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# PROMISED CHILDREN: EDUCATIONAL MYTHS AND PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

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**Abstract:** Is right to education being fulfilled even if schools are temporarily closed during Lockdown? Where is the access to online classes to students? Is it not possible? Is the right to education infringed? It examines the state of affairs in times of digital education, gender divides, possible solutions and prevailing myths of educational system particularly for marginalized disadvantaged groups (DGs) and economically weaker sections (EWS) school children in times of pandemic.

## I. INTRODUCTION:

Right to Education (RTE) as enshrined in our Constitution Our Constitution has provided the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education under Article-21a but it took years to become an Act for Right to Education (RTE), a responsibility of State to realize this promise for the children. It describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India. India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of children.

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 (to be reimbursed by the state as part of the public-private partnership plan). Kids are admitted in to private schools based on economic status or caste-based reservations. It also prohibits all unrecognized schools from practice, and 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 RTE Act requires surveys that will monitor all neighborhoods, identify children requiring education, and set up facilities for providing it. 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 (1). It is the parents' responsibility to send the children to schools in the US and other countries.

The RTE of persons with disabilities until 18 years of age is laid down under a separate legislation - the Persons with Disabilities Act. A number of other provisions regarding improvement of school infrastructure, teacher-student ratio and faculty are made in the Act.

Education in the Indian constitution is a concurrent issue and both center and states can legislate on the issue. The Act lays down specific responsibilities for the center, state and local bodies for its implementation. The states have been clamoring that they lack financial capacity to deliver education of appropriate standard in all the schools needed for universal education. Thus it was clear that the central government (which collects most of the revenue) will be required to subsidize the states.

A committee set up to study the funds requirement and funding initially estimated that INR 1710 billion or 1.71 trillion (US\$38.2 billion) across five years was required to implement the Act, and in April 2010 the central government agreed to sharing the funding for implementing the law in the ratio of 65 to 35 between the center and the states, and a ratio of 90 to 10 for the north-eastern states. However, in mid-2010, this figure was upgraded to INR 2310 billion, and the center agreed to raise its share to 68%. There is some confusion on this, with other media reports stating that the center's share of the implementation expenses would now be 70%. At that rate, most states may not need to increase their education budgets substantially.

A critical development in 2011 has been the decision taken in principle to extend the right to education till Class X (age 16) and into the preschool age range. The CABE committee is in the process of looking into the implications of making these changes.

National Advisory Council (NAC) released a report for implementation of this Act in 2011. The report admits that 8.1 million children in the age group six-14 remain out of school and there's a shortage of 508,000 teachers' country-



wide. A shadow report by the RTE Forum representing the leading education networks in the country, however, challenging the findings pointing out that several key legal commitments are falling behind the schedule. The Supreme Court of India has also intervened to demand implementation of the Act in the Northeast. It has also provided the legal basis for ensuring pay parity between teachers in government and government aided schools. For example, Haryana Government has assigned the duties and responsibilities to Block Elementary Education Officers–cum–Block Resource Coordinators (BEEOs-cum-BRCs) for effective implementation and continuous monitoring of implementation of Right to Education Act in the State.

It has been pointed out that the RTE act is not new. Universal adult franchise in the act was opposed since most of the population was illiterate. Article 45 in the Constitution of India was set up as an act: The State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. As that deadline was about to be passed many decades ago, the education minister at the time, MC Chagla, memorably said:

"Our Constitution fathers did not intend that we just set up hovels, put students there, give untrained teachers, give them bad textbooks, no playgrounds, and say, we have complied with Article 45 and primary education is expanding... They meant that real education should be given to our children between the ages of 6 and 14 years (Chagla, 1964).

In the 1990s, the World Bank funded a number of measures to set up schools within easy reach of rural communities. This effort was consolidated in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan model in the 1990s. RTE takes the process further, and makes the enrolment of children in schools a state prerogative (Mrinal, 2022).

In this paper we, particularly first author, MM, are sharing the field work during November and December, 2020 as an intern with Umeed, a Delhi based voluntary organization, working on the education for socially disadvantage groups of school/children. We have also accounted their mental health narratives in pandemic which have also been discussed elsewhere. It finally examines their issues in greater detail affecting their state of their mind and concludes in discussion on the myths of our education system, digital divide in gender, DGs and EWS and camp model approach for the betterment in the pandemic(Mrinal,2022).

## **II. RET AND LOCKDOWN: IS RTE FULFILLED DURING LOCKDOWN?**

In December 2019, many cases of an unusual pneumonia in China were reported. China alerted WHO about the cases and health care specialists identified it as new virus and named- novel Covid-19. Meanwhile WHO declared novel

Corona virus a global health emergency as the death toll jumped to 170 people and 7,711 cases reported in that city within a month. This virus had spread over all of its provinces in China in a short span. By the end of the next week, China reported 304 deaths amid 14,380 infections. Within a next few day, new cases were also confirmed from India, Philippines, Russia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Singapore, US, UAE and Vietnam.

Many countries declare lockdown to tackle and control the spread of the novel corona virus. In this pandemic situation, many educational institutions included universities, school and colleges are shut down. India also follows the country wide lockdown and hence results in shut down of all the school, colleges and universities due this pandemic situation Indian education system is suffering a huge loss from the side of students, teachers and other stakeholders. India is the country, where the people give top priority to education, and at present our country is still developing and yet not prepared to deal with the current pandemic situation.

No one ever imagined before, that we have to live in a lockdown for the prevention of the disease, and educational institutions are not prepared for the online system of learning because in India, not every person have the facility of internet and proper gadgets to study online from their homes. People living in a remote area do not have the facilities of internet whereas the people living in an urban area have the facilities of internet but some portion of the population is still financially weak. Hence, they cannot afford the gadgets to attend online classes.

Right to education is one of the basic need of the people, and due to the lockdown this right to education is getting affected as the developing country, we have a huge amount of population who is still unfamiliar with the use of internet and majority of the people living in the core area, who don't have the proper facilities.

It seems huge challenge before the government and educational institutions how to continue teaching and taking online exams so that the students keeps on learning and progressing without wasting the time. Hence, government have issued several guidelines for starting the online classes for the schools and universities students. But these policies do not consider the problems of the students as due to lockdown many families lost their earnings people who are businessmen, works on daily wages, people who work in private sectors and lost their jobs due to the economic crises. How these people afford to invest time and money on education in this pandemic crisis as the first basic need is getting sufficient food for survival.

Analyzing these issues, it seems that right to education is being fulfilled by the efforts of governments and educational institutions but if we see the other side of the coin things are not the same. The basic need of the people during the present pandemic situation is to remain safe and to get proper food and water. Every student cannot able to



get the education though online teaching as some areas of our country are far behind from the modern world. Teachers and students of schools and universities situated in small cities are not used to the facility of online learning and this makes the thing very difficult to the teachers to teach the students online.

It is the harsh reality that most of the population of our country is not well aware about the technologies and modern gadgets because they don't feel the need and nobody focus of the development of the people belonging to the small cities and villages. Government must focus on providing awareness and knowledge programs to the people of the small village and cities about the modern technologies and they must be provided the internet facilities so that they become familiar to the technology. This must be done because of the overall development of the people and if we keep on focusing on a particular group of population than the remaining part of the population fall behind.

Other stakeholders such as tele-communication companies can also provide huge contribution towards the development by providing the internet facility all over the country and making the cost of internet affordable so that more people gets incline towards using the internet and stay connected to the world.

Right to education is not for any particular group of people and in present scenario of pandemic situation of novel corona virus, we can clearly see that we are far behind providing the right to education to every student of the country irrespective of their economic status and geographic zone. Now, the government should focus on the development of the people specially who belong to low economic status and the population who belong to the rural area. But it can't be possible without the self-realization that it is our responsibility that every people of the country must try to become aware about the use of modern technologies and the use of internet. We all must become well aware of the technologies of online learning and we all must have the access to the internet facilities and modern gadgets so that right to educations can be fulfilled in any pandemic situation or other humanitarian crises.

## II

The pandemic had a significant impact on children's mental health. They have been through a challenging time living through the risks and restrictions posed by the pandemic. Further they also have witnessed suffering and uncertainties that none should see. Being away from family, friends, classrooms, and outdoor activities caused isolation and anxiety, living with emotional tragedy, and many are at a higher risk of neglect and abuse (Unicef, 2021). In our country, India, 41 per cent of young people between 15 -24 years of age said that it is good to get support for mental health problems, compared to an average of 83 per cent for 21 countries. In fact, India was the only one of 21 countries where only a minority of young people felt that people experiencing mental health issues should reach out to others.

In other country, most young people, 56 to 95 per cent, expressed that reaching out was the best way to deal with mental health issues. These are previewed in The State of the World's Children 2021, also found that around 14 per cent of 15 to 24-year-olds in India, or 1 in 7, reported often feeling depressed or having little interest in doing things. The proportion ranged from almost one in three in Cameroon, one in seven in India and Bangladesh, to as low as one in ten in Ethiopia and Japan ( Unicef, 2021).

## Children in Pandemic: Mental Health

Mental health is important as physical health and these two aspects are dependent on each other. If the person is not stable mentally then his physical health will get affected and if physical health of the person is affected then it increases the chances of developing mental health issues. There must be a balance between these two aspects of health to attend holistic health and well-being. Children are very prone to mental health issues and their symptoms rarely observable because of the continuous physical development and behavioral changes. Hence, it is required to talk about mental health with open mind set and create awareness among young people (Mrinal, 2020b).

There is an increase of mental health burden among school going children after covid-19 outbreak and lockdown throughout our country. Many people have lost their jobs besides daily wage workers have continued to face stress in day to day life. People are constraint to work from home this is inviting further issues of sedentary lifestyle. These factors have also contributed an increase in mental health issues among the people. WHO and its partner organizations have been issuing the guidelines for health workers, care takers of children and old age people for better support and care the mental health of the population (WHO, 2001, Mrinal, 2020a).

It has become difficult for parents to calm their children's anxieties because of the uncertainty and stress in their own lives. The occupational or emotional challenges parents face is interfering with their usual ability to address their children's needs and worries.

When will the school reopen? When can they go out and play? When can they visit their favourite places? These are some common questions that children may be worrying about (Unicef, 2020).Mental health is very important in present pandemic because people don't talk about mental health rather than physiological health or biological health. What is mental health and why it is important? This question is important and must be well defined to destroy the taboo related to mental Health. Hence, mental health is a state of cognitive, behavioural, physiological and social well-being (Medical News Today, 2020).

According to WHO, mental health has 27% -30% burden on health worldwide and one in four people in the world is affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. About 450 million people currently suffer



from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide. Disease burden of mental health is continuously increasing due to sedentary lifestyle, stress, insecurities and constant pressure for survival (WHO, 2001).

School going children were constraint to study and attend online classes. Further they were advised to stay at home which leads them into social isolation, due to which children are very prone to develop mental health issue such as depression, anxiety, boredom, suicidal thoughts and anger issues. It has been observed that 1 in 10 children aged 5 to 16 suffer from a mental health issues, but, 70% of these young people have not had the appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age. Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown may harm physiological health and mental health of the children. The impact on every child can be different based on vulnerability factor such as age, family support, overall health status, special care child, fear of getting infected (Singh et al 2020).

Children from the lower socio-economic income groups began to beg or borrow the mobile for the online classes in Delhi during pandemic 2020. School dropped out Children like Pankaj, 12; Jasin, a 5<sup>th</sup> class student, and Zareena, 7<sup>th</sup> class student, all living in Delhi where Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses (SPYM), is a voluntary organisation, particularly working in R K Puram in Delhi. Pankaj was constraint to leave the studies due to Pandemic and began begging to buy a mobile to study on the Traffic signals in R K Puram. Then Government had declared all schools as closed and teachers should teach online to school children. SPYM says most of these kids used to stay under the flyover or on the street all the day and it is our efforts these are now under the shelter home. Often their mothers used to visit them in the shelter and now most of them are back to normal schools (Aggarwal, 2022, Dutta and Mrinal, 2023).

Children have had limited access to support from social services due to lockdown measures in pandemic. The disruption to routines, education, recreation, as well as concern for family income and health, is leaving many young people feeling afraid, angry, and concerned for their future. According to data from UNESCO, over 286 million children up to grade 6 were out of school in India between 2020 and 2021. UNICEF's rapid assessment in 2021 found that only 60 per cent could access digital classrooms. Many would not be able to continue their education. According to an estimate around 320 million children in India had to switch to e-learning because of school closures during the pandemic, 133 million of which were enrolled in secondary school (UNESCO, 2020a). The unplanned and rapid digitalization highlighted the stark regional, social and economic disparities within India's school education system. The shift from classroom-based learning to digital education left out a large number of children: those with

limited access to the infrastructure and resources required for online learning.

### III. CONCLUSION

We conclude this field work in the Ummed Foundation where we have emphasized on the education of the school children in pandemic, illuminated the field work of first author, MM, with Ummed Foundation about associated educational myths and digital divide for poor students in brief that pandemic situation has taught us. As we have expressed elsewhere the role of voluntary organizations is very important to the human societies and the government (Dutta and Mrinal, 2023). As the Government cannot do all the development work alone therefore it need such organistaions for the better management and development of the community at the local level. We should consider the fact that we all need good education, better health facilities, resources for the better environment protection which all this government cannot do alone hence she needs the voluntary organizations-like Ummed Foundation to realize the promises of free and compulsory primary education as desired in RTE.

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