CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction
Access to education is to have identical opportunity for all people in education, despite of their social class or gender background. Access to quality education is a basic human right. Indian Constitution recognizes the paramount importance of education in realizing the avowed goals of our republic. Under various articles of the Indian Constitution, free and compulsory education is emphasized as a fundamental right of children between the ages of 6 and 14. However, ‘the simultaneous pursuit of these goals is not easy, partly because no country, however rich, can provide all the resources these programmes will need and partly because the pursuit of these goals needs many inputs besides the financial’ (Naik, 1975). India is a large country with varied geographical and socio-economic diversity in its population. ‘The Indian society grew up highly stratified, based on class and caste, and justified these inequalities as rewards or retributions for one’s actions in earlier lives and sanctified them through religion’ (Naik, 1975).

After independence, the scenario of education in India started changing despite the fact much more needs to be changed till today. The problem of educational inequality has its roots in the country’s chequered history, and the problem still persists though the degree of its intensity has changed. These problems are due to factors like difference in geographical location, difference in socio-economic status, social stratification, gender disparities, regional imbalances and non-availability of resources due to inadequate funding for educational programmes. Moreover, all these factors are mutually interrelated and educational outcome depends on the interplay of these factors. The issues of access to education have two dimensions: It is generally linked with either supply side constrains (government or private funding) or demand side factors like the need of society for education and the demand for schooling.

2.2. Studies related to Geographical access and Education

Accessibility is the degree to which a service is available to the needy people. Geographical features like topography, climate, soil etc. directly or indirectly affect the degree of accessibility. Therefore, it has very close relation with development of
economy as well as educational growth. The study by Gallup, Sachs and Mellinger (1998) identified that location and climate have large effects on income levels and social growth. They argue that geographical regions which are not promising to modern economic growth generally have high population density and rapid population increase. Moreover, much of the population growth in the next thirty years is likely to take place in these geographically deprived regions in the developing countries, particularly in India.

Today, many people are living in a “walking world” (Porter 2002) where huge number of people does not have enough access to basic amenities like primary school (Shyam, 2007). The average distance a child is needed to travel to reach the nearest primary school varies from 0.2 km in Bangladesh to 7.5 km in Chad. The distance to the nearest secondary school/s varies from 2 km in Bangladesh to 71 km in Mali (Filmer, 2007). ‘Physical distance to school is also cited as a major barrier to participation for rural children in India’ (UNICEF, 2006; Ward, 2007). In most Indian villages, on an average, primary schools are one km away, middle schools are at three km away and secondary and higher secondary are five or more km away from centre of the village (Ward, 2007, Mukherjee, 2011).

Meheta (2005) in his analytical report on Elementary Education in India: Progress towards UEE- a survey of around 581 districts and 29 States and Union Territories, ‘observed that more than half the primary schools were located beyond 10 kms from the block headquarters. Only 16.35 percent of the schools in rural areas and 71.29 percent in urban areas were located within a distance of 5 kms from the block headquarters’. Obviously the distance hampered the attendance of girls and enrolment in rural areas to a large extent.

The long distance as well as difficult journey to school by children in inaccessible areas may affect the probability of children attending school. This is because accessing school would take considerable travel time and physical discomfort if the distance is to be covered by foot especially in summers and monsoons (Mukherjee, 2011). If the school is located nearby the habitation, it reduces the cost of sending children to school and parents would be more willing to send their children to school (Beutel and Axinn, 2002). Similarly Ahmed and Hossain (1990) pointed out transport service plays a vital role in making school reachable and viable.
Geographical access to school also varies across socio-economic layers of the population. In a country like India, the backward class people (especially schedule tribes) are remotely located or reside outside the neighbourhood of villages. Banerjee and Somanathan (2007) find that in the early 1970s, the correlation of habitations dominated by Brahmans in any village to access to primary, middle and secondary schools was significantly high. It goes to prove that there exist inequalities in distance to schools even within a village among people of different social castes.

A close association can be seen between geographical access and participation of children in schooling. According to Mukherjee, 2011, improved access to schools through the construction of new roads has increased student’s enrolment in schools in rural India. Her study also revealed that the response of student-enrolment to improved connectivity is much high for general caste students compared to backward caste students. Also, improved connectivity benefits girls more compared to boys across all castes Parents in rural areas do not feel comfortable to send girls to schools, if they are not in close vicinity of their habitations (Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian, 2008). Geographical access is a serious problem for upper primary school age children also. The study of Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2011) reveals that despite substantial investment on infrastructure facilities, several villages are devoid of adequate schooling facilities particularly at the upper primary level (after Grade V), and that non-availability of school within reachable distance is a notable reason for children giving up on education without completing the full elementary cycle. Likewise, a report by West Bengal School Education Department (2011) reveals that achieving the goal of Universalization needs more of schools to be provided within accessible distance from habitations. The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Act suggests making the school distance reachable by establishing one primary school within a kilometre of children’s habitation. After completion of five years of primary education, a student of nine years of age requires to shift to upper primary or secondary school. As per the SSA Act, there needs to be one upper primary school within every three kilometre of the student’s habitation. But the number of upper primary, secondary and higher-secondary schools is not enough to accommodate the students exiting in all the primary schools that are funded by the government. Accessibility issue of the higher level schools badly affect the children, who end up study at the transitional stage between the two levels.
There is a negative relation between remote/less accessible location of schools and educational outcome. A study on the effect of geographical location and the performance of students has revealed that the students from the remote areas seldom achieve the same level of education as their city counterparts (Cresswell and Underwood, 2000). Another study by Mitra, Dangwal and Thadani (2008) pointed out some interesting possibilities, i.e. that the quality of education provided by a school is inversely related to the remoteness of the school from its nearest urban centre. The study further states that more remote localities tend to have low connectivity from the nearest village centre, and due to lack of connection and public transportation these areas tend to have decline in the quality of education. Using British data, Dickerson and McIntosh (2013), found that short distance between the students’ home and their adjacent school is positively related to the probability that help students to continue education. This is consistent with Falch et al.’s (2013) finding, which showed that reduced commuting time had a positive effect on graduation from upper secondary schools in Norway.

2.3. Studies Related to Social Factors and Education
India has a huge population with varied social strata. ‘The Indian society grew up highly stratified, based on class and caste and justified these inequalities as rewards or retributions for one's actions in earlier lives and sanctified them through religion’(Naik, 1975). As a result, geographical access to school varies in accordance with socio-economic standing of families and population.

It is well known that school participation, attendance and outcome in India are particularly low among socially deprived communities like Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and other backward classes. It has been acknowledged also that the socio-economic background of the people in rural India have delayed the task of spreading elementary education in the nation. There persist huge gaps in educational attainment between genders, across different social groups and different economic background of the people. Several studies on India have revealed how the social context comprising caste, class and gender inequalities which constitute the socio-economic background of pupils has greatly hindered their access, participation and achievement in the schools (Reddy, 2004).
Gender discrimination has been the single most important factor preventing girls from attending schools. Several studies have revealed that lack of proper access to schools, compel a large number of girls from going to school and continuing their studies. Despite the progress achieved in recent years, according to UNICEF (2015) girls still continue to suffer acute problem of exclusion from basic education all over world. ‘An estimated 31 million girls of primary school age and 32 million girls of lower secondary school age were out of school in 2013’ (UNICEF 2015). However, India has made tangible progress in bridging the gender discrimination in basic education. According to a report of the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi (2014) the country has seen impressive progress in reducing gender gap in participation and retention in elementary education in India. Between 2000-01 and 2013-14, the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in primary education increased from 43.8 per cent to 48.2 per cent, while the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in upper primary education increased from 40.9 per cent to 48.6 per cent (NUEPA, 2014).

Though enrolment is high across genders, retention of girls is quite low. Comparing the situation of out-of-school children in India with that in several other countries of the world, UNESCO describes the progress made by India as inadequate. India has the largest primary school-age population in the world and also the largest number of out-of-school children. In a sample survey of 70,466 children consisting of 49 percent girls and 51 percent boys, only 46 percent of the pupils enrolled in schools were found to be girls and as many as 59 percent of out-of-school children were girls. A recent statistical analysis has shown that the likelihood of boys continuing in school was 5.9 percentage points above that of girls of the same age group, demonstrating the degree to which girls are disadvantaged in the Indian school system. Also, the number of out-of-school children was higher in rural households, their share being 87 percent in the total number of out of school children in the sample (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2005).

Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian (2008) found that there was considerable improvement in participation of girls during the post-Independence period. The improvement was more significant at the upper primary level than primary level. There has also been a notable development in the enrolment of rural girls as stated by
the study. The study also pointed out that some of the states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal need serious attention, as in these states, a large number of girls still face difficulties in entering school and continuing their studies. Another problem that they have pointed out is that the drop out and repetition continue to be more noticeable among girls than boys, with the girls’ share of enrolment declining as they progress to higher grades. They have suggested that ‘the impact of current strategies needs to be monitored and assessed in order to ensure that current expenditures are actually getting translated into change or that, where necessary, they can be more effectively structured’ (Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian, 2008).

Information relating to educational inequality among the different social classes in India is reflected in the writings of many scholars, which include studies about the educational status of backward groups comprising scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. Some of the studies reviewed for the study ‘A survey of research in education in India’ (1979) by the scholars like Desai, Gangrade, Pimplay, Rajgopalan, and Sachchidanand, 1974; Singh 1975, revealed that although the status of SC/ST groups had improved, it was still inferior to that of the non-scheduled groups.

Even some of the recent studies reveal that the situation is almost similar to the one encountered in the 1970s. According to Breen and Vaid (2008) inequalities in educational attainment which had been according to class origins, had declined starting with cohorts born in the 1960s, and that gender inequalities had begun to decline somewhat earlier, but inequalities based on caste seem to have remained largely unchanged.

Sedwal and Kamat’s (2008) paper focuses on educational issues of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes which are identified for protective discrimination and favourable action by the Constitution of India. It brings out the lingering social inequity that characterizes the Indian elementary education scene, and discusses various strategies pursued for bridging the gap. The report reveals that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) have given attention to the issue of gender, but the problem of casteism and its prevalence in school education has not been acknowledged in a similar manner. Till today the SC and ST children face the problem of untouchability, physical and cultural isolation. They have given
the example of some tribal groups who still live in dense forests, hilly or desert areas and are engaged in occupations such as hunting and gathering etc., while others are settled agriculturalists.

Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) explore the development in educational access and find out different groups which are at risk of exclusion from basic education at the elementary stage. The study reveals that though recent years have witnessed some positive developments with respect to girls’ education in India, there still exists a large gap in terms of age-specific participation of children in primary and upper primary levels in rural as well as urban areas. A similar problem of discrimination in enrolment and participation was noticed with regard to different social groups, traditionally identified as deprived. The report reveals that regardless of special focus in the Constitution to meet the educational demand of groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), the situation has remained far from satisfactory. The exclusion is very high in regard to female children living in rural areas. The paper pose questions about the changes and improvements achieved in districts after getting financial support for nearly a decade and whether the strategies adopted by the SSA reflect any change in quantity as well as quality of elementary education in the country. The report reveals that despite improvements, the completion of a full cycle of eight years of schooling has remained an elusive goal for many children in India. The situation of children vulnerable to drop out is serious and the issue demands the immediate attention of planners as well as researchers.

The study by Desai and Kulkarni (2008) examined the changes in educational participation across various social groups over a period of nearly 20 years to see whether educational disparity have declined over time. They used data from a large national sample survey of over 100,000 households for each of the four survey years—1983, 1987–1988, 1993–1994, and 1999–2000—and focused on the educational participation of children and young adults aged 6–29. Their results show a reducing gap among ‘dalits’, ‘adivasis’, and others in completing primary school. However, such improvement is not evident for Muslims, a minority group, which do not seem to have benefited from affirmative action.

Sood (2010) presents a detailed analysis of the status of malnutrition among children in India. The paper explores the relationship between malnutrition and
cognitive functioning of children in their first six years, through an analysis of the effect of malnutrition and poor health on access, participation and performance of school-age children. The paper highlights that despite overall improvements in the nutritional status of children, gender disparity in malnutrition persists, and that it is more noticeable among deprived social groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The economic factors at household level widely influence the education of children in any family. Though different policies of education in India have made elementary education free, still the economic well being of families is the factor that facilitates the process of schooling.

According to Hunt (2008) household income is a dominant factor in determining access to education and children from better off households are prone to stay in school, whilst those who are underprivileged are more likely never to have participated, or to drop out once they are enrolled. A number of studies highlight the link between poverty and dropping out from school (Birdsall et al, 2005; Boyle et al, 2002; Brown & Park, 2002; Cardoso & Verner, 2007).

The studies of Boyle, Brock, Mace, and Sibbons (2002) pointed out that the number of children within the household is an important determinant of access. With larger household sizes (and in particular numbers of children) the financial requirement is high and children are less likely to participate school, and often drop out from school.

Drèze and Kingdon (1999) revealed that parental education has often played as determining factor of school attendance among children. The study also found that boys’ participation in school is more related to father’s education than to mothers and girls’ participation is more related to mother’s education than father’s.

2.4 Studies related to Institutional factors and Government Schemes

Besides geographical and socio-economic background of the family, learning also depends on supply side variable or the quality of the institution where a child goes to study. Institutions are governed by government planning and policies; hence it might be the lacunae in the supply side variable, i.e. the provision of schools by the
government. There exists an over-whelming consensus that low institutional provision across the nation is responsible for low student enrolment and outcomes.

Colclough, Rose and Tembon, (2000) highlighted that poor school infrastructure is related to poor outcome, with high repetition and drop-out and with low progress to upper levels of schools.

Dreze and Sen (2002) pointed out several reasons for concern about the schooling situation in India. The reasons that they pointed out are : the low school attendance in many states that results in children attending school achieving little progress towards the completion of upper primary cycle, the high repetition rate, overcrowded class rooms, lack of teaching aids, absence of class room activity, poor teaching standards and related deficiencies in schooling system. The study reveals that due to improper policy implication, elementary education in India remains grossly insufficient. Some advancement has been made in terms of physical accessibility to primary schools but basic infrastructural provisions are still insufficient. They also contend that ‘a deep lack of real commitment to the widespread and equitable provision of basic education lies at the root of these diverse failures’ Dreze and Sen (2002).

According to the study of Blum and Diwan (2007) many small schools have been established in India particularly in rural areas due to national and international pressure to secure Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals. But these schools are often characterised by insufficient teacher and basic infrastructure. This frequently leads to poor educational quality, high rates of drop-out and low rates of retention. So there is a real need to understand what happens in these schools in order to give them the needed support.

Kingdon (2007) examined ‘schooling access’ and quality in terms of ‘enrolment and school attendance rates, schooling quality in terms of literacy rates, learning achievement levels, school resources and teacher inputs’. She finds some positive sides in India’s educational development like India’s primary school enrolment having become almost universal and also the encouraging trends in current attendance rates as well as literacy rates in recent times. On the negative side is the very low learning achievement in both primary and secondary schooling suggesting
poor quality schooling. The school facilities/inputs are low and teacher absenteeism is
high.

According to Rana (2007) West Bengal's educational problems have its roots in the neglect of primary education by successive governments. The report reveals that in spite of several declarations on universalising primary education, the funds allocated to primary education have been consistently low. Besides shortage of teachers and lack of infrastructure, schools face various shortcomings like teacher absenteeism, poor learning achievement, etc.

Hunt (2008) in his paper provides an extensive review and research of literature on dropping out from school with added focus on children who got enrolment, but dropped out before completion of elementary stage. The main analysis is about the causes behind drop out from school. ‘Here, drop out is not presented as a distinct event, but rather a process where a range of supply-demand factors interact to influence schooling access’ (Hunt 2008). The study reveals that poverty is mostly responsible for student’s dropout from school. Children who are vulnerable like ‘orphans, migrants, lower caste/scheduled tribe children and children from minority communities are more prone to drop out’.

Juneja (2010) highlighted the vast diversity and inequality in the school system in India. Facilities in the different schools are different in terms of infrastructure, resources and outcomes. The study pointed out that children from different socio-economic groups attend different types of schools, and that even within the government primary system there is evidently vast differences in quality, physical facilities, community participation, allocation of funds, etc. Due to these factors, some children face the risk of low achievement and dropout. The study further paper points out that ‘if the elementary education system continues to create parallel schools for the poor and disadvantaged, and if all schools are not improved in terms of their quality and transition to secondary level, universal elementary education will continue to be difficult to achieve’ (Juneja 2010).

A recent study by Govinda (2011) highlighted that not one but a multiplicity of factors are responsible for low levels of student achievement. According to him, as a result of increase in number of private schools and to achieve Universal Elementary
Education, there has been an exceptional increase in school enrolment in India, yet huge numbers of children, especially from deprived societies, still out of the reach of quality education. The causes cited for the lower quality of education include malnutrition, gender gap and social inequality, migration, drop out, and contrast in schooling facilities.

2.5. Studies related to Educational Outcome

Good educational outcome is the ultimate goal of all education related politicise and planning in any nation. The avowed goal of universal elementary education is universal learning achievement. School outcome depends on geographical factors, as well as socio-economic factors. Besides geographical factors and social background of students, institutional factors also play a very important as children spend huge and valuable time of his life at school for learning. According to Carrol’s model (1963), school learning is a function of time that is ‘degree of Learning= f(time spent/time needed)’. Experts are unanimous in their view that the amount of time required to learn a subject to a given level varies from child to child. Hence every child requires proper individual attention/guidance.

Among the numerous policies and programmes on education implemented in India after Independence, the Right to Education Act (2009) marks an important milestone. This Act is an important imitative which has brought India one step closer to its goal of achieving Universal Elementary Education. However, several studies and reports show that the education level of elementary students across the nation is not yet satisfactory. In the existing academic literature, there exist a large number of studies which point to the poor quality of primary and elementary education. These empirical studies hold different factors like social, household and school characteristics responsible for the low learning achievement.

A number of recent studies have focussed on the reasons for the low educational outcome of students across the nation. A study by the NCERT (1991) covering 23 states revealed that in a sample consisting of 65,000 grade IV students (both urban and rural) the average student-score in Grade IV curriculum based basic skills tests in arithmetic, reading comprehension and spelling was 46.4 percent. Students correctly answered less than half the arithmetic questions in 19 States and less than half the reading comprehension questions in 16 States, and correctly spelled
less than half the words in spelling test in 15 States (Shukla, 1994). Similarly, the Survey by Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) on the status of primary schooling conducted in 1996-97 and again in 2006 in the States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, revealed that children were not learning much of the curriculum in the schools. The survey found that 80 per cent of children in classes 4 or 5 could do only simple addition, and 60 per cent could do simple subtraction.

A large number of studies on India hold family background as responsible for student’s low academic achievement. Kingdon’s study on 30 schools in urban Lucknow found socio-economic status of the family as the most important determinant of mathematics and reading score of students (Kingdon 1999). Likewise Bashir’s study (1994) of primary schools in Tamil Nadu also found close links between higher income and better achievement of students.

Similarly, the close association between educational level of parents and child’s achievement has been highlighted by several studies (Saxena, Singh, Gupta 1996, Varghees 1999). Hassan’s study (1995) on Bihar revealed that a majority of students whose parents were illiterate and first generation learners cored zero marks in subjects like maths, language, etc.

Roy, Mitra and Ray (1995) in their study of language (Bengali) and mathematics scores of grade IV students in 15 districts of West Bengal found that only about 20 percent of students obtained the minimum expected score in both subjects and that the child's achievement is directly associated with mother’s educational level.

These findings apart, several studies have found that children of socially backward SC/ST families who are also economically poor are the poorest achievers (Shukla 1994; Kingdon 1999; Aggarwal 2000; Hassan 1995). Prakesh and Pandey (1996) compared the gender, area and social category of children and their achievement levels and found that social category is the most significant factor which affect achievement.

The study by Govinda and Varghese (1993) relating to Madhya Pradesh revealed that after completion of five years of schooling, very few (10 percent in
Hindi and 5 per cent in mathematics) students gain the basic knowledge in the respective subjects. The study also found a systematic improvement in achievement happening with change in the location of students from the underdeveloped rural habitation to developed urban centre.

The study by Aturupane, Glewwe, Wisniewski, 2013, on Sri Lanka investigates the determinants of academic result, as measured by achievement tests, of class IV students. The study found that though Sri Lanka has achieved universal primary enrolment, but the performance in academic tests in many Sri Lankan primary schools is very poor. The study also found that at the family level, factors like parents’ education, better nutrition, regular participation at school, having private tutor, having exercise books, electric connection at home, tend to increase the learning level of children.

There are some studies which show that school and teacher characteristics influence achievement. Shukla (1994) in his study on achievement in 22 States showed that the implementation of Operation Black Board scheme and the existence of parent-teacher associations were positively associated to higher levels of learning in at least a third of the States covered by the study. Similarly Chin (2005) shows that Operation Blackboard in India which redistributed teachers from bigger schools to small schools have had a significant relation with primary to upper primary school transition rates for girls.

Saxena, Singh and Jain (1995) studied the learning achievement in a random sampling exercise covering 24,000 students in the terminal class of the primary school cycle (grade IV in some States and V in others) for testing arithmetic and reading comprehension skills of students. The study revealed the existence of a strong positive association between teaching practices and student achievement. The study by Govinda and Vergees, (1993) concurs with the above finding; their study in Madhya Pradesh highlights that trained teachers make considerable difference in terms of teaching style and classroom management. A secondary analysis of results from the DPEP baseline surveys in low-literacy districts confirms the close association between higher achievement and features like frequent monitoring of student progress, group-earning by students and frequent homework assignments (World Bank 1997).
Class size and pupil teacher ratio also has significant effect on achievement of students. Saxena, Singh and Gupta’s study (1996) and Govinda and Varghees study (1993) show the inverse relationship between pupil teacher ratio (PTR) and students' mean achievement level - higher the PTR, lower the mean achievement level. The study by Lindhal (2005) also highlights the fact that smaller class sizes enhance student achievement. The study by Jacob, Kochar, and Reddy (2008) on the impact of class size on learning outcomes found that in Andhra Pradesh small but significant increase in class size has led to perceivable decrease in test scores of students. However, there are some studies that do not find any relation between class size or PTR and test score. For example the study by Muralidharan et al. (2013) did not find any correlation between PTR in a village and mathematics test scores.

Ramachandran’s (2003) study also points out that many Indian schools do not have basic amenities like blackboards, drinking water facilities and separate toilets for girls and these deficiencies have led to poor school outcomes.

Some studies that looked into the poor achievement of students, state that multi-grade teaching and/or poor infrastructure quality etc. are too be blamed for poor outcomes. Glick and Sahn’s (2006) study points out that there are still many single and two-teacher schools and these schools rely on multi-grade teaching, which negatively impact students’ learning abilities. Similarly Banerjee et al. (2007) also found that inclusion of an additional teacher in each class could improve students' test scores.

Jalan (2010) referring to the low learning level in primary school in rural West Bengal argues that ‘no assessment’ and ‘no detention’ policy may be counter-productive in improving the quality of education. The study also confirms that there is variance in student’s achievement across districts, across blocks, within blocks and across different socio-economic and religious categories of children.

Some studies show that granting incentives to students also helps in improving test scores. A study by Das, Dercon, Habyarimana, Krishnan, Muralidharan, and Sundararaman (2013) show that school grant programmes relating to major categories of books, stationery, and writing materials have had a significant positive impact on student test scores at the end of the academic year in most schools. Another large
scale incentive provided to the students in our country is mid day meal. The study like Jaya-
raman, Simroth and Vericourt (2010) finds that the mid day meal program has had close association with increase in enrolment, but has had no impact on test scores. Similarly, Muralidharan et al. (2013) finds that there is a negative correlation between serving midday meal in schools in a village and mathematics test scores.

Regional inequalities in learning achievement at both national and state levels were the topics probed by some researchers. Bhatty (1998) compares inter regional variations in educational achievements between Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. Asadullah and Yalonetzky's study (2010) revealed that in general, Southern states have less disparity in educational facility and achievement when compared to Northern states and the state of Kerala stands out as the least unequal in terms of educational opportunities. Likewise, Das and Zajonc (2010) show that educational outcome in the states of Orissa and Rajasthan would drop below 43 out of the 51 countries when placed in an international comparative context of TIMSS data.

Pratham’s Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014 highlights the paradox of high enrolment rates (96 percent) and very poor learning outcomes seen across the nation. According to the report, only 18.9 percent of grade 3 students in government schools were able to do basic subtraction or more, as compared to 44.6 percent of grade 3 children in private schools; and the proportion of children in grade 5 who can read a grade 2 level texts is 47 percent, which remains almost the same since 2012. Similarly, the fact that Indian students got very low rank (72nd out of 73 countries) in the Global Education Survey conducted by PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) (Snyder and Dillow 2012).

2.6. Issues from the Literature Review

After reviewing relevant literature, it is quite clear that geographical, social and institutional access to schooling is the basic requirement for achieving the goal of universal primary education. There are spatial variations in educational participation due to poverty, infrastructure and unequal opportunity. Inequality in elementary education persists across various social groups. There are gender and social gaps in participation, retention and learning achievement at the elementary stage. Like in the other states in West Bengal also many strategies have been adopted to include girls, SC/ST children, children from minority groups and children below poverty line but a
significant number of school-age children who are still excluded from education or are at high risk of dropping out before completion of elementary education. Inequity still persists across various social groups. Infrastructure in many schools are not adequate. Besides, learning achievement is presently very low in most parts of the country and constitutes the strongest stumbling block in achieving universal elementary education.

The above studies shed light on the quality of education from different perspectives but there are some facets of primary education that still remain to be fully understood. Therefore, studying the implications of ensuring access to schooling in different geographical settings is one among them, particularly in view of the mandate to impart primary education as per provisions under the RTE Act (2009). Among other things, the Act entails providing adequate classroom facilities in the vicinity of student’s neighbourhood. Other salient features of RTE Act are: ensuring attendance, completion of eight years of schooling and provision of classrooms to suit the age of children. Therefore, there is an imperative need for an in-depth study to examine how elementary education is imparted across different geographical locations and varied population segments. It is also of utmost importance to examine the problems faced by different primary and upper primary schools, as well as problems faced by school-going children in different geographical areas across different social group. Besides, there are very few in depth researches studying spatial distribution of schools and educational development, particularly in the vulnerable geographical areas where physical access or distance is an important problem. Therefore, the southern part of West Bengal particularly South 24 Parganas district with its huge mangrove forests, assumes importance as a geographical segment requiring in-depth study. Given this background, the present study attempts to unravel the micro level problem of elementary education in West Bengal in general and the sample district of 24 Parghanas in particular and also provide some policy prescriptions to solve the problem.