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RTE Act hasn't freed her from a tight rope walk

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Balancing Act:A 10-year-old girl from Chattisgarh performing a tight rope walk at Bibikulam in Madurai on Wednesday.

It has been a tight rope walk, both literally as well as figuratively, for 10-year-old Sanjana of Chattisgarh, and her mother Lalitha who has been taking the little girl from one State to another to eke out a living by making her perform acrobatics on roadsides after throwing dust into the eyes of officials expected to implement the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

The child was spotted performing to the drum beats of her eldest brother on the busy V.P. Rathinasamy Nadar Road at Bibikulam here on Wednesday.

Her mother was using a stainless steel plate to compensate the absence of a cymbal and the other brother stood guard at one end of the rope tied to a hook hammered to the ground. Below the rope was a plastic board soliciting alms from passersby.

Enquiries with the family revealed that Ms. Lalitha, a widow, had been roaming around the country along with her three children to earn a living.

On the move

“We have been to Madurai earlier also. We stay in a place for a month or two, earn about Rs.10,000 to 12,000 and go back to our native before embarking on another journey. This is how life has been moving. Here, we live in a place close to Periyar bus stand,” she said.

Asked if she was even aware of her statutory obligation to educate her children compulsorily, the woman shot back saying: “I know nothing about the law. Even otherwise, how can I educate my children when we have no means even to fill our stomachs?” Half way through the talk in Hindi, she and her sons suspected that the conversation was being picked up to detain them and fled the place in no time.

In the meantime, a phone call made to Jim Jesudoss, Director, Childline Madurai, and his team revealed that they had been receiving such calls for the past two days from various places but were unable to catch hold of the family since the family disappears before they could reach the spot.