

The status of elementary education in Assam in context of RTE Act, 2009

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Abstract

Assam is a small state located in the north eastern corner of the country comprising of 2.58 percent of India's total population yet Assam is placed down on the 19th position with average literacy rate of 73.81% even with the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009. The issues of medium of instruction, ethnic riots, poor teacher's pupil ratio, old teacher's recruitment policies, multi-grade classes, multilingualism, teacher's attendance, non availability of teachers, rate of retention, inactiveness on the part of people's committee are some of the issues that are interfering with the implementation of this act. In light of the above, the researcher has tried to accumulate the different issues associated with the implementation of RTE Act 2009 in the state of Assam with an attempt to suggest certain suitable interventions to improve the prevailing situation.

Keywords: RTE, marginalized community

1. Introduction

Education has been occupying an important place in the Indian society. After independence, the policy makers have worked hard to transform the elitist system of education created by the British into a mass based system, built on the principle of equality and social justice. Universalization of Elementary Education has been accepted as a National goal in India after being recognized as a crucial input for nation building.

The NPE, 1986 attaches immense importance to the fact that enrolment without retention and achievement is of no use. It also suggests a number of systematic programmes of non-formal education for school drop outs, for children from habitations without schools, working children and girls who cannot attend the whole day school. India made a remarkable progress in terms of increase in enrolment, number of schools and number of teachers after the implementation of the NPE 1986. The enrolment increased about six times, number of teachers increased seven times and number of primary schools increased about 3 times. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at the Primary stage exceeded 100 percent (NUEPA, 2000).

In spite of all these efforts, the proportion of children attending school is quite high only in urban area; rural area is yet facing serious problems of non-enrolment and no retention. Similarly, there is a difference in enrolment ratio of boys and girls. There exists rural-urban, male-female, region wise disparities. Coupled with it are various issues like inadequate school infrastructure, poorly functioning schools, high teacher absenteeism, large number of teacher vacancies, poor quality of education and inadequate funds that has affected the education in the area.

2. The RTE Act, 2009

The Right of the Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act was passed by the Indian parliament on 4th August 2009 to execute the article 21(A) which was inserted after 86th amendment of the constitution. Article 21(A) states that,

"The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age group 6-14 years in such manner as the state may by law determine"

To monitor the progress of the Act in the states, a special organization namely the National Commission for the protection of Child Rights (an autonomous body)^[1] was set up in 2007. State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights were also set up in the respective states to monitor the implementation of RTE in the states. The table below shows the list of the provisions under RTE Act 2009.

List of provisions under RTE Act, 2009

1. The right of children to free and compulsory education till the completion of elementary education in the neighbourhood school in the 6-14 age group
2. All children to be admitted to an appropriate age.
3. Specific duties and responsibilities of government, local authorities and parents for providing free and compulsory education.
4. Standard norms relating to pupil teacher ratio (PTR).
5. No fee or charges for pursuing and completing elementary education.
6. Proper infrastructure
7. Provision of 25% reservation for economically disadvantaged communities in admission to class one in all private schools.
8. Appointment of appropriately qualified teachers.
9. Proper norms should be maintained in regards to school working hours.
10. Proper drinking water facilities, separate toilets for boys and girls, library and playground should be provided for imparting education in the school.
11. Proper boundary and fencing in the school.
12. Untrained teachers must be trained within five years

Source: MHRD

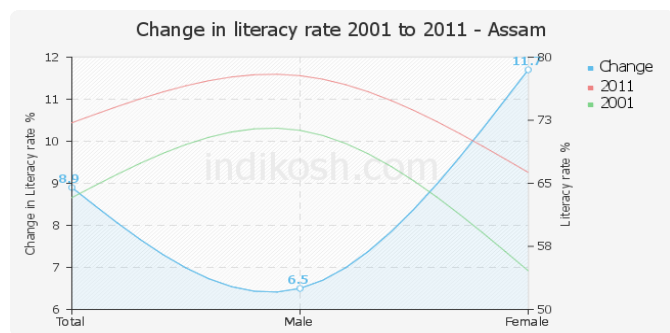
¹ The term "autonomous body" denotes a self governing body, independent, or subject to its own laws.

Thus, the RTE Act provides for development of curriculum in consonance with the values enshrined in the constitution and ensures all round development of the child, making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of child friendly and child centered learning.

3. Issues in Implementation of RTE Act in Assam

Assam is the gateway to the north eastern part of India. Under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan ^[2], Assam initiated a variety of process, systems and structures aiming at the universal enrolment, retention and quantitative improvement of elementary education. Another important step for universalization of elementary education was taken in terms of the RTE Act, 2009. The Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Right (ASCFPC), being the nodal institute for monitoring the education of children of age group 6 to14, expressed concern that the Act is yet to be implemented with true spirit. It was observed that even after the implementation of the Act, the gender gap of literacy in Assam has fallen from 16.7% (2001) to only 11.54 (2011) with the prevailing issues of uneven distribution of teachers in the state. The graph below highlights the change in the literacy rate from 2001 to 2011.

Chart: Change of Literacy Rates in Assam



Source: Census 2011

Fig 1

The reason for the slow progress may be attributed to several factors as discussed above. The state has been a victim of inter community violence leaving a large numbers of people including children homeless and destitute. In certain areas, due to communal violence, the Muslim communities were also deprived of getting education. The state has also been suffering with the issues related to the climatic changes including annual flooding making the children vulnerable to the education that is supposed to be their right after the implementation of the RTE Act. The DISE results indicate that the state the infrastructural provisions (adequate classroom, requisite number of teachers of both the gender as per PTR norms functional toilets, availability of water, electricity and blackboards, a functional mid day meal programmes) in Assam are negatively correlated with increase in socially backward population. The non detention policy further lead to a challenging situation, as students who practically entered to the higher classes were actually without real mastery of the competencies in language and mathematics. Studies revealed

that the schools are not well equipped with infrastructural facilities. In spite of the emphasis of the government on inclusion, most of the government schools are not having ramps and special educators to fulfill the needs the specially abled child.

4. Recommendations for Improving the Status of Elementary Education in Assam

Assam, being the state with its heterogeneous population and immense geo-cultural diversity faces numerous challenges in the implementation of the RTE Act. The main challenge seems to be resource allocation and utilization that has resulted in the uneven distribution of teachers and ethnic diversity. Interventions need to be taken to meet the dearth of teachers' in the state of Assam as this educationally backward area is facing paucity of teachers.

There is a need to conduct workshops for the teachers on transaction in multilingual classroom in collaboration with the state, national and international experts. Pre services training should be made compulsory and the supervision machinery must be strengthened to ensure accountability of teachers. Vocational training and handicraft must be made compulsory in school curriculum and placement of women and qualified teachers for strengthening of educational administration in specific area needs to be addressed.

Innovative programmes like student exchange programme, vocational programmes must be introduced and provisions need to be made for the residential schools for the children who are victims of flood, ethnic violence and other natural hazards with free of cost.

5. References

1. GOI. The Right of the children to free and compulsory Education Act, 2009. The Gazette of India, New Delhi. 2009.
2. Bhattacharya S. Assam Violence; A history of conflict rooted in land. 2012.
3. Government of India. National policy of Education. 1986.
4. NCERT. National Curriculum Framework. 2005.

² Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner