

ON THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION ACT

A COMMENTARY

SURESH C. SHARMA



ADULT EDUCATION INSTITUTE
Freedom First

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Introduction

Education is the foundation of success of individuals and leads to the prosperity of society. The Right to Education [RTE] Act envisages compulsory and free education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14. It is a commendable thought.

Some impediments may be faced in the implementation of the scheme. Availability of adequate funds is essential for the success of any project. The funds will be provided by the Central and state governments. 25% seats will be provided in private schools to students from economically backward sections. These students will not be charged any school fees or asked to pay for books, transport, uniform and mid-day meals. The government will compensate the unaided private schools to meet the expenses incurred in the education of such students. The quantum of amount will be determined perhaps on the basis of average expenses incurred in the government schools or by the particular school, whichever is lower. It is interesting to note that in some of the private schools expenses per child are lower than those in government schools. A significant uncovered balance will be left over where it is not so. To take an example, fees in some of the private schools in Mumbai are Rs.2,000 per month or more.

The major source of funds in unaided private schools is fees from students. To meet the expenses of one fourth of the students of the specified category, fees of the other students will have to be increased by 33%. This will be resented by the parents concerned. It is a mistake to presume that all students in private schools come from the affluent sections of society. It is more a choice by parents to give priority to children's education and suffer hardships themselves. It is not unusual for some families to opt for continued stay in a place with good schools when the head of the family gets posted to a small station with poor education facilities. Enhancement of fees from three-fourth of students is an uncalled for penalty on

those who are striving hard and suffering hardships to bring up their children as responsible citizens. Economic condition is directly related to the size of the family. Parents of one or two children can afford better education for their kids. It is desirable that free education in private schools where part of the budget will be met from fees by other students should be limited to two for any family. It is well accepted that there should be no discrimination against any category of children. It may be difficult to control all students from making some undesirable remarks about children whose study is being partly financed by them. We understand that some schools have filed a petition in the court against the compulsion of allotting 25% seats to children from economically weak class. The Court decision is awaited. (Since demitted).

It is difficult to provide playgrounds in metro cities. It would be counter-productive to close down the schools not conforming to the specified norms since the government is not in a position to increase the number of government schools to accommodate all the children. As it is there is a severe shortage of qualified teachers and schools to cater for all the children in the age group of 6 to 14. Eight million children are out of schools at present. Reservation for children from marginalized sections has been introduced to build up an egalitarian society. It cannot be separate from the structure of the society and teachers will have to ensure that these students do not suffer discrimination from other students. Some municipal schools in Mumbai have not received any applications for the reservation quota as parents prefer private schools.

We bought our own books. Why burden the schools with this responsibility? It would be prudent to continue that practice. As for free transport, the schools can discontinue responsibility for operating buses. This facility is primarily available only in metro cities and is not applicable to small towns. The Act lays down that free transport will be provided when the school is at a distance of more than 1 km for classes I to V and 3 kms for classes VI to VIII. The Act does not specify the responsibility for provision of transport.

The Right to Education Act

It is not clear whether free transport should be arranged when parents admit a child to a school other than the neighbouring institution due to seats not being available or due to compulsion on minority schools. The schools could wash their hands off transport completely. Further, what transport can be provided in villages and hamlets which are not connected by a road and have to rely on tracks?

The mid-day meals are already being arranged at government expense.

The government has every right to mobilize resources for this noble task. It should not be discriminatory against any particular section. They are welcome to increase the education cess. In USA, finances for universal education are provided by the Centre, state and local bodies. Some of the local bodies and states have indicated their inability to continue to meet their obligation. It is to be seen whether the Centre would allot additional grants or the number of schools would be scaled down. A similar situation may arise in India in some of the states. It would be prudent to plan realistic objectives.

The RTE Act is a bold attempt to extend education to all the citizens and needs to be monitored closely to achieve the objectives of universal education. The book examines the various aspects, merits and weaknesses in the newly framed system of free and compulsory education for children.

The various chapters in this book were serialised in the “Educating Adults” section of *Freedom First*, the journal of the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom, between March 2012 and April 2014.

November 10, 2014.

Suresh C. Sharma

Children’s Right to Free and Compulsory Education

The Right to Education Act (RTE) Act received Presidential assent and was notified as law on 26 August 2009 as **The Children’s Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act**. The law came into effect in the whole of India except the state of Jammu and Kashmir from 1 April 2010. Introducing this Act, Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh stated *inter alia* “We are committed to ensuring that all children, irrespective of gender and social category, have access to education. An education that enables them to acquire the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes necessary to become responsible and active citizens of India.”

The RTE Act clarifies that ‘compulsory education’ means obligation of the appropriate government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the 6 to 14 age group. ‘Free’ means that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.

It makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to a class appropriate to his or her age. It specifies the duties and responsibilities of governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments.

It lays down the norms and standards relating *inter alia* to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours. It provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school, rather than just as an average for the State or District or Block, thus ensuring that there is no urban-rural imbalance in teacher postings. It also provides for

The Right to Education Act

prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational work, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief. It provides for appointment of appropriately trained teachers, i.e. teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications.

It prohibits (a) physical punishment and mental harassment; (b) screening procedures for admission of children; (c) capitation fee; (d) private tuition by teachers and (e) running of schools without recognition. It provides for development of curriculum in consonance with the values enshrined in the Constitution, and which would ensure the all-round development of the child, building on the child's knowledge, potentiality and talent and making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of child friendly and child centred learning.

The Act makes education a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14 and specifies minimum norms in elementary schools. It requires all private schools to reserve 25% of seats to children from economically backward sections (to be reimbursed by the state as part of the public-private partnership plan). It makes provisions for no donation or capitation fees and no interview of the child or parent for admission. The Act also provides that no child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education. There is also a provision for special training of school drop-outs to bring them up to par with students of the same age.

The World Bank education specialist for India, Sam Carlson, has observed:

“The RTE Act is the first legislation in the world that puts the responsibility of ensuring enrolment, attendance and completion on the Government. It is the parents' responsibility to send the children to schools in the US and other countries.”

Excerpted from the Wikipedia

The Infrastructure for Education

There is a general tendency to denigrate the three R's i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic of primary education. It is well accepted that education should aim at something more than mere literacy but the three R's are essential for every citizen irrespective of his or her profession. They are the keys to vast stores of knowledge and the building blocks for advanced training. Education is naturally associated with schools which have the advantage of safe environment and supervision. Children learn to socialize, play and improve communication skills. Formal education in schools is a must to build self confidence.

All schools should have a proper building, library and facility for sports. Above all a school should have trained and committed teachers and students. In a report by an NGO, it was mentioned that in one school, children from the neighbourhood were asked to be present during inspection to complete the count.

For a population of 22 crore children in the age group of six to fourteen, there is a requirement of one lac schools with eight rooms each. This is worked out on the scale of thirty students in a class. It is not an impossible target to achieve. The difficulty is proper work schedule and commitment. It is a sobering thought to take stock of the existing state of affairs. A survey by the NGO 'Child Rights and You' reveals that 46% of the civic schools do not have a play ground, 73% do not have a library and 50% do not have a proper toilet. There were no water purifiers in 50% of the schools and there was no proper furniture in 20% schools. In January 2011, hundreds of villagers and students staged a protest in the village of Madhopur in Orissa demanding appointment of teachers, free uniform and redress of grievances regarding mid-day meals. There were only two teachers taking several classes.

The Indian Express of 19 February 2012 carries the story of

a typical rural school as stated by its principal: “Look at my school; it has no walls, no proper class rooms. There are 200 children who pay Rs 30 per month and some from farmers who do not pay even that much for months. I can barely afford to pay teachers. I have tried to get help from the local MLA and failed.”

A 12-year old girl, Durga, lives in a hut under a bridge and has to do her homework in the light from a lamp since the school has no library where students can do their homework. The result is that the teacher has stopped giving homework. It is a good idea not to give homework for the junior classes. A friend of ours admitted their children to the American School in New Delhi. They were surprised when the principal told them that the school did not give any home work. There should be adequate time for study in the school itself. I recall the advice given to us by an experienced teacher that a child should not be put to pressure and must be encouraged to like studies. We notice children of junior schools burdened with home work and the inevitable coaching classes. I may quote the example of military courses in UK. Our Junior Commissioned Officers [JCOs] invariably stood first in the technical courses in UK. One of them explained to me that the British students on the course would leave the precis and books in the classroom and would not take them home for private studies. Their routine was “No studies at home. Queen’s time is over.”

A major difficulty foreseen in providing buildings for new schools or expanding the capacity of existing ones would be acquisition of buildings or land. Land or premises in urban areas are scarce, particularly within one to three kms of residential areas. Positioning of 80 lac trained teachers could be another challenge.

It has been observed by the NGO ‘Pratham’, that 70% of the schools surveyed by them did not receive grants on time.

School Management

The RTE Act stipulates that the management committees of schools other than unaided schools will have 75% members from parents and guardians of students. The remaining 25% will be equally shared by elected members of the local authority, teachers and local educationists. The Head Master will be ex-officio member. The Committee will ensure that teachers are not burdened with non-academic work and children attend classes regularly. It will monitor mid-day meals and prepare accounts. All the stake holders of education are well represented. No guidelines have been laid down for selection of members from the various categories. Some teachers may interpret non-academic work rigidly and accountability for safety of school buildings has not been specified. All work connected with schools should be considered legitimate activity. It is not clear as to how the Committee will ensure that children attend classes.

It would be prudent not to have a large number of members in the committee as it would be difficult to reach a decision. The number could be restricted to twelve. It will have 9 members from parents/guardians and one each from the elected local body, teachers and local educationists. The quality of education largely depends on the ability and commitment of teachers. The advice and views of Head Master and one lone teacher member may not carry weight with others. It is presumed that the committee will have the responsibility to appoint teachers and evolve criteria for admission of students. Children are supposed to study in neighbourhood schools. It is likely that parents would like to admit their children into well managed schools instead. Choice of medium of instruction and caste based reservation in staffing and admissions may be points of discord between parents, local representative and State Administration. Poor parents who make their living by daily wages or work may find it difficult to spare the time to attend meetings. We can notice the

thin attendance in State assemblies and parliament even when the members are well paid. Parents who are not educated may easily be misguided. Some criteria need to be laid down for nomination of members. Discipline of teachers and students should be left to the Head Master. Students are prone to violent behaviour in certain areas. It is noticed not only during examinations but even in daily routine studies on flimsy grounds. Parents can help in such situations. In some schools, 25% teachers were found to be absent and 50% of those present were not engaged in teaching. The Head Master should be given authority and support to deal with errant staff. Interference by management committee will demoralize the staff.

There is no mention of participation by parents in management of unaided schools. It is not essential as most of them are well run and there is increasing trend to organize teachers/parents meetings. The structure of fees and donations do become points of serious conflict. This happens in spite of directions by the Government. The management of present aided schools is good as can be noticed from the desire of students to prefer them to Government schools. Assistant commissioner for education in Navi Mumbai observed that expenses per student in Government schools was higher than that in private schools, yet quality of learning was better in private schools.

There is no mention of the role of Government authorities. It is essential that overall supervision without interference in daily routine be carried out by State officers. The Administration should lay down minimum qualifications of teachers but not interfere in actual selection. In some areas violence amongst kids is rampant. Local management committee may not be able to deal with it. An example of a school in UK may serve as a guideline. A school had to shut down due to bad results. There were free fights, gangs loitering at the gate and drug abuse. Results were bad. It was taken away from local authority and placed under State control, given freedom of over staffing and teaching methods. After six years, the school is unrecognizable. 60% students did better than the national average. Mathematics and science are the most popular subjects. A teacher commented "Create

an expectation and students can take hard subjects and they will demand them.”

Qualified teachers with a sense of commitment are the cornerstone of good education. The Act directs salaries which are too high compared to the prevailing rates in private schools. An example is a school in Rajasthan where the Head Master, his son and daughter-in-law are members of the staff. The school can work with a smaller budget. Under the Act such schools will close down unless substantial aid is provided. The management structure of present aided schools should be left undisturbed unless specific complaints are received.

The management should try to obtain adequate and timely grants and ensure judicious utilization. Education budget has doubled from 2008 to 2011. As per survey by NGO PRATHAM, seventy percent of the increased budget has been spent on teacher and management costs. Whitewashing of walls and organizing school events were particularly popular. Increase in salary of teachers has not resulted in improved learning. Training of teachers and learning by students were at low priority. Like teachers, management committee members must also be committed.

Only a little more than half of 5 million graduates are employable. Major weakness is in computer operation, communication skills and English.

In a report by ‘Aspiring Minds’

Enforcing A Right

Education for children in the age group 6 to 14 years is compulsory under the RTE Act. It is also their right. There is a contradiction in right and compulsion. It is like making voting compulsory but leaving it to the voter to exercise this right. There are some reservations about the implementation of the provisions.

Noble thoughts alone do not work. Two years after the implementation of the Act, enrolment of girls is stuck at 48%, while the SC enrolment has declined from 20% to 19%. There is no change in the school going figure for ST children. It is envisaged that children will have a school within one km of their homes. No thought appears to have been given to varying conditions of terrain and domestic violence. 180 districts in India are in the grip of escalating violence and parents will be reluctant to let children go to school after every violent event. 40,000 children in seven districts of Chhattisgarh are not attending schools regularly. At one time, all the teachers of schools in Doda district in Kashmir stayed in Jammu and not a single child went to school. Children who run away from home just loiter around or take to begging. There are 50,000 street children in Delhi alone. Who will send them to school?

Responsibility to enrol all children in schools has been listed in the charter of the management committees. They have no authority to punish. Are they going to persuade the parents by reasoning with them? That may not always work. If it is compulsory, there must be means to enforce it. In Singapore, parents or guardians whose wards do not attend school can be fined up to 5000 Singapore dollars or/and imprisonment up to 12 months. In USA, absence from school without permission of the principal or parents is investigated and dealt with by the school itself. The student is made aware of the advantages of qualifying at high school level. Unemployment rate for drop-outs is 8.5 % as compared to 3.1% for high school qualified students and 2.8% for post graduate qualified personnel.

The governments encourage education as they find that 75% of the jail inmates are school drop-outs. A drop-out child suffers loss of self esteem. If it remains unresolved in spite of counseling, it is referred to the court who may award fine and/ or imprisonment to child/ parents. The punishment affects driving license and employment prospects.

There are genuine difficulties in families where children help in family business, be it a shop or artisan workshop. Girls have to assist in household work. May be a less ambitious plan of limited school hours will help in overcoming the problems faced by such families. While we can talk about a child's right to education, recreation and play, it must be noted that participation in family business helps him/her to improve his/her skills for taking over the family business or start his own. I asked a kid helping in the family's fruit shop why he did not go to school. An elder in the family replied that further education would render him useless for the family business. He would want an office job which is difficult to get in Mumbai. Looking after sick members develops a sense of responsibility and forges the security of a joint family.

Australia has a provision for exemption from compulsory attendance in schools for children who take up full time jobs. Leaving school earlier than the compulsory age is allowed in Canada under special circumstances. In India, sections of the Muslim community protested against the RTE Act since it will come in the way of attendance in *madrassas* where children are trained to become *maulvis*. If it is accepted, patrons of other religions may follow suit.

In today's society, there are citizens who voice protest against any compulsory measure. They have raised the issue that compulsory attendance in schools is an infringement of parental authority and obligations. Each individual is unique regarding level of intelligence and interests. Some students can understand a subject readily while others may take more time. The brighter students are handicapped in developing their skills to the maximum as the teacher

has to cater for the entire class. The ideal system to have one teacher for one student is not possible in a school but can be achieved by parents or by a private tutor. A school where a teacher attends to a class of 20 or 30 students is an inferior system. A student may be good in a particular subject and dull in others. He should not be forced to study all the subjects and may be restricted to subjects of his choice. Schools have sometimes tried to divide students in sections based on their learning ability. This causes trauma to those segregated as inferior in learning. These conscientious objectors believe that the parents know their children best and are the best guardians of their interests. This is possible only if the parents are well educated and have the time to coach their children. Even for school going children, parents have to help with homework or arrange private coaching.

In UK, education other than schooling is accepted, subject to inspection by the local authority. Parents may choose the national syllabus or devise their own. In our context, it is not a realistic approach. In practice, parents take interest in supplementing the school studies by help at home. Besides at school a child develops ability to deal with others and develop his/her personality. In USA, the popularity of home schooling has increased dramatically between 1997 and 2002, and two million children were home schooled during the 1999-2000 period. In Delhi, cinema houses were directed not to allow school children to see pictures during school timings. We will find enrolment level of 100% difficult to achieve and may have to lower our target.

75% of young Americans, between the ages of 17 and 24, are unable to enlist in the Army because they have failed to graduate from High School, have a criminal record or are physically unfit.

General Wesley Clark

Schooling – An Unmixed Blessing?

There are some reservations about the implementation of the provisions involving “compulsory attendance” e.g. absence of facilities for disabled children, domestic violence and children having to help with the family business.

It is generally taken as universal truth that education can be conducted only in schools and compulsory education implies that all children must attend schools regularly. A school is considered to be a safe place and children learn to be part of a team. Schools provide much more than literacy; they develop leadership qualities, communication skills and duties of a good citizen. Parents are happy to send children to well administered schools. Doubts arise on finding violence, lack of discipline, ragging and even drugs in schools.

An amendment to the RTE Act lays down that children with severe disability may not attend schools and can be educated at home. This violates the UN Convention of the rights of persons with severe disabilities. The very notion of isolating them is negation of social inclusion. Dr. Mithu Alur, founder chairperson of Spastic Society of India, comments, “Home schooling for severely disabled children amounts to condemning a child to imprisonment at home.” It would make it easier for schools to deny admission to such children and recommend home schooling. It is difficult for parents to teach severely handicapped children as this requires qualified teachers. A typical example is the difficulty of parents to understand dyslexia. They may attribute it to lack of effort by the child. Currently, there are 415 institutions registered for rehabilitation counselling and the total number of qualified teachers is 35,000 against a requirement of 175,000. A large number of severely disabled children do not attend school and they are not getting any education at homes either. The parents are not able to devote adequate time and resources.

The school management committees are required to ensure regular attendance by all children but they do not have any punitive authority. They can only advise parents. Parents engaged in small trade and shops expect their children to help and learn the traditional family work. It could be carpentry or mechanic or hawking. Girls get overloaded with the need to help in household work like cleaning and cooking. It would be desirable to have schools for limited hours for this category.

The schools are supposed to be located within a radius of 1 km of a child's residence. That may not be the case and arranging conveyance may be beyond the financial capacity of many families. Bus accidents, even if few, send an alarm, particularly when they occur due to negligence, poor maintenance of vehicles or rash driving. In Maharashtra, the rules for school buses have not yet been finalized. It is also not possible for children to go to school in violence prone areas. Terror attacks and poor communications in tribal regions are another obstacle to regular attendance. It is not unusual to accommodate security forces and people displaced by natural disasters in schools. It is difficult to deny shelter to displaced families but it should only be for a limited period. It is not advisable to accommodate security forces in schools, since the building may get damaged due to riots by mobs or attacks by militants. While the buildings are being repaired, teaching has to be conducted in verandahs or in the shade for short periods.

Home Education

There are an increasing number of parents in UK and USA who prefer schooling at home. Some parents believe that they can impart better education to the children themselves. They feel that education is important; schooling is not. Some parents feel that a student need not learn all the subjects included in the syllabus. This may be true of trained and well educated parents. A child should have the liberty to study only subjects he considers useful or of interest to him. Typical is the case of a student who left school

and took lessons in calligraphy. This skill proved useful to him in designing Macintosh computer. Such incidents apply to a small percentage of children. This approach has faults since children need to interact with other children and adults other than their parents. A child's thinking and communication skills develop when he has to explain his views to other children and trained adults. Children are natural born scientists and should be encouraged to ask questions and solve problems. Teachers can pose the right questions to develop that ability.

Reading and writing alone does not comprise good education and the parents should send children to schools. A major hurdle is the quality of a large number of schools. For example, *The Times of India* of 9th February, 2012 reported that more than one hundred parents locked the gates of a school in protest of lack of teachers. This is not an isolated incident. Similar protests have occurred at other places too. In the absence of teachers, the children tend to misbehave and pick up fights.

Another complaint is about the mid-day meals cooked in unhygienic conditions. In a school about 70 kms from Bangalore, there was only one water tap located in the toilet. Water for drinking and cooking was collected from that same tap. In another school in Kolar District, the door was chopped off to cook meals. The teacher had taken the gas cylinder home and the cook had no choice. Water filter supplied to the school had not been unpacked. With long interruptions in electric supply, how well will the gadgets work? The building of a school in Mumbai has been declared dangerous but the school has not been closed or shifted. To add to the woes, the authorities have directed schools in neighbourhood not to admit students from the former school to safeguard the service of the staff. Barring a few exceptions, parents would like to send children to good schools. They may not be concerned about buildings and mid-day meals. They desire good education so that the children learn discipline and acquire the skills for a good job.

Reservation for Weaker Sections

Present indications are that the government would reimburse Rs.10,217 per student per year. Compare it with Rs.32,550 per child being incurred by the Mumbai Municipal Committee [BMC] in their schools.

The RTI Act lays down that 25% seats will be allotted to children from disadvantaged background in aided private schools. These seats will be equally divided between Economically Weaker Sections [EWS] and Socially Weaker Sections [SWS]. Residential schools with day boarders and minority schools will be exempted. There will be no interviews or screening and admissions will be by lottery. It is not clear whether parents have a choice of schools. The schools may start a second shift to cater for extra seats for students of EWS and SWS sections. The schools had not received guidelines on the criteria for EWS and SWS for the current academic year when admissions in most of the schools were finalized. Parents of general category are worried that the Government may force cancellation of admission of their wards in order to assign seats to students from EWS and SWS.

There may be cases when there are no applicants from students of the reserved category. Do the schools have an obligation to search for applicants? We do find urban areas without any SC or ST population. A sub-division of quota between ST and SC could further complicate the issue.

The expenditure on these 25% students will be partly financed by Government. The remaining costs will be borne by the 75% students of general category. It is wrong to presume that all these students come from prosperous families. Some of them have to work hard and overtime to meet their family needs. They are only more aware of the need for good education. I recall some of our colleagues in the armed forces volunteered for field service so that the family

could continue to stay in a station having good schools. There could be resentment amongst these 75% children for increase in fees due to free schooling for others. There are reports of discrimination against students from reserved category in Karnataka. As per media reports, three children were forced to cut their hair short and in another school, they were allotted seats at the rear benches. Rear bench seats are not an act of discrimination and some one has to sit there. If it is due to caste discrimination, it should be severely dealt with. It will need careful monitoring to ensure avoiding a mini-class war. Forum for Fairness in Education has recommended that the teachers should be sensitized and trained in handling these students. They may not be as well behaved as the others and their uniforms may not be as clean. The teachers should try to instill good values in them without discriminating or punishing them. There is a need to change the mindset of teachers and parents of affluent students.

Present indications are that the government would reimburse Rs.10,217 per student per year. A suitable deduction will be made for concession in allotment of land and purchase of equipment. Compare it with Rs 32,550 per child being incurred by the Mumbai Municipal Committee [BMC] in their schools. Reimbursement of expenditure for reserved category students is likely to be a source of corruption. We already have instances of false claims for mid-day meals. The schools and Government inspectors will find a convenient method of cheating the State.

The Government has opted to pass on their own responsibility to private parties who are not well equipped or always inclined to carry out the mandate. It would be better if,

- the Government should expand the Central Schools chain who are providing good education
- Free education is limited to two children per family. We are shy to admit that large families lead to increased poverty.

Promotions Without Examinations

A survey by the NGO Pratham in 2011 revealed that as a result of 'no tests', 51% students could not read, 73% could not divide and 2.8% could not recognize numbers.

The RTE Act stipulates that students should not be detained upto class 8 and be promoted to the next class. At the end of class 8, some of the students may drop out while those who opt for higher class may find it difficult to cope with the studies. In a school in Mumbai, 150 students failed in class 9. The parents have alleged the school has adopted this policy to ensure a high success in class 10. They demanded a revaluation of the answer books. Principals of other schools have also commented that ten percent students failed to make the grade. In a college in South Mumbai, only 45% students passed in class 11. The pass percentage increased to 70 when the minister granted grace marks. Is this a prerogative of the minister? The parents may be happy but would these students be able to qualify for any competitions or jobs? In a survey only 50 of the 5000 students were found employable. A survey by the NGO Pratham in 2011 revealed that as a result of 'no tests', 51% students could not read, 73% could not divide and 2.8% could not recognize numbers. The teachers and students have developed a casual attitude. Students' attendance was 89% and that of teachers was 90%. Why have examinations at all?

The examinations are a tool to judge the students' ability to understand what he has been taught and be in a position to assimilate subjects of the next class. This is particularly true of science and mathematics subjects. A student who has not grasped the syllabus of a class would find it difficult to understand the subjects in the next class. He may try to drop out or keep on harassing the teacher to keep on explaining what has been already covered. This is a drag on other students. It has been noticed that ten to twelve students

in each class do not prepare well due to the 'no detention policy'. They are reluctant to write essays and long answers and have developed an unhealthy attitude for tests and are not serious about studies. The teachers had to bring down the examinations to an extremely simple level so that all the students could pass. This is not desirable.

Concerned with the deteriorating standards, the education authorities are advising special coaching for weak students who fail. This step misses the essential point that 'no detention' policy weakens the desire of a student to study and do well. It is desirable that this policy should be revoked to ensure a high standard of education which is essential for the knowledge based economy of today.

The term 'School' originated from the Greek word 'Skhole' which means 'leisure'. The reason for associating 'leisure' with school is that, in Ancient Greece, liberal education was not imparted to all.

It was a privilege of the highest class in society which had enough leisure to cultivate the specialised aspects of culture through liberal education. Today, school stands for a specialised and formal agency set up by the society for imparting education to the rising generations.

In olden times, when the social life was very simple, the family provided the child with all the activities and experience he needed. Then, so long as occupations were centered round home or village, the family, the church and the local community served as a school for life.

Gauri Dushi in her Essay on
School as an Agency of Education

The Quality of Education

“A good teacher can add USD 20,000 to a student’s earning in a life time. For a class of 20 students, it comes to USD 400,000”.

- Thomas Friedman

The quality of education depends upon good teachers and willing students. An effective teacher ensures that the students take interest in learning and gaining knowledge or skills. There is a requirement for a large number of teachers to achieve the objectives of compulsory education. Training the requisite number of teachers is a challenge. 9% of the schools are single teacher units and 20% have teachers without professional qualifications. This comes to a requirement of training 6.7 lac teachers. The problem of lack of trained teachers is more acute in the eastern States. 36% of the sanctioned posts of teachers are vacant. 86% of the teachers failed in the Central Teachers Eligibility Test [CTET] conducted last year. This year, 94% failed in that test. 99% of the B. Ed. qualified candidates for teachers post failed in the CTET test. Instead of improvement, there is deterioration.

This is not surprising since there is a lack of good teachers’ training institutes. The Chief Justice Verma Committee appointed by the Supreme Court to examine the quality of teachers training institutes concluded that these institutes were in poor shape. About 90% of them were in private sector and needed large investments, both financially and qualitatively. Out of 291 institutes inspected in Maharashtra, only 34 were considered fit to continue. The panel judged the schools on the basis of open space, built up area, faculty strength, salary and maintenance of funds. Funds are not a problem. The budget allocation has increased by 165% in the last five years. The teacher student ratio is good at 1:35. Yet, there is no improvement in the success rate of students and the drop-out rate has increased. The Mumbai Municipal Committee [BMC] spends Rs.53,335 per year per student while the private schools spend Rs.36,000. The success rate

of students over five years was 82% in private schools against 58% in BMC schools. The reason for the poor performance is apathy, lack of accountability and mismanagement. In spite of this drawback, 84% of the teachers received good to excellent reports. One million students have shifted from government schools to unaided private schools. BMC is now planning to borrow teachers from private coaching schools. About 53% of students lacked reading skills of second grade.

Overcoming drawbacks

The quality of education system depends on the quality and commitment of teachers and principals. The first step should be to improve the training schools for teachers. Promotion of teachers should be based on an objective evaluation system. Parents should take more interest in the progress of their wards and regularly attend parents-teachers meetings. Technology should be used to impart education which is today not restricted to books and blackboards. Parents should limit the time that children spend on TV and computers. A spirit of collaboration should replace the competitive race and students should share work and information.

The present system of 4 years primary and 3 upper primary classes will change to 5 years primary and 3 years upper primary. Existing schools catering to classes upto 4 and 7 will have to be upgraded which will require 29,000 new class rooms. Space crunch will be acute for schools working on a two shift basis. The syllabus too will have to be revised. Not many schools have adequate buildings. Typical is the case of a Zila Parishad school, 107 kms from Mumbai. Students sit in squalor. The boundary wall is broken and vehicles ply through it. Gutters overflow into the play ground and children are falling sick due to filth. Grants are not adequate for supporting the staff and children sweep the floors. Electric bills are paid by the teachers. Good education facilities cannot be forged overnight, just by enacting laws.

No Corporal Punishment

Children should be punished only after obtaining approval from the parents. Some parents may even agree to corporal punishment. Should it be accepted?

Punishment is regarded normal in schools and families, often even considered it necessary for children to grow into responsible individuals. It is so pervasive that a child does not realize that his rights are being impinged upon. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” was a common saying. It is now well recognized that punishment in any form harms the overall development of a child. Corporal punishment leads a child to behave aggressively towards peers and siblings. As adults they are likely to mete out similar treatment to their children. The cycle keeps repeating itself. Corporal punishment leads to adverse psychological consequences.

Provisions of the RTE Act

The RTE Act prohibits all forms of physical and mental violence. This is in keeping with the practice the world over. For the purpose of the Act, corporal punishment is considered as any action that causes pain, hurt, injury or discomfort to a child. It includes hitting, pinching, pulling hair and making children stand in a corner or face the wall. Mental harassment is defined as scolding, sarcasm, using derogatory remarks or ridiculing a child. Disciplinary action under service rules can be taken against teachers who violate these rules. There is no clarity on what disciplinary action can be taken. A committee has recommended that provisions of the Indian Penal Code [IPC] be invoked to punish teachers who inflict injury or harassment.

Some of the practices of punishment today are shocking. A boy lost his eyes. This is not discipline but torture. La Martiner

school woke up only after a student committed suicide. A teacher cut the hair of a girl as punishment. A survey of 150 teachers revealed that all of them resorted to corporal punishment, hitting by rulers or throwing chalk. There are reports of children being forced to drink urine. Besides humiliation this practice is harmful to health. One student was beaten up so harshly in Beed that he succumbed to his injuries. A boy was punished by three teachers for chewing tobacco. Why did it take three teachers to beat one student? A teacher in Hyderabad forced a 15 year old student to do 300 sit ups for quarreling with a class fellow. He developed high fever and died of brain haemorrhage nine days later in a hospital. 400 students in government schools in Delhi complained against severe punishment and no teaching. A principal of a college in Mumbai said that there was no harm in minor punishments such as not allowing games period or make them do two rounds of the school.

Prevalence of Corporal Punishment

The National and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights [NCPCR and STPCR] are required to monitor the implementation of the RTE Act. They carried out survey of 6632 children in 7 states. Derisive words were used against children in the 3 to 5 years age group. More than 65% were beaten by canes and 60% slapped. Punishment included prohibiting children from using toilets. Punishment by hitting students occurred less in private schools. Bihar State Commission for Protection of Child Rights has recommended that children should be punished only after obtaining approval from the parents. Some parents may even agree to corporal punishment. Should it be accepted?

In short, corporal punishment is widely prevalent. The Act recommends disciplinary action against guilty teachers but does not specify what action is to be taken. The suggestion of cancelling recognition raises the issue of opening new schools. Filing cases in courts under various sections of the IPC is not pragmatic due to the large number of likely cases and delays. Besides, the villages and small towns have no courts. Frequent attendance at court is a

punishment to parents as well. It was noticed that only 3% children reported to their parents and 80% parents did not complain for fear of victimization. School principals believe that unless parents complain about such problems, there's nothing they can do to help. There have been some cases in the past where parents have made up such complaints just to get back at a teacher, so there is a need for proper inquiry before taking any action. The obvious remedy is to sensitize the teachers and provide guidance to them. At present the teachers lack the ability to handle difficult and unruly children. Students not completing homework or showing lack of assimilation may need special attention.

As far as enforcement of discipline is concerned, the NCPCR recommends referring lapses of discipline or non-completion of home work to parents. Recently, a 17 year old boy whose conduct had been conveyed to his parents stabbed the lady teacher several times till she fell dead. The parents should be advised to check report cards regularly and take interest in keeping in touch with the school authorities. Employing counselors is just not possible in the villages. We should not evolve a regime where teachers lose interest in the progress of students. Improvement requires a massive investment in improving the quality of teachers and a martial system of assessment. At this stage we can only gradually move towards a "no-punishment" system.

*A well respected teacher advising the 'tiger moms' wanting to load the child with home work remarked:
"Remember, the important point is that the child should not hate studies but enjoy it."*

Recognition of Schools

People, who make laws behind closed doors, don't know the ground realities. These schools are a social necessity.

All schools had to obtain recognition from the Government by 31 March 2013. The schools have to submit details of the strength and qualifications of staff, the number of class rooms, pay structure, blackboards, laboratories and playgrounds. There are seventeen conditions that are required to be met. The school or the society responsible for it must have their own building or rented accommodation for 30 years. Their fate hangs with the Deputy Director Public Education. In Ahmedabad, only 450 schools out of 1045 have applied for recognition. Recognized schools have to obtain recognition again.

Some of the provisions are difficult to interpret. For example, the Act states that school should not be run for profit to any individual, group or association and it should conform to the values enshrined in the constitution. A large number of schools are managed by religious societies. Can these schools be allowed to function? In USA, some individuals succeeded in removing the morning prayers in the schools. Similar litigation can occur in India too. 50,000 private schools in Bihar had protested against the rules for recognition.

Closing down schools

A bureaucratic approach is not desirable. In Bihar, a school must have two acres of land. In Karnataka, 66 schools have not received approval due to lack of infrastructure. Is the Government ready to start their own schools to take the load of these schools? Many Government schools do not meet the criteria of infrastructure. A school building in Dahisar with 200 students has been declared dangerous by the Fire Department. The Inspector of Schools has

told the schools in the neighbourhood not to admit children from this school so that the teachers do not lose their jobs. The Management Committee is unable to carry out the repairs as the fees are low and some parents do not pay even that. The parents are of the view that the Management Committee wants to make money so they want to close down the school.

In the name of quality education, the schools cannot be shut down without making alternative arrangements. R. C. Jain, president of the Delhi State Public Schools' Management Association commented that if the three-year RTE deadline which expires in March 2013 is not extended, 1593 unrecognized schools in Delhi (as per a Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) survey quoted in a 2012 education report) will have to be closed down or face a one-time fine of Rs.1 lac and Rs.10,000 for every additional day. As per the MCD survey, 1.64 lac children study in these unrecognized schools. People, who make laws behind closed doors, don't know the ground realities. These schools are a social necessity.

The State Governments have to notify the rules under the Act. The Gujarat Government has taken a more pragmatic view. The rules have been framed by a committee under the former Chief Secretary, Mr. Sudhir Mankad. They have given importance to the parents and the children and not to the public sector providers of education. The RTE Act and the rules by most of the State Governments focus on the inputs and not on the results. The Gujarat Rules focus on learning results and provide weighted average on four measures:-

	Weightage
1. Students learning outcomes using standard tests	30%
2. Students learning outcome compared to last performance. This will ensure that schools just do not show good results by not admitting weak students.	40%

3. Inputs including facilities and teachers qualifications 15%
4. Non-academic outcomes like sports and personality development. Feedback from parents is to be used for this measure. 15%

Teacher/student ratio is defined in a more practical way. In case the class room is smaller than 300 square feet, the school need not be derecognized and should be allowed to function on a different teacher/student ratio. The acceptable ratio is [area in square feet minus 60] divided by 8. This allows the school to function in a more efficient way with limited infrastructure.

The RTE Act stipulates closing down of schools without recognition. Gujarat schools allow the State to take over the school or transfer it to a third party.

I must narrate the experience of my brigade commander who was posted to the Indian contingent in the Allied Occupation Force in Japan. During lunch break, he happened to walk across to a group of workers engaged by the Force for manual work. He was surprised to discover that the foreman was a former college lecturer and the workers were his students. During breaks, he was conducting regular classes.

Suresh C. Sharma

Poor Learning Results

The poor performance of children from economically weak sections and consequent lack of opportunity led parents to believe that school education could not remove poverty.

The number of students attending schools has increased due to the RTE Act but the quality of learning has declined. The number of students unable to read standard 2 text has increased from 49.3% in 2010 to 52.3% in 2011 and to 58.3% in 2012. NGO *Pratham* has reported that 9.3% students in class III could not recognise numbers from 1 to 9 and 28.8% could not do simple subtraction. The condition in other standards was no different. In class VIII only 26.6% could complete subtraction questions while 45% were able to do division sums. The poor standards explain the reason for the large number of students dropping out after class VIII. There is a drop in arithmetic learning except in Kerala and Karnataka. A Report by the Programme of International Studies Assesment [PISA] puts India 73rd out of 74 countries in quality of education. It has a favourable comment about schools in Tamilnadu and Himachal Pradesh. There is migration from Government schools to private schools. In Kerala and Manipur, private school enrolment was more than 60% against the national average of 25.6%. The Government schools have failed to provide good quality education. *Pratham* has suggested that the provision in the RTE Act not to detain any students till class VIII is responsible for poor learning results. Kapil Sibal, the Human Resources Minister in the Central Government, wanted to introduce a quality assesment test after class XII but the States declined to cooperate. K. B. Kothari, managing trustee of *Pratham*, Rajasthan said that RTE has brought about transformational changes in the schools in terms of infrastructure but we have a long way to go. The survey finding gives a chance to introspect on how to increase the reading and learning levels.

About 14% of parents had no education and 30% of children

in the age group of 6 to 14 drop out after primary schooling. Parents with no education is no obstacle to children attending schools. On the contrary, some of them toil hard to provide education to their children. They are well aware that lack of education deprived them of an opportunity to advance in life. Some of them willingly undergo hardships and work hard to put their children in good schools. Poverty is a hindrance. Help from children in farms in villages or in shops of artisans is an economic necessity. Similarly girls are expected to help in household work. Schools with reduced hours of teaching and earn while you learn could be a possible solution.

The bulk of Indian illiterates live in the country's rural areas, where social and economic barriers play an important role in keeping the lowest strata of society illiterate. Government programmes alone, however well intentioned, may not be able to dismantle barriers built over centuries. Major social reformation efforts are sometimes required to bring about a change in the rural scenario. Several non-governmental organizations have worked to improve the literacy rate in India. A low cost pre-school chain, Hippocampus Learning Centre, has established eighty schools in rural areas of Karnataka. The children speak near perfect English and play with Lego bricks on the floor. Some of the centres have been fashioned out of cattle sheds. The walls have been painted with pictures of fruits, birds and numbers. The world over, pre-school education is being promoted as a tool of social mobility. The students are the children of cane and sheep farmers, silkworm rearers and village traders. Quite a few of them are the first in their families to enter a school. The chain is for profits and social enterprise. A venture capital of Rs.7.5 crores has been provided by international funds, Acumen, Unitas and Lok Capital. The chain has been started by 44 year old Umesh Malhotra, a former employee of Infosys. Earlier, he had set up a chain of libraries in rural areas. The parents are paying the costs which range from Rs.2000 to 3000 per year. In three years of learning at pre-school, a child picks up arithmetic, English, local language and good manners. The children are learning well and change is noticeable in their behaviour and desire to study. To keep costs low, teachers have been recruited

from local villages. The chain can function without any bureaucratic controls as pre-school education is not covered by the RTE Act. Similar efforts need to be made for primary and secondary education.

Poor learning results amongst the underprivileged have been observed in USA and Europe as well. This is increasing the inequality as the poor are not getting good education. Progress and jobs in industrial societies depend upon knowledge and skills. The old aristocracy has been replaced by meritocracy which in turn depends upon education in selected schools. The poor performance of children from economically weak sections and consequent lack of opportunity led parents to believe that school education could not remove poverty. This view changed with charter schools which are funded by the Government and managed privately. The results are monitored closely. Teachers do not have a union. Schools which do not function well are closed down easily since the teachers do not have a union. There are 5600 charter schools in USA. Parents prefer these schools and the waiting list is growing. The experiment is spreading to UK as well. Most of the private schools in India have similar pattern of funding. What needs to be done is close monitoring.

A University training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end. It is education that gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgements, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them and a force in using them.

Cardinal Newman

Parental Choice

Pavement vendors and house maids say with pride that their wards are studying in English medium schools.

Under the RTE Act, admission and attendance to recognized schools is compulsory. There is no mechanism to ensure that children do attend school classes regularly. It is left to parents to keep a check and the good sense of management committees and teachers. They do not have any punitive authority to compel students or parents to enforce admission and attendance. Objections have been raised in UK and USA about compulsory admissions as a restriction on individual freedom. Teaching at home is becoming more popular in UK and USA. In USA, the arrangements at home are subject to inspection by Government inspectors. In UK, an approved syllabus has to be followed. The parents need not be qualified teachers. Some parents who want to give better education to their children consider compulsory schooling to be the worst injustice. Parents can cater for the unique merits and capabilities of their children. They are in the best position to understand them. Those who are not qualified may engage private tutors. This approach is even more suited to children of artisans who desire to hand over their business units to the kids. They are aware that schooling may turn the kids against working by hands. The prevalent unemployment situation for not so bright students encourages them to train a child in family business. I asked a boy helping in his family business of selling fruits why he did not go to the school instead of helping in the family business. His uncle replied that he had studied upto seventh class and any further schooling will turn him away from this work. Jobs not being available easily, he is better off working here than going to school. Same is true for artisans established in small enterprises.

Parents have the option to admit a child to a school of their

choice, subject to availability of seats and their willingness to pay the fees. Schools are forced to raise fees to meet increased costs or additional facilities. Not all parents are able to meet such commitments and lodge protests. The RTE Act does not lay down any guidelines on structure of fees but in practice the Government does intervene in aided schools. As for students from Economically Weak Sections [EWS], the courts have ruled that distance is no criteria. The students will first be offered admission in school within one km, subject to availability of quota seats. Good schools are unlikely to be located within one km of their residences. This may cause dissatisfaction as all parents would like to avail schooling in the best institutions, particularly so when they do not have to pay.

Schools have the option to choose the medium of instruction and parents can select a school as per their choice. Local and regional politicians do try to interfere with the freedom to select the medium of instruction. In spite of the efforts and compulsions of the Government, the trend is to favour English medium schools as is evident from the following table of population of students:

	2009-10	2010-11
Marathi Schools	1.09 crore	1.22 crore
English Schools	18.9 lacs	22.5 lacs
Hindi Schools	4.7 lacs	5.42 lacs

We have noted pavement vendors and house maids say with pride that their wards are studying in English medium schools. There is a craze for English medium schools in rural areas too. A chain of schools run by an NGO is imparting good pre-school education in spoken English in villages. Parents are well aware of the advantages of education in the English language and have welcomed this effort of the NGO. There is no provision for reservation for EWS in nursery classes. It has been observed in UK too that pre-school education improves children's performance.

Education of Tribal Children

The challenge of delivery of education is to enable them to engage with the mainstream yet retain the positive ethos of their culture.

The Government has made special arrangements for education of children, particularly of girls from economically and socially backward classes. 3.6 lakh girls (29% SC, 26% ST, 26% OBC, 9% Muslim, 10% BPL) are studying in over 3500 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas [KGBV] in the educationally backward blocks of India in class VI to VIII. 50,000 children and 391 hostels attached to these schools in sparsely populated areas benefit from this programme. Besides free boarding and lodging, they get a stipend of Rs.200 per month. Yet, the test results of tribal children are not satisfactory.

It has been observed that 99% of the school dropouts in the Nilgiris are Adivasi children. Only 40% of the Adivasi students finish school and the learning skills of those who finish school are low. For example, only 60% children could pass in Tamil and not even 30% could pass in mathematics. The same state of education prevails in other parts of India, as revealed by a study conducted by the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.

Need to be in Sync with Tribal Culture

A tribal took his child to a Government school in the Nilgiris for admission. The father gave the child's name as Karalan. The headmaster frowned and said that his name is going to be Govindan and entered that name in the school records. The father explained this to the child in his language. The headmaster interrupted him and told him not to speak that jungle language in the school. The father left the child in the hostel only to find him back in the house after a week. Most of the children have similar experience in other parts of the country. According to an UNICEF study in Koraput

district in Orissa, 14% of children in the age group of 6 to 14 do not attend school compared to 8% in the rest of the state. More than 40% children drop out before the 7th grade.

The attitude of the settled communities to consider themselves superior does not permit the tribal children to join the main stream. In spite of well meaning efforts, the tribal people continue to be marginalized. The mainstream personnel who do not understand the conditions, aspirations and needs of these communities have drawn up the education programmes for the tribal children. Education of tribal children requires an understanding of their social organization. The challenge of delivery of education is to enable them to engage with the mainstream yet retain the positive ethos of their culture. Failure to address the need for special education increases the inequalities and disadvantages faced by these children. The schools for the tribal children must be based on tribal languages and practices.

In some of the tribal population, women work on their small agricultural plots while the men folk spend their time in drinking country-made liquor resulting in high crime rate and domestic violence. Indiscriminate cutting of trees and encroachment of tribal land by urban society has led to increased poverty. Children who drop out from schools take to their ancestral way of living. There are success stories too. A brief review of one school each in private and one in the Government sector clearly shows the direction to take.

Vidyodaya Adivasi School started work in Gudalur in Nilgiri hills about twenty years ago. The young people taken as teachers are trained in teaching and every aspect of school and education process. Respect for the adivasi way of life is the core of schoolwork. Instead of trying to assimilate or dominate them, they are made a part of the change process. Community organizations manage all matters of the school including admissions and recruitment of teachers. As far as possible, teachers are recruited from among the five tribes of Gudalur area, who train on the job in the school. Knowledge of their language and customs helps the teachers to easily

establish a rapport with the students and there are hardly any dropouts.

Parents, whose children had dropped out, had started believing that their kids were incapable of learning. A visit to the school and interaction with the students and staff changed their outlook. Discussions with the parents led to inclusion of history and culture of the adivasis of Gudalur in the curriculum. The elders could participate in teaching the land struggles and rituals of the people. Songs, dramas, stories, rituals and dances were presented. The school became an open forum for interaction between teachers, students and community members.

Initially, children are taught in their mother tongue and gradually introduced to Tamil, the regional language. The school teaches in five mother tongues. Assessments are comprehensive based on teachers' knowledge of students. It is different from the standardized form filling process designed by the Government department. The training of teachers, curriculum and conduct of education are not in conformity with the RTE Act. Any changes to comply with the rules and regulations of the Act could bring back the specter of dropouts.

Another case is of a residential school for the tribal children run by the Scheduled Tribe and Schedule Caste Department at Daleiguda in Orissa. Forty boys and one hundred forty girls whose homes are far away reside in the school hostel. Krupasindhuv Pangi, the headmaster, is well aware of the needs of the community. After his family's small piece of land was taken away for construction of a factory when he was five years old, his father worked as a daily labourer. Pangi was the first person in the family to attend school. He wanted to ensure that other children also receive education and an opportunity to advance themselves. Under his guidance, the scores of the students have almost doubled. Some of his students have taken up jobs as teachers and lecturers at the colleges. Teaching is carried out in the mother tongue to begin with since a large number

of entrants do not know Oriya, the regional language. Maps of the country, alphabets and pictures of animals adorn the walls of the school building. The students are provided free food and accommodation. There are hardly any drop outs. The recruitment of teachers, syllabus, learning routines and assessment do not follow the conditions laid down in the RTE Act. The good results are a product of innovation in teaching and must be applied to other areas as well.

“Most innovations in education have been generated by alternative schools and by a small number of individuals and organizations. The innovations include new teaching-learning materials, pedagogies and some texts. These need to be enhanced. Innovations in Adivasi/Tribal education will occur when the focus shifts from standardization. Innovation will involve incorporating newer ways of learning, creating new knowledges, open systems of learning, recognition, accreditation, and certification. The reality of present-day innovative education programmes is such that most of the initiatives are taken up by civil society groups and are in operation on small scales. Scaffolding these, instead of subjecting them to bureaucratic norms will go a long way in enhancing innovative educational schemes for deprived groups.” – Report by UNICEF.

“I think the big mistake in schools is trying to teach children anything, and by using fear as the basic motivation. Fear of getting failing grades, fear of not staying with your class, etc. Interest can produce learning on a scale compared to fear as a nuclear explosion to a firecracker.”

Stanley Kubrick

Education of Children with Disabilities

Should these children attend a normal school or be educated in special schools remains an issue, the world over.

Most of the children with disabilities come from the poorest section of the society. One third of them do not attend school. Besides increasing the poverty level, this lack of education imposes great emotional and physical strain. They need special teachers and facilities for toilets and ramps which most schools do not have, thus discouraging disabled children from taking admission. Other children often avoid their company and may even pass taunting comments. The teachers and school administrators must take precautions against such behaviour and impress upon all the students to be sympathetic and helpful to them. In the absence of required facilities, these children themselves are reluctant to join the school or soon drop out.

The RTE Act makes provision for children with disabilities to complete elementary education. Psychological needs also need to be satisfied along with learning. They are assured admission under the socially disadvantaged group. Some States have earmarked an exclusive quota for them. They are to be given special learning and support material. In Maharashtra State, safe transport is to be arranged by State Government or Local Authority. The State Government and Local Authority are expected to carry out school mapping to establish neighbourhood schools and obtain information on all children and dropouts in the area. No screening test or interview will be carried out or admission denied due to lack of proof of age. The rules do not clarify what action is to be taken when the number of applicants is more than the seats available under 25% quota. First come first serve rule is a good guide but difficult to enforce or verify. Maharashtra Government has directed that admissions will be decided by lottery.

Integrating Disabled Children

A child will be admitted to a class appropriate to his age even if he has missed school due to some reason. Extra coaching is to be arranged for such students to bring them at par with other students of the class. This is easier said than achieved. It is difficult to make up for missed teaching. It is worth reconsidering and letting them study in classes appropriate to their academic ability. Children with multiple or profound disabilities may opt for home based education. It should be an option for the parents and should not become an excuse for schools to deny admission. Their education needs may be better served in separate sittings. As far as possible, they should be educated in the main stream for integration with other students. Class room assistants and fellow students play a vital role in building confidence. Some students may not be able to attend all the periods due to physical weakness and can be let off early.

Parents like to admit their children to normal schools to satisfy their emotional needs. This is good so that they do not feel themselves to be disadvantaged. An officer whose both feet were amputated due to injury in a mine field and rose high in spite of the injury has recommended that extra care or help should be discouraged and instead children should be encouraged to be self-reliant. Otherwise it gives the individual a feeling of inferiority and they do not put in the effort required to overcome their weakness. Considerable effort and determination is required by the individual and the family in recovering from a disability. An officer whose leg was amputated was advised by the doctors not to use crutches otherwise he would not have the will to discard them later. He did not follow that advice and used crutches all along. Help should be extended without appearing to be so. I recollect a colleague wanting to get a residential telephone for his family when he was posted to a field station. His wife was suffering from a serious disability. I promised to try since I knew his problem. He retorted angrily that he did not want any sympathy. I had not meant to patronize and did realize my mistake in offering help.

It is imperative to make the students feel normal. This will

depend on the nature of the disability. Students with dyslexia have to get concession in writing or oral examinations. Recently in Mumbai, the Board had exempted children suffering from dyslexia from the Hindi paper in High School examination. They were not allowed to seek admission to college under on-line system since they had not taken the Hindi paper. They had to seek help from the court who directed that on-line admission should be allowed for these children.

Need For Special Schools

There is a need for coherence amongst the various departments of the Government and a uniform policy in the country. The hearing handicapped children or those with visual impairment cannot study in a normal school. There is definitely a need to organize special schools for some category of disabled children. A couple in Mumbai switched seven schools for their eight year old child who suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]. The child was sidelined in all the schools. The parents started a school themselves which has children with the disability as well as normal ones. Started in 2012, it has 23 students out of which 12 children have learning disability. The school follows separate syllabus for special children. The parents feel that special children with disability should mix with other children to get a feeling of being normal. Attempt should be to bring as many students into the mainstream as possible.

Mrs. Sunila Kamath, wife of a retired police officer, made several visits to her village in Konkan after her mother's death. She saw first-hand the struggles in the life of people there. She tried to help them. Along with her sister, Mrs. Pratibha Sengupta, who had been a teacher for blind children in Pune, she undertook a project to translate books into Braille language and has completed 50 books so far. They started a school at Mandargarh village on the Konkan coast for visually impaired children with their own resources. Starting with five students, the school has 35 students today. It is a residential institution. In spite of efforts and appeals, they have not been able to get any Government financial aid. Yet they remain committed to bring light into the life of visually impaired kids. There is much that the administration needs to do.

We understand the conflict between the desire of parents and the limitations of school teachers and administrators. Recently, the parents of an eight year old autistic child received a letter from the school requesting them to remove the child from the school as his behaviour was disturbing other children. The parents approached the Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights [MSCPCR] which constituted a panel to report after studying the behaviour of the child for 30 days. The panel submitted a report favourable to the child after observation of only 11 days. This was contested by the school and the Court directed that the panel should submit a report after observation over 30 days. The school has to judge the good of the majority and not that of one child. We must take note of the fact that children study in a highly competitive environment. Any distraction is frowned upon by the parents who keep a close watch on their children's progress. Being dragged to the court is not an ideal solution. Should these children attend a normal school or be educated in special school remains an issue, the world over.

Education of autistic children is an expensive and complicated task. Educating autistic children requires mental health professionals, usually not available in normal schools. The autistic children are not able to form relationships with other children. Some of these children may also be mentally retarded while others may have above average intelligence but have the same communication problems. The parents' expectations are in excess of what the schools are providing. It is not merely the issue of admission and attending classes with a shadow teacher. Effective education requires one to one instruction for 40 hours a week. Schools are not able to meet the expenses and want the Government to meet these expenses. Parents and school officials want what's best for the children. It can, however, be difficult to make the ideal match a reality. The law has a provision to compel the schools to admit these children but cannot force them to impart specialized teaching.

Performance of Disadvantaged Students

Disability in vision or hearing is no bar to academic excellence.

These students require special coaching. The results in High School examination of children with impaired hearing in the Education and Training Centre run by the Navi Mumbai Municipal Committee was 100% this year. Some of the schools run for students with visual impairment are doing excellent work. One such school in Sundarajanpatti has been achieving 100% results in the 10th Board examination for the last eighteen years. It is a result of hard work by the teachers and the interest taken by the students. One of the girl students aspires to join the IAS. Surprisingly, they do not fare well in higher secondary in commerce as the writers assigned to them do not themselves understand commerce.

It is essential to equip them with skills for a job. About 200 children with various disabilities taking education in schools run by NGOs in Mumbai suburbs achieve good results. The Government could do well by supporting such institutions. I have noticed strangers rushing to help the blind at railway stations. However, to accept these children as equals in a job is more taxing than to help them out of sympathy. I recollect a candidate whose health had no bearing on the job he was being rejected for with the remark “Why not take an individual who can move up or into a better job later.” Government directives for reservation in jobs are ignored.

Some noble minded people are setting a good example. Miracle Couriers in Mumbai employs only deaf persons for delivery. One member of staff explains to them in sign language. SMSs provide effective communications and means to track deliveries. The owner-director of the company comments “They are great with operational work, good with directions and incredibly honest – apt for the work they currently do.”

Without India, the world cannot reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of having every child complete primary school by 2015.

UNICEF Press Release 1 April 2010

Mid-day Meal Scheme

*Why is the Indian State so bad at performing
the tasks it sets for itself?*

- Meghnad Desai

Providing mid-day meals to primary school children was first introduced by the Madras Municipal Corporation in 1925. It was started in Gujarat in 1985 and was extended as a national programme to cover all Government and aided primary schools in 1995. The aim was to improve health and education of children from poor families. It envisaged distribution of cooked nutritious food to the kids with safeguards for check of quality and hygiene. Some children started going to the school due to free meals. The number of dropouts also declined.

The Right to Food Campaign filed a PIL in 1991 in the Supreme Court regarding mid-day meals. It observed that 60 million tonnes of rice and wheat was rotting in Government warehouses while people were dying due to starvation. The Supreme Court issued an order on 28 November 2001 directing all State Governments and Union territories to implement the mid-day meals scheme [MDS] in all Government and aided primary schools. The court order specified that the kids should be given cooked meals and not dry items. The Food Corporation of India [FCI] was to ensure supply of good quality grains to the schools. The court order stipulated that the meal should have 300 calories and 8 to 10 grams of protein each day of 200 days in a year. The Ministry of Human Resources [HRD] norms are 700 calories and 20 grams of protein per meal. The scheme was to be financed by the Education Cess. In addition to free supply of food grains, the revised scheme provided for cooking cost, transport subsidy and provision of mid-day meal during summer vacation in drought affected areas.

Mismanagement of MDS

Presently, 12 crore children are being served mid-day meals. Besides improving attendance and health of children, it provides employment to women and breaks caste barriers. Like many other schemes, appropriate rules have been framed. The tragedy of 27 children dying in Chapra in Bihar has revealed that rules for hygienic food and environment were being violated. Even the cook who prepared the meals lost two kids and the third one is in the hospital. Parents of the children had been shouting and complaining about the quality of food but no action was taken. There has been negligence and apathy at all levels. The incident has created a furore across the nation. It was a clear case of food poisoning. Autopsy reports of the children who died have revealed presence of insecticide in the cooking oil. Exact details of the poison will be known after forensic examination of the viscera. Small amounts of the toxin may be left in the tissues which may have after effects. The medical authorities are in no hurry to discharge the kids and want to ensure that there are no after effects.

Enquiry by a senior officer of the HRD Ministry blames the school principal. The cook had complained that the cooking oil was black in colour and smelt foul. The principal insisted that the oil could not be bad as it had come from her husband's shop. Not only that, she compelled the students to eat the lunch. Instead of rushing the kids to a hospital, the principal fled in panic. Precious hours were lost. The principal was arrested on 24 July. We wait to see how many skeletons fall out of the cupboard.

There were alerts. A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Sciences, Patna, had given a report to the Ministry of HRD who sent it to the State Government. No action was taken. The tragedy was waiting to happen. In Bihar too old aluminium cooking vessels are in use. Bihar received a grant of Rs.500 crores in 2007-08 to buy new vessels. The Bihar government returned the money. Rs.612 crore was idle in various accounts till 2012. Non-utilization of these funds shows apathy and lack of competence. It is alleged that the State Government

keeps the money in fixed deposits which was objected to by the audit authorities.

The incidence of consumption of unhygienic food has not been only to Bihar. Reports of kids getting ill after mid-day meal have been pouring in from various cities. A couple of days after the Bihar tragedy, 147 girl students of Neyveli Lignite Corporation School complained of nausea and giddiness after consuming the meals. All the sick students were provided medical treatment promptly. The chief education officer commented that the eggs served to the students may have been contaminated. No explanation has been offered about the accountability.

On 19 July, 23 kids fell sick after mid-day meals in Goa. The health officer commented that sickness may be due to indigestion or improperly cooked meals and not due to food poisoning. A disgruntled Panchayat member put poison in the meals. Luckily, he was observed by a kid and the food thrown away. The culprit is missing.

In Chhattisgarh, a student noticed part of a dead lizard in food. He reported it to the teacher who told him to finish his meal. 35 kids were taken ill. The condition of one child is serious. The parents complained of shortage of doctors and nurses. The Chief Minister has ordered an enquiry. 50 children took ill in Madhubani where a dead lizard had been found in the food. The school was running in a 20x10 feet room which also served as community hall and the meals were cooked in a veranda. The stories of dead snake and frog in the food are endless. In Haryana, a teacher, charged with stealing mid-day meals paid a fine of Rs.2.75 lacs.

Lack of accountability

Is the project too big to be managed by our administration known for poor governance?

Report by the Planning Commission pointed out that except

for Kerala and Tamil Nadu, schools do not have proper kitchens. The teachers spend one to two hours in distributing lunch, thus limiting the time for teaching. In some States children are employed to clean the utensils. They sit in crowded and dirty sites. Insects are crawling over cooked food. In a nursery school, the scared children insisted that the principal eat first.

There were complaints of adulteration and short supply in foodgrains obtained from the PDS system. Rice supplied by FCI to 2000 primary schools in Kolkata was found to be rotten and had to be sold as fodder. Those responsible for this fault generally escape any punishment or even censure. There have been instances when grains from FCI were found to be unsuitable even for fodder and were sold off to fertilizer factory.

The media has brought out many shortcomings in the administration of MDS. An NGO carried out evaluation of the MDS in Gujarat. 538 out of 563 schools visited by the NGO were supplied meals by a central kitchen and 25 had food prepared in the school premises. 477 schools were served by NGO Stree Shakti. In the schools where meals were prepared *in situ*, the floor was dirty and plates were washed by students with mud from the playground. Leftover food from the previous day was lying on the floor and the aluminium vessels used for cooking were old and in poor condition.

In the schools served by the NGO Stree Shakti, clean kitchen staff use steel utensils, grains are cleaned and there were separate areas for cleaning the utensils. However, inspection of ingredients revealed that except for wheat in Sabarmati School and tur dal in Stree Shakti kitchens, uric acid was observed to be at higher levels than the rules prescribed by the Prevention of Food Adulteration [PFA] authority. This may be due to presence of rodents in FCI warehouses or in stores of schools. There were worms and animal droppings in grains. Traces of aflatoxin were observed which could cause cancer.

The NGO recommended packaged grains and partly dry items

of food. Cooked food was carried in tempo where the employees were placing their feet over the containers with half open lids. This lapse brings out the basic lack of hygiene amongst people. We cannot change it in a short period. We must inculcate it amongst the school kids. Once they become conscious of it, they will usher in a clean environment in their homes.

In a school in Amritsar, vegetables were kept in toilet. It beats all sense of aesthetics besides hygiene. 70% schools in Haryana do not have proper kitchen. In a town near Lucknow, the correspondent watched how meals for kids of twenty schools were prepared in open with flies and insects hovering around. 400 students are taught in one room in a Government school in Samastipur, Bihar. The kids sit on stools and under the stools. We have used double-decker buses and double-decker beds. This school takes the cake for inventing double-decker seats in school. Students complained of pain in the neck at the end of the day. The principal expressed helplessness as no one listens to her woes.

Contamination of Iron Folic Acid

A day after the death of kids in Bihar, 200 children were taken ill in Delhi after consuming iron and folic acid tablets during a government drive against anaemia. 21 of the kids had to be rushed to the hospital. All the children are out of danger. The police have registered a case of “an act endangering lives”. A similar incident of 60 children getting sick after iron and folic acid tablets has been reported from Sholapur which was the first school to get such pills.

Another example of this neglect of hygiene is patronizing of food vendors on pavements by educated and well employed staff. Schools are not merely places of transfer of knowledge. They learn to be good citizens and improve their living conditions.

Blame Game

Reaction of political leaders lacks realism. The ruling party

blames it on conspiracy by the opposition parties. The opposition parties have only one standard solution for all mishaps – resignation by the government of the day. They have chosen to ignore unhygienic conditions of food preparation and distribution in most of the States. Immediate steps taken are to issue instructions that 2 or 3 teachers must taste the food before distributing it to children. These instructions have been issued earlier too. Compliance is the problem. This simple and quick method does not provide adequate protection. A question may arise whether a teacher or any individual can be forced to eat against his or her will. Tasting one spoon of adulterated food may not do any harm while the complete meal may cause stomach upset and headache. The teachers union in Bihar had instructed members not to comply with this order. They have relented to agree to taste the food till an alternative arrangement is put in place. Allahabad High Court in UP has declared that the teacher's job is to teach and not to supervise cooking of meals. Quality control must be at all levels – grains, cooking medium, water, proper kitchen and cleanliness of staff. Above all, there must be accountability. A vendor selling rotten grains is liable to punishment while FCI can get away with gross negligence. If a teacher finds food to be unfit for the children, he has no resources to provide substitute meals. The cardinal principle is that authority and responsibility should be co-located. To ensure cooking and distribution of hygienic food all over the country requires competence of organization. If it is not available in a short time, the Government should opt for dry or packaged food.

Is poverty a crime?

– Father of a deceased child

Government and Private Schools

We have a right to expect Government institutions to always follow rules that have been laid down. In this case the Government has quietly armed itself against violation of the rules.

It should be the primary responsibility of the State to ensure good education for all children. Prior to Independence, the Bhoré Committee had drawn up a 64-year plan to achieve universal literacy. This was considered too slow by our leaders after Independence. The stark situation today is that we are far away from the ideal of universal literacy. The magnitude of the task was well understood by the fathers of the Constitution, hence they placed universal education under the Directive Principles of State Policy and not in the chapter on Fundamental Rights. The present Act aims at compulsory education for all children as a Right. The States have enacted rules governing implementation of this Act. It prescribes teacher/student ratio, number of classrooms required, eligibility tests for teachers, norms for buildings and facilities like drinking water and toilets.

All private schools are required to obtain a recognition certificate from the State or local authority to be able to function. Failure to obtain a recognition certificate attracts a fine of Rs. 1 lac and Rs.10,000 per day till a certificate is obtained. They are also liable to be closed down. Surprisingly, government schools which do not comply with the norms of infrastructure can continue to function. We have a right to expect the government institutions to follow the rules laid down by the government. In this case the government has quietly armed itself against violation of rules.

Private schools have shown better results. In 2010, the representative of Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation said at a meeting of senior citizens that the Government spent more money

per child compared to private schools and yet had poorer results. The Education Minister of Jammu and Kashmir narrates a similar experience – “Despite the presence of highly qualified teachers in the Government schools, academic results are not what we would like them to be. Steps have been taken to fix accountability for poor performance. Directions have been issued to Education Department officers to monitor and inspect schools in a regular manner.” The Minister is aware that the problem is due to lack of accountability.

Preference for Private Schools

Whereas former HRD Minister, Kapil Sibal wanted that 90% children should study in government schools, parents prefer to admit their wards in private schools. This is not only true about the few public schools patronized by the rich elites where fees are exorbitant, but India Initiative, a think tank, found that 85% of the children in Patna attend private schools. Parents of 70% of the students attending government schools would prefer to shift their children to private schools if they could afford fees of Rs.50 to Rs.500 per month. Poor parents opt for private schools due to poor quality of learning in government schools, where at any given time 25% of teachers are absent. The Minister of State, Shashi Tharoor, admitted that we hold the world record for teacher absenteeism. It is all the more shocking that it is so inspite of the fact that teachers’ salaries have been increased to Rs.15,000 to Rs.25,000 per month. Recently, shirtless children in a government school in Mumbai staged a demonstration due to absence of teachers. They shouted “You have given us uniforms and books. Give us teachers also.” Disciplinary action against teachers is difficult due to teachers unions. In USA, a chain of private schools which came up to improve education standards amongst poor students employs non-union teachers.

A journalist touring Rajasthan to assess the impact of the RTE Act did not find a single good government school. A young school boy pointing to a crumbling building in a field full of weeds and garbage said “Only poor children go to this school because it

is so bad.” The toilets were a couple of filthy hovels. That was the condition in most of the schools in the rural area.

Private schools have mushroomed because parents have realized the need of good education for advancement in life. The results of the students are much better than those in government institutions. One of the attractions of private schools is the English medium of instruction. The willingness of poor parents to pay for education is a healthy sign for the future of India. It is no surprise that Indians settled overseas work hard and save every penny to put their children in medical or engineering colleges.

Closing Government Schools

Instead of making efforts to improve their schools, the Government has come up with stringent conditions for running private schools. It has been alleged by official agencies that a deliberate attempt is being made to denigrate government schools as private school chains are being run by influential people. In some places they want the schools to be closed down in order to use the land for commercial purposes.

There are 13 lac primary and secondary schools in India. Schools which do not comply with the norms specified in the RTE Act should have been shut down by a competent authority. About 4 lac private schools face closure or heavy fines which will lead to their closures. These schools, termed budget schools, have come up in slums, villages and small towns through the efforts of entrepreneurs. They charge low fees and are the alternative to crumbling poorly managed government schools, which the establishment and media have ignored. The underprivileged know that the English knowledge is a passport to upward mobility in society. The aim of the Act is to force the children from poor families into government schools.

The Andhra Pradesh Government wants to close down 1,300 government schools as no children want to join these schools. The

dropout in these areas is more than 50%. Educationists in the State attribute it to poor infrastructure and indifferent teachers. 47,000 of the 76,000 primary schools do not have toilets and drinking water facilities. The educationists are critical since the State Government returned Rs. 300 crore grants received from the Centre. It could have been used to upgrade the infrastructure in schools. As a natural consequence of better learning standards provided in private schools, the government is negotiating partnership with corporate bodies to establish new schools. Punjab too is planning to close down some schools for similar reasons. By 2018, 50% of children may be in private schools. The situation is totally different from what was visualized by Minister Sibal wanting 90% students to be in government schools.

Efforts to Improve

Some States, notably Uttarakhand, have initiated a system of giving vouchers of Rs. 3,000 per month to orphans and drop outs. Some NGOs are managing schools for children of underprivileged families. Dr. Bhandari has established a school in the Brahampuri slum in New Delhi. The Centre for Civil Society has given vouchers to 400 girls selected at random. These students are free to choose a school.

The Maharashtra Government has accepted the need to encourage private schools. It has given permission to 2,417 institutions to establish or upgrade existing schools. Out of this 1,977 are for new schools and the remaining ones are for upgrading existing schools. Out of these schools, 1,166 are for Marathi medium, 1,145 for English, 26 for Hindi, 79 for Urdu and one unspecified. The government has received more than seven thousand applications. The expenses will be met by the management and no aid will be given by the Government. The management will create an endowment fund. The Central Government has negotiated a similar scheme with India Inc to establish chains of schools.

The Maharashtra Government has realized the need to improve the quality of teaching English in secondary schools. About 20,000

secondary school teachers will be trained to speak English. Last year, a similar programme was launched to train 67,000 primary school teachers. The British Council and Rashtriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan have signed an MOU for making secondary school teachers proficient in English. The State Government has established a cell for Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR] to organize effort of companies interested in supporting education. This cell will provide a platform for interaction between the Government and corporate houses for training of principals and education officers. The activities will include funding for infrastructure and scholarships. The cell will cut down red tape which discourages parties to help. The British Council will be the lead content and training partner. It will be a good development if it leads to participation by industry in drawing up syllabus and should not become only an exercise to collect funds.

Minority institutions are exempted from reservation of 25% seats for students from the economically backward classes. There is a rush to be classified as a minority school. 688 out of 1576 schools have been granted minority status in Maharashtra. One of the conditions for this classification is that the bulk of the students should be from the designated minority community. Surprisingly, in some of these schools the number of the desired community is only 7%. Minority status has just been a ruse to avoid reservation of 25% seats. The rule of reservation for EWS category should be made applicable to minority schools as well.

Suresh C. Sharma

What Kind of Education?

There is a wide difference between reproducing a lesson and understanding it. They fare badly in IIT entrance examinations which are based on understanding a subject.

In its simplest form education is transfer of information from teachers to students, preferably in a school. It sounds reasonable but misses some essential elements of education which includes - sports, behaviour with fellow students, and respect for seniors, communication skills developed through debates or elocution and self reliance. Learning is acquired through these activities, often imperceptibly. Enhancement or acquisition of skills is a part of education.

Delivery of knowledge has become the main thrust of education in our schools and it is tested by examinations at the end of each term. The results indicate the success of students and teachers. The tests are a source of stress amongst students, sometimes driving them to suicide or running away from homes. This emphasis on study of books deprives the students of the ability to think clearly, examine a problem logically and build up self-confidence to achieve self-selected objectives. Syllabus is revised to introduce some topics and omit others. Serious mistakes in contents are a regular feature. The students must be having a laugh and certainly losing confidence in the contents of the books. There is a mistaken belief in the thought process of the authorities that they can change the facts of history by propagating their views. A point of concern is a biased account of battles between Hindu rulers and Muslim invaders. Yes, while we do not want to implant communal disharmony, there should be a better presentation rather than ignoring the events. The English or French schools do not teach that the two World Wars did not occur. They can present them as examples of human folly which did not benefit any one; but facts must be respected.

We used to have similar revisions of syllabus in the National Defence Academy and other military colleges by committees comprising eminent professors. Every year, there would be an increase or decrease of periods (sessions) of some topic. This came to naught when a member pointed out that the purpose of education is to develop powers of reasoning and logical analysis. The database can vary. The point went home and was accepted by all the members. This should be the guideline for all schools.

Difference between Knowing and Understanding

Our students are generally excellent in reproducing what has been taught to them, thanks to the method of rote learning in class rooms followed by private tuitions at home, supervised by ‘tiger moms’. There is a wide difference between reproducing a lesson and understanding it. They fare badly in IIT entrance examinations which are based on understanding a subject.

The difference between knowing and understanding is well brought out by Dr. Feynman, Nobel Laureate in Physics and professor at Princeton. He used to go to South America or the Indies as guest lecturer. In one of his visits there, the Minister of Education of Brazil asked for his opinion on the standard of education in Brazil. Dr. Feynman plainly said that it was not good. He further explained that every student could repeat the perfect definition of a “crystal” as given in the text book but only two students could understand the subject. To his surprise, the two students said that they had come to Brazil only recently and had been studying in Europe. In the USA, a student would pick up a few items in the household and experiment with different substances. This attempt to learn through enquiry continues later. He acquires knowledge that is related to everyday life.

Our professor narrated an interesting incident. He had spent time in the study of crystals and was invited by the Union Public Service Commission for interviewing candidates for appraisers in the Customs department. He would ask questions on characteristics of a diamond. A jeweller from Delhi was also a member who would just

throw a few pieces of diamonds and glass on the table and ask the candidate to pick up the diamonds. It was a more practical test to evaluate the capability of the candidate. The students should be encouraged to learn how they can put their education to use in their day to day life or in the industry. Enhancement of skills is an important function of education. Traditionally, children of artisans learnt the trade from their parents. Schooling deprives them of these skills as a result they usually want office jobs which are limited and difficult to get for average students. This is a serious fault in our education. There should be career counselling for students who do not fare well in academics to learn a trade of their choice. The system should be guided by the individual's goals and his aptitude.

Some State governments like Uttar Pradesh have issued free laptops to school kids. A modestly priced computer has been promoted by the HRD Minister. The students can access data and world of information at a click. This is an advantage and use must be made in the teaching process. They do not have to worry about which books to consult. The danger is in such a facility replacing the need to understand issues using logical reasoning. A multimedia presentation on the computer looks impressive but does not ensure that the student has understood it. A teacher in the UK explained that students were given an assignment to discuss differences between the various ideologies. Most of the students were unable to complete the task. The reason stated by them was that the articles on the internet were too long and difficult to follow. While new technical tools are welcome, they must be used judiciously.

Augmenting Formal Education

We should follow Germany's dual system of classroom education combined with work experience. The system dates back to the economic crisis of 1873. Set up in the 1880s, it provides the industry with loyal and skilled workers and it has withstood wars, dictatorships and globalization. Formal schooling is combined with apprenticeship. The students work in a firm for 3 to 4 days and attend classes in the school on the remaining days for specialized courses.

They get paid for the work in the firms and may opt for full time employment after 3 to 4 years. About 5% of high school students go to dual training institutes of 344 trades. Industry conducts the examinations.

The system has evolved over a long period and we should not expect quick results. Coordination between education authorities and industry ensures that training matches the demands of industry. The result of this dual system of education is the high quality of German industrial products and unemployment around 8% compared to Italy and Portugal at 38% and 56% respectively. Some of the European countries have signed a memo of understanding with Germany to adopt a similar programme. The Government of India established a chain of ITIs for artisans but the training lacks practical exposure. The social structure and attitudes in India drives them to white collar jobs which are not so many. We are likely to face a problem of substantial unemployment among youths as they are unemployable.

Only 25% of engineering graduates are employable

Kiran Karnik, formerly Chairman, Nasscom

Recognition of Schools

The Government certainly has the authority not to recognize profit making schools. The Government and the socialist intellectuals want education to be run like a charity.

Section 1.1 [a] of the Model Rules and Regulations of the RTE Act states that any school run for profit by any individual, group or association or any other persons shall not be given recognition by the Government. It further states that only schools run by a society registered under the Societies Registration Act or Public Trust Act can be recognized. Most of the schools making large profits are registered under the acceptable categories.

These rules suffer from two drawbacks. Firstly, this provision of not making profits has not been included in the main body. It is part of the rules and regulations which are not binding on the states. The states may or may not enforce them. Most of these profit making schools are run by state level politicians or enjoy their patronage. It is unlikely that the state governments will abide by them. Secondly, it has not been clarified how the government is going to deal with the problem and the specific authority responsible for it.

Mushrooming of Budget Schools

A large number of these schools, called budget schools, have mushroomed in slums, small towns and rural areas due to low quality of education in government schools. The entrepreneurs have established these low-fees institutions to meet the demands of the public with low income and high aspirations. The government schools are characterized by crumbling buildings, unsanitary toilets, aversion for English language and chronic absenteeism of teachers. Even the not so affluent parents want to give a good education to their children

since it is an instrument of empowerment and a vehicle for upward mobility in the society. Some of these schools are run by families. The easiest and an economical method to start a school is to hire family members as teachers and administrators.

A typical example is a school up to 10th class in Rajasthan where the head of the family is the headmaster and three teachers out of ten are family members. The institution does not have to pay high salaries and the loyalty of the family members on the staff is assured. They will willingly and enthusiastically cover any vacancy arising from the absence of any staff member. Managements of some of the profit making schools have claimed that Article 19 of the Constitution gives citizens the right to carry out any occupation, trade or business. Article 19.6 places a restriction on specified activities like setting up nuclear energy plants or satellites. Education may not qualify as a business unit but it certainly is an occupation. The Government certainly has the authority not to recognize profit-making schools. The Government and the socialist intellectuals want education to be run like a charity. We have to accept that teachers and administrative staff have to be paid and investment required in infrastructure.

It is difficult to determine whether a school is making profits or not. Further, there is no clause in the Act which disallows schools to charge students for activities like laboratory fees, computer fees and so on. The quantum of charges on these accounts may add up to more than the standard fees. Some of the teachers recommend guide books authored by them or their friends.

Role of Coaching Classes

Coaching centres are thriving due to the poor quality of teaching at schools. Even students of primary school take private tuitions. This may not necessarily be a deficiency of education at schools but reflects the students' aspiration to move ahead in society. The competition for professional education is severe and students have to work for success right from an early stage. Like budget

schools, private coaching has a role to play. For example, the value of private coaching can be seen in South Korea where sixty years ago, most of the South Koreans were illiterate, but today literacy is the highest in the world. 93% citizens are matriculates. South Korean students have achieved outstanding performance in mathematics and science. The right course of action should be to employ all available resources to provide a sound education to children and not be guided by ideology.

The UNESCO report in 2001 placed India 105th out of 128 countries in educational development. Budget schools are meeting a need to pull India out of the 105th position. The state of education did not improve even after government spent over Rs.3 lac crores in the last decade. The enrolment rose significantly but so did the dropout rate.

I wish to emphasize that the essential inputs for good education are committed teachers and keen students. Infrastructure is welcome but we should not be satisfied with facilities alone. It is alarming that only 5% candidates could qualify in the Eligibility Test for teachers in Maharashtra. 25% teachers are said to be absent from duty every day. Drinking water and toilet facilities alone would not give us good education.

Implementation

A pilot study by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights [NCPCR] has revealed that 95% of the private schools have not complied with the provision of admitting EWS students.

The effective implementation of the RTE Act depends on two factors: Finance and the Role of the 'Education Bureaucracy'.

I. Finance

Adequate funds and judicious utilization are essential for the success of a project. The Central Government is to meet 70% of the cost of the RTE Act and the remaining cost is to be borne by the States. Some of the state governments have expressed difficulty in meeting their share. The HRD Ministry had projected a demand for Rs.2,31,233 crores over five years. The amount sanctioned for one year was only Rs.34,000 crores based on an estimate of Rs.1,71,000 crores and the amount allotted was Rs.15,000 crores. This is probably based on the failure of state governments to absorb the allotment as Rs.10,000 crore had been left unspent from the previous year. That brings the amount available to Rs.25,000 crore, still short of the estimate.

The major deficiency in the utilization of funds is in the provision of class rooms and recruitment of teachers. No allowance has been made for population growth. There is need to consider whether free education should be limited only to two children per family. 25% students from Economically Weak Sections [EWS] have to be given free education. Expenses for their education will be reimbursed by the state governments. This does not include capital expenses. Substantial amount will be required for major repairs or expansion of infrastructure. The shortfall in allotment of funds may not be a major roadblock since only 18 crore children are likely to enrol themselves in schools out of a children's population of 25 crores.

Assuming admission of ten EWS students per school per year in 1.5 schools, the reimbursement would be Rs 1,500 crores at Rs 10,000 per student. Some schools have experienced delay in receipt of reimbursement funds for EWS students. School Management Committees are required to monitor utilization of funds. Inspection by an NGO 'Forum for Fairness in Education', revealed that only one out of seventeen hostels sanctioned was functioning properly. In one case, students from the neighbourhood were brought in for inspection. Similar malpractice has been observed in claims for reimbursement or grants. In one State, the government has sent notice to 1500 schools for claiming funds by falsely showing a larger number of students. In some cases, the number of students was 50% of the claimed figure. Similar malpractices have been observed in claims for mid-day meals.

The Bihar Government has obtained Rs. 1,400 crores aid from World Bank for 70% costs of teachers training programme and school buildings. One thousand high school buildings are planned to be constructed in village Panchayats. The scheme aims at 100% enrolment up to class XII. The surprising point is that aid is being obtained from the World Bank while allotment from own resources remain unutilized.

The Mumbai Municipal Corporation [BMC] wants to provide books, notebooks, shoes, uniforms and umbrellas to students up to Class X. A proposal to transfer money based on Aadhaar Cards fell through since data was not available with the BMC. Doubts were also raised whether the money would be diverted for other use. In UP, the Chief Minister gave away laptops costing Rs. 19,000 each free to students. No amount was left for notebooks. Students were told to buy their own notebooks and teachers were advised to write questions on the board. On both counts of funding and utilization, the performance has been far from satisfactory. We can appreciate that we cannot suddenly move away from the malaise of bad governance and ineffective management. The attempt is there and participation of parents in the Management Committees may be of help to improve the system.

EWS Category

A pilot study by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights [NCPCR] has revealed that 95% of the private schools have not complied with the provision of admitting EWS students. The reasons are delay in government orders defining EWS category, lack of awareness amongst the entitled students, lack of schools near their residence and apprehension of parents about discrimination in elite schools. In some states, a child can claim admission in private schools only if no seats are available in government schools. The fees are free but the cost of books, uniform and transport is to be paid by the students. If the government forces the schools to provide these facilities free to the EWS students, the schools may well opt out of this responsibility. The principal of a reputed school in South Mumbai commented that some people are making use of seats for EWS students by obtaining false certificates of income. There have also been allegations of schools offering money to parents in lieu of admissions. These aberrations may decline as the scheme progresses and people become aware of their rights. A few schools may try to reclassify themselves as minority schools. The middle rung schools are quite comfortable regarding finance as their fee structure is about the same as in government schools and sometimes even lower. It is for this reason that schools in small towns and rural areas have fared better in admission of EWS children. Their genuine worry is that the EWS children may not do well in studies due to lack of proper environment at home. A large number of children take private tuitions after school hours and would certainly perform better.

A study group had recommended to the Central Government that EWS quota be further divided on caste basis. This may cause discrimination against SC/ST and economic considerations would be a better criteria. Reservation starts from post nursery classes. Schools with nursery classes will have difficulty in sparing seats for fresh students in primary classes since in fairness they have to accommodate their own students. They may have to commence one more section.

The annual income criteria decided by the various states for EWS category is as under:-

State	Rs. lacs
Andhra Pradesh	0.6
Rajasthan	2.5
Delhi	0.6
Tamil Nadu	2.0
Gujarat	BPL
Uttar Pradesh	BPL
Karnataka	3.5
West Bengal	BPL
Maharashtra	1.0

The figures above 1 lac are unrealistic and may be challenged in court. This is perhaps an attempt by the education bureaucracy to ensure benefits for themselves.

Social activists are agitating against denial of reservation in convents and minority schools. Allotment of land at concessional rates and relief in taxation amounts to aid. These schools should be subject to reservation for EWS, all the more so since they believe in charity for the poor. It is certain that good schools would be under pressure from the parents of EWS children.

Teachers

The two most important requirements for good education are committed teachers and willing students. Rightly, government has introduced Common Eligibility Test [CET] in addition to the existing Teaching Ability Test. The results of these tests are shocking. Only 11% teachers could qualify in these tests. 631 posts of teachers are vacant in Mumbai alone. Some schools do not even have a principal. Children of one school demonstrated after taking off their shirts “You have given us books but no teachers.”

The NMMC came up with a good initiative to extend classes till Class VIII in the primary section, but qualified teachers have not been recruited due to bureaucratic delay. The Maharashtra Government tried to solve the problem by appointing ad hoc teachers who had to go on strike due to non-payment of salaries. The appointment of ad hoc teachers has been criticized by the courts. Government schools continue to suffer due to a single teacher taking classes for students of different grades in one class room.

The example of students in a school in Mumbai illustrates the problems vividly. A social activist helped 21 children to get admission in a government school. They walk a few kms daily to the school. Earlier they were begging or picking rags. They sit in a corner without books or teacher. The RTE Act directs admission to class according to age. Since they have not attended nursery classes, they are unable to cope with studies. They will drop out soon.

II. Role of the Education Bureaucracy

Private schools lacking infrastructure according to norms laid down in the RTE Act were supposed to close down on 1 April 2013 or pay a fine of Rs.1 lakh and Rs.10,000 per day of contravention. This provision will affect 4 lakh private schools which have come up in small towns and rural areas due to poor learning results in government schools. About 3 crore children study in these schools. The schools can improve the infrastructure only by an increase in fees which may put education to the 3 crore children beyond the reach of their parents. The authority that can give extension has not been mentioned and confusion prevails.

One hundred and fifty schools in Mumbai face closure. The problems of meeting the norms of infrastructure in metro cities are impossible to comply with due to high cost of property and lack of

space for playgrounds. These schools could be closed down next year. The government has not taken any steps to take them over or establish new schools for these students. The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) has, for instance, declared fourteen schools as unauthorized since the trusts responsible for them have not taken the necessary certificates from the education authorities. The vice-principal of one of the schools has alleged that they have to pay bribes to get the schools recognized.

Kalyan Vidya Kunj is a private unregistered school functioning in the narrow lanes of Biharsharif since 1968. Mr Raman, Director of the school happens to be the Secretary, Public Schools Association, Nalanda. The State Government had issued a 40-page norm to all schools for compliance.

Regarding RTE implementation, it was feared with certainty that it will be engulfed in corrupt practices. A state level protest was organised in the state capital, Patna on 19th November 2011 against the proposed de-registration of schools. Mr. Raman spoke that instead of checking the educational mafia and corrupt donation practices in big private schools, Government was more interested in de- registration of small schools imparting education at nominal fees but not meeting all the specifications.

He said that Nalanda is a unique district where the fees of schools are extremely low. The monthly school fees of Bal Kalyan Vidya Kunj started from a mere Rs.110 for nursery and went to Rs.250 for Class X. This fee structure was even less than the amount sanctioned by the Government. The Government instead of encouraging them was more focussed on de-registering them. It was only the location factor among the lower strata of society which decided which school their children are going to.

Another set of problems faced by the authorities is the mismanagement of government grants. Some schools are reporting inflated number of students to claim increased grants.

Twenty one lakh students were found to be missing in

Maharashtra in a check carried out in 2011. Allotment of funds and allowance for mid-day meals depends on the number of students. The state of correct reporting could be the same in other states. The government has decided to close down the schools where bogus students are more than 50%. 248 schools could be derecognized and the services of teachers terminated. This decision is too mild, perhaps because a large number of these schools are run by politicians. The correct course should be to charge them for fraud.

Education Bureaucracy

The rules and clarifications on various issues were received after admissions had been completed. The authorities in some states insisted on cancelling the admissions and abide by the new rules. This was unfair to children and their parents were at a loss. If the number of seats is less than the number of applicants, allotment is to be made by lottery and not merit. This is unfair.

Schools have to raise funds for various activities and facilities. The Government officers interfere in levying fees for genuine activities. For example in 2012, the Director Education directed a school in Mizoram to refund Rs 1.43 crore collected from 2001 to 2009. He also directed the school to construct toilets on the first and second floors of the school building. According to the school authorities, series of complaints were made by the parents of a child who had failed. The education inspector unjustly referred the matter to the Economic Offences Wing who absolved the school authorities of any fraud. The Director Education did not give up and issued refund orders. The school had to get these orders cancelled by the Court which described it as a “most curious case.” The education bureaucracy which has failed to organize good universal education is being made responsible for administering the ambitious RTE scheme. We need to change the mindset of the bureaucrats that the “permit raj” is a thing of the past.

Compulsory Attendance

The RTE Act has provision for compulsory attendance in

schools. It is mentioned in one of the duties of the management committees to ensure that all children attend schools regularly. There is no direction as to how they can ensure this. Some children cannot attend due to family circumstances, lack of schools in the neighbourhood or lack of interest in studies. Parents will likely cover up for their children when they want to stay home and play video games or perhaps they are are compelled to stay home to be used for childcare. Sometimes parents feel they have no control over their children and allow them to make their own choices.

Schools receive funding per student and as the counts decrease because of absence of students, the budget decreases handicapping the schools' ability to maintain staffing levels, update technology and textbooks. In Singapore and USA, children and parents can be fined or even imprisoned for continued absence of children from the school. There is no legal provision in India for such measures which is good. To begin with let us provide good education to all those kids who want to attend schools. Compulsory education can follow.

“RTE will propel India to even greater heights of prosperity and productivity for all guaranteeing children their right to a quality education and a brighter future.

Karin Hulshof, UNICEF Representative in India

Dealing with Truancy

The RTE Act envisages compulsory education for all children. It is a desirable and noble objective as it would provide opportunity to all children irrespective of the family background and build a strong economic society. It will remain a law on paper as there is no agency tasked to implement this provision.

Ensuring attendance at schools by all children is included in the duties of Management Committees but they have no authority to enforce it. At best, the Committee members can only try to persuade the parents to send their kids to the school which is not likely to achieve any success. Another difficulty is lack of requisite number of schools. It is not a surprise that we see large number of children working in shops or worse still, begging on the streets.

We need to enact laws similar to those in force in the Western countries to enforce compulsory education for children. A degree of compulsion is essential in organized society. In USA, all children of a specified age have to attend schools and are entitled to free education. Absence from school is termed “truancy.” The schools are required to employ a counselling officer to deal with truancy. The responsibility for checking truancy is shared by teachers, school authorities and parents. Truancy is a major factor leading to dropout, delinquent behaviour and criminal activities. Regulations and laws have been framed to reduce truancy.

In spite of clear laws, it is estimated that about 150,000 out of one million students in public schools in New York City are absent from schools daily. In India, the problem gets enhanced due to about 10% teachers being absent daily. Laws have to be supported by an enforcement agency. A maximum of ten days absence verified by the parents is permissible. For absence for a longer period, a physician’s certificate is necessary. The school authorities invite the parents of habitual offenders for a discussion to evolve a plan to ensure regular attendance by the children. If the plan fails, cases of

habitual offenders are referred to a magistrate who may impose a fine or award imprisonment. Education at home is permitted if the parents consider that they are the best people to educate their wards. This permission is subject to the core subjects of the syllabus being covered in the home schooling. Currently, two million children are availing this facility in the USA. Similar provision exists in UK also. Compulsory schooling or education at home is a conflict whether the State or the parents are to be trusted for doing the best.

In Australia, the school authorities keep in close touch with the parents and the police to combat truancy. Most of the schools have a police station close by and they patrol the area looking for truant students. The task of marking present is done by computers and names of the absent students is automatically transmitted to the parents. I recollect that the mother of a student in Indore had gone to the school for a routine check on the progress of her son and was shocked to learn that he had often been absenting himself without any information to the parents. Nor had the school authorities taken the trouble to advise the parents. In Denmark, the welfare benefits can be withdrawn if the child does not attend school regularly. In Finland, parents of truant children can be fined and children detained in comprehensive schools. In Germany, attendance in schools is compulsory to avoid “closed off parallel societies.” The schools are considered to be an ideal place for developing tolerance amongst children from families of different values and beliefs.

We are in no position to refer truancy cases to the courts due to the existing heavy load. Nor can we involve the police to help in the venture. A pragmatic approach suggests that we should not impose the condition of compulsion and aim at providing schooling to all those who want it. As people notice the progress of children with educational qualification, more and more parents would enrol their kids in schools. It is also important that there should be adequate opportunity of better jobs for these children. We cannot expect the qualified children to be happy in jobs which they could have got without any schooling.

The Way Ahead

Recognition is essential to ensure reasonable and uniform standards. The norms should be based on results and not on inputs.

Norms for Recognition

It is a good idea to have the facilities mentioned in the Act but not feasible. Instead of improving the state of learning in Government schools, the Government has come out with transferring the responsibility to private schools which are managed by public spirited citizens and NGOs. The norms are utopian when 65% of the rural houses do not have toilet facilities. Drinking water is unheard of in villages and even in cities the quality is questionable. The rivers are heavily polluted. The sad part is that before Independence, water from wells was safe. Open space for playing fields is just not available in metro cities.

If these schools are to comply with the regulations, the fees will have to be increased putting education beyond the reach of a large section of people who have low income and high ambitions. If the Government is still serious about the norms, adequate number of government schools with laid down norms must be ensured.

State of Learning

The RTE Act lays down that “no child shall be required to pass any board examination till the completion of elementary education.” The annual report of NGO Pratham has revealed that class 3 students could not read books of class 1 and the knowledge of arithmetic was poor. The Programme for International Students Assessment [PISA] which tests the mathematics, science and English attainments of 15 year old students placed India 73rd out of 74 countries. The reaction of the Government was not to take part in the PISA for the next ten years. This is like breaking a thermometer

instead of curing the fever. Measurement of learning is essential to judge the ability of students and the performance of teachers. The reason for abolishing the tests is said to be to remove any stress and is based on the recommendation of teachers. No surprise that the teachers want to avoid the work of setting up papers and examining the answer sheets. Tests are a help to students to know their strength and weakness. Presently, the RTE Act will become an act for compulsory schooling and not for education. It helps teachers and not students. The students may or may not be detained in the class for poor performance in tests but they must be made aware of their learning ability at the end of the term.

Government Control

It is obviously important that government agencies ensure correct utilization of grants. They should not interfere in admissions. It has been the lesson in UK also that official interference is an obstacle to good education. Recruitment and promotion of teachers should be done on the basis of merit. The stake holders in education are teachers, students and parents. The management of schools should largely be left to them. In cases where bureaucrats try to obtain favours for their friends or relations, exemplary punishments should be imposed on them.

Medium of Instruction

The political leaders and Leftists are themselves proficient in English and send their children to foreign universities for studies. They have a different prescription for the ordinary people. The choice of medium of instruction should be left to the parents and no compulsion should be exercised to promote views of local politicians.

Private Tuitions

The Act lays down that no teacher should engage himself in private tuitions or private teaching. This is all well but misses the point as to why do children need private tuitions. Parents who desire their children to undertake medical or engineering degree invariably

arrange tuitions. We can see these kids going for private tuitions after school hours. It is a reflection on the standard of teaching and learning. The correct approach should be to enhance the quality of teaching.

Higher Studies

Admission to class IX should be based on the result of tests. Higher education, particularly in technical and medical subjects, is vital for the prosperity of society and steps must be taken to ensure high quality of teaching from class IX onwards so as to be competitive in the world.

Conclusion

Continuous monitoring of the Right to Education Act is crucial to its

- effectiveness in achieving its objectives,
- universal education of India's children.

Education is a tool for empowerment and the RTE Act with all its shortcomings is a good attempt. The task is difficult and the scheme will get modified in the light of practical experience. All the stakeholders should act positively and try to implement it. Universal education will take its own time and the initial attempt should be to give good education to all those who want it. Even if the learning results are below the desired level, children putting on a clean uniform and attending school has its merits. This will teach them a sense of good behaviour instead of running around in the street or traveling up and down in trains without tickets.

Compulsory admission of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) children requires careful handling by the school staff. School education cannot be separated from its social context; those who teach and learn carry with them attitudes, beliefs, habits, customs and orientations which differ from class to class and caste to caste. The elite schools have their own culture and their teaching-learning

environment which suits children of the upper class but which children from the weaker section may find alien. Most of the teachers in schools belong to the middle class which gives an edge to middle class children in learning. Children of upper classes are able to comprehend the contents of the syllabus better than their counterparts belonging to marginalized sections of society.

The present experience of India with mixed or diversified classrooms is not encouraging. The children from marginalized sections of society are discriminated in the classroom on the bases of gender, caste, and ethnicity despite the fact that the Indian Constitution strictly prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste and other social background and is a punishable act. Teachers must exercise due caution to ensure that they are not discriminated against and their lack of knowledge is not ridiculed.

The Act should not be frozen and changes must be made as and when necessary based on experience.

ADULT EDUCATION INSTITUTE

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