

Issues of Inclusive Education for the Underprivileged Students in India

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ABSTRACT

The historical relevance of humanistic thoughts of Indian social and political reformers over the doctrine of the inclusive education practices is remarkably considered even in the contemporary India. Recognizing the holistic policy of inclusive education for the socially disadvantaged and underprivileged sections, the United Nation's Millennium Development has been initiating the strategies to reduce social, economical and the global educational inequalities. Despite of huge efforts, India yet has not fully able to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the deadline of 2015. Though the policy of inclusive education as a political strategy which partially adopted by Government of India since a decade, the social and educational development of the socially disadvantaged and underprivileged students are lagged behind and always pushed them away from the mainstream academic development. Against the backdrop, this paper dealt with an issue of the inclusive education for different excluded groups such as the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward castes, minorities, marginalized or deprived groups: handicaps, differently abled persons, senior citizens, beggars, homeless, victims of substance abuse, women, and different sexual orientations – LGBT groups. It has proposed debate and discussion for active inclusive policy of education for the excluded and underprivileged students in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2030 and of the betterment of the human resource development across the states of India.

Keywords: Equity, humanism, discrimination, exclusion, millennium development goals

In regards to great traditions of humanist educationalist in India, the safeguard for the inclusive education was laid down by the eminent personalities such as Mahatma Gandhi, Ravindranath Tagore, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr.B.R. Ambedkar and J.P. Naik. Education from the humanist perspective historically focuses on developing rationality, autonomy, empowerment, creativity, affections and a concern for humanity. In their views, the humanity is a condition that gives people the possibility for developing human capabilities: of being a reflective and dialogical person, of getting the sources to live a good life, of living together ruled by moral values, of helping others to live a good life as well. A 'humanistic' approach to education involves a move away from traditional behaviourist theories and practices

towards a perspective that recognizes the uniqueness of each individual's perception, experiences and approaches to learning. With regards to historical relevance of the humanistic thoughts and inclusive education practices in India, this paper intends to address the issues of educational development of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Castes (OBCs) minorities, marginalized & vulnerable groups; viz. handicaps, differently abled students, senior citizens, beggars, homeless, victims of substance abuse and women, and diverse sexual orientation – LGBT groups.

According to India's Census Data, 2011, there was reported that 444 million children in India under the age of 18 years belonging to disadvantaged and underprivileged backgrounds. This constitutes nearly 37% of the total population in the country.

Their problems seem to have regarded to education, child labour and exploitation, health, and gender equality; 1 in 4 children of school-going age is out of school in our country – 99 million children in total have dropped out of school; out of every 100 children, only 32 children finish their school education age appropriately; barely 2% of the schools offer complete school education from Class 1 to Class 12 (District Information System for Education (DISE) 2014-15).

Educational Development in India

Universalization of Elementary Education has been a top priority programme of the government of India. Since the Independence, India have been making efforts through the constitutional directives and amendments, committees and commissions, national policies and programmes to make elementary education of good quality available to all. National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986, as revised in 1992, had indicated three thrust areas in elementary education: Universal access enrolment; Universal retention of children up to 14 years of age; and a substantial improvement in quality of education to enable all children to achieve essential levels of learning. Highlighting the National Policy of Education 1986 for the propagation of Universalization of Elementary Education for all, i.e. there is an urgent need to examine broader relational aspects for child rag pickers and inclusive education approach of the neo-liberal economic policy in India. It has undergone the changing dimensions of social exclusion and problem of educational attainment of a particular group of Dalits. The existing studies and researchers have shown the existence of the universal phenomenon of lack of inclusive education policy for Dalit children in India. It attempts to examine the Gross Enrollment Ratio of children in the schools from Dalit communities and of castes, class, gender, and labour parameters to identify spaces of exclusion in the school representation.

Organic academic literature on the educational status-quo in the country like India argue that the Dalit children face considerable hardships in schools, including discrimination, discouragement, exclusion, alienation, physical and psychological abuse, and even segregation, from both their teachers and their fellow students (Thorat: 2008;

Oommen: 2004; Natrajan & Greenough: 2007; Chikarmane: 2014)

Inclusive Education as a Political Strategy

Based upon a prior literature regarding the notion of inclusive education, the inclusive education in the context of the goals of Education for All is a complex issue, and no coherent approach is evident in the literature. Inclusive education is increasingly promoted and supported, not by few passionate individuals and groups, but by the UN agencies and governments globally inclusive education may be implemented by all levels, embrace different goals, and based on different motives, reflect different classifications for special education needs, and provide services in different contexts (Kabeer: 2000; Sachs, Beall & Piron: 2005; Dovi: 2009)

According to Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017), the planning has traditionally focused on the need to provide special support to historically disadvantaged groups. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, have special status in the Constitution of India. Other disadvantaged groups needing special support are other backward classes (OBC), minorities and other marginalized and vulnerable groups which suffer from handicaps such as Persons with Disabilities, senior citizens, street children, beggars and victims of substance abuse. With regards to the issues of inclusive policies, the paper brings out the following educational deliberations to be discussed by referring the empirical data published by the governments.

Issues of Equity, Equality and Access in Education Milieu

India is a nation of ancient and firmly entrenched tradition and culture. For thousands of years, religion, geography and the necessities of a rural agrarian society have sculpted a complex caste system based on status, hierarchy, and above all, strict division of labour. The caste system is an economic order. It prevents someone from owning land or receiving an education. (Beck and Darokar: 2005). In most cases, the caste bias erodes Dalit student's right to education even in institutions of higher education. The incidents of caste-based discrimination in institutions of higher learning are illustrative of the depth and breadth of anti-Dalit sentiment in education, and show that such biases

transcend the rural or urban divide and affect the entirety of the education system, from elementary schools to universities. Caste discrimination persists even in institutions of higher education. Dalit children's right to education is further eroded by their poverty and a generational repetition of under education.

Reducing the administrative gaps in Right to Education (RTE) Act

The creation of a school environment for students from socially backward that is supportive of learning should be a prioritized task. However, a large proportion of schools continue to be not compliant to the norms and standards for school stipulated by the RTE Act, 2009. Discrimination facing due to benefit in admission from RTE is vital to the students from these backgrounds. No uniform criteria and parameters in the RTE norms are followed by the RTE compliance schools. Making all schools RTE norms complaint and creating a learning environment that is child from disadvantaged sections and learning-friendly and gender-sensitive constitutes a high priority task.

In India, the most welfare entitlements are based on economic criteria. However, India also has entitlements for socially excluded castes and communities. Certification of caste is a stringently monitored process and often recorded during passage through formal education channels such as school and college. By and large, the ragpickers/waste pickers have been to outside the formal education system and would therefore find it extremely difficult to secure a proof before 50 year from the claimant that is now required for caste certification in Maharashtra. The occupational status, on the other hand, is easily established through a process of survey and/or registration. The occupational criterion has in fact been accommodated in the national level Socio-economic Caste Census (SECC) undertaken of 2011, the imperatives of the schemes of which are awaited.

There is low level of awareness in the scavenging castes and communities in India are observed due to their monopolization over hereditary customary occupations assured by the reservation policy. Therefore, parents need to advise to make them to realize the importance of their future and well being. This should be done by the social and community

organizations, NGOs in their respective residents. Teachers and teacher trainers should be given special training especially in coping with children from scavenging castes and socially weaker sections. Teachers and teacher trainers should develop a better relationship with community, NGO, social educators and the government.

With increasing number of private education institutions so called as the World Class Institutions to be proposed by MHRD in the field of higher education in India, the fees payable are observed to be high for disadvantaged groups. In view of this more freeships, scholarships, free textbooks, free hostels; subsidized facilities in institutions/hostels should be extended to this group. There should be subsidized loan facilities for the fees/hostel expenditure from the financial institutions like banks.

Low enrollment and high drop-out rates of Dalit students

As a result of the discriminatory treatment, large numbers of Dalit children drop out of school, especially in the early elementary stages. According to India Education Report, 2001-2002 prepared by the Government of India, the school attendance in rural areas in 1993-1994 was 64.3% for Dalit boys and 46.2% for Dalit girls, compared to 74.9% among boys and 61% for girls from other social groups. Furthermore, the drop-out rate in Scheduled Castes during 1990-91 was as high as 49.35% at primary stage and 67.77% at middle stage and 77.65% at secondary stage. The statistics for higher education are no less alarming; the same government report states that enrollment of Dalit students at graduate, post-graduate and professional/research/Ph.D levels is abysmally low, at 8.73%, 8% and 2.77% respectively. (Govind: 2002: 30-35).

Most of Dalit children must work to help ensure their families' economic survival. In addition the parents are far more likely to be illiterate. While the Constitution of India mandates free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14, the right to education free from discrimination is not secured for Dalit children. 99% of Dalit students are enrolled in government schools with the substandard facilities that lack basic infrastructure, classrooms, teachers, and teaching aids. Dalit school children also face discrimination and discouragement from

higher-caste community members who perceive education for Dalits as both a waste and a threat. Discrimination in schools and the resulting drop-out rates for Dalit children are intimately linked to child labour. In India, Dalit children's right to education free from discrimination is constantly undermined by treatment they receive at school. These practices serve to discourage and alienate Dalit children, contributing to their high drop-out rates. Even more pertinently such practices serve to instill and reinforce Dalit children's sense of inferiority, erode their sense of personal dignity and force them to internalize caste distinctions.

Child waste pickers/ragpickers are less likely to attend formal school

There is an urgent need to see the broader relational aspects for child rag pickers and inclusive education approach of the neo-liberal economic policy in India. These inputs, therefore, attempts to overlook the Gross Enrollment Ratio of children in schools from the ragpicking communities and of castes, class, gender, and labour parameters to identify spaces of exclusion in the school representation. In doing so, it tries to create social profile of students from ragpicking households considering their three generations have been in such a degraded occupation.

Discussing above issues, the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, the SDGs, fairly declared 17 interconnected goals, is an urgent call to shift the world onto a more sustainable path by tackling some of the more pressing challenges facing the world today. SDG goals get reinforced in continuing with MDGs which failed to achieve the imperatives and effects of MDGs goals.

Therefore, SDGs expect to offer a robust framework for national dialogue on shared vision and commitments. The new sustainable development agenda seeks to ensure that momentum generated by Millennium Development Goals is carried forward beyond 2015 to achieve not just substantial reductions in poverty, hunger and other deprivations but finally end them to provide a life of dignity to all. One of an important goal of the SDGs targets the ending poverty and access in promoting learning and educational outcomes for all children and ensuring children live without fear of violence,

through efforts to end all forms of violence and promote peaceful and just societies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to redefine the prospects and future for socially disadvantaged, underprivileged students and excluded groups, SDGs need to come across the nature of an unequal and stratified Indian society which would have to be addressed hurdles and challenges. It is an established fact that an education system built in premises of the quality and equity is central to sustainable success in the emerging knowledge economy. The present education system especially in rural areas is not creating a heterogeneous environment for inclusive education to cater to the educational needs of children with special needs and socially backward communities. Though in recent decades, access to education has improved in rural areas, students coming from socially or economically weaker segments suffer significant handicaps relating to the inequality in learning opportunities, often stemming from the sociological and circumstantial factors.

Resisting the dropping-out students

Though the dropout rate is a matter of concern in the case of all categories of students, drop-out rates among the socially and economically disadvantaged groups, especially for girls from these groups, remain higher than the national average. The XIth Five Year Plan had targeted a reduction in dropout rates from 50% to 20% at the elementary stage. Even though the drop-out rates at the elementary and secondary stages of education have been declining, the progress has not been satisfactory. The low NER at the upper primary level and the increasing enrolment gap from elementary to secondary level suggests that although a most of children from socially weaker sections are entering the educational system, a significant proportion of them are not progressing through the system to complete elementary or secondary cycle of education.

Even though the drop-out rates at elementary and secondary stages of education have been declining, large numbers of children continue to leave the school before completing elementary education. In 2014-15, the retention rate at primary level was 83.7% and it was as low as 67.4% at the elementary level. This indicates that roughly, four in every 10

children enrolled in grade I leave the school before completing grade VIII. Dropout rates in secondary education continue to be high, especially for socially and economically disadvantaged groups of learners. Though the dropout rate is a matter of concern in the case of all categories of students, drop-out rates among socially and economically disadvantaged groups, especially for girls from these groups, remain higher than the national average. This brings into focus the need to undertake measures to improve the retention in schools of children from socially and economically disadvantaged communities. Ensuring the completion of the elementary, secondary and higher secondary education by all enrolled pupils emerges to be high priority tasks.

Higher proportion of out of school children in some states

While there has been a steady decline in the percentage of out of school children across caste, gender and social categories, and nationally the proportion of out of school children has been brought down to 4.2% of the population age 6-13 years in 2009-10, the proportion of out of school children remain much higher than the national average in a few States. The States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and West Bengal accounted for larger proportion of out of school children in the country in the 2009. The proportion of out of school children in 2009 was higher than the national average for SC children (5.9%), ST children (5.2%) and Muslim children (7.7%). This indicates some States and children belonging to scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST), and Muslims need greater and focused attention.

There is a need to introduce the special academic and other support to children from socially and economically weaker sections. Private coaching (for a consideration or a fee) as a supplement to formal education may help the child in certain circumstances to keep up with the class; however left to market forces, it has been well established that private coaching increases disparities between classes of students; the relatively well-off segments of the student population can benefit through supplementary coaching, whereas the educationally and socially backward classes generally cannot afford supplementary coaching classes. In a country like India, where large inequities exist, including

in the matter of educational opportunities, it can be postulated that private coaching exacerbates disparities in general.

In other way round, there should be serious attention regarding to lower level of student attendance rates from the socially weaker and disadvantaged sections in schools in some of the educationally backward States. While enrolment levels at elementary level has been increasing steadily, studies on attendance of students at the primary and upper primary stages of education show that there is considerable variation across States in the percentage of enrolled students who are attending school on any given day during the school year. Of particular concern is the fact that some of the educationally backward States have the lowest student attendance rates (below 70%). This highlights need to formulate and implement focused on interventions in these States for improving student attendance rates and sustaining high levels of attendance throughout the school year.

Quality-related deficiencies in early childhood care and education services

Studies show that majority of children from socially weaker and disadvantaged groups in India do not have school readiness competencies in cognitive and language domains when they join primary school despite attending pre-primary classes. This reflects the poor quality of the curriculum. A significant proportion of children are not ready cognitively for primary schooling and nor are school ready for children. Since the possibilities of benefiting from later educational interventions gets reduced if children do not come with basic foundation leading to cumulative deficit later on appropriate interventions need to be formulated and implemented to remove the quality-related deficiencies in Early Childhood Care and Education services.

Deficiencies relating to teaching-learning process for with socially backward students

Several deficiencies relating to teaching-learning process continue to hamper efforts to improve students' learning outcomes with socially backwardness and to raise progressively the standard and performance of the education system. A key component of the efforts to improve

student learning outcomes is the introduction of a learner-centred approach to education with well-designed learning experiences, which would enable each pupil to attain the expected learning outcomes. One of the challenges in this context is to institutionalize teaching-learning processes that will promote a learner-centred approach to education involving active learning approaches, cooperative learning, and methodologies which would stimulate independent thinking, develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, develop skills to communicate effectively, promote planning and execution of projects and self-learning which would enable each pupil to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values conducive to the actualization of his/her potential to the fullest.

Having diversities of the students across castes, gender, class, religions, regions, languages and ethnicities in classrooms, the students from the education institutions and university campuses in India may benefit the socio-cultural environments and academic inclusiveness. According to inferences drawn from previous studies undertaken by USA universities and Indian social sciences institutions, of having the diversity in the classrooms “have substantial positive effects on social behaviour of wealthy students”, based on empirical evidence. This is merely a mention; and if valid, is in the positive direction. There is a need to mitigate a rising discrimination in the overall education sector despite the keeping the diverse classrooms in the educational institutions. In fact, the social diversity among the students to be encouraged in academic classrooms and pedagogical environments by adopting a fair admission process in the academic institutions and schools. Educational institutions such as the schools, colleges, and universities be reinforced strict discriminatory practices against the administrative and academic personnel like the administrative officers and professors to socially backward, Dalits and disadvantaged students in awarding marks in examination, disparaging remarks on the basis of his identity or academic excellence, any form of favour, failing them in the exams, caste, class or religious bias. It is generally evident that the students from SCs and STs and other socially backward castes which are enrolled in science and other technical courses in the universities, colleges, IITs and institutions are more

likely failed in examinations due to biased classroom and teacher’s attitude. And this has resulted in rising level of depression, frustration, alienation and isolation from the mainstream educational milieu. Many cases in India have reported as Dalit suicides in the university campuses. In order to reduce the rate of suicide, the government should strictly set up anonymous grievance cells or social protection cells for such students to register their complaints and anguish. The notion of inclusiveness and diversity of students in higher education would be a sole way for these groups to get improved their standard of living, dignity and wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

To the humanist education standpoint, the higher education institutions are built upon the pillar of democracy. Due to increasing politicization and the commercialization of education in India, there is caused to increase in weakening of the reservation policy, shrinking the higher education funds and other entitlements for the socially disadvantaged and weaker sections. In the inception of the SDG goals, the idea of inclusive education in the educational milieu of India could effectively be emerged to be ensured fair representations, equity and equality in opportunities for the socially disadvantaged and underprivileged students.

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