

Analyzing Government's Role in Secondary Education in border district of Poonch of Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract: Jammu and Kashmir, the northern-most border state of India, is one the educationally backward states of the country. For educational upliftment of the children, several centrally sponsored schemes have been started in the state including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhiyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA), covering elementary and secondary education, respectively.

The present paper seeks to understand the role of Jammu and Kashmir government in providing secondary education in the border district of Poonch which is situated in Jammu province close to the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan, through the Rashtriya Madhiyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) scheme. The paper would also analyze the challenges in its implementation and also suggest some measures for improving educational levels in Poonch.

Keywords: Education, RMSA, Kashmir, Infrastructure, etc.

1. INTRODUCTON

Education is a very important factor which can help in social, economic and political transformation of any individual in any society. Besides the socio-economic empowerment, it can also ensure personal growth in the present-day globalised knowledge-driven societies. The importance of education as the foundation and building block for achieving national objectives and for building a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable society is well recognized. In India, the government has a constitutional obligation to make available free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 06-14 years. The Central government has also initiated various measures for providing quality education in the country. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhiyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) are two

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major schemes in elementary and secondary education for the children in India. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) aims at universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social gaps in enrolment levels and enhancement of learning levels of all children. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) aims to expand and improve the standards of secondary education from class XI to X. Both these schemes have been implemented in Jammu and Kashmir too which is a border state of India having a population of 1.25 crore (Census 2011). The literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir has increased from 55.50% to 68.74% as against 64.84% to 74.04% at the national level during the decade 2001-2011. Jammu and Kashmir has 22 districts all of which have a huge network of government and private schools and are striving to provide good education to the children in the entire length and breadth of this border mountainous state. Poonch is a border district of the state which is located on the Line of Control (LOC) with Pakistan. It is connected with Jammu through a 240-km long hilly road. Except Poonch town the remaining part of the district is rural area.

2. EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF POONCH DISTRICT

Poonch is considered as one of the backward districts of Jammu and Kashmir. Impact of hilly terrain, dense forest areas, high rainfall and non-connectivity through roads, poor implementation of the schemes etc is clearly visible on the educational scenario of the district in the rural areas. This situation as such leads to low literacy rates in the district especially among the women, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities.

Besides, this border district has also been hit by the armed insurgency which erupted in the state some 25 years ago. In the past two decades of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, maximum rural areas of Poonch district have been affected impacted by militancy (Tufail 2012) which, to some extent had an impact on its educational sector too. Situated close to the Line of Control, the district also witnessed heavy infiltration of terrorists from across the Line of Control besides killings of its innocent civilians, massacres, gutting or damaging of its schools and hospitals by the militants. Besides, the impact of hilly terrain, dense forest areas, high rainfall and non-connectivity through roads is clearly visible on the educational scenario of the district in the rural areas.

The district is dominated by two scheduled tribe communities – Gujjars and Bakkarwals – which are nomadic in character (Bhardwaj 1994). Every year with the onset of summers, these tribes go to the higher reaches of Pir Panjal mountains with their cattle, sheep, goat and buffalos (Khatana 1992). While Gujjars are semi-sedentarized and go to the lower or middle mountain reaches, the Bakkarwals are mainly nomads who traverse long journeys with their cattle and these are two distinct nomadic communities (Rao & Casimir 1982).

Poonch district is divided in eleven educational Zones of Bafliaz, Balakote, Harni, Kanoiyan, Mandi, Mankote, Mendhar, Nangali, Poonch, and Sathra and Surankote. Poonch has 178 villages of which 168 are inhabited and 10 uninhabited, 191 Panchayats and a Municipal Committee.

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Table 1: A glance at Poonch district.

Particulars	Number	Detail
Revenue Villages (R)	178	168 inhabited
Educational Zones	11	Balakote, Bafliaz, Harni, Kanoiyan, Mandi, Mankote, Mendhar, Nangali, Poonch, Sathra, Surankote
No of EBB (educationally backward blocks)	5	Balakote, Mandi, Mendhar, Poonch, Surankote
No of Model Schools and Girls Hostel	5	Balakote, Mandi, Mendhar, Poonch, Surankote
Tehsils	04	Poonch, Mendhar, Surankote, Mandi
CD Blocks	06	Poonch, Mandi, Surankote, Mendhar, Balakote, Bafliaz (Bafliaz newly created)

An analysis of district-wise literacy rate of J&K state shows that district Poonch stands at 8th position with regard to total literacy rate. It is 65.41 % & 35.30 % for male and female respectively with a total of 51.07 %.

Table 2: Total population of Poonch district.

Total Population of Poonch	Rural population	Urban population
4,76,977	4,16,072	22,905
<i>%age of Total population</i>	94.78%	5.22%

Literacy Rate	68.69%
Govt. Schools	1512
Private Schools	216
Enrolment in Govt. Schools	94252
Enrolment in Pvt. Schools	35732
Educational Zones	11
CD Blocks	06
Panchyats	191

(Source: Director of School Education, Jammu, J&K Govt. 2016)

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Table 3: Block/sex wise literacy rate at zonal/block level of the district.

CD Block	Name of Zone	Total population			Literates			% age		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Poonch	Kanoiyan	14005	10987	22992	7058	3661	10719	58.79	33.32	46.62
	Nangali	14353	11436	23589	6684	2921	9605	54.10	25.99	40.71
	Poonch (R)	7461	6931	14392	3984	2282	6266	53.39	32.92	43.53
	Total	31819	29154	60973	17726	8864	26590	55.70	32.32	43.60
Mandi	Mandi	18297	16926	35223	8042	2386	10428	43.95	14.09	29.60
	Sathra	11173	10460	21633	5635	2568	8203	50.43	24.55	37.91
Total		29470	27386	56856	13677	4954	18631	46.40	18.08	32.76
Surankote	Surankote	33944	31080	65024	16570	8024	24594	48.81	25.81	37.82
Bafliaz	Bafliaz	26351	24546	50897	14598	5329	17927	47.80	21.71	35.22
Balakote	Balakote	14006	11811	23817	6988	3923	10911	58.20	33.21	45.81
Mendhar	Mendhar	18114	17096	35208	9999	5376	15375	55.20	31.44	43.66
	Harni	13570	14505	26075	8390	4517	14907	61.82	36.14	49.49
	Mankote	14680	13602	28282	7709	3075	10784	52.51	22.60	38.13
Total		46362	43203	89565	26098	14968	39066	56.29	56.29	30.01
Grand Total		179952	167180	347132	93657	44062	137719	65.41	35.30	51.07

Table 4: Teachers in the government schools in Poonch having classes IX-X

S. No.	District	Govt schools			
		No. of Government Sec Schools	No. of Secondary School Teachers		
			Sanctioned post	In position	Vacant
	Poonch	93	549	533	16
Total		93	549	533	16

(Source UDISE 2013-14)

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) in Poonch

The scheme of Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan has been launched in Poonch also to achieve the universalization of secondary education with quality. It stands for achieving the goal with access, equity and quality. The main aim is to cover the children of the age group of 14-16 years for secondary

level and 16-18 years to higher secondary level. The present focus is on the 14-16 age group i.e. class 9th to 10th.

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3. ISSUES AND CONCERNS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN POONCH DISTRICT

Despite active implementation of RMSA scheme, the goal of universalization of secondary education is still illusive in this border district because of various issues. The RMSA data reveals the literacy rate of North-Eastern belt of Poonch district is a cause of concern. The families from this belt from all the communities comprise of nomadic population of the district and they along with school-going children migrate from plains to the high reaches in summer and from high reaches to plain summer areas during the winter season. The education of the children therefore gets disrupted for 4-5 months in a year for which seasonal camps have been established and to some extent but no permanent solution is done so far to address this problem. Moreover, the literacy rate is low in the mountainous areas as compared to other part of the district.

Dearth of Teachers/ Disproportionate Subject Teacher Provision: Almost all the secondary and higher secondary schools of Poonch face staff deficit problem and at senior secondary level, it is very severe. The pupil teacher ratio is very large. One teacher has to handle hundreds of students at a time. He/she hardly manages to watch them. There is dearth of female teachers and even Government Girls' schools are dominated by male staff. Most of the secondary schools in Poonch have no subject teachers at Secondary level with the result, the teachers in the school, are not in a position to improve the quality of education in the particular subject. There are some schools which have more than the required number of subject teachers and while some schools have no subject teacher at all. This disproportionate provision of subject teachers results in the decrease of roll in the schools without subject teachers.

While conducting 'Remedial Teaching', it becomes difficult to provide actual benefit to the low achievers as they belong to the remotest areas in a scattered zone and are not in a position to attend the classes at a particular established and identified place beyond the school timing. Active Pedagogy lacks in "Reading & Writing" practices in the actual class rooms which affects quality education. Most of the teachers remain engaged in other departments for doing jobs like Surveys, Preparing of Voter Lists/Cards etc. which further affects quality of education.

Lack of job satisfaction and motivation among the teachers: Most of the teachers come to the department by chance and not by choice. A large number of teachers in the department lack interest in teaching-learning process. They

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are not sympathetic to the students. They lack devotion and dedication and don't take interest in enriching themselves with knowledge. This weakness of teachers directly affects the quality of teaching.

Absence of proper schooling environment: Besides, the schools lack proper schooling environment. The schools in Poonch are dull. Some of the school buildings are shabby and in poor physical condition and some lack accommodation. Despite yearly capacity building of teachers, methods of teaching are yet traditional and uninspiring. The courses of study are unrelated to the practical life. The students are also not provided with comfortable seating arrangement.

Lack of Incentives for ST/BPL girls: In rural areas particularly Scheduled Tribe (ST) dominated areas, there is poverty and people are not able to make their both ends meet. There is large drop-out in these areas as the young boys and girls are busy in their domestic work, cattle rearing or labour because of their pitiable condition. They cannot afford educational expenses and therefore prefer to leave the education half way.

Community mobilization and lack of awareness: People in several areas do not understand the value of education. They lack awareness regarding the value of education and therefore do not care for the education of their wards.

Absence of educational streams: There is limited number of educational streams available in higher secondary schools. The student can't go for their choicest streams and are compelled to opt for the streams as per the choice of the school authorities and thus go for a subject he/she is not interested in.

Teachers' absenteeism/ Ineffective monitoring and supervision: Teachers' absenteeism has been ranked high especially in rural areas. Monitoring and supervision has to play major role in proper functioning of any system but incidentally this system is not working properly and needs immediate reorganization of the system at zonal level. The inspecting authorities of the district education department (Office of the Chief Education Officer) are so overburdened with their routine work that they have no time to inspect schools. The inspecting authority had a role to study the problems of each school and viewed them comprehensively in the context of educational objectives but unfortunately now no such initiatives are there as the officers' work load is very heavy.

Lack of Infrastructure: Secondary schools in general and higher secondary schools in particular lack accommodation facilities in Poonch. In the district, thousands of students have to be accommodated in the space which is not even sufficient for hundreds. They come with high expectations and the physical

environments of the school compel them to opt out and seek admission in private institutions even though they can't afford the expensive education. The schools are without facilities like toilet, library, laboratory etc. The students have no benches even to sit on. According to Source Secondary Education Management Information System (SEMIS 2013-14) data, 60 % High schools were without drinking water/toilet facility, 20 % without common toilet facility, 10 % schools without girl's toilet facility, 100 % schools without access ramps, 35 % High schools without own buildings 25 % schools buildings were in dilapidated condition requiring re-construction and just 16.78% schools had play ground facility.

Similarly, in the Higher secondary schools of the district, 40 % were without DW/Toilet facility, 20 % without common toilet facility, 10 % without girl's toilet facility, 100 % schools without access ramps, 70 % HSS Schools were without own building. 10 % HSS buildings were in dilapidated condition with 50% classrooms in repairable condition. A total of 17 % schools had playground facility. (Source SEMIS 2013-14).

Besides, the existing school buildings of HS/HSS in Poonch are not as per the requirement of the children as maximum buildings consist of only two/three small rooms of 15x14 feet and of very low quality construction material requiring yearly repair. The rooms are not properly ventilated and do not fulfill the conditions of an ideal classroom. These schools are treated as schools with building but the ground reality is that these schools are in no case fit to be schools and there is dire need to reconstruct and in some cases renovate these buildings.

Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Level (IEDSS)

Realizing that inclusion of children and youth with disabilities is not only a human right, it is also good education and promotes the development of social skills, the scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) has been replaced with a revised scheme of Inclusive Education for the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS). This new scheme enables all students with disabilities completing eight years of elementary schooling an opportunity to complete four years of secondary schooling (classes IX-XII), in an inclusive and enabling environment. The IEDSS also supports the training programmes for general school teachers to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

This is a component under which children with different kind of disabilities are integrated with the children enrolled in regular schools. This is an endeavor to mix them with the hale and hearty children so that they may not feel inferior. This is a step to create in them the sense that they are equivalent to other children.

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During the year 2012-13, a survey was conducted in Poonch district to enlist the children with different disabilities and number of children in the age group of 12-16 and 16-18 years has been identified. In this connection awareness camps were organized at Zonal Level to sensitize the community and organized at the zonal level without financial. However, it was noticed that in the district, no assistive devices were provided well in time for want of timely diagnosis by the doctors. Thus the problems were getting multiplied day by day for the children as well as the district functionaries. Due to difficult terrain and lack of road connectivity some doctors were not able to reach on foot which caused major problem for the children who were not able to come at the place where such camps were organized. While providing Home Based Education to the children who are being suffering from diseases like “Mentally Retardation” it becomes difficult to manage special teacher to teach such children.

Lack of physical education: Physical education is important for physical fitness and efficiency, mental alertness and development of certain qualities of character. The secondary and higher secondary institutions in Poonch do not have play grounds available and deficiency of required staff is also a problem. Since the maximum number of institutions is co-educational, the presence of female physical teachers is rare.

Lack of access to Secondary Education: The remote areas of Poonch still lack access and secondary schools are not available at convenient distances. The parents hesitate in sending their children to far off places after the completion of elementary education. This lack of access results in large dropout at secondary stage. The scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan had succeeded in enrolling the never-enrolled children and mainstreaming the drop-outs to a greater extent which resulted in increasing roll at secondary level. However the elementary pass outs are denied the admission as the higher secondary schools are overcrowded.

Computer Education

In Jammu and Kashmir, computer education has recently been introduced in the schools. Under RMSA, students are introduced to the practical aspects of computer and the basic components of the computer system viz Input/output devices, Primary / Secondary storage devices, CPU etc. As per norms of RMSA computer education has been imparted at Secondary level i.e. ICT centers have to be established in most of the HS schools to improve the quality of education among the children. But it was noticed that there was difficulty in operationalizing such centers effectively due to the non-availability of expert teachers in that very particular subject. It was also difficult to make conducive

environment in the computer lab as there is no provision for the safai-wala for that particular work. Non-availability of electricity due to irregular power cuts is also a major issue as at the required time due to non availability of electricity nothing could be done.

4. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Enrolment in schools: The district at present is showing a progress yearly in the enrollment of the schools and is expected to enhance more in the coming years. The present status is as under:

Enrolment of Schools (having Classes IX and X)

Year	Year Wise Enrolment								
	Total			SC			ST		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2008-09	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2009-10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2010-11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2011-14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2014-13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2013-14	8146	6916	15062	26	16	42	3363	2608	5971

Instead of the fact the roll in the schools is increasing, yet a large portion of the children in the age group of 14-16 years is not attending the school after passing the 8th class. Since the district has hilly terrain with the special focus groups especially the ST and OBC people, it needs take steps for further enrolment of the children. Apart from the up gradation of the schools, there is need to provide educational support to children in far flung areas particularly Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribal communities in hilly terrains. This can be achieved by providing bridge courses or special training in the vicinity of their locations.

The hilly terrains of the district covered by the Muslim minority with scheduled tribe and backward class has shown a slow progress in the school achievements. It is because the schools in these areas are far away from their locations and they are not able to attend the school after completing class 8th. Secondly, the population in these areas is scattered over hills and forest cover and it becomes difficult for them to come down daily to the school after walking a long distance. Such children could be covered by making hostel facilities available at a centrally located place with some special training to achieve the level of studies with other children of the area.

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Pedagogy

Pedagogy deals with teaching methods in the teaching-learning process. The role of the teacher becomes important as Rashtriya Madhayamik Shiksha Abhiyan envisages community-owned quality education at the Secondary level for all the children in the age group of 12-16 years. In the district, the teacher training programmes have been organized on a large scale since the launch of RMSA in Poonch with the main objective of translating the same into the actual class room practices. However, the design of teachers training needs to be further strengthened. Teachers need training and retraining periodically so that they can maintain their professional competence. There is an urgent need to identify training needs, training design, and course material to make teacher training effective and meaningful.

The training of teachers should be for making class teaching joyful and activity based. Besides, the trainings are not up to the mark so as to make a change in the attitude of teachers. The target should be mostly on contents and activities to be involved in the context. Usually, trainings are done in a lecturing manner which needs to be avoided. The training design should be updated with modern methods. The training classes should be given by providing activities on contents. The training should be given class wise and subject wise. Computer aided learning should be developed which will simplify the hard spots in contents.

Strengthening infrastructure

Most of the schools in the district have not enough accommodation for secondary sections as most of the schools have been upgraded recently and no infrastructure till date have been developed to ensure strengthening of teaching-learning progress. Some schools have not enough space to occupy the large enrolment in the class for students. The schools need to be provided with additional accommodation for these classes so as to improve the quality of teaching learning in schools.

The implementation of RMSA schemes particularly civil works is also faced with some problems. The School Management and Development Committees (SMDC) members and Panchayati Raj institutions are not fully aware of the RMSA programme. The SMDC Committees members are nominated or selected and therefore, these committees are not representative by nature. The tenure of the SMDC members is also not fixed and this gives rise to arrogant behavior in some SMDCs'. The PTAs' position is also similar to the SMDC due to lack of understanding of RMSA programme and mission. So the proper training of SMDC members and PTA' has to be done.

As far as girl's education is concerned a number of girls are out of school mostly in backward areas. They are working girls and supporting their

parents in agricultural work, to earn livelihood. Girl-friendly environment and awareness of community needs to be created at the village/habitation level so that all such girls are persuaded for schooling.

The convergence between various departments is also not satisfactory. The convergence needs to be done at different levels by forming core committees at District, Tehsil, Block and Village level so that more and more community members are involved in the implementation of RMSA programme and monitoring mechanism is strengthened for better results.

In district Poonch, no base line surveys have been conducted at any point of time to provide diagnostic view of the various elements of secondary education like enrolment, retention, dropout rate, achievement levels etc. There is thus the need to constitute teams for conducting base line surveys in the major areas of secondary education especially in enrolment, retention, dropout rates, achievement levels etc. The need for action research on some burning issues is enormous including compelling circumstances that keep children away from the school system, lukewarm response of the community in owning and managing the system, the low participation of girls, as compared to boys in the system, absenteeism of teachers leading to low performance at the level of state institutions as compared with the private school teachers etc.

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