

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN INDIA: FALLOUT OF GLOBALISATION

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ABSTRACT

Transfer of knowledge and technology between people and states is an important prerequisite as well as a consequence of globalisation. In this transfer, education assumes a role of central importance as it is a potential instrument of creation, assimilation and transmission of knowledge. Education equips people with knowledge and skills and helps them understand their basic needs and priorities, which enable them to demand, not only better services but also develop in them a healthy attitude resulting in a modern outlook. Education allows them access to a spectrum of opportunities. It further helps in human development leading to economic growth. It is only through improving the educational status of a society that the multifaceted development of its people can be ensured. Education has an important place in shaping a society, it has to be connected with globalisation and the global activities have a deep impact on education. Globalisation of Indian education has contributed in improving the educational status of society in general but its effect seems to be 'far- uneven' in certain sections. Societies that are well connected with the process have benefitted and those that are not have been left behind. Globalisation has perpetuated inequalities in education. It has widened the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Today in terms of education the Indian society seems more fragmented between the rich and the poor, the powerful and powerless, the privileged and unprivileged, the advantaged and disadvantaged.

Keywords: Globalisation, Education, Inequalities, Indian Society

Introduction

Globalisation is an existential reality of the contemporary times that has pervaded all societies of the world today. It has directly or indirectly affected destinies of people in almost all sections of society. It is a process of diverse changes and transformations that integrates the world. Globalisation may be thought of as "the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life", notes David Held (Global Transformation, 1999). The process of globalisation has created a borderless world through the free flow of knowledge and materials and mobility of people. Transfer of knowledge between people and states is an important pre-requisite as well as a consequence of the process. In this transfer, education assumes a pivotal role as it is " a potential instrument of creation, assimilation and transmission of such knowledge". Globalisation leads to economic growth and technological advancements. It requires countries to improve the quality of their human resources and also to upgrade their skills. Education helps in human development; it is an important investment in building human capital that is a driver for technological innovations and economic growth. Education and globalisation seem to be more intricately related to each other. On the one hand, globalisation has multi-dimensional impact on education and on the other hand education facilitates globalisation.

India started the process of economic globalisation in the early 80s by taking small steps and in 1991; major policy changes were adopted that opened the scope for liberalisation and privatisation. This huge process impacted all sectors including education. Education as a service industry is part of the globalisation process under the umbrella of General Agreement on Trade in Services and therefore, it underwent tremendous changes. Private universities, market-driven courses, huge private investments, decreased public spending and internationalisation of education are some of the changes that happened. Consequently, it underlined the need for educational reforms and the Indian government to keep pace with the rest of the world introduced from time to time various schemes to benefit every section of its society so that they were integrated into the mainstream and not left behind. Though globalisation of education system has improved the educational status of Indian people in general, in particular it has had fall-outs leading to inequalities; its

benefits have not been all-inclusive, it is believed to be 'far-uneven'. It has created stratification and has widened the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

Globalisation and Educational Inequalities- Who is left behind?

If we look into the history of India, education was never within reach of its entire people. Unequal access to education has been rampant in India. Over the generations one section of society were enjoying the fruits of education and remaining particularly disadvantaged sections like Dalits, other backward classes, religious minorities were denied the opportunity. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar recognised the importance of education in shaping the future and cautioned the disadvantaged not to lose any opportunity to avail that right, and said, "We may forego material benefits, but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent".

The Indian Constitution is committed to the equality of citizens. The Directive Principles of State Policy is also to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, in particular, of the dalits and minorities. To achieve 'Equality' special provisions have been made in the Constitution. Article 46 of the Constitution states that, "The State shall promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people". The National Policy on Education(NPE) 1986 modified in 1992 gives special emphasis on the removal of disparities and equalising educational opportunities. Various schemes and programmes have been initiated; different educational bodies and policies formed, all culminating in one Right to Education Act of 2009 that makes education free and compulsory for all children upto 14 years of age. But all this has been slowly eclipsed by the strong currents of globalisation in education. Today education has become a tool in the hands of private players. Commercialisation and privatisation has rendered it elusive to the underprivileged. It has become expensive and is catering to the rich, privileged and the upper echelons of society. The pro-market stance of globalisation has led to the widening of the gap between the privileged few and the large masses of the weaker sections of the society. It has further led to marginalisation in education of the already marginalised sections of society.

If globalisation leads to more access and retention in education then probably it is good, but if it makes access to and retention in education more and more difficult, then, it is bad. Today, there is an urgent need to debate on the impact of globalisation on educational inequalities in Indian education and work out the suitable plans and actions to reduce these inequalities. For this we need to see who exactly has been left behind. This paper discusses two sections of Indian society who due to their abject poverty, marginalisation, and being discriminated against since generations have not come under the purview of many benefits of globalised education.

Educational Status of Muslims: Muslims share a significant space in India's population. They account for 14.23 per cent of the country's population and are second largest denomination after the Hindus. Despite their considerable presence they are pretty much at the bottom of most socio-economic and educational indices. The rapid economic growth due to globalisation has had little meaning for them; neither have they been able to contribute effectively, nor have they benefitted from it significantly. And that is essentially because of low levels of education amongst the community. More than half of the Muslim population of India is illiterate, i.e., 53.9 per cent is illiterate with 17.4 per cent only so for namesake. Only 21.2 per cent have completed their primary education while the per cent of secondary education literates among them is 7.4 per cent. Muslims with technical and non-technical diploma courses are only 0.19 per cent and in the higher studies their share is only 1.72 per cent.

Sachar Committee set up in 2005 by the then Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh to analyse the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims of India, made very startling revelations about them. Some of the important findings in the education field are:-

- The literacy rate for Muslims is 59.1% which is far below the national average of 65.1%. When compared to SC/STs, their growth in literacy was far lower than the former.
- As many as 25 per cent of Muslim children in the 6-14 years age group have either never attended schools or else dropped out at some stage.

- Dropout rate among Muslims is highest at the level of Primary, Middle and Higher Secondary stage compared to all the other socio-religious communities
- Only 17 per cent Muslims have completed matriculation as compared to 26 per cent for all socio-religious communities
- Only one out of 25 undergraduate students and one out of 50 post-graduate students in 'premier colleges' are Muslims.
- Muslims consistently have lower levels of Mean Years of Schooling.
- The disparity in Graduate Attainment Rates between Muslims and other categories have been widening since the 1970s.
- The percentage of graduates in poor households pursuing post-graduate studies is significantly lower for Muslims (16 per cent) as compared to SC/STs (28 per cent) and OBC (23 per cent).
- Muslims are grossly underrepresented in the elite IIMs and IITs. Enrolment data for the Year 2004-05 and 2005-06 show Muslims were only 1.3 per cent of the total number of students in all IIM courses. In case of IITs out of 27,161 students enrolled, only 894 (3.3 per cent) were Muslims.

Now, over a decade later, there has been no perceptible improvement in their status. The Muslim community continues to lag behind all other marginalised, weaker communities in the sphere of education. The 2011 Census revealed that Muslims have the highest number of illiterates in the country-nearly 43 per cent of their population. Illiteracy level is even above the national average and only 2.76 per cent of Muslims are educated till graduation level or beyond.

Educational Status of Dalits: Dalits or Scheduled Castes are a very distinct social group in the caste-ridden Hindu society and constitute about 16 per cent of India's population. They have been subjected to social discrimination and oppression due to their low social status in traditional social hierarchy and hence, are the most marginalised and disadvantaged group of Indian society. Historical evidences in this regard indicate that Dalits have been excluded from the whole process of education since centuries. So, there exists inequality in their educational status as compared to other sections of Indian society. According to the 2001 Census the literacy rate of Dalits was 54.7 per cent which was far below the national average at that time. According to Census 2011, their literacy rate increased to 66.1 per cent as compared to 73 per cent of total population. During 2001-2011 the literacy rates for SC grew by 20.8 per cent which is quite a remarkable educational progress as compared to 12.6 per cent increase in that of total population. But still their literacy rate is low compared to that of overall population which is pinned at 73 per cent. However, owing to reservation and affirmative action in the area of education, substantial progress has been made in the field of education. Available data reveals that there has been substantial increase in the enrolment of children belonging to the dalits at all stages. But at the same time the rate of drop-out is also substantially high among the dalits. Despite several kinds of assistance, the drop-out rate is also alarming at the primary, middle and secondary stages of education. Due to historical interventions of affirmative actions in the form of reservation policies by the government of India, enrolment of dalits in higher education has increased.

Muslims and Dalits both have a significant space in India's population. Despite their considerable presence they are pretty much at the bottom of most socio-economic and educational indices. But on comparing the educational status of Muslims and Dalits with each other, the scale tilts more towards the latter. This can be attributed to them availing opportunities provided through reservation policies and also through their own efforts of mobilisation for approval and social recognition.

Perpetuation of Educational Inequalities- Who is responsible?

The role of education in facilitating social and economic progress is a universally accepted fact today. The ability of a nation's population to learn and perform in an environment where scientific and technological knowledge is changing rapidly is critical for its growth. While the importance of human capital and its augmentation for a nation's capital cannot be over-emphasised, its micro-economic consequences also need to be acknowledged. Improvements in the functional and analytical ability of children and youth through education open up opportunities leading to both individual and group entitlements. Improvements in education are not only expected to enhance efficiency (and

therefore earnings) but also augment democratic participation, upgrade health and quality of life. Education is empowerment, and the nature of positive change brought about by education ensures a position of dignity for the individual and the community which instils a sense of confidence and self-worth.

India cannot march on the path of development if a sizeable and significant population in it remains marginalised, disadvantaged and hence educationally backward. If this trend is not arrested it will hinder the progress of the country. This disparity in education access and attainment between different socio-economic groups is sown into the fabric of India. The gap has widened more in the past decades as a consequence of globalisation. In this era of globalisation education has changed from 'service' to 'industry'. Inherent in globalisation is continued stress on privatisation, cutbacks in social welfare on the part of government and faith in the free market. It has reduced government controls, restrictions and strict regulation, and licensing policy in all spheres of economic development and social progress. Liberalised policies have come to govern social sectors like education also. The commercialisation of education due to privatisation has made it costlier and out of bounds for the marginalised, weaker and disadvantaged sections of society. Education today discriminates between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', between the rich and the poor. Muslims and Dalits on account of their poverty-stricken state and being victims of social and religious discrimination have remained elusive from the educational reforms brought about by globalisation. The fruits of globalised education have not reached them. Due to lagging behind in education, the rapid economic growth of past decades has had little meaning for them, because neither have they been able to contribute to it effectively, nor have they benefitted from it significantly.

Muslims are a much worse lot than Dalits. The incidence of poverty is high within the community, and literacy levels abysmally low. Sachar Committee (2006) in its report highlighted that the main reason for educational backwardness of Muslims is abject poverty due to which children are forced to drop-out of schools. Poor and illiterate parents cannot afford tuition for their children, nor can they provide necessary support system. The opportunity costs involved in education are also too high for them. Another factor highlighted was that Muslims do not see education as necessarily translating into formal employment. The low representation of Muslims in public or private sector employment and the perception of discrimination in securing jobs make them attach less importance to formal education. There is a dearth of good quality government schools in Muslim areas. This forces children to go to private schools, if they can afford to, or else dropout. And if schools exist, then they are so low quality in teaching and learning that retention and school completion becomes difficult for children. Sometimes because of this, Madrasas are the only option available for the children. Due to low enrolment and high dropout rate in initial years of schooling reaching higher education levels becomes impossible.

The plight of Dalits is same as Muslims and the two factors of poverty and discrimination is true in their case as well. But accompanying these is the added stigma of their caste and occupation, also. Some other factors contributing to their marginalisation are social and physical segregation of their habitation, economic deprivation, cultural prejudices, social practices, lack of easy access to schools and lack of physical infrastructure, teachers and teaching-learning materials in schools in their locality.

Dalits do not have access or the opportunity to attend high-cost and presumably 'good-quality' private schools. Tuition fees are so high that they are not affordable to the vast majority of Dalits. English Language has become important in the era of globalisation and so it has become difficult for the Dalit students educated in vernacular medium to compete with their English medium educated counterparts.

Higher education has also been severely affected by globalisation. Prestigious, specialised and super specialised courses, especially engineering, management and technology and medicine are highly expensive and inaccessible to the Dalits. Many elite institutions like IIMs, IITs, facing fund crunch had to increase their fee structure and other charges manifold which are not affordable to the Dalits. Many foreign universities are invading the educational spheres at exorbitant educational fees where wealth has become the criteria for admission. It is precisely due to these reasons that Dalits are rarely to be found in prestigious, management and technological institutions all over the country.

The education, that these marginalised sections are receiving in government schools, is of the traditional pattern and there is no provision for skill development narrowing down their employment opportunities. Instead what Drucker calls

'service workers' are being created who are being rendered incompetent in this era of globalisation. Several generations of these people are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and unemployment. Unable to meet the challenges posed by globalised education, and insufficiently equipped with skills they turn out to be additional burden on country's economic and social structure.

Reducing Inequalities- Bridging the gap

Before suggesting measures to lessen the educational inequalities it is necessary to say that even though the role of the government is reduced in view of globalisation, and there is withdrawal of the state from its social obligation, it would be advisable on the part of the state to decide about the nature and extent of globalisation that can be constructively integrated into the educational system so that the disadvantaged sections are not alienated further. National interests should be kept in view. Having said that, these are some of the steps which can be taken to extricate the disadvantaged from the quagmire of stagnation, integrate them into the mainstream, and set them on the path to progress:-

The government should not relinquish its role in the various reforms. It should act as a regulatory body to ensure that education does not become a tool in hands of private players for making only profits at the expense of future of the masses.

The existing schemes of the government need serious review and reinforcement. There should be a mechanism for evaluating and monitoring of existing schemes.

A mass mobilisation scheme should be carried out in areas where the concentration of marginalised is high to generate awareness about the need for education and to promote vocational education and skill development.

Affirmative action has been at the core of public policies towards the betterment of the socially disadvantaged all around the world and there is no denying that Muslims constitute a socially advantaged group in India. Sachar Committee proposed the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Commission to ensure equally and justly 'access and use' of government programmes.

Affirmative action policies should cover private sector also so that the marginalised can have access and exposure to the global space.

Good quality schools should be set up in areas with substantial population belonging to the disadvantaged section. Proper infrastructure and quality of instruction should be given special attention. These schools if not equal should almost be equivalent to private ones. Well-trained teachers should be appointed and administration should take tough measures to ensure that the teachers take their jobs seriously.

In Muslim areas where there aren't good schools, Madrasas can be an alternative form of schooling where vocational training and skill development can be undertaken to make such children educated and employable at the same time.

Globalisation makes it mandatory to know English as a medium of communication. Provisions should be made to this effect in schools catering to these groups.

Special guidance and coaching programmes should be organised to increase their participation in higher education, vocational education and professional education so that they are not left out of benefitting from globalised education.

Conclusion

It is rightly said that when the winds of change blow those who don't stand firm and tall are blown away. Globalisation does not address the socioeconomic heterogeneity and so it does not ensure improvement of welfare of the socially disadvantaged groups leading to unequal development and inequalities in society as a whole. To reduce the inequalities perpetuated in education as ramifications of globalisation the state needs to be more proactive in removing hurdles in path of these marginalised sections so that they don't become a constant drag in the entire nation's progress. It is neither good for the country's social stability nor does it make economic sense. Education is an important consumption good

because it increases people's choices, both in leisure and in work. Notions of justice and equality corroborate its status as a human right.

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