



STATUS OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL- AN OVERVIEW

Ruma Dey

Assistant Professor of Commerce, Mathabhanga College.

Abstract

Historically, education system of Bengal has been elitist. Different programmes were launched by the government to improve the overall performance of Elementary education system in West Bengal. At present, enrolment rate has reached to a satisfactory level as well as literacy rate is also high during the last few years. Total number of primary and upper primary schools, number of qualified teachers and infrastructural facilities are also increasing in the state. But, while comparing the performance or learning levels of students, it is quite dissatisfactory. ASER report regularly highlighted that learning levels are worsening among the children. Then where does the problem lie? Is it the ill-functioning of schools? Or, Misallocation of funds? Or, inappropriate policies regarding elementary education in India as well as in West Bengal. If the children are becoming only school goers and not learning anything, then what is the utility of having a large number of programmes initiated by the Government time to time both by the centre and the state. Based on data generated by ASER and DISE on elementary education, the present study is an attempt to show that there is widening gap between initiatives and outcomes in the elementary education system in West Bengal which raises some important governance questions.

Introduction

West Bengal is the fourth most populous state in the Eastern Region of India accounting for 2.7 % of India's total area, 7.8 % of the country's population and ranks first in terms of density of population which is 1000 per square Km. Muslims are the dominant minority and account for 27 % of the total population of the State. West Bengal is fast emerging as one of the faster growing state economies of the country. The state has registered healthy growth to the tune of 7.6% in 2012-13, higher than the 6.6% growth of the previous year and the national average growth of 5%. West Bengal has been registering an average growth of over 7.28% since 2004-05, closer to the 8% national growth rate during the same period. Nevertheless, the state's per capita gross state domestic product (GSDP) continues to be lower than that of the country as a whole. West Bengal's per capita income (current prices) was seen to be Rs. 69,424 in FY13, lower than the Rs.82,339 of the country. West Bengal is the 6th largest state economy of the country with a GSDP of Rs. 3,65,919 cr. as of 2012-13 (constant prices) and contributes nearly 7% to the economy of the nation. In terms of land area, the state covers 88,75,000 sq.km, making it the 13th largest state in India in terms of area. West Bengal's economy is services driven, with nearly 65% of the state's economy being accounted for by the services sector. Agriculture accounts for 13% and industry 19% of the state's economy.

West Bengal, one of the most densely populated states in the country with a population density of 1000 persons per sq. km. (as per the 2011 census) is severely affected by very low literacy rates. There are various historical, sociological and economic factors that can be credited for such high population density. Therefore making provision of basic infrastructure such as health and education a very challenging task since high population tends to affect per capita resource allocation which in turn affects the effectiveness and efficacy of the use to which this allocated resource is put. In spite of the population pressure, West Bengal has made considerable progress in the field of literacy and school education. The present literacy rate is 77.08% as per the 2011 census, it was 68.64% in 2001, 57.7% in 1991 and 48.6 % in 1981, showing an increase in the rate of literacy. A significant share of the credit goes to the campaign on total literacy and to schooling for all children to achieve the goal of 'education for all'. The school education system in West Bengal tries to ensure education for all children, reduce the drop-out rate and provide qualitative education.

However, in spite of the significant improvements in the enrolment ratios and dropout rates it is estimated that almost 10 lakh children in West Bengal are out of school. An article on a study conducted all over India revealed that West Bengal tops the list of school drop outs. The article specified that, of the 19 districts in West Bengal, 9 have a dropout rate of over 50,000 children in the age group of 6-14 years. The article also highlights the glaring 9.61 lakh out of school children (in the same age group) in comparison to Bihar's 6.98 lakh children.

Demographics

West Bengal's population stands at 91.28 million as of 2011. It is the 4th largest state of the country in terms of population and accounts for 7.5% of India's population, as per the 2011 census. Majority (68%) of the state population is based in rural areas. In terms of gender distribution, males comprise 51% of the population while female for the balance 49%. The state's literacy rate at 77.08% is higher than the national average of 74 % in 2011. The literacy rate has increased 7% during 2001-11. West Bengal is amongst the most densely populated state's of the country, next only to Bihar, with 1,028 people per sq.km as per the 2011 census.



Evolution of Elementary Education in West Bengal

The people of Bengal have historically had a deep quest for knowledge. The impact of the British rule and modern western culture was first felt in Bengal in general and particularly in Calcutta. Professor B.C. Rai, in his book "History of Indian Education and Problems" has mentioned that Bengal has always been a centre of educational interest. For about a century, Calcutta's conscious awareness of the changing modern world was more developed than in other parts of the country. The evolution of education in Bengal can be traced over several centuries. During the mid 11th century- Nadia then called Navadweep, developed in learning and culture in addition to trade and commerce. It had played an important role in the development of Education in Bengal and brought it to prominence in the medieval period. In the 17th century, the influence of Dutch education was found near Chinsura and Hooghly in Bengal. Though we know very little about the status of school education in the 18th century. In the 19th century, the British appointed a committee to conduct a survey on the actual position of education in India, mainly in three cities, then called Madras, Bombay and Calcutta (Kolkata). The first survey conducted by Sir William Adam, an energetic and enthusiastic missionary, from 1835 to 1838, mentioned the prevalence of primary education in Bengal at that time. According to him there were primary schools (pathshala) in all villages of Bengal. The students began their education at the age of 8 years and studied up to the age of 14 years. The cost of education was low and schools were accessible to all children in this period. In the nineteenth century Calcutta witnessed the growth of Western education, development of modern Bengali prose, attempts to make social reforms and some initiatives for the welfare of women. All these were regarded as "renaissance" in one word. Calcutta (Kolkata) played a pioneering role in the development of the modern education system in India. The Western models of education came to India through Calcutta (Kolkata). Several of the first schools, established by the missionaries and reformists were in Calcutta (Kolkata). Personalities such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, David Hare, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and William Carey played a key role in establishing modern schools and colleges in Bengal. Some renowned institutions established in Calcutta during the mid 19th century were the La Martiniere Schools, established in 1836; Bethune school for girls in 1850 by John Bethune to promote women's education; United Missionaries Girls high School established in 1855 and many more throughout Bengal and especially in Kolkata.

The East India Company at this time felt that the responsibility of education could no longer be neglected in India and hence a Parliamentary Committee was appointed to survey the educational progress in India. The Woods Dispatch under the Chairmanship of Mr. Adam Wood was appointed in 1854. The dispatch emphasized on gradation of schools like- primary schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities. It also introduced Grants-in-aid, teacher's training, women education and vocational education.

The education system was then upgraded through various reforms based on the recommendations of many such dispatches and commissions. The Gokhale's Resolution on Indian Education (1911 and 1913) which emphasized free and compulsory elementary education for all children between the age group of 6 to 10 years was one such resolution. Various schemes of educational expansion and administration were undertaken. The 'Compulsory Education Act' was one such scheme which was passed to enforce primary education. In Bengal it was passed in 1930. The local authorities at the provincial level were first entrusted with the charge of primary education and later permitted to develop other educational programmes at their discretion. With independence in 1947, came the realization of entrusting responsibilities of education largely on the state Government and local authorities, especially to encounter the vast diversities of the country. Article 45 of our Constitution states that the State shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they are 14 years of age. The 83rd Amendment of our Constitution approves Education as a Fundamental Right. In addition, the National Policy on Education, 1986 ensures free and compulsory Elementary Education with better quality. In West Bengal now, schools are run by the State Government or the Municipal Corporations or by private organizations, including religious institutions, which continuously try to bring all children between the age group of 6 to 14 years under the purview of elementary education.

India's educational development is a mixed bag of remarkable successes and glaring gaps. In the post independence period, the pace of educational development was unprecedented by any standards. At the same time, perhaps, the policy focus and public intervention in the provisioning of educational services was not adequately focused or, even misplaced, to the extent that even after over five decades of planned effort in the sector, nearly one-third of the population or close to 300 million persons in age-group 7 years and above are illiterate. There are critical gaps in the availability of infrastructural facilities and qualitative aspects of education including, teachers training, educational curricula, equipments and training materials, particularly, in the publicly funded schooling system of the country. The attainments, and the failures have not been uniform across all regions. Though the regional differences are indeed striking, there has been a significant reduction in inequalities in educational attainments across gender and population segments by income levels and the rural-urban divide.



Structure of School Education

A considerable variation in educational attainments and educational infrastructure has been observed across different regions in India. The literacy rate for the population aged seven years and above in West Bengal is higher than the national average. But the rate of growth of literacy in the state was lower than that at the all-India level during the 50th and 55th NSS Rounds. But, West Bengal registered relatively better progress in female literacy compared to the national level. Moreover, the literacy rate improved at a higher rate in rural than in urban areas during the same period.

The West Bengal Education Act, 1973, empowers the West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE) to control and to develop the entire primary education in West Bengal. To meet the requirements of all the districts in the state, 19 District Primary School Councils (DPSC) in the district level are working for primary education under the aegis of the Board. The Directorate of School Education has been implementing the policy of the government. The Government of West Bengal has implemented the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) since 1997 and it has carried out Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to universalize elementary education (UEE) since 2001-02 in all the districts of the state. Initially, the SSA was being funded with 75 per cent contribution by the Government of India and 25 per cent by the Government of West Bengal. But the share of the Central government has been reducing over time. At present, the union government bears 65 per cent and the rest is the burden of the Government of West Bengal. SSA is a time bound programme of the Government of India to set up school buildings for inhabitations with no schooling facilities and also to improve the existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. In West Bengal now, schools are run by the State Government or the Municipal Corporations or by private organizations, including religious institutions, which continuously try to bring all children between the age group of 5 to 14 years under the purview of elementary education.

Present status of elementary education in West Bengal:

Historically, Indian education system has been elitist. Different programme was launched by the government of India to improve the overall performance of elementary education system in India. Performance as represented by literacy-rate during the Five Year Plans is quite satisfactory across different states of India. Literacy Rates in India has risen dramatically from 18.3% in 1951 to 74% to 2011 according to census data(2011). At the same time there is a steady increase in enrolment both at primary and upper primary level.

With increasing number of children enrolling in elementary education system, the Government has faced with the problem of providing education in a more effective manner that enables existing resources to be used to meet increasing demand for education. There are two main groups of problems in applying efficiency and productivity concepts to education. The first relates to the difficulties of capturing in a set of measurements the intangibility of the multiple objectives and outputs in education and the different values placed on them by people with differing perspectives. Despite the importance of efficiency measurement in education, it is only recently that the more advanced econometric and mathematical programming frontier techniques have been applied to primary and secondary schools.

Progress of Literacy and School Education in West Bengal vis a vis child labour

State of literacy

Literacy in West Bengal is still far short of mass literacy: according to Census data, 82.67 per cent of males and 71.16 per cent of females were literate in 2011 (see Table 1). As the numbers in Table 1 show, the proportion of literates in the population in West Bengal has been higher than the corresponding figure for India at every post-Independence Census after 1961.

Table.1:Comparative Literacy rates of Male and Female in West Bengal and India

Year	Males		Females	
	West Bengal	India	West Bengal	India
1951	30.9	25.0	11.5	12.9
1961	40.3	34.3	17.0	12.9
1971	42.8	39.5	22.4	18.7
1981	50.7	46.7	30.3	24.9
1991	56.6	52.7	38.4	32.1
2001	77.6	75.26	60.2	53.67
2011	82.67	82.14	71.16	65.46

Source- Census of various years



From Table 1, we can see that in the year 1951 West Bengal's male literacy rate was just 30.9% and female literacy rate was as low as 12.9%.The rate has increased dramatically from 1951 to 2011.According census 2011, West Bengal male literacy rate is 82.67% and female literacy rate is 71.16% whereas national rate is 82.14% and 65.46% respectively.

Table.2: % of children in different types of school in 2011 in West Bengal

Age group	Govt.	Pvt.	Other	Not in school	Total
Age: 6-14 All	87.8	6.3	1.6	4.3	100
Age: 7-16 All	86.8	5.0	1.6	6.6	100
Age: 7-10 All	87.3	9.0	1.5	2.2	100
Age: 7-10 Boys	86.3	9.8	1.6	2.4	100
Age: 7-10 Girls	88.3	8.3	1.4	2.0	100
Age: 11-14 All	89.6	2.4	1.7	6.3	100
Age: 11-14 Boys	87.3	2.4	1.9	8.4	100
Age: 11-14 Girls	91.9	2.4	1.5	4.3	100
Age: 15-16 All	79.4	2.0	1.6	17.0	100
Age: 15-16 Boys	76.5	2.0	1.8	19.7	100
Age: 15-16 Girls	82.6	2.0	1.3	14.2	100

Source-ASER 2011

Table.3: % of children in different types of school in 2014 in West Bengal

Age group	Govt.	Pvt.	Other	Not in school	Total
Age: 6-14 All	85.6	8.8	2.4	3.2	100
Age: 7-16 All	85.3	6.6	2.6	5.4	100
Age: 7-10 All	83.2	13.9	1.5	1.5	100
Age: 7-10 Boys	82.7	14.2	1.4	1.7	100
Age: 7-10 Girls	83.6	13.6	1.5	1.2	100
Age: 11-14 All	89.4	2.3	3.4	5.0	100
Age: 11-14 Boys	87.5	2.7	3.2	6.5	100
Age: 11-14 Girls	90.9	1.9	3.6	3.6	100
Age: 15-16 All	80.4	1.1	3.3	15.2	100
Age: 15-16 Boys	77.1	1.2	1.8	19.9	100
Age: 15-16 Girls	83.3	1.0	4.8	10.8	100

Source-ASER 2014

According to ASER report, 87.8% students(6-14 age) were in Government school ,6.3% students were in Private school and 4.3 % children between 6-14 age are out of school in the year 2011.But in the year 2014, 85.6% students are in government school, 8.8% students are in private school and 3.2% children aged between 6-14 year are out of school. Enrolment in government schools has decreased but dependence on private school has increased. At the same time number of out of school children has also decreased from 2011 to 2014.

Performance of students in West Bengal

Table.4: % of children by class and Reading level All Schools 2011

Std.	Nothing(not even letter)	Letter	Word	Level 1 (std.1 text)	Level 2 (std.2 text)	Total
I	20.2	45.3	21.8	8.1	4.6	100
II	9.7	33.6	29.5	14.8	12.4	100
III	5.2	19.9	26.9	23.9	24.1	100
IV	3.4	13.9	22.2	26.6	33.9	100
V	2.4	8.4	15.3	25.2	48.8	100
VI	1.9	5.3	9.4	25.5	57.9	100
VII	0.9	3.3	5.5	17.1	73.2	100
VIII	0.4	1.1	3.4	14.8	80.3	100
Total	5.7	16.8	17.0	19.5	40.9	100

Source-ASER 2011



Table.5: % of children by class and Reading level All Schools 2014

Std.	Nothing(not even letter)	Letter	Word	Level 1 (std.1 text)	Level 2 (std.2 text)	Total
I	24.5	33.9	22.1	9.1	10.4	100
II	13.4	26.8	24.3	15.2	20.3	100
III	7.0	18.6	18.6	19.8	36.1	100
IV	4.6	13.4	18.8	18.5	44.8	100
V	2.8	9.3	15.4	19.3	53.2	100
VI	1.7	7.8	10.4	16.4	63.7	100
VII	2.5	5.3	9.4	15.6	67.3	100
VIII	0.5	4.4	6.0	13.9	75.3	100
Total	7.8	15.5	15.6	15.6	45.4	100

Source-ASER 2014

According to ASER report 2014, 24.5% students of std.I could do nothing not even recognize letters.33.9% students could recognize letters and only 22.1% students could read words in west Bengal.It is very sad that even 0.5% students of std.VIII could not recognize letters.The overall performance of students are very poor.

Right to education Act,2009 in West Bengal

India has a long-standing commitment to universalize the elementary education (UEE). The spirit of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments had set the stage for greater decentralization of power and a significantly enhanced role for local bodies, community organizations as well as voluntary agencies in the efforts towards UEE. The 93rd Constitutional amendment has made the *right to elementary education a Fundamental Right* and the recently developed Right to Education Act, 2009 has enforced it through the necessary statutory measures. Holistic and convergent community participation in UEE programs and target-group oriented strategies have already been under taken to fulfill the national commitment, especially, during the last four (Eighth, Ninth, Tenth & Eleventh) Plan periods. As a result, India has recorded an impressive progress in the expansion of literacy and elementary education (Rustagi & Mehta, 2006). In between 1991 and 2001, literacy rate grew from 52 to 65 per cent, the highest ever rate of increase throughout the last century (Census Report, 2001). In respect to children's education too, a remarkable progress has been noticed. GER at the primary level was increased by about six times from 1950 to 1999. Drop-out rates at the primary level declined from 65 per cent in 1960-61 to 40.3 per cent in 1999-2000 and the problem of access in primary education has been substantially addressed (GOI, Selected Educational Statistics, 2001).The NPE (1986) expanded the definition of UEE as consisting of not only of universal enrolment and participation, but also of ensuring universal achievement of at least a minimum level of learning (MLL) by all. This expanded vision of UEE brought quality concerns to the centre stage in all development projects related to elementary education in India. Nearly two years after the legislation was implemented in the rest of the country on April 1, 2010, the West Bengal Government has framed rules for implementing the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 in march ,2012.

Table-6: % of Schools meeting the selected RTE norms,(2010-2014) in West Bengal

% of Schools meeting the following RTE norms		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
PTR &	Pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)	26.2	34.4	33.2	41.4	46.9
CTR	Classroom-Teacher ratio (CTR)	64.8	64.5	67.4	67.2	68.6
Building	Office/ store/ office cum store	79.0	80.9	78.3	82.6	84.8
	playground	42.1	50.5	54.3	51.4	50.7
	Boundary wall/fencing	34.5	42.2	44.0	46.1	48.7
Drinkingwater	No facility for drinking water	19.3	21.1	16.9	16.9	13.9
	Facility but no drinking water available	13.5	15.5	11.2	10.3	7.7
	Drinking water available	67.2	63.4	71.9	72.9	78.4
Toilet	No toilet facility	7.6	8.6	6.9	3.7	2.2
	Facility but toilet not useable	40.3	42.0	34.3	28.3	27.0
	Toilet useable	52.1	49.5	58.8	68.0	70.8
Girls' toilet	No separate provision for girls' toilet	44.5	26.1	33.5	21.9	30.8
	Separate provision but locked	14.5	19.2	13.6	17.2	18.8
	Separate and useable	23.7	41.2	44.0	53.7	46.9
Library	No library	50.5	39.2	35.3	33.8	33.7
Midday meal	kitchen shed for cooking mid-day meal	86.3	86.8	90.2	91.4	95.4
	Mid-day meal served on day of visit	63.4	54.3	59.7	63.0	66.7

Source-ASER 2010-2014



The above table shows the percentage of schools meeting the selected RTE norms in West Bengal from the year 2010 to 2014. In all the cases the number of schools are increasing in meeting the norms laid down by the Right To Education Act, 2009.

Govt. Investment on Elementary Education

Sarva Shiksha Aiviyan (SSA) is currently the Government of India's primary vehicle for implementing the Right to Education Act (RTE). SSA is thus the most crucial vehicle for the overall provision of Elementary education in the country. India's SSA budget (Govt. of India & state share) has more than doubled between 2009-10 and 2011-12, up from Rs.26,169 cr. to Rs.55,746 cr. Across India, per child allocation has more than doubled from Rs.2004 in 2009-10 to Rs.4269 in 2011-12. Total SSA allocation for West Bengal were Rs.2164 cr. in 2009-10, Rs 4329 cr. in 2010-11 and Rs. 4936 cr. in 2011-2012. In 2009-10 West Bengal spent 77% of its total allocation and in 2010-11, the state spent 70%. To ensure that schools meet RTE requirement, the SSA infrastructure budget increases by 156% between 2009-10 and 2011-12. In West Bengal per child allocation for SSA increased from Rs.1618 in 2009-10 to Rs.3236 in 2010-2011. In 2011-12, per child allocation stood at Rs. 3689.

National Knowledge Commission's Initiatives

According to NKC good school education will require major expansion at the elementary and secondary levels and improvement in the quality of schools. Therefore NKC proposed generational changes in the school system which would encourage decentralisation, local autonomy in management of schools, and flexibility in disbursement of funds. To improve quality and generate accountability, NKC has also recommended improving school infrastructure and revamping school inspection with a greater role for local stakeholders and greater transparency in the system. Further, wherever feasible, Information and Communication Technology should be made more accessible to teachers, students and the administration. NKC has also emphasised the need for reforms in the curriculum and examination systems by moving away from rote learning to a critical understanding of concepts and finally improvement in faculty. NKC has created an extensive roadmap for the future. The Governments at the Centre and State are taking steps for the successful implementation of these policy suggestions. The Government's commitment to NKC's vision is reflected in the Twelve Five Year Plan where NKC's inputs have been incorporated in formulating the broad contours of the Plan. The Twelve Five Year Plan (2012-2017) places high priority on education as a central instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth with specific emphasis on expansion, excellence and equity.

Problem of Child labour in West Bengal

Child labour is caused by a range of demand and supply factors, including others, the social and economic exploitation of poverty, the lack of access to relevant and quality education, and societal attitudes. However, this acute problem is being tackled by every corner of the world and West Bengal is not an exception to it. Various NGOs, social activists, welfare organizations and statesmen are trying their level best to eradicate this social problem from root level. The Government of India has also adopted long term as well as short term policies to face the challenge of child labour. According to the recent experimental survey carried out by researcher, throughout West Bengal there are at least approximately 15 lakhs children between the age of 5 and 14 who are fully at work, and more than 6 lakhs of those for whom work is a secondary activity. West Bengal is one of those eleven states in India where 90 percent of child labour population is found. However, the estimates of the number of child workers vary in India because of the difference in the methodology used to estimate child labour and also because of the conceptual differences regarding the definition of 'child', 'child labour' and 'work' itself.

At a time when Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi has supported the controversial amendment to the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act which allows children under 14 years of age to work in family-run enterprises, a recently-concluded analysis by Child Rights and You (CRY) revealed that there has been a significant increase in working children in the age group of 5-9 years. Compiling data from the 2001 and 2011 census, the report states that in urban areas while the number of working girls rose by 240 per cent, it increased by 154 per cent for working boys. Overall, there has been a 53 per cent increase in child labour in urban India, while there is a drop of about 29 per cent in rural areas. Although West Bengal features at the seventh spot in the top 10 States with high rates of child labour, there is a shocking 337 per cent increase in the number of marginal girl children (aged 5-9 years) in urban areas out of 5,50,092 children. Barring Kolkata, there is a high concentration of child labour in the districts of South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Bardhaman and Paschim Medinipur, the report revealed.

Problems of West-bengal primary Education

One of the major problems of state controlled primary education in India relates to its operation and management especially in the context of bringing first generation learners into the fold of schooling. "Extensive inefficiencies in operation in general are reinforced by particular inequities in the failure to provide fair opportunity to children from less privileged background".



notes Amartya Sen in his introductory remarks to the Pratchi Education Report. As per 2001 Census, West Bengal with a literacy rate of about 69 per cent stood at 18th position among 35 Indian states and union territories (it was 19th in 1991). The gross enrolment for 6-11 year age-group (relevant for primary schooling) was 85.60 per cent and the net enrolment was only 40.2 per cent in 1997-98. The drop-out rate for the same period was about 36 per cent for boys and 41 per cent for girls (p 14). The report also records several incidences of children not having been enrolled or dropped out or not attending school regularly on account of hunger and other poverty related factors. Even if the demand for education is an issue (though the report does not say so), it is not due to disinterest in education but because of objective situations related to poverty and survival on one hand, and insensitive nature and poor quality of delivery processes on the other. High level of teacher absenteeism, poor functioning of schemes such as textbooks (these do not reach in time) and mid-day meal (a misnomer as cooked meals are not served), poor quality of teaching and monitoring, lack of language preparedness of teachers to teach in areas where mainstream language is not spoken, insensitive behavior and low expectations from children belonging to SC, ST and Muslim communities, rigid school calendar and timings, poor functioning of accountability mechanisms such as inspection, Village Education Committees and parent-teacher meetings – all these indicate a system of management and delivery not enabling enough to encourage schooling participation of children from less privileged sections.

The west Bengal Govt. has implemented several schemes, making school education free, supplying dry rations of food and free text books at the primary level, supplying free uniforms to a substantial number of girls students and so on.(GO WB 1992,2001,2001-02,Rana,Rafique Sengupta 2002).All these efforts have played a positive role in the expansion of elementary education in west Bengal. However, the findings of the study points to a number of major problems in assuring the quality of primary education, delivered in the region. According to the 2014 ASER report, only 50-60% of children in std.III can read std.I text, and only 40-50% of children in std.III can do subtraction in West Bengal. It is necessary to place these discouraging results in a broader perspective, since the poor quality of primary education is a problem for the rest of India as well. In North Bengal, like elsewhere in West Bengal, the conditions of the socially and economically underprivileged communities, particularly the SC,ST and religious minorities are of serious concern. Often children from, underprivileged communities suffer most-both from the lack of accessibility and the poor quality of education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be stated that in spite of our committed efforts to achieve the goal UEE, still we are lagging behind in respect to many of our targets. At this transitional period, the present study in respect to West Bengal is crucial for identifying some issues regarding our strengths and weaknesses of the Elementary education system. A number of significant findings have been emerged out of the present study. But it is found that in spite of several limitations, there are some positive trends too. It is observed that a thrust for education has been emerging throughout the State across all levels of the community including the marginalized groups and poorer students and thus as a result a large number of first generation learners are now growing rapidly in our primary schools. The next important task is to retain them in schools. A collective and committed approach with government, non-government and overall community is required to speed up this journey to reach the goal. Though considerable gains in literacy and education have been achieved since Independence, yet we still have a long way to go as far as achieving the goal of universal elementary education. In order to increase the responsiveness of children to education, particularly among the children from the underprivileged sections of the society, Government of West Bengal has implemented mid-day meals programme. Participation in preventative health measures is another viable option to reduce the incidence of out of school children. Poor health is known to limit school participation so launching mass medical treatment drives in the schools at properly spaced out intervals is another alternative scheme for increasing the enrolment in the primary schools.

References

1. Acharya, Poromesh (1985). Education: Politics and Social Structure. *Economic and political weekly*, Vol-XX, No. 42.
2. Aiyar Yamini , (2013) “ Money Matters: PAISA and the ASER survey” Director, Accountability Initiative
3. Gangambika Savagaon (2012): Elementary education and inclusive development in India. *Abhinav*,Vol-1, issue-6,2012.
4. Majumder.Manabi and Kumar Rana(2012): In defence of Public education-voices from Bengal., *Economic and political weekly*,vol-XLVII,no-40, oct 6, 2012.
5. Ramachandran,Vimala.and Suman Bhattacharjea.(2009),:Attend to primary school teachers., *Economic and political weekly*,vol-XLIV,no-31.,Aug-1,2009.
6. Sikdar,Satadru. And Anit.N. Mukherjee (2012),: Enrolment and dropout rate in school education., *Economic and political weekly*,vol-XLVII,No.1,jan 7,2012
7. An Overview of the primary and secondary education in West Bengal,-Govt. of W.B Report,compiled by PATH welfare society (2007).