



Mains Practice Question

Q. Analyze the role of education in addressing social inequalities in India. Has the Right to Education Act achieved its objectives?

14 Oct, 2024 GS Paper 1 Indian Society

Approach:

- Introduce the answer by highlighting the significance of education
- Give supporting arguments to Role of Education in Addressing Social Inequalities
- Propose the Evaluation of the Right to Education Act's Objectives of Social Inclusion
- Cite Right to Education Act's limitations
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction:

Education is a **transformative tool in bridging social disparities**, especially in India, where caste, class, and gender inequalities remain significant. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act), aims to universalize quality education and foster social inclusion.

Body

Role of Education in Addressing Social Inequalities:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Education equips individuals with skills and knowledge necessary for **better employment opportunities and economic independence**.
 - **Example:** The success story of **Kalpana Saroj**, resembles that of "**Slumdog Millionaire**," as she transitions from a **Dalit child bride** to a **multi-millionaire**.
- **Social Mobility:** Education provides opportunities for **upward social mobility, allowing individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds** to improve their socio-economic status.
 - **Example:** The story of **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, who came from a Dalit background and went on to become one of India's most prominent leaders and the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, exemplifies how education can facilitate social mobility.
- **Gender Equality:** Education plays a crucial role in empowering women and promoting gender equality.
 - **Example:** The **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme** has set up residential schools for girls from marginalized communities, improving their access to education.
- **Breaking Caste Barriers:** Education helps in breaking down caste-based discrimination by promoting interaction and understanding among different social groups.
 - **Example:** The **mid-day meal scheme in schools has been successful in breaking caste barriers**, as children from different castes eat together.
- **Awareness and Empowerment:** Education raises awareness about rights, social issues, and government schemes, empowering marginalized communities to assert their rights.
 - **Example:** The **Right to Information Act** is partly attributed to increased awareness through education.

Evaluation of the Right to Education Act's Objectives of Social Inclusion:

- **Increased Enrollment:** The RTE Act has significantly improved school enrollment rates, particularly for disadvantaged groups. (**Economic Survey 2023-24** reports India has **26.52 crore students** in schools and **4.33 crore** in higher education)
- **Infrastructure Development:** The Act has led to improvements in school infrastructure, making education more accessible. (More than **90% of schools provide potable tap water, with 95.5% of government schools** having toilets for boys and **97.4% having toilets for girls**)
- **Inclusion of Disadvantaged Groups:** The **25% reservation for economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups** in private schools has promoted social inclusion.
- **Focus on Quality Education:** The Act emphasizes the importance of quality education, including norms for **pupil-teacher ratios and teacher qualifications**. (The **UDISEPlus 2021-22** data shows India's pupil-teacher ratio averaging **26:1 for primary, 19:1 for upper primary, 17:1 for secondary, and 27:1** for higher secondary education)

Limitations:

- **Quality Concerns:** While enrollment has improved, the quality of education remains a concern, particularly in government schools. (**ASER 2023** report reveals that about **25% of youth in the age group of 14-18** still cannot read a Class 2 level text fluently in their regional language)
- **Implementation Gaps:** Uneven implementation of the Act across states has led to disparities in its effectiveness. (While states like **Kerala have achieved near-universal elementary education**, others like Bihar still struggle with high dropout rates).
- **Teacher Shortages:** Many schools face teacher shortages, affecting the quality of education. (As per **Ministry of Education data**, there were over **10 lakh teacher vacancies** in government schools across India).
- **Exclusion of Certain Groups:** Despite improvements, certain groups like children with disabilities and migrant children continue to face exclusion. (**75% of children with disabilities** do not attend schools in India: **UNESCO**)
 - Also, the gender gap widens in secondary school (Class 9 and 10), with girls **dropping to 47.9% of enrolled children**.
- **Private School Resistance:** Some private schools have resisted the **25% reservation clause, citing financial constraints**. (In 2020, many private schools in Delhi threatened to shut down due to **non-reimbursement of fees for EWS students**)

Conclusion:

To truly harness the potential of education in addressing social inequalities, India needs to focus on **improving the quality of education, ensuring effective implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 in consonance with National Education Policy 2020 across all states**, and addressing the specific needs of the most disadvantaged groups. **Only then can education become a true equalizer in Indian society, bridging social, economic, and cultural divides.**