

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF STATE IN PROMOTING INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMME IN THE CONTEXT OF SSA AND RTE 2009

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Abstract: This paper addresses the problem associated with conception of innovative practices in Teacher education in the reference of SSA and RTE. During the last few years revolutionary changes in education have been witnessed in the expectations as well as aspirations in the name of reforms in many countries of the world. The prevailing current of globalization, induction of information technology, reshuffling of teaching approaches with changing philosophical thrust along with accommodation of contemporary issues of gender, environment, equality etc. as a part of school curriculum have intangibly created a tremendous impetus on teacher education programme to restructure its outlook according to the contemporary needs. But this thrust seems to get nullified in the reference of the laid down aims and objectives of the state mentioned for the SSA and RTE where very slight concern has been shown for the capacity building of the teachers according to the contemporary needs; Rather the major concern is focused on the modes of enhancing accessibility of education among the masses. While keeping this problem as central point of deliberation, this paper is trying to evolve the strategies which can minimize the prevailing dichotomy to the maximum extent.

Keywords: Innovative Practice, SSA, RTE 2009, Teacher Preparation.

Introduction: The post liberalization along with post modern era brought revolutionary transformations in almost every sphere of life. These transformations were so drastic and rapid that it sometimes it appears difficult to adjust oneself with them. The changes at the economic and the technical levels can be taken to lay down the foundations for the changes in the social, cultural and political sphere of life. In this context, one cannot exclude the fertile field of education which influenced as well as get influenced by the transformations occurred anywhere within the social setting. During the last few years dramatic changes in education have been witnessed in the expectations as well as aspirations in the name of reforms in many countries of the world. The prevailing current of globalization, induction of information technology, reshuffling of teaching approaches with changing philosophical thrust along with accommodation of contemporary issues of gender, environment, equality etc. have intangibly created a tremendous impetus on teacher education to restructure its outlook and mode of transmission on the priority basis. The reactionary steps against the given scenario is expecting from the teaching community to reorient themselves for developing new capacities and expertise while meeting the contemporary challenges.

During the last decade, a series of reforms have been practiced in the field of education. The seed of those reforms can be traced back by the emergence of National curriculum framework 2005 which perhaps for the first time, expected from the practitioners and other stakeholders involved in the task of education to change their outlook about the whole transaction by evolving the pedagogies, structuring the

interaction in such a manner so that the educational endeavor should appear meaningful and constructive to the society. For example in its first chapter it has been stated in NCF that 'this document seeks to enable teachers and administrators and other agencies involved in the design of syllabi and textbooks and examination reform make rational choices and decisions. It will also enable them to develop and implement innovative, locale-specific programmes. By contextualizing the challenges involved in curriculum renewal in contemporary social reality, this document draws attention to certain specific problems that demand an imaginative response. We expect that it will strengthen ongoing processes of reform, such as devolution of decision making to teachers and elected local level bodies, while it also identifies new areas for attention such as the need for plurality of textbooks and urgent improvement in the examination system.' Somewhere these expectations, reflected through various statements in NCF, carried intangibly the potential to achieve the target of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan. It got culminated in the form of Right to Education Act 2009 when education was put as the fundamental right of the children ranging between the ages of 6-14 years of age. The launching of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan and bringing Right to Education as the fundamental rights brought spur in the field of teacher training programme also. All of a sudden the crisis of trained teachers was being felt everywhere and teacher training institutes mushroomed like anything in the country. Now the teacher training not remained as a sole prerogative of government set up but NCTE started approving it within the private set up also. (The post liberalization era has witnessed

the mushrooming of these private, commercial based teacher training institutions in every nook and corner of the country as follower of the already existing structure rather than emerging as a trend setter.) On this venue the opening of distance mode of teacher preparation may be considered as another feather on the cap to fill up the deficiency of trained teachers in the system. But before initiating deliberation over the innovative teacher preparation programme, it seems pertinent to just have a glance over the goals and objectives of both SSA and RTE respectively.

What Is Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan?

To begin with, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan has been termed as basically as a flagship programme to universalize elementary education by providing an opportunity for improving human capabilities among children by having the provision of offering quality based education owned by community

The salient features of SSA are:

- It is time frame bound programme for Universal Elementary Education
- It is a response to the demand for quality base education all across the country
- It aims to promote social justice through elementary education
- In order to justify its stand for community owned quality base education, it is making active efforts to involve local bodies at different levels like Panchayati Raj Institutions, School Management Committees, Village and Urban Slum level Education Committees, Parents' Teachers' Associations, Mother Teacher Associations, Tribal Autonomous Councils and other grass root level structures to manage the elementary schools

SSA is also an expression of political will for universal elementary education which is seeking partnership between Central, State and local government at different levels. Here the states are free to develop their own vision about elementary education. In order to enhance its effectiveness, SSA has formulated different Strategies like seeking institutional Reforms, Sustainable Financing, Community Ownership, institutional Capacity building, Improving mainstream Educational Administration, community based monitoring with full transparency, habitation as a unit of planning priority to education of girls, Special groups and planning for District elementary education etc. The main concern comes when it specifies the role of teachers here as a part of strategy that *'SSA recognizes the critical and central role of teachers and advocates a focus on their development needs. Setting up of Block Resource Centers/ Cluster Resource Centres, recruitment of qualified teachers, opportunities for teacher development through participation in curriculum-related material development, focus on*

classroom process and exposure visits for teachers are all designed to develop the human resource among teachers.'

Right To Education Act 2009: Another historic step was taken by the state when in August 2009, Parliament Passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. This Act provides a justifiable legal framework which entitles the children between the ages of 6-14 years to an education of quality, based on principles of equity and non-discrimination.

The RTE Act Provides for:

- Right of children to Free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighborhood school
- According to this act 'compulsory education' means obligation of the appropriate government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the six to fourteen age group.
- It makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.
- It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate Government, local authority and Parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing the financial and other responsibilities between the central and state government
- It lays down the norms and standards relating to pupil teacher Ratios (PTRs) building and infrastructure, school working days and teacher working hours

Role Of The State In Promoting Innovative Practices In Teacher Preparation Programmes:

Now after having glance over the provisions of SSA and RTE Acts, if we just look at the nature of teacher preparation programmes, then it is quite inevitable that the message and expectations of the state are not reflected in their execution. Even the statutory body of Teacher Training i.e. NCTE also not successful in laying down broader framework for the teacher training programmes matching with the current aspirations of the society. NCTE since 1978 has brought several changes in its drafts related with Teacher Education but still it is far away from the optimum expectations. It has been admitted by itself with this body while laying down the framework for teacher education that *'it is indeed a matter of concern that teacher education institutes continue to exist as insular organizations even within the university system where many are located.'* This expression in different words can be traced back from the Chattopadhyya Commission (1983-85) which envisioned the new teacher as one who communicates to pupils *"... the importance of and feeling for a*

scientific attitude; a commitment to a concern for society.” On other reference the commission stated that ‘if school teachers are expected to bring about a revolution in their approach to teaching...That same revolution must precede and find a place in the colleges of education.’ The teacher training programmes are still running on age old practices of loading the trainees with theoretical input and giving least concern about their practical implications. When one deliberate upon the issues related with mass reluctance to participate in an educational endeavour, then somewhere one cause can be trace back from the poor training of the teacher which is not related with ground reality. The current teacher preparation programme are suffering from maladies like poor knowledge of the subject, lack of real world experience, focus more on ‘soft’ pedagogical knowledge at the expense of subject matter depth.

National Policy of Education 1986/92 recognized that ‘teachers should have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs of and capabilities of and the concerns of the community.’ It also stated that ‘teacher education is a continuous process, and its preservice and in-service components are inseparable. As the first step, the system of teacher education will be overhauled.’

Even Yashpal committees Report (1993) observed that ‘inadequate programmes of teacher preparation lead to unsatisfactory quality of learning in schools. The content of the programme should be restructured to ensure its relevance to the changing needs of school education. The emphasis in these programmes should be on enabling the trainees to acquire the ability for self-learning and independent thinking.’

The observations cited by different committees and commissions related with teacher preparation programmes signifying the need of changing the structure. The holistic interpretation in this regard reflects the state eagerness to achieve the target related with universalization of elementary education more than bringing qualitative improvement in the teacher preparation programmes. About the latter, the concern seems to be reduced in the form of words only which express disappointments and apprehension about the nature of running the programmes. While reviewing the provision of SSA in the context of Right to Education Act, Bogadia committee discerns its concern over this issue in a fragmented manner. While laying down provision for enhancing accessibility of education for disable children, it has stated ‘Investment in teacher training is key to success of education of children with disabilities. Both pre-service and in-service training need to given special attention to building capacity of teachers for addressing the needs of children with disabilities. The need to enable teachers was felt again

when the issue of inclusion of out-of-school children in the mainstream classes was raised. Again it was felt that teachers need special training in this regard in order to deal with children of different abilities and having different pace of learning.’

‘The integration of out-of-school children in age-appropriate classes will significantly alter the nature of the classroom space. Teachers should be enabled as a regular part of their work to be inclusive and be able to deal with children with different abilities and learning at different pace. The teachers training programme itself should include this aspect, so that all teachers have a basic competence.’

The committee also felt that implementation of RTE is totally difficult without restructuring the teacher training programme meant for the elementary stage. It is reflected in the following lines - ‘Systemic conditions are affected by the quality of training with which teachers are inducted into the system and the support given to them on a sustained basis to maintain their motivation and academic capacity. The implementation of RTE Act greatly depends on significant improvements in pre-service training for the elementary stage. A major systemic obstacle to overcome in this context is the continuing practice in all States of breaking-up the elementary stage into primary and upper-primary for the purpose of teacher training and for deciding teacher’s emoluments.’

By sharing the vision of curriculum, committee has showed its utter distrust over the capabilities of the teachers to create an ideal learning environment where the child should feel free. While raising this issue, it has also been realized that behind the prejudice practices of the teachers in the classroom somewhere their ignorance and insensitivity of the socio-cultural setting are also responsible. For example it been stated in this context that ‘Neither the administrators nor supervisory authorities seem to care about the classroom ecology which evolves around a teacher who is, in most cases, poorly motivated and even more poorly trained to look after a large number of children, many of whom belong to socio-cultural backgrounds about which the teacher has little knowledge and special sensitivity.’ The uniform offering of curriculum to all irrespective of considering the differences may be cited as one of the prime reason for having prejudices in the teachers.’ As a solution, teacherorientation mechanism is required to create an ideal environment.

Appraisal Of The Role Of The State For Promotion Of Innovative Practices: Prior starting the analyses, it is worth to settle down the term innovation, innovative teaching etc. Etymologically, the word “Innovation”, is derived from the Latin word “Innovare” which means to change something into something new. It is defined as “the process of making changes to something established by

introducing something new.” It applies to “...radical or incremental changes to products, processes or services.” On the other hand **Innovative teaching** is a proactive approach to integrate new **teaching strategies** and **methods** into a classroom. Research on education supports the benefits that certain processes, tools and **methods** have on learning. **Innovative teachers** implement new **methods** before they appeal to mainstream educators. With this familiarity, if we ponder over the role of state in promoting innovative practices, then the dichotomy is very difficult to avoid between aspiration and ground reality. Both SSA and RTE are broadly expecting from the teachers to transform their pedagogic approaches and perspectives for the teaching-learning scenario in the classroom. But state is busy in overhauling the curriculum more than bring systemic changes in the field. The extension of B.ED and M.ED programme’s duration from one year to two year is the glaring example in this regard. This change is expected from the pre-service teachers to emerge as better reflector about the ground reality but on ground teachers are hardly having time to enjoy innovation, sometime because of overcrowded classes, sometimes because of administrative hurdle and sometimes due to demotivating environment. In the reference of the SSA and RTE, teachers should be more participatory and democratic in their dealing with the children as well as with the surrounded community. Along with that it is also expected from them to shift their approach from teacher centric to learner centric. But teachers from their pre-service training to in-service level are finding it difficult for this shifting due to inner inhibitions, urgency to complete the syllabus or having idiosyncrasies for teaching. It is quite evident through all these deliberations that state over the years, despite of its regular over emphasis on universalization of elementary education has neither been successful in achieving that goal to an optimum level nor could enlarge its vision to encompass the secondary and higher secondary levels of education as its active

matter of concern. The whole thinking of implementing the innovative practices got stuck with the elementary education only. Even the latter also could not yield the positive results. Merely expressing concern is not the solution, we have to evolve those pedagogies which can equip the classroom teachers to handle the issues emerging in the context of right to education Act along with international trend of globalization and liberalization.

Conclusion: On the light of the above observations, the breakthrough is discernible at the elementary level while implementing the SSA where it has tried to reinterpret the capacity building of the teachers by giving them opportunity to participate in framing of curriculum, equipping according to the technological demands and several other similar activities. But these attempts by the one segment of the educational endeavour cannot be termed sufficient. There is a need to bring revolutionary changes which should be more oriented about the pedagogical transaction rather than providing abstract and irrelevant theoretical input. Over the last few years, the range of innovative practices needed for the teacher preparation programmes have been broadly enlisted. But their virtual execution is still pending. Due to lack of motivation, infrastructure, expertise, commercial interest, stereotype perception in society about teaching, lackadaisical attitude about the state to evolve the uniform and standardized criteria about teacher trainee are several factors which cumulatively hampering the prospect to apply innovative practices on a priority basis in the teacher preparation programmes. Here it is worthwhile to conclude again by citing the reference of Bogadia committee which stated that *In the context of implementing RTE a holistic approach would have to be undertaken whereby the curriculum, textbooks, teaching-learning materials, the use of space in the classroom, infrastructure, assessment and teacher trainings are looked at holistically and mutually reinforce each other.*

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