

# Challenges Of Implementation Of Right To Education (RTE) Act 2009 For Children In The 10 - 14 Age Group In West Bengal

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*Abstract: According to the RTE Act 2009, all children in the age group 6-14 should have right to free and compulsory education. The present study, based on the Census 2011 data, indicates (A) the illiteracy rate for the 10-14 age group, i.e for children who should be attending Upper Primary classes will be a major challenge for the appropriate authorities at the district level in West Bengal and (B) their involvement as Main Worker or Marginal Worker would be further impediment towards the school participation of these children.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 for the children in the 6-14 age group ensures a justiciable fundamental right in India. It has been defined that "Free education' means that no child, other than a child who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate Government, shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education." The Act makes it obligatory for the appropriate Government and local authorities to ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6-14 age group by the term 'Compulsory education'. It is known that India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child when the act came into force on 1 April 2010. It is therefore imperative for the "appropriate authorities", policy planners and administrators to understand the various dimensions of the challenges for implementation of the act and take appropriate decisions accordingly to address the challenges.

A report on the status of implementation of the Act was released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on the one year anniversary of the Act. The report admits that 8.1 million children in the age group six-fourteen remain out of school and there's a shortage of 508,000 teachers country-wide.

The Census 2011 data for the age group 10-14 provides an opportunity to analyse the present literacy and work status of the children in some details for implementation of the ACT.

The set of data on number of illiterate persons and their involvement as "Main Worker" or "Marginal Worker" for the age group 10-14 of Census 2011 data, as available in PCA\_AY\_2011\_REVISED (Special Tabulation on Adolescent and youth population classified by various parameters for India, States and Union Territories - Census of India 2011) is in a way a baseline data for understanding the challenges of implementation of RTE act, for this age cohort.

An attempt will be made in this paper to analyse the implications of the "Literacy Rate" and "Work Status" of the 10-14 age group using the Census 2011 data for West Bengal.

According to the RTE Act 2009:

- ✓ Completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school is now ensured.
- ✓ Admission of a non-admitted child to an age appropriate class is the responsibility of the local authority.
- ✓ The duties and responsibilities of appropriate Governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments has been specified.
- ✓ The norms and standards relating inter alia to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours are laid down.

- ✓ Rational deployment of teachers is required for ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school.
- ✓ Appointment of appropriately trained teachers, i.e. teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications will be required.
- ✓ Prohibition of (a) physical punishment and mental harassment; (b) screening procedures for admission of children; (c) capitation fee; (d) private tuition by teachers and (e) running of schools without recognition is now a law of the land.
- ✓ Development of curriculum in consonance with the values enshrined in the Constitution, and which would ensure the all-round development of the child, building on the child's knowledge, potentiality and talent and making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of child friendly and child centred learning.

The RTE Act 2009 is being implemented in the country with effect from 1st April 2010 and in terms of the said Act all children in the age group 6-14 should be enrolled in the neighbourhood schools for good quality education.

Therefore, all children in the age group 10-14, are supposed to be enrolled at the Upper Primary (classes VI-VIII) under the RTE Act 2009. If the Literacy Rate of the 10-14 age group at any district in the country is not satisfactory, then participation of these children at the school will obviously be doubtful, such phenomena may be identified as one of the challenges for implementation of the said Act. Moreover, the Act directs that the appropriate authorities should take measures that children are enrolled in a school as a regular student for quality education. It will be obvious from the Census 2011 data on number of persons engaged as "Main Worker" or "Marginal Worker" in the age group 10-14, that some children in this age group are not attending school, they are either out of school or irregular in attending the school.

When the socio-economic conditions of the families of these children compel them to be engaged as a "Main Worker" or "Marginal Worker", the opportunity cost of education for these children will be detrimental towards their participation in school education.

It was therefore decided that the situation in respect of above noted issues, as it prevailed in 2010-11 in different districts of West Bengal will be analysed using the relevant Census 2011 data and some challenges will be identified. This understanding may assist the appropriate authorities at different districts of West Bengal to take decisions in drawing up specific plan of actions to address the challenges. However it may so happen that the appropriate authorities might have already taken note of the points raised in this paper as the RTE Act is being implemented for almost four years in 2014, if not noted may call for immediate attention. The findings of this paper will thus have policy implications for implementation of the Right To Education (RTE) act 2009 being implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 in India.

The following diagrams and the paragraphs which are presented here describes a comparison of the proportion of illiterate persons in a district in respect of the total population which will create better understanding of the scenario at the district level and will obviously call for appropriate actions by the policy makers or administrators.

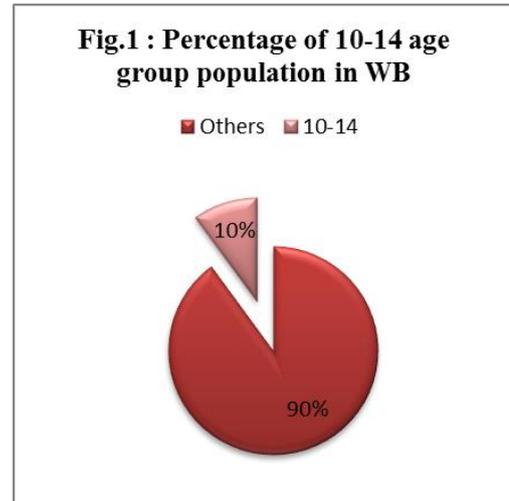


Figure 1

Census 2011 recorded 91,56,523 children in West Bengal, whereas the total population size is 9,12,76,115. This age cohort constitutes 10% of the total population in West Bengal.

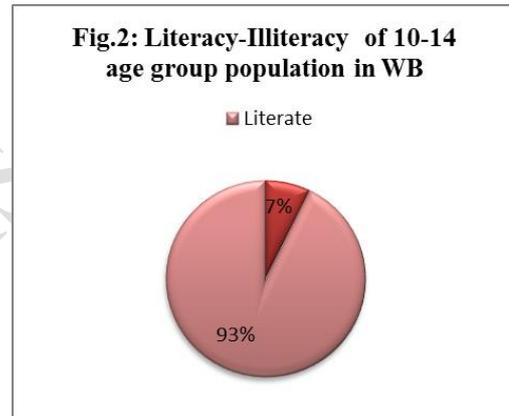


Figure 2

The number of illiterate children of 10-14 age group is 6,64,105 which is 7% of the population of the same age group.

The following diagrams represents the scenario in 2010-11, distribution of illiteracy rates over different districts of West Bengal respectively for the total, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe population. Gender wise distributions are also indicated in the same plot.

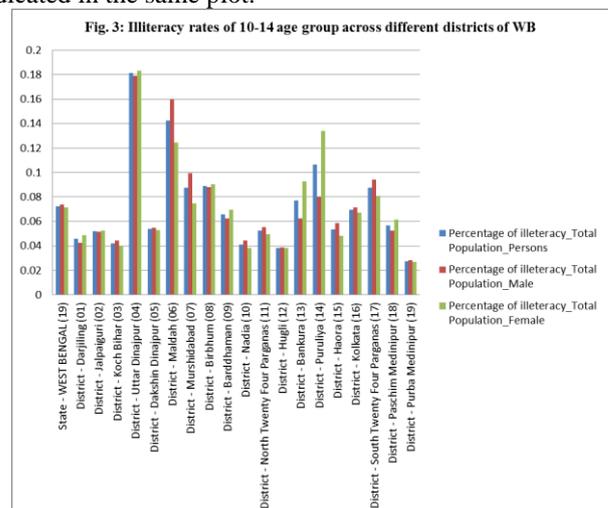


Figure 3

Districts Uttar Dinajpur, Maldah and Puruliya show significantly higher illiteracy rates in the 10-14 age group.

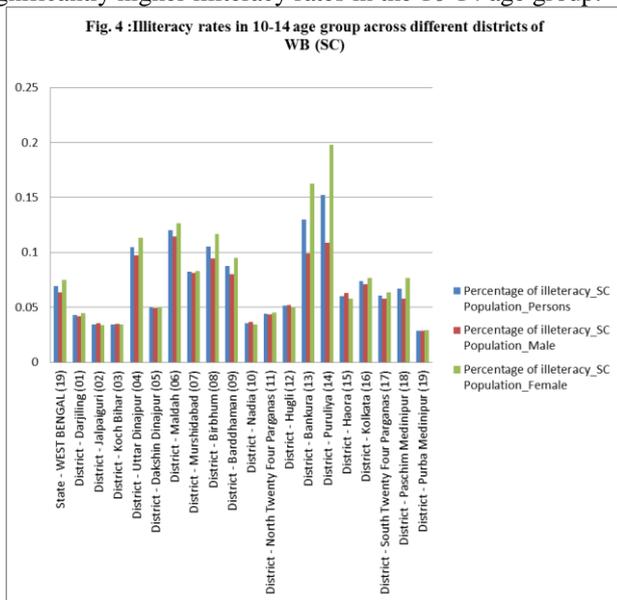


Figure 4

It may be noted that the number illiterate SC persons in the 10-14 age group are significantly higher in the Bankura and Puruliya districts of West Bengal.

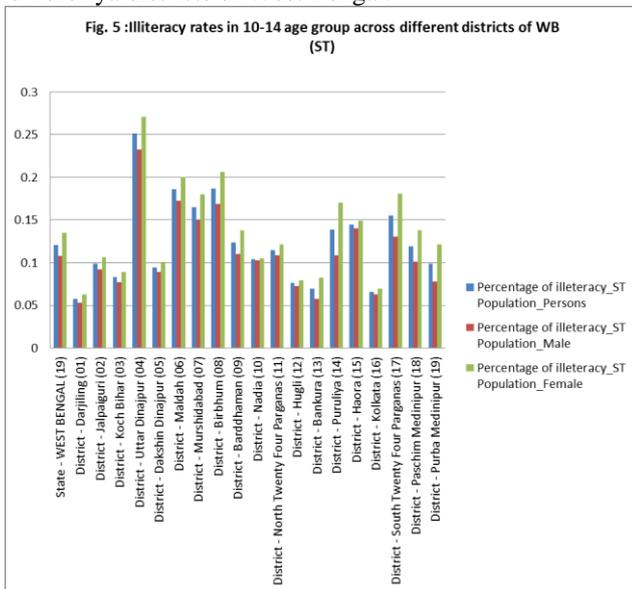


Figure 5

In the districts of Uttar Dinajpur, Birbhum and Maldah the illiterate ST persons in 10-14 age group is significantly higher.

## II. WORK STATUS FOR 10-14 AGE GROUP

According to the RTE act 2009, all children in the age group 6-14 should be admitted in a school in the neighbourhood and complete education up to class VIII level.

It will be interesting to note the concept of work as given in the following lines:

*"Work is defined as participation in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wages or*

*profit. Such participation may be physical and/or mental in nature. Work involves not only actual work but also includes (a) effective supervision and direction of work; (b) part time help or unpaid work on farm, family enterprise or in any other economic activity; and (c) cultivation or milk production even solely for domestic consumption."*

*The Reference period for determining a person as worker and non-worker is one year preceding the date of enumeration.*

*The Census classifies "Workers into two groups namely, Main workers and Marginal workers. Main Workers are those workers who had worked for the major part of the reference period i.e. 6 months or more. Marginal Workers are those workers who had not worked for the major part of the reference period i.e. less than 6 months."*

*The Main workers are classified on the basis of Industrial category of workers into the following four categories:*

- ✓ Cultivators
- ✓ Agricultural Labourers
- ✓ Household Industry Workers and
- ✓ Other Workers

[Source: www.arthapedia.in]

However as will be obvious from the following diagrams and descriptions emanating from the analysis of 2011 Census data of the proportion of 10-14 age group population engaged in "Main Work" or "Marginal Work" in different districts of West Bengal, that a large number of the 10-14 age group children who are supposed to remain present in the school according to the said Act are compelled to join the work force. The situation varies from district to district as well for males and females and for SC-ST categories as compared to general category.

The comparative analysis for different districts will call for some focused district specific attention to address the challenges. The distribution of Main Workers and Marginal Workers over the districts can be seen in the following diagram.

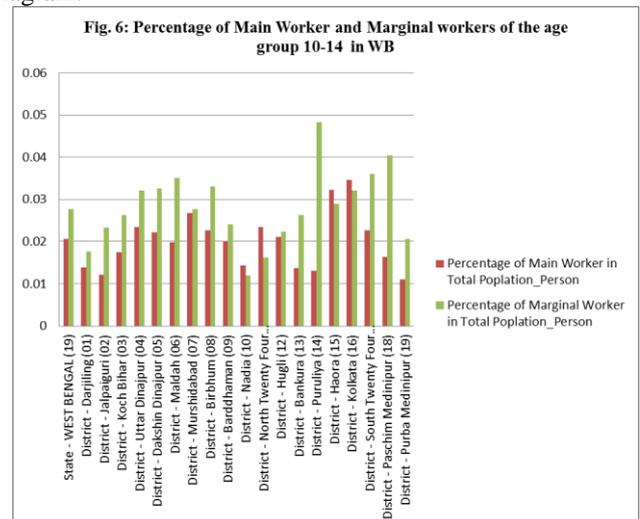
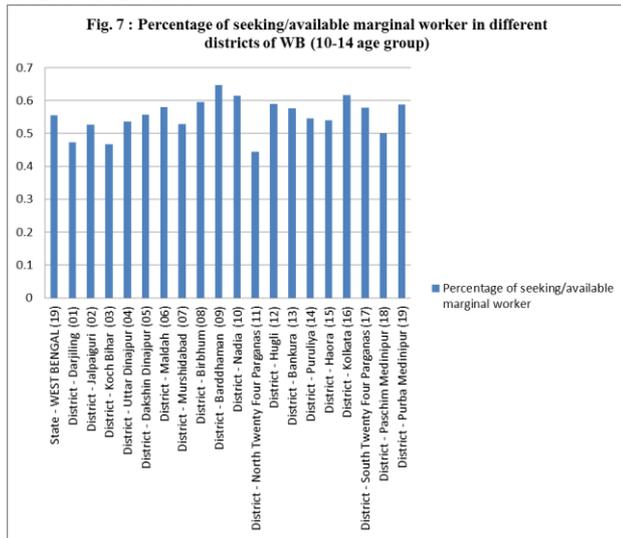


Figure 6

Districts like Uttar Dinajpur, Maldah, Puruliya etc which have lower literacy rates also indicates higher number of Marginal Workers residing in those districts.

Surprisingly the children of age 10-14 are seeking/available for work as a marginal worker in

significantly higher rate. The following graph gives the evidence of the fact.



Source: Table B-1 Main workers, Marginal workers, Non-workers and those marginal workers, non-workers seeking/available for work classified by age and sex (Census 2011)

Figure 7

To find a mathematical measure of this connection between the number of illiterates and number of workers, the correlation coefficient has been obtained. Though the value for the Main Workers is negligible, the higher value for the Marginal Workers (0.533) indicates that the more is the illiteracy rate, even more is the number of children engaged as Marginal Workers.

Correlation between illiterates and main workers(total population, persons)	Correlation between illiterates and marginal workers(total population, persons)
0.2	<b>0.533</b>

Considering one of the districts of West Bengal having higher illiteracy rate e.g. in Uttar Dinajpur, the distributions of workers are plotted as follows. In this district around 18% percent children of age 10-14 of the total population are illiterate. 5% of the total population are in the work force as main or marginal workers. Most of them are indulged in agricultural work (Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers).

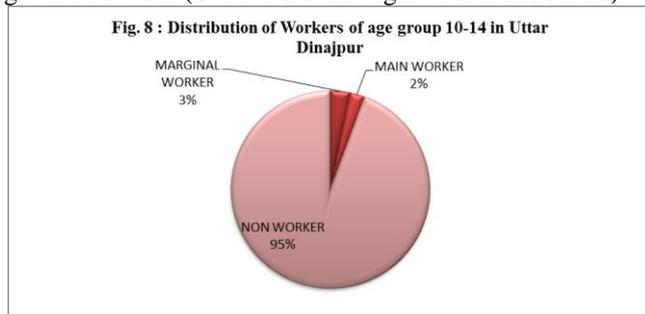


Figure 8

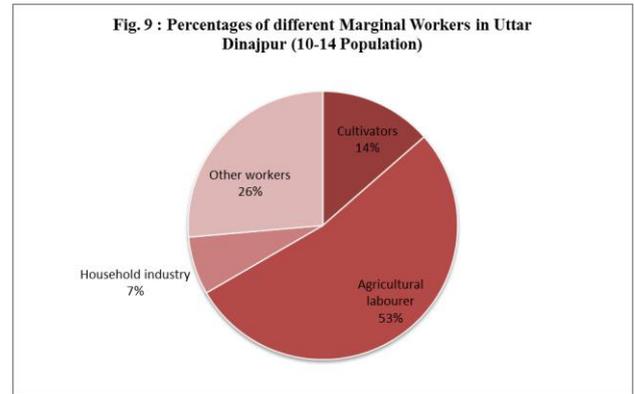


Figure 9

### III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the challenges of illiteracy in the 10-14 age group which might have resulted due to unavailability of the primary schools in the locality, non-attendance of children in the primary schools due to lack of attraction in the school, lack of teachers, lack of support system like mid-day meal programme etc, it must be ensured that children in the 6-9 age group have compulsory primary education, which is now an imperative under the RTE Act 2009. This will require district specific actions.

All of these children in the 10-14 age group with poor literacy status should be admitted in a age appropriate class in the "special training" programme either arranged in or outside the school to bring them at par with other children in the said age group, as elaborated in the RTE Act 2009.

To address the issue of "opportunity cost" of education for the children in 10-14 age group in the districts of West Bengal, as evident from the analysis of data for "Main Workers" and "Marginal Workers" in the 10-14 age group, some kind of vocational education programme may be initiated, where these children may earn some money while they learn. This arrangement may ensure better participation of such children in the schools.

The appropriate authorities may find this paper useful for taking appropriate decisions at the respective districts of West Bengal for addressing the challenges as identified in this study, in implementation of the RTE Act 2009. The summary of the findings are as follows:

- ✓ The number of illiterate children of 10-14 age group in West Bengal is 6,64,105 which is 7% of the population of the same age group.
- ✓ Distribution of illiteracy rates over different districts of West Bengal shows higher incidence of illiteracy in the districts of Uttar Dinajpur, Maldah and Puruliya. For the Schedule Tribe children, illiteracy is almost 25% in the 10-14 age group in the district Uttar Dinajpur. Focused attention to address the challenges is needed.
- ✓ It is interesting enough to note that in Maldah, Murshidabad, Haora and South 24 Parganas the male illiteracy is higher than the female counterparts indicating that larger number of females are better placed in the 10-14 age group

- ✓ Whereas in Puruliya, the female illiteracy rate is significantly higher. For the Schedule Caste children, this is the case for the districts Bankura and Puruliya and for the Schedule Tribes children in 10-14 age group the female illiteracy is higher for almost all the districts.. Hence the girl children of this age group in these areas require separate attention.
- ✓ In the districts Uttar Dinajpur, Maldah, Puruliya etc which have lower literacy rates also indicates higher number of Marginal Workers residing in those districts probably indicating that children in the 10-14 age group are compelled to earn for their livelihood in lieu of attending schools.
- ✓ Surprisingly at least 50% of the children of age 10-14 are seeking/available for work as a marginal worker across all districts in West Bengal, probably they are either pushed out of school or never enrolled in a school. To implement the RTE Act major initiatives have to be taken to bring them back to school.
- ✓ The number of illiterates and the number of Marginal Workers across the districts for the children of age group 10-14 are highly correlated.
- ✓ In this district of Uttar Dinajpur around 18% percent children of age 10-14 of the total population are illiterate. 5% of the total population are in the work force as main or marginal workers. Most of them are involved in agricultural work (Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers).

#### IV. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

The challenges of implementation of the RTE Act 2009 in West Bengal at the district level might have various dimensions. An attempt is made here only to highlight the issues of illiteracy and involvement in work for 10-14 age group, which should be treated as hindrances to education of

these children. However, such a study for the 6-9 age group may also be undertaken in future.

A study may be undertaken to examine the scenario at the national level by comparing the status of literacy and involvement of children in the 10-14 age group across different States in India.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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