

## **New Education, Better opportunities**

**Kreeanne Rabadi** on why the upcoming New Education Policy needs to explore new boundaries in providing better education for India's marginalised and vulnerable children

After a good 30 years, India's education policy is yet again up for revision. Given that India is home to more than 400 million children, the New Education Policy (NEP) has tremendous potential to directly affect a large percentage of India's population. Hence, it is extremely important that decision makers across all levels work together to ensure that a robust structure and mechanism is created for our children to learn, develop and flourish. A well-crafted policy which addresses various existing challenges will be a positive step in ensuring that all children enjoy their right to education. Duty bearers for children should make a promise that the childhood of our country's children shouldn't be spent begging on streets or working in agricultural fields or construction sites, but in well-equipped classrooms.

Interestingly the Right to Education (RTE) Act introduced in 2009 made it mandatory for children between the ages of 6 to 14 years to attend school which has led to enhancing improvements in school infrastructure and spiking the rate of enrolments. At the same time without constitutional provisions, there is significant drop seen in school going children beyond Class VIII 8, making them more vulnerable to labour and exploitation. The data below shows that almost 15% of the children drop out in secondary level of schooling and the percentage is higher when it comes to children from marginalised communities.

### **Dropout Rate for Maharashtra in secondary level (Source: DISE 2013-14)**

	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>15.04%</b>	<b>13.78%</b>	<b>14.47%</b>
<b>SC</b>	<b>18.22%</b>	<b>16.42%</b>	<b>17.39%</b>
<b>ST</b>	<b>21.31%</b>	<b>21.32%</b>	<b>21.32%</b>
<b>MUSLIMS</b>	<b>28.51%</b>	<b>25.69%</b>	<b>27.15%</b>

With over 90% of secondary schools in Maharashtra under private ownership it becomes difficult for children from marginalised backgrounds to avail of secondary education at affordable prices.

It is therefore important to relook at the state ownership of schools in order to move towards universalization of secondary education.

STATE	% OF PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS	% OF PRIVATE HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS
Maharashtra	92	94.8
Uttar Pradesh	90.44	94.1
Gujarat	86.65	91.78
Karnataka	64.94	68.32
Kerala	67.92	64.72
<i>Top 5 states having private ownership of secondary and higher secondary schools (U-DISE 2014-15)</i>		

The government needs to increase its share of government-owned secondary schools to improve the rates of enrolment and retention of children in secondary schools putting secondary education too on their priority list.


### **Child labour and education**

The Census 2011 data states that there are 17.64 lakh children working between the ages of 15 to 18 years in India. More than 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the children in this age-group are working and 71.3% of the working children are in rural areas.

Maharashtra is one of the top 5 states with a modest reduction of 4.7 %. in child labour in the entire decade.

<b>CHIL LABOUR IN MAHARASHTRA</b>	
According to Census 2011, Maharashtra is one of the top 5 states in India for highest number of working children	
<b>Name of the state</b>	<b>Number of children working (Census 2011)</b>
Uttar Pradesh	21.76 Lakhs
Bihar	10.88 Lakhs
Rajasthan	8.48 Lakhs
Maharashtra	7.27 Lakhs
Madhya Pradesh	7.02 Lakhs
<b>MAHARASHTRA STATE DATA</b>	
<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>
7.64 Lakhs	7.27 Lakhs

*Only modest reduction from 2001 Census Figures (4.7%)*



All indicators of education show that children from disadvantaged groups, girls, and Children with Special Needs (CWSN) have higher dropout numbers as classes' progress making them more vulnerable to child labour, trafficking, and child marriage.

The country today has nearly 10.2 million children between the ages of 5 to 14 years who are child labour. There should be convergence between labour and education both in policy and implementation since children often tend to combine work and education leading to lower attendance and eventually dropping out of schools.

### **Child marriages and education**

India also has the highest rate of child marriages and globally the highest number of child brides.

According to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-III) 2005-06, 46% of the women in the age group of 18 – 29 years were married before reaching the legal age of 18 years. India has the highest rate of child marriage with globally the highest number of child brides. In states of Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, the growth rate in child marriage is more than 50%.

According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2013): National Strategy Document on Prevention of Child Marriage, over the last fifteen years, the incidence of child marriage in our India has declined by only 11%, which means slower it is than 1% every year.

Maharashtra too has a considerable number of child marriages which often go unreported—about 4.48 lakh children between the ages of 15 to 17 years are married, 70 % of these children being

girls. The top three hubs for under-aged married girls are Thane, Pune and the suburban regions of Mumbai accounting for 25% of the married girls.

Another issue to be addressed immediately is that of closure and merger of schools since this impacts mainly the marginalised. The state government hence should not only make secondary education accessible to them but they should also design a thorough support system to protect both the child and his/her health.

The NEP should specifically vision for strategies of strengthening secondary and higher secondary education for girls and also health and protection framework in such schools (both in those run by the HRD as well as other ministries).

Construction of residential schools for girls should be prioritised as girls' access to education will be easier and safer. Other areas of improvement could be in financial allocations of school facilities, distance of schools from their areas of habitat, devising a concise curriculum beyond elementary levels, training of teachers and addressing their ongoing vacancies to name a few.

The policy surely stands to play a significant role in not only shaping the future of our children but along with it the social and political economy of our country.

**The author is Regional Director of Child Rights and You (CRY), the country's leading child rights advocacy organization**



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