



**A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE COVERAGE OF RIGHT TO  
EDUCATION ACT 2010 IN INDIAN PRINT MEDIA**

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**Abstract**

*As part of our curriculum, we are exposed to various topics and researches, which enhance both - our knowledge and our understanding about the way media functions and its influence on the masses. One such topic was the Right to Education Act, which came into force in India on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. A study of Right to Education Act related news coverage in Mumbai will present an idea of what kind of Right to Education related reports do or do not exist. It will also highlight if the current Right to Education reports are significant. Are they being capable of securing action on the part of the government? In the context of Right to Education Act, a development report would be one which looks below the surface of Right to Education Act as merely being an Act, finds out who it benefits, speaks to the beneficiaries, and highlights any loopholes in the Act. Through the course of this research paper, a greater understanding will be arrived at as far as the current status of Right to Education news coverage in India's leading English newspaper.*

*Keywords: RTE, Right to Education Act, Print Media.*



## INTRODUCTION

### About RTE:

RTE stands for Right to Education. 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 poor families (to be reimbursed by the state as part of the public-private partnership plan). 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.

### Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in India (2013-2014):

Level	ALL			SC			ST		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Primary (I-V)	98.1	110.6	99.3	110.8	112.2	111.5	111.5	108.8	110.2
Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	84.9	90.3	87.4	93.2	96.5	94.8	86.5	85.7	86.1
Elementary (I-VIII)	93.3	96.9	95.0	104.2	109.4	102.8	102.5	100.5	101.5
Secondary (IX-X)	73.5	73.7	73.6	76.0	76.2	76.1	67.5	66.7	67.1
I-X	89.4	92.4	90.8	98.6	103.0	97.6	95.9	94.2	95.1
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	49.1	49.1	49.1	48.1	49.7	48.8	35.5	33.2	34.4
I-XII	83.3	85.9	84.6	91.1	93.3	92.2	87.5	86.0	86.8
Higher Education	22.3	19.8	21.1	16	14.2	15.1	12.4	9.7	11

Source: Statistics of School Education, 2007-08, MHRD, GoI; Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2011, MHRD, GoI; Statistics of School Education, 2010-11, MHRD, GoI; and U-DISE, NUEPA<sup>i</sup>.

Between 2000-01 and 2013-14, enrolment in primary education increased steadily up to 2010-11 and then showed a declining trend. Between 2011-12 and 2013-14, the total enrolment in primary education decreased by 4.7 million, while the enrolment of girls and boys decreased by 2.5 million and 2.2 million respectively.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate on Right to Education was initiated in India by Mahatma Jotirao Phule more than 125 years ago when a substantial part of the memorandum presented by him to the Indian Education Commission (i.e. the Hunter Commission<sup>ii</sup>) in 1882 dwelt upon how the British government's funding of education tended to benefit Brahmins and the higher classes while leaving the masses wallowing in ignorance and poverty. Before the advent of British rule in India, education was not one of the responsibilities of the State. In Maharashtra, where the power of both the priest and the prince vested in Brahmins, they alone were entitled to recite and read the holy books. And those of the lower castes who recited the Holy Scriptures were severely dealt with<sup>iii</sup>. Things have not fundamentally changed since then. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act, which was passed by the Indian parliament on 4 August 2009, describes the modalities of the provision of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child when the act came into force on 1 April 2010. The law came into effect in the whole of India except the state of Jammu and Kashmir from 1 April 2010, the first time in the history of India a law was brought into force by a speech by the Prime Minister. In his speech, Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister of India stated that, "We are committed to ensuring that all children, irrespective of gender and social category, have access to education." This depicts the significance of the Act.

RTE is a unique topic which itself is a sub-component of a particular subject (i.e. elementary education within the education). The assumption has been that the poor children living in some of the world's biggest cities face too many challenges to learn<sup>iv</sup>. One of the challenges to those who might be on the edge of dropping out is their socio-economic status and peers. There are students who live in poverty and have to work to help support their families. Some students don't attend school because their home environment doesn't allow them to maintain good hygiene or with the latest fashions. When one lives in poverty, education becomes secondary because life is in survival mode. Even in the last held 'Rio+20' summit<sup>v</sup> in 2012 'eradication of poverty' won over 'Green Economy'!

*"The developing countries are rightly concerned that the green economy would replace 'sustainable development' as the key paradigm in the environment-development nexus, with the loss of Rio 92 consensus on the three pillars and the international commitments on finance and technology...vi"*

Right to Education Act (RTE) is one of the key components which can help tackle this problem to a large extent. It aims to transform the Indian school educational scenario; like never before. It is a complex subject made interesting by the politics (from British Raj) and ideologies (from Gopal Gokhale<sup>vii</sup>). RTE focuses more on education as a process of developing human potential than a goal of creating skilled workers. With the RTE 2009, India has finally joined the world community by passing a law that recognizes the right to free and compulsory education. For those of us who ask questions about how and why



should we educate our children, we can take heart from the normative changes signalled by RTE such as prohibitions on discrimination and harassment, improving the status and working conditions of teachers and parental participation. This discussion was to establish a premise that, just like larger debates in the development, debates are afloat about the 'development of education' as well. The only criterion is that we need to develop an eye to view it.

### **Complexity of the coverage of Indian school education system:**

Education has always been a top-down subject, with someone on the 'top' deciding fate of millions of children with a stroke of one act or regulation. Policy-makers try to tweak here and twiddle there to 'experiment' with the system. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Though, there one policy makes or mars future of a child, almost irreversibly and irretrievably. In a demographic setup, it is important that all citizens should be aware of the right to education. News coverage is important for this to happen. While some people have personal knowledge of certain topics, many rely on mass media for direct, up-to-date, and in-depth reporting. This is especially the case with education because statistics show that only an invisible 1.4 percent coverage is given to education related news in our country<sup>viii</sup>, which is not enough. Large numbers of audience give low ratings to the media for school coverage. For example, in a joint survey by the Education Writers Association and the Public Agenda, 44 percent gave "print media with a national readership" ratings of fair to poor, while only 4 percent gave a rating of excellent. Educators and journalists agreed<sup>ix</sup>.

A report from a pro-choice Virginia watchdog group suggests that there are some serious weaknesses in mainstream education reporting, especially when it comes to daily newspapers. Claiming that newspaper reporters are basically too close to bureaucratic sources and those with vested interests, the report suggests that "readers would have to look long and hard to find the larger education story in their daily newspapers<sup>x</sup>." The study is based on telephone surveys of education print reporters and analysis of 403 education-related articles published over eight months by four daily news publishers in Virginia - not the most comprehensive sample, but still worth looking at. To be sure, it is possible that these findings are exaggerated. I don't know the group that put this report out. I haven't talked to the reporters who were interviewed. But one of the basic points made here has a general ring of truth to it which says that a lot of stereotyping of news takes place. The impact on newspapers have been dramatic and has led to expanding news holes, leaving less room for a balanced coverage of all segments in the field of education.

The education news that is reported across any educational level should relate to school policies, ways to improve the curriculum or learning processes, coverage of school reform, teacher quality, or other matters thought to be crucial for educational attainment. Not just this, but educational coverage should also include a share related to stories that deal with budget problems, school crime, and epidemic outbreaks. Every terminology mentioned above, whether pro-educational or anti-educational, has its own significance. For example, the emphasis on school budgets isn't surprising given the country's dismal economic news. However, the lack of balanced coverage of these various segments of education remains a significant problem. E.g. Child labour, accidents, child abuse and such other news based on



situations and circumstances are the kinds of news we get to hear from media. Seldom have we found media considering the complex process of education, especially in the context of a multilingual and geographically diverse nation like India. Much of coverage today is episodic and driven by events. Certainly some values are at work in the way some happenings, some issues and some topics are considered newsworthy and others are not. A reader's drawback in the media with regard to education is its tendency to lead with stories they want to read rather than they need to know.

### **RTE and the Indian print media:**

In this section, reports from most major print channels of India have been analyzed. This sample shows how deeply and uniformly the media has portrayed stories related to RTE.

- Supreme Court stamp on Right to Education: Poor students to study free in many private schools ([Economic Times](#))
- SC upholds law to reserve 25% seats in private schools for poor ([Times Of India](#))
- Reserve 25% seats for poor, SC tells private schools ([Hindustan Times](#))
- SC: Even private schools have to admit poor ([Indian Express](#))
- Principals nervous over reservation for poor ([Hindustan Times](#))
- A game changer: 25 per cent seats for poor and neighbourhood children in private unaided schools ([Deccan Herald](#))
- Residential Schools, Convents not bound to reserve seats for the poor ([Indian Express](#))
- RTE widely acclaimed by academicians; which mandates 25 percent free seats to the poor in private ([Newstrack](#))
- Integrating poor, privileged is a challenge: the RTE clause to admit 25% students from impoverished background will transform the Indian ([Indian Express](#))
- Schools taught to leave no poor behind ([Indian Express](#))

This is what the media told us. Who are the 25% as described by the RTE Bill? The Central RTE Bill 2009<sup>xi</sup> categorically states that there are two sub-categories of the proposed 25% reservation clause. Roughly they are income based and identity based.

Out of 41 Seats in Std 1, 10 seats are reserved as per the following rules -



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6 Seats to SC + 3 Seats to ST + 1 Seat to economically disadvantaged (poor) + disabled from all categories including SC/ST + all other social classes<sup>xii</sup>.

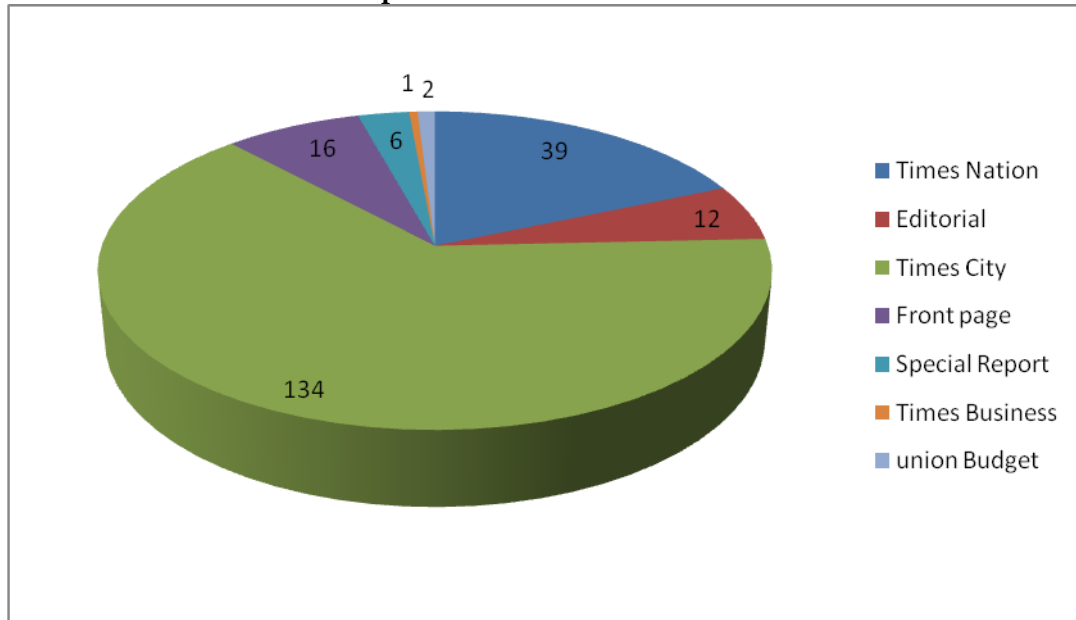
One, repeat only one, seat is determined by your being poor. None of the print channels bothered to even broach the obvious question of “so exactly who are the poor beneficiaries”. It is not as if the media didn’t notice this. The facts clearly establish that RTE is mostly just the quota system extended to the private sector education (majority institutes only). Sure it has a dash of helping the poor – but that is incidental. The rules simply do not bear out any structure driven by a desire to pluck the child from the garbage heap. However it would be totally wrong to assume that print channels cover the news in negative shades always.

“The three-month-long ordeal of thousands of students in Tamil Nadu schools, who had to wait for their textbooks, came to an end in the third week of August. This was made possible by a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court, delivered in a relatively short time after hearing arguments on more than 10 writ appeals and petitions on the implementation of a State Act that aims to provide samacheer kalvi (equitable, standard education) in Tamil Nadu schools<sup>xiii</sup>.”

A striking aspect of this development was the wide-ranging media coverage of the events that followed Chief Minister Jayalalithaa's announcement that the second and final phase of samacheer kalvi under the Uniform System of School Education Act of Tamil Nadu, 2010 would not be taken up for implementation in classes 2-5 and 7-10. For nearly three months, not a day passed without newspapers, both English and Tamil, carrying elaborate reports on the subject, as families in cities and villages alike were affected and the uncertainty for school children and their parents continued for weeks on end. Newspapers published reports and pictures on the protest actions by teachers, students, and parents, besides youth and student organisations, and the police action against them in some places. Many newspapers published interviews and analyses by educationists and academics. Not surprisingly, the detailed reporting of the court proceedings on the subject in both Chennai and Delhi was well received across the State. The Hindu provided informative coverage with pictures and Frontline had two long critical articles in two issues.



Space devoted for RTE coverage in various sections of TOI, leading English daily published from Mumbai



The representation of RTE related news report with respect to positioning has been studied. During the course of research period, it has been found that RTE news coverage was prominent only in the 7 sections of TOI broadsheet newspaper. Out of a total of 210 news reports, following is the coverage as per positioning:

- 1) Times City - 134
- 2) Times Nation - 39
- 3) Front Page - 16
- 4) Editorial - 12
- 5) Special Report - 6
- 6) Union Budget - 2
- 7) Times Business - 1

After analysing these reports, it is clear that a majority of sections are yet to be brought to the fold of elementary education. RTE will provide them an opportunity not only in Central and State-funded institutions but also in private institutions.

## CONCLUSION

The print media played a major role in creating awareness among the people about the need for an RTE and has a vital role to play in ensuring that the system is constantly reminded of what needs to be done on the ground to accomplish what should have been done decades ago. Raising awareness without sustained, fact-based follow-up on issues that matter vitally to society is to leave the social responsibility role of the media half done. For newspapers especially, the growing interest among parents, which extends to the lower middle classes, in educating their children is both an opportunity and a challenge.



With the above reading, we get a broad idea of what RTE is and what importance it holds for a developing country like India. At the same time the reading also presents the idea that for our developing country, RTE and RTE related journalism are of prime importance and would serve in the interest of the country. Most importantly with the above reading in place, the researcher will be able to make sound interpretations and conclusions on the topic. This study thus, investigates the relation between RTE and Indian print media from the Indian perspective. It will give insights into the kind of RTE news coverage: is it government supportive; is it critical or does it keep people at the centre of itself? This understanding is useful to engage in dialogue about required changes in Indian newspapers.

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