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POLITICS OF QUALITY EDUCATION: EXPLORING CHALLENGES OF RTE ACT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Inequality in Indian education system can be seen within the framework of state as well as in social structure divided in various socio-cultural, economic and regional disparities. The basic education now is fundamental right in India at policy level and somehow at implementation level. Desirable results could be seen only when society and state will take cognizance on factors responsible for the issue of social need as well as solution to the new liberal economy. The proper implementation of RTE Act requires- civil culture, responsive politics, sensitive bureaucracy and supportive social structure. All the sections of Indian society will be equally benefited if local governance and community responds properly.

KEY WORDS: *Elementary Education, Infrastructure, Local Governance, Public Policy, Social Change.*

INTRODUCTION

The system of primary education in India has yet to be analyzed critically - a critique that would seek to probe the linkages between education and social change. (Kuamr K & Manisha Priyam, and Sadhna Saxena 2001). India has made progress in alleviating poverty, promoting literacy, improving health and hygienic conditions (Kumar A, 2014, 31); but process becomes slow, due to lack of quality in education particularly in basic education. Improving the quality in education is not just making good policy for education, improvement in literacy parameters, increasing mobilization of society through awareness programs and use of media- social, electronic and print etc., but it should provide answer to issues of girls' education, skill development and fulfill the need of youth especially from marginal section. Unfortunately, the intensions of the policy makers as well as implementing agencies are not very favorable to the marginalized section of the society. We need the combination of vision, commitment to the goal and develop professional research orientation for positive social change.

The RTE Act, 2009 came into force on 1st April 2010, which aims to provide free and compulsory schooling to all children in the age group of 6-14. Section 6 of this act states that the local authority and the appropriate government shall ensure that there is a school in every neighborhood within a period of 3 years from the commencement of the RTE Act 2009. Section 19 of the Act states that where a school, established before the commencement of the Act, does not fulfill the norms and standards specified in the schedule, it shall do so within a period of 3 years from the commencement of the Act. This means, that by 31st March 2013. A key feature of RTE is that it emphasizes quality as an integral aspect of the child's right to be educated. Part V of the RTE Act lays down fairly specific terms under which the quality of elementary education is to be ensured. These include a comfortable teacher-student ratio, curriculum reform and improvement in evaluation methods. (Kumar K. 2011).

OBJECTIVE

Objective of the present study is exploring the challanges of universalizing quality education in Indian society marked by poverty, discrimination and social exclusion. Central concern of the study is identify the factors responsible for children not participating in school education especially from poor families and excluded groups. Also to explore the pattern of social inclusion and exclusion across the country and to explore the interventions of Right to Education Act 2009 which seek to address the challenges of exclusion within the education system.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive, analytical in nature; descriptive because it aims to explain the situation with regard to various aspects of implementation of RTE Act for basic education, analytical in the sense that is tries to analyze available knowledge, with a view to find out the actual constraints in the implementation of RTE Act and quality education.

BASIC EDUCATION BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

The right to education act is a result of long debate started in the 19th century to 21st century. The debate on Right to Education was initiated in India by Mahatma Jotirao Phule more than 125 years ago when a substantial part of the memorandum presented by him to the Indian Education Commission (i.e. the Hunter Commission) in 1882 dwelt upon how the British government's funding of education tended to benefit "Brahmins and the higher classes" while leaving "the masses wallowing in ignorance and poverty." In 1911, when Gopal Krishna Gokhale moved his Free and Compulsory Education Bill in the Imperial Legislative Assembly, he faced stiff resistance from feudal (Sadgopal, 2010, 17). At the National Education Conference held at Wardha (Maharashtra) in 1937, Mahatma Gandhi had to use all the moral powers at his command to persuade the Ministers of Education of the newly elected Congress governments of seven provinces to give priority to Basic Education (*Nai Talim*) of seven years and allocate adequate funds for this purpose. The ministers kept on pointing out that there was no money. The strength of the Gandhian experiment in basic education was that it distinguished between the degraded condition of labour and creative labouring activity for learning. This educational package had appropriated the community in its existential maze (Talib, 2003, 161).

BASIC EDUCATION AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The education system in modern India thus brought about change without betterment, and expansion without any structural transformation. Education became merely a tool in the hands of the state. It acquired an instrumental relevance to accomplish and fulfill the modern and colonial agenda. The educational system that developed in independent India after 1947, carried strong resemblances from the colonial system (Kumar, N. 2007). At the time of Independence, India's commitment to education was expressed in the political resolution to gear the education system to the goals of economic development and social justice. However, the two-pronged strategy of the democratization and compensatory discrimination notwithstanding, even the basic minimum goals in education-that of full literacy and universal elementary education-remain unfulfilled. And there appears little possibility of fulfilling them in the near future (Velskar, 2003, 319-320). Right to Education was not framed in the Constitution of India, drafted by the Constitution committee. There was no Article relating to Right to Education for Indian society. Article 45 was introduced under part IV 'Directive Principles of the State Policy'. The Article 45 stated – provision for free and compulsory education for children' (Agrawal & Gupta, 2010, 23). During the Constituent Assembly debates, a member contended that the commitment made in the draft Article (later to be known as Article 45) to provide "free and compulsory education" to children up to 14 years of age should be limited to only 11 years of age as India would not have the necessary resources. The dilution would have been made but for Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's clarity of mind that it is at this age of 11 years that a substantial proportion of children ((Sadgopal, 2010, 17-18). The Article 45 of the Indian Constitution has not achieved their goal for the children. The Supreme Court of India while hearing a case pertaining to education advised the Government of India to enact a suitable legislation for universalization of elementary education (UEE). The Constitution (Eighty Sixth Amendment) Act 2002 included the following provisions (Agrawal & Gupta, op.cit):

(a) ***Insertion of New Article 21A.*** *– After Article 21 of the constitution, the following article shall be inserted namely: '21A Right to Education,- The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years in a manner as the state may by law determine'.*

(b) ***Substitution of New Article for Article 45-*** *For Article 45 of the constitution, the following article shall be substituted, namely:*

'45. Provision for early childhood care and education to children bellow the age of six years. – The state shall endevavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years'.

(c) ***Amendment of Article 51 A.*** *– In Article 51 A of the constitution, after clause (j), the following clause shall be added namely:*

'(k) Who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities

The aforesaid discussion prompts us to conclude theoretically that the Constitution of India has given opportunities to the policy makers to provide the free and compulsory universal education to all the children upto age of 14 years. But, the basic education in India has not provided equal opportunities to the children from marginalized community due to social, cultural, political, economic, regional and ethnic diversities in the country. It is also seen that 'the education system has functioned as mediator of caste, class and gender inequalities,… that how children from different strata and sexes negotiate classroom knowledge differentially and how the process of classroom interaction need validation *(Velsakar, 2003).* Schools reproduced inequality as Velaskar, explained, through:

1. *the denial of the basic minimum facilities to the disadvantaged and dispossessed while actively promoting the expensive the exclusive interests of the minority of new and old dominant sections.*
2. *a curriculum rooted in 'technocratic rationality' and one which places a value on 'high status' and knowledge such 'as the hard sciences' directly serves the needs of an emergent, iniquitous capitalist economy. The curriculum also suits the capacity nurtured by the upper strata thus giving them a 'head start' in education. Mental labour is glorified while manual labour is disqualified;*
3. *imposition of a 'dominant' culture curriculum not only projects the knowledge, values, norms, linguistic styles, worldviews and meanings of the middle and upper classes, but also projects them as being intrinsically superior and valuable as compared to the culture of subordinated groups;*
4. *segregation of children in schools of different quality on the basis of class and gender and through providing class, caste and gender specific opportunities and experiences within education. Boys from the lower strata are channeled to 'low status' knowledge streams and activities that will correspond to their anticipated futures. Similarly, the myth of female inferiority and inaptitude is perpetuated through the division of knowledge into male and female knowledge and the systematic propelling of the sexes along these bifurcated lines. Channeling actually takes place at the post secondary level but schools function as preparatory areas.(Velsakar, 2003, p.333)*

It is also significant to quote Chanana's critical observations on education in India reflecting on the marginalization and exclusion of the girl child from the main stream of education system. She concludes, "the educational discourse emerging from the development and modernization paradigm imbues education with the powers of engineering societal change at the collective level within this paradigm, the individual who experiences mobility and attitudinal change through education is the kingpin who assumes the role of the change agent. This model assumes a positive relationship between formal education, occupational mobility and change. Formal education bestows necessary skills for the market and also the 'modern' attitudes suited for a changing society, and school is the site of transformation of individuals. But this is not expected from women's education. They are denied agency because the goals of familial socialization and schooling as process have to converge. Denial of women's agency in the educational context revolving around female education is closely intermeshed with the concerns of the family, the agnatic group, the caste (and even the village) in protecting and controlling female sexuality" (Chanana, 2003, p.311). Now, we can safely conclude that the education received by the lower strata and women do not necessarily bring rewards in terms of economic returns.

Despite the Kothari Commission's major recommendations and Indian education policy documents need to equalize educational opportunities among different regions and different sections of the population, the results are not very satisfactory. (GOI 1966; UGC 1992; Nambissan 2003, p. 132). The current education system in India is hegemonic in nature which creates dominant social structure. Even the educational

policies and programmes have ignored the structural responses in terms of gendered vision of parents, teachers and bureaucrats. At this juncture, Chanana's following comments are very logical.

> *'The schooling of girls is essentially embedded in the societal context even through it provides an expanded space for growth to women. It ensures that women remain passive actors in the process of schooling, do not question the patri-focal ideology and do not transgress the social boundaries and work within the accepted system of values. In fact schools and schooling become active instruments of cultural reproduction and social control without seeking to alter the informal and formal process of socialization (ibid.).*

It is evident that patterns of social differentiation and social inequalities in India, represents the complex interaction in traditional and new-feudal structures of caste, class, patriarchy, religion and ethnic origin. Velskar revealed that this intricate pattern of social differentiation is reflected in the educational system (Velaskar, 2003, 320).

The reproduction of the Indian state in colonial era has made it structurally predisposed towards the maintenance of feudalist customs, rituals and normative standard. Education can hardly be expected to interfere with gender asymmetry *and hegemonic social structure* unless it is epistemologically re-conceptualized with the help of a collective academic enterprise involving several different disciplines (Kumar K., 2010).

BASIC EDUCATION AFTER SSA AND RTE ACT 2009

A central plank of public policy for improving primary education services in India is the participation of village education committees (after RTE Act- school management committees), consisting of village government leaders, parents, and teachers. Through habitation level planning and community participation, it is envisaged that the village education committee will take decisions based on local needs and therefore will be able to effectively use the resources allocated for primary education at the local level. (Banerjee, 2007, 1365). Now it is a basic need of the society to ensure the quality education to all children without any barrier in accessibility. The government has to make resources available and we have to create a strong and autonomous quality assurance mechanism, whereby all schools – private or government – are made accountable to ensuring children learn and are provided a nurturing environment for development. The right to education is not about optimal allocation of funds between different sectors of education – it is about ensuring that every single child has access to education of comparable quality at all levels (Vimala R., 2009, 157).

Chanana's following remarks deserve here special mention-

> *"If this is the training at home, how does schooling mediate in this process? There is sufficient evidence to show that schools discriminate in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. For instance, sons are sent to expensive private schools, while their sisters go to the cheaper schools. Again, sports activities are used to reinforce this divide because girls are not encouraged to play football or cricket and expected to play with the swing, hopscotch, etc. Even in music, girls may be offered vocal or instrumental music while boys have to take up drums. This is done subtly by saying to a boy, "sufficient no. of students have already given the option; you are late" (Chanana, 2003, p.307).*

The contradictoriness of women's position was increased by the nature of schooling as it developed in the colonial situation and continued in the postcolonial one. Schools in twentieth-century Banaras were expected to create a new individual who would retain the best in Indian culture while acquiring necessary western knowledge, and girls' schools were supposed likewise to perform a similar feat of cultural engineering. These aims were incompatible in the way they were tried. They were incompatible partly because incompletely conceptualized, being based on inadequate constructions of the past, and partly because of a pedagogic problem: an expanded curriculum set by the state to be further burdened by additional subjects set by a school committee that had no comparable legitimacy. How did schools, as a result, cope with the conflicting demands of society? They did not. Which was a fortunate result for women in so far as they had not had audible voices to begin with, and after the modem schooling such as offered by Agrasen, Arya Mahila and Duroa Charan, they had expanded spaces for action but still no voices (Kumar N, 1994. p.228).

There are so many institutional weaknesses in the implementation of SSA and RTE Act 2009 i.e. no budget for schooling of children through private schools, poor awareness generating mechanism, dominant social structure and "the most striking weakness of the schooling system in rural Uttar Pradesh

(UP) is not so much the deficiency of physical infrastructure as the poor functioning of the existing facilities. The specific problem of endemic teacher absenteeism and shirking, which emerged again and again in the course of our investigation." (Dreze and Gazdar, 1997:76-77 & Kingdon and Muzammil, 2001, 3053). In these hindrances 'the goal of Universal Elementary Education (UEE), through a Constitutional obligation of state is yet to be achieved (Reddy, 2008, p.42).

The problem of Indian education system lies not only in providing an answer to the gaps in the Indian history, culture, policies and their implementation, but also in searching an alternative to the disintegrative approach of the scientists working for different components of the society or on issues related to humanities. This is the time of realization that all the persons of the society, either specialist of the specific branch knowledge or common people interplaying their roles in the social world, are important and creating knowledge for the new generation with the help of experiences of everyday life. Here the following views of Krishna Kumar that deserve mention:

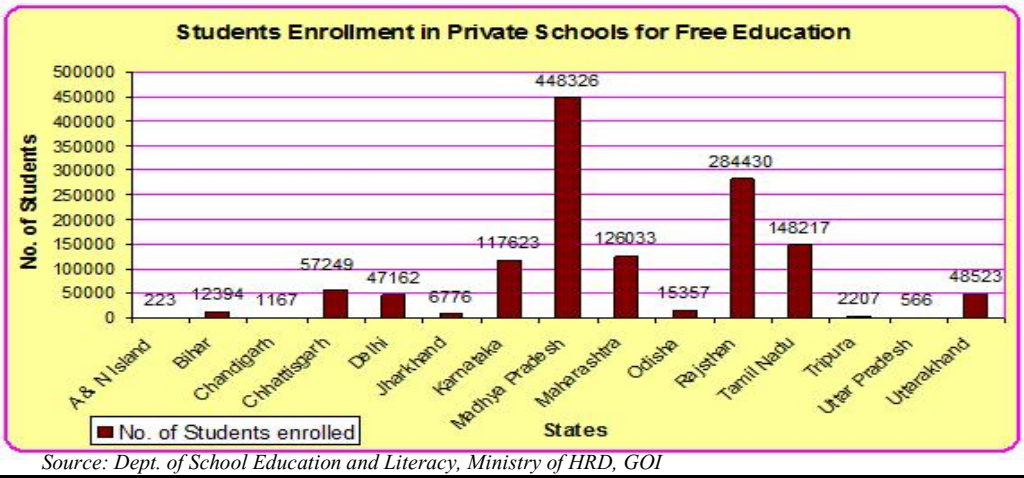
> *The 'educationists' do not appear to think that social research con have anything useful to offer to education, and the 'social scientists' do not seem to think that the problems of content and processes that pedagogues are concerned with have any value for the study of education in the wider context of social interactions. Further-more, the 'educationists' are seldom aware of the data to which social scientists have access. And, in turn, 'social scientists' (Kumar, 1981.*

Indian schooling system, in current scenario requires multilevel reform to provide quality education for children, especially from subaltern sections of the society. As a matter of fact 'civil society has to become more proactive and the state has to offer more space and support for innovative action. This can be done only in a state of mutual trust and an environment of equal partnership' (Govinda, 2003, p-192). The role of NGOs/civil society is not only to maintain the partnership norms but also develop the faith within the community, where they provide the education to children.

It is a provision in the RTE Act 2009 that private schools should enroll 25 per cent children from low income group to provide free education to the children nearby the schools, but it is seen in the rural Uttar Pradesh neither parents nor people from local governance aware about these provisions under RTE Act 2009. The awareness level in the urban centres, even among the teachers is also very low. Soni (2013, 20-22) has quoted a report of Parent Teachers Association United Forum, Mumbai regarding the awareness level among school teacher regarding RTE Act 2009. As per this report only 60 per cent of unaided school teachers and 50 per cent of aided school teachers were aware of their duties and responsibilities as enlisted under this Act. While 71 per cent aided school teachers were aware of what the Act says about children's rights, only 54 per cent of unaided school teachers knew about this. Further, only 45 per cent of aided school teachers and 52 per cent of unaided school teachers were aware of the school's duties and responsibilities.

As per data presented in the Chart-1 and table-1, Uttar Pradesh government have not made significant work to implement the RTE Act in properly, that's why in the highest populated state only 566 children in the private school to get free education under RTE Act till the year 2013-14. The position of Madhya Pradesh is best in all over India.

Chart-1: Enrollment Status Children in 15 States of India 2010-2014



Source: Dept. of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of HRD, GOI

Table-1: Free Enrollment of Children in Un-Aided Schools under RTE Act 2009

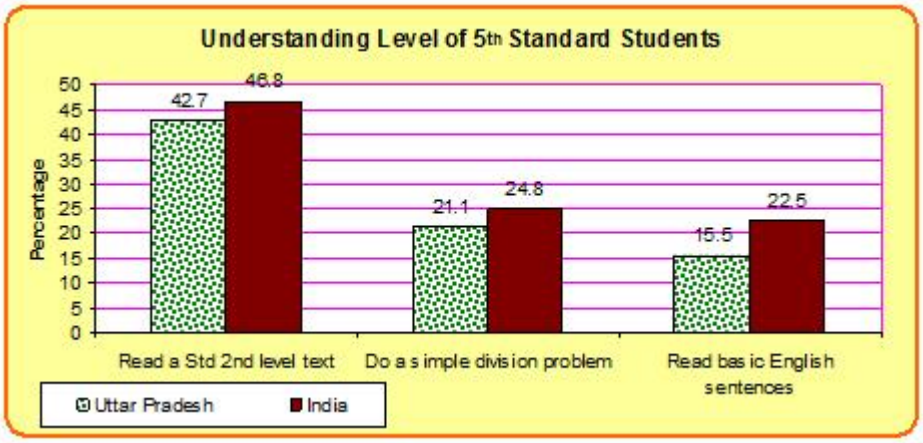
Sl. No.	State* Name	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	Total
1.	Andman & Nicobar Island	0	0	0	223	223
2.	Bihar	0	3388	4306	5700	12394
3.	Chandigarh	12	37	672	446	1167
4.	Chhattisgarh	0	0	25693	31556	57249
5.	Delhi	0	9732	20440	16990	47162
6.	Haryana	Data was not made available from the MHRD, GOI.				
7.	Jharkhand	0	0	3961	2815	6776
8.	Karnataka	0	0	49282	68341	117623
9.	Madhya Pradesh	0	133241	151020	164065	448326
10.	Maharashtra	0	0	67306	58727	126033
11.	Odisha	0	0	11179	4178	15357
12.	Rajsthan	0	0	100002	184428	284430
13.	Tamil Nadu	0	0	147038	1179	148217
14.	Tripura	0	0	737	1470	2207
15.	Uttar Pradesh	0	0	0	566	566
16.	Uttarakhand	0	15104	17255	16165	48523
	Total	**12**	**161502**	**598891**	**556849**	**1316253**

Source: Dept. of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of HRD, GOI (2010-2014)

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of basic education specially in schools run by the *Basic Shiksha Parishad* UP, has declined even after implementation of SSA and RTE. ASER has reflected the ground reality of Indian schooling in its report that - enrolment for children (age 6 to 14 years) was over 96 per cent in 2012, but it could not ensure the quality of education, because children from 5th standard have no knowledge of Hindi, Mathematics and English as per norms. Only 42.7 per cent children from UP and 46.8 per cent from all over India at 5th standard have ability to read local language, 21.1 per cent from UP and 24.8 per cent India could solve the simple mathematics and 15.5 per cent students from UP and 22.5 per cent from all over India have the basic knowledge of English i.e. 2nd standard (ASER, 2013).

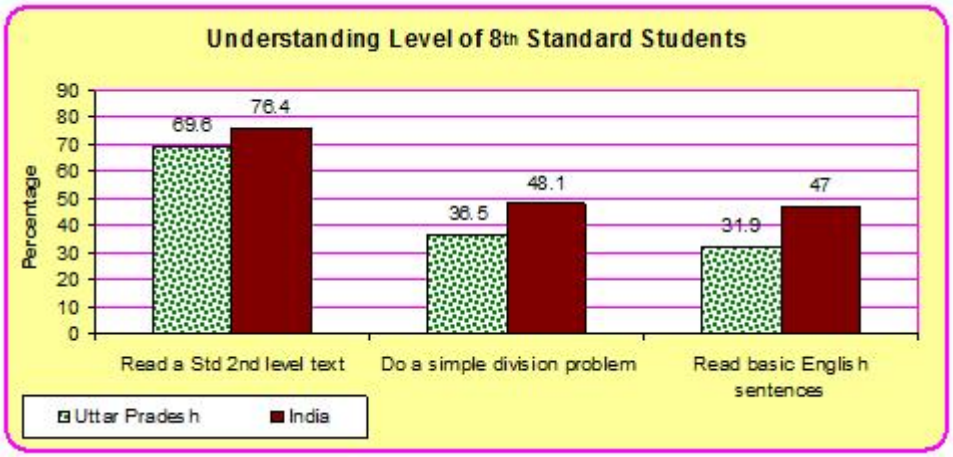
Chart-2: Understanding Level of Students of 5th Standard



Source: ASER, 6 Pager on Status of RTE Implementation, 2013.

Situation of students at 8th standard are also not satisfactory. Uttar Pradesh is poorer in compare to national data. There were 69.6 per cent children from UP and 76.4 per cent from all over India at 5th standard have ability to read local language, 36.5 per cent from UP and 48.1 per cent from all over India could solve the simple mathematics and 31.9 per cent students from UP and 47 per cent from all over India have the basic knowledge of English i.e. 2nd standard (ASER, 2013). Low Pupil Teachers Ratio (only 15.6 per cent school in Uttar Pradesh) and teachers' engagement in non-teaching activities are the major reasons for low quality in basic education in Uttar Pradesh.

Chart-3: Understanding Level of Students of 8th Standard



Source: ASER, RTE and Findings of ASER, 2013.

CONCLUSION

The RTE Act 2009 in India have the provided the tremendous opportunities to the children without any discrimination on the basis of caste, class, culture and gender. But some challenges, still waiting for its solution are : 1. Government has developed most of the schools (around 75 percent) within the habitations and as per norms but not ensured quality educators to provide quality education. Government of Uttar Pradesh is the example of mishandling in the recruitment of teachers at all level; 2. Basic amenities like poor hygienic condition of toilets for the boys and girls; Low PTR and engagement of government teachers in Non-teaching activities are responsible for poor attendance; 3. Higher percentage of girl children from SCs, OBCs and Minorities in compare to boys were found out of school; 4. Unaided school groups are not interested to provide free education to 25 per cent children from low economic section. Teachers of these schools are dominated by the management, and perform for making capital not for serving the society.

Involvement of some NGOs like UNICEF, CARE, Save the Children for the rights of children are good, but due to non-integrated approach of these NGOs and policies of poor performing states making children far from quality education. The quality education in society can be emerged with the help of making education the source of value knowledge, skill development linked to livelihood and sustainable development. Quality gaps in Indian education system and non-rational utopian dream by the armchair policy makers will provide only opportunities for corruption, but it is time to focus on quality and equity in education system in India. We all need to fulfill the provisions of RTE Act 2009, for social inclusion.

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