

A review on the role of non-governmental organizations in achieving right to education

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Abstract

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. An educated person can overcome poverty and backwardness. But even after so many years of independence, India struggles to achieve a literacy rate of over 90 percent. The Government of India and the State Governments need to give top priority in providing quality education to all children. In India the government alone cannot bring all children into the fold of education. The civil society thus plays an important role to ensure that the benefits of education reach the lowest strata of the society. Many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been working to strengthen the education system and to make more and more children educated so that they can have a better life. The present article aims to study and analyze the role played by the NGOs in promoting the right to education and to focus on the achievements made by them. Along with the government, the role played by the civil society is tried to be highlighted in the article.

Keywords: education, non-governmental organizations, development

Introduction

“Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world” – Malala Yousafzai.

Education indeed plays an important role in one’s life. The above well said quote by the 18 year old Nobel Peace Prize winner truly indicates that education forms the basis for lifelong learning and entrust immense benefit upon a person so that he can meet the conflicting challenges. It enlarges, enriches and improves the individuals’ images of the future man. Benjamin Franklin said that an education is the investment with the greatest returns.

Education provides the required skills to the individual so that he or she becomes more self-reliant and aware of right opportunities. It also enhances the ability of an individual to become more responsible and more informed citizen.

The significance of education was very well explained in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* ^[1]. It was held that education is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural value, in preparing him for later professional training and in helping him to adjust normally to his Environment.

As a human being, we possess the basic human rights which are necessary for the inherent dignity and worth of every human person. Human right forms the basis foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world. Right to education is considered to be an important human right. This right has an immense power to transform. The foundation of right to education forms the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.

Right to education have received considerable recognition in the international and national arena. The right to education is enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 ^[2] and Article 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It has also been reaffirmed in the 1960 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination on Education, Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) ^[3], 1st Protocol of European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom (ECHR) and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ^[4].

Under the Indian Constitution the right to education is protected by virtue of various articles such as Articles 15, 21, 29, 30, 41, 45, 46, etc. After the 86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002, right to education is being regarded as a fundamental right under Article 21-A and it is free and compulsory for the age group between 6 to 14 years.

In *Mohini Jain vs. State of Karnataka* ^[5] popularly known as Capitation Fee Case, Hon’ble Supreme Court held for the first time that, right to education comes within the purview of Article 21 of the Constitution. The court held that the right to education directly flows from right to life. The right to life under Article 21 and the dignity of an individual cannot be assured unless it is accompanied by the right to education

². Ian Brownlie and Guy S. Goodwin Gill, Basic Documents on Human Rights, Ed. 3, 2002.

³. R.C. Borpatroghain, Implementation of Right to Education – A Global Perspective

⁴. Id, p. 176

⁵. AIR (1992) 3 SCC 666.

¹. 347 U.S. 483. (1954).

In *Unnikrishan vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* ^[6] the Supreme Court has accepted the view expressed in Mohini Jain's case, that right to education flows directly from the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. In this case the Apex Court has made it clear that right to education which is implicit in the right to life and personal liberty guaranteed by the Article 21 must be construed in the light of the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV of the Constitution.

Governments' Initiatives

Education is the most potent tool for bringing about socio-economic mobility and it also strengthens democracy. Education gives the citizens the tools which is needed to fully participate in the government process. Various initiatives have been taken both by the Central and State governments to promote this important right.

Before 1976, education was the exclusive responsibility of the States. But the Constitutional Amendment of 1976 included education in the concurrent list which was a far-reaching step. Since then the Union Government and the States shared responsibility on the matters relating to education.

At the apex, the Central Government determines targets and prepares the educational plan required to be implemented by the country as educational planning is a part and parcel of the total planning. The Central Government has taken various initiatives to strengthen the education process in the country. Some of them are:

1. Government of India has set-up institutions like All-India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) which provides guidance to the States in the field of Education.
2. The Central Government directs and guides the State Government, local and private enterprise so as to encourage education on right lines.
3. The Government of India has set up Commissions to look into the various aspects of education at different levels. These Commissions have provided valuable recommendations which have further been considered by the experts.
4. Government of India is entrusted to the establishment of an egalitarian society and therefore has taken many steps to provide equal education opportunities to the weaker sections of the society.
5. The Central Government allocates suitable grant to the states, local bodies and private agencies.
6. The Central Government is directly responsible for promoting and spreading education in various union territories and other central administered areas.
7. From time to time it brings out useful information on various aspects of education. The ministry also publishes journals and statistical information which have proved to be very helpful in disseminating information in the country.
8. The Central government is also responsible for the establishment of scientific and technical education as well as of social science and humanities. Such institutions are to be established in close collaboration with the

universities and are to be an integral part of the university system ^[7].

To achieve the goal of UEE (Universalization of Elementary Education), the Government of India has initiated a number of schemes, programmes and projects. Some of the Centrally sponsored programmes includes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Scheme of Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in School Scheme etc.

The State Governments like that of Central Government also plays a vital role in the field of school education. There are local authorities who act as an agent of the State Government. The state education department which is the nodal agency of the State Government takes the major responsibility in this field.

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs are the voice of the people. NGOs have made their impact on the civil society of various parts of the country. They have a share in the responsibility of greater accountability to their own and their future generations ^[8].

NGOs try to reach out to the most vulnerable sections of the society. While most of the government initiatives have been on the supply side of education, several NGOs have made efforts to work with communities and improve the demand for education ^[9].

Developing countries, like India face numerous problems and challenges when it comes to educating their children. A large number of children in this country are unable to complete primary schools and drop out due to the cost of attending school. Many prefer to work for their families than to attend school. As a result few make it out of secondary school and very few go to achieve a higher education.

The government is trying to fight illiteracy but the bottlenecks in the system make the process largely inefficient. Here comes the role of social organization and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Some of the areas covered by NGOs in the field of education are as follows:

- 1) NGOs can provide financial assistance to children who have to dropout because of lack of money by giving them free education at their own expenses.
- 2) NGOs can reach out to children who cannot go to school because of inaccessibility and teach them at their homes.
- 3) NGOs take care of girls who have to drop out of school at adolescence due to the lack of proper sanitation facilities for them at government schools.
- 4) NGOs also assist in the higher education of child and work towards imparting skill based education to them.
- 5) NGOs plays a vital role to bring awareness among peoples specially in the field of health, diseases, medicine,

⁶. (1993) 1 SCC 645.

⁷. Vachan Singh, Development of Education in India, 2005, p. 3-5

⁸. Jagannath Mohanty, Human Rights Education, Reprint 2003, 185-187.,

⁹. Ibid.

sanitation, hygiene etc., which are very important while educating children^[10], Some of the voluntary organizations and NGOs that actively participate in the field of education:

Pratham

Pratham is one of the largest Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in India. It was established in Mumbai in 1994 to provide pre-school education to children in slums. The NGO Pratham now has activities in 23 States and Union Territories of India. Pratham's mission is "Every Child in School and Learning well". By increasing the literacy levels of India's poor, it aims to improve India's economic and social equality. Pratham has introduced low cost education models, launched Read India, Pratham books, set up Pratham Council for Vulnerable Children (PCVC), Early Childhood Care and Education Centre (ECCE), Vocational Skills Programme, and Computer-aided Literacy. Pratham has reached 1.2 million children, 22,000 youths and enrolled 4,500 dropouts. Along with partnerships with Government, it has reached 4.5 million children^[11].

Akshaya Patra Foundation

The Akshaya Patra Foundation commonly known as Akshaya Patra is the world's largest non-profit organization in India which was established in the year 2000 in order to run school lunch programme across India. The vision of this Foundation is that "No child in India shall be deprived of education because of hunger." Its mission is to reach out to 5 million children by 2020^[12].

Akshaya Patra feeds 16, 39, 067 children every day across India. It is operational across 29 locations in 12 States of India. It has been recipient of quite a few significant national and international awards like Nikkei Asia Prize 2016, platinum award at the AVA Digital Awards 2016 etc. Limca Book of Records and India Book of Records recognizes Akshaya Patra as running "the world's largest school meal programme"^[13].

Azim Premji Foundation

This is a not-for-profit organization which is operational since 2001. Its vision is to – "Significantly contribute to achieve quality universal education that facilitates a just, equitable and humane society". The Foundation works in the area of elementary education is to pilot and develop 'proofs of concept' that have a potential for systemic change in India's 1.3 million government-run schools. The foundation focuses on working in rural areas where the majority of these schools exist^[14].

To achieve their goal, they have identified education as a critical area that has direct impact on the economic, social and cultural development of the nation. To concretize their vision, they have established two institutions – Field Institutes and Azim Premji University.

Today, the Foundation with more than thousand employees has field institutes in 40+ districts across 6 states and 1 Union Territory reaching more than 3, 50,000 schools across the country. Right from 2001 onwards, Azim Premji Foundation has undertaken various programmes, some of which are still continuing. These programmes includes Computer Aided Learning Programme (2001-2008), Accelerated Learning Programme (2002-2004), Learning Guarantee Programme (2002-2008), Child Friendly Schools Initiative (2004-2011), Policy Planning Unit (2003-present), Institutional Capacity Development (2010-2013), Education for Children of Migrant Labor (2007-present), Educational Leadership Development Programmes (2006-present) etc.

MV Foundation

The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation also known as MV Foundation is a registered trust established in the year 1981. Its approach is based on a firm conviction that no child works and that all children in the 5-14 years age group must be in school. It recognizes the inextricable link between the program for universalization of education and abolition of all forms of child labor^[15].

In 1991, MVF began working on the issue of child labor and released the first 30 children from bonded labor in Ranga Reddy district. Thereafter it extended its activities to different districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Mahbubnagar, Chittoor, Kadapa, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Anantapur, and Warangal districts of Andhra Pradesh as a direct implementing agency.

Apart from being an implementing partner, it has also become a training and research center to other NGOs in the country. In this capacity it has worked in states such as Assam, Chattisgarh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu and so on. It is also providing technical support to NGOs in Africa and Central America through the 'Stop Child Labor Campaign'.

Some of the remarkable projects undertaken by MVF are quality improvement in primary education in Nalgonda District, residential bridge course camp for girls, education for girls in 15-18 years age group, strengthening of existing systems for prevention of child marriages, program for enrollment and retention of children in schools in vulnerable areas, enabling implementation of Right to Education Act, Madhya Pradesh, righting the future: South-South collaboration and building for Universalization of Secondary Education for girls in Africa etc^[16].

Akanksha Foundation

It is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide children from low income communities with high quality education, enabling them to maximize their potential and transform their life. Akanksha had worked and is working in the field of education, initiating school reform through the school project and providing a supplementary education through the Akanksha centers.

Currently, Akanksha reaches out over 6500 children through two models: the after school or centre model and school

¹⁰. Sanjay Chandwani, NGO Participation in Elementary Education: An Analytical Study, INFLIBNET (Feb 14, 2017, 4:30 PM)

¹¹. www.pratham.org/

¹². <https://www.akshayapatra.org.>

¹³. *ibid.*

¹⁴. www.ngoportall.org/funding-agencies-51-Azim+Premji+Foundation.html.

¹⁵. www.indianet.nl/ka-mvfe.html

¹⁶. mvfindia.in/projects/

project^[17]. It has 20 schools in Mumbai and Pune. The School Project of this NGO is an attempt to open high-quality schools serving children from low-income communities in Mumbai and Pune. These schools are in partnership with local municipalities, with the vision of creating small clusters of model schools in these cities that can be used to impact the mainstream education system.

Cry

“Child’s Right and You” or CRY is an NGO in India working for children and their right. CRY has undertaken a lot of initiatives to improve the conditions of underprivileged children and one of them is the ‘CHOTE KADAM PRAGATI KI AUR’ a literary drive that has reached out to more than 35000 children in 10 states of India.

‘Mission Education’ is another very popular campaign from CRY to make sure that ‘education is every child’s right’ and that proper education reaches to more children in every new academic year^[18].

It is reported that during the year 2016-17, CRY has helped about 2,62,695 children get their Right to School, 2,342 Severely Acute Malnourished children were brought back to normalcy, 1,016 villages were made free from child labor. Recently Dr. Veerendra Mishra from Nehru Yuva Kendra agreed to partner with CRY by linking their youth programme with CRY’s adolescent programme.

Nanhi Kali

Nanhi Kali is a non-governmental organization that supports education for underprivileged girls in India. It was founded by Anand Mahindra in 1996. Since 2005, Project Nanhi Kali is jointly managed by the Naandi Foundation and KC Mahindra Educational Trust which is a part of the corporate social responsibility activities of the Mahindra Group. Currently project Nanhi Kali supports over 57000 students^[19].

Students who are selected for Nanhi Kali receive both financial and academic support that allows a girl child to access quality education, attend school with dignity and reduces the chances of her dropping out. For providing such support, Project Nanhi Kali is working with 19 NGO implementation partners at the grassroots level. The girls attend special classes to learn math, science, and language concepts. Further the KC Mahindra Educational Trust regularly monitors the NGOs by giving technical inputs wherever required to ensure that quality education is being imparted to all the Nanhi Kalis.

Prayas

Prayas is India’s one of the largest NGO. Its goal is to protect the marginalized children, women, and young people. Prayas was founded in 1988 by Delhi Chief Amod Kanth. The organization initially focused on providing shelter and education to children affected by disaster. Since then it has expanded its work into many other areas. It now provides alternative education, shelter homes, health, and nutrition and other services to marginalized children in India. Teenagers

and disadvantaged women also avail of services offered by Prayas, in particular vocational education^[20].

Prayas provides alternative education to children. Children who have fallen out of the government education system are provided with quality non-formal education in order to allow them to catch up and reintegrate into the state system. Students are given mid-day meal and regular health checkups. The organizations alternative education centers have been identified as models of best practice by the Indian government and the United State Department of Labor.

Conclusion

NGOs have contributed tremendously in safeguarding and promoting the right to education. The role played by NGOs in spreading education to different nook and corner of the country cannot be denied. They have been trying to strengthen the education system and make more and more children educated by their various programmes. NGOs have a share in the responsibility of greater accountability to their own and their future generations. The right to education will be meaningful only if all levels of education are reached to all sections of people.

Since the Government alone cannot achieve the goal of Education for All (EFA), it was felt that the collaboration of voluntary organizations, the community and NGOs was necessary, especially in the area of access, retention and achievement. The Government of India laid emphasis on implementation of non-formal education through local and national NGOs as well as other voluntary agencies. It viewed NGOs as vibrant partners in the process of moving towards the goals of Education for All (EFA).

The last two decades have seen several successful collaborative efforts between government agencies and NGOs on a large-scale. One of the best things about NGOs is that they work at the grassroots level. Further they try to connect the masses and spread awareness on the importance of getting good education to march ahead in life.

The mass media and the NGOs need to be active in all aspects to make right to education a reality. Although remarkable achievements have been made by the NGOs, yet there are much to be achieved and long way to go for bringing about 100% literacy in India. Some of the suggestions which may be provided are as follows:

1. Non-Governmental Organizations must attempt to minimize and thereby eradicate poverty by encouraging and undertaking alleviation programmes initiated by the Government along with spreading education because poverty is a barrier of literacy.
2. They must also play an important role in giving proper guidance and spreading awareness among the parents to make their children educated and not be negligent in sending their wards to schools.
3. Initiatives must also be taken in certain areas where education of a girl is still discouraged. In such places the NGOs must take initiatives for education of girls at all levels because by educating a girl child we are educating the whole family.
4. NGOs must also take initiatives to spread value and moral

¹⁷. www.akansha.org/

¹⁸. www.cry.org

¹⁹. www.nanhikali.org/

²⁰. www.prayas.com/

education among the children by organizing workshops and awareness campaigns

5. NGOs must also help thousands of physically and mentally challenged children who do not get the full benefit of education because of social neglect, and absence of support systems in the home and inadequacy of sufficient facilities particularly in schools in smaller towns and villages.

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