

## Right to Education an Opportunity and a Challenge

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Education is a continuous process which helps to prepare individual to play his role as an enlightened member of the society. It means an all-round development of the person. When a person educates, he is likely to be more aware of his own rights. The system of education, introduced by the British government in India was aimed at producing a large number of clerks. After the independence, India has been trying to restructure its educational system to suit the needs of technological and industrial development of our country.

The right to free and compulsory education act is a great leap towards universalization of education in India. Article 21A of the constitution says the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine.

It was in December 2002 that the fundamental right to education bill was framed. Earlier, compulsory education for the children in the 6-14 years age group was a part of the Directive principles of state policy. The law was a part of the right to free and compulsory education a revolution that will put nearly one crore children in school and involve a budget of Rs.171484 crore over five years.

Today the state is seen as the chief provider of education. From April 1 2010 it became incumbent upon the state to provide children in the age group of 6 to 14 years not just free schooling but quality education as well. No child shall be held back expelled or required to pass a board examination till class VIII. There must be 25 percent reservation for poor children even in private and minority schools. There must be one teacher for every 30 students. No direct or indirect cost need be borne by the child or parents to obtain elementary education. Schools shall constitute school management committees comprising local officials parents, guardians and teachers. The SMCs will monitor utilization of government grants the infrastructure in schools including the number of classrooms, barrier free access for the physically challenged, sanitary conditions and safe drinking water. RTE mandates the inclusion of 50 percent women and parents of children from disadvantaged groups in SMCs.

India is a late entrant to the group of countries that have legislated for compulsory education. The right to education is recognized as a human right by the United Nations. Most countries in the west had enacted laws, making elementary education a responsibility of the state. UK was one of the last countries in Europe in 1870 to make it the state's responsibility to provide compulsory education. It was after this that Gopal Krishna Gokhale in 1911,

urged the Imperial Legislative Assembly to confer on the Indian people the right to education.

The implementation of RTE Act faces massive manpower, logistics and financial hurdles. There is an acute shortage of qualified teachers across government schools, mostly in rural India. To improve learning quality it is critical that the government makes clear budgetary provisions for training teachers. States have to recruit and deploy teachers at a 30:1 ratio, establish neighborhood schools within three years and train all teachers. These require massive sums of money. The human resource development ministry has estimated a requirement of about Rs. 34000 crore every year for a period of five years. The central Government is bearing 75 percent and state government 25 percent of the project expenditure in the eleventh five year plan. The sharing will be 50:50 for the Twelfth plan.

The 2008-09 District Information System for education report on elementary education in India painted a bleak picture of the 1:29 million government and private schools covered, over 60 percent did not have electricity, 46.4 percent did not have toilets for girls and almost 50 percent did not have boundary walls to ensure the safety of students.

However the RTE act limited the scope of the fundamental right to education to 6-14 years and committed a mistake by not recognizing the importance of early years. Globally it is accepted that the early years are the most critical years for lifelong development. India cannot afford to deprive its youngest 16 crore population of right to nutrition, health and early childhood education as enshrined in the convention of the rights of children to which India is signatory.

A majority of poor parents are not aware that education is now the right of their child. The government needs to launch a massive awareness campaign so that parents become aware of the act and can take advantage of it. Implementation obviously holds the key to its success. And that clearly will be the government's biggest challenge. Prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said I want every INDIAN child, girl and boy to be touched by the light of education. Stressing social inclusion, prime minister also said his government would prioritize the concerns and interests of the scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, other backward classes, minorities and women, and strive to make the RTE a living reality.