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Access to Education in Darrang District: A Study in the light of Education for All (EFA) Goals

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Abstract

Education is the most important means for an individual through which he or she can develop his/her personality and can live a dignified life. In a developing society, formal education becomes a fundamental prerequisite for improving a person's status. Now education is recognized as a Human Right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 26 states that "Everybody has the right to education, hence the right accuses to all individuals, although children are understood as main beneficiary". The fact is that it is the birth right of every man and woman and the state is required to ensure it to the citizens. Recognition of right to education provides the opportunity for a child in building the capacity of self sustenance in his/her life. It also helps children to know their rights and gain confidence in their claim for enhancing status in society. Although international and national legal laws have been formulated to make education as a right for all but the task of making right to education available for all children along with ensuring quality education has been proved to be a difficult one due to various problems. In this paper an attempt has been made to study about the realization of Education for All (EFA) goals in terms of access and enrolment in Darrang district of Assam.

Key Words: Access, Enrolment, Education for All, Darrang District.

Introduction: Rights are the precondition for development of ones personality. Right to education for a person in this context is one of the prerequisites for a country's progress and development and is explicitly linked with the criteria for development like improving public health, poverty reduction, gender equality and increasing the level of democratic participation. Both education and development lead to a rapid socio-economic progress of a nation and thus democracy can be made successful both as a form of government and as a way of life. The inevitable relationship between literacy and development demands that primary education must be provided to every child. Recognizing this fact efforts have been made to make right to education free and compulsory for all children both at the national and international level. The commitment of the world community for peace, progress and prosperity lead us to accept education as a Human Right for all that is bounded by legal

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enforcement. In this research paper an attempt is made to study about the realization of Education for All (EFA) goals in terms of access and enrolment in Darrang district of Assam.

Objectives: The objectives of this study are—

1. To study about the international legal framework for educational rights in terms of Education for All (EFA) Goals.
2. To study about the realization of EFA goals in Darrang district in terms of Access and enrolment.

Methodology: This study is a descriptive analytical study. The data pertaining to this study have been collected from secondary sources like official statistics of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), books, internet and SSA publications.

The Legal Framework: In 1945, many countries of the world came together for the establishment of peace and humanity and also to make a commitment to respect the dignity of human being all over the world. A remarkable declaration was made in the human history in the form of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 that describes the nature and extent of human rights encompassing a number of social, political, economic and cultural rights of individuals in a great detail. Amongst many other rights, the right to education was recognized as a human right for all.

Article 26 of the UDHR stipulates that-

“Everybody has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory...”

This suggests that education should be accessible to all people. There are many people all over the world who are not able to attend school because of disabilities, child marriage, child labour, poverty, school related violence, far distance to school and many other reasons. A part from these there are also children who dropout of school or those who attend school and still do not acquire basic literacy skill. Article 26 of UDHR addressing all these issues has declared for free and compulsory education for all children and inspires the international community to take necessary steps in this regard.

Between 1976 and 1990s a series of international covenants and conventions were promulgated which provided a comprehensive legal basis for required measures to protect and deliver human rights. The earliest two of these, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), together with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) have been proclaimed by the United Nations to constitute the International Bill on Human Rights. They contain the provisions on compulsory and free primary education, and non-discrimination in education, that were first set out in the 1948 Declaration. The two more recent conventions--- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), contains the most comprehensive sets of legally enforceable

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commitments concerning both right to education and gender equality. CEDAW includes provision for ending gender discrimination by saying that there shall be no distinction in the extent of educational provision for women and men. Again CRC is the most widely accepted human rights treaty and contains strong guarantees of the right to education. It reaffirms the rights of every child, without discrimination of any kind to free and compulsory primary schooling.¹

Aside from these legal international enforcements, the *Education for All* movement was launched as a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children. The nations of the world gathered at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in March 5-9, 1990, in Jomtien (Thailand) and adopted a declaration to take effective steps for achievement of EFA by the year 2000. The most important goal of the EFA declaration was Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), to be made accessible by all children up to the 14 years of age. But the international community had to meet again in 2000, in Dakar, Senegal as the world missed out the goal of UEE. The 164 governments that assembled in Dakar platform adopted another set of six ambitious goals on education. These goals are set out with a view to expand the learning opportunities for all children, youth and adults by 2015.

The Education for All (EFA) Goals²:

Goal 1—***Expand early childhood care and education***: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Goal 2—***Provide free and compulsory primary education for all***: Ensuring that by 2015, all children, particularly girls' children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Goal 3—***Promote learning and life skill for young people and adults***: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skill programme.

Goal 4—***Increase adult literacy by 50 percent***: Achieving a 50 percent improvement in all level of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Goal 5—***Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015***: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Goal 6—***Improve the quality of education***: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all specially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Out of these six goals, three are time bound goals to be achieved by the targeted year 2015. At the United Nations Millennium Summit also in 2000, the world leaders adopted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals are also set to be achieved

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within a timeframe period by 2015. The MDGs encompassed a wide range of goals from the reduction of extreme poverty and child mortality, to improve access to water and sanitation, progress in cutting infectious diseases and strengthened gender equality. Specific target in the field of education is set to achieve universal primary school completion and gender parity at all levels of schooling by 2015. In this regard the Dakar Framework targets and the MDGs are complementary. Progress in education depends on advances in other areas, including the reduction of extreme poverty, the achievement of gender equity and improvement in child health. Children whose lives are blighted with hunger, poverty and disease are clearly not equipped to realize their potential in education. As such without fulfilment of the MDGs the ambition for EFA can not be achieved and in the same way progress towards MDG's targets depends critically on progress in education.³

Since independence, India has implemented a number of programmes and schemes in the field of primary education to realize the constitutional commitment for providing education as a fundamental right for all people. There has been a considerable progress in the field of primary education in providing Education for All (EFA) goals. However, enrolment and retention is not the only criteria for achieving the EFA goals. The matter of quality education still remains a major concern for all and we are still lagging behind in this specific area. The SSA which has been implementing to ensure fundamental right to education for the children is a decentralized programme. Through SSA the aim of EFA is sought to be attained by need based and decentralized planning, enhance community participation and by involving the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in matters of school management and supervision. The SSA is an integrated effort to enhance the efficiency of the schooling system and to ensure building of community ownership for quality elementary education.

After 2001-2002, with the launching of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) new strategies have been adopted to improve the educational scenario of Darrang district. The broad strategies adopted by SSA in Darrang focuses on the institutional reforms. These includes reform in educational administration, financial issues, decentralization, deployment and recruitment of teachers, early childhood care etc. It has also adopted the strategy to ensure involvement of community in the whole process of Universalisation of Elementary Education. This calls for the involvement of women groups, village education council members and Panchayati Raj Institution members.

Since its implementation SSA has been giving priority to girls' education and special focus has been given on education of children from S.C., S.T., minority groups, urban deprived children, children of other disadvantaged groups and children with special needs. For enhancing the status of girls' education and to provide educational facilities especially for the girls belonging to the disadvantageous communities SSA has been encompassing two important National Schemes for girls' education specifically- NPEGEL and KGVB. Under these two schemes, girls from S.C., S.T., and minority communities are being admitted in school and are being provided residential facilities in Darrang.

Besides these with a view to mainstream the out of school children, alternative schooling facilities are being provided by establishing ‘Amar Parhashali’ under Education Guaranty Scheme (EGS Centres) in those areas where there is shortage of primary schools. Here EGS centres have been conceptualized to provide access to schools to those children who are deprived of schooling for non-availability of schools within a walkable distance. The official statistics of SSA, Darrang reveals that since 2002, total numbers of 292 EGS centres have been established in Darrang and all these 292 centres are being upgraded to government primary schools in 2013-14.

Let us here make an assessment of the performance of SSA in providing access to education for children in Darrang district.

Literacy Rate:

Table-1.1: Literacy Rate of India, Assam and Darrang, 2011

State	Literacy Rate (%)		
	T	M	F
India	74.0	82.1	65.5
Assam	73.2	78.8	67.3
Darrang	64.3	68.3	60.4

Source: Census Report, 2011 (provisional)

From Table-1.1, it is revealed that the literacy rate of Assam is slightly lower (73.2 %) than the national average (74.0 %). There is also a difference in male literacy rate which is higher in case of India (82.1 %) than Assam (78.8 %). On the other hand female literacy rate of Assam is slightly higher (67.2%) than the national average (65.5%). The literacy rate of Darrang district is much lower (64.3%) than both national and state average including the male (68.3%) and female (60.4%) literacy rate.

Concerted efforts during the last few years have resulted in the increase in the number of schools, teachers and students enrolment. According to the sources of DISE, 2012-13, at present there are total number of 1065 government primary schools running under the Department of Elementary Education in Darrang district. The total numbers of government elementary schools are provided in Table- 4.14.

Table-1.2: Total Number of Government Elementary Schools in Darrang.

School Category	Numbers
Lower Primary	675
Upper Primary	76
Primary + Upper Primary	22
EGS upgraded	292
Total	1065

Source: SSA, Darrang, 2014-15.

In Table-1.2, it is seen that in Darrang district the number of government lower primary school is 675 and government upper primary school is 76. Besides these, there are 22 schools which are composite schools, having both primary and upper primary level. As already mentioned SSA has established 292 EGS centres (*Amar Parhashali*) which have been upgraded to government primary schools recently. Thus, the total number of government elementary school in Darrang is 1065.

Table-1.3: Number of Enrolment in Government Elementary Schools in Darrang.

Year	Enrolment	
	Primary	Upper primary
2002-03	116019	56124
2003-04	134329	61456
2004-05	146865	63386
2005-06	147349	66857
2006-07	220154	89599
2007-08	217031	94826
2008-09	213066	98725
2009-10	172955	95225
2010-11	194543	98228
2011-12	110232	54520
2012-13	131628	50040
2014-15	106895	26463

Source: District Elementary Education Report Card, DISE.

Table- 1.3 shows that since 2002-03 enrolment in both primary and upper primary level have been increasing gradually till 2006-07 (116019 to 220154) in primary and (56124 to 89599) upper primary level. But after 2007-08, enrolment in primary level declined. Number of enrolment in primary level has declined from 217031 in 2007-08 to 131628 in 2012-13. Again number of enrolment in the upper primary level also declined from 94826 in 2007-08 to 50040 in 2012-13. The decrease in number of enrolment was basically due to separation of Udalguri district from Darrang in 2003 and the government educational statistics were jointly available till 2008-09. After 2009-10 statistics were separated officially. But it is seen that in new Darrang the number of enrolment after 2009-10 has been again decreased in both primary and upper primary level till 2014-15. According to official sources increase in enrolment in private schools has been resulted in the decrease of enrolment in government schools.

It is no doubt that after making primary education as free and compulsory for all children the rate of educational enrolment has been increased since the last few years but the target to reach all the children between the age group of 6-14 years is yet to be achieved even after ten years of declaring right to education as fundamental right in India.

The right to education as a Fundamental Right given by the Constitution of India and the implementation of The Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 has special implications for the strategies adopted by SSA. In order to implement RTE provisions and EFA goals through the SSA vision, special targets are set to provide meaningful access, equity and quality education. The RTE Act demands that meaningful access requires not only enrolment but also high retention and transition through classes with no repetition. Question of quality education relates to good infrastructural facilities, textbooks, teaching learning materials, teachers training etc. At the same time equity issues are associated with the equitable education of all children including girls belonging to socially disadvantaged groups removing the social, regional and sex differences.

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