

RTE Act: A Means for Equity in Education

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ABSTRACT

The constitution of India guarantees equal social economic and political opportunity including liberty of thought and expression as well, to its entire citizen. No discrimination at any ground is the central fact of our constitution. But even after six decade of our independence the gender based disparities sustain as one of the bitter truths of our society. So the equity has remained an important subject to discuss in Indian context for a long time. Equity in broader sense explores why women are still seen as a back bencher in our socio cultural arena as well as a silent viewer in the decision making process despite of having capability of doing every task as smooth as a man can. Majority of the girls remain still unknown that till which standard they will be permitted to get education. This paper would attend focus on how RTE Act can be said as a means for the equity in education.

Keywords:

Introduction

Despite of major returns evidenced through female education in economic and social context, most of the communities in India still go through the poor investment in female education relative to the male education. Promoting gender equity is essential to achieving basic development goals (Jane Arnold Lincove). In the education sector, the implementation of cost-saving strategies resulted in significant gaps in educational access between boys and girls and rich and poor (Stromquist, 1999). Though in order to overcome the problems related to equity based issues, several measures have been initiated across the country but still the social structure of India somewhat come as a challenge to this. Ideologies that shape female and male identities in Indian society are mutually reinforcing across institutions, such as the family, workplace, and community (Kabbeer and Subrahmanian, 1999). Education development priorities ensures equitable access to quality elementary, secondary, higher secondary and tertiary education. Equity in education has two dimensions; the first is fairness, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential and the second one is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic (OECD, Policy Brief 2008). The actual figure of equity based practices can be seen in terms of the Gender Parity Index. GPI is the ratio of the number of female students enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education to the corresponding number of male student in each level. The real figure of equitable access to education can only be seen from the statistics of different researches as well as from the report statistics of gender parity index but if the girls are given chances to get education free from all insecurities, they surely succeed. Once girls are able to get enrolled in school, they are rather more likely than boys to continue their education with more success (UNESCO, 2004). But in one of the studies done in one of the states of India, Rekha Kaul (2015) explores that 95 of the 144 enrolled girls (65.97 per cent) interviewed in government schools did not seem to know until what stage they would be permitted to remain in school by their parents.

Gender Parity and Equality in Educational Opportunity

Policy documents like Kothari Commission Report (1964-66) and the National Policy on Education (1986) and its POA in (1992) have put enormous emphasis on promotion of gender equity in education by reducing the gender gap in access, retention and transition from one stage to other. However, despite such policy recognition of the importance of female education, dedicated programmes within Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and efforts at 'gender mainstreaming' within the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), data shows a continuing gender gap. Problems of gender disparity and discrimination begin with access to schooling. There has also been impressive progress towards bridging gender gap in enrolment and retention in elementary education. Between 2000-01 and 2014-15, the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in primary education has 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. The enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in Classes IX-XII (secondary and higher secondary education) increased from 38.8 per cent in 2000-01 to 47.1 per cent in 2013-14. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for GER in primary education improved from 0.82 in 2000-01 to 1.03 in 2013-14,

while the GPI for GER in upper primary education improved from 0.75 to 1.08 during this period. The GPI for GER in secondary education improved from 0.79 in 2004-05 to 1.0 in 2013-14 while the GPI for GER in higher secondary education improved from 0.80 to 0.98 during this period. The GPI for adult literacy rate improved from 0.65 in 2001 to 0.75 in 2011 while the GPI for youth literacy rate improved from 0.81 to 0.91 during this period.

RTE and Equity: A way forward

The constitution of India guarantees “justice, social economic and political” and “liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship” to its entire citizen. No discrimination at any ground is the central fact of our constitution. But even after six decades of our independence the gender based disparities sustain as one of the bitter truths of our society. The Fundamental Rights Section further under Cultural and Educational Rights can be read as 29. (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. 29. (2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them. Though The Right to Education as a Fundamental Rights directly did not come into existence but its future was placed there by the rights given to its citizens. Some of the constitutional provisions in context to the Right to Education like Article 21, 38, 39(a) and (f), and 41 of the constitution is reproduced hereunder: “21. Protection of life and personal liberty – No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. “Article 38 States, to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people. – (1) The state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life. (2) The state shall, in particular, strive to minimize the inequalities in income, and endeavor to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.”

After a long gap of independence the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Elementary Education Act- 2009 of Parliament received the assent of the President on August 26, 2009 and published in Gazette of India and implemented on April 01, 2010. This right guarantees the quality elementary education to all. With other important clauses it is also placed that in Section 3: right of child to free and compulsory education, where sub-section (1) states that every child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of elementary education.

Even after the grand success of implementation of RTE Act across the country the various studies done on status of women in India invites so many questions. Equity in broader sense explores women as a backbencher in our socio cultural arena as well as a silent viewer in the decision making process despite of having capability of doing every task in a proper way. Majority of the girls remain still unknown that till which standard they will be permitted to get education in an article entitled “Education for Women’s Empowerment: An Evaluation of the Government run schemes to educate the girl child” Ruchira Sen tells that Women and men in India enjoy de jure equality. She further adds, however this de jure equality has not yet materialised into a de facto equality, despite the efforts made in the Five Year Plans. Rekha Kaul (2015) in her article ‘Gender inequality: Challenges of Educating the Girl Child’ quotes Dreze and Sen as they pointed out, ‘In India, both ancient and modern biases shape our politics, reflecting prejudice of class divisions as well as of traditional cultures. Rekha Kaul further inserts that ‘Due to the largely patriarchal structure of Indian society, irrespective of castes, religions and socio-economic conditions, the tasks allotted to girls and women within a household reinforce long-held mindsets that view them as natural caregivers—going to school in several cases is not seen as having any obvious benefits and is often regarded as a waste of time (Bhatty, 1998; King & Hill, 1993). From the Report of EFA it comes to us that at primary level the enrolment of boys was 64 million against 49.8 million girls in 2000-01 while it reported in 2013-14 as 68.8 million for boys and 63.8 million for girls. At elementary level enrolment there were 89.3 million boys against 67.3 million girls were reported. In 2013-14 it became 102.8 million among boys against 96.1 million among girls. These statistics shows that girls enrolment after RTE Act implantation raised with a good margin but relating these with equity based issues, the socio economic and other decision making status of women in our society is still under question mark. The Department of School Education and Literacy, MHRD, Government of India (2016) displays that the GER of boys and girls are respectively 98.9 101.4 at primary level, 87.7 and 95.3 at upper primary level, 94.8 and 99.2 at elementary level, 78.1 and 78.9 at secondary level and 25.3 and 23.2 at higher secondary level reported for 2014-15.

Strategic approaches for Education Development Covering Equity

Education for All: Towards Quality with Equity (MHRD) published by NUEPA, New Delhi places that the approach to education development is based on the four mutually supporting strategic priorities, often referred to as four Es. These are Expansion, Equity and Inclusion, Excellent and Employability. It covers one of its Es Equity and Inclusion as "The focus of equity/inclusion is on bridging the gender and social category gaps in participation in education. It recognises the right of every individual to education without discrimination on any grounds and according priority to education of the excluded, vulnerable, under-served and other disadvantaged groups. The main thrust is to ensure that educational opportunities are available for and accessible to all segments of the society. The approaches include special initiatives for enhancing access to quality education for disadvantaged and weaker sections of the community such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other Backward Classes, children belonging to Muslim community and differently-abled children. The focus on equity and inclusion also envisages approaches that would help meet the learning needs of diverse groups of pupils and provide opportunities for all learners to become successful in their learning experiences."

Conclusion:

To achieve the basic development goal it is needed to promote gender Equity. Fairness, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The true education could be the way to end such social lacunas. We should change our minds to bring the real social change in context to equity. Girls have so potential that they have proved themselves in every field of life, then why the reports of researches come as their future is dependent on their parent. Why they don't know till what stage they will continue their study. Even UNESCO advocated that "Once girls are able to get enrolled in school, they are rather more likely than boys to continue their education with more success".

Hence after completion of education as like as boys they should surely be promoted to choose their own way.

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