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M. Ravi Babu

Research Scholar,
Assistant Professor, Dept. of
Population Studies & Social
Work, S.V. University,
Tirupati, A.P-517502, India.

T. Chandrasekarayya

Assistant Professor, Dept. of
Population Studies & Social
Work, S.V. University,
Tirupati, A.P-517502, India.

Historical narrative of Free and Compulsory Primary Education in Indian Context

M. Ravi Babu, T. Chandrasekarayya

Abstract

Education is an instrument for human development. Study of earlier efforts made for providing free and compulsory education is essential to formulate an appropriate perspective for any further policy making. It is of vital significance in any study in order to collect up-to-date information about what has been thought and done in that particular area. Therefore, the present study is taken up to bridge this gap. In this paper, an attempt has been made to review and synthesize the historical developments of Free and Compulsory Primary Education in Indian Context based on secondary data.

Keywords: Free and Compulsory Primary Education, Indian Education Commission, New Education Policy, Wardha scheme of Basic Education, Sarva Shisha Abhiyan, RTE Act, 2009.

Introduction

Primary Education is an important for physical, mental, emotional and social development of children in the age group of 6-14 years. Primary education is the basic education in every society, intends for development of human beings. The main function of primary education is an adjustment between school and society. Primary education is basic need of every person apart from shelter, cloth and food. Primary Education empowers and equips individuals with analytical capabilities, in stills confidence and fortifies them with determination to achieve goal-setting competences. It, therefore, plays a pivotal role in improving the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the nation (Chandrappa, 2014, p.1) [3]. More than 2300 years back Chanakya had said “that mother and that father are enemies, who do not give education to their children”. Similarly, Nelson Mandela had proclaimed, “Education is most powerful weapon which you can to change the world” (Neeraj Gahlawat, 2011) [5]. Free education means without taking any compensation or free of cost education. Compulsory word is related to Governments and Parents. It is the duty of Government to provide the education and responsibility of parents to give education to their children.

Methodology

The paper is based on secondary source of data aims at studying Historical narrative of Free and Compulsory Primary Education in Indian Context. The significant efforts made in India for the provision free and Compulsory primary educations for children from ancient period to modern period, which divided into five phases as Ancient, Medieval, Pre-Independence, Post-independence as well as Modern period and which are discussed briefly hereunder in chronological manner.

Results and Discussion

Ancient period

There is disagreement amongst scholars regarding the origin and nature of the education system in ancient India. Some of them hold the view that it is difficult to speak of ancient Indian education with certainty, as our information is based on the documents of ‘unequal value and unequal date.’ Nevertheless, it may be stated that education in India has been notorious for not being socially inclusive. Till the 19th century, it was largely considered a privilege restricted to persons at the higher end of the caste or class system. History is replete with examples of caste, class and gender-based discrimination in imparting education. Education was the sole privilege of the priestly castes (Brahmins) primarily because of the religious basis for the content of education, coupled with the elitist medium of instruction that was chose to impart the knowledge. Admission to Gurukulas or Ashramas was not open to all. People from lower castes, and so called ‘shudras’ (untouchables), in particular, were barred from receiving education. Several learned Brahmins started Pathasalas (schools) in important towns where they received patronage.

Correspondence

M. Ravi Babu

Research Scholar,
Assistant Professor, Dept. of
Population Studies & Social
Work, S.V. University,
Tirupati, A.P-517502, India.

The history of free and compulsory primary education in ancient India is fascinating and is recorded and can be tracked to the ancient era. Education in ancient India began around the 3rd century B.C with elements of religious training and impart of traditional knowledge. Sages and scholars imparted education orally. Palm leaves and barks of trees were used for writing. Thus, Free and Compulsory Primary Education is an age old concept in India context. However, in Ancient period, the education was available for a small number, which causes many people remains illiterate. This was due to prevalence of many of socio-economic, religious and cultural aspects at the time in the society.

Gurukula System

- Education in ancient India was more identified with the Gurukula system.
- These ancient Hindu schools in India were residential in nature with the sishyas or students living in the same house with the Guru or the teacher.
- The students lived together irrespective of their social standing.

Brahmacharyam

- Ancient Indians allotted a period of time for the boys exclusively for education.
- Through Upanyana, a student was initiated in to Brahmacharyam. During this period he was under complete self discipline and self control. All sorts of luxuries and pleasures were to be avoided
- This period was called as Brahmacharyam, where the students concentrated on learning various subjects.

Gurudakshina

- Education was free, but students from well-to-do families paid "Gurudakshina," a voluntary contribution after the completion of their studies.

Medieval Period

The Muslim rulers of the Indian sub-continent also did not consider education as a function of the State. It was perceived as a branch of religion and therefore entrusted to learn theologians called 'Ulemas'. Therefore, in ancient and medieval India, education was intertwined with religion. From the location of Gurukulas to excluding sections of the society from access in education, the system of education was clearly not accessible to all persons.

- Education in medieval India expressed a new perspective in the 11th century.
- The Muslim established the elementary and secondary schools.
- Muslim rulers promoted urban education by building libraries and literary societies. Primary schools called maktabas were established and reading writing and basic Islamic prayers were taught.
- Secondary schools called Madrasas taught advanced language skills.
- These were setup by sultan's nobles and other influential ladies.

Pre-independence period

During pre-independence days, educational rights were unknown. In fact, education was considered a privilege rather than a right. The discovery of the sea route to India, in 1498, influenced the course of development of education in the Indian sub-continent. Although many scholars have

commended the British policy of introducing modern education, it was not a spontaneous benevolent act. The progress in education was facilitated with a view to serving their vested interests, i.e., to train Indians as clerks, managers and other subordinate workers to staff their vast politico-administrative machinery. However, education of the 'Indian masses' was largely neglected, and by the beginning of nineteenth century, it was in shambles. The demand for education in India can be traced back to the early stages of the freedom struggle in British India. It subsequently became an integral part of the freedom struggle. The Indian National Congress fought valiantly for the expansion of elementary education and literacy, in general, and in rural India, in particular.

The state obligation to provide education was recognised with inclusion of a directive principle to this effect under Article 45 in India Constitution (directive principles, unlike Fundamental Rights, are not legally enforceable). The leaders of the independence movement, intellectuals and people that comprised the masses stood in unanimity on providing free education to every child up to the age of 14. This concept adopted from the British law of Free and Compulsory Education (Centre for Child and the Law, 1996). However, the need for universalization of primary education in India was pointed out a century ago. A brief overview of the major historical events for compulsory education in Pre-independence period is presented hereunder in order.

- The educational system which the British introduced teaching of English language was given greater emphasis and the study of languages like Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit were left to individual efforts.

Objectives

- The English introduced modern education
- To reduce the expenditure on administration
- To encourage the study of English language
- To expand market for English goods
- To spread Christianity
- According to Lord Macaulay after receiving modern education Indians would remain Indians only in their colour while their interests, ideas, morals and Intelligence.

Steps taken by the British to Introduce Western Education in India

- 1784 Asiatic society of Bengal was founded by sir. William Jones. This society started several English Schools and Colleges.
- 1838 Enforcing compulsory primary education was undertaken by William Adam.
- 1852 Captain Wingate, the Revenue Survey Commissioner in Bombay proposed to impart compulsory education to the children of agriculturist after realising a less of five percent of it. Later on a similar proposal was also followed in Gujarat.
- 1854 The Educational Dispatch also called Wood's Dispatch and considered as Magna Carta of English Education in India had laid stress on mass education, and female education and favoured secularism in Education. Charles Woods's dispatch enabled educational departments to be established in every province and at least one government school in each district
- 1870-80 Free and Compulsory education Acts passed in Britain-Demand was raised in India to provide similar facilities for Indians.

- 1882 Indian Education Commission-Indian leaders demanded provision for mass education and Compulsory Education Acts and wean children away from labour in factories and other kinds of unsuitable work (Desai, 1953). From this point onwards the struggle began for making available this same right to every child in India.
- 1882 Shri Dadabhai Nawroji has demanded free primary education and its universalization.
- 1893 Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikward of Baroda had started first experiment of primary education for boys in Amreli Taluk of his state.
- 1906 Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikward of Baroda had extended Compulsory primary education to rest of the state. It is the first law on compulsory education was introduced by the State of Baroda in 1906. This law provided for compulsory education for boys and girls in the age groups of 7–12 years and 7–10 years respectively.
- 1906 A commission was appointed in Bombay Provenance and it arrived at a conclusion that compulsory education was not proper and people were not prepared for it. The Legislative Council of Bombay was the first amongst the Provinces to adopt a law on compulsory education. Gradually, other Provinces followed suit as control over elementary education.
- 1906 Gopal Krishna Gokhale makes a plea to imperial legislative Council for introduction of free and compulsory education
- 1910 Gopal Krishna Gokhale moved a Resolution in the Central Legislature and again proposed Private members Bill (Rejected).
- 1912-14 Sri Gopal Krishna Gokhale took up the cause. His efforts were supported by Sri R.V. Parulekar. The Gokhale-Parulekar Model of Primary Education was limited to the attainment of universal literacy through four years of compulsory schooling (Sunil Behari Mohanthy, 1985, p.1).
- 1913 There was education in villages, but their education was limited for specific classes. Girls and Backward class was away from education. Primary Education was much circulated from 1902 to 1918 A.D.
- 1917 Sh.Vithalbhair Patel Succeeds in getting Bill passed. According to 'Patel Act' of 1918 (also known as Bombay Primary Education Act, 1918) in the Bombay state, there was free and compulsory education for 6 to 11 years boys.
- 1918 Indian Act of 1919 (Mont-Fort Reforms) introduced diarchy and education become a Transferred subject under control of a minister responsible to the legislature. Though, education was transferred to Indian Ministers under the Government of India Act, 1919 and even though Provincial Legislatures had greater control and autonomy in enacting laws, progress in universalizing education was poor due to lack of control over resources.
- 1930 Hartong Committee recommended for better quality (not quantity) hinders spread and development of primary education.
- 1937 Wardha scheme of Basic Education emphasised by Gandhi voiced the need for universal education. In 1937, at the All India National Conference on Education held at Wardha, Gandhi mooted the idea of self-supporting 'basic education' for a period of seven years through vocational and manual training.
- 1937 With Provincial Autonomy, six Governments had expanded compulsory primary education in provinces. Primary Schools were established in school less villages/habitation, which had no facilities to send their children to nearby schools at an easy walking distance of one mile.
- 1944 The Post-War Plan of Education Development in India (Sargent Plan) proposed to provide primary education to all children in the age group 6-14 by the year 1984. There was free and compulsory primary education upto 1960 with the judgment of Khare committee (Ambhore, 2010, p.92).
- 1947 Ways and Means (Kher) Committee was set to explore ways and means of achieving Universal elementary Education within ten years at least cost.
- 1947 Constituent Assembly Sub-committee on Fundamental Rights places free and compulsory education on list of Fundamental Rights. *"Clause 23-Every citizen entitled as of right to free primary education and it shall be the duty of the State to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years"*
- 1947 (Apr) Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly rejects free and compulsory education as a fundamental right. Sends clause to list of "non-justifiable fundamental rights" (later termed as 'Directive Principles of State Policy').

Post- Independence period

The Government of India made many efforts for provide free and compulsory education to all children in post-independence period, which is clearly reflected in Indian Constitution also.

- After independence, education became the responsibility of the states.
- This continued till 1976, when the education became a joint responsibility of the state and the Centre.
- Education in India falls under the control of both the Union Government and the states, with some responsibilities lying with the Union and the states having autonomy for others.
- The various articles of the Indian Constitution provide for education as a fundamental right.
- India has made progress in terms of increasing primary education attendance rate and expanding literacy to approximately two-thirds of the population.
- India's improved education system is often cited as one of the main contributors to the economic rise of India.

Constitutional Provision

- The Article 45 in Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution had mandated the state to endeavour to provide "free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of fourteen years". The constitution of free India that came into force in 1950, proposed to achieve the target of universalization of primary education within a period of ten years (i.e. by 1950). Although more than five times the number of targeted years has passed, the goal is not achieved till date. The goal of Education for All (EFA) has been high on the agenda since commencement of development planning since 1951. There were improvements in some

ways of free primary education. Schools were open in villages. Concession was given to backward classes. There was facility of free education and free books for girls.

- 1949 (Nov) Debate in Constituent Assembly removes the first line of this clause (now Article 36) i.e. *“Every citizen is entitled as of right to free primary education and it shall be the duty of the State to”*, and replaces it with *“The state shall endeavour to”*, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, clarifies that the objective of article 36 is not restricted to free primary education.
- 1950 Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the newly adopted Constitution of India provides that:
“The state shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years”.
- 1950-60: It would be pertinent to point out that between 1950 and 1960; Article 45 did not receive the importance that it deserved. The state and Union budgets treated education as a peripheral subject, allocating an insubstantial amount for this purpose. much later, a movement toward equitable education began 1964, when the Education Commission (Kothari Commission) was appointed to look into the problem of the education system in India.
- 1956-66 Teacher Education Committee: The committee recommended many teacher training institutions for improving quality of education in the view of universalisation of primary education.
- 1964-66 J.P. Naik Committee- The Kothari Commission had warned policy makers about the tendency for segregation based on inequalities in the school education system. The gravity and objective of this recommendation was aptly summarised by Naik committee *“the recommendation of the commission regarding the common school system is the integral part of the programme to promote the education of the poor, reduce its dual character in which ‘haves’ receive one type of education and ‘have nots’ another, and to create a socially cohesive and egalitarian society’*.

Modern period

The positive role of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in strengthening the socio-economic base of a nation cannot be ruled out. Recognising the importance of education, The Government of India has made several efforts towards free and compulsory education to all children in modern period and for universalisation of elementary education in the country through various important schemes and several committees for introduction as well as development of free primary education in recent decades, which are briefly narrated hereunder.

- 1964 Kothari Committee recommended achieving universalization of education within two time segments. The year 1976 was set as the deadline to provide free and compulsory education up to 5th standard, while 1986 was the deadline to do the same, up to 7th standard. Moreover, the commission strongly recommended the adoption of a ‘common school’, which would help remove or minimize

inequality of education opportunities. It also stressed on the need to maintain the ‘quality and standards’ of schools. Despite all these efforts, the goal remained elusive. This Committee also done an important work related to primary education. It made recommendations that six percent money should expended on education instead of three percent.

- 1968 National Policy on Education (1968) was the first official document evidencing the Indian Governments commitments towards the school education. It stressed on the elimination of disparities in the education system and on the improvement in the quality of the school. The emphasis was more on retention rather than merely on enrolment.
- 1974 The National Policy for Children, 1974 comprises that” The State shall take steps to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen for which time-bound programmes will be drawn up consistent with the availability of resources. Special efforts will be made to reduce the prevailing wastage and stagnation in schools, particularly in the case of girls and children of the weaker sections of the society. The programmes of informal education for pre-school children from such sections will also be taken up”.
- 1975 In 1975, during the emergency, the Central government put the responsibility for primary education as a joint state / centre responsibility by putting primary education under “concurrent list” in an amendment (the 42nd) to the Constitution. However, the right to education was still not a fundamental right in the constitutional sense but only a strong directional policy of recommendation from the centre to the states.
- 1977 Even after three decades, the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) has not been achieved. Therefore, government decided to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education of all children on a time-bound programme as recommended by the Conference of State Education Ministers.
- 1979 Non-Formal Education (NFE) scheme was initiated for the children of 6-14 years of age, who remains outside the formal education system with various reasons. NFE cater learning needs of working children and children in difficult circumstances. The scheme is recently revised and named as Scheme of Alternative and Innovative Education
- 1980 Universalisation of Elementary Education has found place as point 16 in the Prime Minister’s later New Revised 20 point programme.
- 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasised Universalization of Elementary Education for equalization of educational opportunity, common school system to promote social, but not supported by legal tools to enforce such policy mandates.
- 1987 Operation Black Board Scheme (OBB, 1987): Several large centrally-assisted schemes/programmes such as “Operation Block Board” and “Scheme for reconstructing and reorganization of Teacher education” had launched. The OBB scheme seeks to bring both the quantitative and qualitative improvement in primary education
- 1987 Restructuring and Reorganisation of Teacher Education was initiated in pursuance to the

- formulation of the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. The scheme has been revised in order to meet the demand for teachers and to fulfil the statutory obligations with regard to teacher preparation and continuing professional development of teachers under the Right to Education to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.
- 1992 National Policy on education 1986 revised, 1992: National Policy of on Education re-affirmed the goal of universalisation of elementary education did not recognise the right to education. Further, the NPE, 1986 which was modified in 1992 as a 'Program of Action (POA) made certain modifications in the earlier policy. The POA, 1992 emphasized three aspects: universal access and enrolment; universal retention of children up to age 14 years; and a substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve essential levels of learning at the primary education levels.
- 1992 Acharya Ramamurthy Committee, 1992 recommended right to education is included as a fundamental right in part-III of the Indian Constitution, but recommendation was not implemented.
- 1992-1993 The Supreme Court of India declared the right to education to be a fundamental right in the case held Mohini Jain vs. State of Karnataka right to education is concomitant to fundamental rights. It observed that "Right to Life" is the compendious expression for all those rights which the courts must enforce because they are basic to the dignified enjoyment of life. The Right to Education flows directly from Right to Life. The right to life under Article 21 and the dignity of an individual cannot be assured unless it is accompanied by the Right to Education. The State Government was under an obligation to make an endeavour to provide educational facility at all levels to its citizens". This was again reiterated by the Supreme Court in 1993 in the case of J.P. Unnikrishnan vs. State of Andhra Pradesh. In this case, The Supreme Court of India also declared that education up to fourteen years of age is to be considered as a fundamental right of children in India.
- 1993 The 1993 verdict reads: "Entitlements sanctioned by the Constitution cannot be deferred by the State at its convenience. The State has to make the necessary reallocation of resources, by superseding other important claims, if necessary, in a manner that the justifiable entitlement becomes a reality" But this right to basic primary education for all was still not a fundamental right in itself, but only read as a component of a fundamental right to life.
- 1994 District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched to universalisation of Primary Education in selected districts in India. More focused coverage would initially focus on primary stage (Classes-I to V and its Non Formal Education equivalent with stress on girls and for socially disadvantaged groups.
- 1995 Mid-Day Meal Programme, (MDMP): The MDM Scheme of the Department of School Education and Literacy had been introduced for providing a noon meal to children at the elementary stage of education.
- 1997 The Saikia Committee, 1997 had recommended in 1997 that constitution is to be amended to incorporate the Right to Free and Compulsory Education as a Fundamental Right.
- 1997 The Constitutional (Eight-third Amendment) Act: Eight-third Amendment Bill was introduced in Rajya Sabha in July 1999 for inclusion of Article 21-A (Fundamental right to education for 6-14 years), former Article for deletion (the than directive principles of State Policy in the Constitution) and also for introduction Article 51-A (K) as fundamental duty of parents.
- 1998 165th Law Commission Report, 1998
- Advocated legislation of a central Act for providing free and compulsory education without waiting for any amendment in the Constitution of India.
 - Suggested to include private unaided institutions in the scheme of free and compulsory Education.
 - Advocated dispensing with the tuition fee, providing free text books, free uniform, free lunch, etc. whatever necessary.
 - Interpreted compulsion as:
 - Compulsion on state
 - Compulsion on parents
 - Compulsion on society
- 1999 Tapas Majumdar Committee Report: It was set up to look into the financial implications to make the right to free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 as a fundamental right. It recommended that even children belonging to the poorest sections of society must receive education that was comparable in quality with the best. The Committee also suggested a required expenditure of around Rs.1.37 lakh cores.
- 1999 Department of School Education and Literacy, 1999: A separate Department of School Education and Literacy created within the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.
- 2001 Sarva Shisha Abhiyan, 2001 (SSA): The Government of India was committed to ensuring universal elementary education (primary and upper primary) education for all children aged 6-14 years of age through its flagship programme, Sarva Shisha Abhiyan (SSA). It is assumed that, the chief aim of such an education must be just to fit one to earn a living. It is called as "Bread and Butter" system of education.
- 2002 Statute panel recommends right to education for children: The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution has recommended providing free elementary education to children as a fundamental right under the Constitution. The Commission has suggested that a new 'clause' be added to Article 30 to ensure that "every child shall have a right to free elementary education of quality until he/she completes the age of 14 years". The same Article will have another provision to ensure that "every person shall have the right to education beyond 14 years within the limits of economic capacity and development of the State"(Hindu, 8/1/2002).
- 2002 The Constitutional (Eight-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002: The Right to Children Free and Compulsory Education Bill passed in 2002 as the 86th Constitutional Amendment incorporated Article 21-A of the constitution "State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age 6 to

14 years in such manner as the State may, by law determine”.

- 2004 Education Cess was introduced in 2004 for raising additional financial resources needed to fulfil Government’s Commitment to universal Elementary Education.
- 2005 National Curriculum Frame Work (NCF-2005) for school education had formulated.
- 2005 (June) Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee submitted report on free and compulsory education bill and other issues related to elementary education.
- 2008 A.K. Rath Committee was appointed to examine the Education Bill, 2005.
- 2009 The Right to Children Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009: July 20, 2009 the Rajya Sabha, August 26, 2009 Loka Sabha passed the Bill. On August 26, 2009 the President assent to the bill passed the Right to Education Bill.

2010 RTE Act Implementation: Finally, The Right to Children Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 came into force from 1st April 2010 throughout the Country except in state of Jammu and Kashmir. India becomes one of 135 countries to make education as a Fundamental Right of every child (The Hindu, 2010).

“Education for all” declares that everyone has a right to education. Its aim is to give everyone a chance to learn and benefit from basic education – not as an accident of circumstance, or as a Privilege, but as a RIGHT.

Compulsory Education in A.P.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh wants to recognise education as a fundamental right of the child, pursue the objective vigorously and reach the goal of total literacy by bringing about three million kids into the fold of schools in four years. Talking to reporters after a Janmabhoomi visit to Rapole in Ranga Reddy district, the then Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, said the programme had generated a lot of awareness among the people not only about population control but also about the need to send children to schools. There were 2.8 million children in the 5-14 age groups who still remained outside the regular school-going stream. They would be put through bridge course in the coming 4 to 5 years to achieve near total literacy. A sound infrastructure base was created in the rural areas during the past few years with the establishment of a number of schools with adequate teachers. The Chief Minister referred to a Supreme Court order to the Government of India in this regard, and said the State Government would amend the existing laws to enable compulsory education. It was also proposed to introduce deterrent punishment and other disincentives to those who declined to send their children to schools. At Rapole, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu ticked off parents who held back their children from schools on one count or the other and ordered that half a dozen boys and girls be admitted straightaway to residential school or bridge course. He made one of the erring parents to tell the audience that it was an offence not to send children to schools. The kids were diverted from school to tend siblings or herd cattle/sheep or work in the fields to keep the family hearth burning (The Hindu, 8/1/2002).

Conclusion

The efforts made in India for providing free and compulsory education had significantly improved the educational levels at considerable level. However, illiteracy has been significant vary by gender as well as among social groups, particularly downtrodden and nomadic. In recent efforts inclusion education policy has been adopted to provide free and compulsory education to all school aged children apart from non-formal education programmes.

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