Declining Public Funding and Increasing Private Expenditure in Neo-Liberal Regime: Challenges Ahead for Universalisation of Secondary Education

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1 Context

The recent agenda of the Central Government of India, to universalise secondary education in the coming years, has been viewed with great hopes but with certain uncertainties stemming from no increase in the share of public expenditure on education in GDP. As stated in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) document '*Universalising secondary education. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) is an initiative of the Central government, in partnership with State governments, which seeks to universalise enrolment in Grades 9 and 10 across the country*' (IIE 2016). The government of India reiterates its plan to have universalisation of secondary education under Samagara Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), in the light of Sustainable Development Goal 4, to ensure inclusive quality education for all.

'*This (SSA) would help in instilling allocative efficiency and optimal utilization of budgetary and human resources*' *(*MHRD 2018: 6). It defines market efficiency to achieve the social goals of equity and efficiency and attain sustainable development goals, especially SDG 4, to ensure inclusive and qualitative education for all by 2030. Here, it would be pertinent to acknowledge that public funding, however, cannot ensure market efficiency parameters but can ensure a much longer lasting human efficiency with equity and social justice by using the capability approach (Sen 1982).

Social goals cannot be achieved through market principles, as market logic ignores the equity and social justice issues to achieve profit (Thakur 2016a; Thakur and Pathania 2018). The interventions of the private sector in the universalisation of elementary education, in the form of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) reservation in private schools, has revealed a number of cases of these schools indulging in

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corrupt practices. In some of the affluent Delhi schools, the 25% quota for EWS category students in private schools was surreptitiously given to upper sections of Indian society (TOI 2018a, b). These challenges show the market failures for providing public good or service, like education, including asymmetric information, externalities, moral hazard, and adverse selection etc. These challenges need to be considered during the implementation of SSA and universalisation of secondary education in India. The other challenge is to match up to the older SSA's (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) comprehensiveness covering elementary education with thought-out specific details related to budget and resource allocation. Samagra, thus needs, to clearly distinguish itself from stating that though it intends to facilitate school education from pre-school to Grade XII for every child, it has currently undertaken the three stated components under its plan of action—Universalisation of elementary education, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and Teacher Education. Looking at the wide coverage of SSA, i.e. Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) policies and programmes at the States' and all-India levels, the author finds it an over-ambitious goal. The author here critically examines three challenges for universalisation of secondary education in the context of SSA and SDG 4. These challenges are declining public funding, increasing private expenditure in the education sector and the sustenance of socio-economic inequalities in Indian education. This is done by using empirical data from NSSO and MHRD. The chapter is divided into five sections: (i) the context, (ii) declining public funding and increasing private expenditure in education sector, mainly secondary education, (iii) existing socio-economic inequalities in Indian education (iv) economic class in education sector, including secondary education and (v) concluding remarks and policy implications.

2 Declining Public Expenditure and Increasing Private Expenditure in Indian Education Sector

In the neo-liberal policies, the Central government spending on education, as a share of the Central government's total budgeted expenditure, has been falling for the past three years under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government for the period 2014–2019 (Table 1). In 2014–15, the share of education budget in the Central government budget was 6.15%, which declined to 5.44% in 2015–16, 4.68% in 2016–17 and 3.71% in 2017–18 (Table 1). The share of education budget in Gross National Income (GNI) has also declined from 1.06% in 2014–15 to 0.86% in 2015–16 and 0.77% in 2016–17 and it has further fallen to 0.62% in 2017–18. With declining share of public funding, it would be interesting to see how the ambitious goal of universalising secondary education can be achieved through meagre funding. It would be a big challenge, especially in times of increasing private expenditure in education for a hierarchal society, not only economically but socially as well and

Table 1 Declining public spending on education sector

Year	MHRD budget (Rs. billion)	Total Central budget (Rs. Billion)	Gross national income (GNI) (Rs. Billion)	Share of education budget in GNI	Share of education budget in Central budget
2014–15	1104	17,949	104,123	1.06	6.15
2015–16	967	17,775	112,463	0.86	5.44
2016–17	927	19,781	120,347	0.77	4.68
2017–18	797	21,467	128,350	0.62	3.71

Source BS (2018)

that too in the context of a more regressive way of having upper and lower caste associations.

3 Average Expenditure in Education: A Social Divide and Advantage for Upper Caste Students in Cut-Throat Competition for Marks

In the context of the neo-liberal policies, the share of private expenditure has been increasing in education wherein secondary education is also adversely affected. Secondary statistics of access of education at all the levels project an advantage for upper caste population, thus re-establishing the social gap. Tables 2 and 3 show share and absolute average private expenditure per student pursuing general education in schools, colleges and universities; by social groups: SCs, STs, OBCs and others (upper castes or non-SCs/STs/OBCs) in rural and urban areas of India. The per student expenditure in rural India has increased (Table 2) from lower primary (Rs. 2.8 thousand) and upper primary (Rs. 3.2 thousand) to lower secondary (Rs. 5.1 thousand) and higher secondary (Rs. 9 thousand) and even at the higher education levels of graduate (Rs. 11.5 thousand) and post-graduate and above (Rs. 14.5 thousand).

The shares of per student expenditure of SCs, STs and OBCs are lower in comparison to the expenditure of upper castes (Others), except post-graduates and above of OBCs. The shares of SCs and STs to per student expenditure by "Others" in lower secondary levels are 62% and 53% while their respective shares at the higher secondary levels are 67% and 61%. The shares of the expenditure by SCs and STs to the expenditure of "Others" at the lower primary level are 42% and 35% and 50% and 46%, respectively, at the upper primary level. Likewise, the shares of graduate SCs and STs are 75% and 82% while their respective shares in post-graduate and above are 80% and 83%. Thus, higher expenditure incurred by upper caste students in comparison to that by SC and ST students are significantly lower, especially at the primary and secondary levels, showing a social divide in rural India. The higher

Table 2 Average expenditure per student on general education by social group (SC/ST/OBC) in rural India (January–June, 2014) (in Rs.)

Social group	Level of education						
	Lower primary	Upper primary	Lower secondary	Higher secondary	Graduate	Post-graduate and above	Diploma
ST	1531	2104	3572	6635	10,246	11,959	12,139
ST:% of Others	35	46	53	61	82	83	66
SC	1791	2283	4149	7377	9367	11,603	12,187
SC:% of Others	42	50	62	67	75	80	66
OBC	2968	3372	5101	9065	12,044	16,540	12,272
OBC:% of Others	69	74	76	83	97	115	66
Others	4314	4564	6725	10946	12,462	14,423	18,456
All	2811	3242	5100	9031	11,527	14,604	13,422

Source NSSO (2016)

Table 3 Average expenditure per student pursuing general education social group (SC/ST/OBC) in urban India (January–June, 2014) (in Rs.)

Social group	Level of education						
	Lower primary	Upper primary	Lower secondary	Higher secondary	Graduate	Post-graduate and above	Diploma
ST	6324	8377	11,801	18,027	14,611	15,862	16,271
ST:% of others	44	51	62	66	71	75	56
SC	6245	6199	8213	12,610	13,936	11,812	14,182
SC:% of others	44	38	43	46	68	56	49
OBC	8572	9415	10,951	15,513	14093	14,952	17,219
OBC:% of Others	60	57	57	57	68	71	59
Others	14,270	16,485	19,121	27,166	20,601	21,064	28,958
All	10,083	11,446	13,547	20,179	16,771	17,744	21,947

Source NSSO (2016)

expenditure incurred by upper caste students at the time of increasing privatisation has multiplied the cost of education by favouring upper caste social category students, especially at the primary and secondary levels of education. However, per student expenditure of OBCs is higher than those of SCs and STs but these are lower

than those of Others/Upper Caste students, at all levels of education (except post-graduates and above). Probably the OBCs have higher land holding in rural areas which may facilitate their higher spending in post-graduation and above. The average expenditures at all levels of education in urban India are higher than those of rural India (Tables 2 and 3).

The average expenditures are: in lower primary (Rs. 10 thousand), upper primary (Rs. 11.5 thousand); lower secondary (Rs. 13.5 thousand) higher secondary (Rs. 20.2 thousand), graduate level (Rs. 16.8 thousand) and post-graduate and above level of education (Rs. 17.8 thousand). As professional education is not included in general education; therefore, the expenditure at graduate and post-graduate and above levels are lower than that at the higher secondary level of education. The\age shares of SC, ST and OBC students to that of others at the lower secondary level of education are 43%, 62% and 57%, respectively, while their corresponding shares at the higher secondary level are 46%, 66% and 57%. This is reflective of a social divide in secondary education in terms of lower shares of expenditures by the disadvantaged groups, as in the case at the lower and upper primary levels, thereby keeping the disadvantaged groups laggards in education and employment in Indian economy (Thakur 2016b).

4 Socio-Economic Inequalities in Education Including Secondary Education

Indian society is enmeshed in socio-economic inequalities in terms of class, caste, gender and regional divide (Thakur 2016b). This section examines the existing social exclusions by using Survey Office/Organisation (NSSO) data for the year 2014.

Due to these social-economic inequalities, the exclusions of the disadvantaged sections also impinge on the education sector, viz., secondary education. These exclusions in school education are examined below by using data of National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

GARs in Lower and Upper Primary Levels of Education

Table 4 shows that gross attendance ratio (GAR) in lower primary level of education (I–V standards) was 101% in rural India by all social categories. This shows universalisation of elementary education at primary level of education, which can be attributed to implementation by the Central government of the Fundamental Right to Education Act, 2009 in 2010. In urban India, the GAR in lower primary education level of all the social categories was 102%. However, the ratio of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) male and Scheduled Castes (SC) female was slightly lower than 102%, at 94% and 97%, respectively, reflecting exclusion on the basis of gender, caste and tribe (Table 5). The GAR at the upper primary level of education (VI–VIII Standards) of rural India declined for SCs, STs, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and "Others" (non-SC/ST/OBC), in comparison to their GAR at lower primary levels. The caste deprivations are also reflected in the larger declines noticed in the GARs

Table 4 Gross attendance ratio in school education, by social group (SC/ST/OBC) and by sex in rural India (January–June 2014)

Social group	Lower primary	Upper primary	Lower secondary	Higher secondary	Above higher secondary
Male					
ST	100	93	75	51	7
SC	102	90	81	53	10
OBC	103	90	87	64	13
Others	102	95	98	78	16
All	102	91	86	63	12
Female					
ST	101	85	78	45	5
SC	102	80	88	54	7
OBC	100	88	82	58	9
Others	99	97	90	70	14
All	100	88	84	58	9
Person					
ST	100	89	76	48	6
SC	102	85	84	54	9
OBC	101	89	85	61	11
Others	101	96	94	74	15
All	101	90	85	61	11

Source NSSO (2016)

of the SCs, STs and OBCs at the upper primary level, in comparison to those of the "Others"—upper caste population.

Table 5 Gross attendance ratio in school education by social group (SC/ST/OBC) and by sex in urban India (January to June 2014)

Social group	Lower primary	Upper primary	Lower secondary	Higher secondary	Above higher secondary
Male					
ST	94	97	112	87	16
SC	100	96	87	56	13
OBC	103	89	83	66	18
Others	104	94	98	87	22
All	102	93	90	73	18
Female					
ST	101	86	92	75	15
SC	97	85	106	65	14
OBC	104	82	89	71	16
Others	101	100	96	82	22
All	102	88	94	75	18
Person					
ST	97	92	102	81	15
SC	98	91	95	59	13
OBC	103	86	86	69	17
Others	103	97	97	85	22
All	102	91	92	74	18

Source NSSO (2016)

GAR of all the social categories in rural India declined from 101% at the lower level to 90% at the upper primary level (Table 4). The GAR in urban India declined from 102% to 91% (Table 5). The declining attendance ratios were slightly over 10% in rural and urban India, reflecting challenges for universalisation of elementary education. This implies that completion of elementary education is a structural and systematic challenge in the Indian school system.[1] In rural India, GARs at the upper primary level of SCs (85%), STs (89%), and OBCs (89%) are lesser than that of the "Others" (96%). The corresponding ratios in urban India are 91%, 92%, 86% and 97%, replicating caste deprivation phenomenon in elementary level of education. This caste deprivation, with lower GARs for SCs, STs and OBCs, coincides with gender-deprivation. The GARs of females at the upper primary level of education belonging to SCs, STs, OBCs and others in rural India were 80%, 85%, 88% and 97%, respectively. The respective ratios in the context of urban India were 85%, 86%, 82% and 101%. Thus, lower ratios of SC, ST and OBC females, in comparison

[1]There have been issues of accurate data on attendance and enrolment captured by the investigators and data supplied by the school officials while assessing RTE in universalising elementary education, resulting in overestimation of data on attendance, enrolment and completion by students in elementary education.

to their counterpart males and the females of the "others"-upper castes, reflect the incidence of double deprivation for females due to caste and gender.

GARs in Lower and Higher Secondary Levels of Education

With regard to rural India, the GAR in the lower secondary level of education (IX–X) of all social categories has declined from 97 to 85% at the elementary level, showing a decline by 12%. The GAR at the higher secondary level (XI–XII) has further declined to 61%, implying a decline by 21% from lower secondary and by 36% from elementary education (Table 4). This significant decline of GARs in lower and higher secondary levels of education explains the problems of higher drop-outs, lower transition and retention rates in school education. These problems are more critical at the higher education level as the GAR in the above higher secondary level of education in rural India is only 11%, indicating the highest decline of 50%; from 61% GAR in higher secondary level. The GAR of all social categories in urban India is 18%, indicative of rural-urban divide in access to higher education which is also linked to the drop-outs after school education. These declining attendance ratios across levels of education, from lower primary to above higher secondary, depict wastage of human potential due to incidence of higher drop-out and lower retention rates. It can be further proved that declining GARs is also entangled with the socio-economic inequalities in rural India. The GARs of persons of SCs, STs, OBCs and others at lower secondary level in rural India are 84%, 76%, 85% and 94%, respectively, (Table 4). The corresponding ratios for urban persons in India are 95%, 102%, 86% and 97% (Table 5). Likewise, the respective GARs in lower secondary level of education of rural females are 88%, 78%, 82% and 90% while the corresponding GARs of these social categories for urban females are 106%, 92%, 89% and 96%. The real social conditions of SCs, STs and OBCs could be judged by their social conditions in rural India, as the GARs (males and females) of these three social categories are lower than those of the upper caste 'others' (males and females).

GARs in Higher Secondary Levels of Education

At higher secondary level, the GARs of persons of SCs, STs, OBCs and Others in rural India are 54%, 48%, 61% and 74% while the corresponding GARs for urban India are 59%, 81%, 69% and 85%. Likewise, the GARs of rural females at the higher secondary level are 54%, 45%, 58% and 70 and the respective ratios for urban females are 65%, 75%, 71% and 82%. The rural Indian conditions of SCs, STs and OBCs are adverse compared to those of upper castes (Others), showing caste and gender-biased Indian society, with the data depicting lower attendance of these disadvantaged populations. Thus, educational access may still remain a challenge for the universalisation of secondary education after the implementation of universalisation of elementary education.

There are other issues that can act as guiding force or determinants for effective implementation of the new SSA. For instance, class issue is also a challenge for access, equity and quality in education sector, and this aspect is examined in the

subsequent section by using data on GAR by Usual Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure (UMPCE).

5 Economic Class in Secondary Education Sector: Common School System Is the Only Alternative to Achieve SDG 4

There are higher aspirations of education among the parents and their children. The disadvantaged sections of society, lower economic classes have only one way of improving their economic status by acquiring more education and training and increasing their chances of getting jobs. This would enable them to break the shackles of the vicious circles of poverty in a developing country, like India. It is natural for people of developing societies to have lower base of socio-economic endowments, so that they have to work hard to build human capital and capability in the future to move up in socio-economic terms. The higher aspirations could be proved by the data given in Table 6 as the GARs of all economic categories at the lower primary level is nearly 100%. However, in the next levels of education, a larger section of society drop-out, especially in higher education, as explained in the earlier section of this paper that GARs in the above higher secondary level of rural and urban India were only 11% and 18%, respectively. (Tables 4 and 5; see also last columns of Tables 6 and 7). Table 3 depicts that GARs for all economic categories of rural India, at lower and upper primary levels, are 101% and 90%, respectively. The GARs for lower and higher secondary levels have declined to 85% and 61%, respectively. For the five economic classes (usual monthly per-capita consumption expenditure-UMPCE) of lowest (Rs. 0–786), lower (Rs. 786–1000), middle (Rs. 1000–1286), higher (Rs. 1287–1667) and highest (Rs. 1667 and above), the GARs for lower primary level in rural India are close to 100%, showing higher aspirations for their better future though higher education. But, the GARs have declined with the increase in level of education and the rate of decline of GARs is greater for the disadvantaged economic sections, viz., lowest, lower, middle and even higher in comparison to the highest economic strata

The GAR of persons of the lowest economic class in rural India has declined from 99% in lower primary to 91% in the upper primary level and then to 67% in the lower secondary level, before falling to 38% in higher secondary level and finally to a mere four per cent beyond the higher secondary level. However, the same attendance ratio of the highest economic class has declined from 107% at primary level to 91% in upper primary, going up to 105% in lower secondary level of education before declining to 89% at the higher secondary level and further to 21% at the above higher secondary level of education in rural India. Thus, at the secondary level in rural India, economic class influences the GARs between lowest and highest economic class as the difference in GAR at lower secondary level is 38% and the corresponding difference at the higher secondary level is higher by 51%.

Table 6 Gross attendance ratio in school education by Usual Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure (UMPCE) by sex in rural India (January–June, 2014)

Particular	UMPCE (Rs.)					All
	(0–786)	(786–1000)	(1000–1286)	(1287–1667)	(1667 & Above)	
Male						
Lower primary	100	98	102	104	109	102
Upper primary	83	94	96	92	94	91
secondary	68	83	85	93	105	86
Higher secondary	42	48	58	72	90	63
Above higher secondary	4	6	10	15	22	12
Female						
Lower primary	96	99	100	103	106	100
Upper primary	79	87	91	96	88	88
Lower secondary	66	79	87	89	106	84
Higher secondary	34	48	57	67	87	58
Above higher secondary	3	5	7	10	19	9
Person						
Lower primary	99	99	101	103	107	101
Upper primary	81	91	94	94	91	90
Lower secondary	67	81	86	91	105	85
Higher secondary	38	48	57	70	89	61
Above higher secondary	4	5	9	12	21	11

Source NSSO (2016)

In urban India, the GAR in lower primary education of the lowest economic class persons is 100% which declined to 82% in upper primary. In lower and higher secondary levels, the respective GARs are 67% and 41%, and it is six per cent in the above secondary level of education (Table 7). However, the respective GARs in the five levels of education of the highest economic class persons are 101%, 94%, 111%, 99% and 33%, respectively. The respective differences between the two economic

Table 7 Gross attendance ratio in school education by UMPCE by sex in urban India (January–June, 2014)

Particular	UMPCE (Rs.)					All
	(0–1200)	(1200–1667)	(1667–2250)	(2250–3333)	(3333 and Above)	
Male						
Lower Primary	100	102	105	106	101	102
Upper primary	88	89	100	93	96	93
Lower secondary	63	88	97	104	111	90
Higher secondary	39	66	74	91	100	73
Above higher secondary	6	11	15	24	33	18
Female						
Lower primary	101	101	105	102	102	102
Upper primary	77	89	94	100	91	88
Lower secondary	72	95	104	102	111	94
Higher secondary	43	64	83	92	98	75
Above higher secondary	7	10	16	24	34	18
Person						
Lower primary	100	101	105	105	101	102
Upper primary	82	89	97	96	94	91
Lower secondary	67	92	100	103	111	92
Higher secondary	41	65	78	92	99	74
Above higher secondary	6	10	16	24	33	18

Source NSSO (2016)

class persons in lower and upper primary education are 1% and 12%, which increased to 44% and 58%, respectively, in lower and higher secondary levels of education.

Gender and Economic Class in Secondary Education: Rural and Urban India

Along with economic class, the gender-issue is also prevalent in Indian secondary education. The GARs of rural females belonging to the lowest economic classes in lower primary level of education is 96%, declining to 79% in upper primary level and further to 66% in lower secondary education and 34% in higher secondary level

of education and to a mere three per cent in the above higher secondary level of education (Table 6).

However, the GARs in lower primary education level of the highest economic class female in rural India is 106%, declines to 88% at upper primary level, rises to 106% at lower secondary education, before dropping to 87% at higher secondary level, and further to 19% at the above higher secondary level (Table 6). It will be noticed that there is a significantly higher GARs of the highest economic class females in rural India than their counterpart females belonging to the lowest economic classes. The difference between the GARs of the lowest and highest economic class females at the lower primary level in rural India is 10%, which declines slightly to nine per cent in upper primary, rises to 50% in lower secondary level and further to 53% in higher secondary level.

The GARs of urban females of the lowest economic classes in lower and upper primary levels are 101% and 77%, which declines to 72% at lower secondary level and 43% at the higher secondary level and further to seven per cent at the above higher secondary level of education (Table 7). The GARs of urban females from highest economic classes in lower and upper primary levels of education are 102% and 88%, while the GAR is 94% and 75% at the lower secondary and higher secondary levels, respectively, and 34% at the above higher secondary level of education. The difference between GARs of urban females of highest and lowest economic classes at the lower and upper primary levels are one per cent and 11%, respectively, while their respective differences at lower and higher secondary levels of education increase to 22% and 32%, indicating a combination of economic class in gender.

6 Conclusion and Policy Implications

The neo-liberal interventions in Indian education policies have sustained the issue of access and equity for the deprived sections of the society, especially education beyond elementary education. Apart from other inequities, the economic class is also influencing the access and equity to/in secondary education and beyond. In order to address this issue, Indian education system needs to revisit the two recommendations of the Kothari commission, which are for having common school system and also increasing the public funding by at least six per cent of the GDP. Introducing the common school system (CSS) with uniform quality of schools to all students in their neighbourhood, irrespective of socio-economic background of the students was also advocated by National Education Policy, 1986 and 1992 of the government of India. Relying on temporary arrangements like the Economic Weaker Section (EWS)'s quota of 25% seats to be filled by private schools under Right to Education Act, 2009, which is a case of public–private partnership (PPP) model, will hardly be able to address the problem of equity. During the implementation of the PPP in education, schools were reported to be indulging in rent-seeking behaviour or corrupt practices in selling the EWS seats to the rich sections of Indian society. This shows that it is difficult or well nigh impossible for the private sector to provide fair and

judicial supply of public services (TOI 2018a, b) as it contradicts the law of nature of production or provision of public good in Public Economics. Some private schools were reportedly not filling up full quota of EWS seats while some were shifting the burden of costs to the EWS students in the schools (TOI 2018a, b; FE 2018).

There are also other examples of market failures in the production and provision of local of global public goods like education (Tilak 1997, 2018). Thus, at the times of existing higher socio-economic inequalities in the Indian education sector, including secondary education, there are two policy implications on the basis of challenges critically examined above: (i) introduction of CSS is necessary for ensuring inclusive and quality education to all, including universalisation of secondary education and (ii) increasing of public funding to finance the public good, viz., secondary education in a welfare state by the Central and state governments.

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