

Education – A basic child right (A reflective study in the state of West Bengal)

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Abstract

Children's rights are human rights. They protect the child as a human being. As human rights, children's rights are constituted by fundamental guarantees and essential human rights. The father of modern education—John Amos Comenius proposed – “all persons should be educated, so we could have peace in the world”. Visionaries of the world understood that peace meant guaranteeing every person certain rights that are conditional for humanity—education being one of the most important. UNESCO has recently criticised the state of primary education in India. It is imperative, therefore, to reflect on the Right to Education (RTE) Act which is being implemented all over the country. In the present study the main concern lies with the status of education as a basic child right in the state of West Bengal. Problems faced of implementing Right to Education Act in West Bengal are - apathy of illiterate masses, uninteresting school subjects, indifferent attitude of parents towards girl's education, the distance of school and over crowded class. Actions to be taken for implementing Right to Education Act in West Bengal are introducing Adult Education Programme, introducing school subjects related to life situation, bringing change in the attitude of the parents towards girl's education, school at the door of each and every child and developing infrastructure and appointing more efficient teachers. At last it can be concluded that Right to Education is a basic right of each and every children. It can be achieved by the joint effort of both the Government of West Bengal as well as all the concerning people.

Keywords: Right to Education, Child Right, SSA

1. Introduction

Children's rights are the human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors. This includes their right to association with both parents, human identity as well as the basic needs for food, universal state-paid education, health care and criminal laws appropriate for the age and development of the child, equal protection of the child's civil rights, and freedom from discrimination on the basis of the child's race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, disability, color, ethnicity, or other characteristics. Interpretations of children's rights range from allowing children the capacity for autonomous action to the enforcement of children being physically, mentally and emotionally free from abuse, though what constitutes "abuse" is a matter of debate. Other definitions include the rights to care and nurturing.

A child is any human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. The term "child" often, but does not necessarily, mean minor, but can include adult children as well as adult nondependent children.

Children's rights law is defined as the point where the law intersects with a child's life. That includes juvenile delinquency, due process for children involved in the criminal justice system, appropriate representation, and effective rehabilitative services; care and protection for children in state care; ensuring education for all children regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, disability, color,

ethnicity, or other characteristics, health care and advocacy.

Children's rights are human rights. They protect the child as a human being. As human rights, children's rights are constituted by fundamental guarantees and essential human rights

- Children's rights recognize *fundamental guarantees to all human beings*: the right to life, the non-discrimination principle, the right to dignity through the protection of physical and mental integrity (protection against slavery, torture and bad treatments, etc.)
- Children's rights are *civil and political rights*: the right to identity, the right to a nationality, etc.
- Children's rights are *economic, social and cultural rights*: the right to education, the right to a decent standard of living, the right to health, etc.
- Children's rights include *individual rights*: the right to live with his parents, the right to education, the right to benefit from a protection, etc.
- Children's rights include *collective rights*: rights of refugee and disabled children, of minority children.

1.1 Four general principles that underline all children's rights

Non-discrimination means that all children have the same right to develop their potential in all situations and at all times. For example, every child should have equal access to education regardless of the child's gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability, parentage, sexual orientation or other status

The best interests of the child must be "a primary consideration" in all actions and decisions concerning a child, and must be used to resolve conflicts between different rights. For example, when making national budgetary decisions affecting children, Government must consider how cuts will impact on the best interests of the child

The right to survival and development underscores the vital importance of ensuring access to basic services and to equality of opportunity for children to achieve their full development. For example, a child with a disability should have effective access to education and health care to achieve their full potential.

The views of the child mean that the voice of the child must be heard and respected in all matters concerning his or her rights. For example, those in power should consult with children before making decisions that will affect them.

1.2 The Right to Education

The father of modern education—John Amos Comenius proposed – “all persons should be educated, so we could have peace in the world”. Visionaries of the world understood that peace meant guaranteeing every person certain rights that are conditional for humanity—education being one of the most important.

The addition of the Right to Education (RTE) in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 was the beginning of a remarkable expansion of educational opportunities around the world. The parliament of India enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) on August 2009. The same got enforced on April 1st 2010.

As per the act, education is a fundamental right of every child who is between 6 and 14 years old. The act also states that until the completion of elementary education, no child shall be held back, expelled or required to pass a board examination. There is also a provision for special training of school drop-outs to bring them up to par with students of the same age.

With the introduction of the RTE Act making elementary education as right the delivery services related to education has to be approached in a right based framework. The National Level Committee on “Implementation of RTE Act and Resultant Revamp of SSA”, formed towards this submitted its report in April 2010 and the following principles emerged:

- A. *Holistic view of education*, as interpreted in the National Curriculum Framework 2005, with implications for a systemic revamp of the entire content and process of education with significant implications for curriculum, teacher education, educational planning and management.
- B. *Equity*: to mean not only equal opportunity, but also creation of conditions in which the disadvantaged sections of the society-girls, children of SCs/ ST/ minorities/Landless agricultural workers and those with special needs, etc. - can avail of the opportunities being made available under the programme.
- C. *Access*, not to be confined to ensuring that a school becomes accessible to all children within specified

distance but implies an understanding of the educational needs and predicament of the traditionally excluded categories- the SC, ST and others section of the most disadvantaged groups, the Muslim minority, girls in general, and children with special needs.

- D. *Gender concerns*: implying not only an effort to enable girls to keep pace with boys but to view education in the perspective spelt out in the National Policy on Education 1986/92; ie a decisive intervention to bring about a basic change in the status of women.
- E. *Centrality of teacher*: to motivate them to innovate and create a culture in the classroom and beyond the classroom that might produce an inclusive environment of children, especially for girls from marginalized backgrounds.
- F. *Moral compulsion* is imposed through the RTE Act on parents, teachers, educational administrators and other stakeholders, rather than shifting emphasis on punitive processes.
- G. *Convergent and integrated system* of educational management is a pre-requisite for implementation of the RTE. All states must move in that direction as quickly as possible.

1.3 RTE Act and Preparedness in West Bengal

The Act necessitates several steps to be taken by every state government within the time frame. Sometimes it needs infrastructural development and restructuring of the educational system, such as-

- Keeping in conformity with the provision of the Right of children to free and compulsory education, 2009 the formulation of state RTE Rules is under process.
- Specification of limits of neighborhood for Primary and Upper Primary schools are to be done.
- Teacher recruitment becomes necessary to follow the PTR as per guideline. Vacancies should not exceed 10% of sanctioned strength and sanctioned strength should be as per enrolment.
- All teachers must have the minimum qualifications NCTE notifications.
- Teachers should not be engaged in non-academic activities (except census, election, disaster management); also not be involved in private tuition.
- EGS centers are to be closed gradually and formal education is to be provided only through recognized schools eventually.
- Every primary schools are to be provided with i) Library, ii) games equipments and play materials.
- All unaided schools are to be registered at DI office.
- All unaided schools to be instructed to reserve 25% seats for children weaker section/dies-advantaged group from neighborhood.

1.4 Attainment of Universal Elementary Education and Related Issues

India has built up strong human resources in the fields of scientific and technological capabilities, humanist and philosophical thought and creativity. The need for a

literate population and universal education for all children in the age group of 6-14 years was recognized as the crucial input for nation building and the same was given due consideration in enactment of the Constitution as well as in successive five year plans. Yet, as the country has remained behind many of the developing countries in terms of universalisation of elementary education and the goal has remained elusive. Progress of elementary education in the country as well as in West Bengal and related issues are mentioned below.

1.5 Literacy among Different Social Groups and the Gender Gap

Literacy rate as well as probability of attaining higher level of education has strong

Correlation with the social background. While the literacy rate in West Bengal during 2001 census was 68.64% the same for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were 59.04% and 43.40% respectively. The literacy rate for Muslims was 57.5% during the 2001 census. Poverty, occupation and geographical location are important determinants of literacy. The highest incidence of illiteracy is among the agricultural labours in rural areas and casual labours in urban areas. The urban areas have generally has higher literacy than in rural areas. Within rural areas certain geographical locations which are remote and have higher incidence of poverty generally have lower literacy. There is also persistence gender gap in literacy. The literacy rates of male and female in West Bengal during the last three census held in 1991, 2001 and 2011 are shown graphically below.

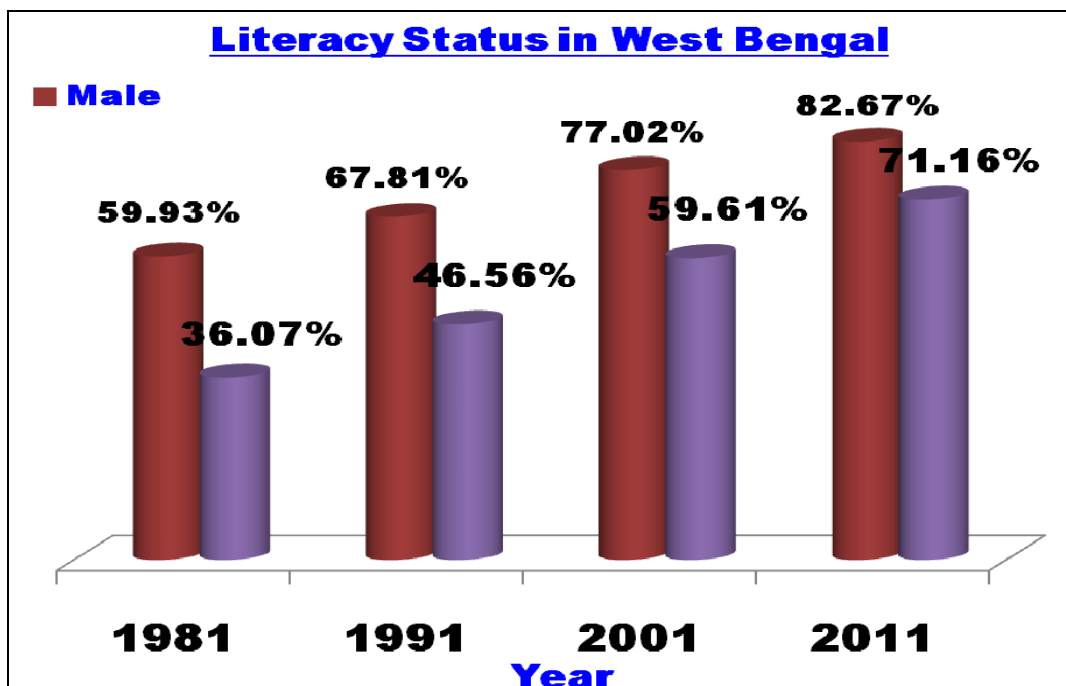


Fig 1: 1981 male 59.93%, female 36.07%; 1991 male 67.81%, female 46.56%; 2001 male 77.02%, female 59.61%; 2011 male %, female %

The gender gap in literacy also varies across social classes. As per 2001 census literacy rate of SC male and female were 70.54% were 46.90% respectively. Corresponding figures for the ST were 57.38% and 43.40% respectively. Thus the gender gap in literacy for the SC and the ST were 23.64 percent points and 13.98 percent points respectively. Gender gap in literacy among Muslims was 14.8 percent point, which is contrary to the popular belief of educational backwardness of Muslim women, though in absolute terms they are behind the state average. Compared to that the gender gap in literacy for all social groups in West Bengal taken together was 17.41 percent points during 1991, which has improved to 11.51 percent points during 2011. The SC community faces the maximum gender gap in literacy. In absolute terms it is tribal people who have the lowest literacy rate though with lesser gender disparity. Female literacy rate is strongly correlated to many of the important social

indicators. District-wise female literacy status in West Bengal during 2011 census is given below. Rural female literacy of West Bengal during 2011 census was 66.08% implying that little more than one third of the rural women in West Bengal were illiterate. There were two districts namely Purulia and Uttar Dinajpore with rural female literacy lower than 50%. Only East Midnapore had rural female literacy higher than 80% and three districts, namely Howrah, N. 24 Parganas and Hooghli had that rate above 70% but below 80%. Utmost effort should be made in improving female literacy for the school going children as well as for the adult illiterates. As a social group the tribal women face the maximum deprivation related to illiteracy. Access to elementary education of all the socially disadvantaged groups, particularly the tribal women is one important area for closer monitoring and appropriate interventions.

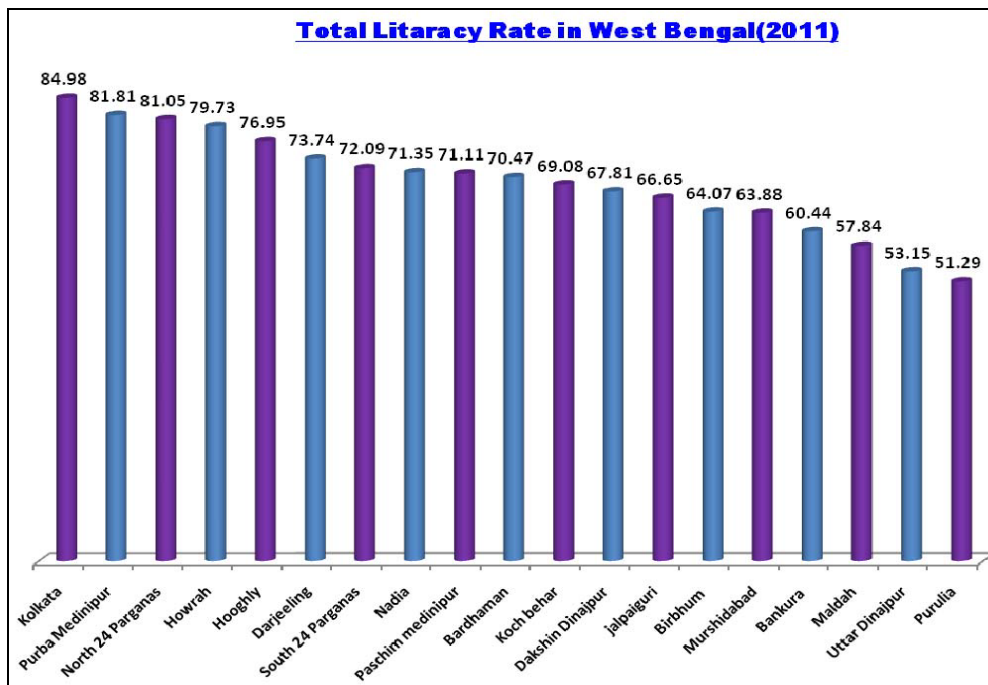


Fig 2

Rural female literacy of West Bengal during 2011 census was 66.08% implying that little more than one third of the rural women in West Bengal were illiterate. There were two districts namely Purulia and Uttar Dinajpore with rural female literacy lower than 50%. Only East Midnapore had rural female literacy higher than 80% and three districts, namely Howrah, N. 24 Parganas and Hooghli had that rate above 70% but below 80%. Utmost effort should be made in improving female literacy for the school going children as well as for the adult illiterates. As a social group the tribal women face the maximum deprivation related to illiteracy. Access to

elementary education of all the socially disadvantaged groups, particularly the tribal women is one important area for closer monitoring and appropriate interventions.

1.6 Progress of Literacy in India and West Bengal

Access to elementary education has increased manifold over the years since independence. In any case the goal for EFA has remained elusive though literacy rates have increased steadily over the years. The growth of literacy and the absolute number of illiterates in India and West Bengal from independence is given in the table below

Table 1: Progress of literacy & Absolute no of Illiterates in India & West Bengal

Year	India			West Bengal				
	Liter rate%	No of person		Increase in no of Illiterates	Literacy rates%	No of person		Increase in no of Illiterates
		Literate	Illiterate			Literate	Illiterate	
1951	16.7	58.9	294.2	+32.4	24.95			
1961	24.0	102.6	325.5	+31.3	34.46			
1971	29.5	157.3	376.2	+50.7	38.86			
1981	36.2	241.0	424.3*	+48.1	46.32			
1991	52.2	349.76	320.41	+18.3*	57.70	32.6	23.9	
2001	64.8	560.7	30.15	-16.26	68.64	47.19	21.56	.2.34
2011	74.0	778.5	272.95	-31.20	77.10	62.6	18.6	-2.96

*From the year 1991 children below 7 years instead of below 5 years are being excluded for calculating literacy. During 1981 illiterate population in the age group 7 years above was 302.06 million. Considering that, number of illiterates in the country increased by 18.3 million in

1991 as compared to 1981. There is also wide inter-district variation in literacy within the state as shown below.

Table 2: Table/graph showing inter-district literacy status during 2011

District Code	State/District	Literates (Persons) 2011			Literates (Rate) 2011		
		Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
1.	West Bengal	62614556	39898187	22716369	77.08	72.97	85.54
2.	Derjeeling	1328218	752287	575931	79.92	74.97	87.48
3.	Jalpaiguri	2527018	1752822	774196	73.79	70.55	82.33

4.	Koch Bihar	1879984	1643723	236261	75.49	73.87	89.01
5.	Uttar Dinajpur	1521933	1262730	259203	60.13	57.15	80.67
6.	Dakshin Dinajpur	1102355	906370	195985	73.86	71.18	89.42
7.	Maldah	2136898	1771627	365271	62.71	60.42	76.82
8.	Murshidabad	4134584	3254627	879957	67.53	66.27	72.65
9.	Birbhum	2175923	1846090	329833	70.90	69.25	81.74
10.	Bardhaman	5350197	3048014	2302183	77.15	73.39	82.75
11.	Nadia	3524073	2386942	1137131	75.58	71.50	85.88
12.	North Twenty Four Parganas	7798722	2973608	4825114	84.95	78.11	89.80
13.	Hoogly	4140487	2421002	1719485	82.55	79.22	87.75
14.	Bankura	2264013	2028958	235055	70.95	69.60	85.23
15.	Puruliya	1656940	1404686	252254	65.38	63.75	76.24
16.	Howrah	3642617	1277113	2365504	83.85	80.82	85.58
17.	Kolkata	3648210	NA	3648210	87.14	-	87.14
18.	South Twenty Four Parganas	5639112	4065797	1573315	78.57	76.78	83.62
19.	Paschim Medinipur	4173522	3606955	566567	79.04	77.92	87.01
20.	Purba Medinipur	3969750	3494836	474914	87.66	87.47	89.14

1.7 Enrolment and Retention in School

Since independence, there has been a substantial increase in enrolment at all levels of education, five- fold from 19.2 million to 110.9 million in 1998- 99 at the primary stage; 3.1 million to 40.4 million in the upper primary

stage. The gross enrolment ratios of children in the age group 6-11 increased from 42.6 percent in 1950-51 to 92.14 percent in 1998-99. Likewise, the gross enrolment of 11-14 years age group increased from 12.7 percent in 1950-51 to 57.58 percent in 1998-99.

Table 3: Enrolment Status of Primary Schools

S. No.	District	No of schools	5+ to 8+ Population (projected)	Total Enrolment (overall)	Net Enrolment	Out of School Children (5+ to 8+)	Gen (Overall)	NER (Overall)
1	Bankura	3531	289934	360982	288733	1201	124.5	99.59
2	Birbhum	2387	273649	346291	270369	3280	126.55	98.80
3	Burdwan	4028	628560	778088	624651	3909	123.79	99.38
4	Coochbehar	2029	225118	321735	222706	2412	142.92	98.93
5	D/Dinajpur	1207	136495	186631	135963	532	136.73	99.61
6	U/Dinajpur	1457	221806	327993	208329	13477	147.87	93.92
7	Darjeeling	789	97468	119679	94655	2813	122.79	97.11
8	Hooghly	3130	457820	571961	456221	1599	124.93	99.65
9	Howrah	2155	388236	485851	386568	1668	125.14	99.57
10	Jalpaiguri	2224	309135	466625	307579	1556	150.95	99.50
11	Kolkata	1598	416080	479076	413302	2778	115.14	99.33
12	Malda	1902	298866	432763	294893	3973	144.80	98.67
13	Murshidabad	3191	532639	738733	523691	8948	138.69	98.32
14	E/Midnapur	3257	403773	574417	403383	390	142.26	99.90
15	W/Midnapur	4690	471751	609046	467370	4381	129.10	99.07
16	Nadia	2702	418188	528351	417988	200	126.34	99.95
17	N/24 Pgs	3626	811196	942713	807699	3497	116.21	99.57
18	S/24 Pgs	3751	627590	830985	621016	6574	132.41	98.95
19	Purulia	2995	230291	307939	217983	12308	133.72	94.66
20	Siliguri	510	88516	127102	217983	1053	143.59	98.81
	State	51159	7327110	9536960	7250561	76549	130.16	98.96

Source: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, as on 01.04.2011

Table 4: Enrolment Status of Upper Primary Schools

S. No	District	No of schools	Population in the age group 9+ to 13+	Total Enrolment (overall)	Net Enrolment	Out of School Children (9+ to 13+)	Gen (Overall)	NER (Overall)
1	Bankura	702	335172	361073	310897	4233	107.73	92.76
2	Birbhum	461	316347	346967	292065	11942	109.68	92.32
3	Burdwan	902	726635	771362	666020	11013	106.16	91.66
4	Coochbehar	351	260243	270517	214892	4664	103.95	82.57
5	D/Dinajpur	175	157792	170219	143528	1606	107.88	90.96
6	U/Dinajpur	269	256415	241349	196157	16140	94.12	76.50
7	Darjeeling	136	112676	110391	97843	5128	97.97	86.84

8	Hooghly	707	529254	586704	508881	1150	110.85	96.15
9	Howrah	597	448812	477802	414393	5307	106.46	92.33
10	Jalpaiguri	422	357369	375463	293257	6046	105.06	93.94
11	Kolkata	611	481001	495951	451831	2769	103.11	82.06
12	Malda	349	345499	354505	288792	5313	102.61	83.59
13	Murshidabad	654	615747	630207	511295	17297	102.35	83.04
14	E/Midnapur	700	466775	529998	441277	12289	103.31	87.89
15	W/Midnapur	944	545358	578313	487926	2669	113.54	94.54
16	Nadia	544	483439	533152	451281	1115	110.28	93.35
17	N/24 Pgs	996	937767	989132	871767	11757	105.48	92.96
18	S/24 Pgs	844	725513	745904	635610	11506	102.81	87.61
19	Purulia	480	266224	275035	233986	12289	103.31	87.89
20	Siliguri	134	85759	85250	66213	2430	99.41	77.21
21	State	10278	8453800	892297	7577914	141601	105.62	89.64

Source: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as on 01.04.2011

1.8 Child Right and Education as per UNICEF

The eastern state of West Bengal is the nation's fourth most populous, with more than 91 million inhabitants. The capital and largest city of the state is Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), the seventh largest populous city in India. (Census of India, 2011) West Bengals most important industrial belt runs along the Hooghly River in north and south of Kolkata. The other significant industrial regions include the ones along the Damodar River, steel plants at Durgapur and Burnpur, a locomotive plant at Chittaranjan and Haldia, the terminus of an oil pipeline from the state of Assam and the site of a large oil refinery, also has a petrochemical industry. Other important manufacturing sectors include ships, automobiles, chemicals and fertilizers, wagons, electronics, paper and cotton textiles. The state also has a large number of small scale and cottage industries. West Bengals forest area is 11,879 sq km which is almost 13.4 per cent of its total geographical area. (<http://www.westbengalforest.gov.in>). Part of the world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, is located in southern West Bengal. West Bengal has seven per cent of India's total child population and children represent 35 per cent of the state's total population. The state is home to 32 million children, of whom 73 per cent, or 23 million, live in rural areas and 27 per cent, or 8.7 million, live in urban areas. West Bengal has managed to keep its rates of infant, neonatal and maternal mortality and mortality of children aged less than five years much below the national average, but there are regional disparities and a huge urban-rural divide. Moreover, while the states neonatal mortality is lower than the national average, it still remains to be a key challenge to achieve

1.9 UNESCO on Child Right and Education

UNESCO has recently criticised the state of primary education in India. It is imperative, therefore, to reflect on the Right to Education (RTE) Act which is being implemented all over the country. It mandates free and compulsory education for every child up to Class 8. The HRD ministry, headed by Smriti Irani, intends to extend the ambit of the RTE Act to the secondary and pre-primary levels, with substantial modifications. The Right to Education Act has been introduced six decades after independence. Indeed, this is the first time since independence that an Act has been promulgated for the

welfare of children. Mahatma Gandhi's dream of spreading basic education will be fulfilled, if the Act is implemented effectively. The recent UNESCO report mentions that there are about 287 million illiterates in our country and the scenario is indeed alarming. At present 4.6 per cent of 220 million children in the 6-14 age groups are out of school i.e. about 10 million, which is extremely dismal. It is imperative that the RTE Act is re-examined with the focus on its ramifications, points of strength and weakness. The elementary education policy and its pattern change from time to time without much difference. In fact, the basic education (Buniadi siksha) formulated by Mahatma Gandhi was as remarkable as it was challenging. Cooperation, harmony rather than competition was given due importance for the overall development of the body, mind and soul of the child. The approach was holistic. Community programmes, games, dignity of labour, work education, creativity and imagination can enhance the child's psychological attitude and build up his personality. The RTE Act envisages free and compulsory education for every child in the 6-14 age group.

1.10 Problems faced for Implementing Right to Education Act in West- Bengal;

After going through the above discussions and surveying the reports of the different committees and commissions on the problems and prospects of child right and Education it is essential to know why inspite of all the efforts of the government we are yet to achieve the goal. The followings throw lights on the problems and issues of implementing the programme in the state of West Bengal.

Apathy of Illiterate masses – Though the government has taken all the possible steps to introduce right to education still then there are many parents who are illiterate and cannot understand the value of education. For them living for earning the bread butter is of utmost important. They are mainly interested in sending their children for doing odd jobs and earn money instead sending them to the schools.

Uninteresting School Subjects: The school subjects taught in the schools are not related to the life situations, they failed to create interest among the students towards study.

Indifferent attitude of parents towards girl's education: After a certain age the parents mostly in rural and hilly

area are not interested to send their girls child to the school. Instead they want them to stay at home, do all the household works and make them prepare for their marriage.

The distance of school: Although the government has made several steps to attain universalisation of provision still then in hilly and rural areas it is not possible.

Over crowded class: At some places the classroom is over crowded with students because either of the shortage of properly trained teachers or the shortage of the sufficient classrooms.

1.11 Actions to be taken for implementing Right to Education Act in West Bengal

The problems discussed above are faced actually while implementing Right to Education Act in West Bengal. If these problems can be studied properly and the ways and means to eradicate them can be found out which are possible in real situations the act will be successful in West Bengal. The followings are some of the ways to meet the end.

Introducing Adult Education Programme: Adult education programme can be introduced, including women education in order to eradicate illiteracy among the parents. It will make them understand the value of education and also they will know the plans and programmes of the government towards their educational development. So they will send their wards to the school instead of sending them to do manual work to earn money.

Introducing school subjects, related to life situation: The interesting school subjects should be introduced. The subjects should have along with educational values it will make them self-sufficient. Moreover the subjects should be according to the life style and the climatic condition of the locality. So that more children will be interested to come to the school.

Bringing change in the attitude of the parents towards girl's education: Most of the parents in the remote areas and rural areas think that after a certain age the girls should remain at home and learn the household activities which will help them in their future life. Even if government has banned child marriage till then it is in practice. All the attitude must be changed for bringing the act in practice.

School at the door of each and every child: Universalisation of Primary Education implies universalisation of provision. It means school should be at the working distance of each and every child. At places it becomes impossible to set schools for each and every child in hilly areas. It is not only the responsibility of the government but also the parents, local bodies, and NGOs should take the responsibility to establish schools in those areas where it is required.

Developing infrastructure and appointing more efficient teachers: The government should take the responsibility to develop the infrastructural facility of the school. More number of teachers should be appointed. Government should give more incentives to the teachers appointed in hilly and remote areas. In service training facilities should be provided to the teachers to upgrade their knowledge.

2. Conclusion

At last it can be concluded that Right to Education is a basic right of each and every children. It can be achieved by the joint effort of both the Government of West Bengal as well as all the concerning people. With the strong involvement of parents, society, Ngo's, and other non- governmental organizations

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