The 83rd Amendment could be critical in addressing the question of universalisation of elementary education. But will such a hope be fulfilled?
to cheap non-formal education. With this background it is hard to imagine that an important policy initiative like the 83rd Amendment can be brought in without any discussion and transparency. Consequently, there is every reason to believe that the Bill is likely to prove discriminatory, non-participatory and cheap.

Discriminatory, because whereas Article 45 talked of children up to the age of 14, the Bill clearly restricts the age from 6 to 14. This virtually rules out any state initiative in pre-schooling, something the rich increasingly enjoy through private institutions and is denied to the poor. The particular needs of working children, children with disability, the girl child find no mention in the Bill. What is worse, the onus of educating the child is on the parents. This could lead to more parents in jails than children in schools!

Non-Participatory because there has been no attempt to involve the millions who have worked for education for the masses in the recent past and for decades in eliciting their views, and more importantly, to ensure their support and involvement at the implementation stage.

Cheap for the following reasons. The financial implications of the draft Bill prepared by Mr. Bommai were calculated by the Saikia committee and estimated as Rs. 40,000 crores for a five-year period. Subsequently, the Tapan Majumdar committee set up by the MHRD estimated the figure to be about Rs. 63,000 crores for the same period. It is not clear which estimate Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi will present when he introduces the Bill in Parliament. The Government talks of a "new policy" called the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, but a closer look reveals that it is not really a policy but an accounting and administrative measure at the Ministry level to combine and use interchangeably various education heads. How that can raise the required amount is anybody's guess. But what seems likely is that the implementation will depend more and more on external funds and follow the path of the cheap Education Guarantee Scheme-based non-formal mode, further reducing the quality of Indian school education.

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**BILLS ON THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION**