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## ACHIEVING UNIVERSALISATION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN INDIA- A PRIORITY AND FOCAL POINT OF WHOLE EDUCATION PROCESS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Secondary education has played multiple roles in nation building, and it is worth to say in Indian context that primary role of secondary education lies in its contribution to economic growth and poverty reduction. Universalisation of secondary education is becoming a growing concern in every country of the world at present as it plays an increasingly important role in creating healthy and cohesive society and spurs economic growth. Secondary education along with primary education at present is considered as basic education which acts as the milestone for the progress and prosperity of a country. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, political thinkers, educationists, policy makers, all have stressed on universalisation of secondary education for the development of the country like primary education. In this article, the authors try to focus on significance of universalisation of secondary education (USE) in India for overall development of our country.*

**Key word:** Secondary Education; Significance of USE

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education in India comprises of two distinct stages i.e. the stage of school education and the stage of higher or tertiary education. Secondary stage as the second stage of school education begins where the stage of primary education ends, and goes before the stage of the first degree course. Thus, it forms central link in the chain of formal education, because it is through this stage backward and forward linkages of education are established. As the teachers for primary school come from secondary schools, so a good standard of secondary education helps ultimately to improve primary education. On the other hand the university students are drawn from the secondary schools. Therefore the students of higher education also depend considerably upon the quality of secondary education. Thus, "Secondary education acts as a terminal stage for those who do not want/cannot proceed for further education, and as a preparatory stage provides a strong academic foundation for higher studies of students who show intelligence and aptitude for such studies" (Devi, 1986). Secondary education has a special importance in the entire educational structure as its successful completion is a requirement for admission into institutions of higher education and at the time, "Being a terminal stage it caters to the needs of those who enter the world of work" (Anand, 1997).

## PROGRESS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION DURING THE PAST YEARS

In India, there was a long history of organized education. The Gurukul system of education was one of the oldest education systems on earth. Gurukuls were traditional Hindu residential schools of learning, typically the teacher's house or a monastery. During this time, education was not universal and not compulsory for all. The current system of education, with western style and content was introduced in India after Missionaries, East India Company and British came here. Regarding the formal system of education, Lord Macaulay's Minute of 1835 can be considered as an important landmark in the history of Indian education which emphasized the adoption of English system of Education. After that it was Wood's Despatch of 1854 which was an important document in the development of education policy in this country. Therefore, the growth and development of the secondary education in India can be traced from Wood's Despatch of 1854. In 1882, the British Government appointed Indian Education commission (Hunter Commission) which suggested simplifying and liberalizing the conditions of grants to schools. As a result of this secondary schools were established in many parts of the country and their number increased to 5,124 in 1901-02. In 1917 Calcutta University Commission (Sadler Commission) was appointed. On its recommendations Secondary Education Boards were established in all provinces.

After independence due to allocation of funds made in five-year plans for secondary stage of education, the expansion was rapid, yet not to the expectations of making this stage wide spread throughout the country. The enrolment of girls, SCs and STs and other backward and socially disadvantage classes remained quite low. In 1955 the All India Council for Secondary Education (AICSE) was established. Two types of work were entrusted to this Council at that time-first, advisory works and second, executive works. During the Third five-year plan, in 1961, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established. This Council has been entrusted with the task of school education and the training of school teachers. It started making efforts for the expansion and upliftment of secondary education, and as a result the number of students at the secondary level increased rapidly. During the period of fourth and fifth five-year plan (1969-74, 1974-1979), the secondary education was expanded rapidly, separate secondary schools were opened for girls, and at the same time the curriculum and the examination system at secondary level were reformed and steps were taken by the Government of India for vocationalisation of secondary education. An 'Open School' was established by the Central Board of Secondary Education and it also started open education at secondary level. In the sixth five-year plan also special efforts were made to improve the condition of secondary schools and science kits were made available to them. After that it was in the year 2004-05, during the tenth five-year plan, CBE took a new initiative in the field of secondary education. CBE appointed a committee to prepare a blueprint for "Universalisation of Secondary Education" and the experts who were members of this committee gave many suggestions for improvement and vocationalisation of secondary education and specially emphasized in making secondary education universal for all. From the year 2005, a new history is created in the field of secondary education.

Generally, it is believed that it was Christian missionaries who took first initiative to spread modern school education among Indian natives but it was Wood's Despatch of 1854 during British rule which established the foundation of modern education including secondary education. From the above mentioned educational statistics in the tables it is clear the expansion of secondary education may be regarded as satisfactory after independence from the point of view of the economic condition of the country, but it still needs more expansion.

In this context, public as well as Government of India have to be more serious to do a lot. The following table has shown the progress of secondary education in India after independence up to 2006.

**Table: 1**  
**Progress of secondary education after independence up to 2006**

Year	No. of Secondary, Higher secondary, Inter & Junior colleges	Number of Studying in Secondary, Higher Secondary, Inter and Junior Colleges.
1946-47	11,907	0,26,82,000
1950-51	7,416	0,15,00,000
1060-61	17,319	0,34,00,000
1970-71	37,051	0,76,00,000
1980-81	51,573	1,10,,00,000
1990-91	79,796	1,91,00,000
2000-01	1,26,047	2,76,00,000
2004-05	1,52,049	3,71,00,000
2005-06	1,59,667	3,84,00,000

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, Ministry, MHRD, 2008.

## UNIVERSALISATION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION (USE)—A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

“Universalisation of secondary education implies creating universal access and opportunity for all children within the age group of 14 to 16 years to receive secondary education. Universalisation of educational opportunity at the secondary level is a major instrument of social change and transformation. As secondary education deals with the children between the group of 14 to 16 years which is most critical and precious period of an individual’s life and thereby determines the quality of nation’s citizen” (Buragohain, 2010). Since the beginning of year 2000, the universalisation of secondary education is attracting the attention of policy makers in India because the success of SSA in achieving large scale enrolment of children in regular and alternate schools have opened the challenges of expanding access to secondary education. “The population of children in the age group (14-18 years) be estimated at 107 million in 2001, 119.7 million in 2006 and will be increased in 2011, whereas the current enrolment in secondary and senior secondary education together is carrying 37 million only” (Govt.of India, 2004-05). Keeping in view the changing development context and as a logical extensive of the policy of universal elementary education, the central government shifted its policy emphasize to some extent towards development of secondary education during the tenth five-year planning (2002-07). During this period in 2005 the Central Advisory Board of Education set up a sub-committee to prepare a blueprint on ‘Universalisation of Secondary Education’ which emphasized the provision of high quality secondary education to all Indian adolescent girls and boys up to the age of 16 by 2015 and up to 18 by 2020 (universalisation of secondary and higher secondary education). The targets for USE as spelled out by the CABE (2005) committee included: (1) universal participation by 2015; (2) universal retention by 2020; (3) mastery learning by more than 60% learners

by 2020; and (4) universal higher secondary education (grade XI-XII) by 2020. This CABE committee on USE (2005) has provided four major guiding principles and that is given below –

- i) **Universal access:** - Access to education is defined in physical, social, cultural and economic terms. It is not sufficient to provide physical access of school education to the children with disabled or the children coming from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Rather, school should create a new cultural ambience and child-friendly educational environment and curriculum for all children including disabled and social advantaged groups, then the concept of universal access to education will be more meaningful than just providing concrete building, blackboard or even computers.
- ii) **Equality and Social Justice:** - The spirit of equality and social justice should touch secondary education and should be developed through secondary education. It is possible only when the curriculum empowers the child adequately to initially understand, then question and finally deal with that inequality and injustice. The child should be in a position to continue to seek equality and social justice in his/her life after the school. Besides, their attention should be drawn to at least six dimensions of equality and social justice for which the school system will have to strive for viz - a) gender difference, b) economic disparity, c) social disparity i.e. SCs (Schedule Casts); STs (Schedule Tribes) etc. d) cultural diversity including the issues of religious and linguistic diversity, e) disability, f) rural-urban difference. All these dimensions need to be reflected with sensitivity in the curriculum such that the self- esteem of each child is built up. This is necessary for ensuring that all children are able to complete their secondary education.
- iii) **Relevance and Development:** - According to CABE committee education taught in the school should be relevant to help in unfolding full potential of the child and to play the role of linking the development of the child with the society and its political, productive and social cultural dimensions.
- iv) **Structural and Curricular Aspects:** - Course materials or curriculum should link the world of knowledge with the world of work. Productive work and vocational education along with academic subjects should be included in school curriculum from pre-primary stage to the +2 stage.

According to CABE these above mentioned four guiding principles together imply a paradigm shift necessary for moving towards the goal of universalisation of secondary education. Supporting the same point of view the report of the working group on secondary education for the XIth five -year plan set the target to achieve 75% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at secondary (high school) and 50% GER at higher secondary education level by the end of XIth plan. The aim is to achieve 100% enrolment and retention at high and higher secondary level that includes vocational stream by 2020. Accordingly, many initiatives are being taken in XIth plan. One of the most important of these was the scheme for ‘Universal Access to Secondary Education’ (SUCCESS, classes IX-X only) with a view to universalize access, reduce social, regional and gender disparities in enrolment, drop-out and retention and improve the quality with a focus on science and mathematics. In order to implement successfully the scheme of USE the government of India has announced a mission on the lines of SSA in the name of Rastriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) which has been started on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009. The vision for secondary education is to make good quality education available, accessible and affordable to all young persons in the age group of 14-18 years. With this vision, the followings are to be achieved by RMSA and i.e.-



- To provide a secondary school within a reasonable distance of any habitation, and this should be 5 kilometer for secondary schools and 7 -10 kilometers for higher secondary schools.
- 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 section of the society, the educationally backward, the girls and the disabled children residing in rural areas and other marginalized categories like SCs, STs, Other Backward Class (OBC) and Educationally Backward Minorities (EBM).
- To improve the quality of secondary education resulting in enhanced intellectual, social and cultural learning.

The other objectives include improving quality of education imparted at school level through making all secondary schools conform to prescribe norms, removing gender, socio-economic and disability barriers, providing universal access to secondary level education by 2017, i.e. by the end of 12<sup>th</sup> five- year plan and achieving universal retention by 2020. In order to meet the challenges the framework of RMSA (MHRD, 2009) further says that universalisation of secondary education gives opportunity to move towards equity. The concept of “Common School System” will be encouraged. If these values are to be established in the system, all types of schools including unaided private schools will also contribute towards universalisation of secondary education by ensuring adequate enrolments for the children from under privileged society and the children Below Poverty Lines (BPL).

To implement this Abhiyan all over the country, there have been organized State Madhymik Shiksha Abhiyan Committee at State level and District Madhymik Shiksha Abhiyan Committiee at district level. The District Madhymik Shiksha Abhiyan Committee has to send its plans with preference to State Madhymik Shiksha Abhiyan Committee, then latter committee has to send its plans with preference to National Madhymik Shiksha Abhiyan Committee and National Madhymik Shiksha Abhiyan Committee gives them grant in order of preference. This Mission of RMSA has complemented Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). India thus moved herself into a new level of universal school education. Indeed, “It is a giant step, articulation of a big ambition and a quantum leap in educational policy making” (Mukhapadhyay, 2001).

## **ACHIEVING USE- A PRIORITY AND FOCAL POINT OF WHOLE EDUCATION PROCESS IN INDIA**

The role and importance of Secondary Education has been nicely described thus: “A careful analysis of educational development in the last two centuries in different parts of the world has revealed that the twentieth century was the century of developing Primary Education whereas the twenty-first century is going to be the century of developing secondary education. Hence the emphasis on the quality of secondary education and the need to prepare ourselves well for facing the challenges of the twenty-first century assume special significance” (Dave, 1993). Infact, “At secondary level, two main functions of education (i.e. individual and social aspect) coverage” (Alvarez, 2000). At the individual level secondary education empowers and prepares youth for life in respect such as personal development, preparation for the labour market training for higher cognitive functioning, and as part of it social function advances human and social capital for nation building. Therefore “There is the need for investment in order to expand secondary education which yields considerable social

economic returns, and that makes it crucial for national development” (Tilok, 2001; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Duriaswamy, 2002; Lewin, 2006, 2008).

In India all efforts have been taken to universalize elementary education (UEE) since independence. It is a national commitment. Compared to elementary and higher education secondary education has not received due attention, it deserves till now. In 2001, the Govt. of India has launched Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Indeed, the goal of SSA for universalisation of elementary education in India and its success provides a sound basis for sustainable development of secondary education. The growing number of children in the elementary school has brought a pressure to bear on the need of further education. Therefore, “Universalisation of secondary education (USE) should now be our goal, this will generate creation of human capital and will provide sufficient condition for accelerating growth and development and equity as also quality of life for everyone in India. It is therefore time to consider the issue of universalisation of secondary education and achievement of the goal by 2020” (Tiwari, 2005).

Besides, if disadvantaged group and poor section of society is to acquire knowledge and skill that is valued in the labour market, then, more of them will need to experience effective secondary schooling that encourage abstract reasoning and high level cognitive development. And without much doubt if India does not provide more educational opportunity at secondary level, frustration amongst youth may ferment unrest and the gap between India and other developed and developing countries in human resources invest will wider rather than diminish. For all these reasons “After SSA the next phase in India’s educational effort is to make sure that all its children progress beyond basic literacy and numeracy and acquire the competencies needed to play a full role in India’s rapid socio-economic and scientific development” (Lewin, 2008). It has been realized by policy makers, planners and administrators of education of this country that with universalisation of elementary education, for economic, social, technological advancements and political advancements, universalisation of secondary education is becoming of primary importance. Universal access to secondary education, following the constitutional mandate to universal elementary education and success of SSA, it has become essential to push this vision forward to move towards universalisation of secondary education which already has been achieved in a large number of developed countries and several developing countries. “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” (Kumar, 2011). Therefore universalisation of secondary education is becoming primary focus for overall development of educational process in the country.

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