

**LANGUAGE IN INDIA**  
**Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow**  
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**Right to Education and Languages in India**  
**Part I**  
**B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.**

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**Introduction**

Education is at the core of the development of a society and the nation. It is imparted through one or many languages. Multiethnic, multicultural, multi religious, multilingual society throws unique challenges to the educational planners in general and language planners in particular.

The 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2008' of the Government of India was cleared by the Cabinet on Oct 30, 2008. This proposal for legislation was with the Government since the 86th Constitutional amendment was passed by the Parliament in Dec 2002 giving every child between the age of 6 and 14 years right to free and compulsory education. The first draft of the Bill was drafted in August 2005, again a new draft of the Bill was prepared in February 2008 and it reached the cabinet in August 2008. It became an Act after it received the Presidential assent few months ago. This Act which is in force in the country today, intends to provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years' which extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir, is a unique educational planning document which may bring a sea of changes in the educational scenario of India.

**The Present Situation and the Past**

The cartoon given below published in a well-known daily depicts the time that it has taken from 1947 to 2010 to bring in "Right to Education" [RTE] in India. That is a snail speed. While looking at the Indian Education Scenario in the post Independence India, I personally feel that this is not a long period in the history of a nation or in the history of education in a country.

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I consider this period of 1947 to 2010 as a formative period for educational planning for a democratic nation. During this period, the Govt., was guided by the recommendation of well-known Committee reports like those of Radhakrishnan Committee Report, Kothari Commission Report at the Union level and at the level of the States like West Bengal by Ashok Mitra Committee Report, to name a few of them.

When we look back at the implementation of the educational policies in the country, we find elite schools admit students from the elite communities and the government. schools admit or get the students on most of the occasions from the lowest strata of the Society. The principle of haves and have not's is functioning strongly. The domain of education including pre-primary education is also within the ambit of profit making, money laundering, ultimately it became a commercial activity instead of becoming a social movement for creating an equitable society. Every year during the period of schools re-opening after summer vacation, newspapers used to indicate that the children's parents who seek admission in the private educational institutions have to go through the process of interviewing by the institutions and demanding heavy amount of money as donation.

Since the Govt. was not in a position to provide education for all the needy in the schools, there was mushrooming of private educational institutions, which are outside the Govt. control, started to have their own rule of governance and implementation of the policies. On most occasions what was common to the Govt. and private institutions was only the textbook and nothing else. Even there are examples where the schools were run in the cities in garages. This kind of educational system that existed needed a strong dose of medicine which can eradicate the deceases of the India's educational system.

### **Salient Features**

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India has three streams of education viz., literacy, formal education and non-formal education apart from Madarassa System. The salient features of RTE in addition to free and compulsory education are: making a provision for preschool education; providing education in the neighbourhood; reservation for the disadvantaged children from the neighborhood in the private schools; abolition of interview of the child, parent, capitation, donation; providing quality education by setting minimum standards for public and private schools and erasing of the inequalities that exist at present; providing for the up gradation of the non formal schools in a period of three years into formal schools with minimum standards; fixing the teacher student ratio; banking upon quality education and trained teachers, decentralising the implementation, Job security for teachers by appointing them on permanent basis; stopping of private tuition etc. The Act in principle aims at quality education. I consider the Right to Education Act in India as the first step in the right direction.

### **Goals of Right to Education**

Since the Right to Education in India is trying to build upon what has been done in the past six decades or so, aims at basically quality education for all the children entering into the school, and it is provided to all the children compulsorily and it is free of cost. In the past 20 to 25 years irrespective of urban, rural divide preschool education also had become commercial activity. Now the Right to Education makes a provision of preschool education for children between the ages 3 to 6. The concept of neighborhood school at the entry level and reserving of 25% of the seats in private school to the disadvantaged children is the most progressive step. While making education free and compulsory, the Act also in order to improve the quality of education throughout the country and to iron out inequity that exists today prescribes minimum standards for both public and private schools. Most important factor that makes learning in the class room possible is the pupil teacher ratio. It is prescribed to be 40: 1.

### **A Bold Step and Consensus – Some Questions Remain**

The first draft of the Right to Education Bill was available in the public domain and I have been tracking the discussion and developments taking place in the media and academic circles. The final form of the bill has accommodated many of the positive suggestions that have come from the different quarters. I consider that the Right to Education Act is a bold step in the right direction for the development of India in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

However, the debate in the past few months that is appearing in the media mainly relates to private education institutions to open up their minds and gates of their schools for the down trodden and also though various terms of the Act are defined in clear terms, but the implementers are not recognizing the value of terms. For example, what is neighborhood is the question for various private institutions.

### **Impediments Put Forth by the Media**

These things have to be resolved by sitting across the table and not by litigation. One of the most important impediments that have been put forth in the media about the implementation of the Right to Education is lack of enough funds with the states and since the education is in the concurrent list of the Constitution of India the role of Union Government in the implementation of RTE.

So far no debate or discussion has taken place about academic or the language issues in the implementation of RTE. This paper analyses the RTE from the point of view of the changes it may bring about in the language education scenario in the country and the need of possible academic initiatives that are required for the successful implementation of the same

### **Language Education**

Language education in India is a vast domain, encompassing all stages, right from pre-primary to research of high order. A multi-ethnic, multi-lingual pluralistic nation like India, with 1652 mother tongues, 122 Scheduled and Non-scheduled languages needs to evolve education and language policies in such a way that all the segments that constitute the nation acquire a sense of participation in the governance, development and nation-building. In addition, the specific aspirations of various ethnic, religious and linguistic communities need to be met to their satisfaction.

### **The Constitutional Provisions**

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states, 'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental states. Elementary education shall be compulsory... Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children'. The *Constitution of India* also makes provision for '... free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years'. But the *Constitution of India* has no explicit statements regarding the language(s) to be taught in education or the language(s) through which education has to be imparted, except in the case of linguistic minorities.

This may have been a tactical compromise on the part of the Constitution makers, because everyone could sense the great linguistic complexity of (free and democratic- not required, since linguistic complexity was there earlier too) India. The language policy of India for the domain of education, as it stands today, has not been framed and implemented in a single stroke, but is has evolved in the course of half a century, through the process of mutual understanding and adjustment of roles of various mother tongues (home languages) as school languages.

### **Progress of Implementation**

The *Recommendations of the States Reorganization Commission* is a landmark in the formulation of language policy for education in India. These recommendations resulted in the creation of linguistic majority/minority population in each state. The Union Government was requested to elucidate a policy outline for education in mother tongue at the Secondary stage. The *All India Council for Education* recommended the adoption of the Three Language Formula (TLF) in September 1956. The Government of India arrived at it in the meeting of Chief Ministers of States and Central Ministers held in 1961. The Formula included: The regional language and the mother tongue when the latter is different from the regional language; Hindi or, in Hindi speaking areas, another Indian language; and English or any other modern European language. A modified form of it was proposed by the *Education Commission* (1964-66).

The *National Policy on Education* of 1968 spoke about the regional languages and the Three Language Formula. This was reiterated in the *Education Policy* (1986) and was adopted as the *Programme of Action* by the Parliament of India (1992). The *National Curriculum Framework for School Education* Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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(2000), however, stated that even about four decades after the formulation of 'Three Language Formula', and in spite of the policies that followed, the Formula is yet to be effectively implemented in true spirit.

### **Continued Relevance of the Three Language Formula**

Despite all the changes in the socio-economic scenario, market pressures and the behavior pattern of the Indian youth, the Formula still holds relevant. The *National Curriculum Framework (2005)* adopted by the Central Advisory Board on Education brings a paradigm shift in defining the components of the TLF thus: First language - home language or mother tongue; Second language-English; Third language - Hindi in non-Hindi states and, in Hindi speaking states, a language not spoken in those states. The TLF which was construed as a strategy with no direct Constitutional status, and being totally dependent on governmental and institutional support, got legal sanction and status from the *Apex Court* of the country for its implementation.

### **Empowerment through Education**

Education empowers the citizens and language education and education through a language accelerates development. *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education*, which consolidates the experience in the field of education and creates a road map for the future, to empower the citizens has made provisions relating to education in general and also relating to language education in particular. When implemented it will have a long standing effect on educational outcome.

### **Current Scenario of Language Education**

Before going into the linguistic issues, I want to provide a glimpse of language education scenario for the help of readers. In the Indian context, most unfortunately latest educational statistics relevant to understand the dynamics of language education are hardly available. Only one report I could access i.e., ASER 2009. This is available in the net, public domain. I am greatly indebted to this study. However, the interpretation of the statistics is done by me and I am responsible for these interpretations.

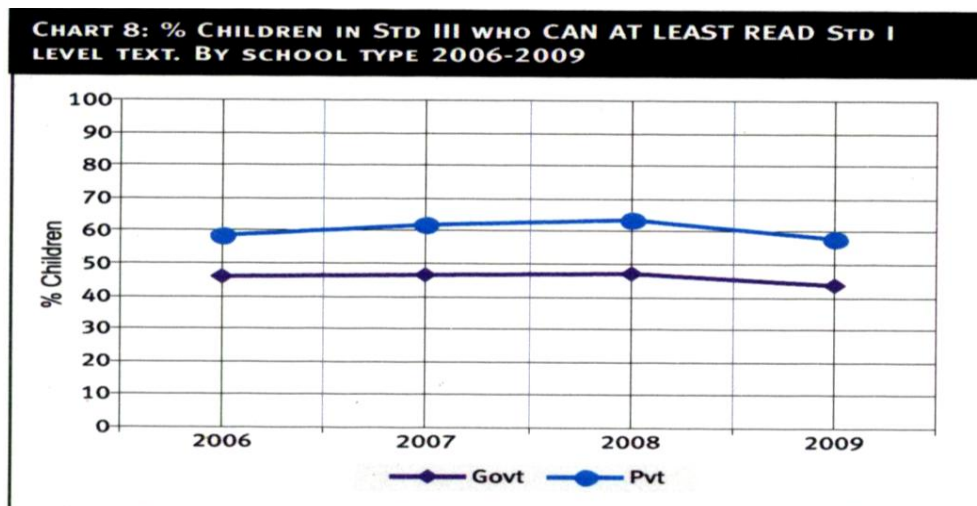
From the above ASER 2009 table which provides information about the percentage of children studying in Govt., Private, Madarssa etc., schools and also those children who are not in the school is highly educational for us. Higher the standard/class more children are not in schools. More number of students are studying in the Govt. schools and very less number of students are studying in other schools but reasonably good percentage of students are in the private institutions.

TABLE 1: % CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOLS 2009				% Out of school	Total
Age group	Govt.	Pvt.	Other	Not in School	
AGE: 6 -14 ALL	73.0	21.8	1.2	4.0	100
AGE: 7-16 ALL	70.4	22.2	1.1	6.3	100
AGE: 7-10 ALL	75.6	20.5	1.3	2.6	100
AGE: 7-10 BOYS	74.3	22.1	1.2	2.4	100
AGE: 7-10 GIRLS	77.2	18.5	1.4	2.9	100
AGE: 11-14 ALL	70.0	23.0	1.0	6.0	100
AGE: 11-14 BOYS	69.4	24.4	0.9	5.3	100
AGE: 11-14 GIRLS	70.9	21.2	1.1	6.8	100
AGE: 15-16 ALL	56.9	24.9	0.8	17.4	100
AGE: 15-16 BOYS	57.1	25.3	0.8	16.8	100
AGE: 15-16 GIRLS	57.0	24.4	0.8	17.8	100

NOTE : 'OTHER' includes children going to madarssa and EGS.  
 'NOT IN SCHOOL' = dropped out + never enrolled.

Here itself, I would like to point out that RTE intends quality education has more work to do since more number of students are in the Govt. schools. Also RTE has a greater role in bringing the children who are outside the school into the school.

Now, let us try to look at some of the language competencies that exist in the children in different parts of the country in the Govt. and private schools. The ASER 2009 table given below clearly indicates that in case of 3rd standard children at least ...can read Standard I level text book, the private school children are more competent than the Govt. school children in this reading skill.



This difference is consistently maintained since 2006 to 2009. This table is also indicative of serious interventions required in Govt. schools for language education. As we know, irrespective of urban-rural, government-private etc., English is in a great demand. Two tables given below speak about the competencies of the children from 1st to 8th standards in English.



<b>TABLE 6: CLASS-WISE % CHILDREN WHO COMPREHEND ENGLISH 2009</b>		
<b>STD.</b>	<b>Of those who can read words, % who can tell meaning of the words</b>	<b>Of those who can read sentences, % who can tell meaning of the sentences</b>
<b>I</b>	65.0	73.2
<b>II</b>	66.2	74.0
<b>III</b>	66.7	74.7
<b>IV</b>	67.7	77.7
<b>V</b>	69.9	80.4
<b>VI</b>	70.0	81.1
<b>VII</b>	72.0	82.7
<b>VIII</b>	73.3	84.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	69.4	81.4

<b>TABLE 5: CLASS-WISE % CHILDREN WHO CAN READ ENGLISH (ALL SCHOOLS) 2009</b>						
<b>STD.</b>	<b>Cannot read capital letters</b>	<b>Can read capital letters</b>	<b>Can read small letters</b>	<b>Can read simple words</b>	<b>Can read easy sentences</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>I</b>	56.2	25.5	10.3	5.7	2.3	100
<b>II</b>	33.8	31.4	18.5	11.8	4.4	100
<b>III</b>	21.4	27.0	23.0	20.5	8.1	100
<b>IV</b>	12.8	21.0	22.0	28.2	15.9	100
<b>V</b>	8.5	15.7	19.2	31.0	25.7	100
<b>VI</b>	4.9	10.5	14.6	31.5	38.5	100
<b>VII</b>	3.7	7.6	11.3	28.3	49.1	100
<b>VIII</b>	2.7	5.5	8.1	23.4	60.2	100
<b>TOTAL</b>	19.5	19.0	16.3	22.1	23.2	100

It is nothing but natural that as the children progress from standard to standard their language competency increases.

### **Right to Education and Language**

In this context I consider that the Right to Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is in search of a new paradigm for language education. In the document the "Right to Education" the language issue comes up directly in 3 points. They are extracted below for the help of readers.

- (1) "...child belonging to disadvantaged group" means a child belonging to the scheduled caste, the scheduled tribe, the socially and educationally backward class or such other group having disadvantage owing to social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor, as may be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification;
- (2) "medium of instructions shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue";

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- (3) For sixth class to eighth class  
At least one teacher per class so that there shall be at least one teacher each for – (i) Science and Mathematics; (ii) Social Studies; (iii) Languages.”

The fourth point also carries some relevance to the issue

- (4) Assess the learning ability of each child and accordingly supplement additional instruction, if any as required.

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