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**RE-ENGINEERING SECONDARY EDUCATION THROUGH RASHTRIYA
MADHYAMIK SIKSHA ABHIYAN**

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Abstract

Ever since the success of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), the Indian Government has identified the increasing range of users & providers of secondary education, which has further led to a government programme related to Universalisation of Secondary Education (USE). This vision under RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan) may fulfil the demand-supply issues in secondary education as envisioned in the XI & XII five-year plan. This article details a purview of Secondary Education in India along with a discussion on the existing link between UEE & USE. Similarly, it traces a crucial journey from USE to UHE (Universalisation of Higher Education). An effort has been made to draw attention towards the existing policy of USE along with a critical discussion over RMSA. The paper ends with underlining a need to integrate the different levels of education.

Key words: Primary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education

1.1 Introduction: Secondary Education, a missing link

‘Secondary Education is the real weak spot in our entire educational machinery’.

(The University Education Commission, 1950)

‘As countries make strenuous efforts to achieve universal literacy and primary education for all, while at the same time expanding and improving the quality of their system of tertiary education, for many nations secondary education has become the weakest link in the education chain’. Maclean (2001: p.39)

During the last decade there has been a frantic pace in education at all levels. More so, secondary education has gained importance in developing countries, for a number of reasons. The pace at which the developing countries achieve universal elementary enrolment generates direct demand for secondary education. The UNESCO World Education Report (2000) on 'The right to education' demonstrates that primary education has expanded significantly in many developing countries since the 1950s which has resulted in a significant increase in gross enrolment in secondary education. However, as access to secondary education has expanded, its overall quality has often been on the decline due to over-stretched resources combined with less efficient systems. An indirect demand for secondary education is generated due to the increasing demand for highly skilled labour force in the global economy. It is because the secondary graduates as a labour force are trainable for the requirements of the globalised market.

1.2 The Secondary Education System in India

In India, educational institutions are established and managed by different agencies. Depending on the management type, the schools can be categorised as: (a). Government schools (b). Local body schools (c). Private aided schools, established & managed by private societies but funded by government (grant in aid schools) and (d). Private unaided schools which are established and run by educational entrepreneurs & recognised by the government. Secondary education forms an integral part in the development of the entire education system. The objectives of the first part of secondary education (IX-X) are twofold: (1). preparation for entry into the world of work. (2). preparation for higher levels of academic studies or for vocational courses (Sujatha, K. 2002). For a large majority of students this is the terminal stage of formal education.

The network of the education system in the second highest populous country, India is geographically vast and is developed over a long period of time. Growth in secondary

education in the post independence period is quite impressive. However, 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. Secondary Education is a crucial stage in the educational hierarchy as it prepares the students for higher education and also for the world of work. The Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) has definitely sought the urgency for Universalisation of Secondary Education (USE). Classes IX and X constitute the secondary stage, whereas classes XI and XII are designated as the higher secondary stage. The normal age group of the children in secondary classes is 14-16 whereas it is 16-18 for higher secondary classes. The secondary and higher secondary stage, enables our students to compete successfully for education and for jobs globally. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to strengthen this stage by providing greater access and also by improving quality in a significant way. Indeed, vast heterogeneity is mirrored by large differences in the development of education among states. It is because the educationally backward states have lower enrolment vis-à-vis lower physical and human resource investment than their counterparts. Besides, education is a concurrent subject and state responsibility.

1.3 Education for All: From UEE to USE

Growth or development of education cannot simply be looked at in terms of institutions, enrolment and teachers or even the gross enrolment ratios. Besides growth and expansion, another equally important aspect is how effectively the education is delivered. Indeed, a meaningful way of looking at is whether they have also performed well or not. Effectiveness of the secondary education system to a greater extent depends upon improving the quality of elementary education. It is important to raise the quality of education at the elementary level as well. Simultaneous quality improvement programmes both at elementary and secondary level is required. Indeed, achieving UEE needs to be viewed in terms of not mere achievement in quantitative targets but with a good quality education. India's gross enrolment rate (GER) at the secondary level of 40 per cent is far inferior to the GERs of East Asia (average 70 per cent) and Latin America (average 82 per cent). Even countries such as Vietnam and Bangladesh, which have lower per capita incomes than India, have higher GER. Hence, it is equally important to examine the inputs by linking the indicators (Transition rate, Dropout Rates, Completion Rates) of UPE with the final outcomes in the development of secondary education. The following indicators have been markedly helpful in the journey from UEE to USE.

1.3.1 Transition Rate

Transition rate refers to percent of students joining from one level to the next level of education. Transition rates at secondary level indicate how many students are enrolled at the secondary level out of the total enrolment at elementary level. Even though secondary enrolment had increased during the last decade, but no such improvement is visible at transition rate.

1.3.2 Drop-out Rate

Besides, transition rate, another grave problem is the drop-out rate (leaving school in between) particularly at elementary levels of education. The ability of an educational system to minimise the number of dropouts is a strong indication of its development and growth.

1.3.3 Completion Rate

Completion rate in secondary education is an important indication of successful education. Completion of secondary education is considered the minimum requirement for successful labour market entry in a modern economy and building the foundation for a diversified tertiary sector. Indeed, it is a minimum requirement for taking part in a global knowledge economy. As most of the states follow the non-detention policy at primary stage, a large number of students get promoted to the next stage based on the attendance, without considering the competency levels. This in turn, gets reflected in very low completion and success rates.

1.4 RMSA: Sketching USE

It is well recognized that eight years of education are insufficient to equip a child for the world of work as also to be a competent adult and citizen. The pressure on Secondary Education is already being felt due to the success of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Therefore, while secondary education is not constitutionally compulsory, it is necessary and desirable that access to secondary education is universalized leading to enhanced participation and improved quality.

RMSA aims at expanding and improving the standards of secondary education. With the successful implementation of the SSA, a large number of students are passing out from upper primary classes creating a huge demand for secondary education thus creating a need for strengthening secondary education infrastructure across the country. Concerned with it, the Human Resource Development Ministry, has implemented a secondary education scheme, RMSA during the XI Plan at a total cost of Rs.20,120 crore. The vision for secondary education includes:

- Providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance of any habitation, i.e. 5 kilometres for secondary schools and 7 -10 kilometres for higher secondary schools.
- Ensuring 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, the educationally backward, the girls and the disabled children and other marginalized categories like SC, ST, OBC and educationally backward minorities.

To meet the challenges of USE, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the conceptual design of secondary education with the guiding principles as universal access, quality & equity.

1.4.1 Access

Keeping in mind, the wide disparities in schooling facilities on behalf of geographical, socio-cultural, linguistic and demographic conditions, specially designed broad norms are to be developed at the national level, generally comparable to those of Kendriya Vidyalayas. Development of the infrastructure facilities and learning resources will be carried out through:

- Expansion of existing Secondary Schools (SS) & Higher Secondary Schools (HSS).
- Up gradation of Upper Primary Schools. Ashram Schools will be given preference.
- Opening of new SS/HSS in un-served areas based on the school mapping exercise with mandatory water harvesting system and disabled friendly buildings.
- Adapting Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

1.4.2 Quality

- Providing required infrastructure like, Black Board, furniture, Libraries, Science & Mathematics laboratories, computer labs.
- Appointment of additional teachers and in-service training of teachers.
- Bridge course for enhancing learning ability for students passing out of class VIII.
- Reviewing curriculum to meet the NCF-2005 norms.

1.4.3 Equity

- Free lodging/boarding facilities for students belonging to SC, ST, OBC and minorities.
- Hostels/ residential schools, cash incentive, uniform, books, separate toilet for girls.
- Providing scholarships to meritorious/ needy students at secondary level.
- Inclusive education will be the hallmark of all the activities.
- Expansion of Open and Distance Learning.

1.4.4 Administrative Reforms

Necessary administrative reforms are proposed by the strengthening of resource institutions at, various levels, e.g.

NCERT (including RIEs), NUEPA and NIOS, at the national level;

SCERTs, State Open Schools, SIEMATs, etc., at the State level; and

University Departments of Education, Reputed Institutions of Science / Social Science / Humanities Education, and Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) / Institutions of Advanced Study in Education (IASEs) funded under the Centrally-sponsored Scheme of Teacher Education.

1.4.5 Decentralisation of Power

Involvement of Panchayati Raj and Municipal Bodies, Community, Teachers, Parents and other stakeholders in the management of Secondary Education, through bodies like School Management Committees and Parent – Teacher Associations will be ensured in planning process, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

RMSA is conceived as a long term partnership between the Central and the State/Union Territory governments. The procedure for release of funds underlines an important role of both central & state government bodies viz. The State level Implementation Society for RMSA, the National Mission, and the State level Executive Committee & the assistance of the Technical Support Group of National Mission.

1.4.6 PPP mode in RMSA

The Mission recognizes PPP as an important tool for improving the quality of certain aspects and facilities which contribute to the overall quality of education provided in schools. This model can be used to enhance the basic infrastructure available in schools for the sciences, arts, sports, ICT and audio-visual education. Wherever possible, philanthropic investment by private organizations should be utilized for improving school infrastructure. The success of the RMSA also depends on the availability of necessary infrastructure, facilities and a range of pedagogic equipment in teacher training institutions such as DIETs, CTEs and IASEs. PPP can therefore be considered for the enhancement of quality in all aspects of infrastructure and facilities available in these institutions.

1.5 Integrating Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Education

Even as the government has been announcing huge investments in the education sector, all the three levels of education in India are hardly integrated. While there has been adequate focus on primary education, secondary education hardly gets the attention it deserves and remains highly inequitable across states. Similarly, mere expansion of colleges & universities has led to an unwanted rush in the form of inexperienced graduates & post-graduates.

While primary education is fundamental to the nation, secondary education forms the interconnectivity to the higher education system, by providing the required input. Secondary education provides an indispensable link to the whole education system and interest for it is being revived in many developing countries. Indeed, primary and secondary schooling is considered as 'successive phases of a continuing process' and should be made available to all children. Education is a continuing process from childhood to adulthood and schooling should not be conceived as comprising two radically different kinds of educational process, one primary and another secondary. In majority of the developed (Germany, Australia, Canada, U.K., etc) and also in developing countries (China, Costa Rica, Kazakhstan, etc), the duration of compulsory education extends to lower or even higher secondary education. Secondary education has more significant effect on the redistribution of income, growth and reducing poverty than primary education (Tilak, 1989, 2005).

The rise in the share of the population shifting into the service sector leading to overall higher per capita income in the country is being reflected in the growth and demand for education. General awareness of the social and economic benefits of education and also its increasingly recognition as a powerful weapon for social identity and mobility across several sections of the society gave an impetus for the growth and demand for higher education. In the recent years India has taken a fresh and more critical look at the role of education within the context of overall national development. The goals of education follow the national goals of development. This means development of the human resources which is possible only through a properly organized programme of education.

As the success of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan has led to the need of RMSA & USE, similarly the successes of later will soon call for the emergence of Universalisation of Higher Education (UHE). The essential character of an education system is a linkup between the different levels of education. Certainly, there is a paramount necessity of equalising educational opportunities. Moreover, a democracy can exist only among equals and it can be achieved through educational institutions at different levels. The first lesson of democratic principles &

policies can be learnt in our schools. Indeed it is carried further through learning institutions. A child left out of school at any level can't enjoy the duties & rights as talked about in civilised society. Hence, universalisation of education must be carried at all the levels. Keeping in view the societal & national requirements, the central & state government must frame policies withstanding a link between elementary, secondary and higher education.

1.6 Concluding Remarks

The misconception that merely promotion of the students under UEE to secondary level can lead to the success of USE is dubious. SSA envisaged that the goal of UEE will be achieved in 2010. With the liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy, the rapid changes witnessed in scientific and technological world and the general need to improve the quality of life and to reduce poverty, it is essential that school leavers acquire a higher level of knowledge and skills than what they are provided in the 8 years of elementary education, particularly when the average earning of a secondary school certificate holder is significantly higher than that of a person who has studied only up to class VIII.

The Indian Prime Minister in his Independence Day Speech, 2007 has already called for USE. This is clearly the next step after UEE. Emphasis has been put on the role of state & central governments to launch the Scheme for Universalisation of Access for Secondary Education (SUCCESS). Keeping in mind the physical, financial, pedagogical and human resource needs, we need to recognize the role currently being played by the private sector. For a fast economic growth, it is not sufficient to exclusively concentrate on primary education. It is evidenced that early expansion of, and public investment in secondary education paid rich dividends in East Asia (World Bank, 1993, Tilak, 2001). Hence, secondary education is crucial for economic growth.

Though UPE, USE & UHE programmes are meant for universalising & widening access to all, but one must keep in mind that education constitutes a key public good. In social & political contexts, investing in education is of paramount importance. Education ensures that the new generations are well prepared to guarantee the country's future economic & social development. In India, the lack of proper training and knowledge among future decision makers clouds the development prospects of the region. The governments at central & state level still have to face this complex challenge effectively.

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