

RTE – Empowering the future of India

Almost a hundred years ago, Gopal Krishna Gokhale urged the Constituent Assembly to confer on the people of India the Right to Education. Today, the Government of India has undertaken the task of bringing into force the Right to Education which was enacted last year in August 2009.

The Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009 marked a historic moment in the Indian education system with the implementation of Right to Free and Compulsory Education for the children up to the age of fourteen years. This Act is endowed with building blocks to provide every child right to quality elementary education. There are an estimated eight million children who dropout between the age of six and fourteen years. Readmitting dropouts and girls who are secluded from education is a crucial task for school managing committees. With these thoughts RTE might propel India to greater heights of education system by improving each child's accessibility to secondary and higher education for a bright future.

This Act provides a platform to reach the isolated, secluded and disadvantaged groups of society, such as child laborers, migrant children, and children with special needs, facilitating them with provisions like well built infrastructure, trained teachers, mid-day meals, books, etc.

Assembling the assorted rules and methods of education system, the Act endeavors prohibition of corporal punishment to ensure classrooms free of fear and anxiety as well as providing education in regional language wherever possible. The Act strives to reach out to the maximum of India's uneducated population. Moreover, RTE focuses on the quality of teaching and learning with substantial reforms of training more than one million new and untrained teachers in the next three to five years and to reinforce the skills of working teachers.

RTE ensures Quality Education

As per RTE, quality education is a form of knowledge which is not limited to books, examination, degree or marks. Quality education is more than principles of literate schooling. It includes care and attention of a teacher which helps nurture the child's growth by inculcating the spirit of inquiry, a passion for executing thoughts and to explore the world independently. For the healthy growth of a child, family and community play a major role ensuring friendly education and easy learning. Inclusion of parents, local authorities, teachers and students are a must in school management.

The committees entail to outline school development plans and monitor school education and facilities provided to a child. In this way, it will also help overcome past disparities.

HRD frames model rules for states

What makes this effort different from any previous attempts at increasing National Literacy such as the National Education Policy (1969), National Literacy Mission or the more recent Inclusion in Education of Children & Youth with Disabilities (2005) is the way it ensures 'co-enrolment' and encourages integration, irrespective of the social or financial background the child comes from.

The Act guarantees a minimum of 25% reservation of seats for children with financial difficulties and also provides free transportation and residential facilities where schools aren't structured. In addition, a detailed 3 year school development plan will ensure adequate financial support to school infrastructure and recruitment of teachers.

It however remains to be seen whether this act, unlike other similar propositions, delivers everything it promises.

Funding RTE

The Finance Commission has assigned Rs. 25,000 crore for the states to implement the Act in the current fiscal year 2010-11 while the Centre has reserved a budget of Rs. 1, 50, 00 crores. Under this scheme states are instructed to reserve 25% of the seats for the weaker sections of the society.

Challenges in implementation of RTE

RTE poses number of challenges in India. One of the challenges is to eliminate disparities and ensure quality education with equality. Secondly the Act states that the age of learning must be reduced between four or six years of age, but in areas where children enter school only after the age of six, it is a great challenge. In addition, bringing the eight million school dropouts back into the education system and ensuring they stay put in school by providing them necessary motivational/moral support also poses a major challenge necessitating flexible and innovative approaches. Underdeveloped states such as Bihar, UP, Rajasthan have the highest dropout rate. Discrimination on basis of caste, creed, and religion is the third aspect that RTE needs to cover up in order to provide complete education. Financial capabilities of parents are another concern for the government in order to provide higher education.

With the implementation of RTE, India can overcome various social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic barriers which hamper inclusive growth of the Indian education system. Thus, India can emerge as a global leader in achieving the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring that all children complete their primary schooling by 2015.

Right to Education is a world initiative in which 135 countries are participating by providing free and compulsory education for more than one crore children. Recently, the World Bank announced an investment of \$1.05 billion in two projects located in India, one of which will boost enrollment process and help children in completion of elementary school.