



## **AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL EDUCATION IN INDIA-THE WAY FORWARD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, Education is the one of the most important instrument for social and economic transformation of a country. Education in India has been gone through a paradigm shift since independence. Considerable emphasis has been given on literacy, school enrollment, and spread of institutions of higher education including technical education over the decades. India is a country of 1.3 billion people, where 67% of the Indian population lives in rural areas. Approximately 196 million elementary school going children, out of that 146 million are enrolled in rural schools (U-DISE, 2015-16). The enrollment of children for the age group 5-14 has been above 95% in rural India (ASER, 2018). This is a good sign as far as rural education is concerned, quality and access to education is major issues in rural education system. The rural children go to school but the learning quality they receive is not enough. Their foundation skills in reading and arithmetic are very poor. As per ASER data shows, only 73% of standard students VIII students can read a standard II level text. And only 44% of children in standard VIII can solve a basic arithmetic problem. Though the literacy rate has been increased in rural areas but still there is a gap between rural and urban literacy. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for girls at both primary and higher secondary level has increased more than that of the boys. There is also major digital divide with in the country across states, cities and villages, and income groups. These are the few glimpses on the picture of education in rural India and in this paper aims at analyzing the present scenario of rural education system in India, problems associated with rural education. It also focused on the various initiatives taken by the government and some of the suggestions for restructuring rural education to suit the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, taking into consideration of local and global needs.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

From ancient times, India is known as 'Home of Rural Life' and people living in villages represents the true images of 'Real India'. Currently India's population is more than 1.31 billion and three fourth this population can become the nation's strength, helping the economy to grow. Out its total population 60% above people lives in rural area. More the



rural India learns and sharpens its skills, the better it would help the economy. In shaping the rural economy the role of education is crucial. If a country's rural education is performing well, it reflects on the entire economic state of a county. In India, Right to Education (RTE) is a fundamental right, which states that every citizen of India between the ages of 6 to 14 years will get free and compulsory education irrespective of caste, creed, religion, and economic conditions, it gives equal opportunity to all. Even though education is a basic right of every citizen, many are deprived of this right. Compared with the education facilities available in urban areas, the schools in Rural India have a scarcity of basic needs like drinking water, transportation facilities, and competent teachers. Even though the population residing in rural area is very high, not much attention is given to the rural education system. Though government schools exist in rural areas, but when compared to private schools then quality and access to education is major issue. There are few schools in rural areas and students have to travel far away distance to get education and basically girl students face more problems in travelling long distance to attain school, leading to increasing in the number of illiterate and dropout of students in rural areas. Though the rural people are aware about the importance of education and it is the only way which can bring improvement in their economic, social and political conditions but due to lack of money they are not able to send their children to private schools and hence depend upon government schools for education. Since 70 years passed from independence still the rural education has not been improved to that extent as compared to private schools. However, due to lack of literacy and education, the rural India witnessed many draw backs. However, in most of countries, rural sector is less developed than the urban sector and in India where rural sector is almost neglected; the rural education is really a serious matter of concern. India now suffers from the twin challenges of unviable sub-scale schools and a severe shortage of teachers which makes in-school interventions only marginally fruitful. The basic objective of rural education is to ensure that every child in rural India to receive free and compulsory as well as quality education which will prepare them to compete in every challenging situations. In such a situation, education in rural India needs to be strengthened with diversified objectives. Rural education initiative in India has the following main objectives:

- *To provide free and accessible education to all rural children*
- *Aims at reducing disparity in rural India by educating all.*
- *To develop rural economy by strengthening rural education.*
- *Guiding and supporting children for getting higher education.*



- *Promoting a conducive and stress free environment for students in all schools.*
- *Adoption of new methods of teaching and assessment system.*

**Objective of the Study:** This paper aims at analyzing the present scenario of rural education system in India, problems associated with rural education. It also focused on the various initiatives taken by the government and some of the suggestions for restructuring rural education to suit the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, taking into consideration local and global needs.

**Methodology:** The study mainly based on secondary data. The current scenario of rural education has been analysed on the basis of published journals reports, articles, All India survey on higher education (AISHE) report 2019-20, ASER report, national statistical organization (NSO) report, 75<sup>th</sup> round of national sample survey (2017-18), and other government data sources.

### **The Present Scenario Rural Education in India; How Much Educated Rural India Is?**

India is on the threshold of faster inclusive and more sustainable growth because India is going to reap the full advantage of demographic dividend within few decades. By 2030 India will be world's most populous country. The average age of India is less than 25 years and in the times to come India will have largest working population. India can harness the advantage of this demographic dividend only through skill based, employable, and need based flexible education system. Education acts as immune for development because it creates human capital which is important element of development. Education is more relevant in countries like India, because it has lots of diversities and disparities like, geographical disparities, gender disparities, rich and poor divide, urban and rural classification, language diversities etc. in such scenario education enables an individual to look at society and its aspects with a wider perspective. Without education, people are unable to develop the basic sense required. With literate and educated rural people, India might emerge as a developed nation. Even though India's literacy rate has registered some growth over the last few years, but it has not been able to impart the kind of education that modern times demand. There are several issues that the Indian education system is undergoing and the major one is the poor rural education scenario. We cannot deny the fact that even today; a major part of India



population still resides in rural India. However, there is hardly any attention being paid to the education system existing in rural India.

From the census report, it is noted that the general education levels have gone up among all sub-groups, though there is intra and inter-gender variations. For example, educational level differs between males and females in both rural and urban areas, while gender-wise, there are differences between the rural males and urban males and between rural females and urban females. Though the illiteracy rate of the rural and urban females has declined over the years, it is still not only higher than that of male counterparts. Hence, educational attainment among the females, whether in the rural or urban areas, lags behind that of male population by two decades. Moreover, rural males level of literacy is less than not only that of urban males, but also that of urban females.

**Table-1: Rural-Urban Education in India**

Year	Literacy rate (%)				Change in literacy rates		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural-urban literacy gap	Rural	Urban	Total
1961	24.48	58.59	30.68	34.11	-	-	-
1971	30.30	64.56	37.32	34.26	5.82	5.97	6.64
1981	35.17	69.06	43.57	33.89	4.87	4.50	6.25
1991	44.10	73.08	52.21	29.07	8.93	4.02	8.64
2001	58.73	79.92	64.83	21.19	14.63	6.84	12.62
2011	68.91	84.97	74.04	16.06	10.00	5.05	9.21

Source: Census Report, GOI

From above table, it is clear that, the rural literacy rate always remained lower than that the national average. Although from 1961-2011, the rural literacy has increased three times i.e. from 24.48 percent to 68.91 percent but there is a huge gap between urban and rural literacy figures but with the increasing awareness of the central and state government and implementation of different flagship programmes on education, the gap is gradually decreasing, as it clear from the table. The decal change in literacy rate was highest in 1991-2001 as compared to other years. The current rural education scenario in India can be noticed by examining these points-

***Uneven Distribution of Technology and Digital divide*** - There is a major digital divide with in the country across states, cities and villages, and income groups. According to



the ASER report nearly 4 percent of rural households and 23 percent of urban households possessed computer and 24 percent of the households in the country had internet access. Among persons of age 15-29, nearly 24 percent in rural area were able to operate computer. The internet access was restricted to 15 percent of rural household and 42 percent of urban households. In rural areas there is less internet penetration, lack of digital infrastructure; students don't have mobile phones or laptops to access the education.

**Education and Literacy rate** - In India, Literacy rate among persons (aged 7 years and above) is about 77.7 percent. In rural areas, the literacy rate was 73.5 percent as compared to 87.7% in urban areas, while male literacy rate was higher (84.7%) than female literacy rate (70.3%). Only 5.7 percent were graduates or above in rural areas while percentage was 21.7 percent in urban areas.

**Students not Enrolled** - According to annual status of education reports survey, 5.5 percent rural children are not currently enrolled in the year 2020, from 4 percent in 2018. This difference is large among the youngest children where 5.3 percent of rural children aged 6-10 years are not enrolled in school in 2019, as compared to just 1.8 percent in 2018.

**Access to Schools and types of Education** - Only 38 percent of rural households have secondary schools within 1km of the house as compared to 70 percent for urban households. In rural areas 92.7 percent households and in urban areas 87.2 percent of households reported availability of primary schools within 1km from the house. 96.1 percent of students were in general education and remaining was in technical/professional education. The ASER survey report shows that for the children 6-14 age group, more than 60 percent all children are enrolled in government schools and close to 30% are enrolled in private schools.

**Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** - There has been continuous increase in GER over the last two decades. In 2019-20, GER at upper primary level increased to 89.7 % from 87.7% in 2018-19, GER at elementary level increased to 97.8% from 96.1% in 2018-19. GER has improved by nearly 10% in secondary level between 2012-13 and 2019-20. Gross Enrollment Ratio of girls has increased to 90.5% from 88.5% in 2018-19 and the GER for girls at both secondary and higher secondary level has increased more than that of the boys. (UDISE, 2019-20)

**Free Education, Scholarship and Stipends** - At all India level nearly 14 percent students attending formal education received scholarship/stipend. Nearly 77 percent of the students studying in government institutions were receiving free education. Percentage of students studying in private unaided institutions and receiving free education was nearly 2



percent in rural areas and 1 percent in urban areas. At pre-primary level nearly 33% students were getting free education in India. Primary level, the proportion of students receiving free education was 62 percent.

**Private Coaching** - Nearly 20 percent of students attending pre-primary and above level were taking private coaching in India. Incidence of taking private coaching is maximum at secondary level (31% of male students and 29% of female students.)

**Household Expenditure on Education** - Average expenditure per student incurred during the academic session (2017-18) for basic courses was nearly Rs. 8,331 for general courses, Rs. 50,307 for technical and professional courses. The average annual expenditure on education for secondary schools students is Rs. 9,013 of which Rs. 4,078 goes towards regular school fees. About Rs. 1632 or just over 18 percent goes towards of the total expenditure, on private coaching.

**Persons currently not attending Education** - In India, percentages of persons in the age group of 3-35 years dropping out of studies were nearly 14 percent in rural areas and 10 percent in urban areas.

**Access to and Availability of Learning Materials** - In rural India approximately one third of all enrolled children received some kind of learning materials or activities from their teacher during the reference week. A slightly larger proportion of students in higher classes received materials as compared to lower classes. For example, close to 38% of high school students received materials as compared to 30.8% of children in std. I-II. (ASER Survey).

### **Major problems in growth of Rural Education in India:**

Since independence government has taken number of steps to improve its quality of education through different educational policies, increasing fund allocation for development of education in the country. In spite of several attempts, the progress in achieving the desired goal is far behind further accelerated action needed to the rural education because this rural education is mostly neglected. The major problems faced by the rural schools in India are as follows-

**Less number of Schools** - In comparison to the number of schools in urban area, there are very few schools in rural areas. Due to non-availability schools in nearby areas, students in rural areas have to walk long distance in order to reach their schools.

**Low Income of Parents** - Usually, peoples in rural area have little income sources which are usually consumed in basic survival, making education out of their income is



insufficient. And less number of government schools in local areas discourages parents more to spend on education, resulting deprivation of education to their children.

*Inadequate Infrastructure* - The schools in rural area have really lack of proper infrastructure facilities. There are no proper facilities for sitting, lack of building for classes, even there is any building lacks doors and windows. There is lack of trend teachers, sometimes one teacher for the whole school. Another basic facility that rural schools in India lack is the availability of drinking water and washrooms, if any, that is out of functioning. Because of non-availability of washrooms, female students hesitate to go school. This leads to very poor quality of education being imparted, hardly fulfilling the need of education.

*Rural-Urban Divide* - The division of education as rural and urban education is growing of serious concern as there is wide gap coming in between rural and urban education. In number of schools are way higher in urban areas as compared to rural India. The way of teaching also differs in urban schools. The teaching methodology in rural schools are still based on traditional method, while the urban schools are adopting modern ways of teaching like use of projectors, computer graphics for concept learning and focus on development of each student. Gaining computer education at primary level is still a dream for many students studying in rural india because of non-availability of computer labs in schools but these facilities are provided in privet and urban schools.

*Deficiency of Funds* - Deficiency and unavailability of funds one of the major barriers for rural educational development. Due to deficiency of funds some schools cannot buy benches, blackboards, etc.

*Lack of technology* -Today we live in a technology-driven world and the education system of today also using these modern to technology to make teaching-learning process interesting and easier. Unlike schools of urban area, schools of rural area are not well equipped with basic modern gadgets like computer, laptops, tabs, high-speed internet, wi-fi etc.

*Low Salary Structure* -Low salary structure affects the efficiency of teachers and does not give proper attention to the students. Sometimes due to low salary, teachers in rural area go for privet coaching or tuitions.

*Less Emphasis on Extra-curricular Activities* - In rural schools students are not able to involve in extra-curricular activities like sports, swimming, singing, dancing and painting etc. such events and activities lead to the overall development of the children.



*Non-teaching duties of Teachers* - In schools teachers are also assigned some other non-teaching activities like election invigilation, census data collection etc. which often keeps teachers away from schools.

*Social promotion* - Though in class promotion system or social promotion, students are upgraded to the next level despite poor performance at their current grade level. This is hampering the quality of education to be received by students from education institutions.

*Linguistic barrier* - UNESCO estimates that 40% of school-aged children don't have access to education in a language that they understand. Basically children can get comfortable with reading and writing in a language that they know. Teaching in mother tongue or in local language can eradicate the constraints of language barrier in learning.

### **Measures to make improvement in rural education system:**

*Reduce barriers and boost free education* - Free education should reach to all remote corner of rural area because poverty is one of the most critical and common problems in rural India. This is one of the major obstructions in the development of the rural education. This problem can only be solved if free education provided to all. This will bring up literacy rate more and more parents will show their eagerness to send their children to schools if they are not required to bear the educational expenses.

*Opening up of new schools* - In rural area people are basically depends on government educational institution to educate their children. The scarcity of schools/colleges in rural India made it difficult for the students residing in remote areas to reach schools and learn. If more schools were setup, parents would be prompted to send their kids to schools, it will definitely improve the educational standard of students in rural India. Moreover, government should focus on other basic facilities like free text books, library facility, study rooms and other facilities so that education would not like a burden to their parents.

*Filling up the vacancies of teachers* - The average number of teacher per school in rural areas is 2.92 at primary, 6.53 at upper primary, and 3.50 at elementary level as compared to urban area figures of 4.83, 8.37, and 4.91 respectively. It means schools located in rural area suffer from shortage of teachers. As far as distribution of female teachers in rural area is concerned, rural schools are poor in having female teachers in comparison to urban schools. Appointment of highly qualified, experienced and competent teacher in rural areas could probably be an effective educator with fewer resources than an untrained, poorly educated, and inexperienced teacher. This problem must immediately be solved in order to smoothen the rural education system.



*Excelling Scholarship Programmes* - In order to encourage the efforts of students and to motivate them in academic and in extracurricular activities, some type of scholarship either in form of financial assistance or other form of incentives should be given to those who perform well in the class. This will motivate other students in improving their performance.

*Provision of Transport and Communication Facilities* - In rural areas, students have to walk miles of distance to attain their schools. Basically, in remote tribal villages there is lacking of all weatheric condition of road facilities, as a result, it is tedious for the students to walk, due to this, they express lack of interest in studies and do not take pleasure in coming school. Hence, it is essential to bring about improvements in roads in rural areas and transport facilities to the students.

*Computer Education*- Computer education and information and communication technology (ICT) based education must be compulsorily taught in rural schools, which will not only help in improving their skills and abilities but also in making of them competent in the present digital world.

*Curriculum and Teaching-learning Process*- It is essential for the teachers to communicate with students in a friendly and polite manner. Teachers need to be kind and courteous towards the students and help them in the achievement of their goals. Make sure that teaching-learning processes should be well-organized, child-centric and adequately implemented. The curriculum of rural education can be updated and can include vocational education related to local needs.

*Promoting Extra-curricular Activities* - Rural schools are such platforms where students can blossom their hidden talent, skills and abilities in extra-curricular activities. Making physical education, games and sports and other extra-curricular activities as an integral part of curriculum in schools for holistic development of children and making provision of infrastructure for the same.

*Special programmes for girl education* - Still a large number of girl students from remote rural India are not able to get education due to several social and economical constraints. So special programmes for girl students in providing accessible education and ensuring their full retention should be the important objective of rural education system.

### **Initiatives by Government for Ensuring Quality Education in Rural India:**

Keeping in view the huge potentiality of demographic dividend available in India, government has taken a series of initiatives to make education more meaningful and



employable. Major initiative is in the form of incorporation of 'Elementary Education' as a Fundamental Right under Article 24A the constitution of India and enacted the Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. Now it is a fundamental right of all children to demand eight years of quality elementary education.

*National Education Policy, 2020:* NPE, 2020 is set to be major impact on the current ongoing education system in India. It aims at making "India global knowledge superpower" by making several changes from the school to college level in the Indian education system.

*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):* This is one of the flagship programme of government of India launched in 2001-02 with a aim to provide elementary education to all children in the 6-14 years age-group. This programme will mainly cover educational needs for girls, and scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. Under this programme many new schools opened in places where did not have any facilities and proper infrastructure.

*Model School and Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme:* Several Eklavya model school has been opened up in rural areas and RGNF fellowship scheme launched to encourage the students belonging to scheduled tribes community to pursue higher education.

*Open Black Board Operation:* This scheme was launched in 1987 with a aim to provide essential facilities to all primary schools in the country. This scheme launched as a central sponsored scheme for qualitative improvement in elementary education, the increased retention of children in schools, and a move towards a child-centered approach to education. This is for the first time, a type of minimum criteria based programme launched by government of India.

*Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS):* This programme also known as "National Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary Education" launched by the government of India in 1995. The main objective of the MDMS is to attain the goal of universalization of primary education with the emphasis on increasing the enrolment, attendance, and retention of children in primary classes. Under this scheme, emphasis given on the nutritional status of students and given free cooked meal every day to each enrolled children.

*District Primary Education Programme (DPEP):* This was a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 1994 with the objective of universalization of primary education. Its main objective was universal access, universal retention, and universal achievement and revitalizing the primary education.

*Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV):* The National Policy on Education (1986) envisaged setting up of residential schools in various states across the county that will



provide free and quality education to talented rural children, comparable to the other high paid residential schools in India for class VI to XII.

*Samagra Shiksha:* It subsumed the earlier schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamika Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education and newly launched as integrated scheme for school education. This scheme focuses on the improvement of quality of education by providing support like training to teachers, infrastructure grants, digital learning etc.

*Digital Learning:* To encourage digital learning among the teachers and students several programmes like e-Pathshala, Diksha, MOOCs, SWAYAM, National digital library of India (NDL) programmes have been launched by the government.

### **Concluding Observations and Suggestions:**

In coming decades, India will have a youthful population when other countries have ageing population. If this advantage is restricted to small, highly educated elite, then we can't compete with other countries. With more than 60 percent belonging to rural area and 35 percent of its total population under age of 15, but facing low human resource development. This is because of India's education system suffering from numerous challenges. Different policymakers and educationist urged to increase spending on education is 6 percent of GDP, but actual spending has around 4 percent of the GDP for the last few years. On the one side, India's top business schools, IITs, IIMs and universities produce globally competitive graduates, but on the bottom end primary and secondary schools particularly in rural areas struggles to find staff. It is found that though the literacy rate has been increased in rural areas but still there is a gap between rural and urban literacy. GER for girls at both primary and higher secondary level has increased more than that of the boys. There is also major digital divide with in the country across states, cities and villages, and income groups. There required a comprehensive roadmap of curricular and assessment reforms, new teacher recruitment and training strategies, leadership development and integration of collaborative technologies. It will help to teacher as well as student community to create, think, adapt, share contents, and encourage innovations and creating in solving real-world problems. Teacher education programmes both pre and In-service will undergo drastic changes to make them update and rigorous. Therefore, for complete development of any society rural education is the need for the hour and more efforts has to be taken by the government, educated youth, teachers and NGOs to spread awareness among rural people about the need



and significance of education. Thus, if India envisages achieving faster, inclusive and sustainable development goals then, it can only be fulfilled by imparting quality education in rural areas. In this regard education is most relevant way for engagement of rural population to take them to the development process.

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