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RTE act and reality of gender based universalization in elementary education

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Abstract
An important landmark for education sector is the implementation of the Right to Education Act, which aims to provide the right to quality and equitable elementary education in a formal school for children between the age group of 6- 14 years, irrespective of the income levels, caste and sex. This paper analyses weather this act bridges the gender gap or not in elementary education and find out gender based overall impact of RTE Act on key indicators of elementary education such as GER, NER, level of Attendance, Gender Parity, Retention rate, Transition rate and Dropout rate in the Rajasthan by the using raw data of DISE of 2008-09, 2012-13 & 2016-17 and 71st round NSSO report. The result indicates that there is some improvement during the post RTE period but gender-based inequality is persist. The GPI marginally improved but still only 0.86. Girls share in elementary education has been increased after RTE Act, while this change was not seen a significant change and still lower than boys share. In post RTE period, gender-based gap for their average attendance level also still exist. Dropout rate of female also higher than male. These findings raise the question on success of RTE Act.

Keywords: RTE act, gender gap, education for all, elementary education, GPI

Introduction
Bridging the gender and social gaps in elementary education is one of the fundamental goals of RTE act. It is a fundamental right to attain Universal Elementary Education in the country. The role of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) is strengthening the social fabric of democracy through provision of equal opportunities to all. Its overall goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children. Equity in education in the sense gender-based inclusion, means to ensure a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic (OECD, Policy Brief 2008) [8]. "Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education act" was enacted on 26th august 2009. The act has a provision under article 3(1) about free and compulsory education which is a fundamental right for all children without any type of gender discrimination between the ages of 6 and 14 in a neighbourhood school until compilation of their elementary education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 introduced new article 21A making the right to education of children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right. In last two decades for universalisation of primary education implementation of SSA and RTE-ACT with the objective of bridging all gender and social category gaps at primary and upper primary stages of education.

This act had a long history. Constitution of India has given a commitment in the article 45 of free and compulsory elementary education for all the children in the age-group 6 to 14 years within 10 years of launching of the constitution. But the target was not achieved within the stipulated time limit. Policy documents like the report of the Kothari Commission 1966, the National Policy on Education 1986 and its POA in 1992 have put enormous emphasis on promotion of gender equity in education by reducing the gender gap in access, retention and transition from one stage to other. However, despite such policy recognition of the importance of female education, dedicated programmes within Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and efforts at 'gender mainstreaming' within the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), data shows a continuing gender gap in relation to attendance, retention and drop-out. Although, the increased enrolment of girls is widely attributed to the increasing number of 'informal' or 'nonformal' education programmes, and associated with a public sector that is considered widely to have failed in terms of delivery of quality education. If the increasing enrolment of girls is taking place in an environment of fragmented provision and poor-quality public delivery, then the question remains of the value and success of current policy and programmatic interventions in relation to closing the gender gap in a sustainable way.

From 1950 to 2017, at national as well as state level education sector witnessed enormous progress in terms of an increase in the number of institutions, rise in enrolments for elementary education, increase in the enrolment of girls and students belonging to the weaker sections of the society since the formation of our Constitution. After that all efforts India still has a large proportion of the world's total illiterate population and according to 2011 census, gender-based literacy rate gape was 21.6%, which was very high. In that context, during the Census of 2011, Rajasthan reported the poorest female literacy rate (52.1 percent) among all Indian states with significant variation among districts ranging from 32 percent in Jalore to 57 percent in Kota. Further, it was below 50 percent in 17 of the 33 districts (census of India, 2011). Although female literacy levels have improved over the years, the gender gap persists in varying degrees across districts and various social groups.

RTE act have many provisions to bridge gender inequality, but it criticised both on provisions as well as various issues related to its implementation. Kaushal (2012) [4] noted that although the RTE Act has brought hope to school children, there is a striking inequality in elementary education both in quality and quantity thereby causing disparities in its access across location, economic category social group and gender. Data shows a continuing gender gap, problems of gender discrimination and disparity begin with access to schooling. There has also been impressive progress towards bridging gender gap in enrolment and retention in elementary education. At national level between 2000-01 and 2014-15, the enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment in primary education has increased from 43.8% to 48.2% (GoI, 2015) [2]. But access and retention problems still deepen. Once girls are able to get enrolled in school, they are rather more likely than boys to continue their education with more success (UNESCO, 2004) [14]. But in one of the studies done in one of the states of India, Rekha Kaul (2015) [3] observe that 95 of the 144 enrolled girls (65.97 per cent) interviewed in government schools did not seem to know until what stage they would be permitted to remain in school by their parents.

Education plays a prime role in the process of social and economic development which is initiator of cycle of employment opportunities, higher productivity and income, better health, greater social and political participation for creation of a just and equitable social and political order and above all enhancing individual's personal and social endowments and capabilities for a more intensive, socially enriching and sustained well-being (Srivastava and Sinha, 2008 UGC report). Education is major medium of freedom, social justice and social transformation along with a key channel for economic development (Kumar, R., S. Kumar & Anurag). In that context for female Warner, Malhotra, and Mcgongale (2012) [15] in their paper observe that Female education has long been acknowledged to have strong correlations with other dimensions of human and social development. The low rates of female literacy not only have a negative impact on women's lives but also the country's economy as well. As Mehrotra (2006) [6] notes, low levels of education significantly affect the health and nutritional status of women. For instance, in the case of India, he notes that chances of suffering from the diseases caused by malnutrition decrease steadily with increased levels of education. Height and Body Mass Index are varying with level of education and illiterate women are reportedly at more risk of having lower height and BMI. Similarly, he noted that while 56% of illiterate women suffer from anaemia, the percentage declines to 40% in the case of the women who have completed at least high school. Despite of major returns evidenced through female education in economic and social context, most of the communities in India still go through the poor investment in female education relative to the male education. Promoting gender equity is essential to achieving basic development goals. Even as the thresholds of schooling completion increase, with significantly narrowing gender gaps in primary education in particular, discrimination against girls in secondary and higher education remains an issue. Economic and social privilege also affect gendered patterns of access, with girls in secondary and higher education predominantly drawn from higher income and social groups, endowed with higher social status.

One of the eight Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations is to have universal primary education. This will not be achieved without India's help. In 2009 it was estimated that 8,000,000 children aged six to fourteen years were out of school. India has taken strong actions since the goals were set and has since greatly contributed to decreasing this number. In merely fifteen years, from 2000-2016 primary school enrolment in India increased sharply and GER reached to near hundred percent (DISE). This is a great improvement and is very encouraging. With the passing of the Right to Education Act (RTE) India has made major strides towards achieving access to primary education for all of its children. This is a vital aspect in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and in creating an equal and healthy society in India.

As we move down from high caste, male and urban in relatively developed regions to Scheduled castes as well as tribes, female and rural in relatively less developed regions, the inequities become more and more sharp (Raza, 1986) [11].

Although there is disparity between male and female literacy rate but they are highly correlated and this important positive correlation continues in the different social segments of population. (Raju, 1988) [9]. Ramachandran (2001) [10] describes how issues with the enrolment of SC and ST girls are of more concern in certain states. The enrolment situation of SC girls is of concern in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, while the enrolment of ST girls is low in Rajasthan, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. According to '*Access to Elementary Education in India: Country Analytical Review' published by* NUEPA, (July 2008) [7] the majority of children entering school fail to complete an elementary cycle because many schools are facing the problem of lack of staff and teachers are often untrained and given little academic support.

The role of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) is strengthening the social fabric of democracy through provision of equal opportunities to all. Its overall goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children. RTE act recognizes that ensuring girls education requires changes not only in the education system but also in societal norms and attitudes. A two-pronged gender strategy has therefore been adopted, to make the education system responsive to the needs of the girls through targeted interventions which serve as a pull factor to enhance access and retention of girls in schools and

on the other hand, to generate a community demand for girls‟ education through training and mobilization.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to find out the status of girl child education with reference to pre and post RTE period and to analyse the change that has taken place after implementation of RTE Act. Apart from that, the paper will discuss the equity issues related to girl child education and the challenges they face in accessing education and the overall impact of RTE on enrolment indicators such as GER, NER, Retention rate and Dropout rate in the rural urban areas of Rajasthan.

Database and Methods

For analysing and examine the effect of RTE Act on gender equity following data have been used;

1. DISE (District Information System for Education) raw data for academic year 2008-09, 2012-13 and 2016-17 on elementary education for states have been used for GER, NER, enrolment share, dropout, transition rate and retention rate.
2. Census of India, Social and Cultural tables-C series, 2011 have been used for literacy rate.
3. NSSO 71st (2014) round data have been used to shown the level of attendance.

According to the objectives of the study, tabulation plan was prepared and graphical representation was done based on the requirement. Further, data was analysed by using percentage to get suitable results.

Gender parity index prepared to shown gender equity for enrolment.

Results and Discussions

Share of Enrolment in Schools and type of Schools

RTE act has a provision for Neighbourhood school, it means for a Primary School enrolled student the distance should not more than 1 km and it should not more than 3 kms for an Upper Primary enrolled student. According to 2016-17 DISE report, Rajasthan have 105436 private and government schools which provide elementary education, while this number has increased only 351 from 2008-09 to 2016-17.

Majority of schools providing elementary education are government owned schools. Soni (2013) [12] observed that government schools have various types of inefficiencies such as poor infrastructure, availability of teachers and their absenteeism and also caste and gender-based discrimination. These factors work as a pull factor for parents to opt for private schools. On the other hand, RTE Act have a provision to make the private school as a partner for getting the objective of quality-based education for all. For that under 12(1)(c) article, this act has a provision of 25% reservation in private unaided schools for economically weaker section. As a result of all causes percent share of schools and also enrolment share in private schools has been increased sharply in post-RTE period. Table shown that the ratio of government sector's school was 77.14% in 2008-09, which decreased sharply and remained only 64.43% in 2016-17 and in same time period private sector school increased more than 1.5 times.

Table 1: Share of the enrolment and elementary schools

Type of schools	Share of enrolment in schools (in %)		Share of the various type schools (in %)	
	2008-09	2016-17	2008-09	2016-17
Government	64.06	50.66	77.14	64.43
Private	35.94	49.34	22.86	35.57

Source: Computed from DISE raw data report of 2008-09 and 2016-17.

Over a period of time of 8 years the majority of enrolment related to elementary education are in government owned schools. In 2008-09 all government schools had 64.06 percent of the total elementary enrolment. But after RTE-act this share declined and in 2016-17 it was only 50.66 percent. This thing notified that majority of schools imparting elementary education are even today government owned schools (64.43% in 2016-17), but the percentage share of enrolment in government schools was lower (only 50.66% in same year) than their share in the number of schools.

Sex wise Enrolment

After RTE-act implementation, the share of girls' enrolment in elementary level was 46.23% in 2016-17 as compared to 45.05% in 2008-09. DISE data shown that girls percent share in elementary education has been increased, while this change was not seen a significant change. Even in 2016-17 it was lower than the male enrolment share. This lower enrolment of girls shown that Rajasthan still far behind to achieve the goal of RTE Act of universalization of elementary education. The girls' enrolment share in primary level was 46.39% in 2008-09, while it improved and reached at 46.58% in 2016-17, but this was also marginal improvement due to less enrolment of girls than boys. At Upper Primary classes it was 45.55% in 2016-17 which is less than primary level but its improvement rate was greater than primary level.

Table 2: Percentage of girls to total enrolment

Sex wise enrolment									
Level of education	sex	Total		SC		ST		OBC	
		2008-09	2016-17	2008-09	2016-17	2008-09	2016-17	2008-09	2016-17
Primary	female	46.39	46.58	46.26	46.77	45.90	46.62	46.63	51.84
	male	53.61	53.42	53.74	53.23	54.10	53.38	53.37	48.16
Upper Primary	female	41.76	45.55	40.99	45.78	40.66	45.28	41.28	50.61
	male	58.24	54.45	59.01	54.22	59.34	54.72	58.72	49.39
Elementary	female	45.05	46.23	44.85	46.44	44.59	46.19	45.04	51.45
	male	54.95	53.77	55.15	53.56	55.41	53.81	54.96	48.55

Source: Computed from DISE raw data report of 2008-09 and 2016-17

Percentage of Girls to total Enrolment in various categories

The share of SC girls to total SC enrolment in elementary level at state level in 2008-09 was 44.85% as compared to 46.44% in 2016-17. Data indicate that girls share in both primary and upper primary level of education has been increased, but this improvement was not seen a valuable change. At upper primary level in study period its growth rate was higher than primary level but percentage share was less.

The share of ST girls to total ST enrolment in elementary level at state level in 2016-17 was 46.19% as compared to 44.59% in 2008-09. For primary level the percentage share of girls to total enrolment was 46.62 and at upper primary classes was 45.28 in 2016-17, which shown that the girls share increased after the implementation of RTE-act, but at the upper primary level it was less than primary level.

According to DISE data, the share of girls enrolment to the total OBC enrolment was more than boys enrolment. The share of OBC girls to total OBC enrolment in elementary level at state level in 2016-17 was 51.45% as compared to 45.04% in 2008-09. For primary level the percentage share of girls to total enrolment was 51.84 and at upper primary classes was 50.61 in 2016-17, which shown that the girls share increased after the implementation of rte-act and its ratio reached above to 50%.

Gender Parity Index

The Gender Parity Index (GPI), for Rajasthan state at elementary level education was 0.82 in 2008-09 and 0.86 in 2016-17, which shown positive improvement as compare to pre and post RTE period. But on other side, these DISE data shown that even after 7 years of implementation of RTE-act only 86 girls enrolled on 100 boys at elementary level. GPI in upper primary classes was improved from 0.72 in 2008-09 to 0.84 in 2016-17, shown that after RTE-act nearly 12 more girls enrolled on 100 boys' enrolment, while upper primary GPI even now less than primary level from. The GPI at primary level was 0.87 in both study years, shown that there was no improvement in girls' enrolment as compare to boy's enrolment at primary level. This analysis presented that boys was outnumbers then girls on both levels of education.

Table 3: Percentage of girls to total enrolment

Gender Parity Index		
Level of education	2008-09	2016-17
Primary	0.87	0.87
Upper Primary	0.72	0.84
Elementary	0.82	0.86

Source: computed from DISE raw data report of 2008-09 and 2016-17

Levels of Educational Attendance

It is a key outcome variable to analyse the RTE Act progress. Data shown that the overall current attendance rate was only 85% at elementary level. Further, it was 4% higher for boys than girls. Ideally it should be near to universal. Data shown that it was lowest for urban male children a highest for urban male. In that context Kumar *et al.* (2018) describe that during the post RTE period gender-based gap have declined, but male-female divide still found. They also observed that during last two NSS report period (2008 and 2014) attendance rate increased but its rate was very modest and gender-based exclusion continue to persist. It was 87% for rural area and 83% for urban area. For girls it was more or less same for rural and urban sector. But for male, children of rural area were present with higher rate than urban area children. Data also shown that in urban area girls attendance rate was slightly higher than boys.

Table 4: Levels of Educational Attendance

Net attendance ratio for different levels of attendance in 2014			
At elementary level			
Sector	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Rural	88	83	86
Urban	82	83	83
Total	87	83	85

Source: computed from NSSO 71st round data of 2014

Gross Enrolment Ratio

Gross enrolment ratio (GER) is the total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year. It is one of the crucial indicators through which the goal of universal enrolment is assessed is the Enrolment Ratio. The data at the elementary level, shown that the GER in 2016-17 decreased to 95.76 compared to the 101.71 in 2008-09. In 2016-17 ger for girls was 95.45 and for boys it was 96.03. Data shown that after the implementation of RTE-Act GER decreased for both girls and boys, while the girls GER was lower than boys, although the decreasing rate of GER was higher for boys. The GER in primary level in 2016-17 was 97.8, decreased from 2008-09 (116.54). It shown that in previous years a large number of children was not enrolled in schools, but due to the government's efforts they enrolled in various primary classes so the GER reached more than hundred. But after 2010 this ratio sharply decreased, due to the provision of age-appropriate admission in RTE-Act. But this ratio should not be lower than hundred for universalization of elementary education. The GER for girls was again lower than boys. It was 98.43 for boys and 97.09 for girls. At upper primary level this ratio for all was 91.99 in 2016-17 and in 2008-09 was only 76.99, which shown high improvement. For girls it was 92.32 and for boys was 91.72, shown that girls ratio sharply increased in last eight years and reached higher than boys.

Table 5: Levels of Gross Enrolment

Gross Enrolment		
Sex	2008-09	2016-17
At primary level		
boys	117.86	98.43
Girls	115.10	97.09
Total	116.54	97.80
At upper primary level		
boys	80.16	91.72
Girls	74.50	92.32
Total	76.99	91.99
At elementary level		
boys	103.72	96.03
Girls	99.80	95.45
Total	101.71	95.76

Source: Computed from DISE raw data report of 2008-09 and 2016-17

Net Enrolment Ratio

The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) is defined as enrolment of the official age-group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population. The table shows the Net enrolment ratio in elementary schools in Rajasthan. The NER in 2016-17 was 83, which declined from 87.8 in 2008-09. In 2016-17 NER for girls was 82.85 and for boys it was 83.13. Data shown that after the implementation of RTE-Act GER decreased for both girls and boys, while the boys NER was lower than girls and the decreasing rate of NER was higher for boys. In primary level of classes NER in 2016-17 was 78.24, decreased from 2008-09 (92.7). It shown that in previous years number of children was more enrolled in schools than after the implementation of RTE-Act. The NER for girls was again lower than boys. It was 79.23 for boys and 78.4 for girls. At upper primary level this ratio for all was 68.93 in 2016-17 and in 2008-09 was only 57.26, which shown high improvement but on the other hand it indicating that about 43 percent of children of age 11-14 years are not enrolled in schools. For girls it was 68.8 and for boys was 68.98, shown that girls ratio sharply increased in last eight years but even in 2016-17 it was lower than boys. Despite significant achievement in NER, unless all the remaining children are brought under the education system, the goal of universal enrolment is not likely to be realized in the near future.

Table 6: Levels of Net Enrolment

Net Enrolment		
Sex	**2008-09**	**2016-17**
At primary level		
boys	92.7	79.23
girls	89.8	78.4
total	91.3	78.84
At upper primary level		
boys	59.8	68.98
girls	54.5	68.8
total	57.26	68.93
At elementary level		
boys	89.7	83.13
girls	85.7	82.85
total	87.8	83

Source: computed from DISE raw data report of 2008-09 and 2016-17

Transition Rate (primary to upper primary level)

One of the important indicators on which the expansion of Upper Primary education depends is the transition rate from the Primary to the Upper Primary level of education. The transition rate presented in Table shows that at state level a good percentage of children are dropping out in transition. As many as in 2016-17, 91.6 percent children across all districts transited from Primary to Upper Primary level of education compared to 90.1 percent in the 2008-09. Though transition rate shows improvement, about 8 percent of children still drop out in transition. Further, gender wise a small deviation is observed in children transition. For boys' transition rate was 92.24 and for girls it was 90.85. In the comparison of 2012-13, no significant difference in transition rate is noticed in the case of boys but for girls it improved by more than three percent. As it seems, the goal of universal elementary education in states mentioned above may not perhaps be realised in the near future if transition rates are not improved significantly.

Table 7: Transition Rate

Transition Rate (primary to upper primary level)		
Sex	2012-13	2016-17
Boys	92.15	92.24
Girls	87.73	90.85
Total	90.1	91.6

Source: Computed from DISE raw data report of 2008-09 and 2016-17

Retention Rate

The country has made significant progress towards achieving the goal of universal access. As mentioned above, this is also reflected in the ratio of Primary to Upper Primary schools/sections. On the other hand, enrolment, both at Primary and Upper Primary levels of education has also increased many-fold, resulting in significant decline in out-of-school children. However, it is equally important to know the retaining capacity of the education system for which a variety of efficiency related indicators can be used. Needless to mention that retention rate is based on enrolment data over a period of five years whereas apparent survival rate presented above, a stock statistic, is based on enrolment data of only one year i.e. 2012-13.

Table 8: Retention Rate

Retention Rate (in percent)				
Sex	**primary level**		**elementary level**	
	2012-13	**2016-17**	**2012-13**	**2016-17**
Boys	66.9	78.66	47.61	58.95
Girls	66.64	79.18	40.22	55.42
Total	66.78	78.89	44.1	57.31

Source: computed from DISE raw data report of 2012-13 and 2016-17

The retention rate in Rajasthan at the Primary level shows a gradual improvement from 66.78 percent in the year 2012-13 to 73.68 percent in 2016-17. It is still too low to achieve the goal of universal retention at the Primary level. Without much improvement, neither these states nor the country as a whole can achieve the goal of universal retention at the Primary level of education.

A retention rate of 73.68 percent which was in 2016-17, indicates that about 26.32 percent of children dropped out from the system before reaching Grade V. For boys it was 78.66% and for girls was 79.18%, which shown that girls were more retained in primary schools than boys and the improvement in girls retention rate was higher than boys retention rate from 2012-13. At elementary classes retention rate for all was 57.31 in 2016-17. Data shown that in last four years this rate increased by more than thirteen percent but still nearly 33 children was dropped-out from hundred children which enrolled in first class before four years. Retention rate for girls in elementary level was 55.42% in 2016-17 and 58.95% for boys in the same year. In last four years girls retention rate was increased sharply but even now it lower than boys.

Dropout Rate

The average dropout rate is still too high to attain the status of universal retention at the Primary level of education. The dropout rate presented in Table for 2016-17 indicates an average drop-out rate of 6.99 percent in primary grades against 5.51 percent during the 2012-13. This shows that during the intermediary years 2012-13 and 2016-17, a good number of children enrolled in Grades I to V dropped out from the system before completing the primary grades.

Table 9: Dropouts

Dropout Rate		
At primary level		
Sex	2012-13	2016-17
Boys	5.34	6.94
Girls	5.71	7.06
Total	5.51	6.99
At upper primary level		
Boys	1.16	3.65
Girls	5.17	5.17
Total	2.95	4.34

Source: Computed from DISE raw data report of 2012-13 and 2016-17

Data shown that dropout rate at state level was increased during the study period. Gender wise data also shown that this rate in primary classes was increased and reached 6.94% for boys and 7.06% for girls in 2016-17, while in 1012-13 it was only 5.34% and 5.71% for boys and girls respectively. It indicates that at the Primary level of education retention rate declined during the study period and decline rate was high for boys. At upper primary level an average drop-out rate was 4.34 percent in 2016-17 against 2.95 percent during the previous cohort of 2012-13. It indicates that in 2016-17 the children who enrolled in upper primary classes dropped out more than 2012-13 from the classes before completing the upper primary grades further, gender wise a small deviation observed in children drop-out. For boys drop-out rate was 3.65% and for girls it was 5.17%, In the comparison of 2012-13, no difference in drop-out rate is noticed in the case of girls but for boys it shown significant change.

Conclusion

The study reveals that the RTE Act is an important landmark to bridge the gender gap in the education sector and universalization of elementary education for the 6 to 14 age group children. Results of the indicators which analyse in this article for find out the impact of this act on gender-based inclusion shown that there is some improvement during the post RTE period. Data shown that GER of girls near to universal. Girls share in elementary education has been increased after RTE Act, while this change was not seen a significant change and still lower than boys share. In post RTE period, gender-based gap for their average attendance level also still exist. Girls were in better situation for retention rate after the implementation of RTE Act. At primary level, girls were more retained than boys and the improvement in girl's retention rate was higher than boys retention rate. Enrolment share in private schools sharply increased during study period due to 25% reservation for disadvantage groups in private schools and better pull factors. Despite all these factors, more than fifty percent children attending government schools, which predominantly belong to excluded and deprived group who cannot afford costly private education.

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