of bargaining power just because of faulty education system prevalent in Bihar .

Over the time, likewise other states in India, Bihar has also achieved near universalization of primary education. As such, Bihar has achieved 96.2 percent of the total gross enrolment ratio of students in primary education during financial year 2022 wherein gross enrolment ratio for male students was 95.1 percent against 97.4 percent for female students. The attendance in primary schools has increased marginally from 56.5% in 2018 to 59.3% in 2022 (national average - 72.9%) as per ASER report 2022. Though, Bihar has achieved this milestone at the cost of quality in primary education. With another little push from the government end along with active public participation, the goal of universal quality primary education can be achieved in near future which would ultimately reflect into improvement of Bihar's performances in various aspects of development.

Primary School management In Bihar

Since 1947 up till 42nd constitution Amendment Act, 1976 whereby education as a subject was transferred from State List to Concurrent List, education as a subject was mentioned in the state list which imposed the sole responsibility of education the children and management and regulation of primary schools on the state government. Post 1976 till 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment acts, 1992, both union and state governments owe the responsibilities of education of children and management and regulation of primary schools. Post 1992, both panchayats and municipalities bear the responsibilities of regulating primary schools in their jurisdiction in villages and town respectively under the guidelines issued by union and state government to ensure quality and remove area specific complications through participation of local community.

Issues confronting Primary Education

At economic front, Bihar is burdened with one-third of population below poverty line. Although agriculture, leading employment sector, is itself a gamble of the monsoon which force the families to engage their children in child labors to earn additional bread and butter for their families as adult members fail to compensate the loses occurred due to agricultural failures.

At political front, Bihar is an over politicized state wherein every policy is measured through the yardstick of populism and casteism. The political masters prefer some issues always remain an issue of political discourse in which quality education to all is one such as they lack political will to remove the problems associated with primary education from roots. Their very political life exist on the existence of these issues in the society. Also, it is very easy to mobilize the illiterate masses through polarization of caste and socio-cultural identities.

At quality front, Bihar government emphasizes upon increasing the numbers of schools, teachers and physical infrastructures compromising with qualitative aspects. As evident, the government's primary schools, especially in rural areas, lack the basic physical infrastructures like functional toilets, drinking water dispensaries, libraries, etc. mentioned in government's manuals. Besides, scarcity of professionalism, devotion and sympathy among teachers for the cause of poor children's education. In addition, no regular updation of syllabus and availability of study materials at time to students. All these factors discourage both parents and children to prefer education to employment.

At management front, the bureaucracy, due to elite hangover, often fails to ensure local participation in management, regulation and audit of primary schools which have led to transformation of the temple of learning into a den of corruption whereby vested interests of few overweigh the needs of newer generations leading to the situation of human capital decay because early phase of education determines the kind of person a child will become in future as 85 percent of a child's brain develops during this phase only.

At psychological front, the poor population of Bihar have presumption that quality primary education is possible in private schools only and government schools everywhere are only meant to generate employment opportunities wherein both quality and quantity lack during the time of regulation and service delivery. Due to lack of political and constitutional knowledge, they are

not aware of their rights and obligations of the government mentioned in the constitution. Thus, they fail to raise their voices to make government accountable towards constitutional duties.

At school front, the primary schools face serious shortage of qualified and professional teachers in all subjects of all standards ranging from class I to class VIII. In the politics of women empowerment and social justice, the primary education, as a whole, became the victim of quality crisis because of recruitment of such persons as primary teachers who themselves are in dire need of proper basic education. It is evident from the report that 97 percent of teachers fail to pass an examination, conducted by Bihar Public Service Commission, for the post of headmasters. It is the reason that despite higher enrolment rates on papers, higher drop rates are still the reality of time.

At pupil-teacher ratio front, right kind of teacher-student ratio is the foremost requirement of quality education everywhere and any discrepancy directly haunts the qualitative aspect of learning and efficiency aspect of teaching processes. According to official reports, Bihar schools have the worst student-teacher ratio of 60:1 against the set norm of 30:1 for primary schools and 35:1 for upper primary schools under Right to Education Act, 2009, and 26:1 for primary schools and 21:1 for upper primary schools fixed by Unified District Information System for Education plus (UDISE). In rural areas, an entire school runs with the help of just two or three teachers and it often goes unchecked to complex politics and bureaucracy nexus.

Manifestations of Poor state of Primary Education

At social level, the state which fails to provide quality education to all children often ends with the curse of widespread ignorance, superstition, child marriages, juvenile crimes, social conflicts, poverty and social stratifications. With all these issues, quality of life of people in the state often deteriorates as people spend their most of time in struggling to fulfil their basic minimum requirements of life only and it is evident from Bihar's poor performances in various indicators of human development such Human Development Index published by United Nation Development Program and India Sustainable Development Goals published by NITI AAYOG.

At economic level, faulty primary education often culminates into defective entire education system which ultimately results in the situation of opportunity loss for those who get exposed to the reality. The ultimate aim of education is to transform children into productive assets for the state but a defective education system turns children into a liability for the state. Consequently, economic opportunities are permanently lost for both individuals and the state as the individuals do not enjoy the bargaining power in employment markets and such a population, thus, becomes a bane for the state.

At political level, it is very easy for the political masters to fool illiterate and poor population with their false promises and propagandas during the election. It is predominantly poor and illiterate rural population which often registers a greater share in total voting percentage in every election. Thus, they very conveniently become the prey of failures of polarization of caste and religion issues done by our political masters whereby human developmental issues take a back seat. As a

result, the polity of state often ends with criminalization of politics and it is evident from Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report which discloses that 72 percent of Bihar minister have declared criminal cases against them. Therefore, inefficiency, opacity and non-accountability, spiraling together, give birth to corruption and morality decay which silently kill the future, dream, aspiration, talent and potential of our millions of poor children in specific and the state in general.

Conclusion

This prima facie seems that a faulty education system not only negatively affects individuals who are directly exposed to it but it has also a spillover effects over other dimensions of the society, economy and polity of any state and the nation. Primary education, in one's life, is a very first staircase of such a ladder which leads one's to a meaningful life. It is the stage which requires a right kind of education system in the society because it is the only phase where a child enters the outer world to learn the manners how to induct himself in social constructs and imbibe core fundamental values of life which altogether help him to tackle life related problems at different phases of life in a more mindful manner. As such, only healthy members together can establish a healthy family, healthy families together can establish a healthy society and healthy societies together can build a healthy state which ultimately healthy states together can build a healthy nation. Likewise, only a durable, sustainable and quality primary education can construct a better place for human sustenance with social, political, economic and cultural justice.

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