

## Research Paper



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## TRAJECTORY AND IMPEDIMENTS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

The school education in India has come a long way after its independence. The trajectory of growth that the school set up has been through is exponential in terms of its numbers. However, the quantitative expansion of school infrastructure, enrolment of students and teachers' availability has somehow not been able to keep itself in tune with the qualitative aspects of education. Though there have been numerous efforts to pave way for the quality in education to be put in place and there have been some noticeable success in the desired lines; still the Indian school education system has a long way to go when compared with the parallel knowledge economies of the world. The qualitative improvement of schooling in terms of scholastic achievement of students, link of secondary education with the rapid changing world outside the boundaries of the school system, curriculum reforms, pedagogical concerns, examination reforms, etc are yet far from satisfactory. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has witnessed its remarkable success in terms of numbers and this has resulted into the launch of much enthusiastic Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) by the Government in year 2009-10. However the success of the RMSA is yet to be seen. The policy makers come up with lots of roadmaps to improve upon the level and state of education, but the execution of such roadmaps comes across some serious impediments as well. This paper discusses the challenges of the secondary school education in India and contends that the need of the time is to anticipate such roadblocks along with envisioning the roadmaps, so that adequate measures could be taken up while moving ahead with the execution of the reforms. This way the output of the programme could be substantive and satisfactory for the betterment of all the stakeholders of the educational process and that of the society at large.

**KEYWORDS:** RMSA, SSA, Gross Enrolment Ratio, Growth Trajectory of Secondary education

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most important instruments of human development, empowerment and social change across all societies on the globe is its education system. Education is one of the most important components of the inclusive development model of the emerging Indian democracy, which was well articulated even in the 1960s in the report of the Education Commission (1963-64). Over the period of time especially after independence, Indian education sector has grown visibly, yet remains far away from being a developed society and economy. Though the school education in India has come a long way after its independence. The trajectory of growth that the school set up has been through is exponential in terms of its numbers. However, the quantitative expansion of school infrastructure, enrolment of students and teachers' availability has somehow not been able to keep itself in tune with the qualitative aspects of education. Though there have been numerous efforts to pave way for the quality in education to be put in place and there have been some noticeable success

in the desired lines; still the Indian school education system has a long way to go when compared with the parallel knowledge economies of the world. The qualitative improvement of schooling in terms of scholastic achievement of students, link of secondary education with the rapid changing world outside the boundaries of the school system, curriculum reforms, pedagogical concerns, examination reforms, etc are yet far from satisfactory. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has witnessed its remarkable success in terms of numbers and this has resulted into the launch of much enthusiastic Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) by the Government in year 2009-10. However the success of the RMSA is yet to be seen. The policy makers come up with lots of roadmaps to improve upon the level and state of education, but the execution of such roadmaps comes across some serious impediments as well. Some of the following facts and figures describe and substantiate the preceding statement about the Indian education sector and illustrate the need for renewed attention to development of education.



There are around 125.4 million young people between the ages of 15-24 who are illiterate in the world (UNESCO, 2010), and 99.5% of them (124.8 million) live in the developing world. More than half of them (51.8%) are found in South Asia, and India's share of these is around 62%. In fact, India alone is home to a little less than one-thirds (40.4 million; 32.2%) of all the young illiterate people in the world (UNESCO, 2010).

The importance of secondary education in developing countries like India can be understood for a number of reasons. This stage of schooling provides an indispensable link to the whole education system. While elementary education is fundamental to the nation, secondary education forms the inter connectivity to the higher education system, by providing the required input. Indeed, elementary and secondary schooling are considered as 'successive phases of a continuing process' and should be made available to all children. The rapidity at which the country has been progressing to achieve universal elementary enrolment would generate direct demand for secondary education. Also, in view of the demands of fast changing technology and the growth of knowledge economy, a mere eight years of elementary education would be grossly inadequate for the young children to acquire necessary skills in the job market. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to strengthen this stage by providing greater access and also by improving quality in a significant way.

### SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA AND ITS GROWTH TRAJECTORY

The Wood's Education Dispatch (1854) was the first official policy document of the colonial India for public provisioning of education that promoted growth of secondary education. Subsequently, in the second half of the 19th century, the network of English-medium secondary schools, mostly private aided, expanded with faster pace compared to that of the primary schools. Towards the late 19th century the policy focus, however, shifted to include issues relating to expansion of primary education. With the recognition of primary education as a subject of critical importance by the Indian

Education Commission Report (1883) and intense political unrest and uprising for nationalism among educated Indians (in the early 20th century), the colonial government was compelled to review its policy of quantitative expansion and private support for schooling in favor of greater state involvement. Thus the policy focus shifted from quantitative expansion to quality improvement of secondary education with greater state control. The policies of promoting aided secondary schools and colleges were abandoned in favor of expansion of the network of government schools (Chaudhary, 2007).

Soon after independence in the year 1947, India inherited a system of education which was not only quantitatively small but also characterized by the persistence of large intra- and inter-regional as well as structural imbalances. Only 14 percent of population was literate, and one child out of three had been enrolled in the primary school. The State endeavour for the development of education began with the promulgation of the new Constitution in 1950, which enshrined *free and compulsory education till the age of fourteen* as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 45). The responsibility for education was assigned to individual states of the Republic, which was shifted later on from the State List to the Concurrent List through a Constitutional Amendment in 1976, which provided for the Central and State Governments to be jointly/concurrently responsible for formulating and implementing educational policies and plans.

### EXPANSION OF EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

The post-independent India witnessed remarkable quantitative expansion of school education facilities. The access to such facilities has expanded mostly in terms of number of schools, teachers and students' enrolment at various levels of schooling. The following Table-1 presents the expansion of schools, teachers and enrolment by levels of education in India after independence.

**Table-1 Growth of Educational Institutions, Enrolment and Teachers by Levels of School Education in India**

Year	Institutions (in '000s)			Enrolment (in millions)			Teachers (in '000s)		
	Primary	Middle	Sec*	Primary	Middle	Sec*	Primary	Middle	Sec*
1950-51	209.7	13.6	7.4	19.3	3.1	1.5	538	86	127
1960-61	330.4	49.7	17.3	34.9	6.7	3.4	742	345	296
1970-71	408.4	90.6	37.1	57.1	13.3	7.6	1060	638	629
1980-81	494.5	118.6	51.5	73.8	20.7	11.0	1363	851	926
1990-91	560.9	151.5	79.8	97.4	34.0	19.1	1616	1073	1334
2000-01	638.7	206.3	126.0	113.8	42.8	27.6	1896	1326	1761
2005-06	772.6	288.5	159.7	132.1	52.2	38.4	2184	1671	2155
2007-08	787.8	325.2	172.9	135.5	57.2	35.8	2315	1780	2127
2008-09	759.7	365.9	181.4	127.9	56.1	44.9	2397	1793	2410
2009-10	823.2	367.7	190.6	135.7	59.4	48.3	2339	1912	2480
2010-11	748.5	447.6	200.2	135.3	62.1	51.2	2100	1887	2500
2015-16	840.5	282.0	602.4	129.1	67.5	39.1	2606	5746	2662

\* includes high/ higher secondary /Intermediate/ pre-university/ Jr.college /pre-degree levels

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, various issues

The figure presented above shows that expansion of schools at the primary level has been four folds and teachers by approximately five folds and enrolment in primary education has grown at about seven folds. The number of middle schools has grown tremendously by 33 times by the year 2010-11. The table above shows some reduced figure of middle schools in year 2015-16. This could be due to the elevation of middle schools to secondary schools. The enrolment in middle schools has gone up to 22 times and a tremendous increase of approximately 67 times in terms of number of teachers is seen. Secondary schools have witnessed a huge growth of 81 times in numbers and 20 times by the number of teachers appointed. The enrolment in secondary schools have increased at by 26 times from 1950-51 to 2015-16 (Table 1).

Growth in secondary education in the post-independence period seems quite significant, but this has to be seen in the context of overall population growth of the country and its relative pressure on the demand of education for the same. Also, this pattern of growth indicates an uneven pace of growth between institutions and enrolment leading to

crowded classrooms especially at upper primary and secondary levels. However, the number of teachers has increased specially in secondary schools by substantially huge proportion. This indicates the intention and efforts of the Government in a positive direction. Yet, the gaps between what is being provided and what is coming out as the end result needs to be filled adequately by appropriate means.

### GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for secondary education (including senior secondary classes) was under 50 till 2009-10. In year 2010-11 it was reported to be 52.1 percent. The dropout rate in Grades I-X was as high as 52.7% in year 2009-10 and in year 2010-11 it was reported to be 49.3 percent. In other words, only around half of every 100 Grade I cohort survive up to Grade X (Government of India (SES), 2010/11). The situation was even worse till 2005-06, when the secondary school dropout rate was 61.62 percent (Table-2). However, the situation seems to have improved a lot when we look at the latest data presented in the table 2.

The following Table-2 presents the detail of GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) and Dropout rate during last two decades.

Table-2

Year	Gross Enrolment Ratio			Dropout Rate		
	Primary (1-5)	Middle (6-8)	Secondary (9-12)	Primary (1-5)	Middle (1-8)	Secondary (1-10)
1990-91	100	62	19	42.6	60.9	71.3
1995-96	89	59	31	42.1	58.8	69.6
2001-02	96	60	33	39.0	54.6	66.0
2003-04	98	62	39	31.47	52.32	62.69
2005-06	109.4	71.0	41	25.67	48.80	61.62
2007-08	113.97	78.06	45.81	25.09	42.68	56.71
2009-10	115.47	81.52	49.26	28.86	42.39	52.76
2010-11	116.0	85.5	52.1	27.0	40.6	49.3
2014-15	100.08	91.24	78.51	4.13	4.03	17.06

Source: Selected Educational Statistics – Various Issues

Drawing on the GER figures of the Table-2 presented above, and that from the SES 2010-11, it is evident that despite all efforts being made for the expansion of secondary education, still over 50 million children have not even got enrolled in secondary schools. This figure is different from the number of students who were dropped out of the secondary schools. The Table-2 indicates high overall dropout rate for class 1 to 10 as well till year 2010-11. However, the latest data of year 2014-15 shows remarkably positive sign of improvement. The dropout rate of primary grade students reduced from 27.0 in 2010-11 to mere 4.13 in year 2014-15, for middle school students this figure reduced from 40.6 in year 2010-11 to 4.03 in year 2014-15, and for secondary students the dropout rate reduced from 49.3 in year 2010-11 to 17.06 in year 2014-15. This result draws quite optimistic picture however the dropout rate of secondary school students still needs to be looked into. One possible reason of this variation could be the emphasis of government so far on primary and middle school education through Universalization of Elementary Education scheme. Let's hope that the RMSA brings out the same improvements in terms of secondary school students' dropout rate.

### THE GOVT.'S RETREAT FROM SCHOOL EDUCATION

The governmental efforts and intentions towards enhancing the qualitative output of school education and more specifically secondary education has been in question for a

long time. In fact, going by the factual data available, the secondary education sector has been at low priority in comparison to other sectors in the economy in terms of its share in the total public expenditure. In absolute terms, the public expenditure on education has increased from 644.6 million Rupees in 1950/51, to 740560 million Rupees (BE) in 2012/13. However, public expenditure on education has never crossed 15% of the total public expenditure during the last six decades. Kothari commission (1964-66) had recommended a 6 per cent of GDP to be provided for education. In reality, public expenditure on education has never crossed 4%, except for in 1999/00 and 2000/01. In 2008/9, the budgeted public expenditure on education was as low as 3.78% of GDP. Further, while elementary education takes substantial part of the education budget (i.e. 46.6% in 2012/13, BE), the share of secondary education in the total education budget in year 2012-13 was as low as 12.25% (2012/13, BE). In year 2016-17, the share of overall education in the budgeted expenditure of India has been fixed at 3.64 percent which even less than that in 2008-09. The imbalance in the pattern of public expenditure within the school education sector in India is clearly visible. While India spent around 70% of its planned education budget on elementary education, secondary education received only about 18.59% of this budget in 2012-13. This is not at all an encouraging picture for the secondary school education in the country.

## RASHTRIYA MADHYAMIK SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (RMSA)

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA) took off as a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of the Government of India (GOI), being implemented for providing quality and meaningful education to all children in the age group 14-16 years of age for Secondary Schools and 16-18 years of age for Higher Secondary Schools.

With the onset of this programme, the government set out the goal of universalizing secondary education as a next logical step after having invested for universalization of elementary education. The vision statement of the RMSA has been outlined as to make secondary education available, accessible and affordable to all young persons. It aims to provide a secondary school within a reasonable distance of any habitation, which should be 5 kilometer for secondary schools and 7-10 kilometers for higher secondary schools, to ensure universal access of secondary education by 2017 (GER of 100%), and universal retention by 2020, providing access to secondary education with special references to economically weaker sections of the society, the educationally backward, the girls and the disabled children residing in rural areas and other marginalized categories like SC, ST, OBC and Educationally Backward Minorities (EBM).

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE ENERVATION OF INACTION

Though the Govt. efforts of late show some positive sign of improvement on the front of school education, yet the growth or development of secondary education cannot simply be looked at in terms of numerical expansion of schools, enrolment and teachers or even the gross enrolment ratios. Besides growth and expansion, another equally important aspect is how effectively the secondary education is delivered. Indeed, a meaningful way of looking at it is whether they have also performed well or not. Hence, it is equally important to examine the inputs by linking with the final outcomes. Also, a scheme or plan of action is meaningful in its true sense only when the desired outcomes are realized, not only in terms of the quantum of the achievable, but also in terms of the goals to be achieved within the stipulated time frame. For any such programme to work smoothly and efficiently, it is necessary to have a systematic monitoring and assessment system as well as feedback mechanism in place.

Unfortunately, as is evident, the substantial output of RMSA even after four years of its beginning is yet to be seen. The Govt. appointed agencies are presumably engaged in their respective assignments towards achieving the goal of RMSA. Still those agencies lack formulation of a clear roadmap to go ahead as far as quality of our schools is concerned.

## IMPEDIMENTS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

Despite the secondary education being a critical segment of the school education sector, it has never been properly placed in the policy-planning and implementation process in India since independence. It took almost over 50 years to make an exclusive plan for secondary education in the name of RMSA in year 2009-10. While in British India, secondary education was promoted through skewed colonial development policies, it was neglected in free India because of various other reasons including priority shift of the leaders. However, despite all these impediments, there has been visible quantitative expansion of secondary education system. As we have seen in the table presented here the number of teachers has increased with a huge margin. Nevertheless, this sector is

yet to get in tune with the changing context of schooling. Despite various roadmaps of education sector and secondary sector specifically been planned, there are impediments which have been restricting the pace of the secondary education to move forward. Like in several other developing economies, secondary education in India faces a number of development related challenges.

The impediments or challenges that the secondary education in India is facing, can be further articulated as: (i) identifying the appropriate secondary education schooling model, (ii) keeping quality at the core concern while expanding the secondary schooling facilities, (iii) access and equity issues amidst the growing social demand for educational attainment, (iv) privatization of schooling in the light of Right to Education Act, (v) appropriate curriculum and evaluation system across states, (vi) mode of financing secondary education keeping affordability and sustainability into consideration, etc.

## CONCLUSION

In order to get rid of the inertia of inaction and ambiguity, it seems pertinent to have a sincere and dynamic mechanism in place to monitor and look into the strategic formulation and implementation process of development of secondary education in India, so that it may be ascertained that the implementation of relevant plans for qualitative development of school education is moving in the right direction and with the right pace.

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