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Analysis of an Impact of Digital Divide on Right to Education in India during COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupt every sector – Agriculture, Industrial, Manufacture and Service sectors, Education amongst the worst affected in India.

Education can help to eradicate the social, economic, and political disparities existing in society. The compulsory primary or elementary education must be enforceable to achieve these goals. Education is a Universal fundamental human right. This right to education recognized in Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, under Article 26(1) that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory”.

During the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, all the educational institutes including schools impart online education. This step exaggerates the already existing digital divide. The digital divide denotes the gap between those with access to digital and information technology and those without it. It comprises both physical access to technology hardware and, technological skills and resources which allow for its use. The current pandemic crisis has a different impact on different sections of children, it worsens the existing inequalities with creating a new one.

In this critical pandemic situation, the government shall come forward with suitable policies and plan to build inclusive and effective education system so that the Right to Education of all be protected equally without discrimination. As the access to digital technology is the need of the hour in this Information Era.

This paper analyses the impact of ‘Digital Divide’ on ‘Right to Education’. This paper discussed the Constitutional provisions, Legislative and Judicial efforts and attempted to explain the challenges pose by the pandemic situation. It also suggests some solutions to carry out learning in this critical situation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupt every sector –Agriculture, Industrial, Manufacture, and Service sectors, Education amongst the worst affected globally. Previous to the pandemic, the

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world was already facing challenging circumstances in fulfilling the right to education as a basic human right. Online digital learning limitations pose the impact on education sector.

Since, March 25, 2020 lockdown in India till today the educational activities remains closed in unlocked phase 4.0, to avoid spread of infection by maintaining social distancing. It causes unprecedented toll to right to education to underprivileged and marginalised section of the children as the sudden outbreak of pandemic compel the educational institutions to shift the traditional learning to online learning as a new norm. This crisis impacted unequally in India as underprivileged and disadvantaged children faced the problem of access to schooling due to lack of digital technology and connectivity.

The school closure will exaggerate the educational inequality, increased the dropout rate and unprecedentedly affects the social economic conditions of marginalised and underprivileged children of India, thus ultimately affects the Nation.

As per the target set by Sustainable Development Goal of UN², “All girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education.” This becomes distant dream due to lack of accessibility, acceptability, affordability and applicability of e-learning to millions of children in India. Thus, increased the already existing digital divide, which affects the Right to Education of deprived children in India, and reducing the opportunity to the vulnerable sections in India.

Although Constitutional provisions, Legislative programmes and policies and Judicial decisions promote and protects the Fundamental Right to education of children in India, pandemic situation pose new challenges to protect this right due to aggravating digital divide among have and have not. It causes long term impact on overall social economic condition of India.

This paper analyse the impact of ‘Digital Divide’ on ‘Right to Education’ and attempted to explain the challenges pose by pandemic situation. It also suggest some solutions to carry out learning in this critical situation.

II. EDUCATION:

Education helps the human being to enrich his intrinsic and extrinsic personality development. The concept of education described by many eminent persons.

According to ancient thinkers in India, Vidya or knowledge or learning or education is the ‘third eye’ of man, which gives him an insight into all affairs and teaches him how to act; it

² www.un.org/sustainable

leads us to our salvation; in the mundane sphere it leads us to all-round progress and prosperity.³

Rousseau believed that, "Education is the child's development from within". Plato propagated that, "Education develops in the body and soul of the pupil all the beauty and all the perfection he is capable of",

Mahatma Gandhi said, "By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the Child and man- body, mind, and spirit."

According to Swami Vivekananda, "Education is a manifestation of the divine perfection, already existing in man."

Sri Aurobindo thought that, "Education which will offer the tools whereby one can live for the divine, for the country, for oneself and for others and this must be the ideal of every school which calls itself national".

So, education develops a balanced person in all sphere, who can contribute to the sustainable development of the society and the world.

Providing opportunities to learn from childhood empowering the person to live a dignified and enlightened life.

Education can help to eradicate the social, economic, and political disparities existing in the society. The compulsory primary or elementary education must be enforceable to achieve these goals.

III. RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Education is a Universal fundamental human right. This right to education recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, under Article 26(1) that "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary, and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory".⁴

Right to education is protected under Indian Constitution, Legislative Acts, Government Policies and Schemes and many Judicial decisions.

In this paper, author analyse the Right to education in India from Constitutional, Legislative and Judicial Perspective in detail.

³ Dr. Sanjay Sindhu, Fundamental Right to Education in India: An Overview Vol.3(5): G.J.I.S.S., 92-95 (September-October, 2014) ISSN: 2319-8834

⁴ www.un.org > universal-declaration-human-rights

Constitutional Perspective:

The Right to Education initially included as Directive Principles under Articles 41 and 45.⁵ The Supreme Court implied the Right to Education from other Articles of the Constitution – Arts. 15(3), 21, 24, 39(e) and (f) and 51A (k).⁶

The Constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002⁷ added a new Article 21 A which makes the Right to Education as a Fundamental Right in part-III of the Constitution. Thus, Constitution of India protects Rights to Education of children as Fundamental Rights, under Directive Principle of State Policy and Fundamental Duties.

Articles 41 and 45: The Constitution directs the State to provide education within the limit of its economic capacity and development. Earlier, Article 45 provides free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution. That means, the education for the children of this age group should have been free by 1960. But, there is less efforts taken by the State Governments. After, Constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002 the Article 45 was substituted and now it provides education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years. These Articles put obligations on the State to provide Education for children but, within their economic capacity that means it provide room to State to bypass these obligations.

Article 15(3): This Article provides that State shall make any special provision for children. So, it also includes the responsibility of the State to provide Education to the underprivileged children and make special policies, schemes, programmes etc. for their development.

Article 21: This Article provides protection of life and personal liberty. As, the education help to improve the life and protects the liberty of a person and promotes dignified life which is the ultimate goal of Right to Education. So, according to Judiciary the Right to Education flow from the Article 21 in many cases.

Article 24: This Article prohibit the employment of children of below the age of 14 years in hazardous factories and mines etc. This Article is related to Right to Education as it protects these children, so, there are chances to send their parents to school for education.

Article 39(e) and (f): Similarly Article 39 (e) and (f) protects the tender age of children from abuse and children are given the opportunities to developed in dignified manner without exploitation.

⁵ See Constitution of India, Bare Act 2013, Universal Law Publishing Co.Pvt.Ltd.
www.unilawonline.com/bareacts

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

Article 51A(k): The Constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002 added clause (k) in Article 51A. This Article making it binding on parents or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or ward between the age of 6 and 14 years.

Article 21A:

This Article was inserted by The Constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002, which makes the Right to Education a Fundamental Right, as the goal set under Article 45 was not achieved since more than 40 years. Article 21A states that, the State to provide free and compulsory education to all the children of the age of 6 to 14 years in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine.⁸

This Article impose responsibility on State to ensure the Fundamental Right of Education of every children belong to this age must be fulfilled and protected.

The term ‘free’ includes in this Article means every child has right to education without paying any fee for admission in the school. So that, his right to pursue an elementary or primary education should not be hampered and helped to fully developed his personality.

The term ‘compulsory’ education make it obligation on the part of Government to ensure the completion of education of all children between 6 to 14 years of age. As the Article 21A is Fundamental Right, it is enforceable right.

To implement Article 21A, the government legislated The Right of Children to free and compulsory Education Act, 2009. The author has discuss this Act in later part of this paper.

Thus, The Constitution of India guaranteed the protection of Right to Education of the children up to the age of 14 under the different Articles in Part III, IV and IVA. While interpreting the Constitution, Judiciary also protects the Right to education of the children.

Legislative perspective:

The Parliament of India to give effect to the 86th Constitution Amendment Act 2002, passed the Right of Children to Compulsory Education Act, 2009.⁹

This Act provide the Primary Education to all children of aged between 6-14 years.

This Act imposed a legal obligation on the State and Central governments to execute the fundamental rights of a child as per Article 21A.

All schools, whether State schools, aided or unaided private schools have to provide free and

⁸ Constitution of India, Bare Act 2013, Universal Law Publishing Co.Pvt.Ltd. www.unilawonline.com/bareacts Bare Act page 15

⁹ Dr. J.N. Pandey, Constitutional Law of India 54th ed. 2017, Central Law Agency, Ch no.11 Page No. 340-41

compulsory education up to 25% of the disadvantaged sections of society out of total number of children admitted.¹⁰

After 11 years of implementation of RTE Act can be seen that it cannot achieve its purpose fully.

Judicial perspective:

Before the insertion of Article 21A, the Supreme Court implied the 'Right to Education' from Articles 21, 24, 30(1), 39 (e) and (f), 41, 45 and 46 of the Indian Constitution.

*Mohini Jain vs. State of Karnataka*¹¹, the Supreme Court held that, "the Right to Education flows directly to Right to Life and State is under a Constitutional mandate to provide education in educational institutions at all level for the benefit of the citizens." In this case, the Court did not clear about the age of a citizen to take the benefit of Right to Education guaranteed by the Constitution.

In *Unnikrishnan JP v State of Andhra Pradesh*¹², the Supreme Court held that, "the Right to Education for children of the age of 6 to 14 years a Fundamental Right." The Court implies this right from Article 21. The Court further held that, "the Right to Education to be implicit in the Right to Life because of its inherent Fundamental importance. As a matter of fact, we have referred to Arts. 41, 45 and 46 merely to determine the parameters of the said right."

In *Ashok Kumar Thakur v. Union of India*¹³, the Supreme Court opined that, "Article 21A is the most important Fundamental Right and stands above other rights, as one's ability to enforce one's fundamental rights flows from one's education."

In *Associated Managements of Primary and Secondary Schools in Karnataka v. The State of Karnataka by its Secretary, Department of Education and Ors.*¹⁴ The Supreme Court read Article 21A with Article 19(1) (a) has been interpreted as giving all children the right to have Primary education in a medium of instruction of their choice.

In the case of *Anuj Garj v. Hostel Association of India*¹⁵ Supreme Court opine that "the State should ensure that children were armed with modern technologies to compete in the developing world and attain success."

¹⁰ THE RIGHT OF CHILDREN TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION ACT, 2009, No. 35 of 2009, Ministry of Law & Justice, Legislative Dept. 26th August 2009, mhrd.gov.in

¹¹ Mohini Jain vs. State of Karnataka AIR 1992 SC 1858

¹² Unnikrishnan JP v. State of Andhra Pradesh, AIR 1993 SC 2178, 2231: (1993) 1 SCC 645.

¹³ Ashok Kumar Thakur v. Union of India (2008)6 SCC 1

¹⁴ ILR 2008 KAR 2895

¹⁵ *Anuj Garj v. Hostel Association of India* (2008) 3 SCC 1

Recently, the Kerala High Court, in *Faheema Shirin R.K. v State of Kerala & Ors*¹⁶ case, declared “the right to Internet access as a fundamental right, making it a part of the right to privacy and the right to education under Article 21 of the Constitution.”

The court held that, “in an information society, unequal access to the Internet creates and reproduces socio-economic exclusions.”

In spite of above Constitutional, Legislative and Judicial provisions and efforts, the children from the deprived and underprivileged sections of the society do not acquire the appropriate benefit of it. During current COVID-19 pandemic situation, all the educational institutes including schools impart online education. This step exaggerate the already existing digital divide gap between the underprivileged sections like rural, remote area, girls, disabled children, urban poor children. Author analyse about digital divide and its impact on Right to Education in detail.

IV. DIGITAL DIVIDE

Digital divide denotes the gap between those with access to digital and information technology, and those without it. It comprises both physical access to technology hardware and, technological skills and resources which allow for its use.

According to the United State (U.S.) National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA), “Digital Divide refers to the gap between those who do not and those who do have access to computers and the internet.”¹⁷ .

Today the term ‘Digital Divide’ indicated the gap between those who have access to ICTs and the skills and knowledge to use them effectively, and those who may or may not have access. Now a days the educational dissimilarities and technical skills indicates the digital divide including the factors such as age, gender and ethnicity becomes obstacle to use the technology than physical access to it.¹⁸

The digital divide include amongst rich and poor, urban and rural, majority and minority, male and female, accessible and remote areas. To mitigate the digital divide gap amongst above government of Centre and State launched so many projects, schemes and programmes.

Government’s efforts to eliminate digital divide:

Government of India launched following programmes, schemes and projects to eliminate digital divide in India.

¹⁶ *Faheema Shirin R.K. v State of Kerala & Ors*¹⁶ WP(C).No.19716 OF 2019(L)

¹⁷ Sadanand Bansode., Suresh Patil, *Bridging Digital Divide in India: Some Initiatives*
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236141535>, Article · January 2011

¹⁸ 1.2 The digital divide www.soas.ac.uk › cedeo-demos › unit1 › page_08)

Bharat Net Program, National Digital Literacy Mission, DIKSHA, e-Pathshala, Swayam, Swayam Prabha¹⁹

The Government of India, The MHRD and University Grants Commission (UGC) have launched many online platforms with online depositories, e-books and other online teaching/learning materials, educational channels through Direct to Home TV, Radios for students to continue their learning like-

Gyandarshan , Gyandhara, Radio has been used specifically for remote areas children who lack online facility.²⁰

- The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan, (PMGDISHA)²¹ launched in 2017, to usher in digital literacy in rural India by covering 60 million households. The Standing Committee on Information Technology in January 2019 concluded that the digital literacy efforts of the government are far from satisfactory.
- National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN), a project aimed to ensure broadband connectivity to over two lakh (250,000) gram panchayats of India by 2016²²

Its Bharat Net project²³ is the world's largest rural broadband connectivity programme. The targeted date for completion for the project was March 2019.

This project still not completed so, the Indian Government has pushed its timeline for completion to August 2021.

The results of these policies are not satisfactory. There is still a lot of room for improvement.

There is a necessity to improve and advance strong rural digital infrastructure and ecosystem.

During COVID-19 crisis the government have to make targeted policies and programmes to lessen the digital divide gap in society and nation so that, everyone get benefited.

V. INDIAN GOVERNMENT SCHEMES:

The divide exists despite the rise in the number of wireless subscribers in India over the past few years. According to the monthly report released by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on June 29, the country had over 1,160 million wireless subscribers in February

¹⁹See, India Report- Digital Education, June 2020, Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi. Available at www.mhrd.gov.in

²⁰ Pravat Kumar Jena Impact of Covid-19 on higher education in India Volume 5 International Journal of Advanced Education and Research ISSN: 2455-5746; Impact Factor: RJIF 5.34 Received: 25-05-2020; Accepted: 09-06-2020; Published: 18-06-2020 www.alleducationjournal.com; Issue 3; 2020; Page No. 77-81

²¹ www.pmgdisha.in Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)

²² www.gktoday.in > digital-divide-in-india, Digital Divide in India – GKTodday, ,Nov1,,2016

²³ Apar Gupta and Sidharth Deb. Bridging India's digital divide during COVID-19 requires a comprehensive strategy:Part 1 May 17, 2020 www.medianama.com > 2020/05 > 223-bridging-india-

2020,

But this growth only indicates the rise in basic telecommunication facility. Services such as online classrooms, financial transactions and e-governance require access to the internet as well as the ability to operate internet-enabled devices like phones, tablets and computers. Here the urban-rural distinction is quite stark.

According to the 75th round of National Sample Survey²⁴ conducted between July 2017 and June 2018, just 4.4 rural households have a computer, against 14.4 per cent in urban areas, with just 14.9 per cent rural households having access to the internet against 42 per cent households in urban areas.

There is also a gender divide. The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020²⁵ released in March by GSMA, an association of industry organisation representing interests of mobile network operators worldwide, says that while 79 per cent men own a mobile phone in the country, the number for women is 63 per cent.

VI. IMPACT OF DIGITAL DIVIDE

Already existing digital divide gap in India becomes exaggerated due to COVID crisis. It impact on poor, rural, & remote area children and also on gender inequalities. The current pandemic crisis has a different impact on different sections of children, it worsen the existing inequalities with creating new one. The issues of child labour, child marriage, criminal activities will increase with the dropout rate of children who lack the internet infrastructure and facilities. There are rise in inequalities among the deprived section of society. The digital divide has its own social and economic implications.

Learning inequality: -

Learning inequality are already exist among low- and middle-income class but the Lockdown worsen this problem. The high class families tackle this problem easily as they have physical access and technical skills to learn their children at home. Children with disabilities who were already marginalized before the outbreak are not included in strategies of distance learning.

Gender inequality:-

The poor parent make the choice between son and girl in prioritising for education. They often choose son over girl to educate. Thus, girl's dropout rate will likely to increase. This

²⁴ www.mospi.gov.in NSS 75th Round- June 2018

²⁵ www.gsma.com>gender gap2020/05

again exacerbate the problem of gender inequality.

Economic inequality:-

The closure during pandemic widen the economic inequalities due to loss of job and work by the poor parent, it directly impact on the education of the poor children, it will show the long lasting effect.

VII. CHALLENGES:

Despite unprecedented efforts taken by Governments all over the World, the COVID-19 crisis get worsen day by day. All the socio-economic sectors has faced the tremendous challenges including education sector. The country like India, where the socio-economic condition is not par with the provisions of the Constitution. The Corona period further aggravate the problem of digital divide and ultimately affects the Right to Education of disadvantaged, marginalised and deprived children in India.

The E-Learning has lag behind the children who don't have e- resources, regular electricity supply, technologically learned teachers and other problems which forced them to drop out.

The author analyse the challenges due to Online Education in four categories-

1. Accessibility-

There is lack of accessibility to internet connectivity and physical digital devices amongst the marginalised population of India. The accessibility also requires high speed of internet and regular supply of electricity, which is not available equally all over India.

Following data proves such inequalities in India-

According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, in 2019²⁶, Wireless internet Teledensity 88.46 wherein Urban Teledensity 155.49 and Rural Teledensity 57.13 as per 100 inhabitants in India.

Continue and uninterrupted power supply is prerequisite for online education. According to nationwide survey of villages by the Ministry of Rural Development in 2017-18²⁷, showed that 16% of India's households received one to eight hours of electricity daily, 33% got 9-12 hours and only 47% received more than 12 hours of power supply daily.

According to National Sample Survey Organisation (2018)²⁸ estimates, among the poorest

²⁶ [www.trai.gov.in > sites > default > files > PIR_10072019](http://www.trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/PIR_10072019) Telecom Regulatory Authority of India – Trai, Jul 10, 2019

²⁷ [scroll.in > India > Digital Divide](http://scroll.in) Indian education can't go online – only 8% of homes with ... May 5, 2020

²⁸ www.mospi.gov.in NSS 75th Round- June 2018

20% households, only 2.7% have access to a computer and 8.9% to internet facilities. In the case of the top 20% households, the proportions are 27.6% and 50.5%, respectively.

India is the World's second-largest internet user base, According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (“TRAI”)²⁹, in September 2019, India had 687.62 million internet subscriptions. Therefore more than half of the population do not have internet accessibility.

The accessibility is also affected due to remoteness of geographical area in India like mountainous area, dense forest area wherein most of the tribal people dwell.

The NSO’s Household Social Consumption on Education survey³⁰ (June 2017 and June 2018) shows that just 4% of rural households had, between, access to computers, compared with 23% of urban households. And, just 15% of rural households had internet access as compared to 42% of urban households.

March 2020, Ookla’s Speed test Global Index ranked India 130th in terms of mobile and 71st in terms of fixed line internet speeds.

Data published by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)³¹ in February, 2020 discloses that India has around 115 crore wireless subscribers, of which only approximately 66 crores have access to broadband-quality internet. Therefore, merely half of the country’s population has access to decent quality of internet.

The National Sample Survey 75th Round³² report indicates that there is a glaring digital divide between rural and urban India. According to the report, the proportion of households in the country having computers was found to be around 10.7% (only 4.4% of rural households and 23.4% of urban households possessed a computer). 14.9% of rural households, 42% of urban households, and 23.8% of households all over India were found to have internet facilities.

From the above data it is observed that there is a lack of accessibility all India between rural and urban, rich and poor related to broadband internet facility and infrastructure.

2. Acceptability-

Although India government promotes digital education in most of the schools in rural area rely on traditional method of teaching and are not comfortable with online education mode. Their culture and language become barrier to the acceptability of such mode.

²⁹ www.trai.gov.in>itu-2019

³⁰ www.aspirantworld.in>household-social..

³¹ www.trai.gov.in>itu-2020

³² www.mospi.gov.in NSS 75th Round- June 2018

The gender biased culture also added to the problem of acceptability of e-education. The following data shows it-

The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020³³ released in March by GSMA, an association of Industry organization representing interest of mobile network operator worldwide, says that while 79% of men own a mobile phone and only 63% women own it in India.

According to the Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India report, based on the 2017-18 National Sample Survey³⁴, mere 13% of people surveyed (aged above five) in rural areas just 8.5% of females could use the Internet.

More than 80% of the content on the Internet is in English, so it is a linguistic barrier to accept digital education by those who are not well versed in English language, most of the education in India is in vernacular language.

According to The 2017-18 National Sample Survey³⁵ about 16% of women had access to mobile internet, compared to 36% of men.

The above data shows low acceptability of e-learning in India due to gender bias and traditional culture,

3. Affordability-

The e- learning requires well economic condition to afford the high speed internet service and to buy digital tools like-smartphones, computers, laptops etc. most of the population in India is economically deprived, the following data shows it. This pandemic situation aggravates it.

Poverty in India increased 71 to 100 million due to COVID-19, it affects the decision of parents to provide the children e- education. Such students remain behind the affordable students.³⁶

Approximately 70% population live in rural India of that 75% are poor. Lockdown increased the burden of education on these poor people.

This situation is not only affect the rural areas but also affects the urban areas. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's³⁷ estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9%.

³³ www.glwps.georgetown.edu/resource2020

³⁴ Praveen Sudevan, Why e-learning isn't a sustainable solution to the COVID-19 ...www.thehindu.com › Sci-Tech › Technology, May 11, 2020

³⁵ www.mospi.gov.in NSS 75th Round- June 2018

³⁶ Education during COVID-19 and beyond - the United Nations www.un.org › wp-content › uploads › sites › 2020/08

³⁷ e-learning: COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and strategies for ... government.economicstimes.indiatimes.com › education 16 April 2020

2011 Census³⁸ data reports 377 million urban dwellers in India, with the number of poor standing at 76 million, and the number of slum households at 13.7 million. More than 8 million children under 6 years of age live in slums.

4. Applicability-

Although the government launched so many e-projects as discussed above, there is lack of digital literacy in India. The internet availability is of no use without digital literacy that means it affects the applicability of internet facility.

The survey³⁹ says that in rural households 9.9% students can operate a computer in comparison to 32.4% in urban household and 13% can use the internet as compared to 37.1% in urban household.

In its 2019 report⁴⁰, the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology suggested that the digital literacy drive had reached only to 1.67 % of the population even though at least three major flagship programmes were being run together.

Other challenges like delay in implementations of government schemes and policies posed further barrier to digital divide. Along with it lack of robust ICT and digital literacy in India are additional cause for increasing digital divide.

Solutions:

Every children in India has a Fundamental right to equality and equal opportunities to acquire education and live dignified life (Art. 14, 15). In such pandemic situations, one has to find out amicable solutions to mete out discrimination and disparities aggravated by digital divide.

Some of the specific innovative initiatives taken by the State Governments and communities are –

One initiative has taken by Maharashtra government's Nagpur division to use multimodal communication technology is '*Shaale – Baharchi – Shaala*'⁴¹ to reach all the students who have no accessibility of broadband and digital device. Here, a topic first broadcast through Radio, then take follow up through SMS/Whats App. It became easy to choose the media for learning according to accessibility and affordability of everyone.

³⁸ www.censusindia.gov.in>2011-common

³⁹ TPT Bureau | Agencies Massive gap in rural- urban education, expenditure, and ...thepolicytimes.com › Education July 22, 2020

⁴⁰ STANDING COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ...164.100.47.193 › lsscommittee.org › 17_Information_Tec... Dec 4, 2019

⁴¹ How Online Education Can be made more accessible for all ...www.thequint.com

Nuh, Haryana:⁴²

Following the social distancing norms in this new era the Nuh district of Haryana started innovating teaching method "**Mohalla Pathshala**" for those children who had no access to online classes. It benefited to 70,000 children of the district. Under this initiative, local young graduates called "shikshadoots" are voluntarily teaching the children in community classroom wherein upto 15 children are allowed with social distancing in one batch.

There is urgent need to take some immediate actions to prevent the long-term effect of digital divide. Some other solutions fit to situations are discussed here.

- Government should amend the Right to Education Act and Article 21A to add new provision related to accessibility and affordability of ICT and digital devices and should include Pre-Primary and Secondary education to all, so that broaden the scope of Right to Education.
- Wealthy corporate sector should take initiative in such situation to provide online technologies and devices to the underprivileged private and public schools as a corporate social responsibility.
- Government should address the issue of digital divide on priority basis by emphasising on successful implementation of 'Bharat Net Project', to provide free internet and digital tools to the deprived students, so that no one leave behind and they receive full term education.
- Government should make specific provisions with incentives for girl child as they belong to the most deprived section of the society generally, and in such crisis particularly.
- Government and private sectors should work cooperatively to bridging the digital divide by financing in digital infrastructure and digital literacy.

VIII. CONCLUSION:

In this critical pandemic situation, the Government shall come forward with the suitable policies and plan to build inclusive and effective education system, so that Right to Education of all be protected equally without discrimination. As an access to digital technology is the need of the hour in this information Era.

The government of India take the moral responsibility to provide every child education during this crisis period and no one should lag behind. As once dropout will become difficult

⁴² For Students Missing Online Classes, Haryana District's ...www.ndtv.com > All India Aug 29, 2020

to return of child for education which impact the overall development of Indian citizen and ultimately the Nation.
