PREFACE

Educational right captures an important reality for India’s millions of children who can be rightfully termed as social categories at risk of exclusion. These social groups have been the victims of multiple forms of silent and loud emergencies such as hunger, poverty, destitution and children trafficked by armed and conflict emergencies. These children have been systematically deprived of education of minimum quality while some of them remain ever beyond the reach of formal schooling.

The irony is that their educational deprivation obtains at the backdrop of India’s most enabling Constitutional guarantees, judicialities and legislatures that are well equipped to protect and uplift the pathetic existential conditions of these social groups. In the educational domain, these Constitutional guarantees and legislatures were further buttressed when India became a signatory to EFA declaration, the Dakar Framework for Action, The Millennium Development Goals and implementation of various laudable educational schemes meant for the deprived sections of our community. The civil society actors play watchdog role and campaigners for bringing the unreached into the ambit of basic education. Strangely enough, against such developments, the educational position of the disadvantaged children continues to be at a pitiable position, being at the bottom of the heap; and thereby leaving out millions of population as illiterates while they are capable of being educated citizens.

Therefore, under all these circumstances, the rights agenda to Education for All is not a straightforward task and profoundly challenging for an extremely hierarchicised social order that is unique to India. Its further implication is that, the right to education for all and its realisation goes well beyond the territory of education policies and projects alone. This calls for a paradigm shift of an inclusive and participatory approach to education for all by bridging the straddles between educational right and social, political and economic rights of people.

However, the tradeoffs of securing these rights of the people are fraught with tension, violence and stubborn social norms of exclusion, but can be challenged through state proactive and strong legislations by creating an enabling environment of the disadvantaged children. The present research study has attempted to delve into some of these contending issues and complexities by examining the nuanced socio-economic, political and cultural features of the disadvantaged social groups.
The emerging issues and problems raised in the study has led one to be insightful to such complexities and contradictions that have been largely marginalised in popular educational discourse both among the academicians and policy concerns. It is these contradictions and paradoxes that have prompted me to reflect and engage in the present research project. My critical reflection and passionate engagement in this way could not possibly take roots if I was not a part of various civil society groups at Indian Social Institute. These groups routinely engage in education issues-its agenda, projects, policies including the Right to Education Bill.

It can be recalled that it is during this routine engagement that I, being a part of this group brought out a critical short write up on the Right to Education Bill, proposed by the NDA government. The paper was distributed among institutions of Catholic schools in Delhi and the group. As the Bill was brought to the knowledge and conscience of the public, various academicians, researchers, social activist, teachers in various parts of the country started reflecting critically in the form of seminars, workshops, discussions and gradually gained nationwide momentum that culminated in the form national seminar held at Delhi. The contributors came out strongly against the historical shift of education from the List of Directive Principles of State Policy to Fundamental Rights. Making education a fundamental right was an issue raised way back in the year 1947 but without success, since if elementary education as a fundamental right, if to be translated into action, was profoundly challenging and difficult for a country where millions are living in emergencies due to poverty, hunger, ignorance, mass illiteracy and violence of all kinds etc. Secondly, by shifting education to Fundamental Right, it pushes every responsibility on parents for educating their children and in case schools remain non-functional, it is the responsibility of parents to report to the court. Without going deeper about the Bill, understanding this much itself sounds extremely difficult and challenging since making the Bill workable for children particularly of poor families, toiling masses and disadvantaged children requires these parents to be fully empowered. This is precisely the reason why enforcing the Bill in its original form and making it workable requires societal transformations, not just reforms in education sector alone. Are we prepared for it? The answer lies with the people, neither with the policy makers nor with the policy implementers. That is precisely why I argue, that to me, Educational Right for Children has a universal appeal. For a matter of fact, it is relevant to examine and study a Bill of this kind even for Kerala state which claims to have achieved
100% literacy rate, whereas, the truth is, in Kerala there are children who have not yet seen the door of a school. Therefore, the present research engagement I would admit is just a tip of an iceberg.

Despite such understanding and relevance of a study of this kind for all regions in the country, I must admit, I chose Manipur state, not solely because I am a native of the region, but precisely because, the state unlike any other region poses the greatest challenge. It is this thought provoking challenge that has caused tension, anxiety and restlessness in me, often pondering, if I as a researcher could have an opportunity to passionately engage and translate this thought process in the form of a research study. Armed with this idea, I approached Professor Avijit Pathak to be my supervising professor.

Engaging in a doctoral thesis of this kind is thus a product of the heightened complex paradoxical times we are living. I am truly grateful to my country, India, for it showers on us immense possibilities of exploring and engaging in our timeless curiosity and anxiety. The present doctoral thesis was born out of this journey of exploration and curiosity of our paradoxical times. It is also a part of one’s thought processes, imaginations, possibilities, hopes and aspirations. But taking forward such exploration in a doctoral thesis in its present form would not have been possible had not Professor Avijit Pathak supervised my entire doctoral journey. In fact, it can be recalled that when I was passionately charged and ready to engage in my doctoral thesis, Professor Pathak hardly took few minutes while deciding to be the supervisor of my thesis. Right from the start of this noble journey of engagement in the doctoral thesis, his contribution to the present doctoral thesis remained till the end of the journey of the thesis. I am eternally grateful to Professor Avijit Pathak for his support throughout this journey. Professor Avijit Pathak is a professor who does not profess; but one who truly believes in constant nurturing of the possibilities and the potential in each of us. This, I realise in my dialogical relationship with Pathak Sir during the journey of engaging in this doctoral thesis. This in turn has instilled unshaken strength and faith in me. This incalculable value that Pathak Sir possesses is itself a lifelong learning experience from him, truly larger than the doctoral thesis itself. Above all, his austere living mode and overall philosophy of life has unintended influence on me, reposing a sense of empowerment in me and making life more fulfilling.
I am indeed grateful to all those researchers, academicians, teachers, social activists and lawyers who shared common platform with me during the course of our engagement in dialogue and discussions on an issue as important as the ‘right to education’. Their constant company, engagement and solidarity gave me tremendous strength on the immense possibilities of bringing about change in the face of extremely challenging political environment of our times.

I am truly indebted to all my respondents specially the toiling parents, who despite their hectic and busy schedule interacted with me, sharing with me passionately on the issue of my research and all those teachers, children, Secretary, Bethel School and Father M.C George. I am thankful to Jogita, Programme manager and animator, Jimy, of Bosco Mangaal for giving me sufficient time despite their busy office schedule and going out of their way helping in my efforts of gaining insights into the noble works of Bosco Mangaal. I am indeed thankful to Tamo Ramananda Yelam for his constant intellectual engagement and sharing his lived experience of societal crisis of today’s Manipuri society.

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