

# Pathetic state of education: Who to blame

P S M Rao, July 21, 2015, (Posted by Deshkal Society on Google Group)

There have been some vociferous demands to increase the public spending on education. The real problem of deficits is more in the governance, than in the budgets, which needs adequate focus. Given the will, many ills that plagued the education system could be corrected without requiring the government to spend an additional rupee.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2014 once again mirrors the pathetic situation of school education in India. As high as 75 per cent of III, 50 per cent of V and 25 per cent of VIII Standard students were not able to read, let alone understand, the simple text of a lower level, II Standard.

Similarly, more than 75 per cent of III Standard students could not do a two digit subtraction and 56 per cent of VIII standard students could not solve the problems involving the division of three digits by one digit. Likewise, about 19.5 per cent of II Standard students could not recognise the numbers up to 9 and about seventy five per cent of V standard students could not read simple English sentences.

No doubt the education spending has been lower than what has been required; the Kothari Commission recommended way back in 1966 to rise this spending to reach to a level of 6 per cent of GDP by 1985-86. That was never reached; it lingered between 3.1 and 3.8 per cent during 2001 to 2010, at the best.

Yet, what has been spent is not a pittance. The public expenditure on education was Rs 2.97 lakh crore in 2010-11, Rs 3.57 lakh crore in 2011-12 and budgeted to Rs 4.10 lakh crore in 2012-13. As a proportion of the GDP, educational spend has increased from 0.64 per cent (Rs 64.46 crore) in 1951-52 to 4.05 per cent (Rs 2.97 lakh crore) in 2010-11.

The ASER's policy brief also acknowledges the 'impressive strides made in terms of providing school buildings, classrooms, teachers, textbooks and other facilities during last two decades' and it points to the excellent achievement in school enrolments – 95 per cent of the children in the 6–14 age group.

The heavy expenditure on education has also facilitated the establishment 14.25 lakh schools, primary to senior secondary, in the country as can be seen from data presented in educational statistics at a glance-2014 of the Government of India.

The school teacher population of 82.68 lakh, accounting for a more than a quarter of organised sector employment in the country, is more than the individual populations in some 160 countries

Despite all this, the school environment is not encouraging to retain the students there; 47.4 per cent of the students are dropping out before completing their X Standard and the mean years of schooling of those above 15 years is only 4.4 years.

## **Teachers' cruelty**

Many teachers are not only incompetent but are cruel to the students. The ASER's policy brief notes that the teachers were not following child-friendly practices. The data analysis of 850 hours of class room observations has shown that the teachers were not even smiling, laughing or joking at least with some students in the class rooms.

A government's publication, 'Child protection: A handbook for teachers' says, "many street and working children have pointed out corporal punishment at school as one of the reasons for running away from school and also from their families and homes," "almost all schools inflict corporal punishments" and "children are known to have had their bones and teeth broken, their hair pulled and forced into acts of humiliation."

The report has documented 40 types of corporal punishments teachers inflict on students causing them severe pain and humiliation. That means many of the perpetrators are going scot-free although what they do is an outright illegality.

Article 39 (f) of the constitution guarantees children freedom and dignity while Section 17 (1) of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 specifically prohibits their physical punishment or mental harassment. But these things mean nothing to the erring teachers who ruin the lives of millions of our future citizens.

The government teachers who are supposed to be well qualified, trained and well paid can be retrained, disciplined and sensitised so that they can shun their brutality and learn to be child-friendly. That does not need any extra spending, but will.

Who is primarily responsible for this guilt then? Is it the head of the school, who fails to discipline the errant teacher, responsible? Or, is it the government officials at different levels in the hierarchy who turn a Nelson's eye? Or, is it the persons above them, the political leaders who forget their responsibility towards their electors?

Or, are we, supposed to be the most powerful in a democracy, actually responsible? If that be so, do we need to wait, but no choice, till the general awareness increases whereby the people can effectively resist the mischief of their deputies?