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Right to Education: International and National Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The aim and objective of this paper are to study the International and National perspectives of the Right to Education. Education with a holistic outlook is dealt with the development of every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative capacities. It looks to indulge students in the teaching/learning process and encourages personal and collective responsibility. Education is a basic human right and the best investment that we can make to ensure a sustainable future and leave no one behind. This is true for every country and every region. However, millions are deprived of educational opportunities every day, many as a result of social, cultural and economic factors. A recent report on the latest National Statistical Organization (NSO) survey shows just how sheer are the digital divide across States, cities and villages, and income groups. The study on household social consumption related to Education was part of the NSO's 75th round, conducted from July 2017 to June 2018. Most of these Internet-enabled homes are located in metropolises, where 42% have Internet access. In rural India, however, only 15% are connected to the Internet. The Right to Education Act is supposed to be unduly input-focused rather than outcome-oriented. However, India's new education policy has filled the fissure, which will indeed enhance the quality as well as methodologies in our education system. More Right to Education, along with other inter-governmental initiatives, has clearly succeeded in attracting children to schools but providing quality education is a very aloof vision. Under India's RTE Act, the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is the evaluation mechanism for Elementary Education. It means an evaluation of a different kind (e.g., paper-pencil test, drawing and reading pictures, and expressing orally) which is different from the traditional system of examinations. Furthermore, the Right to Education is a fundamental right and UNESCO purposes education for all by 2015. India, along with other countries of the world, should also put genuine and honest efforts to make this goal a real achievement.

Keywords: Right to Education, Civil and political rights, Social Justice, Compulsory Primary Education, Marginalized groups, Fundamental Rights

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I. Introduction

Education, as a human right means: the Right to Education is legally guaranteed for all without any discrimination states have an obligation to protect, respect, and fulfil the Right to Education. There are ways to hold states accountable for violations or deprivations of the Right to Education. Education is the process of making things learned and acquisitions of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and habits and helps to lift those who belong to socially and economically marginalized from poverty. The Oxford Living Dictionary (OLD) defines Education as: 'the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university.' The OLD defines learning as: 'the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught. Education comprises lifelong learning that takes place in formal and non-formal environments, as well as informal learning. All three elements are important and shape who we are and how we engage with the world around us at every stage of life. From our cognitive and physical development, our understanding of the world, how we think, our values, our identity, our experience of the world to the knowledge and skills we develop that help us to negotiate life, Education and learning are the foundation of it all.³

Right to Education, which Art. 21A seeks to confer, is different from other fundamental rights enshrined in our Constitution, in that the other rights are mostly in the nature of 'protective' rights (i.e., which guarantee certain kinds of protection against the State to every citizen) while the Right to Education mandates certain pro-active action on the part of the State vis-à-vis every child of the country who is in the 6-14 years age group. While Education has become a Fundamental Right, other comparable entitlements, e.g., the Right to Food/Nutrition, Health, Clean Drinking Water, Clean Environment, Work/Employment and Social Security, are yet to be expressly conferred that status in the Constitution. It also needs to be noted that while the earlier Fundamental Rights had no or insignificant financial implications for the State, the Right to Education has major financial implications, and therefore the issue of the State's economic capacity would need to be borne in mind while fleshing out this Right through the legislation envisaged in Art. 21A.

India is known as the home to 19% of the world's children. What does that mean? India is a country where the majority of youngsters live. But it is also true that one-third of the world's illiterate population resides in India. It is not like that the rate of literacy has not been increased, it is, but the rate of growth is rapidly very slow in contrast to decline. From 1991 to 2001 the rate was 12.6% while it has declined to 9.21%. To tackle these alarming issues, the Government

³ The Oxford Living Dictionary

of India introduced the Right to free and compulsory education act, RTE and made Education a fundamental right for the children's age group of 6-14. The Right to education act is an act of Parliament proposed on 4 august 2009, which shows and highlights the model of the importance of free and compulsory Education to children age group 6-14 in India. India has become one of the 135th countries to implement the Right to Education as a fundamental right guaranteed in our Constitution under Article 21A to every child.

This act came into force on 1 April 2010. While Education has become a Fundamental Right, other comparable entitlements, e.g., the Right to Food/Nutrition, Health, Clean Drinking Water, Clean Environment, Work/Employment and Social Security, are yet to be expressly conferred that status in the Constitution. It also needs to be noted that while the earlier Fundamental Rights had no or insignificant financial implications for the State, the Right to Education has major financial implications, and therefore the issue of the State's economic capacity would need to be borne in mind while fleshing out this Right through the legislation envisaged in Art. 21A.

II. WHAT IS EDUCATION?

Formal Education refers to Education that is: institutionalized, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognized private bodies, and—in their totality—constitute the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognized as such by the relevant national Education or equivalent authorities. Vocational Education, special needs Education and some parts of adult education are often recognized as being part of the formal education system. Institutionalized Education occurs when an organization provides structured educational arrangements, such as student-teacher relationships and/or interactions, that are specially designed for Education and learning.⁴

Non-formal Education refers to Education that is: institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal Education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal Education within the process of lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided in order to guarantee the Right of Access to Education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway structure; it may be short in duration and/or low intensity; and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Nonformal Education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications or to

⁴ UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2012. *International Standard Classification of Education: ISCED 2011*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Montreal, Canada, para. 36.

qualifications at all. Depending on the national context, non-formal Education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and Education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development. It can include training in a workplace to improve or adapt existing qualifications and skills, training for unemployed or inactive persons, as well as alternative educational pathways to formal Education and training in some cases. It can also include learning activities pursued self-development and, thus, is not necessarily job-related.⁵

Informal learning refers to the: forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate but are not institutionalized. It is consequently less organized and less structured than either formal or nonformal Education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, workplace, local community and daily life on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis. Like formal and non-formal Education, informal learning can be distinguished from incidental or random learning.⁶

III. PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDED RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Right to Education should imply that every child has a right to be (a) provided full-time Education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school that satisfies at least certain essential norms and (b) enabled to complete elementary Education. It may, however, be pointed out that the National Policy on Education 1986 (as modified in 1992) did envisage the alternative modality of non-formal Education also for achieving universal elementary Education. For instance, para 5.8 stated that "the Nonformal Education Programme, meant for school dropouts, for children from habitations without schools, working children and girls who cannot attend whole-day schools, will be strengthened and enlarged". Right to Education also implies that it is the State's obligation to remove whatever obstacles – social, economic, academic, linguistic, cultural, physical, etc. – prevent children from effectively participating in and completing elementary Education of satisfactory quality. Right to Education must be seen not merely as a right for its own or the individual child's sake but also as an instrument of promoting other constitutional objectives, e.g. equality, justice, democracy, secularism, social cohesion, etc. Provision of Free and Compulsory Education of satisfactory quality to children from weaker sections is the responsibility not merely of Schools run or supported by the State, but also of schools which are not dependent on State funds. Schools of the latter kind also need to provide Education to such children at least to the extent of 25% of their intake. This is

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⁵ Ibid., paras. 39-40.

⁶ Ibid., para. 43.

necessary not merely as part of the social responsibility of such schools, but equally so that their 'fee-paying' students study in a socially more representative and diverse environment and develop into socially sensitive citizens. Other provisions regarding unaided schools would, however, be viewed as introducing a far more regulatory regime than has hitherto been the case and amounting to undue/excessive regulation of private initiative in Education. One major reason why it has not been possible to universalize elementary Education all these years is the dysfunctionality of the delivery system.

The Committee has therefore attempted to formulate a number of provisions for the proposed legislation, essentially aimed at greater decentralization and accountability so that the delivery system is able to rise to the challenge. Although its terms of reference were confined to free and compulsory Education for children between the ages of 6-14 years, the Committee has considered the main programme for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), viz., Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and proposed convergence to the extent possible. While ECCE will continue to be provided (in the State sector) through Anganwadis under ICDS, the Committee has recommended that additional pre-school facilities be provided to children in the age group of 5-6 years wherever necessary.⁷

IV. EDUCATION AS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY RIGHT

1.) The Right to Education and civil and political rights

Education plays a role in how individuals engage (or choose not to) in political and civic spaces and thus impacts their civil and political rights. As Fons Coomans, a law professor and expert on the Right to Education points out: 'Civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association or the right to political participation, only obtain substance and meaning when a person is educated.' Added to this list could be the Right to vote, the Right to freedom of speech, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the Right to family and private life. Education gives individuals the foundational knowledge and provides the necessary skills to participate in political and public life, including debating, understanding complex issues, critical thinking, knowing and representing their own interests, holding duty-bearers to account, influencing decision-makers, and making informed choices. Individuals

⁷ Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on Free and Compulsory Education Bill And Other Issues Related to Elementary Education June 2005, available at: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/fcebill.pdf

⁸ Coomans, F. 2007. Content and Scope of the Right to Education as a Human Right and Obstacles to its Realization, *Human Rights in Education, Science and Culture: Legal Developments and Challenges* (edited by Yvonne Donders and Vladimir Volodin), UNESCO Publishing, Paris, France; and Ashgate, Vermont, USA. pp.185-186.

also gain valuable skills and learnings from participating in political and civic life. The right to Education and physical and emotional well-being The Right to life, health, and an adequate standard of living, including food, clothes, and shelter, protect from degrading and harmful conditions affecting physical and emotional well-being. Empirical evidence suggests that Education leads to better outcomes with respect to physical and emotional well-being. Education and maternal Education, in particular, are known to increase life expectancy, leading to better childhood nutrition, reduce child mortality, reduce illness and childhood illness prevent and reduce HIV infection rates, reduce mortality from diseases

- improve mental health
- positively affect early childhood development
- increase the likelihood of being happy

The mechanisms thought to underlie the relationship between Education and mental and physical health include increasing:

- a person's ability to make healthier life choices based on relevant information, for example, choosing healthier food and exercising more regularly
- a person's ability to access and navigate the healthcare system: understand and comprehend what their health needs are, advocate for herself and others, communicate and engage better with care providers
- a person's ability to seek medical advice and follow treatment, for example, by taking medicine at the right time and in the right dosages
- responsiveness to awareness-raising campaigns on health issues

Education is of particular importance to the physical and emotional well-being of marginalized groups, for instance, women and girls. Girls who receive more Education are less vulnerable to harmful cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, are less likely to become pregnant and young mothers, and are also less susceptible to gender-based violence against women and girls. According to the UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report, a girl in a low-income country receiving secondary Education is 63% less likely to marry than a girl without Education and has fewer and healthier children.45 Children of literate mothers are over 50% more likely to live past the age of five and receive good nutrition. There are also significant health benefits for girls and women, with considerable

evidence that an increase in a mother's Education reduces the likelihood of dying in childbirth.9

2.) The Right to Education and economic rights

Education and work are deeply connected. Education provides individuals with the skills necessary to find decent work and secure a fair wage. Work is a key way for individuals to lift themselves out of poverty and militate against exclusion and marginalization. Education and work interact to empower individuals, particularly in exercising other human rights. For example, Fons Coomans underscores the link with physical and emotional well-being: 'an educated person will have a greater chance of finding a job, will be better equipped to secure his or her own food supply and is more aware of public health dangers'.¹⁰

3.) The Right to Education and cultural rights

Education and culture are closely related. Education provides an enabling environment for cultural diversity and allows for the realization of the Right to take part in cultural life. Access and participation in cultural life greatly contribute to the development of the self: of one's identity, sense of belonging, personal enrichment, and personal expression. In addition, the promotion of cultural diversity contributes to reinforcing understanding, respect, and tolerance towards others.

4.) The Right to Education and sustainable development

Education and sustainable development are intrinsically connected. Sustainable development is aimed at the eradication of poverty, and therefore a number of the benefits mentioned above also apply here. For example, Education gives people a better chance of finding decent work, thereby being a key means of lifting people out of poverty. Education also helps people to realize that development should benefit people and communities as a whole. It enables people to recognize that economic development should be pursued to provide long-term benefits in line with human rights and the preservation and conservation of the environment. In 2015, the international community committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹¹, which is an expansion of the Millennium Development Goals, and which reflects the importance stated place on Education in achieving sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education sets out a number of targets that are rights-based; for example, Target 4.7

⁹ Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4, Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. Sonia Bhalotra with Damian Clarke. 2013. *Educational Attainment and Maternal Mortality*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Zimmerman, E., Woolf, S. H. and Haley, A. 2015. *Understanding the Relationship Between Education and Health: A Review of the evidence and an Examination of Community Perspectives*. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Rockville, MD.

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). 2015. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York, UNGA (Doc. A/RES/70/1.)

recognizes that Education for sustainable development and human rights education are vital to achieving sustainable development. Education also plays an important role in the realization of environmental rights, that is, the Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment which is a key component of sustainable economic growth.

Education and the transfer of knowledge on environmental issues are necessary to raise awareness and spur action at all levels of society and amongst different actors, including individuals, organizations, decision-makers, and so on. Indeed, 'effective climate change education increases the number of informed and engaged citizens, building social will or pressure to shape Policy, and building a workforce for a low-carbon economy.¹²

V. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The pace of awareness programmes on the Right to Education practically need upgradation so that individuals know their rights that they are empowered to claim them. Local Authorities must monitor the implementation of the Right to Education and regularly report on deprivations and violations. Indeed, there must advocate and campaign for the full implementation of the Right to Education, holding the State accountable. Proper management of those who seek remedies when there are violations of the Right to Education.

How stark is the digital divide across States, cities and villages, and income groups? The scope of the Right to Education act should not be limited to the age of 14 years. It should be extended to the second level also. The Government should make some modifications like introducing diplomas/degrees/courses with specialization in IT, software mobile communication, media, entertainment, telecommunication, automobile, construction or need of the requirement. CSS (Common School System) was an important step and go hand in hand for attaining equality decades ago, however, now it must be changed into MSS (Model school system) based on the dynamic nature and demands of the society where Education should be provided free of cost and on a joint venture with private institute patterns.

Parents need to play a ruthful role in making RTE policy to be a success in India, and, for this regards government mandate this as a fundamental duty of guardians and parents. Moreover, it can be done only by motivating them through counselling and guidance, and they must be made alarming about the RTE Act through media, pamphlets campaigns, hoardings, rallies, etc. only then we can be aware all people about the importance of Education and should expect that our future generations will be well educated.

¹² Ledley, T. S., Rooney-Varga, J. and Niepold, F. 2017. Addressing Climate Change Through Education. *Environmental Issues and Problems, Sustainability and Solutions*

Schemes like mid-day meals, SSA, RMSA accompanied by world organizations like UNICEF are playing an important role in increasing the massive enrolment ratio. By securing beginning and basic Education for Indian children. However, these international and national agencies should more be focused on weaker sections of the society, economically backwards, females and highly populous states of India; these states should be a topmost priority to improve the quality of this act.

Most importantly, local authorities and governing bodies should get involved so as to ensure the enrolment of the newborn babies, and their records should be sent to a neighbourhood school. After that, school authorities take care of and follow up with the child and send the information for registration and admission to his/her parents without any delays.

The Provision regarding severe punishment for the abasement of this act should be made out, and the responsibilities of the Central Government, state government, teachers, parents, administrators, Owners of the school have to be fixed. It should be made necessary for all the government employees; whether working under State or centre or person working under centre or state-funded agency, should send their children in Government or in government-aided institutes for the promotion of these schools.

According to international law, other actors have responsibilities in upholding the Right to Education:¹³

- the role of multilateral intergovernmental agencies, such as UNESCO, OHCHR,
 UNICEF, is of particular importance in relation to the realization of the Right to
 Education in providing technical and financial assistance
- international financial institutions should pay greater attention to the protection of the Right to Education in their policies, credit agreements, structural adjustment programmes and measures taken in response to the debt crisis
- private businesses also have the responsibility to respect human rights and avoid infringing on the rights of others. For more information, see UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment 24, Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment 16, and our page on Privatization
- civil society plays a crucial role in promoting the Right to Education and holding the

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¹³ Understanding education as a right, available at: https://www.right-to-education.org/page/understanding-education-right

State accountable for its obligations

• parents have the responsibility to ensure that their children attend compulsory Education. They cannot deny their children access to Education

CADE sets out what constitutes discrimination in Education, including the following practices:¹⁴

- depriving access to Education
- providing Education of inferior quality
- establishing or maintaining segregated educational systems or institutions, unless they
 are gender-segregated, for linguistic or religious groups, and are non-exclusionary and are
 of the same quality as comparable institutions, and conform to minimum education
 standards.
- Inflicting undignified conditions.
- It also clarifies the unequal treatment that does not amount to unlawful discrimination:
- the establishment and maintenance of gender-segregated education systems or institutions provided that the equivalent access is guaranteed, that qualified teaching staff are of the same standard, that school buildings and classrooms and equipment are of the same quality, and that there is an opportunity to study the same subjects.
- The establishment and maintenance of separate education systems or institutions for religious or linguistic reasons provided that participation is optional and that the institution meets standards set by the State.
- The establishment and maintenance of any private school so long as they are not set up to exclude any group and that such schools are complementary to public ones and meet standards set by the State.

VI. GOVERNMENT AND JUDICIARY: PRINCIPAL ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The period spanning between 1950 to the judgment in Unnikrishnan's case in 1993 saw several legal developments. The Indian Education Commission (Kothari Commission) 1965-1968 reviewed the status of Education in India and made recommendations. Most important amongst these is its recommendation of a common school system with a view to eliminating inequality in access to Education. Immediately thereafter, the National Policy on Éducation, 1968, was

¹⁴ CADE Article 1.

formed. The 1968 Policy was the first official document evidencing the Indian Government's commitment towards elementary Education. The Policy dealt with issues of equalization of educational opportunity and required the common school system to be adopted in order to promote social cohesion.

However, it was not supported by legal tools that could enforce such policy mandates. Interestingly, it even required that special schools should provide a proportion of free-student ships to prevent social segregation in schools. The second round of studies was conducted by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, and this process contributed to the formation of the National Policy on Education, 1986. This Policy, while re-affirming the goal of universalization of elementary Education, did not recognize the 'right to education.' The 1986 Policy is also severely criticized for having introduced non-formal Education in India. The 1986 Policy was reviewed by the Acharya Ramamurti Committee in 1990, and this review process contributed to the revised National Policy on Education of 1992. The Acharya Ramamurti Committee recommended that the Right to Education should be included as a fundamental right in Part III of the Constitution. However, this recommendation was not implemented immediately. A great legal breakthrough was achieved in 1992 when the Supreme Court of India held Mohini Jain v. the State of Karnataka, 15 that the "right to education" is concomitant to fundamental rights enshrined under Part III of the Constitution" and that 'every citizen has a right to Education under the Constitution.

The Supreme Court subsequently reconsidered the above-mentioned judgment in the case of Unnikrishnan, J. P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh¹⁶. The Court (majority judgment) held that 'though Right to Education is not stated expressly as a fundamental right, it is implicit in and flows from the Right to life guaranteed under Article (and) must be construed in the light of the Directive Principles of the Constitution. Thus, 'Right to Education, understood in the context of Article 45 and 41 means: (a) every child/citizen of this country has a right to free Education until he completes the age of fourteen years and (b) after a child/citizen completes 14 years, his Right to Education is circumscribed by the limits of the economic capacity of the State and its development. In the meanwhile, major policy-level changes were made under the dictates of the IMF-World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme and the world Bank-funded District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was introduced in 1994. Under DPEP, the notional commitment towards FCE up to 14 years was reduced, and primary Education for the

¹⁵ AIR 1992 SC 1858 : (1992) 3 SCC 666 ¹⁶ AIR 1993 SC 2178 : (1993) 1 SCC 645

first five years was introduced. Further, the concept of multi-grade teaching and para teachers was also introduced. While policy level changes had diluted the quality of FCE, the Unnikrishnan judgment empowered people with a legal claim to FCE. Several public interest litigation petitions were filed in different High Courts to enforce the Unnikrishnan judgment and acquire admission into schools. This created tremendous pressure on the Parliament, and thereafter a proposal for a constitutional amendment to include the Right to Education as a fundamental right was made in 1996. Accordingly, the Constitution (Eighty-third) amendment Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in July 1997. The 83rd Amendment proposed that Article 21-A be introduced (fundamental Right to Education for 6-14 years). Former Article deleted (the then-existing directive principle on FCE) and Article 51-A (k) (fundamental duty on parents) be introduced. Between 1997 and 2001, due to changes in Governments, the political will that was required to bring about the Amendment was absent. In November 2001, however, the Bill was re-numbered as the 93rd Bill, and the 83rd Bill was withdrawn. The 93rd Bill proposed that former Article 45 be amended to provide for early childhood care and Education instead of being deleted altogether. This Bill was passed in 2002 as the 86th Constitution Amendment Act.

Currently, under Article 21-A of the Constitution, every child between the ages of 6-14 has a fundamental right to Education. Which the State shall provide 'in such manner as the State may, by the way, determine'. Early childhood care and Education (for children in the age group of 0-6 years) is provided as a directive principle of State Policy under Article 45 of the Constitution.

VII. CONCLUSION

The Right to free and compulsory primary Education is considered a 'minimum core obligation' of the Right to Education. Effectively, primary Education is prioritized given its importance to the individual. Obligations to realize primary Education extends beyond Provision to primary school-aged students. Under international law, states must also provide Education for all those who have missed all or part of their Primary Education. The Right to Education includes not only the Right to access Education but also the Right to quality education. As '*Quality is at the heart of education*.' Teachers, at all levels of Education, are the primary means through which the curriculum is delivered and one of the key ways in which the aims of Education are imparted. Thereby they have a crucial role in the educational process. Education is not just about what is taught but also about how it is taught and by whom. The

¹⁷ Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005

Right to quality education cannot be achieved without trained and qualified teachers who provide effective quality teaching. Seventy years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognizing the universal Right to Education for the first time. Since 1948, every single country in the world has ratified at least one human rights treaty guaranteeing the Right to Education or some aspect of the Right to Education, and a great number of states have made efforts to enshrine the Right to Education in their highest legal order.

Practically, Education covers 5% of the GDP of any country to support their social transformation. Education is a key to growing finer or one step ahead who is not educated. Education is a powerful tool to provide an opportunity for a human being to develop to the fullest. For the advancement and promotion of the Right to Education UN human declaration, many more conventions mention about Right to Education. At last, everyone human being has the Right to Education. Education must be free, at least in the primary and fundamental stages. Moreover, primary Education shall be compulsory. Advance and professional Education shall be made generally available, and higher Education shall be accessible to all on the basis of merit and equality.
