

# Perspective and Development of Sishu Siksha Kendras in West Bengal

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**Abstract:** This paper tries to explore the perspective of the establishment of the Sishu Siksha Kendras (SSKs) in West Bengal. An attempt has been made to look into the district wise development of the SSKs from the beginning with special reference to their frequencies, their students and their Sahayikas. To achieve the findings, compiled U - DISE Data from 1997 - 98 to 2020 - 21 has been taken into account. 'Sishu Siksha Karmasuchi', launched in 1997 - 98, is the major scheme of the Panchayat & Rural Development Department to achieve the goal of universalization of primary education. The whole administrative charges along with all the manpower of Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission was being transferred from P & RD section to the School Education Department with effect from 01.12.2020. Initially the program was started in 1997 - 98 academic session in the four districts of West Bengal namely Bankura, Burdwan, Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur. After that time period, SSKs were in increasing mode till 2016 - 17 but after that time period a large number of SSKs has been gradually closed. Leadership of School Education Department has been suggested for capacity building of the SSKs through state, district and panchayat level network.

**Keywords:** Sishu Siksha Kendra (SSK), Sishu Siksha Karmasuchi,, Perspective of the establishment, Development of the SSKs.

## 1. Introduction

In view of mainstreaming of the OOSC (Out of School Children) and other under privileged children of the remotest areas of the state of West Bengal, Sishu Siksha Karmasuchi was launched. But with time, the Karmasuchi has gained enormous popularity and its need for the purpose of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) has become established in related quarters. Further, in the RTE Act 2009, under Chapter - I, Section - 2 (n/i), the 'School' has been defined as –“a school established, owned or controlled by the appropriate Government of a local authority”. The SSK has been proposed by the concerned Panchayat Samities and have been approved by the Zilla/ Mahakuma Parishads, which is a local body under West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973. Therefore, the SSK has gained the status of 'Formal' schools, managed by the Panchayat & Rural Development Department, by the Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Siksha Mission. At present (2020 - 21), there are 15076 SSKs functioning in the state of West Bengal, proving scope for completing the Elementary Education (From Pre - Primary to Std - IV) to 916391 learners under the supervision of 37089 Sahayikas.

## 2. Background

In order to achieve the cherished goal of universalisation of primary education, in Karnataka a total of 216 tent schools were opened to provide bridging facilities to the migrating

children. The SSA Andhra Pradesh has been conducting Vindam Chaduvukundam – a radio program for out of school children. To get back 0.13 million 6 - 14 years age group children of migrant sugarcane cutter mainstream education, Janarth, an Aurangabad based NGO in Maharashtra, started the innovative intervention of Sakhar Shalas in the year 2001 - 02 with 882 Children of migrant labourers at two cooperative sugar factories in Ahmednagar district. A team of officers from SSA and NCLP (National Child Labour Project) of Ranga Reddy district accompanied Mr. Murthy to rescue child labour working in shops and dhabas in the street of Uppal. The team decides that going back to their previous school would be the best option for the rescued child. Vidhayak Samsad, a local NGO, started five Bhonga Shalas in 1995 in two blocks of Thane district of Maharashtra which ensure primary level (standard I - IV) education to the children from brick Kilns mainly on the tribal population on the entire brick Kiln season (December to May). SSA Orissa, SSA Andhra Pradesh and Action Aid India (a non-government organization) started a collaborative project to address the educational need of children and set up residential and non-residential bridge courses around the brick Kilns. The primary aim of the project was to ensure that the children who were forced to migrate along with their parents would not lose the other half of the academic year. In West Bengal after independence (1950 - 51) only 14783 primary schools were there where in the year 1977 - 78 it has increased to 42659 in the year 1997 - 1998 it becomes 51021.

**Table 1:** Number of Primary Schools and enrolment before the emergence of SSKs in West Bengal

Year	Number of Primary Schools	Total Enrolment	Total number of children between this age group	Gap (no of students out of school)
1950 - 51	14783	14, 16, 526		
1960 - 61	27972	26, 34, 989	5377041	2742052
1970 - 71	39132	54, 61, 939		
1977 - 78	42659	57, 77, 591		
1990 - 91	48456	68, 83, 911	9035220	2151309
1997 - 98	51021	88, 07, 732	9490608	682876

Source: Directorate of School Education, Govt of West Bengal (for number of Schools); Economic Review of Govt. of West Bengal (for enrolment)

No doubt there has been an expansion of primary education (including basic education) in West Bengal but there has been 682876 children do not get the opportunity to go the primary schools or many of them drop out after having registered there. To rectify the situation, the Panchayat & Rural Development Department, with a view to open 1000 Child Education Centre (later known as Shishu Shiksha Kendra) in the state of WB, issued an order, dated 04/08/1997. After about two years, the Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission, under the Panchayat & Rural Development Department, Government of West Bengal was formed on 24/11/1999, as a registered Society under the Society Registration Act 1961 (Registration no: S/96500 of 1999 - 2000), to look after the CECs by implementing the Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi as a co - partner to achieve the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), as recommended by the 1st International Convention on Education at Juntian, Thailand in 1990 & the 2nd International Convention on Education at Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. Later on from 2003, the Mission is implementing the Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi also, as per the decision of the P & RD section. Demand for education also went up after Total Literacy Campaign was successfully launched in the state in early nineties. However, the demand of the situation could not be fully and effectively met with formal primary education systems. At the same time, it was quiet tough to establish primary schools at every nook and corner of the state wherever there were some children not having access to the school. The Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission functions to assist the efforts of the SE Department for bringing about the fundamental changes in the field of Elementary Education and through it overall improvement of socio - economic and cultural atmosphere of the society. The specific objectives of the Mission are A. Universalization of Elementary Education, B. Provision of reduction of disparity, if any, in enrolment, retention and learning achievement amongst gender and social categories, C. Improvement of Quality of Education by in depth capacity building & other action research activities.

#### Rationale:

Introduction and integration of SSKs at primary school level has several challenges. Major among them is infrastructural facilities, the appointment procedure and salary structure of the Sahayikas - the gap between Primary Schools and SSKs. Failure to meet the challenges would mean a further widening of the knowledge gap and deepening of existing economic and social inequalities among the Primary Schools and the SSKs. So, there is a need to discuss the present scenario of SSKs both at state and district level. As it is a relatively new concept, research studies are very few. This paper is a review of studies and surveys attempting to

summarize the results and draw broader conclusions. It focuses on (1) the perspective of the establishment of the Shishu Siksha Kendras (SSKs) in West Bengal and (2) the district wise development of the SSKs from the beginning with special reference to their frequencies, their students and their Sahayikas. To satisfy these objectives information has been taken from secondary sources like U - dise data, Government documents, doctoral thesis, seminar /conference proceedings and research articles.

#### Perspective of the establishment of the SSKs:

The perspective of the establishment of the SSKs has been discussed based on the several characteristics as well as criteria recommended by several education policies in West Bengal. Those are:

1) **Types of SSKs:** The Shishu Shiksha Kendras are of two types,

- Co - educational (for both boys and girls) and
- Girls' (for girls only)

#### 2) Category of SSKs

These Shishu Shiksha Kendras have five standards, classes PrePrimary –Classes IV. NEP - 2020 emphasizes on the criticality of the early years to ensure quality early childhood care and education for all children between 3 - 6 years by 2025. The extant 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3 - 18. This implies that there will be 3 years of Curriculum framework for Anganwaadi /preschool level. In the new structure, a strong base of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from age 3 is also included. Anganwadis co - located with primary schools, SSKs pre primary schools covering at least age 5 - 6 years co - located with existing primary schools, SSKs and stand alone pre primary Schools.

#### 3) Medium

The Medium of these SSKs is mainly Bengali. According to NEP - 2020, the medium of instruction until at least grade 5 will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language.

#### 4) Curriculum and Syllabus

The curriculum and syllabus follow the equivalent classes of schools prescribed by the West Bengal Board Of Primary Education. A new and comprehensive National Curricular Framework for school education will be developed by NCERT. The curricular and pedagogical structure of school education guided by a 5 + 3+ 3+4 design corresponding to the age ranges of 3 - 8, 8 - 11 years respectively. It will

consist of Foundational Stage (in two parts, that is, 3 years of Anganwadi/ Preschool+ 2 years in primary school or SSKs in grades 1 - 2, both together covering ages 3 - 8) with flexible, multilevel play or activity based learning and the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE. Preparatory Stage (grades 3 - 5, covering ages 8 - 11) with the introduction of experiential learning across the Sciences, Mathematics, Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities.

#### 5) Enrolment

The minimum enrolment should be 80 for 5 classes in the SSKs. NEP 2020 ensures universal access at all levels of schooling from pre - primary School to grade 12. It aims to achieve 100% gross enrolment ratio in school education by 2030. The initiatives that will be undertaken for this include provision of effective and sufficient infrastructure, alternative and innovative education centres to ensure that children who are dropping out of school are brought back into main - Stream education, universal participation in School by carefully tracking Students, as well as their learning levels.

#### 6) Academic Session

The Academic Session of the SSKs corresponds to that of the schools under the West Bengal Board of Primary Education i. e. from January to December.

#### 7) Working Days and Instructional Hours

SSKs should run for at least 200 days in a year and at least four hours should be devoted to each teaching learning day for the purpose.

#### 8) Management of the SSKs

There is a managing committee for proper management of the Kendra. Managing Committee of SSKs includes five members such as one BDO representative, Mukhya Sahayika, one guardian representative, one MLA representative and local Panchayat member. The welfare of students and the Sahayikas are taken care of by the managing committee. It also reviews the steps taken for the safety and security of the students of the SSKs. The members have financial powers beyond those delegated to the Mukhya Sahayika.

#### 9) Relationship with regular system of education

These SSKs have the power to issue transfer certificates of Banglar Siksha Portal, similarly any child with a transfer certificate from a regular Primary School or Madrasah is eligible for admission in the appropriate standard in any SSK.

#### 10) Text Books

The M. C usually contacts S. I, D. I and DSE for supply of available free nationalized text books. According to NEP - 2020, high quality textbook materials will be developed by NCERT and SCERTs. State will prepare their own curricula and prepare text books incorporating state flavor and material. The availability of textbooks in all regional languages will be a top priority. Reducing the weight of school bags and textbooks will also be ensured by suitable changes in curriculum load.

#### 11) Midday Meal

The M. C contact S. I of schools, BDO, SDO, ADM, DM, Director, Midday Meal and others for providing Midday Meal to the learners of the SSKs. This makes retention easier.

#### 12) Construction of ACR and development of infrastructure

The M. C collects donation from the community and endeavor to get benefit from different developmental grants or schemes for construction of additional room and other physical infrastructure.

#### 13) School Uniform

All girls and boys are getting two sets of dresses from SSA at the rate of Rs 300 per set though there are uncertainties regarding in time availability. There are grievances for non entitlement among the SSKs each year compare to the Primary School which is justified.

#### 14) Stipends and Scholarship

The M. C contacts for West Bengal Minority Development and Financial Corporation for prematric scholarship for minority students (Aikyashree) and other sources for stipends as available for the learners of the primary schools or SSKs like Sikhashree for SC and ST students.

#### 15) Attendance Register

i) for the purpose of keeping records, an attendance register of the learners attending classes is maintained and the Sahayika of each standard signs at the bottom of the same register on every working day.

ii) there is an attendance register for teachers also recording the attending teaching staff including Mukhya Sahayika.

#### 16) Cash Book

For the purpose of keeping permanent record of transaction, a bound cash book is maintained and it is signed by the chairperson at the end of the day when transaction takes place.

#### 17) Resolution Book

A hard bound register is maintained to record the proceedings of the meetings of the MC.

#### 18) Remarks Book

This book is maintained for comments of the inspector, supervisors, officers, renowned personalities, honorable guests for future guidance and future improvement.

#### 19) Contingency

All SSKs have been getting school grant at the rate of Rs.10000 per year for the enrollment 1 - 30 and for the enrollment 31 - 100 got Rs.25000, for the enrollment 101 - 250 got 50000, for the enrollment 251 - 1000 got Rs.75000 and more than 1000 got Rs.100000. This grant is mainly utilized as a support of School Grant and Maintenance Grant including qualitative improvement of class room teaching learning process.10 percent of the fund is utilized for the activities of Swachhata Action Plan.

**20) Requisition**

The SSKs used to claim different grants to the nodal officer with supporting papers for the next period. On being satisfied with the papers and other documents, the nodal officer releases grants. If no requisition is placed the question of release of grant or allotment does not arise.

**21) Mode of Payment**

All grants payable to the Shishu Shisha Kendra is paid by cheque. For this purpose, The MC opens an account to be operated jointly by the Mukhya Sahayika and the secretary with a bank or post office. Remuneration payable to the staff within the sanctioned strength as per prescribed staff pattern is paid by the cheque also. For this purpose, every staff open an individual account with a bank or post office.

**22) Accounts & Audit****Table 2:** Staff Pattern of Sishu Siksha Kendra

Designation	Eligible criteria	No. of Posts	Honorarium per month (w. e. f 01.02.2024)
Mukhya Sahayika	H. S or equivalent	01	[at]Rs.11255/ -
Sahayika	H. S or equivalent	03	[at]Rs.11638/ -
	Total	04	

**24) X. Engagement / approval of Sahayikas:**

- The Sahayikas are generally inhabitant of the ward or Gram Sansad in which the SSK is set up. In case of non-availability of suitable candidate in the said ward or sansad, Sahayikas are appointed from neighboring areas. NEP - 2020 has recommended that teachers should continuously work with students and their parents to ensure that all school age children are attending and learning in school.
- The Sahayikas have minimum essential qualification as per requirement. According to NEP - 2020, the Sahayikas should have special training in the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE. Those with qualifications of 10+2 and above shall be given a 6 months certificate program in ECCE and those with lower educational qualifications shall be given a one-year diploma

The SSKs maintain details of all receipts and expenditure properly for further assistance from the Government. For this they have to maintain Acquaintance Register for keeping records to the staff, Mid Day Meal Account, other Contingent Accounts etc. All the expenditure is audited yearly. The SSKs also submit utilization certificate regularly to the nodal officer to get further assistance regarding Remuneration, Contingency and other grants.

**23) Staff Pattern of Shishu Shiksha Kendras and their honorarium**

Each SSK should follow the Staff pattern where total number of Sahayikas required 04, among them one is Mukhya Sahayika others are Sahayikas their minimum qualification is H. S or equivalent.

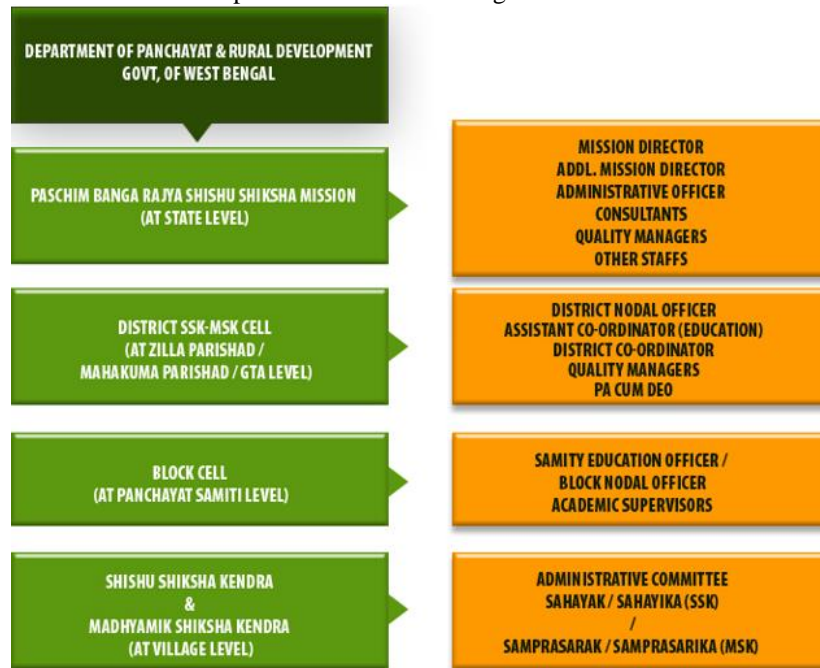
program. These programs may be run through digital/distance mode allowing teachers to acquire ECCE qualification with minimal disruption to their current work.

- They have the age of 30 years and above at the time of their appointment.

**25) Supervision & Monitoring**

In order to make the program successful and to ensure that the desired quality of learning is achieved by the learner, it is necessary to have strong administrative and academic supervision and to provide continuous guidance to the teachers. The Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission has been formed with a Mission Director, a senior official of the Civil Service Cadre and not below the rank of Special

**Table 3:** Supervision and Monitoring structure of the SSKs



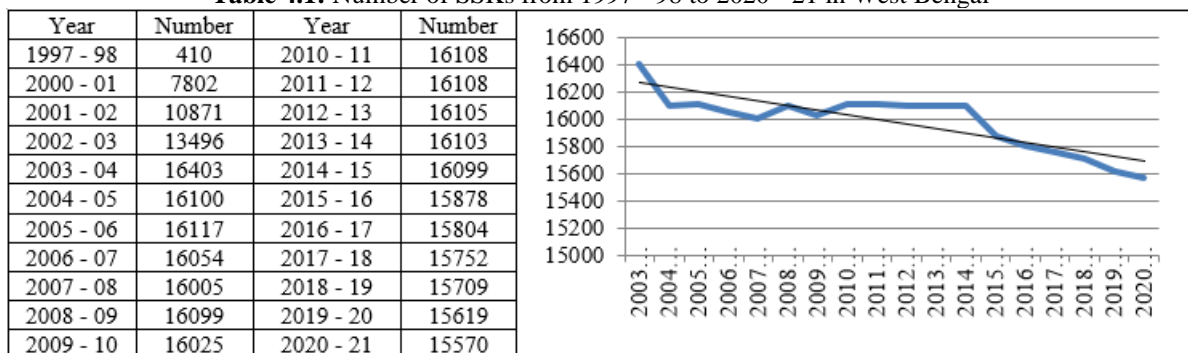
Secretary to the Government of West Bengal, one Additional Mission Director and one Administrative Officer of the same cadre. Other than the above, some supporting officials are working in the office of the Mission. The whole administrative charges along with all the manpower of Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Shiksha Mission was being transferred from P & RD section to the School Education Department with effect from 01.12.2020. The joint secretary (Elementary Education) School Education Department, Government of West Bengal was taking over the administrative charges.

**Development of the SSKs in West Bengal:**

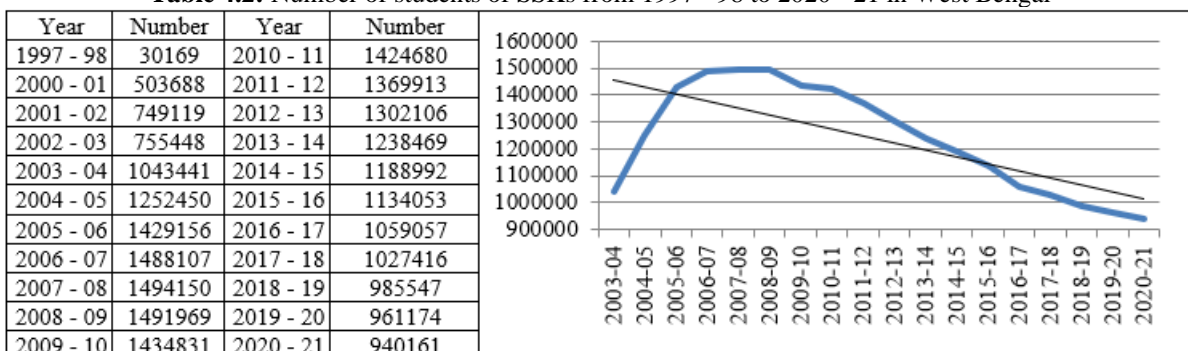
It is observed that at the time of introduction of SSKs in 4 districts of West Bengal namely Bankura, Bardhaman, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur where the primary schools were far from 1 km radius SSKs were established. In the present study to measure development of the SSKs in West Bengal, three aspects namely (i) number of SSKs, (ii) number of Sahayikas and (iii) number of learners have been considered.

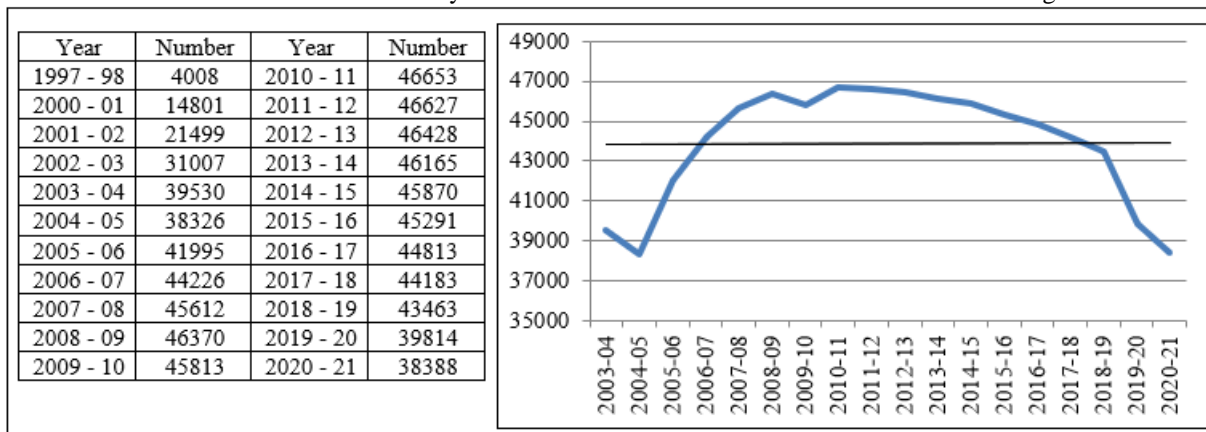
**2.1.1 SSK, its students and teachers in all districts in together from 1997 - 98 to 2020 - 21**

**Table 4.1:** Number of SSKs from 1997 - 98 to 2020 - 21 in West Bengal



**Table 4.2:** Number of students of SSKs from 1997 - 98 to 2020 - 21 in West Bengal



**Table 4.3:** Number of Sahayikas of SSKs from 1997 - 98 to 2020 - 21 in West Bengal

Sources: Compiled U - DISE Data from 1997 - 98 to 2020 - 21

The number of SSKs, its students and Sahayikas of 24 academic sessions i. e. from 1997 - 98 to 2020 - 21 in West Bengal were presented in the Table 4.1. Initially the program was started in 1997 - 98 academic session and it was observed that there were 410 SSKs where 30169 students were taught by 786 Sahayikas. After that time period, SSKs are in increasing mode. In 2010 - 11, 16108 SSKs were there, where 1424680 students have learned under the supervision of 46653 Sahayikas. In 2020 - 21, there was 15076 SSKs where 916391 students have been benefitted under the guidance of 37089 Sahayikas i. e. in decreasing mode.

### 3. Discussion

This part makes an attempt to discuss and interpret in details the important findings and results on basis of collected secondary data regarding i) perspective of the introduction of the SSKs and ii) the development of the SSKs in West Bengal.

Perspective of the introduction of the SSKs:

In case of contingency, most of the SSKs in West Bengal have the enrollment 31 - 100. So they have got Rs.25000. Although by this fund it is tough to fulfill all the purposes but it is surprising to note that there is no effective follow up system for which expected results are not reflected in teaching - learning process. According to the norms of ACR grant, if there is sufficient land for construction of additional class room then the fund would be allocated after searching. Most of the SSK has no such vacant land. That is why they have been suffering from shortage of classrooms. Any research work has been hardly found considering the physical facilities of the SSKs. This finding is not in consonance with the finding of Salam, N (2014). His study has shown that only 22.22 % schools have got it almost regularly but it had not been available to rest 77.78% in last few years for unknown cause. There are grievances for non-entitlement among the SSKs each year compare to the Primary School which is justified. This is hot debate question that why the students of SSKs cannot get dresses every year who are also the most vulnerable section of the society. It is also observed that free textbooks are available in all the SSKs in the beginning of the session but Salam, N (2014) has shown in his study in case of primary schools one two titles were send in the mid of the session which was the

common feature of every year. It is very clear that in all dimensions, there is a huge improvement in physical facilities except health checkup matter. There is no system of regular health checkup which shall have to be initiated without further delay. Health Card is distributed very rarely. This was also cited in Salam's study. According to class routine there are some classes allotted for games and sports. All the SSKs have their annual sports organized by school education department. After RTE Act (2009), those provisions are ensured in all SSKs. But due to lack of communication SSKs cannot participate in the sports as the schedule of external evaluation coincide. It is unfortunate that no student of SSK has got the opportunity of receive any type of scholarship at the time of data collection due to having no bank account of them and their parents also. Although the present situation is quite better where most of the eligible students have got scholarship except non aadhar students as the Aadhar card is mandatory for applying any type of scholarship.

Midday meal is running with great success in all sample SSKs though Salam in his study has shown that there were some discontinuities due to irregular availability of rice or funds. About the hygiene of the food, Biswas, D (2006) found that the food after preparation kept covered in the separate cooking shed in the schools. The cooking place is also neat and clean. As the most of the guardian are belongs to economically weaker section, they are engaged in daily wage labour job so they cannot participate regularly in the guardian meeting. As most of the guardians are first generation learner sometimes, they do not take the matter seriously so they are willingly absent on those meeting. The Sahayikas of the SSKs are also getting in - service training for 5 - 6 days per year in a sporadic manner though there is a provision of 20 days teachers' training as per norms of SSA. From 2016, the Sahayikas are given an opportunity to appear in 10+2 level from Rabindra Open University as per NCTE rules. The Sahayika who has no basic training or B. Ed training, has also given a chance to take the DLED training of 2 years as per the rules of NCTE. Dr. Salam, N (2014) has shown in his study that, the learning of students was affected adversely by in - service training of teachers as the training program was conducted in working days. But now the training has been conducted in the vacations like summer vacation, puja vacation and in the Sunday. There should be new things in training program like attractive methods of

teaching. So, entry behaviour of teachers must be considered while developing training design. Training must be contextual and easily applicable. Training program must be conducted by well-equipped and skilled persons in the concerned subject or else these are useless. Overall, a strong onsite monitoring and support system must be there for effective follow up.

#### Development of the SSKs:

To find out the development of the SSKs of West Bengal it was observed that initially the program was started in West Bengal in 1997 - 98 academic session and it was observed that there were 410 SSKs where 30169 students were taught by 786 Sahayikas. After that time period, SSKs were in increasing mode. In 2010 - 11, 16108 SSKs were there, where 1424680 students have learned under the supervision of 46653 Sahayikas. As the Sahayikas were appointed after 40 years of age, so most of the Sahayikas have got retirement after 2017 - 18, so due to lack of the Sahayikas and as well as lack of the students a large number of SSKs were already closed. For this reason, in 2020 - 21, there was 15076 SSKs where 916391 students have been benefitted by 37089 Sahayikas. This finding is not in consonance with the finding of Salam, N (2014). According to his study there was no single teacher primary school. This is may be due to the total recruitment procedure has been stopped, so after retirement the post remains vacant. From the time series data of overall primary enrolment of SSA, it is clear that enrolment in Government aided primary Schools and SSKs is decreasing year by year. (DISE Report 2006 - 2012). Salam, N (2014) has shown that in primary schools, the Pupil Teacher Ratio was high due to there were some para teachers along with regular teachers which is not found in SSKs. In most of the districts like Coochbehar, Darjeeling, N - 24 Parganas, S - 24 parganas, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Bardhaman and Hooghly the number of SSKs reached to its maximum level in the year 2003 - 04 whereas rest of the districts hold maximum number of SSKs in the session of 2005 - 06. Most of the districts carried maximum number of SSKs' students in the year of 2006 - 09 whereas maximum number of Sahayikas was found in the year of 2010 - 11. After that time period they were in decreasing trend.

#### 4. Suggestion

The SSK is getting the students with comparatively lower socio-economic background with first generation learner as well as poor merit. There is a perception of common people that a private or Government primary school is better in quality than a SSK. So, the students with comparatively better socio-economic background are going to private or Government primary schools. It is found that there is a SSK with single Sahayika. She cannot able to take classes as she is engaged in nonacademic activities like Mid-day meal arrangement, Census and Election Duty, Pulse Polio etc. So the teaching learning process is totally collapsed. Only for this reason many meritorious students left the school and took admission in a primary school. As new methodologies like activity-based learning, peer group learning, cooperative and collaborative learning etc could not be practiced properly without one dedicated Sahayika for each class. So the findings of the study cannot support this provision of

RTE and recommended for at least four Sahayikas for four classes. There is also need of qualified subject teacher for at least Mathematics and English. It is also suggested that all the Sahayika of the SSKs should be kept in mind that they have been appointed in the SSKs in a noble profession i. e. eradicate illiteracy in the remote area where there was no primary school at all. So, they have to be satisfied with their honorarium although it is very less compare to the salary of any primary school teacher. Moreover, entire teaching learning and evaluation system needs a radical change to activity based learning and continuous comprehensive evaluation system.

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