

CHAPTER III

EXPERIENCE OF SECOND GENERATION ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

According to the International Encyclopedia of Education, Research and Studies (1985), "Primary schooling starts at 6 years of age in Europe and the United States, 5 years in United Kingdom (currently 4+ in some cases), and at 8 years, after very effective kindergarten, in the Soviet Union. There is much diversity in its duration : some countries (USA, UK, France, Australia) making clear breaks in provision and origination at about puberty, when secondary or high schools starts: some, like Portugal until 1979-80, employing a largely single grade school system from age 6 to 12 years. The grade system is the rule for most European schooling, and 'standards' are applied fairly rigorously to France and Belgium grades, despite the existence of substantial minority of more flexible, child centered methods, introduced into the lower primary grades in the late 1960s. Supporters of the grade system state, both in Europe and United States, that it enables nationwide checking of standard, schools, and teachers, and ensures reasonable compellability and uniformity of curriculum content. In some countries (typically parts of India, the People's Republic of China, and Hong Kong) pressure of numbers is so great upon early primary school that shift system have to be worked half-daily." A UNESCO publication on 'Primary Education On the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century' (1986) states that the regulations presently existing on entrance age and duration of primary education allow the conclusions that the most common age for education at the first level is 6 years in 144 countries and territories. The two other most frequent entrance age are 7 and 5 respectively.⁽¹⁾

The term 'Primary Education' is understood as a basic stage of education which is either a self-contained phase (of various lengths in various countries) or which forms a part of longer cycle of general education. Primary education may lead to other kinds of post-primary education, whether secondary or not, or to the world to the period of compulsory schooling. Elementary education has been described in Encyclopedia Americana (1988) as Elementary Education, the period of formal schooling extending from admission to school - in kindergarten or 1st grade - to completion of the 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. Also known as primary education in many countries, it

designates the range of schooling for children in many countries, it designates the range of schooling for children from about 6 to 12, 13 or 14 years of age.

A survey conducted by UNESCO and report published in Basic Education and Literacy : World Statistical Indicators (1990) reveals the following fact : (i) 100 of countries and territories have a duration of 6 years (grade) for primary education with different entrance ages, (ii) with an entrance of 6 years, 59 countries have a duration of 6 grades for first level education and 27 countries, 5 grades and (ii) in 26 countries an entrance age of 7 years together with a duration of 6 grades is observed.⁽²⁾

Table 8. Distribution of countries according to entrance age and duration

Duration in years								Total
Entrance Age	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Countries
4						2		2
5			3	13	13	1	1	31
6		6	27	59	5	16	1	114
7		4	5	26	6	6	1	48
8	1			2				3
Total Countries	1	10	35	100	24	25	3	198

Mahatma Gandhiji's perception on primary education was reflected in "Harijan". According to him, "The use of primary education should be extended at least to seven years and should include the general knowledge gained up to the matriculation standards less English plus a substantial vocation." The First Conference of National Education, held at Wardha on 22nd and 23rd October, 1937, considered the new system of education proposed by Gandhiji. Among others, it passed two resolutions viz. (a) that in the opinion of this conference free and compulsory education be provided for seven years on a national scale (b) that the endorses of the proposal made by Mahatma Gandhi that the process of education throughout this period should centre some from of manual productive work, and that all the other abilities to be developed or training to be given should as far as possible, be integrally related to the central handicraft chosen with due regards to the environmental of this

child.

The Sergent Report (1944) mentions as “Universal Compulsory, and free Primary or Basic education for all children between the ages 6 and 14, divided into the Junior Basic (6 to 11) and Senior Basic (11 to 14) stages. Article 45 of the Constitution neither uses the term elementary education nor primary education. It stages “Compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” The Secondary Education Commission 1952-53 has recommended ‘four or five years of Primary or Junior Basic Education and middle or Junior Secondary or Senior Basic School Stage which should cover a period of 3 years.’ The Education Commission 1964-66 used the terms Primary (Classes : I to VII of I to VIII) as detailed below :

- (a) Lower Primary : Classes I to IV or I to V.
- (b) Higher Primary : Classes V to VII or VI to VIII.
- (c) Lower Secondary Classes : classes VIII to X or IX to X.

The National Policy on Education 1968 referred to the Directive Principle under 45 of the Constitution seeking to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. An NCERT publication the Curriculum for the Ten-year school : A Framework (1975) used Primary stage and Middle stages. According to the Ishwarbhi Patel Review Committee (1977) Primary education classes I to VII/VIII divided into two parts : Classes I to IV/V and classes V/V to VI/VIII. It also used the terms lower primary stage and upper primary stage. The National Policy has observed in Para 3 of Part III as, “The National System of Education envisages a common education structure. The 10+2+3 structure has now been accepted in all parts of the country. Regarding the further break-up of the first 10 years efforts will be made to move towards an elementary system comprising 5 years of primary education and 3 years of upper primary, followed by 2 years of High School.” A publication of the NCERT entitled National Curriculum of Elementary and Secondary Education : A Framework (1988) has used the term elementary education (8 years), divided into primary stage (5 years) and upper primary stage (3 years). The Article 45 of the Constitution does not mention any term. It states, “ The State shall endeavour to provide, with in a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.”⁽³⁾

There has been a good deal of variation in the years of schooling for the two

stages. There have been as many as six patterns of educational structure till recently.

Table 9. Pattern of Education Structure up to Class VIII

Pattern	State	Primary	Upper Primary
Pattern I	Andhra Pradesh	I - V	V - VII
Pattern II	Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Orrisa, Panjub, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, A. & N. Islands, Chandigarh, Delhi, Pondicherry.	I - V	VI - VIII
Pattern III	Assam, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu. Lakshadeew.	I - IV	VI - VIII
Pattern IV	Maghalaya	I - III	IV - VI
Pattern V	Mizoram	I - IV	IV - VI
Pattern VI	Nagaland	I-IV	V-VIII

Broadly speaking, elementary school organization refers to the combination of two stages of education - primary stage of education covering Classes I to V (Age Group 6 to 11 and upper primary covering Classes VI to VIII (Age group 11 to 14). Thus, the elementary stage covers 8 classes from I to VIII and age group 6 to 14.

The Report of the Fifth Educational Survey published by NCERT (1989) provided an overview of elementary education in India. "Among the primary schools, 71,495 (13.50%) were without buildings. They were run in thatched huts, tents or in open space. Of the rest 3,85,120 (72.75%) Primary School had pucca or partly pucca buildings. Others were in Kachcha buildings. Among upper primary schools, 1,21,707 (86.79%) had pucca or partly pucca buildings and 11280 (8.13%) schools had kancha buildings. Further among the primary schools, 40732 (7.69%), 2,00,077 (37.79%) and 134551 (25.42%) had zero instructional room, one instructional room and two instructional rooms respectively. In case of upper primary schools, 3192 schools had

no instructional room and 24909 had one instructional rooms. 73.70% of the upper primary schools were either run by the government or by the local bodies. However, more than 50% upper primary schools in the State of Kerala (65.77%), Meghalaya (85.56%), Mizoram (72.14%), Orrisa (90.13%) and West Bengal were private aided schools. Percentage of primary schools with one teachers, four teachers and five or more teachers was 34.75%, 27.27%, 15.10% and 14.10% respectively." Table below represents the number of schools under different management category.

Tables 10. No. of Schools under different Management category

Category of	Number of Schools	% of Total
Primary Schools		
Government	2,19,837	41.53
Local Body Schools	2,51,699	47.54
Private Aided Schools	44,701	8.44
Private Unaided Schools	13,155	2.49

N.B. 52.70% primary schools in Andhra Pradesh and 58.84% in Kerala are private aided schools. In other States, majority of the primary schools are government or local schools.

Government schools are run by the State Governments and local Bodies schools run by Municipal Corporation, Municipal Committee, Cantonment Boards or District Boards. Education is free in this schools. These schools have been established for fulfilling the obligation to provide for free and compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14 as stipulated under Article 45 of the Constitution. Elementary education is also free in aided elementary schools. Textbooks used in the governments schools, local bodies schools and by the Education Department of the States. Private schools which do not get any grant from the government or local bodies are usually called public schools or private non-aided schools. These schools charge fees and accept donations. They are governed by rules framed under Education Codes. The medium of instruction is generally English. Public schools enjoy a good deal of freedom in various matters. Many of the public schools are residential. These schools attract children from rich homes. Single Teacher Schools - about one-third of primary schools are single teacher schools. Such schools pose many organizational and academic problems.

Prior to 1976, education was a state subject and thereafter all education became a concurrent subject. The government of India has undertaken a few centrally sponsored schemes for the promotion of elementary education in the country. Nevertheless, elementary education is financed mainly through resources of the State Government. Local bodies and voluntary organizations also work in this field. Sixteen States and three Union Territories have passed legislation on compulsory education. These States are : Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujrat, Haryana, Himachla Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The Union Territories are : Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh and Delhi. The States prescribed the pay scales and other service conditions for teachers. They also provide for their training. The state prescribed curricula and textbooks. Most of the States have nationalized textbooks. For inspection and supervision, State Governments maintain some staff even when the power to supervise is delegated to local bodies.

In addition to the above mention functions, State Governments also perform functions in respect of their local bodies similar to those which the Government of India performs towards the State Governments, particularly in the context of allocation of resources and maintenance of standards and targets of achievement. Each State maintains a department or Directorate of Education for administration and supervision of elementary education.

Table 11. Compulsory Education of different states

Number of States	Compulsory up to the age of
5 States / UTs	6-11 years
16 States / UTs	6-14 years
1 State	6-10 years
10 States / UTs	Compulsory in not force

Education is free up to the middle stage in Government and Government-aided (Class VI/VIII) in all the States. UT's except those of M.P., Meghalaya, Punjab, free even up to class X or higher in Government and Government-aided schools, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujrat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir,

Karnataka, Kerala, Nagalands, Arunachal Pradesh, Darda and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Daman & Diu, Lakshadeew and Pobjicherry. Even of those States where it is not free for all boys students, it is free in case of girls in some of the States.

J.P. Naik, an eminent educator of our country has very aptly observed, "The progress of primary education is an index of the general, social and economic development of the country as a whole." Primary education plays an important role in laying the proper foundation of child's cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, social and spiritual development. Primary education contributes to national development also. Various study has clearly demonstrated that countries which have made proper provision for primary education are far ahead with those of inadequate provision.

Universalization of elementary education in India means making education available to all children in the age group 6 to 14 or in classes I to VIII. Opportunities for this education may be provided through formal or non-formal means of education. It signifies that 'education is for all' and not for a selected few. This concept accepts that education is the birth right of every child. This means all children belonging to the rich and the poor, living in towns as well as rural areas and in places which are accessible with difficulty have to be provided with facilities for elementary education. Universalization of elementary education is also means free education. In some of the advanced countries free education means no fees, free books and stationer, free mid-day meals and free school transport. But in developing countries like India, it has not been possible to provide all these facilities free of cost. Of course, education at this stage is free of tuition fee. Other facilities on a selective basis are also provided. Universalizations of primary or elementary education involves the three stages or steps namely, (a) Universalization of provision, (b) Universalization of enrolment and (c) Universalization of retention.

(a) Universalization of provision : It means that school facilities should be provided to all children between age group 6 to 14 years in the country. The schools be easily accessible - within the walking distance of a child. We have fairly succeeded as far as this provision is concerned in respect of children of the age group 6 to 11.

(b) Universalization of enrolment : All children between the age group of 6 to 14 years must be enrolled. For this, compulsory legislation must be passed. Under legis-

lation, parents can be fined for not sending their children to schools. However, this provision has remained on paper only.

(c) Universalization of retention : By this we meant that once a child joins a primary school, he should remain there till he complete all 8 classes. If the child leaves the school in between, the idea of universalization stands defeated. Unfortunately, 60% of all the first admissions leave the primary school before completing it. It gives birth to problem of wastage. Mere enlistment of children is not enough. They have to be retained.

Universalization of elementary education has been one of the most important goals of educational development in India since Independence. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution directed States to endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years of the commencement of the Constitution free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years. This resolve to be fulfilled by 1960 was, however, severely hampered by several problems, such as the influx of displaced persons after partition and scarcity of resources, both financial and human. As a result, the target date had to be first revised to 1970, then to 1976, and later to 1990. The target date according to the National Policy on Education, 1986 is 1995. The modified Policy, 1992 has further revised the target date. It states, "It shall be ensured that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality is provided to all children upto 14 years of age before we enter the twenty-first century. A national mission will be launched for the achievement of this goal."⁽⁴⁾

Table 12. Expansion of elementary education Sex-wise (1950-51 and 1990-91)⁽⁵⁾

Item	1950-51	1990-91	Increase Approx.
No. of Primary Schools	2,10,000	5,58,392	2.5 times
No. of Middle Schools	14,000	1,46,363	10 times
Enrolment in Classes I to V	192 lakhs	99 lakhs	5 times
Boys	138 lakhs	501 lakhs	4 times
Girls	54 lakhs	99 lakhs	7.5 times

Table 13. Percentage of the Population Enrolled⁽⁶⁾

Age Group Classes	1950-51	1989-90	1990-91
1. 6 to 11 Classes I to V	42.6	99.9	101.03

The National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 envisages that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality should be provided to all children up to the age of 14 years before the commencement of the 21st century.⁽⁷⁾ The NPE visualised education as a dynamic, cumulative, lifelong process, providing diversity of learning opportunities to all segments of society. It envisaged improvement and expansion of education in all sectors; elimination of disparities in access and stressed on improvement in the quality and relevance of education at all levels—from primary to higher education along with technical and professional education. The National Policy on Education (NPE) also emphasised that education must play a positive and interventionist role in correcting social and regional imbalances in empowering women and in securing a rightful place for linguistic minorities. The nation is now firmly committed to providing education for all. The overriding priority to provide compulsory primary education, for children with special needs, eradication of illiteracy, vocationalisation, education for women's equality, special focus on the education of SCs/STs and minorities are some of the major strategies to achieve the national goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). The educationally backward areas are given special attention to remove regional disparities. Emphasis has been laid on the improvement of infrastructural facilities in the primary schools to make the school environment more attractive. Flexible and innovative programmes in the form of Non-Formal Education (NFE) have been launched to cater to school dropouts, girls, working children, etc. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was set up to represent a national and political commitment on the need to harness all social forces to achieve the objective of eradicating illiteracy and effecting a qualitative change in the lives of the people. It has made it possible for the country to set a target of making 100 million non-literates in the age group of 15-35 years functionally literate.⁽⁸⁾

The elementary education system in India is one of the largest in the world. There has been massive expansion of elementary education (EE) during the post-

independence period; however, the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) is yet to be achieved. Universal access, universal retention and universal achievements are board parameters to achieve UEE. Considering the magnitude and complexity of the problem, meticulously formulated strategies have been adopted in the form of Operation Blackboard (OB), Non-Formal Education (NFE), Teacher Education (TE), and District Primary Education Programme have been formulated.

Special focus has been laid on the access to education for millions of girls and working children, who cannot participate in the school system on account of socio-economic compulsion. These segments largely constitute girls, SCs/STs and the other deprived sections of the society. Non-congenial school environment, unsatisfactory conditions of buildings and insufficiency of instructional materials registering major demotivating factors for enrolment and retention of children in primary schools which called for a drive with a programme named as Operation Blackboard. This scheme intended to usher in improvement of the infrastructural facilities at the primary schools. This drive has been extended to cover upper primary schools as well. Girls, working children, dropouts and those belonging to S.C./S.T. and other deprived sections of the society stand to benefit from this approach. NFE has enough flexibility to provide education at their doorsteps to enable them to learn at their own pace and convenience. The major challenge for NFE is to maintain quality, comparable with the formal system. The national programme of nutritional support to primary education is intended to boost enrolment, attendance and retention in primary schools and also to supplement nutritional requirements of children. The scheme covers the children studying in primary classes in the government, local body and government-aided schools throughout the country. Total beneficiaries are estimated to be 9.75 crores in nearly 6.88 lakhs primary schools in the country during the period under report.

The district primary education programme provides special thrust to achieve Universalisation of Primary Education (UPE) through decentralised planning and management, disaggregated target setting, community mobilisation, district and population specific planning. The programme mainly aims at providing access to primary education for all children, reducing dropout rates to less than 10 per cent, increasing level of achievements of primary students by at least 25 per cent and reducing the gap between genders social groups to less than 5 per cent besides catering to the needs of special groups like tribals, SCs, women and other marginalised sections. The teacher

education scheme envisages setting up of DIETs in each district to provide academic and resource support to elementary education teachers non-formal and adult education instructors. It also seeks to establish micro-level structural arrangements to organise pre-service and pre-service training for secondary teachers, and provide extension and resource support service to secondary schools. Some area-specific externally-aided projects in the field of primary education are also being implemented. Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) aims at universalisation and qualitative improvement to primary education in remote and socio-economically backward villages of Rajasthan with focus on girls. It identifies teacher absenteeism as a major problem in primary schools and in inaccessible areas. Mobilisation and participation of the community to improve primary schools is an important feature of the project. Lok Jumbish is an innovative people's movement for education. The Bihar Education Project (BEP) is meant to provide education for all through people's mobilisation and participation. It is a basic education project which aims at bringing about qualitative improvement in the educational system and overall socio-cultural situation in Bihar. Although special programmes have been taken up to improve specific deficiencies in the educational system, no strategies can succeed in achieving UEE without specifically addressing its gender and regional dimensions. Gender disparities are conspicuous in India. Recognising this, most programmes have specific components aimed at the reduction in the bias towards the girl child.⁽⁹⁾

The National Policy on Education (NPE) envisages that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality should be provided to all children up to the age of 14 years, before the beginning of the 21st century.⁽¹⁰⁾ The target of universalising elementary education has been divided into three broad parameters, *i.e.*, universal access, universal retention and universal achievement during the eighth five year plan. As a result of the effort made by the Central government and state government, 94 per cent of country's rural population have been provided with primary schools within one km and 84 per cent have upper primary schools within three km. This has result in : (i) enrolment of children of 6-14 years of age in primary and upper primary schools has gone up to 87 and 50 per cent respectively; since Independence (ii) significant improvements have taken place in enrolment of girls SCs/STs; and (iii) the number of primary and upper primary schools has gone up from 2.23 lakh in 1950-51 to 7.75 lakh in 1996-97. Accordingly the number of teachers in primary and upper primary

schools have also gone up from 6.24 lakh to 29.86 lakh, during this period.

The central and state government have, over a period of time, evolved strategies to check dropout rates and improve levels of achievements in the schools. This has been attempted through: (i) creating parental awareness and community mobilisation; (ii) involvement of communities and PRIs; (iii) economic incentives; (iv) improvement in the content process of schooling (minimum levels of learning); (v) District Primary Education Programme initiative; and (vi) National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (Midday Meals Scheme). The 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill has been introduced in the Rajya Sabha to make the 'right to elementary education' a fundamental right and a fundamental duty. A group of experts on educational finance are currently examining the requirement of additional resources to make education compulsory for the 6-14 year old children. The National Elementary Education Mission is being set up for facilitating the achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) within a given time frame. It is expected to play the role of an overarching body, facilitating the achievement of (UEE) in a systematic sustained and integrated manner, involving all segments of society in this national endeavour. An attempt at competency-based learning has also been made. The Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) was introduced in many states over the last six years and this has led to the development of better textbook-cum-workbooks supplementary reading materials, teachers' handbooks and better systems of pupil evaluation. The government is now trying to extend the MLL approach to the upper primary stage.

The central government plays an important role in funding plan expenditure on elementary education. Ninety-seven per cent of the expenditure incurred by state governments on education sector goes towards the payment of teachers' salaries. The expansion of the school system and the quality initiatives in elementary education have been possible on account of increased resource availability even during a phase of structural adjustment. India is one of the few developing countries which has not allowed the expenditure on education to shrink during the reform period. The increase in expenditure on elementary education alone over the last three five year plan periods has been more than the increase in expenditure on education as a whole. Forty-eight per cent of the central plan was spent on elementary education in the eight plan. There are however substantial variations between states in terms of per capita

expenditure on education. A media and advocacy plan is being launched for universalisation of elementary education. It will focus on the right of every child to elementary education. Besides radio and television, the media campaign would use traditional and folk forms of communication. The print media would also be fully used to promote education for all. The Government of India, Department of Education, has been running, a programme of Non-Formal (NFE) for children of the 6-14 age-group who remain outside the formal system, since 1970. These include dropouts of the formal school, children from habitations without schools, working children, children who assist in performing domestic chores like fetching fuel, fodder, water, attending to siblings, grazing cattles etc., and girls who are unable to attend formal schools. Though the focus of the scheme is only educationally backwards states, it also covers urban slums, hilly, tribal and desert areas. The programme, at present, is in operation in 25 states/UTs. Under the scheme assistance is given to states/UTs. in the ratio of 60.40 and 90.10 for running co-educational and for girls, centres respectively. Cent per cent assistance is given to voluntary agencies for running NFE centres and undertaking experimental and innovative projects. Currently 2.90 lakh NFE centres has been sanctioned catering to about 72.5 children. Of the total number of centres about 1.18 lakh centres are exclusively for girls.

The National Bal Bhavan is an autonomus institution under the Department of Education. It has been playing a major role towards enhancing creativity amongst the children in the age group of 5-16 years specially from the weaker sections of society. The programmes have been designed to bring forth the inner potential of a child giving him an opportunity to express ideas through various medias. The membership of the Bal Bhavan has grown from just 300 in 1956 to over a lakh in recent years. Fifty-two Bal Bhavan Kendras have been opened in various places in Delhi. The National Bal Bhavan also provides general guidance, training facility and transfer of information to state and district Bal Bhavans in the country. An important element of post-independence educational policy has been to provide free and compulsory education to all children at least up to the elementary stage. The directive principles of state policy as enunciated in our Constitution envisage that the state shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for children up to 14 years of age within a period of 10 years. The constitutional directive has been spelt out unequivocally and emphatically in the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, and its Programme of Action (PoA), 1992.⁽¹¹⁾ The policy envisages that free and compulsory education of

satisfactory quality should be provided to all children up to the age of 14 years before the beginning of the 21st century. In keeping with the policy objectives, the targets for the ninth five year plan have been fixed under three broad parameters-universal access, universal retention and universal achievement. Universal enrolment of all children, including girls, disabled children and children belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in primary classes and provision of upper primary education for them. Provision of non-formal education (NFE) for school dropouts, working children and girls who cannot attend formal schools.

Provision of early childhood care and education to children of 3-6 years of age. Reduction of dropout rate between Classes IV and VII from the existing rate of 36.3 per cent and 56.5 per cent to 20 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively. Expansion of minimum levels of learning (MLLs) to all primary schools and extension of this concept to the upper primary stage. Substantial improvement in school infrastructure, teacher education and in quantity and quality of teaching-learning material. Promotion and extension of national curricular framework at the elementary stage which envisages a common core with adequate flexibility to relate it to the environment and needs and interests of the learners. Improved performance of the UEE programmes over the years would be evident from the following: Accessibility of schooling facilities is no longer a major problem. At the primary stage 94 per cent of the country's rural population now have schooling facilities within one km distance. At the upper primary stage also 83.98 per cent of the rural population have a school within 3 km distance. Enrolment ratio is 104 for classes I-V and 67 for classes VI-VIII. While the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at the primary stage in the country as a whole and in most of its states exceed 100 per cent, there are quite a few states where the ratio is considerably lower. These include Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and Meghalaya. At the upper primary stage, these states and in addition, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Sikkim have GER lower than the national average. In most of these states the literacy rates also are lower than the national average. There is thus a strong regional dimension of UEE. While universalisation of elementary education is the ultimate goal, no strategy or programme of action can succeed without addressing itself to gender and regional dimensions, specifically.

Gender disparities are conspicuous in regard to enrolment and retention. Girls' enrolment has grown at primary stages from 5.4 million in 1950-51 to 47.4 million in 1997-98 and that at upper primary stages from 0.5 million to 15.87 million. The rate of growth of enrolment of girls has been higher than that of boys. But disparities still persist as girls still account for only 43.2 per cent of enrolment at the primary stage and 39.0 per cent at the upper primary stage. The dropout rate of girls is much higher than that of boys at the primary and upper primary stages.

According to the 1991 census, the population of Scheduled Castes (SCs) was 138.12 million (16.33%) and that of Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 67.8 million (8.01%) of the country's population.⁽¹²⁾ The enrolment of SCs and STs has increased considerably at the primary stage because of the affirmative policies of the government. The participation of SCs and STs is now more or less in proportion to their share in the population, at the primary level. Dropouts, though declining over the years, are significantly large. Gender disparities are very conspicuous among SCs and STs also. In order to achieve Universalisation of Elementary Education, the following key strategies have been worked out in consultation with states and UTs viz. (i) overcome the problem of school dropouts and lay emphasis on retention and achievement rather than on mere enrolment alone, (ii) strengthen the alternatives of schooling, particularly, the non-formal education system for working children, girls and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised sections of the society, (iii) shift focus from educationally backward states to educationally backward districts, (iv) adopt disaggregated approach with a focus on preparation of district-specific and population-specific plans, (v) provide universal access to schooling facilities particularly to girls, disaggregated groups and out-of-school children, (vi) introduce minimum levels of learning for enhancement of learners' achievement. Micro-planning would provide the framework for universal access and universal participation while MLLs would be the strategy for universal achievement, (vii) improve school effectiveness, teacher competence, training and motivation, (viii) decentralisation of planning and management through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) / Village Education Committees (VECs) and stress on participating processes and (ix) convergence of different schemes of elementary education and related services such as early childhood care and education and school health and nutrition programmes.

India is one of the few developing countries which took the initiative in 1991 to lay down minimum levels of learning (MLLs) to be achieved at the primary stage. This new approach integrates various components such as curriculum, classroom, evaluation and teacher orientation. The first phase of the programme was implemented through 18 voluntary agencies, research institutions, SCERTs, etc. The results of these projects show significant improvement in learning attainments of school children. It has now been decided to up scale the MLL programme through institutional mechanism across the country. The national resource institutions like the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Regional Institute of Education (RIEs), State Councils of Educational Research and Training, and District Institutes of Education and Training are being networked for this purpose. Curriculum revision, re-writing of textbooks to make them competency-based, enhancing their pedagogical value, and the training of teachers in the classroom processes are the major activities, undertaken. The state governments have introduced MLL in most of the primary schools including local body/private schools. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) has adopted MLL as a major strategy for improvement of the quality of the primary education. Non-formal education programme is also adopting MLLs wherever appropriate. Learning competencies for various subjects taught at the upper primary stage are also under consideration.

An innovative project called Lok Jumbish (People's Movement for Education for All) with assistance from the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) was undertaken in Rajasthan in 1992. The basic objective of the project is to achieve education for all through people's mobilisation and participation and the are (a) providing access to primary education to all children up to 14 years of age, (b) ensuring that all enrolled children attend school/NFE centres regularly and complete primary education, (c) creating necessary structures, and setting processes which would empower women and make education an instrument of women's equality, (d) pursuing the goal of equity in education. Making necessary modifications in the content and process of education to better relate it to the environment and (e) effectively involving people in the planning and management of education. The project is implemented by the Lok Jumbish Parishad (LJP), an autonomous society registered under the Societies Registration Act. The first phase of the project was implemented between 1 June 1992 and 30 June 1994 and incurred an expenditure of Rs 14.03 crore shared in the of 3:2:1 among SIDA, the Government of the India and the Government of

Rajasthan. The second phase of the project was implemented between 1994 and 1998 with a revised outlay of Rs 95.65 crore shared in the ratio 3:2:1. In this phase, the project covered 75 blocks. The LJP has undertaken environment building activities in 5,683 villages and has completed school mapping exercises in 4,006 villages. Three hundred and eighty-three new schools have been opened while 227 primary schools have been upgraded. The Lok Jumbish Project has made a positive contribution to quality improvement through the development of improved MLL-based textbooks from classes I-IV, which have been mainstreamed in all schools of the Government of Rajasthan. Lok Jumbish has also set up vibrant block and cluster resource groups for academic supervision and regular training of primary school teachers. A renewed teacher training strategy in a cascade model, is also being implemented successfully. An innovative and successful NFE programme launched by LJP has spread to more than 3,000 centres, called Sahaj Shiksha Centres. Catering to dropouts and out-of-school children, especially girls, the system has close links with the community and has shown to provide comparable learning achievement levels amongst students. The LJP has been able to set up innovative management structures incorporating principles of decentralisation and delegation of authority as well as build partnerships with local communities and voluntary sector. Community mobilisation and school mapping exercises have shown good results, and provide the bases for opening of new schools, Sahaj Shiksha Centres and community-centred building development programmes.⁽¹³⁾

Based on the report of the committee of state education ministers, a proposal to amend the Constitution of India to make right to free and compulsory education for children from 6 to 14 years of age a fundamental right and also to make it a fundamental duty of parents to provide opportunities for education to children between 6 to 14 years age group were considered and approved by the cabinet at its meeting held on 16 May 1997. In pursuance of this decision of the cabinet, the Constitution (Eighty-third Amendment) Bill, 1997 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 28 July 1997. The bill was examined by the department-related parliamentary standing committee on human resource development. The matter is being further examined in the light of the report of the parliamentary standing committee. It is felt that a wider public debate on the implications of the proposed legislation should be initiated. In order to build public opinion and mobilise social support, a national programme of media publicity and advocacy for universalisation of elementary education is pro-

posed to be launched in the ninth five year plan. The programme will focus on four groups, namely, (i) teachers and all those involved in the education of children, (ii) students and parents of students, particularly non-literate parents, (iii) community opinion builders and (iv) policy makers and public representatives. It is hoped that the programme would facilitate social mobilisation and environment building for operationalising the proposal to make elementary education a fundamental right.

The National Elementary Education Mission (NEEM) is proposed to have the central objective of mobilising all the resource-human, financial and institutional - necessary for achieving the goal of universalisation of elementary education. The setting up of the mission is expected to give a boost to the efforts being made by the government and non-governmental organisations to achieve universalisation of elementary education. In pursuance of the NPE 1986, Operation Blackboard (OB) was launched in 1987-88 with the aim of improving the human and physical resources available in the primary schools of the country existing as on 30 September 1986. The scheme consisted of three components viz. (1) provision of an additional teacher to single teacher primary schools, (2) providing at least two classrooms in each primary school and (3) providing teaching-learning equipment to all primary schools brought under the scheme. During the eighth plan, the scheme was revised in- 1993-94 and expanded to provide third classroom and third teacher to primary schools where enrolment exceeds 100. This has been extended to include upper primary schools. The scheme was intended to improve school publicity and advocacy for universalisation of education, enhance retention and learning achievement of children by providing minimum essential facilities in all primary schools. Thus the scheme seeks to bring about both quantitative and qualitative improvement in primary education. Hundred per cent central assistance is provided for appointment of an additional teacher in single teacher schools. This scheme is implemented through state governments. Construction of school building is the responsibility of the state governments. However, in consultation with the Department of Education, the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment has worked out a formula to make available the funds for construction of school buildings under operation blackboard. According to this formula 48 per cent of the funds for construction are provided by the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment under the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) and the states have to raise 40 per cent non-JRY and 12 per cent JRY's state share.⁽¹⁴⁾

On the basis of past experience, observations of audit and evaluation reports it was seen that several states have unutilised funds sanctioned for teaching-learning equipment under the OB scheme. It was felt that to a large extent the under utilization can be attributed to lack of sufficient flexibility and decentralised procurement/supply of teaching-learning equipment. While indicating broad categories of teaching-learning equipment to be procured, the specific items under each category were left entirely to the discretion of the state government to be procured, as per local conditions. The state governments have also been advised that as far as possible, procurement of equipment should be decentralised and quality control insisted upon. It was further suggested that involvement of representatives of Panchayati Raj institutions, village education committees and teachers/headmaster in this process be ensured. Flexibility in the selection of teaching learning equipments and their decentralised procurement has facilitated timely supply of quality materials in several states.⁽¹⁵⁾

Despite considerable expansion of the formal system of education, the achievements of UEE goals remain a distant dream as a large group of children still remain outside the formal system due to various socioeconomic constraints. In order to reach this large segment of marginalised children, the Department of Education has been running, a programme of non-formal education for children of 6-14 age group since 1979-80. These include dropouts from the formal schools, children from areas without schools, working children, children who assist in performing domestic chores like fetching fuel, fodder, water, attending to siblings, grazing cattle, etc. and girls who are unable to attend formal schools. The National Policy on Education, 1986, and the Programme of Action, 1992, envisage a large systematic programme of NFE for those who cannot attend the full-day schools. It assumes that if the essential requirements for running a good programme are fulfilled, NFE can provide education comparable in quality, with formal schooling. It visualises NFE as a child-centred, environment-oriented system to meet the diverse needs of comparatively deprived sections of society.⁽¹⁶⁾ Decentralised community participation through Village Education Committees (VECs) in planning, running, and overseeing the NFE programme has been considered, crucial for its success. Although the focus of the programme is on the educationally backward states, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, it also covers urban slums, hilly, tribal and desert areas and projects for education of working children in other states/UTs as well. The programme at present is in

operation in 25 states/UTs. The strategies of NFE are (i) condensed course of about two years' duration, (ii) part-time instructions at a time/place convenient to learners in small groups, (iii) part-time honorary instructor/supervisor locally recruited and trained, (iv) emphasis on flexibility and decentralisation of management, (v) use of curriculum and teaching-learning material comparable to the formal system and relevant to local environment and learner's needs and (vi) testing and certification of NFE students to enable their entry into the formal system. The programme is implemented through state/UT governments as well as NGOs. The central assistance to states/UTs is being provided on a sharing basis between the central government and the state governments in the ratio of 60:40 for co-educational centres and administrative resource support and 90:10 for exclusively girls' centres. Hundred per cent central assistance is being provided to NGO's for running NFE centres and experimental and innovative projects.

The programme of NFE is being monitored through Quarterly Progress Reports (QPRs), periodic evaluations conducted by Joint Evaluation Teams (JETs) and field visits of central and state government officials. Moreover, seven external agencies evaluated the programme in eight states, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. On the basis of feedback received, remedial action is being taken for effective implementation of the programme. Operations Research Group (ORG), New Delhi, has also been asked to develop tools for evaluation of the programme along with the schemes of teacher education and Operation Blackboard. The emphasis during the ninth plan period was given on consolidation of the existing programme. Efforts would be made to improve the quality, allow for greater flexibility, re-location of NFE centres on the basis of micro-planning, area survey and promote more experimentation and innovation in the field of elementary education. Development and scaling up of NFE models that can help the learners to learn at their own pace will be a major thrust. The cost parameters are being revised to make the scheme more acceptable and in keeping with the socio-economic realities of the day. The scheme is under revision during the ninth plan. Effort to make the programme more meaningful is being taken up and experiences of successful NFE programmes such as Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi, etc., are being taken into consideration while revising the scheme.⁽¹⁷⁾

The overall aim of the scheme is to promote experimentation and innovation for the achievement of the goals spelt out in the National Policy on Education. The scheme has been in operation from the year 1987-88. Under the scheme voluntary organisations are given 100 per cent grants for trying out innovative strategies that could be replicated/ disseminated in the formal stream. The main areas of experimentation and innovations have been action research, community mobilisation, curriculum designing and preparation of need-based teaching-learning materials and aids, training of personnel and development of teaching techniques, new evaluation methods, linkage of school education with vocational education and alternative method of education for special target groups such as disabled children, girls, working children, tribal children, etc.⁽¹⁸⁾

The programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, popularly known as the Midday Meals Scheme, was launched on 15 August 1995, nationwide. This programme intends to give a boost to the universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and to improve the nutritional status of students in the primary classes (I-V). From 1997-98 onwards, the programme has covered all the children studying in primary classes in the government, local body and government- aided schools. This is one of the largest school nutrition programmes in the world today. The total number of beneficiaries is estimated to be 9.75 crore in nearly 6.88 lakh schools in all the blocks and urban areas in the country. The programme is more successful where cooked meals/processed food are being served. The central support under this programme is on : (a) provision of food grains free of cost to the implementing agencies for which economic cost is reimbursed to the Food Corporation of India and (b) reimbursement of transportation cost to district authorities for moving food grains from Food Corporation of India godowns, to schools/ villages.⁽¹⁹⁾

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is a centrally sponsored programme providing special thrust to achieving Universalisation of Primary Education (UPE). The programme takes a holistic view of primary education development and seeks to operationalise the strategy of UPE through district-specific planning with emphasis on decentralised management, participatory processes, empowerment and capacity building at all levels. The programme is structured to provide additional inputs over and above the provision made by the state governments for expenditure

on elementary education. The programme fills the existing gaps in the development of primary education and seeks to revitalise the existing system. The DPEP is contextual and has a marked gender focus. The programme components include construction of classrooms and new schools, opening of non-formal/ alternative schooling centres, appointment of new teachers, setting up of block resource centres/cluster resource centres, teacher training, development of teaching- learning material, research-based interventions, special interventions for education of girls, SC/ST, etc. The components of integrated education to children with disability and a distance education component for improving teacher training have also been incorporated in the programme.⁽²⁰⁾ The programme mainly aims at providing access to primary education for all children, reducing primary dropout rates to less than 10 per cent, increasing learning achievement of primary school students by at least 25 per cent, and reducing the gap between gender and among social groups to less than 5 per cent. The district is the unit of programme implementation. It is selected on the basis of twin criteria, viz. (a) educationally backward districts with female literacy below the national average, and (b) districts where Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) have been successful, leading to enhanced demand for elementary education.⁽²¹⁾

The DPEP is a centrally sponsored scheme. Eighty-five per cent of the project cost is shared by the Government of India and 15 per cent by the state governments. Both the central share and state share are passed on to State Implementation Societies directly as grant. The Government of India share is given by external funding. Several bilateral and multilateral agencies are providing financial assistance for the DPEP. The World Bank has provided a credit amounting to US\$ 260 million (approx. Rs 806 crore) under phase I of DPEP (1994-2001). The European Community has signed a financial agreement with the Government of India to provide a grant of 150 million ECU (approx. Rs 585 crores) as programme support for DPEP in Madhya Pradesh (1994-99). An agreement has been signed with the International Development Agency (IDA) for a second credit amounting to US\$425 million DPEP II (1996-2002).⁽²²⁾ The programme which was initially launched in 1994 in 42 districts of seven states has now been extended to cover 149 districts of 14 states, in Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. Further expansion of the programme in 10 districts of Rajasthan, 20-25 districts of Uttar Pradesh, five districts of West Bengal and eight districts of Orissa has been made.⁽²³⁾

The National Agenda for governance, issued in March 1998, has education high among its list of priorities. Inter alia, eradication of illiteracy, universal primary education, free education for girls up to the graduation level and the educational upliftment of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities have also been highlighted. With a view to involving the State Governments in implementing educational priorities set out in the National Agenda for Governance, a Conference of State Education Ministers and Education Secretaries was held in New Delhi on 22 and 23 October 1998. Inaugurating the conference, the Prime Minister stressed on the importance of universalisation of primary education and achievement of total literacy as key factors, for nation building. For the development of education, he stressed on the need for community involvement, women's empowerment, collective responsibility of centre and the states along with other programme like maternal and child health, nutrition, and so on. He also stated that our universities should become centres of excellence, and importance should be given to the improvement of the quality and management of education. As a result of the deliberations in the meeting, the following emerged :

a) There was a general consensus that universal elementary education would have to be taken up as a mission. Universal access and universal retention along with qualitative inputs would be the key components here. Implementation would be done with full collaboration between the central and state governments, with community involvement. A National Committee to be chaired by the Minister for Human Resource Development and consisting of Education Ministers of the states of Assam, Haryana, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, would develop the structure and outlines of this mission.

b) It was resolved that the financing of education was not commensurate with the needs of this sector and that more funds would need to be provided both from the public and private sources. The funding of education would have to be done both by the central and state governments in a collaborative manner. This would need to cover all sectors of education viz., elementary, secondary and higher.

c) The importance of providing free education for girls up to the graduation level as already included in the NAG was welcomed. It was stated in this connection that some funds for this activity had already been provided for in the central budget. The scope and extent of what constituted ' free education ' would need to be, however, further discussed and deliberated upon. This would be further deliberated by the

State Education Secretaries with the Union Education Secretaries , in concurrence with respective, state governments .

d) It was resolved that the thrust of the educational policy should be directed towards those who are marginalised in general and in particular to those belonging to SC\ST and minorities.

e) It was recognised that there was a need to build environment-awareness through curricular and co-curricular activities at all levels of education.

f) It was also noted that the literacy level in the country would need to be stepped up significantly in order to create the base for all educational efforts . The National Literacy Mission and the State Literacy Missions would need to work with greater vigour and zeal, to achieve this objective .⁽²⁴⁾

Just like the progress at the elementary level, a significant progress is made in the field of literacy and continuing education but like universal enrolment, the goal of universal literacy also remains elusive. From a low 18.33 per cent in the year 1951, it is reported to be 52.21 per cent in the 1991 Census. The female literacy rate is still low which has increased from 8.86 per cent to 39.29 per cent during the same period. However, due to change in definition in literacy 1991, the real progress made during the decade 1981 to 1991 is not reflected. If a minor adjustment is made to the available data, the corresponding literacy rate comes out to be 42 per cent which was about 36 per cent in 1981. The same is computed at the state level, would reveal that for a majority of states it would not be possible to achieve the goal of universal literacy by the stipulated year 2001. Recently, based on the past trends Mehta (1993,2) projected that the goal of universal literacy in the country is not likely to be achieved even after the year 2027 (HT, 1993).⁽²⁵⁾ As against the constitutional provision of free education, the NSSO 42nd Round survey conducted during 1986-87 shows that out of the poorest children of the 20 per household in rural areas, about 22.15 per cent of those in the Government schools were not getting free education as against 40.15 per cent in urban areas and 89.88 and 84.30 per cent in respectively in privately managed institutions. In Government schools, the amount of expenditure in rural and urban areas was only Rs.61 and Rs. 79 per annum respectively. About 21.30 per cent girls of the poorest of the 20 per cent households in rural areas were not getting free education (general) against 38.57 per cent in urban areas. More than 23.32 and 15.40 per cent children of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population in rural areas were not getting free education in Government schools as against 94.31 and 89.45 per cent

in Private schools. Compared to this, about 43.96 per cent of Scheduled Caste and 83.26 per cent of Scheduled Tribe population in urban areas were not getting free education in Government schools as against 87.13 and 85.88 per cent respectively in privately managed institutions. Taking all the levels of education together, more than 72.57 per cent of the children in rural areas and 43.65 per cent in urban areas who got free education were in the Government schools, as against 84.62 and 51.05 per cent at the primary stage. About 10.86 and 3.42 per cent children of the poorest of the 20 per cent households in primary and post-primary grades in rural areas were exempted from paying tuition fee as against 23.44 and 7.60 in urban areas. Taking all the levels of education together, the corresponding figures for the 20 per cent poorest households were only 15.71 per cent in rural areas and 13.85 per cent in urban areas.⁽²⁶⁾

Table 14. Growth of Enrolment at Primary Level (Grades I-V)-All India: 1950-90

Compound Growth Rate			
Period	Total	Boys	Girls
1950 - 55	5.51	4.87	7.07
1955 - 60	6.88	6.16	8.45
1960 - 65	7.60	6.39	9.92
1965 - 70	2.46	2.10	3.09
1970 - 75	2.87	2.63	3.26
1975 - 80	2.36	2.19	2.64
1980 - 85	3.46	2.90	4.31
1985 - 90	2.54	2.15	3.11

Source: Mehta, Arun C. Education For All in India (1998). Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1998, p.13.

Index numbers have been computed by taking the 1950-51 enrolment as the base year and the relative figures are obtained up to the year 1993-94 (Table 14). Since the NPE was announced in the year 1986, the same has also been computed by taking enrolment in the year 1986-87 as the base year. Compound growth rates have been computed on a quinquennial basis for the period 1950-55 to 1985-90 (Table 14). The index numbers at the Primary level show a spectacular increase in enrolment

throughout the period 1950-51 to 1993-94. It increased from 100 in the year 1950-51 to 564 in the year 1993-94 showing an increase of 5.64 times in about 43 years. The break-up of enrolment of boys and girls further reveals that the increase was more rapid in the case of girls (8.59 times) than boys (4.48 times). In the initial period, first after the independence, enrolment in the base year was very low. Hence, it shows a spectacular progress at the Primary level but in the later years the tempo couldn't be maintained, which is evident from the values of index numbers computed (1986-87 to 1993-94) by taking 1986-87 as the base year. Thus the index number which was 100 in the year 1986-87 increased marginally to 104 next year which further improved to 124 in the year 1993-94. During the same period, enrolment at the Primary level (in absolute terms) increased from 87.13 million to 108.20 million showing compounded growth of 3.14 per cent per annum and the corresponding enrolment ratio was 95.33 and 104:5 per cent respectively in the years 1986-87 and 1993-94. Again, it has been observed that the rate of increase in girls' enrolment is higher than the rate of increase in boys' enrolment. Similarly, compound growth rates which have been worked out in different periods show a declining trend in both boys' and girls' enrolment. However, in some periods, higher growth rates in the case of girls have been noticed than in enrolment of boys. Further, the results reveal that in the initial period, enrolment at the Primary level increased rapidly from a low 5.51 per cent during the period 1950 to 1955 to 6.60 per cent during the period 1955 to 1960 and to 7.60 per cent during the period 1960 to 65. However, it started declining throughout the period 1985 to 1990. The average annual increase was only to the extent of 2.15 and 3.11 per cent during the period 1985 to 1990 which has declined from a high 6.39 and 9.92 per cent during the period 1960 to 1965 respectively in the case of boys and girls. Further, it has been observed that percentage expenditure on elementary education to total investment on education declined from 55 per cent in the First Plan (1951-56) to 34 per cent in the Seventh Plan. However, in absolute terms, the same has increased from Rs. 930 million to Rs. 19,630 million showing an increase of Rs. 18,700 million which is more than 20 times than in the First Plan. Thus the rapid decline in enrolment at the Primary level (in terms of growth rate) noticed above may be due to percentage share of investment on elementary education which, in fact, declined from 37 per cent in the Third Plan (1961-66) to 31 per cent in the Fourth Plan (1969-74).⁽²⁷⁾

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