An Analysis of Pandemic 2020 impacts on Primary, Secondary and College Education in Urban and Rural India

Meenakshi Paul
Department of Economics, Jadavpur University

Abstract:- COVID-19 has an unprecedented impact on the education in India and worldwide affecting a huge number of students across states, class, caste, gender and region. School and college closures impacted not only students and teachers and families but also had far reaching societal and economic consequences. But the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic taught us that change is the only constant and thus is unavoidable. It has worked as a catalyst for educational institutions to grow and opt for new technical platforms which have not been used anytime before. On the other hand the shutting down of schools and the decision of shifting traditional classrooms to digital platforms has not only enhanced learning inequality among children, but also plucked a considerable number of children out of school due to the digital divide. This paper highlights both positive and negative impacts of COVID on primary, secondary and higher education. It puts forward the struggles of the rural and urban areas separately to cope up with the pandemic and discusses the measures taken by Indian Government to provide seamless education in the country and also provides a set of long-term measures that should be adopted and implemented in the due course of time to mitigate losses and bridge gaps.

Keywords:- COVID-19, Education in India, Digitisation, Govt. of India, Measures.

I. INTRODUCTION

On 12 January 2020, the World Health organisation confirmed that novel Coronavirus was the cause of a respiratory illness in a cluster of people in Wuhan, Hubei, China. On 30 January, India reported its first case of COVID-19 in Thrissur, Kerala, which rose to three cases by 3 February; all were students returning from Wuhan(Covid19_Wikipedia) .A pandemic is defined as "occurring over a wide geographic area and affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population". WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11 as cases increased exponentially affecting about more than 4.5 million people worldwide(WHO website).It has affected the country's economy at large due to demand and supply gaps, changes in jobs, work types, education, industry skills demand/expectations and so on. A global coordinated effort was needed to stop the further spread of the virus enforcing social distancing and complete lockdown. In India, 1.5 million schools and colleges were closed due to the pandemic and lockdowns in 2020 which has impacted 247 million children who were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools and 3.2 million college goers(UNICEF).Classes were suspended and all examinations of schools, colleges and universities including entrance tests, internships, placements were postponed indefinitely. It fastened the adoption of digital technologies to provide education through internet, though creating many challenges but opportunities for the educational institutes to strengthen their infrastructure. However online learning is definitely not an option for all as only 1 in 4 children has access to smartphones and stable internet connection. Survey shows that only 37.6 million children across 16 states are continuing their education through various technical initiatives such as online classrooms and radio programmes etc (UNICEF). Widespread unemployment and income loss also paralysed the ability of many households to pay in order to keep their children in schools. Despite all these, mental health and well-being of children is also a crucial concern, while psycho-social support from teachers, parents and caregivers is also a priority.

II. OBJECTIVES

This research paper focuses on the following objectives:

1. Highlighting the various positive impacts of COVID on Indian Education system.
2. Enlisting the negative impacts of the pandemic on the field of education and health in India.
3. Discuss the measures and programmes undertaken by the state and central government during this pandemic to reinvent the education ecosystem.
4. Provide some suggestions to carry out educational activities during this pandemic.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data presented in the current study has been taken from various authentic websites like wikipedia, UNESCO, Statista and Tarang. Information has been collected from various national and international reports, journals,e-contents related to the impact of COVID on the health, education system and culture on students of the country. Figures have also been taken from reliable sources like UNICEF, the Hindu and Economic Times.

IV. DISCUSSION ON IMPACT OF COVID

The ongoing pandemic has largely affected the lives of millions of students. Students faced an urgent need to shift from classroom programmes to an online mode of education. However , given the diverse socio-economic scenario of India this transition is not as smooth as we might assume it to be. In the case of India we have to bring into consideration that almost 7% of our population is under the poverty line. It is difficult for them to earn 2 meals a day, keep aside buying smartphones so that their children may continue classes through online mode. Covid manipulated the working system and induced many changes in the World and it definitely took some time for everyone to settle down and accept the new normal. Change is the only constant and we all have to accept that E-learning seems an implementable solution at the moment to fill up the void created due to the absence of classroom learning. Although online education can never replace classroom programmes due to personalised nature of attention and face to face interactions, it may however be effective in breaking the brick and mortar system of education. Institutions have adopted a blended learning technique and encouraged teachers and students to be technology savvy.
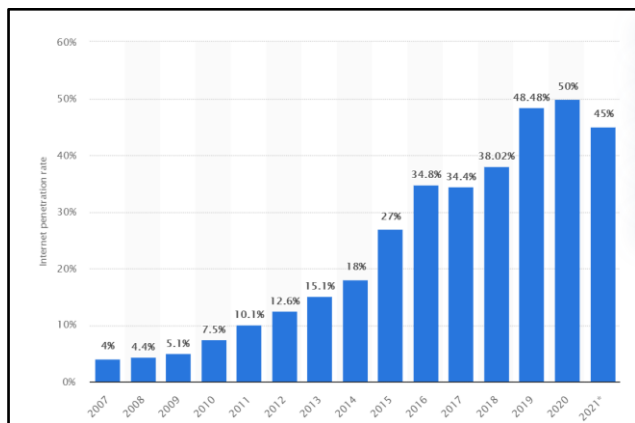

Chart 1
Source- STATISTA website

Blended learning- As data from chart 1 reveals , the amount of internet consumed has increased by 50% in 2020 which is the highest in the last few years as soft technology, online webinars, virtual class rooms, teleconferencing, digital exams and assessments became common phenomenon, where otherwise we might have merely mentioned them — or they might have come into practical use many years later or more. Instead of slipping into an airplane mode when faced with a hostile and difficult environment, the teachers have come out blazing by meeting the challenges promptly. Whether it is getting used to technology or adopting new ways of teaching, the teachers have stood up and delivered their best. Classes are conducted through various virtual platforms like zoom, google meet, Skype whereas notes and lectures are distributed through whatsapp, Youtube, gmail, google classroom, telegram etc.

Digital literacy- This is indeed a great opportunity for universities and colleges to start improving the quality of the teaching materials that is used in the knowledge delivering process. Blended learning has emerged as a new format of learning and hence there will be a push to find new ways to design and deliver quality content especially when we know that the learning management systems will bring about more openness and transparency in academics curriculum. More virtual meetings, online competitions must also be organised by schools and colleges to improve the speaking and communication skills of students and thereby boost their confidence. Some students may take time to adjust to this new system of learning so there is a requirement to figure out how to create social presence during the web course. Some tools can be used to make the presence felt by the participants of the online course such as asking student's personal information, encouraging interaction between students, supporting video communications so that the facial expressions of the students and their voices are also clearly heard and seen.
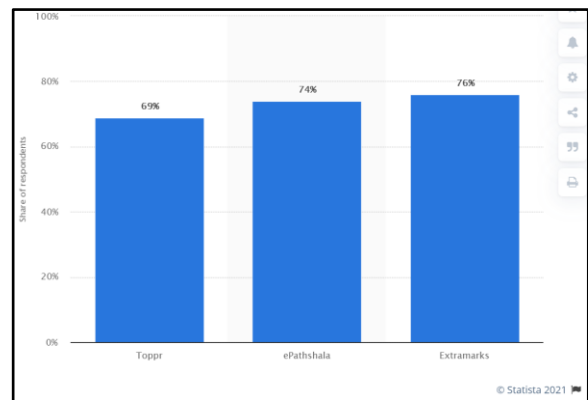

Chart 2
Source- STATISTA website

As we can see from the data collected from Statista 2021 presented in chart 2 , there has been a surge in the percentage of students using online platforms like Toppr by 69%, ePathshala by 74% and Extramarks by 76%. Platforms like Ek-Step, Classdojo are providing an easy interaction interface and are updated with educational videos that students can access any time of the day. It has been a boon for online learning platforms like Coursera, Udemy, Tencent classroom with bolstering profits. From the date of announcing free live classes on its Think and Learn app, BYJUs has seen a 200% increase in the number of new students who are actively using the application. Khan academy which provided teachers with an app to help track students progress in each lesson has seen an 80% increase in stakeholders. These digital contents like powerpoint presentations, video lectures helped in igniting interest and passion in children towards science and experiments like never before. The Forbes article research found that online classes are more likely to present materials that are more attention-grabbing and multimedia formats that may be better suited to today's students. But technical trade skills or medical courses and courses related to science require proper laboratory work and workshops which has become impossible to organise or attend during this pandemic.
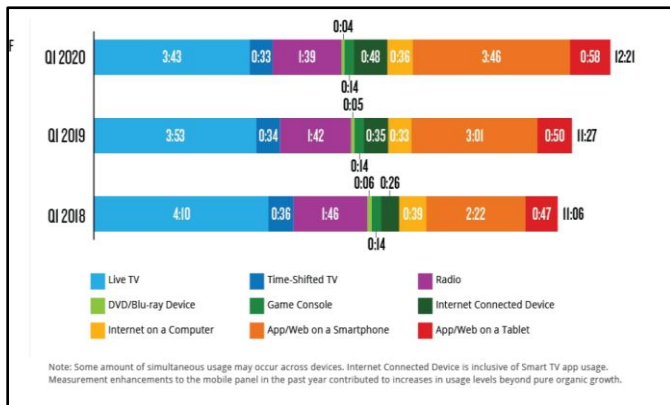
Chart 3
Source- Comscore Report

Increased screen time - According to the Comscore report presented in chart 3, media consumption has risen to more than 60% worldwide and an increase of 114% in internet consumption among children of age 12-18 has been noticed. The Nielson report says that an 18 year old adult previously spending 11.27 hours per day on average in 2019 now spends 12.21 hours per day with approx 9 hours spent on internet surfing and attending virtual classes. Many parents are concerned about the health hazards because their children are spending numerous hours watching a screen. The sudden increment in screen time is one of the biggest concerns and disadvantages of online learning. Researchers have proved that kids who spend a lot of time on screens are more likely to have problems like excessive itching and redness in eye, weight related issues and also trouble in reading and writing. They are also more likely to point out a good range of other mental and psychological health issues. Students are also likely to develop bad posture and other physical problems thanks to staying hunched ahead of a screen for several hours at a stretch. Yet right now, screens are the only safe way for many young people to learn or socialize .A good solution to the present would be to offer the scholars plenty of breaks from the screen to refresh their mind and their body. It is very important to identify that attending these virtual classes may be stressful so communication must be adopted as a tool when handling the crisis. So parents having open conversations with their wards enable free flowing discussions which can serve as a stress buster for the children according to UNICEF guidelines. Connecting with distant relatives over video calls will also help the child feel loved. Most importantly, it is important to emit hope among the children, let them believe that scientists are working towards a Covid free world and things will improve and recover eventually.

Collaborative work- There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take new forms and can even be monetized. As advantages, the flexibility of schedules and spaces stands out, but collaborative work between teachers and students with participation and interaction through forums, chat, and other tools requires great amount of responsibility, discipline and organization as well as a high level of individualized follow-up and attention by the teacher. Covid-19 has therefore endowed bigger responsibilities upon individuals, institutions and

states to mitigate inequality – both in the education that students receive and in the methods that education can be used as a tool of minimizing socioeconomic inequality by improving social mobility among everyone.

Democratization in the classroom- "Please make my child sit on the front bench of the class and give him/her more attention," is the first request that goes to the class teacher from the parent. It is as if students who sit in the front benches get more value. This brings to our notice that a beautiful thing about online classes is that the Back Bench is passé and all students get a front row seat and equal attention. Online mode of teaching and learning has brought about a democratization in the classroom setting and removed prejudices in a way that is very much constructive in the learning method. And it is important that it stays this way even when students start arriving in the classrooms once things begin to normalise.

Challenges in teaching- Online learning has also affected the teachers since most of them are teaching in this mode for the first time, and have limited or no training to do so. Hence, the quality of teaching is affected. Only 17 percent of teachers in government schools reported that they received training to conduct online classes; in private schools, this stood at 43.8 per cent(World Economic Forum).Many teachers, in low fee private schools and also contractual teachers in government schools are going through traumatic period of crisis and uncertainty ; as many of them are experiencing irregular salaries, salary cuts or even job loss due to the pandemic .Along with online classes, teachers are also burdened with COVID duty(family members may have been affected) and this has severely impacted their health and well-being. This lack of training or need for reskilling during the pandemic is evident from the fact that there has been a huge leap in search phrases like "how to teach online during pandemic ", "best online teaching platforms to teach", " helpful online teaching tools", and " new online teaching techniques"(Mishra,2020). UNICEF survey revealed that 66% of teachers working in our country has experienced longer working hours extending to more than 20 hours a week.Regarding school attendance, 15% of all primary and secondary school teachers in the private and Government schools reported that all their students were attending classes, while 16 per cent reported their students were attending online classes only half the time. 37% per cent of all primary and secondary school teachers reported that students were indulging in the same standard of work before remote learning, while the rest disagreed. However, the results were not all bad , with some teachers reporting students who are easily distracted or disruptive in the classroom, now engaged with their work a lot better when working independently at home.

Global interaction and academic activities -As things have shifted to an online mode, students are getting opportunities to interact with peers from around the globe . Many International colleges and universities are offering short term online certified courses, meaning that learners do not have to relocate to attend such schools or partake in these activities. Teachers and students had to undergo extensive

reskilling to cope with this new system of learning. There has been an exponential increase of learners of online courses like machine learning, app development, film making, foreign language courses, python, java, marketing. As educators continuously react to the market situation and try continuously to gain new required skills, unknowingly they become an adaptable force that can shift, adopt and bend with any changes which may rise in the job market .As a result, new and young employees will have a greater storage of knowledge and efficiently react to what the industry and what the market demands, leveraging their skills to carry across murky waters. However the academic curriculum of many schools and colleges have been disrupted, forcing them to either cancel the exams or postpone it. As lockdown continues, students are suffering a loss of the full academic year of 2020-21 which is is not only degrading the possibility of continuing education but also students will be facing much anxiety and difficulty in resuming schooling again after this huge time gap. Schools, colleges and other educational institutes have cancelled all board exams including for class 10 and 12, entrance and recruitment exams, as well as yearly or semester based University exams, based on guidelines received from controlling bodies like the CBSE, ICSE, or UGC. Many students who wished to study abroad are now canceling their plans or postponing them for an indefinite period . According to a survey conducted by PIE nEWS only 40% of the 2020 aspirants who were willing to study abroad are not likely to cancel their plans. On the other hand 50% of the aspirants are sure about canceling their plans altogether while the rest 10% are likely to see how the current situation may evolve. A survey conducted by SIKSHA clearly shows that there is also a change in the students' choice of country due to the current situation. It is also difficult for the aspirants to get an educational loan unless they have proof of onsite classes of their respective foreign colleges. So it may not be feasible for Indian students to attend online classes in the foreign universities now because of the obvious time difference, people living in the countryside may not have a stable 3G connection, forget about 4G, electricity cuts and above all paying 15 to 20 thousand dollars for online classes is not worth when almost same learning opportunity is offered here with little amount of money.

Affordability- A tiny advantage of online education is the reduction in financial costs. We have to agree that online education is much more accessible and affordable as compared to physical learning when you are technically equipped. This is because online learning removes the extra costs of student transportation, student meals, and more importantly, real estate. Additionally, all the course or study materials are available on online platforms , thus creating a paperless learning atmosphere which is more affordable, while also being beneficial to nature. Since online classes can be attended from home or location of choice, there are fewer chances of students missing out on important lessons. In addition to that, many colleges are also allowing the online degree and certificate-seekers to apply for financial aid, including grants on the basis of need and scholarships on the basis of merit.
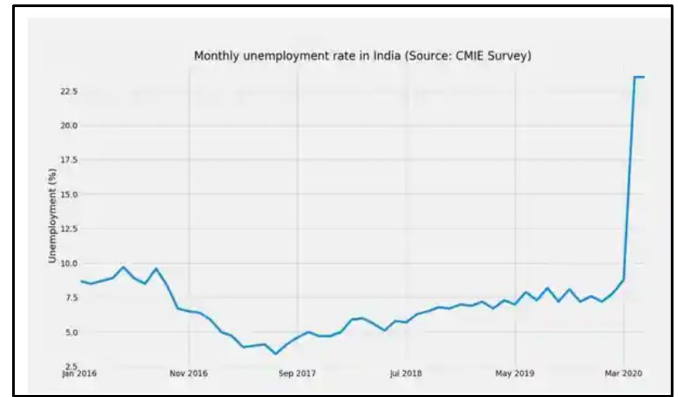

Chart 4
Source- CMIE survey

Reduced employment rate- As we see from the graph in chart 4 that the pandemic has pushed up the unemployment rate in India to more than 22.5 percent with the highest unemployment rate of 23.5 percent in May 2020.As many as 41 lakh youth in India lost their jobs due to the Covid-19 pandemic with majority of the job losses in the construction and farming sector. In India, two-thirds of firm-degree training and 3 quarters of internships have been interrupted in the course of the pandemic. In an already gloomy job marketplace with developing unemployment rates, a majority of the graduates are probable to discover it extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to find suitable jobs. Students who had refused the idea of pursuing a higher education in favour of jobs have begun regretting their decisions. For many, the possibility of employment after their education was vital in their selection to pursue luxurious courses. Many took out education loans to finish their research and studies and pinned hopes on the roles they might get, to assist them pay off the loans and ease the monetary burden on families. According to the World Bank, in India, 12 million people have a chance of slipping below the poverty line due to pandemic-related job losses(World Bank website).

India is the homeland of about 1.3 billion people. Apart from geographical and physical differences there are also social, economic, cultural and political differences. The effect of the pandemic has also been different on different people .Though in the urban areas people are complaining about working from home, salary cuts, absence of cultural meetups, there are more grave issues in the rural areas which are going almost unrecognised. The New Normal has been adapted by citylife easily but what about the lakhs of people in rural areas facing the worst consequences of the virus. People are being pushed to poverty with shortage of jobs and work. With the help of modern technology and educated parents, children residing in metro cities, metropolitan cities amidst abundant scope and good infrastructure the transition was smooth. But the biggest concern still lies in the rural areas which have seen a huge increase in dropout rates from primary and secondary schools, increased gender violence and excruciating digital divide with no means of revival. There is a huge gap between urban and rural educational systems for which the students in rural areas are facing

difficulties not just related to online classes but added work pressure and responsibilities at home.

Digital divide-   As learning has moved to online mode, the challenge has magnified for students in the rural areas as they have a to poor accessibility to electricity, smartphone, computers and the internet. Only 4% of the population in the rural areas has an access to computers as against 23% of the Urban population of students above 5 years of age(World Economic Forum). In rural households, only 10% of students have the ability to operate computers against 32.4% of students in urban households. In a 2017-18 survey, the Ministry of Rural Development found that only 47% of Indian households receive more than 12 hours of electricity and more than 36% of schools in India operate without electricity(CRY research). This suggests that while students who are from families with better means of living and have educated and supporting parents can easily bridge the transition to remote learning,on the other hand the students who are from underprivileged backgrounds are likely to succumb to inefficiency either because of the inaccessibility of the technology or the low education of their parents to guide them through tech-savvy applications. Between the years 2013 and 2017, the ratio of Data: Voice expenditure also went from 45:55 to 84:16(Wikipedia). Having online classes on a regular basis definitely adds up to a cost implication as parents have to bear the cost of internet and data services .

Dropout rate-   In India, several experts have voiced concerns over the rise in dropout rates in schools as new socio-economic dynamic forms in a post Covid-19 world(MHRD,vol-3). According to 2015-16 estimates of UNICEF, 8.5 percent of enrolled children drop-out before finishing primary school and 19.1 percent before completing secondary school education in India. The number, however, rose alarmingly to 57 percent at higher secondary level of education. The rate of dropout among children from the Scheduled Castes (SCs)/ Scheduled Tribes (STs)/ Other Backward Classes (OBCs) has risen, especially in secondary classes. The dropout rate in June 2020 has increased by 15.6 percent for the general category, 22.5 percent, 26.9 percent and 20.04 percent for SCs, STs and OBCs, respectively as January 21 data shows(UNICEF).
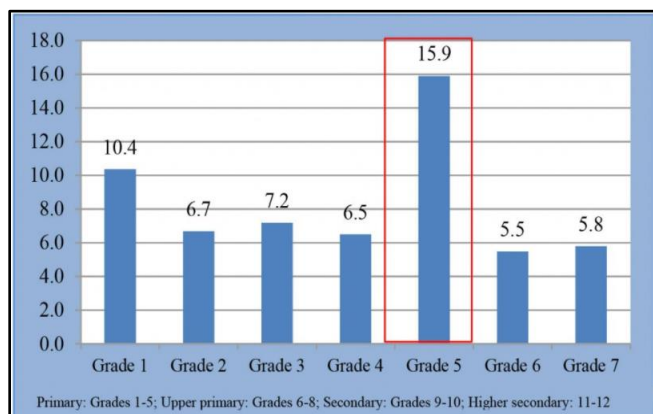

Chart 5
Source- UNSAID website

In chart 5,   UNSAID data reveals that during this pandemic, dropout rate has increased in all primary and secondary classes with a maximum percentage surge of nearly 16% dropout rate in class 5. Drop out from schools is considered to be the end of a long term procedure of academic disengagement, which has negative impact on life-earnings, employment and physical health. The increased dropout rate can be blamed on the worsening financial condition of the parents and households which have lost jobs, forcing children to chip in to bring some extra income . The primary reasons for dropping out of schools are financial and health issues, migration and lack of interest among parents and students and of course now adds the technical and digital divide. Regressive gender norms, patriarchal social norms and restriction on mobility of girls restricts their way to school further increases the risk of dropping out for girls during this crisis in a larger magnitude.
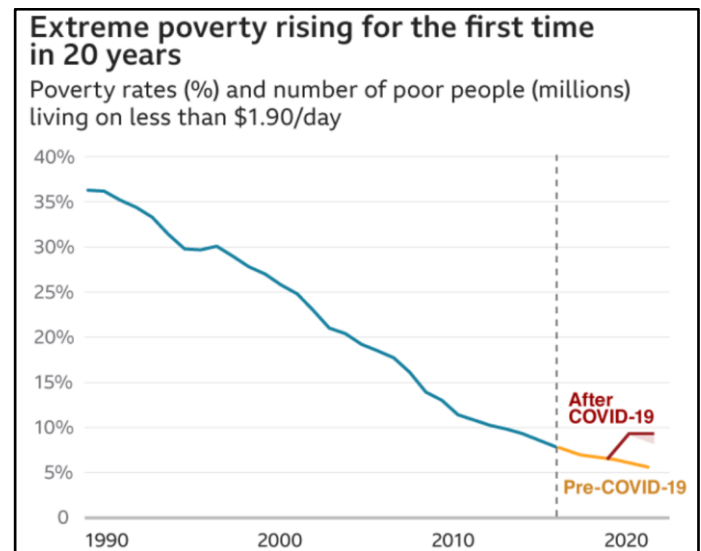

Chart 6
Source- Times of India report 2020

Poverty and child labour- The graph(chart 6) indicates that poverty rate is rising for the first time in 20 years and this has a direct relation with increase in child labour rate. A rise in poverty from billions of people living in slums, informal settlements and inadequate housing merged with declining remittances and business failures directly impacted their children's education. Child labour not only affects the childs ability to get into school but also has long lasting effect on their ability to learn effectively and develop cognitive skills. Schools are considered educational hubs where students learnt not only to read and write but also means to secure their future, social engagement, to break stereotypical orthodoxal barriers and lead an honest, judicious and independent lives. But closure of schools during this pandemic and digital divide pushed more and more children into a loophole forcing them to work instead of focusing on studies hence raising the cruel child labour and broadning gender gaps. Surveys across different states of the country have concluded that there is a general trend of an increase in child labour rate and also a decrease in the number of children going to schools when there is a prolonged period

of crisis and the ongoing time is one such period**.** A survey conducted by a local NGO in West Bengal in 2020 has found that child labour among school-going children(who were previously going to school) has increased by 105 percent during the pandemic with dropout rates being 67 per cent in rural and 55 per cent in urban areas(Indian Express, 2021). As the migrant labourers have returned to the rural communities, household poverty as a result of lack of income, security and remittances primarily contributed to a rise in child labour. The percentage of child labourers among girls in India exceeded those than among the boys. While among the girls the number increased by 113 per cent, among the boys the increase was 94.7 per cent(CRY website).Girls in poor and vulnerable households face increased domestic duties adding to their inability to access online education mainly because of inaccessibility to the internet and gadgets and because the male child and his teaching are prioritized even today in patriarchal societies. Those already working had to do so for longer hours or even under worsening conditions. Girls are expected to perform additional household chores and agricultural works to support their families. With such low access to technology in rural India, digital schooling has further disengaged girls from education. There already exists a pro male bias in the intra household allocation of expenditure cutting of sources of daughters education. With 1.6 million girls aged 11 to 14 years currently are out of school, the pandemic could disproportionately impact girls further by putting them at risk of early marriage, early pregnancy, poverty, trafficking and violence(Wikipedia).The sharp increase in child labour during the pandemic, especially in Northern India is also evident from the increase in the number of calls to helplines.

Loss of nutrition- The Mid Day Meal (MDM) scheme has proven to be a significant part of the diet of Indian children. It is one of the most important interventions performed by the Government of India with multiple benefits such as lowering hunger among students , increasing school attendance, and addressing malnutrition. As the schools are shut down across the country, the school feeding programme could no longer provide the much-needed free lunch to 115.9 million children who are currently enrolled under the scheme of MDM(CRY website). Hence covid is no longer a healthcare issue but also is directly affecting lives of millions of children from underprivileged society leading to malnutrition. Even before the pandemic, only 50 percent rural and 21.4 percent urban children reported that a free mid-day meal was provided by the local government schools. As on May 1, 2020, only 15 of the 36 states/UTs had taken steps to adapt to the MDM scheme. A survey by Save the Children reports that about 39 per cent of households whose children were going to schools, did not receive MDM during lockdown between April and June 2020(Niti Aayog).A survey by the Population Council in Bihar shows that 29 per cent received cash instead of cooked food or dry ration. A survey conducted by UNICEF in June 2020 in 15 states in India, revealed that out of 7,235 families surveyed ,only three-fifths of the families received midday meals-related compensation for their children(UNICEF).Mid-Day meal students are demanding

Rs. 1,000 per month and good space to continue their learning . The failure of some of the states to adequately distribute meals has driven many children to work as rag pickers during the lockdown to earn money to eat food. Several key nutrition-specific interventions for children delivered through national health mission, included immunisation, supplementation whose absence during covid may increase child malnutrition and as estimated 6000 children could die everyday because of disruption in health services. This not only prevents physical growth of children but also their mental and intellectual abilities. The persisting food insecurity and increase in food prices are not only impacting children's long term health but also reducing their cognitive skills and abilities.

V. INITIATIVES AND SUGGESTIONS

At this time when urban India is witnessing a boom in online study and debating whether to enroll their wards in coding classes or online abacus classes ,in Rural India 2020 and 2021 has been a huge leap backward. If the nation wants to improve its economic and social well being, the only way it can be done is by improving the education , health and wealth of the poor and marginalised sections of the society. Survey showed that about two third of the children in rural areas of India did not receive books and study materials during the lockdown of 2020. Though children in cities quickly shifted to online mode of study , it was not a viable solution for the rural school going children as most of them had no access to smartphones or even electricity. To achieve and fulfill the dream of skilled India ,there has to be an upgraded focus on the education system of rural India especially during this period of crisis. There is a need to provide a holistic approach to ensure quality education at the basic grassroot level. Every village has its own unique challenges ,so local communities and the Government should work closely with people in order to get a detailed analysis of the problems.

The Ministry of Education had several meetings with states and UTs to come up with solutions and initiatives to ensure that students don't lag behind in their studies. The Ministry has developed a rich variety of online resources that are available on a variety of platforms like Diksha, e-Pathshala, Swayam, Nishta and others. These platforms are offering teachers and students with engaging learning materials relevant to the prescribed school curriculum. They have more than 80,000 e-content items in multiple Indian languages, catering to Grades 1-12. During the lockdown period these contents have been accessed nearly 215 million times (Pravat,2020b).SWAYAM is a country wide online training platform which hoisted greater than 1900 guides covering schools (class IX to XII) And Higher Education (both UG and PG) in all topics which includes engineering, humanities and social sciences, regulation and management courses.

To ensure fairness in virtual learning, TV Channels/Radio are being utilised to reach out to the toughest and marginalised areas. The 32 DTH TV channels are aired on Swayam Prabha. These channels are open for

viewing throughout the country with the help of DD Free Dish Set Box and Antenna(UNICEF). The same are being promoted with unique emphasis on college students in far off areas. 12 channels will be solely marked for School training (Class 1 to 12). Swayam Prabha Channels pertaining to high school education will be given for two hours in a day to every State/UT.The Union authorities is banking hugely on the Bharatnet project, which objectives are to offer broadband to 250,000 gram panchayats within the country via optic fibre to enhance connectivity(Misra,2020).

In April 2020, the Union HRD Minister announced that in the wake of COVID-19, the centre which previously allocated 7300 crore under the mid day meal scheme now has enhanced its allocation to 8100 crore (for procurement of pulses, vegetable, oil, spices and fuel). In a recent order passed by MHRD, it has asked states/UTs to provide pulses, oil, rice, cereals etc. along with food grains as Food Security Allowance (FSA) to eligible children instead of transferring the cooking cost to children / their parent's bank accounts.

Some school teachers in West Bengal have taken up a unique initiative of teaching the students especially of tribal, rural and backward regions who can barely afford smartphones. The idea was first brought up by the WB government through which classes are conducted under open sky, in vacant temple premises or even under trees. Lovingly called by the locals "lockdown schools" , these open classes began from Unlock 1 in the first week of June and made sure that distancing was maintained with proper use of mask, soap, sanitizer and water(The Hindu).In light of COVID, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has conducted a nationwide online interactive training for Anganwadi workers. The Odisha government in partnership with UNICEF has started 'Ghare Ghare Arunima',which is a home-based course of study for children who are enrolled in Anganwadi centres that are closed due to COVID-19(Misra,2020). This programme lays emphasis on reaching out to parents with a focus on keeping the children engaged in a host of meaningful calendar activities that will keep them stimulated and improve their psychological well-being.

In Spite of all these measures taken by the State and Central Government there is still a huge gap in rural and urban education. Still every 6 out of 10 students are dropping out of school, one in every 3 children are facing the brunt of child labour. So are these initiates at all fruitful? We may say to some extent but not entirely. If these interactive trainings, free channels, and allocation of cooking cost are saving the lives of 10 children and are beneficial to 10 children, these initiatives are successful as they are helping those 10 children to continue their studies. But this brings us to think about the rest. With schools closed and jobs lost, education in rural areas has taken a backseat in the list of priority of illiterate or barely-literate parents .Immediate measures are essential to continue learning in government schools and universities. Open source online learning solutions and easy Management Software should be adopted so teachers can conduct teaching online. The DIKSHA platform, with reach across all states in India, must further be strengthened to ensure accessibility of learning to the students. In a situation where most rural families are scrambling for even one square meal, purchasing smartphones and internet packs are considered nothing but luxuries which only well off people can afford. Government must try its best to provide poor households with full time electricity and smartphones and bring those areas under proper internet and network coverage. Officials must be appointed in each and every village to help the children learn how to use these smartphones, access online study materials and interact with their teachers. There is a need to build low-tech, free of cost and gender- sensitive learning approaches in the education response to COVID-19. The Government should prioritise the distribution of learning materials, accessible to particularly disabled girls and girls without access to the internet. Response and recovery planning must target girls in particular to advance gender equality in education. This can be done by prioritizing their safety and protection, ensuring participation for adolescent girls, intensifying community mobilization by including pregnant girls and those who were out of school before the COVID-19 crisis. Though schools are closed because of safety issues, classes in the rural areas should never have stopped, as even a month gap of schooling discourages them to further continue their education. Initiatives must be taken immediately to begin classes with small groups of children with regular counselling of both parents and their wards. Parents of poor and vulnerable households must be encouraged to help their children to continue their education. Government should compensate the families who have lost jobs or are receiving minimum wages with cash on hand , the only way to uplift them from this grave scenario. Part time teachers must be enrolled to set up neighbourhood learning centres in open areas, task forces at the local level could help to prevent child marriages. Rural libraries must be set up as learning centres as soon as possible. Students must be encouraged or to some extent lured to continue their education despite all the challenges.

VI. CONCLUSION

This is the time that has been never dreamt of. The pandemic is bullying around the globe, leaving no space untouched and unturned . It certainly has left a very strong and fateful impact in the field of education in India. To fight back the serious disruptions caused by the pandemic leading to a shutdown of all educational activities, educational institutes, the country embraced the digital mode of learning as an answer to fill the void left by classroom teaching. But owing to the vast digital divide in India, almost 79% of students were separated from education as 55,000 villages in India did not have mobile network coverage and in rural India only 4 percent households had access to the internet. If the Indian education system realises the need for transition to online learning without creating a digital divide, the Centre and state governments must increase the spending on education to at least 6 percent of GDP. At present, central and state

allocations to the education sector is a smaller amount than 3 per cent. Ironically, the education ministry's allowance for digital e-learning was reduced to Rs 469 crore in 2020-21,the year Covid struck-from Rs 604 crore in the previous year. India should develop strategic moves to ensure that each and every child could get sustainable access to learning during pandemic COVID-19(WHO). The Indian policies must include various individuals from diversified backgrounds including remote regions, marginalised and minority groups for effective delivery of education.

As per the present scenario, there is an unsound uncertainty when schools and colleges are going to reopen. After a year long home confinement, Govt is finally gearing up to reopen schools and colleges in some States with proper precautions in a staggered manner keeping in mind the best interests of students and with an emphasis on promoting regular hand washing and hygiene practices of students, teachers and other school staff and sanitisation of school building, with adequate supplies and facilities as well as maintaining physical distancing strategies. Everyone has many queries and questions: When will life be normal? Is the vaccine effective? But life continues to move forward and so does education. We sense the good damage done to the sector of education during this era of the coronavirus, though we may also count COVID-19 as a blessing in disguise. The pandemic has opened doors to new opportunities like digitalization and adoption of modern technology. The situation demands an update in infrastructure and technical knowledge to face events like these in the future. Covid has been an unexpected and unanticipated guest and is staying longer than we had foreseen. The impact has been cataclysmic. Covid has impacted the education system of the country in ways many of which might have a long-lasting impact. In order that whenever normalcy resumes, it might not just be a replacement normal, but it might even be a high normal.

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