

STATUS OF EDUCATION

Schooling or Waste of Time?

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Annual status of Education Report (ASER) 2010 is out. Thanks to PRATHAM, they carried out the tedious survey covering over 13000 schools from over 500 districts of India. Although it has some good news like improvement in Gross Enrollment but not so good news such as only 53.4% children in Std 5 can read a Std II level text! This suggests that even after five years in school, close to half of all children are not even at the level expected of them after two years in school! Some findings of the report are as follows:

- * Percentage of out of school children in India at its lowest ever, which is definitely a Good News!
- * In 2010, for rural India, the percentage of children (age 6 to 14) not enrolled in school is 3.5%. This number was 4.0% last year and 6.6% in 2005.
- * The proportion of girls (age 11-14) who are still out of school has declined from 6.8% in 2009 to 5.9 in 2010. This number was 11.2% in 2005.
- * However, the percentage of out of school girls (11-14) is still high in some states like Rajasthan (12.1%) and Uttar Pradesh (9.7%) where the proportion remains largely unchanged since last year.
- * Noteworthy in this regard is the performance of Bihar where the percentage of out of school girls and boys in all age groups has been declining steadily since 2005. In 2006, 12.3% of boys and 17.6% girls were out of school in the 11 to 14 age group. By 2010, these numbers had declined to 4.4% for boys and 4.6% for girls showing very little difference by gender.
Although the report ASER 2010 points out some of the aforesaid positive developments, the report exposes a bleak picture of the overall development which demands an urgent attention of the Government, the Public, the Civil Societies, and especially "citizens".
- * The report notes that there are big increases in private school enrollment in some states since last year. Overall, ASER 2010 shows that private school enrollment for rural children in the age group 6 to 14 has increased from 21.8% in 2009 to 24.3% in 2010. This number has risen steadily since 2005 when it was 16.3% nationally.
- * The southern states show substantial increases over last year in private school enrollment for the age group 6 to 14. Between 2009 and 2010, the percentage of children (age 6-14) enrolled in private school has increased from 29.7% to 36.1% in Andhra Pradesh, from 19.7% to 25.1% in Tamil Nadu, from 16.8% to 20% in Karnataka and from 51.5% to 54.2% in Kerala.
- * Among other states, Punjab shows an increase from 30.5% to 38%. however, private school enrollment (age 6-14) remains low in Bihar (5.2%), West Bengal (5.9%), Jharkhand (8.8%), Orissa (5.4%) and Tripura (2.8%).

Is not the last point shameful? Why multi-thousand-crore Rupee Public Education System, which is supposed to provide free education, fails to attract children, when an average Indian parent struggles hard to meet the ends with meager resources? Do people like to waste their money on the mercenaries of private education? Of course not! The fact is that the public education system fails miserably to provide quality education. What is the way out? How long people will keep paying for the Govt. school teachers and the staff from tax money and let them sleep? And the poor people will have to pay the price by NOT being able to send their kids to decent schools! The consequence will be a few more generations of semi-literate or illiterate Indians!

The gravest concern is the quality of education provided throughout India. The report states that the reading ability of children has remained largely unchanged except in some states. That means there is little or no progress! Nationally there is not much change in reading levels as compared to last year.

- * Nationally, there is a decline in the ability to do basic math (i.e. recognize numbers and do basic operations). This decrease of a few percentage points is visible across all classes. For example, the proportion of Std I children who can recognize numbers (1-9) has declined from 69.3% in 2009 to 65.8% in 2010.
- * The proportion of children in Std III who can do two digit subtraction problems has decreased from 39% to 36.5% in the same period. The proportion of children in Std V who can do simple division problems in Std V has dropped from 38% in 2009 to 35.9% in 2010.

However, Punjab 's performance in basic arithmetic has been improving over the last few years. For example, in Std II the percentage of children who can recognize numbers up to 100 was 56.3% in 2008. This number went up to 59.6% in 2009 and to 70.4% in 2010. Similarly the proportion of Std IV children who can do subtraction has gone from 66.9% in 2008 to 81.4% in 2010. The percentage of Std V children who can do division has risen from 43.5% in 2008 to 69.8% in 2010.

In ASER 2010, children in Std V and above were asked a set of questions that involved calculations that people do in everyday life. The tasks included calculations from a menu, using a calendar, estimating volume and calculating area.

Overall, in Std VIII, three quarters of all children were able to do the calculations based on the menu, about two thirds of all children could use the calendar and only half could do the calculations related to area. The questions related to area seemed to be the most difficult for children to solve. Such problems are usually found in textbooks in Std IV or V. Here, among Std VIII children, Kerala does best with 79% children able to solve the problems followed by Bihar at 69%.

Grossly, the study finds that Middle school children are weak on everyday calculations. So what purpose does going to school serve? When the children, after having spent 7 to 8 years in school, cannot read a basic level text and fail to do everyday calculation, what can one call it? Schooling or waste of time?

The trend of attending tuition is going down for private school children. Nationally, there is not much change between 2009 and 2010 in the proportion of children who are enrolled in government schools and also take extra paid tuition classes. However there is a clear decrease in the incidence of tuition among children enrolled in private schools across all classes till Std VIII. This shows the private schools are improving their service, why is it not the same in Public Schools?

Some states like Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa have very low private school enrollments but high proportions of children enrolled in government schools who also take tuition classes. For example, in 2010, in West Bengal 75.6% of Std V children enrolled in government schools take tuition classes. This number for Bihar is 55.5% and 49.9% for Orissa.

How people can fix the rot? If they can come on the streets for other things (Masjid/Mandir/Church/Telangana/Kashmir) why not raise their voice for improving the situation of Education?