

# How Far Have We Come in Sarva Siksha Abhiyan?

*Five years after the launch of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, it is time to make a realistic assessment of its achievements. Official statistics reveal a promising reduction in dropout rates especially for girls; however, the quality of infrastructure and teaching standards in government schools leaves much to be desired.*

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An enlightened human resource base is a prerequisite for attaining faster economic growth. The east Asian miracle and the popularity that endogenous growth theory has attained thereafter emphasise the role that education plays in economic growth and conceptualise the process as “human capital” accumulation. Empirical studies also point out that investment in elementary education increases the productivity in all the sectors of the economy much more than other levels of education and that economic returns to investment in primary education are greater than those arising from other levels of schooling [Colclough 1980].

For ensuring free elementary education to all children between the age of six years and 14 years, the National Democratic Alliance government launched the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001 and brought a constitutional amendment in 2002 making elementary education a fundamental right.<sup>1</sup> The main objectives of the SSA programme are: (i) all children in school by 2003; (ii) all children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007; (iii) all children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010; (iv) focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for

life; (v) bridge all gender and social category gaps at the primary stage by 2007 and at the elementary stage by 2010; and (vi) universal retention by 2010.

After five years of implementation of this programme it is time to undertake an appraisal of the performance of this programme in the realisation of its objectives. An attempt is made in this article, using data published by National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, in March 2006, to carry out a supply-side analysis of the elementary education scenario in India.

## Literacy Rates across States

Before entering into an in-depth analysis of elementary education we present the picture of the prevailing literacy rates across the major states in India. While Kerala leads all states in respect of the literacy rate at around 91 per cent, Bihar ranks the last with a literacy rate of only 47 per cent in 2001. Most of the developed states in the country have comparatively high literacy rates. States like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Gujarat, Karnataka and Haryana have literacy rates of 77, 73.5, 69.7, 69.1, 66.6 and 68 per cent respectively. Although not considered one of the developed states, Uttaranchal, and also West Bengal have achieved literacy rates of 71.6 per cent and 68.6 per cent respectively. The lowest

performers are Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, which have literacy rates of less than 60 per cent. The states, which have just managed to achieve literacy rates above 60 per cent but still remained below the national average, are Andhra Pradesh (60.5 per cent), Assam (63.3 per cent), Orissa (63.1 per cent), Rajasthan (60.4 per cent), Chhattisgarh (64.7 per cent), and the national average being 65.4 per cent in the year 2001.

The literacy rates on the basis of gender reveal a highly disconcerting picture. While male literacy rates by gender follow almost the same pattern as the aggregate literacy rate, female literacy rates all over India presents a grim picture. Only a few states like Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Punjab have achieved a female literacy rate of more than 60 per cent; Kerala scored the highest percentage of 87.7 per cent followed by Maharashtra with 67 per cent, Tamil Nadu 64.4 per cent and Punjab 63.4 per cent. The condition is deplorable in the states Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, where the female literacy rate is below 50 per cent.

## Dropout Rates

A mere increase in the number of children enrolled in primary school does not make much difference unless and until the children acquire a basic standard of education, say, at least a secondary level education. Elementary education neither provides any skill nor information to increase the mobility of individuals concerned. Therefore, it is imperative to

**Table 1: Literacy Rates across Indian States, 2001**

States	Overall Literacy Rate	Male Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
Andhra Pradesh	60.5	70.3	50.4
Assam	63.3	71.3	54.6
Bihar	47.0	59.7	33.1
Chhattisgarh	64.7	77.4	51.9
Gujarat	69.1	79.7	57.8
Haryana	67.9	78.5	55.7
Jharkhand	53.6	67.3	38.9
Karnataka	66.6	76.1	56.9
Kerala	90.9	94.2	87.7
Madhya Pradesh	63.7	76.1	50.3
Maharashtra	76.9	86.0	67.0
Orissa	63.1	75.3	50.5
Punjab	69.7	75.2	63.4
Rajasthan	60.4	75.7	43.9
Tamil Nadu	73.5	82.4	64.4
Uttar Pradesh	56.3	68.8	42.2
Uttaranchal	71.6	83.3	59.6
West Bengal	68.6	77.0	59.6
All India	65.4	75.8	54.1

Source: Mehta (2006).

make an assessment of the proportions of students enrolled in primary school who reach class X. It is seen that attainment of secondary level of education remains beyond the reach of most children. Table 2 shows the dropout rates at different levels of school (primary, elementary and secondary). Over the years, since 1960-61 the dropout rates at the three levels have come down. However, the rates still remain unduly high. In 2003-04 the dropout rate at the secondary level was around 63 per cent. It implies that out of 100 children enrolled in class one, only around 37 students could reach class X. Out of these 63 dropouts around 31 students leave the school before they reach class five. Another 21 students stop education well before reaching class VIII. Further analysis of the dropout rates on the basis of gender reveals that in 2003-04 although the dropout rate of girls was lower than of boys at the primary level, it was higher at the middle and secondary schools stages.

### Enrolment in Government Schools

Since primary education is considered a merit good, the role of the government sector is of special importance at this level. During the past decade and a half, a number of private educational institutions have come up. The relative roles of the private and the public sectors in elementary education have been different across states as is reflected in the enrolment in government schools. Table 3 shows the proportions of students enrolled at the elementary stage, in government schools in different states. Over the years, in most states, there has taken place a decline in the percentage of enrolment in government schools. In 2004-05, only in a few states (like Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa) enrolment in government schools at the elementary level was more than 90 per cent. The states, which had less than 50 per cent of students enrolled in government elementary schools were Haryana, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal. The reasons underlying this declining trend need to be looked at in depth.

### School Infrastructure

An encouraging learning atmosphere is essential for effective education to happen. The state of educational infrastructure is one sure indicator of the

learning atmosphere in place. Table 4 gives a rough and ready indicator of the infrastructure facilities in the school sector in the different states in India. The figures on the percentage of schools with a proper school-building give a very disturbing picture. In states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, large numbers of students at the lower primary level are enrolled in schools, which do not have adequate, building facilities. The proportions of such students come to 5.3 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 5.1 per cent in Bihar, 6.4 per cent in Chhattisgarh, 7.6 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and 7.3 per cent in Rajasthan. Of the 18 states included in the table, there is not a single state, which has more than 90 per cent of schools in good condition. The proportion of schools, which are in urgent need of major repairs, is particularly high in Assam (40.8 per cent), Bihar (19.3 per cent), Jharkhand (18.7 per cent), Orissa (17.7 per cent) and West Bengal (31.3 per cent).

Another indicator of the status of infrastructural facilities is the availability of toilets and latrines in the campus. The states in which less than 50 per cent of schools have common toilets are Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. Only in a handful of states like Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal have more than 80 per cent of schools reported having common toilet facilities for students on the campus. Separate toilet facilities for girls do not exist in most states. Kerala has separate toilet for girls in 81 per cent of the schools (primary and upper primary). In states like Assam, Bihar and Orissa, less than 20 per cent of schools have a separate toilet for girls. In Jharkhand, 20.1 per cent schools have this facility.

In providing drinking water, most states show a satisfactory performance. Uttar Pradesh ranks the highest in providing drinking water facility in schools. In 96.6 per cent of the schools in UP, drinking water facility exists. Other states that cross the cut-off level of 90 per cent are Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab and Tamil Nadu. The lowest performers in this category are Assam and Haryana where the proportions of schools having drinking water facility are 77 per cent and 75.5 per cent respectively.

### Skilled Teachers

Employment of adequate numbers of skilled teachers is a prerequisite for imparting quality education. However, many states have failed to provide an adequate number of teachers for elementary education. A few indicators of this provision are shown in Table 5. Except Andhra

**Table 3: Percentage of Enrolment in Government Schools (Primary and Upper Primary)**

States	2003-04	2004-05
Andhra Pradesh	77.2	67.5
Assam	99.5	99.5
Bihar	99	98.7
Chhattisgarh	51.8	56.9
Gujarat	90.4	88.8
Haryana	57.3	47.5
Jharkhand	97.6	97.6
Karnataka	76.5	74.7
Kerala	37.8	35.8
Madhya Pradesh	62.4	60.3
Maharashtra	78.8	78.7
Orissa	96.5	96.5
Punjab	100	56
Rajasthan	70.9	69.8
Tamil Nadu	60.2	64
Uttar Pradesh	12.9	22.2
Uttaranchal	20.7	19.8
West Bengal	87.9	80.5

Source: Mehta (2006).

**Table 2: Dropout Rates at Primary/Elementary and Secondary Schools in India**

Year	Primary (I-V) Classes			Elementary (I-VIII) Classes			Secondary (I-X) Classes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1960-61	61.7	70.9	64.9	75.0	85.0	78.3	NA	NA	NA
1980-81	56.2	62.5	58.7	68.0	79.4	72.7	79.8	86.6	82.5
1990-91	40.1	46.0	42.6	59.1	65.1	60.9	67.5	76.9	71.3
1991-92	40.3	44.3	42.0	56.1	62.4	58.7	69.6	76.3	72.3
1998-99	40.9	41.3	41.5	54.2	59.2	56.3	64.5	69.8	66.7
1999-2000*	38.7	42.3	40.3	52.0	58.0	54.5	66.6	70.6	68.3
2000-01*	39.7	41.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7	66.4	71.5	68.6
2001-02*	38.4	39.9	39.0	52.9	56.9	54.6	64.2	68.6	66.0
2002-03*	35.85	33.72	34.89	52.28	53.45	52.79	60.72	64.97	62.58
2003-04*	33.74	28.57	31.47	51.85	52.92	52.32	60.98	64.92	62.9

Notes: \* Provisional; NA: not available; total dropout during a course (stage) has been taken as per cent of intake in the first year of the course (stage); primary, middle and secondary stages consist of classes I-V, I-VIII, I-X, respectively.

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Data extracted from India Stat.com

Pradesh, Haryana, Kerala and West Bengal, in all other states more than 10 per cent of the primary schools have only one teacher for five classes. And the figure of single teacher schools is as high as 40 per cent in Rajasthan, 28 per cent in Chhattisgarh, 26.7 per cent in Madhya Pradesh, 25.8 per cent in Uttaranchal, 23 per cent in Assam and 21 per cent in Jharkhand.

The figures of Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) reveal the inadequacy of teachers for elementary level of education. For lower primary and upper primary levels, the ratio varies from 20 in Assam to 85 in Bihar. The states that exceed the PTR of 50 are Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Only a few states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Kerala,

Punjab and Uttaranchal have a PTR below 30. In states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Jharkhand the proportions of such schools are quite high: 35.7 per cent in Bihar, 24.2 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 11.2 per cent in West Bengal and 11 per cent in Jharkhand.

For enhancing the quality of education and increasing the retention rate, the employment of adequate numbers of teachers is essential. Nevertheless, a number of states lag far behind.

In order to reduce the dropout rates in elementary education, the central government as well as the state governments have undertaken several measures. A few of them are the mid-day meal programme, provision of uniforms to girl students

and free supply of study materials for all students.

The fall in dropout rates (Table 2) could be due, at least partly, to the measures taken by governments. In comparison to 1999-2000, the dropout rates have come down from a very high level of 40.3 per cent to 31.47 per cent in 2003-04. Interestingly, the fall in the dropout rate for girls has been higher than that of boys. While the dropout rate of boys has declined (between 1999-2000 and 2003-04) by almost 5 per cent the corresponding rate of decline has been 13.73 per cent for girls. Further, in the year 2003-04, the dropout rate for girls has come down to the level for boys. This year the dropout rate for girls was even lower: 28.57 per cent in comparison to 33.74 per cent for boys!

For achieving universalisation of elementary education, the centre and state governments have undertaken several measures, which have resulted in increasing the retention rate of students; hence the quality of education at the elementary level could be expected to go up. Nonetheless, the progress so far has not been satisfactory enough to achieve the target of universal retention by 2010. There is a long way to go in the area of building infrastructure and inducting skilled teachers. A better teaching-learning atmosphere in the school and an increase in the quality of education would definitely attract more students to schools and also increase the retention rates. For this purpose, governments need to augment their budgetary allocations for education and improve their level of efficiency in utilisation through innovative policy intervention. **EPW**

**Table 4: School Infrastructure**

States	Percentage of Enrolment in Schools without Building		Percentage of Schools in Good Conditions	Percentage of Minor Repair	Percentage of Major Repair	Percentage of Schools with Common Toilet	Percentage of Schools with Girls Toilet	Percentage of Drinking Water Facility
	Primary Only	P+UP						
Andhra Pradesh	5.3	1.8	77.4	16.4	6.2	67.2	53.4	83.5
Assam	0.8	0.8	21.7	37.5	40.8	53.9	14.6	77.0
Bihar	5.1	1	51.1	29.7	19.3	48.9	18.5	90.0
Chhattisgarh	6.4	6.7	71.8	20.7	7.5	31.3	24.8	82.9
Gujarat	2	0.4	82	13.9	4.2	58.0	52.7	83.0
Haryana	0.4	15.5	86.4	8.7	4.8	57.1	69.5	75.5
Jharkhand	2.8	0.3	52.8	28.4	18.7	35.1	20.1	88.8
Karnataka	1.9	0.2	73.4	19.5	7.1	80.2	57.9	90.2
Kerala	0.2	0.6	64.1	30	5.9	84.0	80.9	96.4
Madhya Pradesh	7.6	3.1	76.7	17.9	5.4	49.6	38.5	89.3
Maharashtra	1	0.6	78.6	14.9	6.5	61.8	49.8	82.0
Orissa	2.1	0.2	39.3	33	27.7	44.3	16.6	83.6
Punjab	0.7	1.1	88.8	9.7	1.5	71.4	71.6	94.2
Rajasthan	7.3	1.1	77.7	15.9	6.4	77.3	54.4	89.9
Tamil Nadu	0.2	0.1	77.8	16.8	5.4	41.5	57.7	96.0
Uttar Pradesh	0.7	0.2	85.5	11.5	3	82.5	75.6	96.6
Uttaranchal	1.4	0.6	83.8	12.8	3.4	86.3	73.5	88.5
West Bengal	0.6	1.2	39.6	29.1	31.3	55.1	35.6	77.9

Source: Mehta (2006).

**Table 5: Manpower in Teaching for the Year 2004-05**

States	Percentage of Single Teacher Schools		Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)		Percentage of Schools with PTR>100	
	Primary	P+UP	Primary	P+UP	Primary	P+UP
Andhra Pradesh	8.5	0.2	28	25	0.5	0.5
Assam	23.0	0	34	20	9.9	0.8
Bihar	14.2	3.2	76	85	26.3	35.7
Chhattisgarh	28.0	6	40	28	3.9	3.5
Gujarat	11.5	2.7	31	38	0.7	0.9
Haryana	9.1	4.3	44	45	3.2	3.0
Jharkhand	21.0	3.8	54	56	11.1	11.0
Karnataka	17.1	0.4	25	38	0.5	0.5
Kerala	0.2	0	26	26	0	0.0
Madhya Pradesh	26.7	4.1	36	31	3.4	4.9
Maharashtra	15.0	0.5	30	31	0.4	0.5
Orissa	19.8	1.7	36	40	2.1	2.4
Punjab	19.1	2.9	37	22	3.1	2.0
Rajasthan	40.0	2.3	37	34	3.4	3.6
Tamil Nadu	11.2	1.2	34	42	1.3	3.6
Uttar Pradesh	16.2	6.9	74	65	27.5	24.2
Uttaranchal	25.8	2.5	29	26	2.5	2.3
West Bengal	6.1	2.2	50	58	7.2	11.2

Source: Mehta (2006).

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## Note

- 1 Right to education at the elementary level has been made one of the Fundamental Rights under right to life and personal liberty by the 86th constitutional amendment of 2002.

## References

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