

## Character as the Prerequisite to RTE Fulfillment in India

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### Abstract:

*The present paper attempts to draw the attention on the role of character in successful implementation of RTE. The adequate literature review and live cases from the fields of formal education, character education and RTE approves that “character is the prerequisite to fulfillment of the right to education.” Other rights are not under consideration of this paper but it tries to reveal the interrelationship between rights and character. At its very beginning paper discusses about journey of education and finding it as a right for all children passing through a long history. This paper, especially deals with the true nature of the fulfillment of the right to education and presuming character as the underlying real means to achieve that. The paper attempts to find out the answer to some major questions regarding the success of RTE, these are: Why are we not achieving at least the substantial level, regarding RTE? What the primordial and bigger are in comparison to mechanical, quantitative or data related threats and if they can be attained by the character? How responsibilities are coexisting with rights and how human character*

*plays a role in their interrelationship? How RTE would be exercised truly and easily by using strength of character?*

**Key words:** character, RTE, formal education, character education, right, threats, responsibilities.

## **EDUCATION: ‘for privileged’ to ‘right to all’**

Education is one of the oldest concepts of this globe. Informal education is as old as the earth. The journey of education is from that period till today. When formal education came into existence, it was not accessible to all. Elite groups enjoyed the formal agency of education, i.e. school, for a quite long time. Schools are supposed to be the ‘places of academic discussions for elites and privileged only’. From there formal education started and that inequality has been practiced for a long time. In general, we may speculate that till 1948 we didn’t take any step to counter it and the situation prevailed. This was disgraceful that how many years the children have suffered, and we took so long time to perceive the fact. Education empowers, makes free from all bondages and discriminations, provides essential benefits in the society, and gives a number of opportunities, above all converts a living being into a human. Education is the basic need and universally it should be accepted as a fundamental human right from the beginning. It is also mandatory to enjoy and practice other rights. Thus, by facing ups and downs Education became right for all children in 1948, when the UN human right declaration came into existence. In that resolution it has been proposed that there will be ‘right to education’ (RTE) for all through article 26. Following are the resolutions taken in Article 26:

“Everyone has right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.....”  
**(2010).**

Many barriers played a big role in making educational opportunities equal to all. These were like, class, caste, race, gender, language, etc. Some of them still exist in the form of challenges to fulfill RTE. Education and rights are the interdependent terms. 'RTE act 2009' is accepted and came into effect on 1 April 2010 in India as the right of children to free and compulsory education, but 'right to education' is a long awaited human developmental necessity. Many countries have accepted the same and as reported by The Hindu Newspaper over 134 countries in the world have made such law earlier than India (2010). Even though many children are out of this and deprived of compulsory education in India and all around the globe, instead of the constitutional provisions and international legal obligations.

The idea of RTE is not new but came into effect when inequalities among children became intolerable. There are lives with opportunities and on the other hand, some are struggling for the fulfillment of basic needs. It is quite obvious that the RTE is the outcome of human ethics and character development. The roles and responsibilities of parents, communities, states or nation regarding RTE are the social dimensions of the character development. Education is said to be a man making process and by the implementation of RTE India has moved forward in the direction of 'being human' for its fellow citizens. The country is known for its moral obligations for a long time. It is the birth place (Janm-Bhumi) for four religions and work place (Karm-Bhumi) for eight religions. But attainment of its own standard is becoming a challenge for Indian society. These rights are equivalent to the virtues spread through guided participation over the globe by ancient civilizations and among them one is Indus civilization.

## **RIGHTS**

As given in business dictionary, “Rights are, in general, justified, recognized, and protected... violation of which is unlawful” (2015). Any right is to be viewed and believed as the group or community exercise rather than an individual practice. One practices right and conception of its actual use enhanced with the virtue to assimilate, but not oppose the exercise of the same right by community members. This is the association of ‘right with responsibility’, which includes the options for fundamentally intolerance and opposite views. The principle of tolerance needs members to behave democratically with one another. It is just like to eliminate egoism and authoritarianism, being indifferent and promote humanism. We cannot implement any right with our own perception of right and wrong. Many times, we never follow anything without being pressurized by the fact that others obey the standards. Imposing right on someone as similar as being authoritarian, while ignoring when the community is ready to accept is impossible. Thus we should try to make RTE as a community or mass exercise with the help of human elements, like tolerance, integrity, recognition and respect of other’s right, social and community preference over personal choice, moral imperatives to follow legal obligations. Thus, there is a sound relationship between ‘fulfillment of any right and character building’.

The fulfillment of any right requires that all concerning people understand as well as prefers them. The perfection in achieving the task for the fulfillment of the right also depends on the people around; making the environment of the particular system. The involvement of those people should be so pervasive and reflective that the whole environment could be favorable in a synchronized manner for the completion of the task. Now, to what extent it is possible that certain act will do this? When the right is related to dynamic human nature. We cannot deny the

role of human caring, responsiveness, emotions, duties and responsibilities, etc. and combining all human characters.

## **WHAT IS CHARACTER?**

Generally, character is related to the certain dimensions of good and bad habits. In human perspective good habit is for successful life and being a good citizen of the society and bad habits symbolize for the failure and anti-social activities. There are so many definitions of character and we will just put the concept in brief.

According to Gandhi in his autobiography

“To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realization. And I held that this was an essential part of the training of the young, and that all training without the culture of the spirit was of no use, and might be even harmful” (**Gandhi, Desai reprinted 1993, p. 177**).

Here are the elements given by the proponents of character in relation to right and responsibilities. There is a wide area of character Education but selected elements discussed in the literature are directly linked to the rights and responsibilities. **Leming, 1997** has discussed about “...the character traits like life skills, and values such as: goal setting, one of them is personal and social responsibility.....another is respect for the rights of all people, productive interpersonal relationships, self-discipline, and self-respect.” Linking these components of character with RTE we find that many of them listed here is mandatory to fulfill the RTE. Similarly, ten objectives are given as

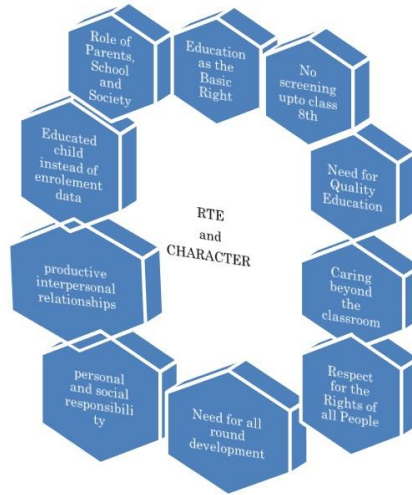
“1. Personal integrity and honesty rooted in respect for the truth, intellectual curiosity, and love of learning. 2. A sense of duty to self, family, school and community. 3. Self-esteem rooted in the recognition of one’s potential. 4. Respect for the rights of all persons regardless of their race, religion, sex, age,

physical condition, or mental state. 5. Recognition of the right of others to hold and express differing views combined with the capacity to make discriminating judgments among competing opinions. 6. A sense of justice, rectitude, fair play, a commitment to them. 7. A disposition of understanding, sympathy, concern and compassion, for others. 8. A sense of discipline and pride in one's work; respect for the achievement of others. ....10. Courage to express one's convictions." (Megalommatis, 2008).

In the objectives specified above, excluding objective '9', all others may have are more or less direct or indirect impact over the fulfillment of RTE. Objective '4', '5' and '6' have more proximity than others.

## **RTE and CHARACTER**

Being specific to RTE, the role of human character is more legitimate. Education is the basic need at present and indispensable part of human life. It is concerned to all three domains and to all the spheres of development, i.e. physical, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, etc. Talking about RTE we should not ignore the pervasive nature of education. We talk about the RTE act and develop an incomplete perspective regarding education. This perspective is more of mechanical and involving less of other human elements. The act is just like a 'force to act' but we need the action, even after removing or in the absence of the force. This is due to the intermingling of human elements with education and mass involvement for the fulfillment of RTE. The realization of the dream is still awaited and in the stipulated time passed so far from the introduction of RTE, the result is not satisfactory. We need to understand the underlying factors of expansion of RTE. Thus,an act is not enough and it will be deduced further that 'character building' will resolve the issues of less proportion of RTE fulfillment.



**Fig: Showing elements of Character as the Underlying Primordial Imperatives for true fulfillment of RTE**

## **ANALYSIS OF RTE-2009 AND THREATS IN RELATION TO CHARACTER**

Analyzing the act in India, the following points are to be considered particularly for this paper. These are cardinal and bigger, but not the mechanical, quantitative or data related threats and barriers in the realization of the dreams of RTE in true sense:

- There is no detention policy in RTE act. The act advocates for no screening up to 8th class, thus if school, teacher or any authority is not accountable enough to provide quality then there may be literacy, but not the education.
- The act does not assure for learning outcome and all round development which are respectively the auxiliary and ultimate goal of education.
- The act does not address the problem related to individual difference. No provision for remedial teaching for slow learners. If the schools are not with true fulfillment of the child's necessity of education, then definitely government will get enrollment data not the educated children.

- Since the education is in concurrent list. The central government and the state government both have to play their roles in RTE, and then if any of the two is insensitive what the act can do?
- Any government agency and the local authority have to show responsibility for providing free and compulsory education to every child. This sharing in most of the time leads to confusion regarding 'who is responsible for what'. This problem will emerge when we are more mechanical.
- Another complexity is about the working children, children living on the streets or children without a parent/guardian that 'how will they be enrolled'? Certainly we need some people and NGOs having true human elements.
- A number of marginalized children may suffer to get the equal weighted in private schools. They may leave or underdeveloped if we are lacking productive interpersonal relationships even after their admission according to the clause of RTE to have 25% reservation for them in those schools and many times schools may pretend to obey the law if they do not have moral obligations.
- There is nothing to bind the communities, linguistic and other minorities, diversified masses of India and even Hindi dominant states with non-Hindi speaking states except a few declarative and discrete legal provisions of the act in this regard.
- The act is for legal definitions of the rights of children and responsibility of state, but what about the virtues, natural caring and respect for personal and social responsibility to protect the right of children as being human.

*(Source for the RTE provisions: <http://mhrd.gov.in/rte>)*

The above points are the grounds for propositions evolved from live cases and contradictions encountered in real life to fulfill RTE. These are given as follows:



### **Cases in relation to characterless practices of teachers**

There are reports regarding deployment of few teachers at the elementary level. Many states are facing this problem and in many cases, one teacher is appointed for many classes. In a government primary school placed in a village, the teacher has appointed a person for his job and he himself earns from his business in the city. At one place, the wife has been appointed, but the husband is doing her teaching job. Other than these, so many instances of corruption can be found in transfer and posting due to which there are less numbers of teachers in the villages, but more in urban due to political influence. Job is secured to those politically powerful teachers who are committing crime by being absent continuously and providing alternatives. They are so tricky and trendy that they never get caught. They remain absent for years, but a signed application with no date is always ready in the hand of another colleague and that will be produced on any routine inspection after putting the suitable date. In spite of these arrangements if they are caught, even then also nothing happens to them. Political influence or a big amount (which is very little for them as it will be for no duty performed in the past and not for the same in the future) serves their purpose. This is assured as on so many such cases very few have been suspended or punished so far. Legal provisions are there, but against the law the corrupted teachers manipulate the system. Here comes the evidence of disadvantage to the children for whom RTE has been introduced. They suffer of being captivated by these immoral teachers for the complete school hours and this is a direct violation of children basic right. Who is responsible for the violation of their right? Now, what can the legal provisions of RTE do? Is it enough to implement this act or do we need some building up of character to arouse a sense of responsibility among them?

Secondly, if the teachers are not made accountable for the slow learning or even no learning then to whom the child

will complain about their right? All these teachers are not functional regarding the assigned duty, and then it is useless to talk about remedial classes. The duty and responsibility are meaningless for them as these are the strengths of character and these teachers have no such foundation. RTE is not for enrollment data, but it must be equivalent to the outcome of fulfillment of any other right and it is the satisfaction of each and every child as a receptor. To achieve the requisite goal of RTE a particular level of education is mandatory to be imparted by the qualified teachers and the teachers must be adequate in number in any school. In other words, RTE in true sense does not come without quality education. Contradictions of real life cannot be ignored. We can't think about the fulfillment of right by the teachers without character. Gandhi has set a standard in his autobiography (**reprinted in 1993, p. 180**), by saying, "It would be idle for me, if I were a liar, to teach boys to tell the truth. A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant, and a stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupils the value of self-restraint."

Proposition emerges from the above as 'if there will be no quality education RTE would be meaningless and for the fulfillment of its objective character is a pre-requisite'.

### **Cases in relation to marginalized, slow learners, economically backward, orphan and working children**

There is a story about a child from below the poverty line. In a private school the student got admitted. He was with the children of elite group there. In the recess time all the affluent children shared their lunch among themselves, but the child remained isolated. Once he answered in the classroom, he received verbal appreciation from teacher and became famous. That is like a realization of dream for other children, but for that child it was unfortunate. The other children entered into privacy of that child. They wanted to know about him and once a classmate caught him at recess to share his lunch. The

classmate took the lunch box in his hand and opened it in front of all other classmates. Only pickle was there with two loaves. Interestingly the classmate took one piece of bread with pickle to taste, but soon after that he put the box down as a natural tendency of vomiting he felt. That was recognized by other classmates even laughed at by some others. This was a bitter experience of poverty in the classroom by the particular child. How the natural right of education will be enjoyed by these children, when they are suffering with another conflict of 'have' and 'have not' in these academic institutions.

These incidents are common and as a teacher, evaluator or administrator one will be able to read the shy faces of the children suffering in the classroom due to inequalities. The slow learner child needs special attention. But it is more common that many times they are confronted with the mockery made either by the teacher or by classmates or by both on their responses in the classroom. This may also cause the drop out of those children and it is quite common to see that due to misbehaviour or directly bitten by a teacher, the children leave the school. Many children do not love to learn. Data of enrollment is increasing, but the distance from learning is also increasing day by day and it is very common that many children in India do not want to go to school. This is the hard fact that they are not ready to learn due to these incidents. RTE is in the zone of a big question mark due to the lack of readiness.

Teacher and classmates should make an impulsive classroom environment where all may deliver up to their maximum. That will be the actual fulfillment of RTE. The likewise incidents may make a child of extreme shyness forever that will further lead him to remain in isolation. It may further lead to no response in the classroom, then to less creative, unmotivated to unproductive citizen and then maybe to the extreme point of involvement in antisocial activities. Gandhi in his autobiography reiterates (**reprinted 1993, p. 177**), "I

regarded character building as the proper foundation for their education and, if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends.”

If the foundation of life is based on the strengths of character, these issues will be easily tackled. There will be character based behaviour in the classroom and even beyond the classroom. The natural caring will come through character education which is mandatory in case of children. It is ‘caring beyond the classroom’ like a mother. The society having extremely rooted foundation of character will be responsive to RTE. No children will be left behind. Working and orphan child will be then admitted very easily. All the units of society will assure the successful enactment of RTE. The School authority will take the responsibility to arrange the timing for working or needy children. Orphan child will get academic shelter. The classmate will never execute the behaviour which makes somebody shy. On the other hand the children of marginalized group will learn ‘stress management’ through character education and any awkward situation can be handled easily. It is quite similar to the notion expressed by the Delors Commission Report (1996) to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. One of the four pillars of education; as explained on the official website is “**Learning to live together:** to expose individuals to the values implicit within human rights, democratic principles, intercultural understanding and respect and peace at all levels of society and human relationships to enable individuals and societies to live in peace and harmony” (UNESCO, 2016).

Thus, the proposition comes out here is: ‘character based foundation will resolve the issues of the marginalised, slow learning, economically backward, orphan and working children by putting all on a common platform of humanity with equality to fulfill the RTE truly and easily.’

### **Case related to non-promotion of the vernacular and differences of states**

If a child from Bengali background goes to private school and the non-Bengali teacher gets him learn orange through Hindi. The teacher tells him that 'Santra' is 'Orange'. In such case, the child cannot identify the particular fruit because he knows Bengali but the teacher teaches him English through Hindi. At home, he is introduced to the same fruit as 'lebu'. Here the child remains in the dilemma due to not teaching him in the language he knows or the vernacular. How the child will resolve the issue? Definitely he will resolve on his own after a long time. During the period he will suffer with violation of child right. In decades ago, there was facility to get education in all languages. But now in the formal education system, there is a rare opportunity to get an education in the vernacular. The character has to play a role in this regard to make the authorities and society responsive to the problems of child encountered in this regard.

Further, Hindi speaking or non-Hindi speaking states have natural differences and no one will deny this. RTE cannot resolve the issues in the absence of a linking element between the two and also the responsibility to be taken by the authority to provide the education in their vernacular or vernacular education. Character building encompasses the areas to resolve these issues which are challenges for the policy makers in case of fulfillment of rights in the diversified population like India. Rightly said, "challenge for educators and policy-makers is to shape the evolution of national and global identity in such a way that the rights of all citizens (including school children) are respected, and the cultural, linguistic, and economic resources of the nation are maximized" (**Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000**). If we think for a comprehensive attainment of RTE, we have to think about this genuine problem. An international understanding is there on this issue to practice linguistic human rights of children. It is a crime to ignore the child on a language basis;

either ignoring the difficulty due to vernacular background or giving less opportunity to flourish or respond in the classroom due to language barrier.

A proposition can be made here thus: 'Character is the most suitable notion to meet the challenges of the cultural and lingual diversities, which is essential for the fulfillment of RTE in all groups and communities.'

### **Cases of failure of programmes run by Government of India due to corruption i.e. absence of character**

It is not enough to frame and implement a law. The failed or underachieved implemented programmes of the Government of India, like SSA, NREGA, NRHM etc. has been reported in various studies. Some states are still suffering and some are with extra results. For instance, as reported "SSA has failed to achieve its goals due to high dropout rate in the primary schools in the bigger states like Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand" (**Prasad, Sinha & Khan, 2013**). Similar comments are there from **Agarwal, 2013** about one as "NREGA, which guarantees 100 days of employment in a year to anyone who is willing to do unskilled manual labour, is facing severe criticism for corruption. The Asian Human Rights Commission reported, in its urgent appeals programme, that implementation in Uttar Pradesh suffers due to its dependency on the local self-government (often the village panchayats) and faces caste prejudices, politics and a complete lack of accountability. The people belonging to the lower castes suffer from discrimination and do not enjoy equal rights of employment and wages they are entitled to under the scheme. According to a CAG report on NREGA in 2013, the scheme has failed in Karnataka and Bihar due to misappropriation and subversion of funds." What are the reasons behind the failure? Of course a number of may be listed. But one common problem is corruption and lack of strengths which comes from character building or moral obligations. The actual involvement of

humans of humanism which signify character building, needed for the fulfillment of RTE, otherwise we will suffer with the same result of failure. We have pointed out the same type of corruption issue, state vs. center vs. local authority, role confusion of sharing and uneven characteristics of states in relation to RTE. These are the real threats for the RTE fulfillment.

To make RTE free of this type of drawbacks is a big task. Strength of character will make a way out. Indian society and authority will be able to ensure fulfillment of RTE by following moral obligations and ignoring corruption. The strong foundation of character should be practiced through the path historically paved by Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda etc. and recently by Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. The path is to be on those principles; even on conditions they may be detrimental for us. RTE needs this type of virtue from all the concerning ones either it may be a nation, state, local authorities or it may be Indian society.

The proposition emerges here is ‘character will make RTE free from corruption for its fulfillment.’

## **CONCLUSION**

Right is not the conviction of one individual. Actually, it is the notion of mass involvement. The right of one is to be completed by another concerned entity. So one’s right is another’s responsibility. If a person is not following the basic character needed for a particular profession or in a particular situation, then he/she may not complete his or her duty. As soon as ignorance crops in mind regarding responsibility or duty the right of other people may be crushed. As an effect the frustration encompasses the mass. The person whose rights gets violated, may violate rights of others by committing the same crime of not performing the assigned duty. Thus, a chain will emerge of violation of rights, one by one.

For example, the teacher when employed to count men and sometimes animals, teacher when appointed as para teachers with less salary or a good teacher suffers to get promotion throughout the life; then they get their rights violated. Thus the rights of children will be in danger when frustration encircles them.

Thus, avoiding the principle of character and ignorance of responsibility is the root cause for the emergence of the chain of violations of rights.

To break this chain, we should have a strong foundation of human character. Through this personal and social responsibility will be attained and as a result the RTE will reach to its destination of fulfillment. Thus, it is quite clear now that step by step building the character is just realizing, one by one, the ultimate goals of RTE.

Thus, an overall output that comes from analyzing all the propositions and interrelationship between Character (having the components; regard for rights and responsibilities) and RTE is “Character is the prerequisite for the actual fulfillment of RTE.”

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