

Reaching out the fringe: PAHAL as a template for voucher program in education of marginalised children

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1. ABSTRACT

Pahal, which is one landmark public-private partnership initiative in the field of education choice for urban deprived area in Uttarakhand, provides monetary aid worth Rs. 3000/- per child to the private schools for providing free education to children of age 6-14 years from the slums of Dehradun, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar. The program started in 2007 and, since then, based on its initial success has been expanded covering the need of more than thousand children. Being the first government venture in implementing the education voucher scheme in India, Pahal demands detail documentation of the project. The current study, as one of the first attempts to record the status quo of Pahal and its beneficiaries involving both schools and children, is focused to document various stages of the implementation process and to understand the socio-economic impact of the same. The present study is concentrated to the schools under PAHAL in the city of Dehradun, Uttarakhand

2. INTRODUCTION

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor...that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

– Long Walk to Freedom:

The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (1994, p.144)

Marginalization in the education by the dimensions like poverty, gender, disability and cast is perhaps one of the most inhuman aspects of a society which believes in rigid categorization. Effective and innovative education policies can release massive opportunities to overcome the marginalization, while a flawed policy and poor implementation reinforce the peril of marginalization by many folds. Evidences from existing research reveals that on the other extreme of this social polarization, marginalized groups often experience education systems as an remote establishment which is difficult to access and unable to provide a meaningful alternative to ensure their social mobility and way out of poverty . As Sen, in his Idea of Justice, argues that perfect definitions are self-limited by the inherent stringency and 'What moves us is not the realization that the world falls short of being completely just (...) but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate' (Sen, 2009, p. vii).

I started working on the current paper in the light of Sen's vision. The general objective of the study was to develop an improved understanding of the status quo of the education of Out-of-School children in India, a country which homes 1.4 million children who are out of the education system and Government's effort in reaching out to them. The study was carried out in context of PAHAL, the India's first voucher project in the field of primary education, an initiative of Sarva Shiksha Axiyan under its' Alternative Innovative Education component, before amendment of Right to Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. The scheme started as a voucher program, targeting the community of rag-pickers, snake charmers, beggars and other migratory population of Dehradun in 2007. The program enrolled more than 1000 children's education between the year 2007-2011. The success of the program in Dehradun propagated launching of same program in three more districts of Uttarakhand including Udham Singh Nagar, Haridwar and Nainital.

However, inclusion of the new children from the targeted community has been stopped since 2011 as according to the RTE Act- 2009, AIE centres are being reconceptualized as special training centres for out of school children to ensure their age-appropriate enrolment and participation in regular elementary schools. Although RTE act covers a whole gamut of underprivileged students by dint of the 25% reservation for these children in recognized private schools, even after five years of amendment of the ambitious education law, proper

implementation of the same is lacking resulting in dropping out of the marginalized students, often facing social discrimination in school, before completing the elementary education.

the need of special focus groups were specially taken care of the flexible and broad framework of SSA with the program like PAHAL and implementing specific 'tools' like education voucher. In this light PAHAL demands special study to understand the impact of education voucher in providing specific need based approach for the education of marginalised and out-of-school children of India.

To address this objective, the current study has first considered the planning and implementation process of the program. Secondly the program has been viewed from the perspective of the different stakeholders of the particular system including government, educators and students. In the final part of the study the impact of closure of such a program on the education of the targeted group has been assessed and on the light of that, improvisations have been recommended for the existing policy framework.

3. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1. To document PAHAL as India's first cash voucher project.
2. To understand the effectiveness of a cash voucher project while addressing the educational need of marginalized children.
3. To suggest the possible of policy recommendation for adopting PAHAL as a model for education voucher for reaching out the marginalized.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Global Situation Involving Out of School Children

According to the report of UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2013) currently the world has 57 millions of children who don't go to schools. Almost half of these children are never enrolled in school while rest are either have stopped going to school or are yet to be enrolled in school. In the present time of global unrest when social disparity between different ethnic and economic groups is resulting in the perpetual degradation of stability and a ground level unification measure seems to hold the keys to unlock of the crisis of defragmentation. In this regard securing universal primary education for all children is one issue which demands special attention from the decision makers of all the countries throughout the world, especially of those countries where the number of out-of-school children are highest. Interestingly half of the world's OoSC are from fourteen countries including nine countries of sub-Saharan Africa along with countries like Pakistan and India.

This situational complexity has been compounded by the fact that although the last decade saw a dramatic reduction of number of OoSC, the progress of reducing the number has stagnated in recent years (GMR 2012). Technically, out-of-school children are the kids who are left outside of the education system of their country as (1) they do not have access to a school in their community, or (2) they do not enrol despite the availability of a school, or (3) they enroll

but do not attend school, or (4) they drop out of the education system (<http://www.globalpartnership.org/focus-areas/out-of-school-children>).

So the factors like economic condition of the concerned country as well as the strategic engagement of its citizens into country's developmental process or lack of are related to the number of children who are left outside the educational system. Research involving the education of marginalised children have depicted that the children from poor and socially vulnerable background are disproportionately placed at risk of academic failure (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). The failure in academic environment is often related to the individual's racial, ethnical and cultural minority status (Gordon & Yowell, 1994; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). Moreover, country's conventional schooling system often introduce the risk factor in the education of this population by disseminating an approach which is not supportive to the marginalized students but institutionalize low academic expectation for them. Lack of adequate human and monetary resource often makes the schools to compromise with the quality of education for the extreme poor population (Wang, 1995; Masten 1994). Another important factor that impedes the social homogenization through education is the disparity between the behavioral patterns and values of mainstream and marginalised pupil that insinuates the feeling of 'Lack of fit' among the latter leading to dropping out from the system (Boykin, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Gordon & Yowell, 1994; Taylor, 1991).

Another challenge that hampers the very process of inclusion of these children in a regular system is the non-involvement and non-accountability of the parents in the schooling system. In the World Bank source Book of Social Accountability (The World Bank 2013) the role of Parent-Teacher Association in providing quality education in an environment with scarce resource has been emphasized. If the observation that was made for children from poor family in the work of Henderson & Berla (1994) can be extrapolated from the marginalized Out of School children of an urban community, then the benefits of parents involvement in educational system becomes apparent, too. The difficult job situation of parents is likely to be quite common in marginalized population and lack of resources, for instance in terms of time, inhibits the collaboration of parents with school (Shaeffer 1992).

Indian Scenario

In 2002, India accounted for more than 25 percent of all out-of-school children worldwide. Intriguingly, in 2013 report of UIS says that India, with 1.4 million OoSC of age group 6-14, still ranks among the top five nations in this list. This statistics present a fact which is in stark contrast of India's goal of sending all the students to school by 2015.

In an effort to bring the children, who were earlier left outside the educational system, to the school, India started its flagship program named Sarva Shiksha Aviyan with fund from World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) in 2003. From 2003 to 2011, this program has successfully brought 17 million children from marginalised background to school. However, with a population of over a billion of people and meagre per capita income which is less than US\$1000, India's struggles against issues like illiteracy and poverty always face challenges due to physical, social, and economic barriers, marked by regional variations and socio-cultural biases. The heterogeneity of the problems in education sector of India varies across the states which ultimately culminate into lack of availability, quality, and efficiency in the elementary

learning system. Moreover many neo-literates (primary school graduate) have relapsed into illiteracy as there is a severe lack of systematic natural transition of these children into post primary education system.

Voucher Scheme in Education

The problems faced by India, as a developing nation, essentially are compounded by the diversity and complexity of the socio-economic landscape of the country. The students who are left outside the school system do come from various ethnic groups like disadvantaged or minority communities, migrant families, urban poor, working children, children with special needs, or children who are subject a biased value system as a disproportionate number of OoSC are girls. This diversity in the concerned population requires special initiatives which would be addressing the problems in specific manner.

While addressing the solution to such issues which are essentially pluralistic in nature it becomes absolutely necessary to use flexible tools which can be applied economically and in a target specific approach. Voucher scheme is such a tool which the Government pays the money to the parents of the child rather than to the school in a specific school-student system. The vouchers can be Tax-funded as well as sponsored by private suppliers like foundations, NGOs, trusts or philanthropist individuals. Providing the parents with vouchers increases their freedom in choosing the school and enhances the accountability of the educators.

For a successful and expanded use of vouchers it is important to include the private players in the program. According to the World Bank "The main rationale for developing public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education is to maximize the potential for expanding equitable access to schooling and for improving education outcomes, especially for marginalized groups". (Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio, and Guáqueta, 2009:9). From its inception the concept of developing PPP in education has garnered much debate around it. The main arguments for the proponents of PPP are that it increases the cost efficiency, choice increase, parents' accountability through choice, wider availability of options, lowering the burden on the State, quality improvements through competition. While the opponents of PPP argue that it leads to discrimination, segregation, greater socioeconomic inequality, lack of social cohesion.

Taking into account different aspects of a PPP and voucher based provision of reaching the target groups, a serious social movement should be encouraged to understand the impact of vouchers and its potential to bring the much needed dynamism and fluidity as a tool of social change in the Indian scenario. In this background, the documentation and assessment of India's first Government sponsored voucher program that was launched in a PPP mode in Uttarakhand is extremely important for future policymakers and social observers. The next section gives a overview of the Program and subsequent section would build an objective perspective towards the impact of the program and take-home lessons from it.

5. OVERVIEW OF PAHAL

As the implementation of SSA, India's flagship effort to universalize elementary education for all, allowed states to develop context specific guidelines within the overall framework of it and encouraged the addressing the specific local need based on broad National Policy Norms, PAHAL was launched in Dehradun with the aim to bring out-of-school children of a specific minority population in the mainstream educational system. The never enrolled or dropped out children from the community of rag-pickers, beggars, scavengers, snake-charmers and orphans children living in urban slums, were the target group of this program which was funded by Alternative and Innovative Education component of SSA.

The scheme was launched in view of the shortage of government's school within 1 km range of the urban slums and non-acceptance of existing EGS/AIE in the neighbourhood by the parents of the children of the target groups. The non-availability of the land and rented buildings to set up new schools in slum area made SSA to enter in the Public-Private-Partnership with the local Government recognized private schools with had adequate infrastructure and willingness to incorporate these children into its system.

The socio economic group targeted by PAHAL

As the data provide in the Sarva Shiksha Aayan's website of Uttarakhand has a considerable number of out-of-school children in the state. Dehradun, being the capital of the hilly state, recently is undergoing huge infrastructural upgradation in terms of construction of new buildings and roads. Migratory labours from other states, especially from Bihar, who are involved in such projects is a prominent component of the city's underprivileged population living in slums. The children from this community are usually potential first generation learner and their access to state education for early childhood learning is considered as a great scope to improve the social condition of the community. These children, lacking parental care and often facing language barrier, are left vulnerable to social abuse, injury and addiction of different forms. The difficult working condition of the parents, lack of support from employer and low income discourage the parents to send the children to school.

The people who are involved in occupation like snake- charming along with beggars and rag-pickers are very common in the city's demography. Thus this old city, with its current developing stage, houses a large group of economically and socially vulnerable population. The younger generation of this demographic group is often deprived of parental guidance and is involved in different substance addiction. The project PAHAL was started with the aim to bring the out-of-school children of this population to the schools.

Public-private partnership with neighbourhood schools

As there was a dearth of available government schools in near vicinity of the slums and the special constraints inhibited the scope of building new schools in the crowded urban slum areas, the SSA authority started a unique Public-Private-Partnership with nearby Government recognized private schools situated within radius of 0.1 km of the slum and which fulfilled necessary infrastructural requirements.

A memorandum of Understanding was signed by the private schools and the District Project office on the basis of agreement of the following conditions:

1. Willingness to bear all the cost of the children over and above the amount provided by the Scheme.
2. Ready and willing to accept all the terms, conditions and other formalities as considered appropriate by SSA from time-to-time.
3. Willing to accept annual external/internal evaluation system to check the minimum learning level of the children.

The schools which entered into the project were responsible for providing the following facilities to the children.

1. Education and other school facilities
2. Textbooks, workbooks and other learning materials
3. Question papers and answer booklets
4. School uniform
5. Conveyance facility, if it was being provided to other students of the school.
6. Remedial teaching, If the child is unable to attain pre-decided learning level
7. Facility for computer education, sports, cultural and co-curricular activities.

The following table depicts the number of students taken up by different schools of Dehradun and other districts of Uttarakhand under the PAHAL project in the year 2007-2009.

District	Schools	No. of Students (Targeted)	No. of students (Enrolled)
Dehradun	Akhil Bharatiya Mahila Junior High School	500	453
	Dayanand Junior High School		
	Sneha Doon Academy		
	Chandershwar Public School		
	Bal Shiksha Sadan		
	Maharishi Vidya Mandir		
	SNSM Public School		
	Nanhi Duniya		
Nainital	SKM Senior Secondary School	148	129
	Pushpa Bal Vidya Niketan		
	Nirmala Convent Senior Secondary School		

Haridwar	1. Chetan Jyoti 2. Maitri Anchal	258	209
Udham Singh Nagar	1. Govind Vidya Mandir 2. Naayug Bal Vikas Vidyamandir 3. Sarswati Shishu Mandir 4. Krishna Public Schoo 5. Shivaji Public School 6. Sunrise Public School 7. Red Rose Public School	465	465
Total	20	1371	1256

Financial rules and regulation of the scheme

The project was conceptualized as a voucher project which would provide the parents with a voucher of Rs. 3000/- for the education of their children in the assigned private school. However, it was found that parents were unable to use the vouchers properly and there was a general confusion with the other voucher project running in the state at that time in the field of health. Hence the project was rechristened as PAHAL project and the money was transferred directly to the account of the school against enrolment of each child. The money worth Rs. 3000/- pa per child was directly transferred to school's account and the amount in three equal installments.

First Installment: Within one week of the enrolment of the students for providing uniform, textbook, study material, examination fee etc.

Second Installment: On the basis of attendance and improvement of learning level according to the evaluation report submitted by external agency.

Third Installment: On the basis of attendance and achievement after receiving Annual examination report.

The amount provided to the school in different installments covered tuition fees, school fees, uniforms, stationery, examination fees, holding parents-teachers meeting, archiving the documents, expenditure for emergency purpose. The detailed report for yearly spending under PAHAL scheme is prepared by the school and submitted to SSA and District Education Office.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

Demarcating the children

" We used to go slum-to-slum... door-to-door... sometimes used to pick them from the roadsides.... and then looked for their parents.... In Dehradun we identified 550 children.... We had provision to take up only 500 children, although...we knew we cannot retain all of them in the schools" (Mr. Shailendra Negi, District coordinator of PAHAL, 2007-2011).

The project started with demarcating the OoS (Out of school) children of the 6-14 age group from roads and slums. A team of SSA officials and cluster resource persons led by the District Coordinator of the project identified 550 children and a detailed database of the biography of these children was developed. The database contained the photograph, name, age, parents name, family background, economic conditions of the children.



Counselling the parents



" Convincing the parents were tough... to the a child means a pair of hands to earn... many of the parents were addicted and alcoholics.... We especially spoke with the mothers of the children... we used to speak with them regularly..." (Mr. Shailendra Negi, District coordinator of PAHAL, 2007-2011).

Once the demarcation of the children was done, the team approached the parents in order to convince them to send the children to school. This stage faced with initial opposition from the parents as sending the children to schools would reduce the number of earning members of the family. However with the help of community members the project started getting familiarised within the other members of the

slum and with repeated counseling of parents, especially mothers of the children, many of the parents became agreed with SSA's proposal. At different stages of the project, the parents are thoroughly counseled both by the officials, community workers and the principals of the schools to make them aware about the importance of education. The parents of the other students of the schools, who come from a higher socio-economic tire, also showed initial rigidity towards the inclusion of the students from PAHAL project in the classroom. These parents were also counseled personally by the principals of the school to facilitate the process.

Convincing the Schools

"... We approached 10-15 private schools of the locality... Few of them refused harshly to be a part of such scheme, few of them inclined.... we made a MoU with them... stating all the terms and conditions of the scheme...." (Mr. Shailendra Negi, on the process of involving the Private schools).

The schools were shortlisted on the basis of minimum infrastructural requirements and the School authorities were approached. The proposal to be a part of the project was refused by some of the schools. Even when the Principals/ Head teacher agreed with SSA, there was internal opposition from many teachers. The teachers of many schools were intimidated with the unhygienic state and lack of basic grooming of the PAHAL children. Hence the teachers were also required to be counseled by the principal/ head teacher of the schools in order to continue the program.



Role of community workers

"... She was an exceptional lady, very enthusiastic and dedicated.... She was from the same community...but knew the value of education.... She spoke with the parents... every morning she used to go from door-to-door in slum... collected the children and bring them to the school..." (Mr. Shailendra Negi, on the role of Santosh, a community worker chosen for PAHAL).

"... I wanted to do something for others... I felt good while doing this work... I learnt so many things being a part of the project... now I work with this school.... Children love me... the parents know me..." (Santosh, on her experience with PAHAL).

The children of the targeted community were essentially irregular in terms of going schools and preferred the life outside the school. To build a favorable interface between these children and regular schooling system the program included community based personnel (majorly women) who were of low educational quality but highly motivated individuals. These workers were recruited locally by the SSA in consultation with the school management. Community workers played a very important role in bringing the students to school by daily visiting their homes and regularly communicating with



the parents. These workers, who usually were from the same community, collected the students from their home each morning and led them to schools. This process helped to reduce the number of children who tend to drop out from school after attending initial classes.

Process of starting education of the children in school

Historically, students from poor and marginalised section of the society always face the possibility of being left out of the early childhood education. The eligible students who were enrolled under the program were divided into different age groups and learning level. These students underwent bridge course conducted by the schools for variable period of time. Depending on their achievement level in the bridge course the students were enrolled in appropriate class.

7. MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Self-assessment

The students were encouraged to assess themselves in comparison to the other students in terms of physical appearance and general state of hygiene. Continuous monitoring by the teachers and principals and the active involvement of community workers helped the students to start maintaining general clean physical appearance. Sneha Doon Academy, one of the participating schools installed mirror in front of the classroom with the aim to let the children assess themselves. The schools generally started having provision of bathing and cleaning of the children before commencing the class.

Schools internal assessment

Initially the children admitted under PAHAL were kept segregated from the other children of the schools and they were taught separately in different classrooms for initial one to one and a half year. On the basis of the learning level and capacity of individual student, they were shifted to appropriate classes after schools internal examination.

Assessment by Government officials CRPs and NSAs

In every class PAHAL students were assessed through both by schools general examination system and by a series of monitoring by Block Resource Persons, Cluster resource persons, District Project Officer, and DIET. On field visit the schools reported of being assessed by and NSA (Nagar Shiksha Adhikari) which takes place once in three months. The monitoring pattern of the scheme as reported in official record is as followed:

Monitoring Authority	Monitoring Period	Reporting period to State Project Office
Related CRC Coordinator	First week of every month	Second week of related month

DIET	Second week of every month	Third week of related month
Related BRC coordinator / Urban Education Officer	Third week of every month	Fourth week of related month
State Project Officials	Quarterly	—

On the basis of these two independent processes the learning outcome of the students were assessed. On each visit the government officials communicated with the principal/head teacher of the school regarding the progress of the program and the scope of improvement in the same.

The assessment of the overall status of the project in the school the SSA requires the following records regarding PAHAL.

	Register	Description
1	Admission record	All the information regarding the admission of each student.
2	Record of distributed amenities	Detailed records of all the articles provided to the students by the school.
3	Record of activities	Contains detail of the activities carried out by the school regarding PAHAL.
4	NEEV register	The evaluation record of the learning level of the students under PAHAL according to NEEV guidelines
5	Medical Records	Contains reports based on medical tests of the PAHAL students
6	Record of meetings with parents	Description of meetings with the parents of PAHAL students
7	Attendance register of the teachers	The details of attendance and leaves taken by the teachers involved in teaching in PAHAL.
8	Salary record	Contains details of salary drawn by teachers teaching the PAHAL students.
9	Financial Records	Detail of the cheques received as fund PAHAL scheme from time-to-time
10	Attendance register for the students	The details of attendance of the students under PAHAL scheme.
11	Account register	Contains details of the fund and expenditure for PAHAL
12	Tabulation register	Contains details of the performance of the students in monthly, half-yearly and annual examination.

8. SOCIAL INCLUSION OF THE CHILDREN AND PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL

"Can you identify who are the PAHAL children...? They all look same... no? We don't behave unequally with them... earlier it was difficult... they were very unruly... now the problem has reduced much..." (Principal of Dayanand Junior High School).

" You cannot discriminate while teaching.... they used to be very unhygienic... they used to smell bad as they did not take bath for days... It was hard to be in the classroom... but we had to be patient with them.... " (A Teacher of Dayanand Junior High School)

One of the most potent obstacles that the education of marginalised students has to deal with is the social discrimination from peers, teachers and staffs of the school. These children, already vulnerable because of socio-economic challenges, need special attention and encouragement to remain in school and continue the study.

In case of PAHAL, since the teachers and principals of the private schools voluntarily took part in the program without the boost of monetary incentives they showed a lenient view towards the children and parents. The students were taught in the bridge course in separate classrooms for initial 12-18 months and depending upon their level of learning and adaptation ability they were promoted to the class providing age-appropriate learning level. In the primary research, classrooms of two schools



of Dehradun were visited and the teachers and principals of the schools were interviewed. It was found that teachers of the schools played active role in identifying the children and bringing them to the schools. Although there was not always general consensus among the teachers for accepting the children in the system, the intervention of principal's and counselling the teachers helped to ease out the apprehension.

According to the response of the teachers the PAHAL students are treated without discrimination in the classrooms. As a mean to achieve parity in classroom, both the schools were found to be providing the PAHAL students with the same textbooks that the regular students follow in the class. For schools with limited financial resources this act as an extra burden since SSA provides money for NCERT textbooks which cost less than those followed in private schools. This sets an example in the field of social inclusion of the school education of marginalised students.

"... parents of regular children often had issues with let the PAHAL students study with their children.... they used to come to me and complain.... they themselves were lower-middle class

group.... the mothers working as house-maids.... but they looked at the PAHAL community with apprehension.... I used to make them understand the situation.... it was a difficult process to convince them...." (Principal of a private school under PAHAL scheme).

Resistance from the parents of other students who were enrolled in the school according to the normal procedure was a matter of concern for the Principals and teachers of the private schools. Majority of the parents of those students usually come from a lower socio-economic segment of the locality with mothers working as house-maids in the neighbourhood and the fathers are involved in professions like driving and small time labours in nearby factories. Although they themselves are struggling to move upward of the social ladder through accessing education, many of them opposed the idea of including the children from extra-poor background in the same classroom as of their children. This behavioural pattern is interesting from the perspective of social exclusion of the marginalised augmented by the pressure from group of immediate above strata. The sense of social belonging is often fuelled by a comparative positioning of self in the hierarchy and in this context collective opposition from the lower-middle class and poor family to exclude PAHAL children from the school system provides an interesting example of the same.



The teachers and Principals of the school used to take pro-active role in convincing these parents and according to the principal of Dayanand Junior High School, she used to conduct regular parent-teacher meetings to solve the issue. As a mean to make these parents understand the importance of social inclusion, she used to give examples of how the teachers from a higher strata teaches the children of the parents who come from a lower social segment and are unhappy about the scheme directed to expand further inclusion process. Regular counselling of the parents helped to build a lenient attitude among the parents towards the PAHAL beneficiaries. Many of the children of these parents were hostile to the PAHAL children, too and they complain to the Principals about the discriminatory behaviour towards the PAHAL as the latter receive free uniforms and books from the schools and receive extra care from the teachers inside the classrooms. These students were also counselled with patience and are motivated to help their disadvantaged peers in the classrooms.



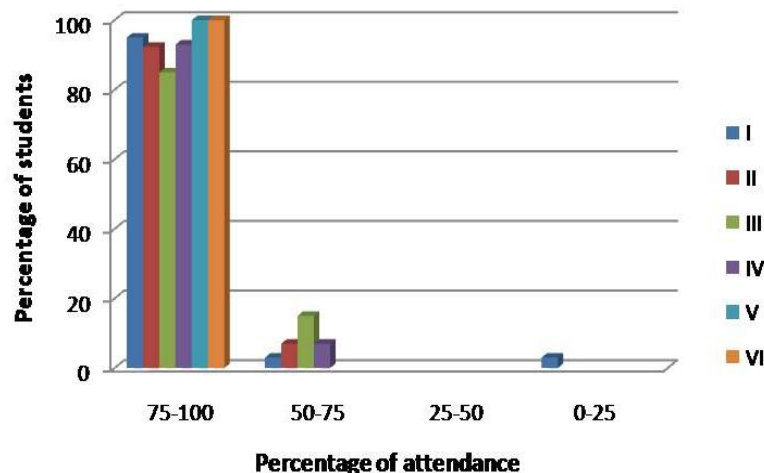
According to the educators involved in the program, inclusion of marginalised PAHAL children in the regular classroom is a time dependent process and with extended period of collective

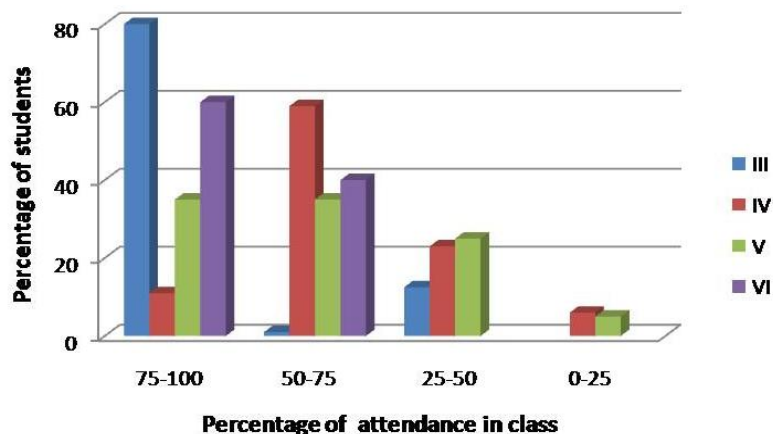
learning and coexistence the students starts feeling comfortable with each other and the process is stimulated by a non-discriminatory behaviour from the teachers inside the classroom. Initial bridge course was important to bring the PAHAL student to a mental and behavioural plane from where they can start their journey to barrier-free interaction and inclusion process.

During the primary research it was found that inside the classrooms apparently there was no difference between the PAHAL students with the regular students in terms of responsiveness, activity and behavioural pattern. The inclusion of the marginalised students is a time dependent phenomenon and as the present study reveals, with proper assistance from the educators, three-four years of togetherness in the classroom helps the marginalised students to adapt in the peer group.

The academic performances of the students were regularly assessed both by school and the SSA officials. The academic records revealed that in general the PAHAL students did considerably well in language, mathematics and general knowledge. Some of the students were found to more receptive than the others coming from the same background and few of them were the front-runners in the respective class in terms of academic excellence.

The PAHAL students often succumb to the non-cooperative environment of family and society that resulted in irregularity in being present in the schools. Nevertheless, record of the year 2011-12 and the year 2013-14 were accessed from two different schools to assess the regularity with which the PAHAL students are attending the schools. It was the found that for the year of 2013-14 of the 50% of PAHAL students studying in various classes of Dayanand High School attended the school for more than 75% of the working days. The record from Akhil Bharatiya Mahila Ashram for the year 2011-12 revealed that almost all the students of the school in class I-VI attended the school more than 75% of the working days. The independent data sets set in different time period indicated that the general response of the students in terms of regular attendance was satisfactory. The data from two schools are represented in graphical form below:





As an evidence of the inclusion in the school environment, PAHAL students were found to regularly take part in the cultural and extracurricular activities and excelling in them. Following is a list of the different programs organised by Dayanand schools in which the PAHAL students participated in the year 2013-14.

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- Students sang Bhajans in Gandhi Jayanti
 - Students sang Bhajans in the youth convention.
 - Students recited in competition.
 - Students celebrated the children's day.
 - Students celebrated the Republic day.
 - Students took part in drawing competition.
 - Students participated in the debate competition.
 - Students regularly do well in handwriting competition.
 - Students actively participated in sports.
 - Students took part in the Independence day celebration.
-

In the light of PAHAL it is evident that excelling in extracurricular activity, along with the educational achievement, can be identified as one of sharpest parameters to assessing the social inclusion of the child from a marginalised community.

Impact of PAHAL in spreading education in the target group

According to the SSA officials and educators, the PAHAL program, as it was dealing with mobilization of a community of first-generational learners passed through an initial phase of slow progress which lasted for one-one and half year. However, once established in the existing educational framework the program started impacting the life of the target group in a critical and positive way. Involvement of local resources, support system and knowledge base helped inclusion of the marginalised children. Number of students who graduated Class VIII under the umbrella of PAHAL, took admission in class IX of the respective private schools while some of the graduated students got themselves enrolled in local Government School. A major part of the targeted community was exposed to the mainstream education system for the first time through PAHAL and in spite the fragile economic condition, the decision of the family, to continue the education of the children in private school, with an aspiration of graduating the class XII level reflects the positive contribution of the program on the life of the marginalised community.

From a different perspective, it was assessed that if one member of a marginalised family is incorporated into the schooling system of the mainstream society the parents have greater opportunity to access the information and it is easier to mobilise the already sensitized parents to be a part of the larger society. Interviewing parents during

Case Study:

Students from Sahil Memorial Dayanand Vaidik Junior High School

1. In the year 2008, a girl named Garima from neighborhood slum was admitted in the school under PAHAL. Although she comes from a marginalized background, she is described as very receptive and pro-active in her studies and classroom activities. She secures very good marks in her class and teachers have high hope for the future of the girl.
2. Swati, a child from extra poor background who was enrolled in the school through the scheme in 2010, was picked up by the school officials as her parents wanted to send their children to school but could not afford the expenditure. The girl was very attentive and performed well in the studies. She is considered to be one of the most active and competitive students of her class.

Students from Akhil Bharatiya Mahila Ashram Junior High School

1. Sulochana Kumari, a child from extra poor background was identified by the school staff and was admitted to the school through PAHAL. She studies in class VII and she secures the highest marks in her class.
2. Shivani, a student of class V of approached one of the teachers of the school to get her admitted to the education system. She was facing parental pressure not to get enrolled in the school as the family did not take extra financial burden for child's education. The girl was admitted to the school under PAHAL school and performing extremely well in the academic environment.

the course of the research revealed that many of the parents sent their second children to the school system as they became aware of the overall benefit of education system both in the process of inclusion and upward mobility in the societal context.

9. CHALLENGES FACED BY THE PROGRAM

While running the program faced various challenges which eventually proved to be of strong cumulative effect in the continuation of the project. The problems about which the stakeholders spoke of great extent are depicted below:

1. The lack of monetary resources

"The financial help that we get from the Government is less.... really very less. This year, after providing the books, uniforms and stationeries to the PAHAL students, we had practically no money left for the tuition fees...." (Principal of a private school under PAHAL scheme).

"...We have asked the Government to increase the money... many times have sent application... nothing changed...." (Principal of a private school under PAHAL scheme).

The meagre amount of Rs. 3000/- pa per child the schools are forced to compromise with the tuition fees. According to the all the principals who were interviewed, dearth of funding forces the schools to compromise with the teachers' wages. While tuition fee for a regular child is 250-300, the same for a PAHAL student is only Rs. 60/- as the school is bound to provide books and uniforms to the PAHAL student from the fund provided by SSA. In this context the decision of schools management, to provide costlier books to the PAHAL students instead of NCERT books, to encourage the social inclusion of the students, compels the school to compromise with the financial stability of it. Moreover, as few of the principals stated that they receive donations from philanthropic individuals which keep their school able to teach the students from marginalised community.

During interview one of the Principals said that he willingly took part in the program as he believed in philanthropic cause and majority of the students of the students of his school come from lower-middle class background. But to continue the education of children from marginalised community he needs more financial assistance from the Government. In this regard he sent application to Government pledging an increase in per child amount provided in PAHAL scheme, which however met with stoic silence from the Government. During the interview he did not hide his frustration regarding this.

2. Transfer of Government Officials

"The program used to run smoothly earlier... as the District Coordinator got transferred, the program started facing problem... he was there from the inception of the program... he knew the situation better..." (One of the Principals).

Transfer of government officials of education department who initiated and successfully ran the project in midway of the program seriously hampered the progression of the same. Mr. Shailender Negi, District Coordinator of the program was transferred to another department in 2011. This step, according to school authorities severely hampered the smooth sailing of the project.

3. Lack of engagement from parents

" Some of them suddenly stop coming.... for weeks... we ask the other students about what happened to them.... most of the time we get to know the parents of the absent students have left the city.... the parents don't inform us as they go back to their home town for months.." (One of the Principals; On absenteeism of the PAHAL student).

" We have no other option.... we cannot send her to school... both of us go out for work... who else will take care of the home... she has to take care of her sister too...." (Mother of one of the PAHAL girl on why her daughter stopped going to school)

The parents often leave the city for their hometown and take the children along with them for undefined period and without intimating the schools authority. The reasons for which they leave the city are that either their contracts get terminated or they go to their native place in the pretext of family or religious occasions. Since commuting to and fro involves fair amount of monetary resource, the family prefers to extend their stay in the native place for longer period. Gap of two-three months in the school education hampers the progress of the children and cause problem in schools regulatory process. Dayanand Junior High School, which admitted 117 children under PAHAL in the year 2008-09 currently have 66 children of the PAHAL children. Rest of the children dropped out eventually reducing the scope of the reaching desired success level of the project.

Secondly, many of the children have both the parents working as contractual labours. Most of the parents who were interviewed confessed that they need the girl child, if she is the elder child, to stay in the home to take care of the household works. Hence they prefer the girl no to go the school.

"... they would come anytime for the meeting... we sent someone from the school to the slum to let them know about the meeting.... it the meeting is scheduled on Friday afternoon, they even come on Thursday morning.... they cannot be blamed always... I cannot force them to sacrifice a day's salary to attend the meeting...."(One of the Principals; On the issue of Parent- Teacher meeting).

Difficult job situation is an external factor which negatively affects the involvement of parents in the education of the children as they do not get time to come for a parent-teacher meeting in the noon as in a rigid working environment that would cost them their salary for the day. Hence the parents usually try to come to meet the Principal before the school starts. Mothers of the students are more frequent to come to the school as the women who stay at home have

more chance to collaborate with the school. As the interview with the parents revealed many of them feel apprehensive to go the school, too.

10. CLOSURE OF NEW ADMISSION UNDER PAHAL

In 2009 as the RTE was implemented, AIE centres started being reconceptualized as special training centres for out of school children to ensure their age-appropriate enrolment and participation in regular elementary schools. Moreover the private schools were asked to reserve 25% of its seats for the students of disadvantaged class. Hence the government decided to discontinue PAHAL as the latter also addressed technically the same demographic population. This decision was supported by many of the schools' authority who felt running a program like PAHAL exerts pressure on the financial resource of the schools. Hence admission of new students under PAHAL has been closed for last two years and the education of students who are already being taught in the school under PAHAL is being continued. As the PAHAL aimed to provide education till class VIII, once the last batch of the students pass class VIII, the program will be automatically be stopped in the schools.

11. IMPLEMENTATION OF RTE AND IMPACT OF THE SAME ON THE TARGET GROUP

Although the implementation of RTE is expected to facilitate the education of disadvantaged children, there is little scope to address the specific population of PAHAL under RTE and 25% reservation.

1. 25% reservation is directed to a broader population where PAHAL was addressed to a very vulnerable population with specific problems. The parents of the children who generally approach the schools for reserved seats socially belong to a little higher rung than the parents of PAHAL students. Often the latter lack information and motivation to send the children for 25% reserved seats.

2. Admission under RTE has stringent requirements of documents like Home address, Date of Birth Certificates and ration cards etc. The parents of children who were addressed by PAHAL seldom possess such documents and hence cannot access the reserved seats.

Ms. Bhargav, a teacher of Dayanand School fears that with implementation of RTE and closure of PAHAL, many children from the marginalized background will be left outside the education system.

12. SUCCESS OF PAHAL: CAN CASH VOUCHER PROGRAM BE PLACED AS IDEAL MODEL FOR THE EDUCATION OF MARGINALISED CHILDREN IN INDIA?

Voucher program, on the line of SEIGYM program in Somalia, seems to be of enormous possibility in the field of education of children of extra-poor socio-economic population. The

flexibility, specificity and penetrability power that an education voucher provides to its beneficiaries can make huge impact in propagating an alternative system in an otherwise rigid and conventional set up.

PAHAL, India's first Government aided voucher program that is running successfully in four districts of Uttarakhand, is quite similar to the SEIGYM as the voucher was distributed to the those schools which entered in the partnership with Govt. to provide the education to the selected population. The program included 1785 students from marginalized community; most of them were enrolled in the initial years of the program i.e. 2008-2009, who were to be in the education system till class VIII. As per the official records, the program is well monitored. This is important in the context that even after admission in a regular school, lack of proper monitoring leaves marginalised children vulnerable to exclusion, denying them the right to a child-friendly and equitable environment. The children did fairly well in an academic environment and in extra-curricular activities. However, SSA stopped taking new children from 2011 and currently only the students who are already in the program continuing the study in various private schools.

The program was appreciated for its innovative approaches to reach out the fringes of the community and bringing the out of the school children to the mainstream educational field. Moreover since the program carried out education for the target group for last six years and produced few bright graduates of the elementary education system of the district in a budget covering much less per-child expenditure than that of 25% reservation quota in RTE, it demands detail review from the policymakers as well as from the activists working in the specific field.

In the current section the success and impediments followed by untimely closure that the program faced, have been reviewed from the perspectives of different stake-holders. Based on the objective analysis, the program has been evaluated as a template for viable model of voucher project approach for educating the marginalised section of the country.

SEIGYM Voucher program in Somalia

The Somalian Education Initiative for Girls and Young Men (SEIGYM) has executed the concept of using voucher program in reaching out to the members of urban marginalized community in a unique approach. The program provided its beneficiaries with a voucher to avail the training or education of their choice. The community members and local authorities were included in the functioning of the program and two committees were formed with representatives from women's group, youth groups, local and international NGO's and UN agencies.

The program runs in two parallel ways in terms of flexible use of the voucher.

1. The selected students directly received the vouchers to purchase the training or education of their choice and can redeem the voucher in any of the training centres affiliated by Africa Education Trust. The program gave training to the alternative trainers, women and craftsman who want to start their own training courses (drivers, painters, carpenters, tailors, nurses etc.), too. In the larger towns where the existing resource was enough available, and the number of training providers and students are more this voucher mediated transaction take place.

2. In the areas where resources and number of students are less, based on the requirement of the students, AET recruited local trainers to provide the course and payed them against the value of the voucher. In smaller town where majority of students looked for literacy or numeracy, the method worked effectively. If the community agrees to support the training program for a specific group of disabled or marginalised people, the program helps to set up the training course.

The voucher program incorporated the component of a very diverse and impactful local committee as that would help to work for a multilayer structure of natural society and keep the selection process of the students transparent and simple. The vouchers are redeemed through a supervised and accountable system and the process is regularly monitored by a local AET staff. In remote areas local teacher or trainer is appointed to do the monitoring. The success of the voucher program is measured through the attendance records of the teachers and students, their mutual commitment level in the program and month wise performance of the students.

The voucher is used to pay the local vocational training courses against monitoring and delivered service. The program represents an interesting model for flexible and context specific use of vouchers for the need of marginalised and extra poor section of the society.

Providing the power to choose incentivises the parents from marginalised community to be part of the government's initiative

The extent of parent's involvement in the education system has been considered to be of special importance for the education of children from poor social background (Di Gropello 2006, Henderson and Berla 1994). Henderson and Berla concluded that student's achievement in school is strongly related with parent's academic expectation from the children, which prompt the parents to be involved in the education process of the children and to create an environment in home which is favorable to learning. Hence the policies that would encourage the parents to develop these conditions, would augment the process of academic inclusion of marginalized children in the existing schooling system.

Interviewing parents from the marginalised community of Dehradun revealed that usually the parents are poorly informed about the education process and since they are used to live in the fringes of the mainstream society, they do not feel motivated enough to enter in a hitherto unknown social territory as the social behaviour of these people are essentially limited by the fear of non-familiarity. Disparity between social exchange language of the mainstream and marginalised society stops the parents in sending their children to a school attended by the children from higher socio-economic rung.

Providing the parents with an exchange medium in the form of cash voucher would motivate the parents to approach the school with sense of self-sufficiency which would increase the chance of success of such projects. As the parents of PAHAL students mentioned that they feel good about acknowledging the fact that their children go to a school while many of them confessed, too, about their lack of knowledge and resource to step into the established education system on their own. Cash voucher will directly enhance the engagement of parents from marginalised community into the mainstream society and thus the voucher system can be one excellent step towards achieving social inclusion through education policy.

However, voucher program carries a potential peril of non-accountability from the parent's part. This fact is partially supported by the view shared by the Principals of Private schools that generally the schools face lack of seriousness from the parents of the students as reflected by irregular attendance of them in parent-teachers meeting and not sending the children regularly to the school. This behaviour is likely to stem from their lack of accountability in the process of education of their children. It is well accepted fact that when parents contribute financially to the education of their children, they become more aware about the quality and cost-effectiveness of the educational services of the schools (Coleman & Hoffer 1987, Wolff & de Moura Castro, 2001). The corollary of this assumption is if the parents can be involved in the process of voucher mediated learning, there is greater chance that they would look at themselves as an integral part of the system and the school can expect greater cooperation from the parents. The 'EDUCO' model, which was implemented in the schools of the poor area in El Salvador in 1990, uniquely gave authority to the local community over the school management in the issues like finance and staffing. In this approach, the parental involvement not only enhanced the learning outcome of the students but also significantly diminished absenteeism of the children (Di Gropello 2006).

Voucher program helps in estimating the expenditure involved in the process and increases accountability of the stakeholders:

Running an alternative education program in a 'shoe-string' budget with commendable success implies that reaching out-of-school children is not a simple goal to be achieved merely by constructing more school, distributing more books or training new teachers. The program PAHAL had a initial budget of 15 Lakhs INR and was meant for incorporating only 500 children from a single city into the school system. However, as the Then Program Coordinator Mr. Negi states " We went out for headhunting of around 550 children in a door-to-door approach, considering that their social and economic background would eventually result in dropping out atleast 50 children from the program in the very early stage of the venture". This conviction and understanding of the local need was properly channelized by the technical clarity that comes with the per-child-funding through educational voucher as it ensures accountability from the authority that a generic umbrella program meant for a very specific population rarely be able to provide.

PAHAL had INR 3000/- per child per annum budget and it included the cost of book, study materials, uniforms, sweaters meant for the students apart from the school and the tuition fees. As the view from teachers and principals indicated that this was in no way sufficient for the regular education of a student from the monetary perspective, still the record of the schools indicated that there is a fair amount of transparency in the manner in which the expenditure was recorded and meticulously the details of the process was monitored.

Exclusion of the unwilling schools from the process of educating marginalised children actually makes the process more efficient

The profile and experience of the stakeholders and beneficiaries of PAHAL revealed that successful addressal of a sensitive issue like educating students from the extreme poor background demands more of a specific than generic umbrella program. The children are in majority the first generational learners and often, as a result of zero parental guidance and social cooperation, are not capable of maintaining the minimal commonality in the peer group inside a classroom. In this context effort to compel the educators to be involved in the teaching process very often face harsh refusal from the school authority. The fact is based on the experience of the SSA officials who started approaching the schools with the proposal of enrolling PAHAL students in their system. Education voucher system enables the Government staff to exclude such schools from the system, since treating the marginalised student with discrimination only enhance the number of future drop out students as classroom discrimination is globally considered as a major player in keeping away the once enrolled students from continuing the education in a regular system.

On the other hand, a voucher program which works either through direct cash transfer to school against a MoU for long term and willing association between school and government makes the school authority more responsible and accountable to provide quality education to the students.

Cash Voucher program, aided with non-monetary incentives would help improve the status quo of the school system

While interviewing the educators involved in teaching PAHAL students, it became evident that successful inclusion of these students into an otherwise rigid school system requires considerable amount of hard work fuelled by philanthropic attitude from the teachers. Since the teachers teach the students with minimum monetary compensation, these educators can be proved to be indispensable component for a system which works for reaching out to the marginalised community. Voucher program has the inherent mechanism to send the beneficiaries to a service provider which delivers better in a competitive environment. For a school, achieving success in providing quality education for marginalised is dependent on both the monetary resource and humane face of the educators. Hence incorporation of voucher program in this scenario will boost those schools which treat the extra poor children in the ideal manner. As found in the primary research, one of the private schools, set up in the limit of very mundane fiscal skeleton, was found to be doing commendable job in the field of social inclusion and learning achievement. The teachers of this school are paid zero financial incentive from the government for staying beyond the normal school hour to train the PAHAL students. Moreover the school suffers from serious infrastructural inadequacy in terms of space and electricity. Education voucher of substantial monetary amount would bring more students from marginalised community to such schools and serve the interest of both the beneficiaries. On the other hand, even if the education voucher is not of sufficient monetary coverage, as it was in the case of PAHAL scheme, subsequent aid from government as recognition of their performance in achieving the goal would help these schools to upgrade their infrastructure which in turn would help them in spreading quality education to a larger societal section.

Cash vouchers would help the floating community to overcome the challenge of frequent relocation

Children from migratory population who comprise a major part of PAHAL beneficiaries are globally considered as one of the most vulnerable groups facing several challenges in accessing quality education in continuous basis.

One of the complexities related to the PAHAL children is that the enrolled children often stopped coming to school for indefinite period of time which sometimes extended for few months. The parents of these children have an extensively mobile lifestyle because they work as contractual labours in different parts of the country. After completion of their work in certain place they go back to their native place, only to stay their till some new opportunity comes in their way. The children of this community with both the parents working as labours need to relocate with their parents in regular basis. This hampers the chance of them to access regular education in a conventional schooling system. For the education of these children voucher scheme holds the promise to enable them regular education. If the parents are equipped with cash voucher which can be redeemed in different schools at different part of the country without going through rigorous admission process, the issue of the discontinuity in education with the floating population can be addressed.

Individual philanthropic sponsors would be more attracted by a voucher scheme

As the private school owners describes their source of funding in a financially-starved background the importance of individuals who sponsor the education of unprivileged children becomes evident. As government's aid is majorly insufficient to continue the education of these children, schools depend on the donation from these philanthropic individuals/organisations for covering their expenses. Introducing voucher scheme in this specific scenario would encourage the individuals to sponsor the children in a parallel voucher based method. Promoting a collective endeavour for per-child-funding would help to reduce the disparity between children from different background.

13. OTHER POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCORPORATE IN THE CURRENT FRAMEWORK

The experiences achieved from specific need based program like PAHAL would help the policymakers to incorporate few practical and timely improvisations in the education of marginalized children.

1. The lessons learnt from the PAHAL should encourage the policymakers to think over the very fact that current policies and strategies that are focused on reducing the number of out-of-school children should also take it into the account that available resources should always be used in an effective way.
2. The parents from the community of migratory workers usually do not have legal authentication in terms of documents and in absence of them they are apprehensive to approach state run service for the enrolment process of the children. The current policies and their implementation process largely rely on the willingness and attitude of the local authority. A strong collaboration between the community level and state level is needed to implement policies directed to address the specific need of the targeted community.
3. The number of beneficiaries of PAHAL was of miniscule scale in comparison to the extensive target group of RTEs 25% reservation quota. However, many of the children who were admitted under the umbrella of PAHAL eventually dropped out from the system despite of the presence of regular tracking and monitoring of the project. This calls for additional steps from the country's policymakers which not only simply focus on enrolment, but on the retention of every child at least till the age of 14.
4. The Government should develop clear and stringent standardized protocol for monitoring the children at risk of dropping out and engage the relevant authority to undertake regular social mapping to understand the need of the stakeholders and adopt possible mechanism to bring back the dropped out children to school.

14. CONCLUSION

Free and universal elementary education for all is a noble goal to pursue for a country which believes in treating all its citizen with equal dignity and expect responsible involvement from them in achieving all inclusive development. However although RTE act was amended in 2009 with a much ambitious mission, the lack of practicality in designing the framework of the law is reflected by the myopic generalization in many of the issues which demands case specific approach to reach the optimum solution level. Education of marginalised population is a topic of much debate which has partially been addressed by th 25% reservation of the total seats of school. Reserving one-fourth of total seats in a regular school and compelling the school authority to teach and include the children from a vulnerable background create a 'make-or-break' situation provoking many of the school to bypass the reservation process by finding loopholes in the RTE framework. This affects the children from extra poor population most and the vision of 'education for all' dies a tragic death because the present system lacks flexible approaches to take care the benefit for all the stakeholders of the education system. Taking all the aforementioned points into account, it seems that there is much scope to incorporate voucher program in the education scenario of the marginalised, creating conceptual paradigm shift in the system to facilitate the target group. In this light, a scheme like PAHAL can work as a beautiful model template for the government sponsored voucher program.

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