SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN THE CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM OF INDIA

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Abstract-In this rapid era of globalization, education plays a very important role in each and every class of society irrespective of their class, creed or religion. India has undergone significant rise in educational expansion in recent years. However, certain socially excluded groups such as Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe, Muslims, girls and women and children with disabilities face discrimination in many aspects, which leads to social inequalities. This article explores the issues, dimensions and challenges related to social exclusion from education particularly the children coming from disadvantaged groups. In addition, it has also focused on the policies implementation to get rid of these educational inequalities. Therefore, it has required actions and steps to make education available to all groups of the society that will remove social inequalities from the education system and promote social inclusion and social cohesion.
Key Words: Social Exclusion, Education, Social Inequality, Disadvantaged Groups

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of learning is called education that includes acquisition of information, knowledge, social and moral values and most importantly skill nowadays. There are various means of attaining education such as storytelling, classroom discussion, teaching, research and training, and learning through IT hubs. In current scenario, nobody can deny the importance of education in this complex world. It is a foundation of our life to mitigate the challenges and to make crucial decision of life. We need education not only for our livelihood but also for our survival. It benefited both individual and society as a whole. Instead of our livelihood, it plays pragmatic role to understand our as well as world's diverse culture, socio- economic and political system, science & technology. Therefore, we need an effective and comprehensive education system for development of the nation. Today, human resources are an important component of economic development indeed we required a man-power planning to pertaining knowledge, skill and training to our citizens. This has implication of future course of action to develop India as a knowledge base economy.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In this rapid era of globalization, education plays a very important role in each and every class of society irrespective of their class, creed or religion. India has undergone significant rise in educational expansion in recent years. However, certain socially excluded groups such as Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe, Muslims, girls and women and children with disabilities face discrimination in many aspects, which leads to social inequalities. These socially excluded communities face discrimination in the attainment of different resources especially in gaining education. Inequality leads to failure in accessing fair education to these socially excluded groups of individual and finally suppresses social and economic mobility. These patterns of unequal access to social resources are commonly known as "social inequality". In other words, social inequality may be explained as the differences between the abilities and efforts of various individuals or may be some individual is gifted with exceptional talent or intelligence or may have worked very hard to achieve power, status and wealth. Although, these factors are not responsible for social inequality, they are largely produced by the society itself.

In each and every society of the world, especially people born in the developing country like India, the society is divided into different classes. Some groups of people have a greater share of resources such as property, money, education, health, power, etc than the other groups of the society. According to sociologists, this type of classification is commonly known as "social stratification". This stratification leads to social inequality because of which socially excluded groups are formed.

Ethnicity and religion is also reflected in educational attainment with a vast quantity of literature documenting inequalities therein (GoI 2006; Govinda 2002; Probe Team 1999; Thorat and Newman 2009). These types of social inequalities have been a cause of concern to both the government, public and civil society. The government has put in place strong, affirmative action policies to redress many of the historical injustices. Some of these have received strong public support but others, particularly those regarding reservation of seats in colleges and universities; have led to resentment and protests from more privileged sections of the society. It has highlighted by Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998). Nonetheless, after more than 60 years of implementing policies aimed at restoring this imbalance, and some decline in educational inequalities, the gap still remains wide (Desai and Kulkarni 2008)

3. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

➢ To understand the social exclusion in India.
➢ To examine the educational inequality in India.

> To overview various causes and effects of social exclusion in the Indian education system
> To study different barriers to social inclusion in India to attain basic education.

4. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

This paper has been analyzed the trends, causes and effects, challenges and future course of actions of social exclusion in India education system. The work has used explorative method to draw inferences on the basis of previous literatures and done trends analysis. Research work is based on secondary data. For this study, data has collected from various sources including the National Family Health Survey–II (1998/99), Reproductive and Child Health Survey 2002-2004, the 2001 Census and routine monitoring information from the Department of Education.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Overview of the Effect and Causes of Social Exclusion in the Education System of India

In the early 1990s, there has been a significant rise in the overall literacy rates and school participation rates across the country. Gender, social inequalities and social disparities have also been declined with an overall increase in the number of children attending school. Due to massive enrolment strategies, the country was quite successful in the rise of number of children getting enrolled in primary schools. The Gross Enrollment Rate has increased from 90% in 2003-2004 to 98% in 2004-2005. Similarly, the net enrollment rate has risen from 72% to 82% during the same period. (Department of Education, 2006) A number of factors have contributed to the rising enrollment rate including the introduction of mid-days meals, opening of alternate schools, promoting the participation of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and massive enrolment drives.

A constitutional amendment was passed in 2002 making free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged 6-14 years. The national and state governments continue to deliver the programme Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which aims to achieve universal elementary education by 2010.

While enrolment and attendance in primary school has increased, the quality of education remains a major concern. Little emphasis has been placed on making education more relevant or in encouraging learning by doing and learning by observation. Activity-based and child-centered learning arrangements are still very weak. There are many situations where children mechanically go through five years of primary education and emerge barely literate, leading to community apathy towards schooling. The poor quality of education is reflected in the continuing low level of completion rates of primary school. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS) collected data on the 'level of education completed', whereas the Reproductive Child Health Survey (RCHS) provided data on the years of education completed. The length of primary education is also defined differently in different states of India with some states having 5 years of primary education and others having 4 years.
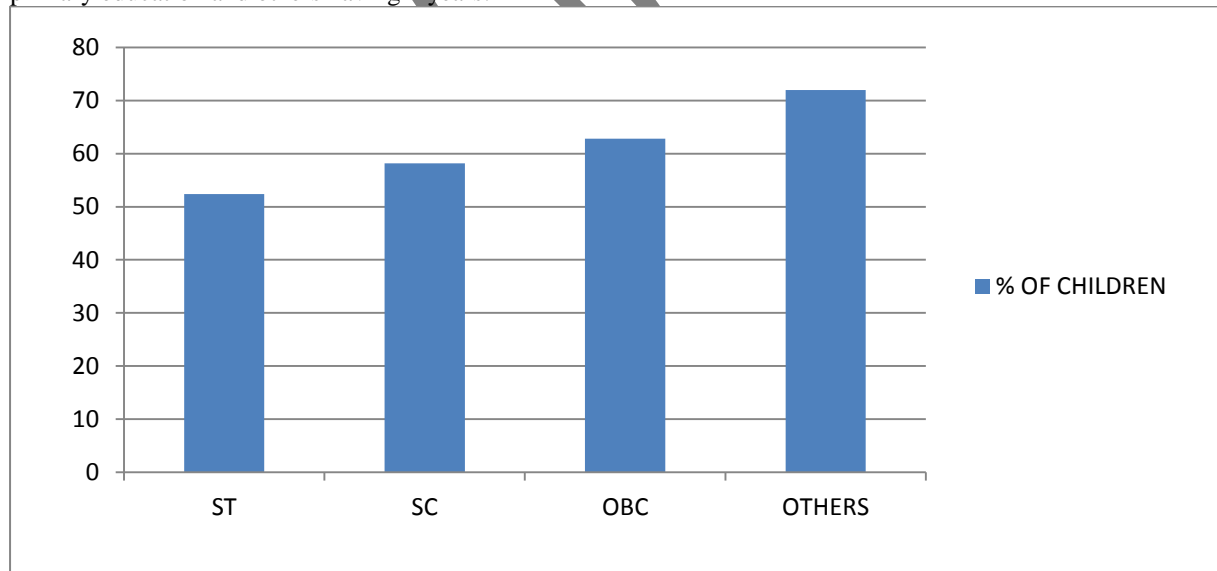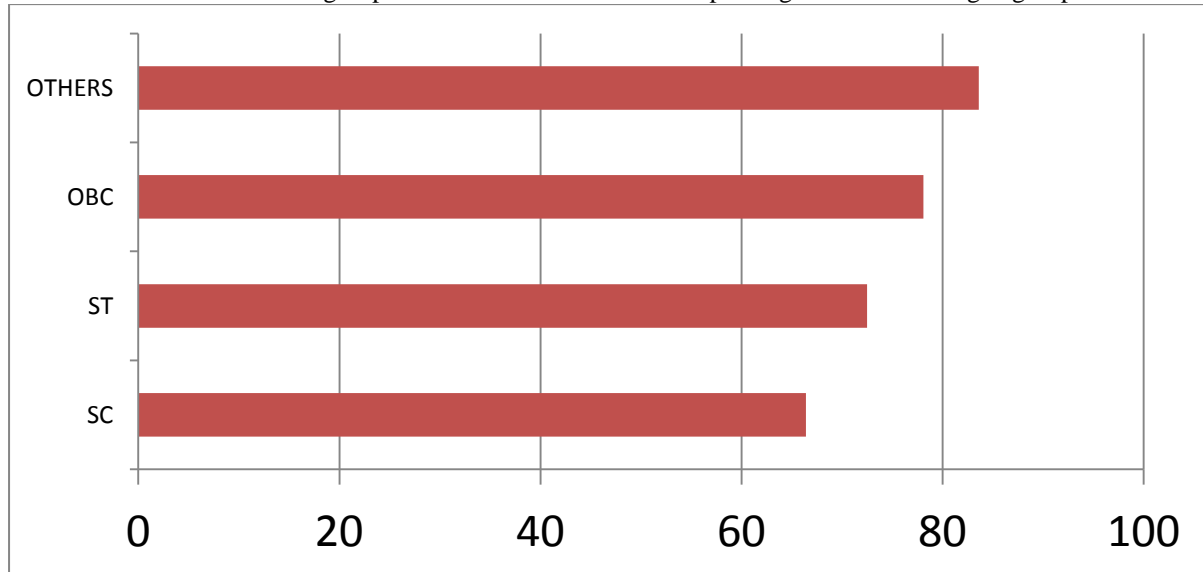

Source: NSSO, (2005)
Fig. 5.1 Shows Percentage of Children (6-14 years) who can Read and Write

Hence, in some states the completion rate is calculated for 9-11 years age group while in others it is with the 10-12 years of age. Based on the RCHS-II (2002-2004), 37.8% of children in 10-12 years age group have completed at least 5 years of schooling.

The above graph (5.1) clearly indicates that there is a huge gap between the SC children and children from other caste who can simply read and write is 52.4% as compared to 72.0%. Here the picture of social exclusion is

clearer. If appropriate steps are not taken to remove this type of social inequality, a huge gap will be formed between the children of other groups and the children of the underprivileged or disadvantaged groups.

Source: NSSO, 2005

Fig. 5.2 Shows Percentage of Children Attending School

The above graph clearly indicates Graph 1 indicates the percentage of children (6-14 years) attending school, which is 72.5% for SC compared to 83.6% for children from other castes. In spite of all the attempts done by the government to make education available to all groups of the society, the socially excluded groups are largely affected.

5.2 Social Exclusion: A Major Issue of Human Rights

Reviewing the effectiveness of policies and programmes in addressing social exclusion relates to the discussion on human development and human rights. Put simply, development approaches from the 1950s to the 1980s primarily focused on social and economic development as an outcome of the development process and were less concerned with civil and political rights. During this period, government policy and the development community were also less concerned with the quality of the process by which the outcomes were achieved (Jonsson, 2003, 4). In contrast, the human rights based approach to development recognizes both the achievement of a desirable outcome and the establishment of an adequate process to achieve and sustain that outcome. "Participation, local ownership, empowerment, and sustainability are essential characteristics of a high-quality process (Jonsson, 2003, 45). A rights perspective is based on principles that emphasize accountability of those with obligations to realize the rights of children; the universality of rights; the indivisibility and interdependence of rights; and also the principle of the best interests of the child and taking into account the views of the child. The state and the other 'duty-bearers' (e.g. parents and teachers) have obligations to fulfill these rights. As rights-holders, children are entitled to demand that the duty-bearers meet their respective obligation to respect, protect and fulfill their rights. (United Nations Children's Fund, 2002)

This global shift in development towards a human rights perspective has important implications for addressing social exclusion in education as it encourages one to take a broader, systemic and more holistic view of the issue and not interpret it only as a failure of the education system alone. A thorough analysis of the implications of adopting a human rights-based approach to programming is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is sufficient to note that this approach necessitates a broader perspective in addressing the issue of social exclusion, and highlights the importance of focusing on both achieving the desired outcome (i.e. all children in school) and following an inclusive and participatory process. Similar to the broader recognition that poverty is not merely a lack of income but rather a condition of living in various forms of deprivation, social exclusion is not only a development issue, but is also a human rights issue and therefore requires a more comprehensive and process-oriented response (Jenkins and Barr, 2006).

5.3 Degrees of Social Exclusion

Social exclusion occurs at different degrees. The degrees are mentioned below in the following points –
  ➢ the complete denial of access to social services, such as the refusal of being treated at a hospital or children from the disadvantaged groups are not allowed to play together in public parks or schools.
  ➢ Alternatively, it can take the form of selective inclusion, where socially excluded groups receive differential treatment such as being required to pay different prices for goods and services.
  ➢ Sometimes exclusion is deliberate and explicit for example when people from a certain social background are denied access to a particular facility.

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> Sometimes it can be implicit and unintentional, and is simply a result of people adhering to ingrained norms and values and established form of social interaction.

Various Barriers for the Socially Excluded Groups of Children in the Attainment of Basic Education

Table-5.1 Reasons for Never Attending or Dropping out of School, Children Aged 6-17 years

Particulars	Males		Females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Never attended School (%)	6.4	13.6	9.0	25.7
School far away	1.5	4.4	3.4	5.2
Education not necessary	6.1	7.8	12.9	13.1
Required for work at home or outside	12.6	17.1	15.4	24.5
Costs too much	28.5	25.8	30.1	23.8
Not interested in studies	26.5	25.7	15.7	15.9
others	26.5	17.0	19.7	15.4
Don't know	3.0	2.0	2.8	2.1
total	100	100	100	100

Source: NFHS, 1998-99

The Table 5.1 indicates the major problems for children never attending or dropping out of school based on the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – II. However, we are unfortunate as this information is not available for different groups.

Table-5.2 School far Away, Education not Necessary, Costs too Much

Particulars	Males		Females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Dropped out of school (%)	10.6	10.6	11.0	12.6
School far away	0.3	1.4	1.2	7.5
Education not necessary	2.4	2.3	5.4	4.3
Required for work at home or outside	21.9	28.4	20.8	26.2
Costs too much	15.2	13.3	17.0	11.4
Not interested in studies	42.5	40.0	30.2	24.0
Repeated failures	6.0	5.3	6.1	3.7
Other*	5.9	5.5	14.3	18.2
Don't know	5.7	3.8	5.1	4.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NFHS, 1998-99

5.4 Social Inclusion: A Process to Eliminate Social Exclusion in Schools

Inclusive education is the process of eliminating exclusion on the basis of social, economic and cultural background of the child in schools and other centres of learning. It is an indispensable tool to achieve social

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equity (UNESCO 2009). The policy makers and the governments all across the globe adopt two principles of policies to increase access to education to all the individuals of the society.

➢ The first principle is to allot extra resources to low-income public schools or the fully funded government run schools which cater to students from the low economy or under-privileged groups and also to the children with disabilities, alternate schools for out of school children and other non-formal educational set-ups.

➢ The second principle is to make schools accessed by children from affluent or high-income families accessible to children from the marginalized sections or disadvantaged or socially excluded groups. The second principle is more effective as the integration of these socially excluded groups of children into the private schools.
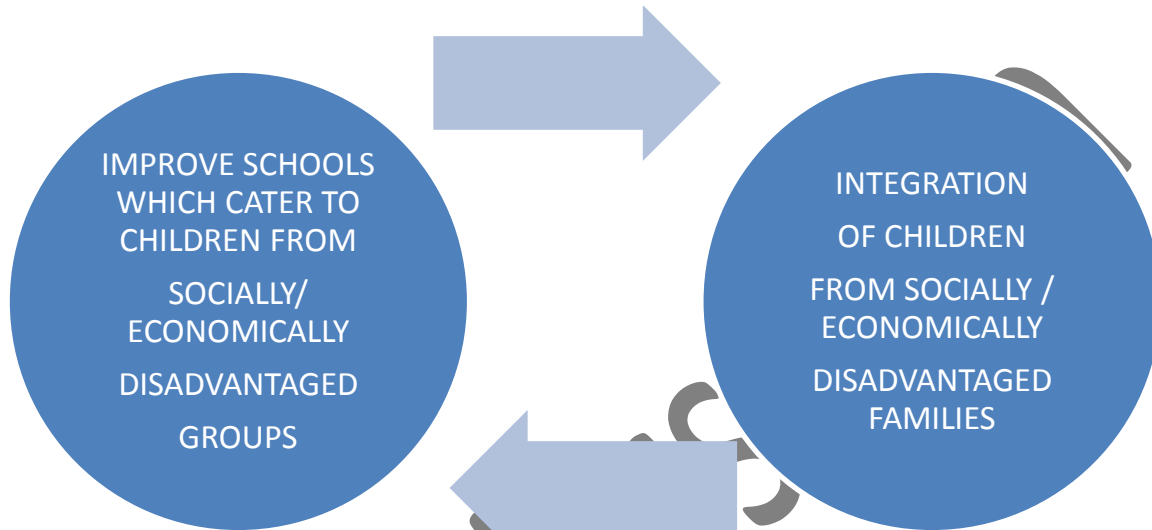
6. A TWO WAY APPOROACH TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Fig. 6.1 A Two Way Approach To Inclusive Education

6.1 Improve Government Schools Which Cater to Children From Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds or Children With Disabilities

In India, the Government schools majorly cater to children from disadvantaged or underprivileged groups. SCs and STs had a total enrolment of 37.6% and 35.29% in government run primary and upper primary schools in 2012-13 (DISE 2012-13). Therefore there is a need to ensure that these schools are equipped with sufficient resources to provide quality education equivalent to the standards of private schools in the country. This is however a long term policy which the government should follow. In the short run, with government schools failing to meet standards, there is a need to increase access to private schools to children from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure equitable access to quality education.

6.2 Integration of Children from Socially / Economically Disadvantaged Families or Children With Disabilities in Private Schools

➢ The dropout rate is observed the highest among disadvantaged groups of children which indicates the failure of government schools to retain children. With the ASER 2013 projecting 50% of Indian children attending private schools by 2018, and private school students performing 20% better on basic literacy and numeracy skills, it is imperative to make the private schools more accessible to children from all sections of the society (Indus Action n.d.).

➢ Section 12 (1) (c) of the Right to Education Act, 2009 aims to attain the goal of inclusive education through this approach. The provision mandates reservation of 25% seats in class 1 in private unaided and special category schools near by, for the children from economically weaker sections and socially backward groups; if a school provides pre-school education, then the rule applies the same to the pre-school section of the school.

➢ However, this integration was not favoured by the private run schools. The principals are of the view that an alternate schooling system where children from disadvantaged backgrounds study in the same school premises in a different shift would be better than integration of such children with the fee-paying children (Mallica 2005).

➢ An observation of schools abroad shows that integration of children from different backgrounds has a positive impact on the performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finland, which is considered to have one of the best education systems, had the lowest socio-economic segregation

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according to PISA scores (Kahlenberg 2012). Thus, this integration shows positive impact and can be implemented.

7. SPECIAL INCENTIVES / PROVISIONS FOR EDUCATION TO SOCIALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS TO ELIMINATE SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN INDIA

The following special provisions for SCs and STs have been incorporated in the existing schemes of the Departments of Elementary Education & Literacy and Secondary & Higher Education:

➢ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) main objective is to provide quality and free elementary education to all the children in the age group of 6-14 by 2010 in the country.
➢ Flexible norms for starting of primary schools: A primary school can be opend within 1 km walking distance from habitations of 200 populations instead of habitations of 300 populations.
➢ Priority is given to the areas of concentration of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the programmes of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Lok Jumbish (LJ), Shiksha Karmi (SK), Non-Formal Education (NFE) and National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education.
➢ Under the Scheme of Strengthening of Boarding and Hostel facilities for girl students of Secondary & Higher Secondary Schools preference is given to girl hostels located in educationally backward districts, particularly those predominantly inhabited by SC, ST and educationally backward communities.
➢ The scheme of Kasturba Gandhi Swatantrata Vidyalaya is to improve literacy among the women belonging to SCs, STs, OBCs & Minorities.
➢ The Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme enables women, especially from socially and economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups to address and deal with problems of isolation, lack of self-confidence and oppressive social customs.
➢ The higher educational institutions administered by the Central Government reserve 15% seats for Scheduled Castes and 7.5% for Scheduled Tribes in case of admissions as well as in appointments (teaching & non teaching posts). Seats are also reserved in hostels attached to the Central universities/colleges.
➢ Zero tuition fee in all States in Government Schools at least up to upper primary level. Most of the states have abolished tuition fee for SC / ST students up to senior secondary level.
➢ Providing various incentives like free textbooks, uniforms, stationary, and school bags for SC / STs etc.
➢ There is 15% reservation of seats for SCs and 7.5% for STs in Central Government Technical educational institutions including IITs, IIMs, Regional Engineering Colleges, etc. Apart from reservation, there is also relaxation in the minimum qualifying marks for admissions for SCs & STs. There is fee exemption, book bank facility and scholarships in IITs.
➢ Relaxation in the minimum qualifying cut off stages for admission in Universities, Colleges and Technical Institutions, apart from reservation. University Grants Commission provides relaxation of 5% from 55% to 50% at the Master's level for appointment as Lecturer from SC/ST.
➢ UGC has established SC/ST Cells in 113 Universities including Central Universities to ensure proper implementation of the reservation policy.
➢ Kendriya Vidyalayas provide 15% reservation for SCs and 7.5% for STs. Norms are relaxed in admissions, if necessary and tuition fee is exempted.
➢ Navodaya Vidyalayas provide reservation of seats in admissions for SC & ST students in proportion to their population in the District subject to the national minimum i.e. 15% and 7.5% for SCs and STs respectively.
➢ Out of 43,000 scholarships at the secondary stage for talented children from rural areas 13,000 scholarships are awarded to SC/ST students. Out of 1000 scholarships, 225 scholarships are exclusively reserved for SC/ST students under the National Talent Search Scheme.
➢ Development of Indian Languages by CIIL, Mysore through research, manpower, production of materials in modern Indian Languages including tribal languages.
➢ 244 districts have been identified as special focus districts on cross matching basis from among those, consisting of areas of Minority Concentration blocks / tehsils, ITDP blocks, Schedule V & Scheduled VI areas and districts with SC female literacy less than 10% for focused attention by Centre as well as by States/Union Territories in implementation of programmes / schemes.
➢ Allocation 15% and 7.5% funds on notional basis from the budget of the Department of Elementary Education & Literacy and Secondary & Higher Education under the Special Component Plan (SCP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively.

CONCLUSION

In recent times, Indian schools have seen a massive expansion and an increased demand in the number of children going to schools but still we can see a large number of children from specific groups remain excluded from schooling for various reasons. Social Inclusion is one of the cross cutting principles to eliminate Social

Exclusion in the society and enhance Social Cohesion. The main focus of the government and school authorities should be on building socially inclusive atmosphere in schools and the societies where all the children are considered as one and should be based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Further more research is needed to enhance a socially inclusive atmosphere and complete removal of social inequalities like social exclusion.

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