UNIT 13 THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Structure

13.0 Objectives
13.1 Introduction
13.2 Issues In Education
13.3 Better Life Through Education
   13.3.1 Exploitation through education
   13.3.2 Education for planning development
   13.3.3 Administering education in India
13.4 Access vs. Success In Education
   13.4.1 Child labour and the right of the child
13.5 Role of Medium of Instruction in Education
13.6 Developing Critical Thinking
13.7 Let Us Sum Up
13.8 Suggested Readings
13.9 Answers to Assignments

13.0 OBJECTIVES

If we examine all the qualities that distinguish human beings, from other living beings education is definitely one of them. As people fight for scarce resources, education becomes an important facility. Some people have succeeded in taking more benefits from the educational facilities than others. It is important that those who have monopolised education as well as those who have been deprived of it know the importance of the situation. The struggle for the right to education has to be seen from two angles - one of providing education and once it is attained, people must try to make the same available to those who are still deprived. It is sometimes noticed as a tendency of the deprived, as Paulo Friere in Pedagogy of the Oppressed pointed out, to "adopt an attitude of 'adherents' to the oppressor". That is actually a tendency of the educated elite to join the league of the oppressors. Just as it is important to let no one snatch the right of education, it is equally important that these 'oppressors' do not indulge, consciously or unconsciously, in subverting this crucial right to humanization.

After going through this unit, you would come to know:

- the importance of education in human life,
- some of the major issues in providing education,
- the crucial role that medium of instruction plays in education.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Every human being has got certain rights which are basic to becoming a respectable citizen. Education is a right of every individual to access sources of information and knowing about the opportunities for self-development. It is also important because through education one can know of human rights which are crucial to extending dignity of human beings. Education as Gandhiji said, should nurture respect for oneself and respect for one's own culture, community and country. Education should be seen as an equalizing force. It should not only make provisions and physical resources required for imparting education but actually making quality education
available on equitable basis. Education should bring about equality in society.

Those who are educated give an impression that it is a difficult job and they have acquired education through hard work. If we examine the percent of successful people we will find that those who went to good schools and were taught by trained teachers were better educated and so they became successful. Against them, those who went to ill-equipped or ill-managed schools could not acquire proper education and so they lagged behind. Those who are declared successful in schools go for higher education and turn become eligible for all social benefits. The quality of higher education (HE) rests on the quality of school education. We cannot expect HE to do miracles if the school education is mediocre. Only if a sound foundation is laid, the HE can be expected to give quality output. Another hurdle in the success of education is the corruption perpetuated by the white-collar people. Corruption is one of the major hurdles in extending the benefits of education to the actual beneficiaries. Educational resources, right from chalk to computer have been misused. Those who are ill-equipped cannot even raise the voice against them. However, because of the unequal distribution of education those in possession of this skill consider themselves superior to others. This argument needs no elaboration. How is it that those who work day and night in the rugged field conditions to feed those who work in cozy conditions command less respect? Education should aspire to develop respect not only for one's own culture but also for culture of others. Tolerance, peaceful co-existence and instructional brotherhood should be the objective of education.

1. It seems education is the beginning of human development and happiness. What measures would you suggest to make education universal?

All political parties irrespective of ideological differences show similar concern for education of the masses, but no party government has taken up this issue seriously. The reiteration of the obligation to provide basic education without making any effort is doubly harmful. Governments make the commitment again and again without doing anything in this direction.

A thumbnail sketch of the government's expenditure shows that 25% of the state's funds go to defence, 20% to debt repayment and 18% for administrative expenses. Only about 31% of the funds are available for the basic needs of living which include, among others education, health, drinking water, shelter and roads. Political parties and governments raise the issue of mass-education but the essence of the problem is lost as their concern ends by making budget available for education. And whatever little is available, the concerns of parties and governments end with making provisions for buildings and staff. The questions, which need attention, are:

- budget allocation for education must increase
- educational provisions should be made not only through construction of building and appointment of teachers, but by making the whole system work,
- the teaching-learning process should be friendly and not alien;
- the medium of education should be familiar, and
- the learners should be involved in deciding what to learn (i.e., curriculum design).
Success or failure of a student depends upon the type of school s/he goes to. Give reasons 'for' and 'against' this view.

13.2 ISSUES IN EDUCATION

Glaring differences exist between individuals, groups, societies and countries. These disparities are not god-made but created by human beings. Some thrive by snatching the rights and privileges of others. Efforts are being made to give every person his/her due. The awareness of 'Right to Education' is significant because it initiates the process of learning to be equal human beings. To become aware of the rights of individuals and groups one needs to know the skills. Education provides this crucial tool – the Aladin's Chirag. Education is essentially a means to an end. It helps in unearthing the mine of information extending access to so many opportunities and privileges which an uneducated person does not know about. In the absence of such information, one is deprived and cheated of the rights the government and humanity are under obligation to extend. It is useful to know that learning is a life-long process: it is never too late to learn. It is actually wrong to think that learning gets over after the school and college. Education is actually a movement since right to education cannot be realized by waiting for the obligations to be extended by the government and the community. Much less in a society where so much less is spent on education and with distorted priorities.

13.3 BETTER LIFE THROUGH EDUCATION

If we count the achievements of modern society we will find that medical, transport, means of information and so on are the best ones. We can improve our lives by using them. Scores of studies suggest that illiterate people believe more in traditional methods of treatment including black magic. These methods are not scientific and illiterate people, because of centuries of belief in these, tend to get trapped. Education has reached the benefits of new medical inventions to those who have access to scientific knowledge. Education gives access to sources of information and new discoveries and an educated person can reap benefits from the discoveries made world over. It has been found that educated parents use the medical advice and assistance for childbirth and child rearing. It has been seen that ill-educated people have more children than well-educated. All their earnings are spent on providing sub-standard health, education and other amenities of life. Because of low child mortality and immunization facilities, educated people have twenty-five percent less fertility rates. Because of less fertility and a small size family the educated have more money and resources available for other luxuries of life.

Education, besides providing direct access to sources of information, indirectly extends benefits of developments in different areas like health, wealth and happiness. For example, those agriculturists who have access to knowledge tend to select the most appropriate type of crop for their land and also use optimum fertilizer. Knowledgeable people get maximum return for their investment. Those who do not get first hand information from the sources of information depend upon hearsay which is not scientific. Educated people don't have to learn from experience all the time and repeat mistakes made by others,

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3. In the previous section you have read about the benefits of education. Please identify two more benefits that you think come through education.

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13.3.1 Exploitation through education

As against education being an equalising and empowering tool, it can also be used for exploiting others. Education is a handy tool in creating hierarchies in a society. For example, every colonial rule imposes its own system of education, language of education, methods of evaluation etc. which mismatch with the learners' native systems and practices. Explaining the character of Indian education in *Hind Swaraj*, *Gandhiji* said: “Our ancient school system is enough. Character building has the first place in it and that is primary education. A building erected on that foundation will last.” He expressed the view that without weighing the consequences of adopting Western education we gave up our ancient system and this was destined to bring unhappiness.

Children who are educated in a foreign system lose touch with their own system and find it extremely difficult to master an alien system. A foreign system of education brings texts along with examples which glorify a foreign system. Slowly the learners develop a liking for the foreign system and also develop apathy for natives. This apathy for ‘native’ and attraction for ‘foreign’ can be seen not only in educational matters but also spreading into other fields like culture, race, customs, government, country and so on. It is only through education that masses can learn to respect one’s own culture and discard whatever is not conducive to promoting human dignity in one’s culture.

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It is easy to fight colonialism because it is exploitative both in form and content. But exploitation through education is difficult to combat because it wears a progressive garb. Describing modern education of letters *Gandhiji* said "It is merely an instrument and an instrument may be well used or abused. The same instrument that may be used to cure a patient may be used to take his life, and so may a knowledge of letters.” When most human of humane charity - in this case, educational charity - carries an exploitative agenda, it is difficult to counter.

4. Do you think the present system of education is appropriate? Mention your views in the space given below.

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13.3.2 Education for planning development

The development of the skills to read and write in a person may look simple but they have larger implications in the life of a person, a family, a society and a country. An educated person may adopt scientific methods and start using more industrial products, demand more rights and privileges and ultimately may demand a ‘share in the cake’ which the informed ones share by default, as it were, in the absence of the demand from the illiterate. Education is the process to power and higher the degree of education more empowerment would follow to the person, family,
society or country. Educated individual is expected to take socially rational decisions based on scientific process of decision making just as an educated society is expected to take globally rational decisions. This is also reflected in the development profile of states in India.

In the years after independence Kerala has developed very much where as Bihar has not done so well. We examined the case of female literacy, and number of schools and teachers in primary schools compared to mortality rate of children and consumption of power per capita, number of telecom lines per thousand population. It was found that compared with Bihar:

- Kerala has more schools, less students per teacher
- Kerala had less mortality rate among children
- Kerala had high per capita consumption of power
- Kerala had more telephone lines per 1000 persons as and so on.

It is apparent that where we have more literacy, we have high life expectancy. Education was given a high priority in the planning of Kerala in the past and they have now attained a level where life is more secure and comfortable.

The latest Human Development Report (2000) has boldly announced that there is no cure better than education is relieving Indian women from the rampant and inhuman cruelties of domestic violence. Educating women has proved particularly beneficial in this regard, the Report claims.

The key activity of modern societies is planning. Through plans and policies made today, the resources and powers of tomorrow are ensured. Those who plan are qualified to plan because they understand the benefits of planning. If this understanding is extended to masses, planning would be more equitable. The participation of all in the decision making process can be ensured only through education. Once educated, masses cannot be ignored, far less discriminated against. Every one can become part of the decision making process.

Education is thus an important empowering tool. Education you may have notice, is one of the most important agents of mobility and change - individual and social. This tool will decide the fate of individuals and groups in times to come. Such a situation was envisaged by the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution and they made provisions for the education of the masses at least at three places under three Articles namely Art. 41, 45 and 46.

5. If you are asked to review the subjects taught in the elementary classes which subjects would you like to drop and which would you like to introduce and why?

13.3.3 Administering education in India

The notion of ‘Right to Education’ encompasses larger issue beyond the simplequestion of admission to a school. Somewhere we have to make a beginning however. In fact this dilemma has always remained. Article 45 made it mandatory for the Government to make educational provisions for children below the age of 14 by saying that “The State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” But the force of the Article 45 was diluted by the provisions made in Article 41. Through the 42nd amendment to the
Constitution, Education which was till then a State subject was transferred to the Concurrent list making it a joint responsibility of the Central and the State Governments.

Let us also be clear that just making provisions for education is not enough. Unequal quality of education will give birth to unequal competition and as a consequence inequality in society. Only when education of equal quality is extended there can be real competition and equal distribution of facilities and privileges. The UN Convention held in 1989 on the ‘Right of the Child’ recognized the right to education. India was one of the signatories of this Convention which made it mandatory for India to make primary education (i.e. education of children up to the age of 14) compulsory and free. But this goal is evading the Indian planners even after 50 years of independence.

Some important steps have been taken by the government and non-governmental agencies in this area. Foremost of course, is the Supreme Court decision in the Unnikrishnan Vs Andhra Pradesh. The court decreed that "every child/citizen of this country has a right to free education until he completes the age of fourteen years. Thereafter his right to education is subject to the limits of economic capacity and development of the state”.

The demand to right to education is finally taking a shape in the form of ‘right to primary education’ for which reportedly, a bill is likely to be placed in the ‘Parliament’ shortly. There has been a good variety of programmes launched in the country to combat problems of illiteracy. Among others, they include Operation Blackboard, Teacher Education, Minimum Levels of Learning and the District Primary Education Programme funded externally by the World Bank. The National Literacy Mission claims to have raised the level of literacy from 52% to 62% in the country. Besides, there are inspiring innovative experiments in educating the society going on in the country. Ekalavya (Hosangabad), Lok Jumbis (Rajasthan), Education Guarantee Scheme (MP) etc. are some of the prominent examples. The government expenditure on education is also on the rise. Since the inception of planning in 1950-51, spending on education as a promotion of GNP has increased from 1.5% to 3.9% but as can be seen, much more remains to be done than is the case so far.

6. Find out about any such educational programme going on in your area and write about its merits.

The concept of right to education entails two very different things. It can mean equal right to everyone to receive education and right to equal education to everyone. Provision for maintaining schools have been made in all parts of the country; but it is not difficult to notice a great difference in infrastructure and teacher attendance. The public schools are so ill-maintained that most people like to send their children to the private schools (Privately owned and managed schools are often misleadingly called public schools). Most people first want to send their children to public schools but as these schools don't perform well they discontinue sending children because it is found to be a wasteful exercise. The survey conducted by the Public Report On Basic Education (PROBE) team in rural U.P., Bihar, M.P. and Rajasthan presents a very gloomy picture of the facilities in public schools. There are no blackboards, chalks and also most often the teachers were absent from the schools. As against this, it has been found that in the state of Himachal Pradesh, the public schools were made to function efficiently. Himachal Pradesh has also moved to the top position in the scale of social development among states in India.
13.4 ACCESS Vs. SUCCESS IN EDUCATION

One of the first hurdles in making education available is the issue of access to educational institutions. Access involves two key concepts—physical and socio-linguistic access. It has been pointed out time and again that location of a school influences accessibility. Quite often the most powerful person or the powerful community influences the decision of the location of a school in a village or town. There are no roads connecting the school to the areas of the less privileged. The less-privileged children have to walk down the difficult terrains to reach the school, which tire them and often influence their punctuality and achievement in the long run.

The schools, which are said to be free, in fact demand expenditure in terms of transport, passage, roads etc. if learners do not have to commute on foot. Before deciding on the location of a school it is important to ensure that all learners have physically friendly access to the school. Constantly lagging behind children undergo humiliation and finally dropout. Even though access to education is a major issue but it is not the only issue.

The Fifth All India Educational Survey says that 94.5 percent of the rural population had primary schools within one km and 83.98 percent had upper primary school within 3 kms, which sounds reasonable as far as providing infrastructure facilities are considered. Besides the issue of physical accessibility is the issue of social accessibility. The norms and processes of schools, the dress, the seating arrangement etc. do not normally subscribe to the social norms of the less-privileged children. Some children do not find any difference between the home and the school norms, for example, behaviourally and linguistically. Their total energy and concentration is devoted to learning activities but some find the home and the school norms totally different. Such children feel out of place in schools and suffer mentally and psychologically. They cannot concentrate. Often, they feel discriminated. Poverty denies human rights to their children. But as the latest Human Development Report (2000) has indicated, education especially universal elementary education is the best cure for removal of child labour problems in India.

7. Which language would you prefer to be used as the medium of instruction English or in other tongue? Give reasons,

13.4.1 Child labour and the Right of the Child

The right to education is directly related to the abolition of child labour. Quite often we are confronted with data that abolition of child labour would cost heavens; but unless and until children are debarred from working they cannot go to school. According to one report nearly 10 crore children were employed as labourers during mid 1990s. The inclination of the poor parents and children themselves would be great to make an earning out of living. Immediate needs overshadow the long term needs. Studies have proved that there is high desire for education but most of the times opportunities are not available. Neither the Governments nor the society can be spared this responsibility of providing necessary facilities so that every child is attracted to the school.

At the back of the mind of those who are involved in providing learning facilities, particularly to the less privileged, is that they are doing a charity. This notion must be dispensed. Receiving equitable educational facilities is a right of every individual and those involved in expediting it are welcome but they should not make it a tool of further exploitation.
Education cannot be seen in isolation. It is one of the many sub-systems like administrative, police, government etc. which mutually influence each other. We cannot expect a radical education system in a conservative society, which is still hierarchically arranged on colonial power patterns. By and large Indian institutions and systems still follow colonial power ethics. This actually calls for raising voice to change other sub-systems to make provision of education more democratic, equitable, and accessible.

13.5 ROLE OF MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN EDUCATION

To carry on the process of education we need a language – as the medium of education. The choice of language is crucial as it drastically influences not only the process but also the success of learners. Most often the language of education in Indian schools is either English or one of the National Languages of India. On close examination we find that English is neither the mother tongue nor the first language of most Indians. Similarly, most Indians speak in a language which is not one of the National Languages but a dialect of these languages. In the case of learners who speak a dialect, they find it difficult to concentrate on the content of the subject because they have to first concentrate on the language used, understand it, and then understand the contents. In such a situation, don’t you think every learner has the right to get education in one’s mother tongue?

Programme evaluation of students (for success or failure) is usually done for understanding the content. Language is only a catalytic agent in these cases. The natural question, which arises, is why not provide the needed range of opportunities to all students to study in their own mother tongue. The choice of one language as against the other as the medium of instruction puts some above the others and it has been seen with English language that a particular medium of instruction seeks to put one set of learners over many others because of the system’s bias in favour of it.

13.6 DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING

The present system and structure of teaching-learning does not encourage original thinking and equity oriented education. Instead it develops a tendency to follow first the teacher and later the boss. The traditional Indian system of education has been inquiry-oriented. That is why the classical texts are in the form of question and answer. From what we know, the Gurukul also followed a system of inquiry from students and answers from fellow students and the teacher. The present system is information oriented which gives a secondary status to knowledge and wisdom. More dangerous is the fact that information of things alien to us are imparted in abundance but leave us totally ignorant about our surrounding. Once people get educated these issues will come up and transform not only the system of education but also the content of education i.e. the curriculum will change.

Priorities have to be decided upon by the Government and the beneficiaries as well. It becomes a chicken and egg question. Should education precede health care, eradication of child labor, provision for decent accommodation or these would precede education. The widely accepted and more forceful argument these days is that education must precede everything as the capacity to realize and utilize optimally the provisions of health and child care and hygiene cannot be made without education. One of the major hurdles posed in making educational provisions is that learners are not ready, there is no demand for it. To explain the situation precisely it has been mentioned that learners i.e. children will have to be pulled out from industries and household jobs which will cost a lot of money. The families surviving on these wages would need assistance. The other argument is that because the illiterate people have not realized the importance of education,
they keep being exploited generation after generation. Should education not be made compulsory by Constitutional amendment so that the children up to the age of fourteen compulsorily attend school? Article 111.24 (a Fundamental Right) of our Constitution has clearly pronounced that “No child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any hazardous employment” but still millions of children are employed for hazardous work in different sectors. Besides children are employed to do household jobs and often subjected to inhuman treatments. Can we create a system where economic capacity of the families can be enhanced leading naturally to a situation where the children engaged in hazardous works today are freed to pursue education. Education cannot be planned in isolation; it is an important component of social development. In this route one can see the practical possibilities of realizing the goal of ‘Education for All’ which will lay the crucial cornerstone for the Right to Education.

13.7 LET US SUM UP

Education is the gateway to success in life. It is one of the tools which makes people aware of the disparities, processes of creating and finally re-emerging disparities and develops equity in society. The importance of education is not realised by all. Some people have monopolised the provisions made for education and others are scared of joining the group and sceptical about their capabilities in receiving education. Education has been thought to bring about a qualitative difference in the life of individuals and groups.

To bring about a social change through information about the provisions of education and the right of every individual to education it is expected that the demand for education will grow. This consciousness can be brought about through the process of education itself. It is one of the most important responsibilities of the governments and people involved in human affairs to find means and ways to make it available to all on an equitable basis.

13.8 SUGGESTED READINGS


13.9 ANSWERS TO ASSIGNMENTS

Sit with a class fellow or an interested person and argue your points of view on Right to Education in respect of eight assignments given above. What is important in this connection is to develop critical thinking and not to blindly succumb to forces and arguments just because they are current or they come from sources which are otherwise influential.