

10

Primary Education in Ladakh — Then and Now

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Ladakh is a part of Jammu and Kashmir, covering almost half the state area, yet conversely the population density is only 2 per cent of the whole state. The geopolitical fact of Ladakh is such that it is considered one of the most difficult terrains of the world. The area is one of the most neglected regions of Jammu and Kashmir.

As per government information, Ladakh seems to have achieved socio-economic development to a great extent but serious insight is needed to analyse the ground reality of education system in Ladakh. The education scenario in Ladakh has undergone a myriad changes in the last few years or so, including the mushrooming of many private schools, forsaking the government aided schools, the cut-throat competition, etc. Throughout Ladakh, schools are well distributed and 75 per cent of them provide only primary education. Primary education

means the basic education which is imparted in childhood and India has already made it compulsory in 1990.

Nevertheless, Ladakh as compared to many other districts of the state and India as a whole, is a lot better. The collective effort of many people of Ladakh has resulted in the setting up of various institutions to improve the education system. A few of them aimed to renovate the primary education system and improve government schools in Ladakh. Private schools and institutions provide alternatives and the main focus is to tackle the root of the problem of educational failure and to reform the education system. The basic concern is towards quality education. The criteria for quality education are not determined by the fact that someone scored high percentage or more than other. One of the major limitations of quality education involves critical and

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independent thinking. These are necessary to facilitate learning, which needs to be processed through training teachers at all levels.

In 1973, a local Society called “Lamdon Social Welfare Society” was opened for the purpose of providing Western education in Ladakh. Later, with support from HH Dalai Lama and some international organisations, the school has developed to accommodate students from in and around Ladakh by opening several branches at different places. Leh is the centre with the name Lamdon Model Senior Secondary School and rest with Lamdon Model School. The main focus lies in preserving Ladakhi tradition and culture.

Similarly, Moravian Mission School has been playing an important role in the education sector of Ladakh since 1992 and is managed by Balaji Venkateshwara Education Society. The school takes into account the needs of the children from far away places of Ladakh for better education.

In 1994, for the first time there was a bottom-up initiative taken by the Student’s Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL). They began Operation New Hope (ONH), a movement to offer ‘ethnically suitable and locally appropriate education’ and make government schools more functional and useful.

Back then, getting an education meant getting enrolled in the nearest elementary school of one’s neighbourhood which was usually

a government aided school since there were only two or three private schools in Ladakh, particularly Leh. The students would go through the prescribed syllabus for the particular session and not deviate from the same, doing nothing new from it and as a result learning nothing new. Although the private schools like Lamdon Model Senior Secondary School (the one where I studied) did conduct few extra-curricular activities and few teachers even went to the extent of using the then modern audio/visual techniques to explain a particular theory or a chapter specially Science and English Literature. It did help to form a vague idea about a particular concept or theory, but in those days the generalisation of concept was not very common since India was getting introduced to the idea of globalisation. Back then, there were no computers, internet, smart phones or any other tool which could help a student to learn more or which could cater to the curiosity or keen nature of a student who would want to learn more.

It is true that more and more private schools are coming into the picture in Ladakh, keeping in mind the growing need and demand. Since most of the Ladakhi parents these days are educated and understand the need to prepare their wards for a cut-throat competition in the present times, explains their preference for private schools. However, it is also true that the strength of the classes is such that the teacher in a given span of 30/45 minutes cannot give attention to each and every student on a daily basis.

The need of the hour is to ensure quality education focusing on the talents and interests of each and every student and to ensure their equal participation in various activities including extra-curricular ones. Also, the prime objective should be to develop students' interests and keenness in learning something new.