

Diversity, Marginalization and Schooling

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ABSTRACT

A reality often ignored in education, is that of a heterogeneous classroom. In the contemporary world, it is imperative to acknowledge that classrooms are not homogeneous groups, but one of students coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Inclusive education addresses the diverse needs of students in a classroom. It strives to provide education to all, especially those who have been excluded from education, in the same classroom. It is also important to recognise that there exists a web of complexities which need to be addressed by researchers and practitioners constantly in the endeavour to make inclusive education a reality. This paper attempts to understand the experiences of those who have been excluded and marginalised from education. It analyses the various issues and concerns in educating the marginalised. It would also help inform and prepare teachers and schools against discrimination and exclusion. The paper raises questions about equity, equality and diversity that warrant reflection.

Keywords: Marginalisation, Education, Schooling

1. UNDERSTANDING MARGINALIZATION: AN INTRODUCTION

In India, the domain of schooling is reflective of the privilege of the elite where the members of the upper caste and class have enjoyed the right to education, depriving the masses of this fundamental freedom. Masses of children are starved of the basic right to education for the sheer reason that their parents cannot pay for school. According to the UNESCO, Education for All, Global Monitoring Report (2010), "Marginalization in education can be understood as excessive and endless disadvantage in education that sets some groups and individuals apart

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from the rest of society.” As a result, they are less likely to enter school, to start school at the appropriate age or to complete a full round of education, and they are more likely to leave school with lower levels of achievement. As well as being a sign of social deprivation in its own right, disadvantage in education is a cause and an effect of marginalization in other areas and a powerful transmitter of deprivation across generations. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, *Reaching the Marginalised*, “Marginalization in education is a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities”. This paper is an introductory piece highlighting the concept of marginalization and its relationship with education. The paper begins with building a background of marginalization in education in India with a focus on the Dalits and Adivasis. The following segment focuses on the discrimination faced by the marginalized communities in India especially in the field of education. The third segment is a theoretical segment where several issues such as equity and equality have been debated in the light of marginalization. The final segment is the conclusion which highlights efforts which can be made at an individual as well as a collective level to battle marginalization in education.

Despite the fact that all countries ratify the principles of equal opportunity and universal rights, research shows that, when it comes to opportunities for education, some people are more equal than others – the marginalized being the least equal of all. Inequalities linked to parental income, gender, ethnicity, race and other factors continue to confine life chances and intensify marginalization.

Social and cultural barriers to education form another forbidding hindrance. In our country, the education of girls is widely alleged as being of less value than that of boys, with traditional practices such as child marriage adding another layer of disadvantage. Members of ethnic minorities often face deeply embedded obstacles to equal opportunity. Starved of an opportunity to learn in their own language and faced with social stigmatization, they are set on an early path to disadvantage. Unfortunately none of these disadvantages operate in isolation. Poverty, gender, ethnicity and other aspects interact to create corresponding and emphasizing layers of handicap that limit opportunity and hinder social mobility. Velaskar (2010) argues that in India “Children face several atrocities; girls are traumatized by sexual harassment, dalit children by caste atrocities and minorities by pedagogies of hate.”

Elitist nature of education in India can be traced by to the Vedic times when education was restricted to the upper castes and was also given by the higher castes in Sanskrit (Pathak,

2013). Even during the colonial times education played a key role in the legitimization of colonialism. The British argument of “civilizing mission” where in they believed that in order for India to come out of the dark ages it must educate the masses and thereby imposed the British system of English education, which was successful in creating a class of obedient servants who lacked confidence and faith in themselves and started believing in a cultural superiority of the British. According to Pathak (2013), the main problems that we face today, of inequality in education, lack of access to education, poor quality of education, poor enrolment ratio of education can all be traced back to the faulty practices of the Western education policy of the British. Pathak argues that arrogance (of the middle and upper classes) became a by-product of modern western education.

Post-independence, despite the egalitarian stance of our Constitution, there exist several inequalities within the school system. These inequalities have further reinforced marginalization within the school framework. There exists a duality within education where elite schools exist for the children of the affluent and poor quality government schools for the rest. According to Kumar (1992) this is a process of “sponsored upward mobility” which privileges the affluent and ensures their success always. Kumar argues that this form of exclusive education cannot be conducive to the aspirations of a democratic and egalitarian society. Instead it breeds elitism and reinforces the existing inequality. In the words of Beteille, (2001) “There is a close but complex relationship between occupation and education in all modern societies...The expansion of education leads to the creation of new opportunities although not all members of society can benefit from those opportunities or benefit from them to the same extent, hence education can also be a source of inequality. This point hardly needs emphasis in a country like India where even elementary education, not to speak of higher education, is outside the reach of large masses of the population. Even in those countries where elementary education has become universal, not everyone can expect to go to the same kind of institution for secondary or higher education”. To this Nambissan (2013) argues that in India the learning context in schools is rendered complex not merely by the fact that it is mediated by class and power relations but because there are intersections with caste and Adivasi and minority status as well as gender factors which influence access to social and cultural resources in diverse ways. She argues that poverty as well as caste and ethnicity are seen as enduring constraints to the access and progress of children in schools. The increasingly stratifying nature of the education system and unequal schooling act as a key factor in the reproduction of inequality and marginalization in India.

2. MARGINALIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION

Inequality and marginalization have taken the form of discrimination against the disadvantaged section of society which includes scheduled caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (STs), other backward Classes (OBCs) and the Economically Weaker Section (EWS). Discrimination can be understood as an action that treats people unlawfully and unfairly because of their affiliation to a particular social group. Discriminatory behavior takes many forms. However, all forms of discrimination are exclusionary or rejecting in nature.

Wankhade (2013) examines the various forms of discrimination (primarily based on caste) which exist in Indian society. Also he points out that this discrimination could take a direct or an indirect form.

Caste intensified discrimination- by virtue of birth in upper caste, an individual enjoys a higher social status, more economic power and carries inherent cultural capital and uses all this against individuals born in lower caste.

Caste specific discrimination – based on cultural norms, belief practices and customs, derives its legitimacy from principles of caste and religion. For example scavenging, shoe making, hair cutting are considered impure and are performed by lower caste.

Caste imposed discrimination – caste inequality has been socially constructed through age old norms and customs and practices to project social and political interests. These groups try to dictate and impose their own world view, their practices, beliefs, and customs on other depressed groups.

Self -imposed caste discrimination- members of lower caste have internalized caste inequality and consider their position divinely given and they willingly submit to the dictates of the upper caste.

Although literature based on developing countries has highlighted the role of schools and teachers in promoting marginalisation in education, much of such evidence is anecdotal. In India, qualitative research presents a dismal picture of the sufferings of Dalit and adivasi children. In one study, a school teacher from a Dalit background recalled, “We were asked to sit separately. Our copy or slates were not touched by the teachers”. (The Probe Team 1999) Dalit homes are mostly located outside of the main village and thus children from Dalit background have lesser access to schools. In a village in Tamil Nadu, it was observed that

“None of the Scheduled Castes were even allowed to walk through the residential areas of the dominant castes or through the village’s main street running through the residential areas of the dominant castes. They had to walk a long way along the periphery of the village to reach their huts.” (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002) Further, teachers also tend to behave inappropriately, often humiliating students from a Dalit background. It has also been seen that teachers from an upper caste background tend to have lower expectations from students from Dalit background and consider them ‘dull’ and ‘uneducable’ (The Probe Team 1999). The UNICEF Report On Inclusive Classroom, Social Inclusion/Exclusion and Diversity: Perspectives, Policies and Practices reports that “Children have narrated painful stories of their experiences in the classroom and shown their resentment to this, as well as towards the teachers (Probe Report, 1999; Nambissan, 2001; Govinda, 2002).” In a personal observation and discussion with teachers of several private schools of Delhi it was seen that teachers are often insensitive to the needs of the children with special needs. Even minor things like refusing to eat from the tiffin of a slum child can have an impact on the impressionable mind of the child. Nambissan (2013) also points out that, teachers from upper caste are indifferent to the needs of the children from the Dalit community. In her experience she notes that this leaves the dalit student bereft of the love and care he deserves from his teacher. The Dalit student finds himself excluded because of the lack of involvement of the teacher.

"They come to school without brushing, in dirty clothes", "living under one room with parents, they are born characterless", "they are caretakers of younger siblings", "most of them work for a living", "and they show risky behavior and at times intimidate teachers". These are some of the observations made by government school teachers as quoted by Indian Express Chandigarh, in July 2013.

This recent example is a clear example of the concerns of teachers which also impacts their attitude towards the children with special needs.

In an NGO based report titled *The urban irony of education as a right*; a case study on education in a slum in Delhi explains why there were so many dropouts, "The parents and children are scared to talk to their teachers in school. If they have doubts understanding what is being taught and try to express this to their teachers, they are scolded or asked to leave the class because the teachers do not like to be challenged. They are afraid of the teachers. And so are the parents. They worry that if they complain about teaching standards their child will be

thrown out of school." Again the onus is on the teacher in this case. Students and parents are afraid to speak and interact with the teacher which reflects the attitude of the teacher.

Children have also reported experiencing violence at the hands of teachers and classmates from dominant castes. Dreze and Gazdar (1996) in their study on a village in Uttar Pradesh reported that teachers refused to touch Dalit students. Students reported being subjected to verbal abuse and physical punishment by teachers, and also being beaten up by upper-caste classmates. Dalit students feel like outsiders and inferiors in every day affairs which even leads to suicides by Dalit students just to save dignity (Sukumar, 2008). Individual choices like dressing style, the kind of footwear, language skills, fluency in speaking English all lead to an inferiority complex. Research studies also found that Dalit children made to work in school; there were mainly two types of tasks assigned to the students by the teachers. Those which were refined and related to school activities such as participating in and leading the morning assembly, representing the school were done by upper class section while jobs like cleaning the playground, mid-day meal utensils, toilets were done by students of the disadvantaged class/caste (Ramchandaran and Naorem, 2013; Nambisaan 2009).

Adivasis also suffer from similar low expectations. In addition, they face some additional issues as well. Their geographical location is often inaccessible as they live in hilly regions or forests. Demographically, tribal habitations are small and do not have a dense population. This translates into a lack of infrastructural facilities, including schools and roads. Even when schools are within walking distance for students, during monsoons, roads become impassable. Teachers, who tend to live in large town, tend to unofficially close the schools as it is difficult for them to reach schools at such times. Language poses another major challenge for tribal education. They tend to have local dialects and often do not speak the main state language. Thus, students from tribal backgrounds tend to feel further alienated as many of the teachers are not proficient in tribal dialects. Language spoken by the teacher/ medium of instruction is often different from the vernacular language spoken which makes it extremely challenging for the student to perform well in class (Ramchandran & Naorem, 2013).

Languages have been associated with task and class. The elite prefer the use of English as their first language and completely discard and disregard their vernacular language and feel that other languages are for trivial tasks and must be left to be used by the lower classes (Mohan, 2014) For greater social mobility the disadvantaged feel the need to learn the English language which is a major challenge as they are mostly first generation learners and studying

in English medium becomes extremely challenging. Teachers find it difficult to translate English words to Hindi words, as the children have no concept of it. In the primary years, children of the disadvantaged section are at a great loss due to their inability to grasp the language, which in turn makes them feel deficient and unintelligent.

These children experience exclusion as an individual and personal failure (Sukumar, 2008); first generation learners from marginalized disadvantaged communities, not only lag behind curriculum requirements, but also face entrenched pedagogical practice. Teachers interact with students who speak well and are conversant in English, which further alienates marginalized students and excludes them, making it a vicious cycle. Most teachers believe that students of marginalized section do not find education important and therefore do not perform well. Absenteeism and irregularity amongst children also meant that the students were unable to keep pace with learning (Ramchandaran & Naorem, 2013)

With respect to the adjustment of the socially marginalized section (especially dalits and adivasis) in inclusive schools it has been revealed that in the classroom, curriculum delivery and pedagogy in government schools in India, children belonging to marginalized communities, are subjected to discrimination and humiliation. This has an impact on their self-respect and self-confidence. Caste and class based marginalization can also take the form of labelling and stigmatization. Rao (2013) argues that stigmatization is the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance that leads him to experience discrepancy between the actual and imagined identity, which may impact the presentation of his own self in society. This discrepancy, when known about spoils his social identity, it has the effect of cutting him off from society and from himself so that he stands a discredited person facing an unacceptable world. Stigmatization often leads to uneasiness; cowering, self-exclusion which other researchers argue also leads to academic failure and lack of social adjustments. In a case study based on the IIT JEE, he illustrates with several examples where and how discrimination takes place. He highlights the fact that even the entrance forms are colour coded which is the first form of stigmatization. As the students enter the classroom they are constantly reminded of their caste identities and labelled. These labelled students find it even more difficult to interact with the advantaged students and end up grouping amongst themselves. There are very few exceptions to this grouping pattern and may occur only when a Dalit student excels in sports or co-curricular activities. He shares several instances of SC students been discriminated against ... sometimes to the extent that they have left the institution as they could not bear the stigmatization. He argues that the policies and practices that identify

recognize and label students within academic and non- academic contents of the institution are detrimental to academic success and social adjustment of SC/ ST students.

Marginalization can also take the form of symbolic violence. Bourdieu (1998) defined symbolic violence as an extension of the term violence to include other forms of violence. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is an imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning upon groups or classes, accepted as legitimate. It is related to various modes of social and cultural domination. Symbolic violence is the unnoticed (partly unconscious) domination that people maintain in everyday living. Because symbolic violence is practiced and repeated in everyday life, people do not realize that certain acts or attitudes contain symbolic violence. He further states that symbolic violence is a soft violence applied by subject to other subjects. Symbolic violence is repeated from time to time through education in the family, formal schooling or informal learning. Bourdieu (1998) used the term “symbolic violence” to describe how the ideas and values of a ruling cultural class are purposefully imposed (often through subconscious means) onto a dominated social group. Culture plays a role as maintenance of the power relations. He claimed that culture contributes to the systematic reproduction of symbolic violence.

Another perspective to marginalization stems from Michael Apple’s concept of hidden curriculum. In *Official Knowledge* (1993), Apple maintains that textbooks represent a "selective tradition": "someone's selection, someone's vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one group's cultural capital disenfranchises another's. Apple refers to the process of depriving a particular group of privilege and power, while simultaneously enhancing the privilege and power of another group. He suggests that this happens through the preservation of a curriculum that reinforces the knowledge and culture of a particular population while concurrently ignoring the knowledge and culture of other populations. Apple further goes on to state that curricula aren't imposed, but rather negotiated, as non-dominant groups struggle to be heard. What tends to occur through this process of deliberation and negotiation is that the knowledge and perspectives of marginalized groups are included but become marginalized.

3. EQUITY OR EQUALITY: A RESPONSE TO MARGINALIZATION

The response to this inequality and marginalization of the disadvantaged section has led to the emergence of a debate between equity and equality and equality and universality. What do we want in this country? Do we want equal rights for all citizens? Do we want a just treatment for

all citizens? Is it possible to give justice and equal chances to all? Equity in education is a measure of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education. Equitable education systems are fair and inclusive and support their students to reach their learning potential without either formally or informally pre-setting barriers or lowering expectations. Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to educational success. An equitable education system can amend the effect of broader social and economic inequalities. In the context of learning, it allows individuals to take full advantage of education and training regardless of their background. Instead of acting as mechanism to transmit social injustice, education should act towards promoting equal opportunity and social mobility. The efforts of governments ratifying equal opportunity principles, reaffirming human rights commitments and signing up for international summit statements on education is not enough. Overcoming marginalization requires concrete policies that address the underpinnings of inequality perpetuating marginalization – and it necessitates political leaders to recognize that marginalization matters.

It is in the light that right to education is now a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Indian constitution. The Right to Education Act (RTE), enacted in 2009, has piloted a hope for school education in the country. It is the culmination of efforts made by educationists, members of civil society and judiciary for the last many years. Free and compulsory education for all children had been deliberated even in pre-Independence years. It made its way into the Constitution as a Directive Principle of State Policy under the former Article 45, whereby states were required to ensure provision of free and compulsory education (FCE) to all children till the age of 14 years within a period of 10 years of the formulation of the Constitution. There is enough evidence to suggest that this goal has not been achieved even several decades after India became independent. With the RTE coming into force, there is an expectation that this will finally be translated into provision of quality school education for all children. It is the primary responsibility of the Government to ensure implementation of the Act. The RTE Act is in consonance to the National Curriculum Framework 2005, which placed “an urgent need to understand children in their social, economic and cultural contexts and also to organically link the teaching learning practices and processes to broader social reality in order to make classrooms inclusive.” Inclusion in education also acknowledges diversity and differences among students as an important resource and opportunity for enriching learning. Inclusion promotes every child's participation in the teaching-learning process as well as the participation of communities in the schooling processing order to benefit all learners. At the same time, it

combats exclusion by reserving a special lens to promote the participation of children and communities from socially excluded and vulnerable communities. Ultimately, social inclusion is about transforming school systems and the learning environment in order to respond to the diversity of learners.

Inclusive education refers to the education of all children in mainstream schools within their local community (Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1995). According to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), inclusive schools “are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.”

The most important aspect of an inclusive classroom is an emphasis on the building of cohesive cultures around values and practices that respect diversity and multiculturalism. According to Mahajan (2010), “The concept of multiculturalism endorses the idea of difference and heterogeneity that is embodied in the concept of diversity.” He further argues that the concept of multiculturalism contributes to the agenda of democratisation and non-discrimination. He establishes that the idea of multiculturalism locates cultural identity as a source of discrimination in society. Second, he contends that equality for diverse cultures necessitates a system of special, group-differentiated rights. Unlike liberals who defend universal citizenship and equal rights as the most suitable instruments for countering community based discrimination, multiculturalists believe in granting special group rights for vulnerable minorities. This concept of multiculturalism in society holds true for multicultural classrooms as well. Educationists today believe that diversity needs to be respected and treated equally and hence promotes and supports reservation for the marginalised sections of the society.

However reserving seats (as proposed by the RTE and scholars like Mahajan) for the marginalised is no single formula or blueprint for overcoming marginalization in education. Policies need to address underlying causes such as social inequality, gender disparities, ethnic and linguistic disadvantages, and gaps between geographic areas. In each of these areas, equalizing opportunity involves redressing unequal power relationships. The inequalities that the marginalized face start in early childhood and continue through school age years. They are deeply engrained and highly resistant to change. Yet progress is possible with sustained political commitment to social justice, equal opportunity and basic rights.

The EFA Global Report on Reaching the Marginalised (2010) validates that removing school fees is imperative to make education more accessible for the poorest, but is not adequate to remove cost barriers. Indirect costs often termed as hidden costs associated with uniforms, textbooks and informal fees need to be lowered as well. Bringing schools closer to marginalized communities is also essential, especially for gender equity. Physical accessibility to schools has been a persistent problem for India and the government needs to construct schools in each community, village such that quality education can reach the masses.

4. AN EFFORT TO MARGINALIZATION

However getting marginalized children into school is just a first step. Ensuring that they receive quality education poses significant policy challenges. One of the areas which needs our attention is the fact that schools in deprived areas fail to draw qualified teachers hence making the cycle of marginalization vicious. Reforms in classroom teaching firstly require a need to respect the local language of the marginalised children and continue teaching in a bilingual mode so as to include all the students equally. Ensuring that children enjoy opportunities for learning in an inclusive environment requires changes in attitude, backed by investment in teacher training and learning equipment.

It is necessary therefore to increase the amount of time students spend with their teachers. Several non-academic activities may be organized for students and teachers together to enhance and improve this relationship. According to Artiles and Kozleski (2007), “The interaction between and among teachers and students is crucial in helping students develop, practice, use, and construct knowledge in informal situations. In this kind of classroom, opportunities to learn are facilitated by a sense of shared aspirations, supportive relationships between and among students and teachers, a community focus on local complexities, the development of tools for inquiry, and other features of a community linked together in purposeful learning.” Schools should encourage teachers, parents, and administrators to form collaborative teams to work together on comprehensive plans for students of the diverse abilities and develop school-wide systems that reward positive behavior. Teachers teaching students of the marginalized section should provide more than a warm and caring social environment. They must be attuned and responsive to the individual cues and needs of students in their classrooms; thereby teachers in inclusive classrooms must be most sensitive to the special needs of the child. Highly sensitive teaching requires teachers to pay keen attention to, process, and respond to a lot of information simultaneously. In an inclusive classroom where

students of the marginalized section hesitate in expressing their point or fail to understand a topic, the teacher must be able to identify and immediately react by helping and motivating the child to learn. She may, for example, change the tone of her voice to reengage those students not participating, take a quick moment to restate her question in simpler language.

Since, teacher is an indispensable element in the process of teaching learning, proper education and training of the teacher is most important. The range and complexity of changes taking place in the field of special needs implies transformation of teacher training curricula. Hence, the agenda for teacher education programmes must be to groom and train, provide practical experience and support each teacher to work with special needs children. Teachers in inclusive classrooms should have effective communication skills; good inter personal skills (sharing, leadership, conflict resolution etc.); adequate problem solving skills; & technical skills (behaviour analysis, assessment, individualized instruction etc.) A part of the teacher training must also address the realities of everyday interaction in any given classroom. A heightened awareness of, and the understanding that in the school setting situations arise where they [the teacher], must diffuse conflict, empathize with individual needs, provide emotional security, and more importantly, a sincere desire to interact with students must be imparted in teacher training. Teacher education programs must be designed to prepare teachers for greater social and cultural diversity than they typically experience in university classrooms.

Strategies such as co-teaching could also be applied to such inclusive classrooms. Co-teaching commonly results in a teacher teaching and the others supporting and (possibly other related-services staff) sharing the teaching responsibilities within a classroom to include children with and without identified special learning needs. First, the teachers engage in co-planning, making decisions together on the content that will be presented and the accommodations that will allow students with and without special needs to access the knowledge and skills embedded in each lesson. During instruction, co-teaching could be demonstrated in one teacher teaching and the other supporting. This strategy would help in reducing the burden of a single teacher and also ensure a better teacher student ratio such that students would get more and more individual time with the teacher. Along with this teachers also need greater flexibility and autonomy in their day to day transaction. It is often seen that the burden of completing the curriculum and the rigidity of the curriculum can make it difficult for teachers to spend time on explaining it to the diverse abilities of children. Hence inclusive classrooms require teachers to have greater autonomy and flexibility.

Teaching is a multifaceted profession, but, the most important responsibility a teacher has is to demonstrate a sincere interest in the students. It is only with a better student teacher relationship that the goal of inclusive education be fulfilled. Since the art of teaching is based on a strong foundation of social skills, the educator must be consciously aware of social interactions and the impact of those actions. Every teacher must be sensitive to the needs of the students of the marginalized section and help them adjust in the new environment. A little word of praise and encouragement could do wonders for the students from the disadvantaged section. Educators, must also, create an environment that allows them to get to know the students, and one that demonstrates a sense of safety and security. They must try and make sure that all the students are also sensitized to the needs of the other students which would facilitate the whole process of inclusion. Conclusively one may say that a little warmth and love in a student teacher relationship and a change of attitude is definite to make our inclusive classrooms truly inclusive in nature- reaching the finale of the spectrum where marginalization would finally be bridged.

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