

**EDUCATION OF THE MARGINALIZED; IN THE CONTEXT OF
POLICY INITIATIVES FOR UNIVERSALISATION OF
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION**

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Abstract

It is well discussed and agreed globally that every child has the right to get a quality education without any discrimination or exclusion. However, both developing and developed countries face challenges in guaranteeing equal educational opportunities to all their citizens. Social justice and equity are becoming increasingly associated with educational accessibility through which the socially deprived people can come forward to the mainstream. But marginalized groups are often left behind, denying their right to education. Individuals who are not in mainstreams are subjected to discrimination and exploitation in multiple facets that is, they belong to more than one marginalized group.

Education in various forms definitely catalyst the process of social change and achievement of social justice. To develop an egalitarian society, the education system can play a prime role in equipping the children to draw out their capabilities and thus ensuring a deserving place in the society. But it is very unfortunate that a majority of children of our country of the deprived conditions are still excluded from the mainstream of education and hence they cannot participate in the social, cultural and intellectual affairs like their other peers. It appears that current educational programs should equip to address the needs of children who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion for building a better future together.

Keywords: Marginalised, Universalisation of Elementary Education

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Introduction

Constitution of India gave provisions for free and compulsory education to all children of the nation of the age group 6 to 14 to ensure universalization of primary education. In 2009 the Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act was enacted in India to ensure the same. But this intention is not yet implemented properly even nine years after the Right to Education Act. Even though almost all children were enrolled in the school many of them cannot attend the classes and result in drop out. This increased rate of the drop may be because of their socioeconomic background including ethnicity, caste, economic condition, gender, and religion. Children with special needs also deprived of the education system due to inadequate facilities and specialized training. Many studies found that there exist some exclusionary practices from the part of school authorities in many parts of the country which badly influences the education of children from the marginalized group although the responsible officials in this regard hesitate to admit the fact.

Meaning of Marginalized

Marginalization is a universal tendency related to social stratification. In marginalization opportunities and benefits are denied to the individuals those living on the 'margins' while encouraging the opportunities for those who are in the 'Centre' of the society (Ramesh, 2013). The lower literacy level of education and the continued discrimination of marginalized in educational institutions pose a major problem.

Marginalization may be of –

- Gender-related
- Culture-related
- Location-related
- Poverty-related or
- Special groups include disabled, gifted children and children living with HIV and Aids, etc.

Many communities across the world show prejudice based on caste and class resulting in the exclusion of marginalized people. It may directly affect the attainment of effective endowments in the spheres of education, occupation, and livelihood.

Education of marginalized children: Present Indian scenario

Inequality in educational opportunities has emerged as a major issue in India. It has also become pertinent, as the increasing influence of globalization has jeopardized educational opportunities for the marginalized. Although the provision of basic education in most countries is the responsibility of the State, experience shows that, over the years, the role of the State as the main provider of educational services has reduced owing to privatization and commercialization of education leading to a denial of education for the marginalized groups.

Various studies have pointed out that the children from socially and economically deprived communities hardly get any chance to get a minimum level of education and most of them are working children. There is a general agreement about the segment of society that is not attending school and they belong to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), minority, urban poor, other backward castes and people living in remote rural areas.

It is evidenced that a sizeable part of the child population belonging to socially backward communities living in rural areas is still deprived of basic education.

Annual report (2016-17) of National Institution for Minority Educational Institutions states that Scheduled Casts students constitute 13.9% and Scheduled Tribes students 4.9% of the total enrolment. 33.75% of students belong to Other Backward Classes. 4.7% of students belong to Muslim Minority and 1.97% from other Minority Community. According to the response received during the survey, 4.67% of students belong to Muslim Minority and 1.97% is from other Minority Community. Muslim Minority has more male students than females whereas another Minority has more females than males.

The development of any society will be evidenced by its literacy rate as well as the education accessibility of its members. The survey results indicate that the national level literacy rate is increasing in a steady manner. In 1951 the literacy rate was 18.32% and in the latest senses report it is 72.98%. But if we are analyzing the progress in categories based on locale, gender social strata, etc. we can observe the drastic disparities and inequalities.

There are a gender and locale difference in educational achievement. Statistical reports support that urban males and females show more educational attainment than rural males and rural females. Educational attainment of females than females, tend to be less than that of male irrespective of locality.

The area and gender-based literacy level data from the 2011 census report comprehensively gave the present status of educational accessibility of males and females in different locality separately. When analyzing the literacy rate of the latest census report it is evident that even though the total literacy rate increased over the decade there exist a great disparity between the male and female literacy level. In the majority of the states female literacy level is considerably low than the males. The difference between urban and rural education level is much more terrible.

Even after seven decades after independence, there exists inequality in accessing the quality education based on gender as well as locality. In all the states the rural literacy rate is far less than that of the urban population. The literacy rate of the urban population is 84.98 and that of the rural population is 68.91. The gap between rural-urban literacy indicates the inadequate educational facilities of the remote places of India.

Besides the differences between the social groups within both rural males and females, there exist inter-gender as well as intragroup differences. The education level of different social groups is well described in the Government of India, 66th round National Sample Survey Organization.

While analyzing the report it is clear that the ST and SC communities are the least educated. Among rural males, only 2.2 percent ST and 2.7 percent SC students reached up to graduation. The status of rural females is worse than this. Only 0.9 percent of ST and 1.1percent SC females are acquiring the graduation level and above. In the higher secondary level also this trend is replicating. The percentage of rural ST males who reached up to higher secondary education is 5.7 and rural ST female is 2.7. It is evident that irrespective of the gender the rural people are less accessible to higher education. In the urban area, the literacy level of marginalized people is better than that of the rural area but lagging behind that of other community. It is noticed that the

levels of educational accessibility of males of the marginalized section were worse than that of both males and females of the other community and similarly within the same social strata there exist gender wise difference. So while comprehensively analyzing the latest senses report of India it is clear that difference in the level of accessibility of education is greater between the marginalized people and other social groups especially in the higher education sector.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development given that dropout rate of primary and upper primary classes were less when compared to the rate of secondary classes. Engagement in economic activities is found to be the reason for the dropout for males from school and females are forced to involve in domestic activities, especially in the rural area.

Inequality in the Quality of Education

Apart from the lack of physical access due to prevailing social biases and economic as well as family reasons, a large number of children drop out because of school-related reasons. Poor teaching standards also seem to be one reason for the drop out of many children and results in inequality inside the classroom. Injustice can possibly be reflected even in the curriculum and content if it does not sensitize children about the practice of injustice in society. Curriculum development initiatives need to consider the development of socially responsible individuals.

The crucial need of today is to promote tolerance among students through education so that they can appreciate cultural diversity and protest against all the discriminations. However, the teacher's role in transacting the content efficiently is another important precondition for achieving quality and also to achieve equality in the learners' achievement level. Availability of qualified and efficient teachers needs immediate attention. Recruitment of an adequate number of teachers to ensure the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 (as per the SSA recommendation) in all the elementary schools is another pressing issue in most Indian states, which are experiencing a rapid expansion of elementary schools and increase in enrolment. While the teachers need to understand and appreciate the diverse background of children, it is often experienced that they discourage these children from attending school showing an incidence of relational and cultural injustice.

Policy initiatives for retracing the Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE)

Indian constitution has given due emphasis for national integration and hence a national system of education. The directive principles of State Policy envisage that the state shall provide free and compulsory education for children up to fourteen years of age. Later this has been made a fundamental right by amending the Constitution.

Constitution of India, through Article 46 entrust the State to promote economic and educational interests of the marginalized and weaker sections of its citizens, especially Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes and also to protect them from social exploitation and all form of social injustice. There are many other articles which help in the implementation of Article 46 like Articles 330, 332, 335, 338 to 342. Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution also discussing the same objectives.

The National Policy on Education (1986) and its POA, 1992 advocate for the provision of essential facilities for attaining universal access to education of comparable quality. Also the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE), 1992 recommended for the adoption of a holistic approach to address the educational needs of children who has to work for their livelihood, girls, disadvantaged and marginalized groups and considering issues of quality, process, and content more efficiently.

Drawing experiences from all the earlier programs and projects, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was introduced in selected districts in a joint partnership of government and international organizations in 1994. This project was later merged into another national program, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which is followed by Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA). These programs have stressed the reduction of the social and gender gap in elementary education. Regional disparities also exist in terms of making provision for educational opportunities.

The government should take a second look at the effectiveness of Education Policies and develop and implement major programs for strengthening the accessibility of quality education without

any objections. A reallocation of government resources for better education and vocational training is the need of the present time.

It is a fact that for millions of economically and socially backward students living in rural areas, government loan schemes are still a dream. The solution for this dilemma is the development of a uniform, affordable and quality public education system. If the public education system of a country is strong enough, the chance for discrimination will decrease to a great extent.

Mainstreaming the Marginalized

Mainstreaming is the process of incorporating individuals with special and specific needs and into the main educational stream to enjoy regular school classes and thus to incorporate them into the prevailing social activities and thoughts. Various initiatives and efforts have been made to realize the concept of education for all however, the rate of wastage and stagnation in the Indian education system is still in a critical range. Multiple causes are there including social, economic, ethnic and also faulty educational systems which hindering the children from lower social strata from accessing and sustaining the education. For the mainstreaming of the marginalized children the following suggestions would be beneficial;

- The effective implementation of the Right to Education Act should be monitored by the government to ensure not simply enrolment of students, but on the retention of every student in school.
- The government should take initiatives to check the dropout rate by monitoring children at risk of dropping out, and develop appropriate social mapping strategies has to develop by relevant authorities among marginalized and minority communities to ensure the retention.
- Any kind of discrimination should be stopped from all the educational systems including from the part of the policymakers, officials, teachers, and fellow students. The government should strictly monitor such practices in the educational institutions from primary level to higher education. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights can do much in this regard by making appropriate guidelines to address discrimination and other abuses of children and set out appropriate disciplinary measures. Penalty for such malpractices also should be strengthening.

- Better incentives to the families to send their children to school regularly till they complete their high school education.
- More teachers should be recruited from various marginalized groups to motivate more students to come to higher education fields
- Better hostel facilities for the students who need it to complete their course
- More educational institutes in rural and remote areas
- Proper attention for the tribal education by giving due respect to their cultural uniqueness and ethnicity
- Designing and implementation of instructional materials and curricula in tribal language with facilities to switch to regional language
- Human Resource Development Ministry can develop manuals for teachers and instructors to foster social inclusion and equity. Encouragement of children from marginalized groups in different school activities and responsibilities would positively influence their development. The collaboration of children of different social strata also should be ensured. The government can give instruction regarding this.

Along with proper service conditions, training and qualifications of teachers are a matter of concern. Quality of education is affected because of teaching-learning materials. Many of the teachers and students hardly get textbooks and materials of good quality causing learning difficulties for the poor children, as they have practically no access to any material other than textbooks. While improving quality, it is necessary to provide essential physical and academic facilities in the school.

Conclusion

Although India has already made significant strides in the task of expanding schooling facilities for all children, considering the existing disparities, a multifaceted endeavor is required to make a balance between quality and quantity to ensure its benefits available to all sections of society living in different regions. This should be an integral part of policy interventions for promoting social justice in society. Educational inequality takes different forms in different places which in turn results in the decrease in opportunities for children with low economic background, girls, ethnic, linguistic and socially marginalized group and children with disabilities and special

needs. So integrating all the children irrespective of the above-mentioned barriers should be the prime objective of the country.

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