ABSTRACT

Right to Education Act (RTE Act) 2009 is an historic step for provision of free and compulsory education to children of India covering the age group of 6 to 14 years. This Bill to come into reality took a long journey more then a century. Its roots can be traced back in Gopal Krishna Gokhle’s attempts 1911, when he presented a bill for compulsory primary education in the Imperial Legislative council. The salient features of the bill are --free and compulsory education to all children of 6 to 14 years of age, no donation, no capitation fee, no screening test for entry, no holding back, and many more. Here in this article challenges which the girl education is still facing today specially among the rural and among the uneducated parents along with some concrete suggestions to make this bill a success especially with reference to girls education which is being neglected through centuries.

Keywords: Right to Education; Gender; Family Related Factors; School Related Factors

INTRODUCTION

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill 2008 was passed in Lok Sabha August 5, on 2009 that makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children between the ages of 6 and 14. The Human Resource Minister Kapil Sibal described it as “harbinger of a new era” for children to meet the challenges of the 21st century and the parliament hailed it as ‘historic’ for providing better future to children of the country that could lead India far in its commitment to an equitable and progressive society. This bill to realize had a long history. After freedom in the article 45,1950 of the Indian Constitution, provision was made for free and compulsory elementary education for all the children in the age-group 6 to 14 years within 10 years of launching of the constitution i.e. by 1960. But the target was not achieved within the stipulated time limit. After this Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy on Education 1968, NPE 1986, revised NPE 1991 and its Programme of Action (POA 1992), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 2000, also aimed to ensure that free and compulsory education should be provided to all children up to 14 years age. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 introduced new article 21A making the right to education of children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right.

Importance of Women Education

We are all well aware with the importance of women education. Educated women lead directly to, economic growth, and better family health, lower rates of child mortality and malnutrition, control on spread of HIV & AIDS. They can be effective voice for articulating women related causes. They can fight against female foeticide, child marriage, dowry etc. It is the education which will equip the women and girls to lead a life of dignity, to exercise their rights, to make their own choices/or decisions. The educated women are better able to assert their families’ interests. At present need of communal harmony, increasing activities of terrorism, the society becoming self centred, erosion of
values, need of peace education all these necessitate the priority and need of the girl education all the more and right to education bill is stepping stone in this direction.

**Challenges for Girls Education**

Men dominate women all over the world, resulting in a widespread discrimination against the women. And this inequality in the society inevitably has a negative impact on the girl’s right to education in terms of the provision of opportunities -- entry or continuance of education and content of education.

Gender inequality in education is extreme but it is all the more in rural, slum and with uneducated parents of the country. Girls are less likely to access school, to remain in school or to achieve in education due to many factors whether they are from within the families or from societal end or may be cultural or from within the school boundaries and these related factors keeping girls away from the school and challenging their participation in education are many and denying their right of education but some of them are discussed below-

### Family Related Factors

- **Lack of parental positive attitude towards Girls Education.**
  
  India has a vast majority of illiterate and poor parents. The uneducated parents do not want to send their wards in school because of their ignorance about the value of education and if it is the girl child the condition is worse. Though article 51A (K) of part IV-A of the constitution states that it is fundamental duty of parent to provide opportunities for education to their children aged between 6 to 14 years. But the question is that merely addition of this article forcing the parents can do nothing of worth these illiterate parents

- **Early Marriage /Dowry**
  
  The low value in view of parents attached to girls’ education reinforces their early marriage. Marriage of the daughters is viewed as a higher priority than their education by their parents. Poor Parents want to get married their daughters at the earliest. They have to save money for the marriage of their daughter because they know it very well that they have to manage dowry for their daughters. Rural parents face practical difficulty that as their daughters will become educated they will have look for them educated partners (Dua 2008).

- **Domestic work/ To look after the siblings /Ill health of any member of the family**
  
  To take care of domestic works as scrubbing the utensils, cleaning the house, preparing meals, to look after the younger siblings when both parents are out for work is another major factor for keeping out girls out of school. If some member of the family has ill health these are the again girls who are to be sacrificed they are instructed by their parents to be there in home.

- **Financial constraints/ Big size of family / Child Labour**
  
  Financial constraints are contributing factors behind non enrolment and discontinuation of studies of the girls (Dua2008). The uneducated and poor parents do not follow small family norms and the big size of family do not permit them to arrange for the education of their all children. They prefer to keep the girls at home when there is question of sending whom to school because the girls can help them also in house keeping besides bringing any extra burden of expenditure on them and also it is the male child whose education is preferred if there is choice before the parents. Parents think that to spend money on girl’s education is wastage (Dua2008).

Further, ‘need of girls to earn the money’ is also impacting girl’s performance and attendance in schools and resulting in physical and mental fatigue, absenteeism and poor performance. Their involvement in some sort of occupational work to add to the family income has been a contributing factor for not sending them to school or taking them out of school also their mothers take them along
at their place of work, they involve girls with them because they can not send them separately to earn because of safety reasons. Though mid day meal scheme is bringing the children to school.

**School Related Factors**

- **Inappropriate school curriculum**
  Parent view that school subjects have no utility in life. What these girls will do with studying subjects which have no place in their life in future.

- **Poor Infrastructure**
  Though poor infrastructure influences the education of both boys and girls but better sanitation facilities lure girls more. Non availability of toilets in the school compel them to go to their home which increases their chances of not coming back to school because of their need at home.

- **Violence against girls in schools or on their way to school/Teacher’s behaviour**
  Violence against girl’s works considerably in denying girls from their right to education. and it is major cause of discontinuation of their primary education. Violence includes physical and psychological intimidation, teasing threats and these may occur either in their school or on their way to school. In rural areas male teachers depict the similar attitude of their village environment that girls do not need education and they will not do well as they are less intelligent to boys.

- **Inconvenient school timings/Non availability of school in neighbourhood**
  Inconvenient school timings are also major factor keeping the young girls out of school and thus denial of right to education. because the morning hours are very busy for the girls to help in the domestic chores, to get ready the younger kids for the school, packing the lunch of the parents who will just leave for the work. And if it is the harvest time they are persuaded to be absent from the school to again help because either they will be helpful in the fields or if both parents are going for work they have to do the domestic works. If school is not available in the nearby vicinity it multiplies the woes of parents they hesitate in sending their daughters alone to cross the aloof distances or the rainy seasons when the roads get immersed in water or sometimes the bridges over small rivulets overflow which is a routine Indian scene in the villages.

Thus from the foregoing paras it can be easily concluded that cultural, social beliefs and practices along with family related and school related factors prevent girls from the educational opportunities i.e. challenging/denying them from their right to education.

**Salient Features of the Right to Education Bill**

- **Free and compulsory education for every child between the age group 6 to 14 years.**

- **25% reservation in private schools for disadvantaged children from the neighbourhood, this point needs special attention because it may result that girls from some influential families at the cost of poor girls.**

- **at the entry level, no donation or capitation fee for admission; no interview of the child or parents as part of the screening process,**

- **Prohibition of denial of admission irrespective of the time of the year, no holding back, no expulsion, no mental harassment of the children, and ban on private tuition by teachers,**

- **Awarding a certificate to the child after the completion of his primary course,**

- **Calls for a fixed student-teacher ratio,**

- **Mandates improvement in quality of education,**
School teachers will need adequate professional degree within five years or else will lose the job.

School infrastructure (where there is problem) to be improved in three years, else recognition cancelled.

Financial burden will be shared between state and central government.

Some Suggestions

To make this bill a success in view of girl’s education some suggestions can be---

- This Bill states free and compulsory education for every child between the age group 6 to 14 years, Here again girl child education should be taken care of. There are a number of chances that again it is she who can be sacrificed against education of her brother when there is her need in family related works at home and this can be done through awareness programmes about the necessity and importance of girls education.

- Discrimination within the education system must be abolished, and education materials and processes must not only refrain from reinforcing gender discrimination, they should also actively combat it and this can be achieved through change in curricula, not highlighting the gender defined roles (collecting firewood, childcare, domestic tasks).

- Awareness programmes for parents/community/School faculty with regard to importance of girl child education and also about this bill must be focused. Media as T.V. can act excellently.

- Good sanitation, good infrastructure, severe punishment for those found guilty in girl abuse of any type, power to be exercised by National Commissions for protection of child rights in pursuance of provisions of this bill can serve the purpose.

- Girls are to be given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity, their protection against exploitation of any type must be ensured by the school authorities.

- Pre primary education in education group of girls of 0-6 years should be taken care of.

- Girls involved in child labour should be motivated to learn.

- Teachers can be sensitised for taking care of girl students. If some thing foul on the part of male teachers/principal/or fellow boys is found should be dealt severely. Teachers’ wrong assumptions and expectations that girls do not need education and will not do well can be dealt through special arrangement of lectures/some seminars.

- Female teachers must be there in the primary school in whom the girls can not only easily confide but also they will serve as role model not only for the girls but it will pass a strong message to the community about economic independence of the girls.

- Some remedial teaching for those weak girls who do not find time in their homes due to their involvement in domestic work should be stressed.

- Girls with learning disabilities can be provided with special extra facilities as ramp, Braille readers or any other help as and when required.

- Some girl’s schools taking consideration of girl population of the area can be established in the neighbourhood so that distantly located school may not hamper the girl’s education.

- Girls with disabilities can be taken care of in neighbour hood schools. Again there is need of specially trained teachers to look into the education of this category of the girls.
Parents, specially rural and uneducated, should be made aware about the importance of their daughters education through some nukkar nataks, choupal which still occupies a large share in village life.

Mothers of the girls in particular can be educated through adult education programmes because it the mother who can lead her daughter’s education.

There is an urgent need for affirmative action to challenge the rights abuse with regard to education of girls. Some questions are important to deliberate upon would girls will really benefit from this bill or the uneducated parent will continue to prioritise the education of their boys? Will the school administration/the govt/the local authorities will take some special initiatives seriously or will this bill also end up in merely formality like all other previous initiatives taken by the govt. Let us hope for the good. Merely introduction of this bill will not suffice the purpose there is need of strong will power on the part of parents, society, schools, government agencies, non government agencies to play their role honestly ensuring not only in girl’s access to education but their retention and achievement too. Discrimination within the education system must also be abolished, and education materials and processes must not only refrain from reinforcing gender discrimination, they should actively combat with it also.

REFERENCES

3. Right to Education Act—India Development Gateway, retrieved on 12.3.2014