# Education and Social Exclusion in India A Policy Perspective

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## Abstract

*The estimations of different statistics indicate that a large number of children are out of schooling system in India and majority of these children are from socially disadvantaged and economically deprived communities. A large number of marginalised children including religious minority are not able to access schools and maximum benefits of school opportunities despite the wide expansion of education system across the country. In fact, access to education is strongly and deeply rooted in social attitudes and orientations embedded in social structures and cultural belief systems. These structural and ideological factors play a vital role in producing social inequality and exclusion in education with respect to achievement and participation at all levels. In this context, it is pertinent to examine and analyse the complex relationship between social exclusion and education in a policy perspective for achieving the educational equity.*

## Introduction

Education is considered as one of the most important tool of human and a social development. Basic Education in India is a social good because of its unique characteristics of non-excludable and non-rivalry in nature. Therefore, the general assumption is that education is for all and no one is excluded from the access of the privilege of this type of social good. Though education is a social good and if access to education is a necessary prerequisite for access to a range of other social opportunities, then who can be educated and how became a fundamental concern of the policy makers at the policy level. Owing to its nature of democracy, just after independence much emphasis was given to formulate an inclusive education system in the country for achieving the universal primary education along with the universal literacy for achieving the political agenda of nation-building on the part of a newly independent country like India. As a result, along with the

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constitutional commitment to free and compulsory education to all children, the State had to focus on the extension of physical access to schooling, i.e., by establishing new schools and raising the social demand for education among the masses.

Although the expansion of education began rapidly in the initial years of planning and later in the subsequent years , but it failed to ensure the universal access and full participation of children in the educational process across the castes , classes and regions. Yet, access to education was not easy even then and now under all circumstances and where it is made easy, the quality of education provided often leaves much to be desired (Beteille 2008).

In real term the issue of access to education is strongly associated with many factors, issues and phenomena. The established fact tells that it is biased not only on account of severe economic inequalities but also because of strong and deeply rooted social attitudes and orientations embedded in social structures and cultural belief systems. These structural and ideological factors play a vital role in producing social inequality and exclusion in education with respect to achievement and participation at all levels. It is quite evident from the official statistics in India that 7.05 million children in the age group of 6-14 are out of schooling system (GOI, 2007). Even the SRI- IRMB study figured out the statistics is nearly the fourteen million for the same age group. However the figures may vary based on the different sources, but the fact remains the same. A large number of marginalised children including the Hindu and non-Hindu religious fold are not able to access schools and maximum benefits of school opportunities despite the wide expansion of education system across the country.

In this context, it is pertinent to examine and analyse the complex relationship between social exclusion and education in a policy perspective for achieving the educational equity.

The understanding of the dynamics between social exclusion and education raises many questions as: how do the traditional social privileges control access to educational opportunities? Is education itself an instrument for the construction of hegemonies? To what extent has corrective action since independence bridged the gap between the dalits at one end of the caste axis and the castes at the other end? In addition, one has to address the questions such as: Who considers who are to be included or excluded in the education system? Who are branded as "other category" in education system? What are the "limits of policy" in effecting fundamental changes in the hierarchical social relations which circumscribes the lived realities of the marginalised? What are the processes of policy response addressing the issue of social exclusion?

Against this backdrop this paper critically examines the policy environment in India with regards to educational inclusion of the socially deprived groups.

The paper is divided in to three sections. **Section-I**, analyses the issue of social exclusion and educational

access of marginalised groups, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who have been traditionally excluded from the mass education. **Section-II**, addresses the policy context, within which debates around exclusion and inclusion have occurred. **Section-III**, suggests possible remedies for social exclusion in education.

## *Section-I*

### Social Exclusion and Education

Drawing from the social science literature the notion of social exclusion can be defined as "the inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of society in which he or she lives" (Papadopulos, 2001). More concisely, it is "the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others" (Behrman and Others, 2003).

A wide range of factors affect the process of social exclusion. The inadequacy of income is central, but it is agreed that social exclusion refers to a wide set of circumstances than poverty. It refers not only to the distribution of income and asserts, but also to social deprivation and lack of voice and power in society.

Social exclusion is a complex process. It is sometimes the product of single factor. It is equally often the product of a complex forces and factors. Amartya Sen has described the various dimensions of social exclusion (Sen, 2000). On the basis of treatment in society, there are certain situations wherein some people

are being kept out or at least left out and in other situations some people are being included (may be even forced to be included) - in deeply unfavourable terms. According to him, the former is '*unfavourable exclusion*' and latter as '*unfavourable inclusion*'. From the point of view of policy analysis, Sen describes '*active exclusion*' and '*passive exclusion*'. In 'active exclusion', some people are excluded through deliberate policy interventions by the government or by any other willful agents, whereas the dynamics of passive exclusion works out through certain social processes without the deliberate policy interventions.

Education exclusion is a facet of social exclusion and manifests itself in a spectrum of social and psychological inequities. The stronger form of educational exclusion arises when the individuals and groups are denied the resources and facilities within the educational system. The other and soft form of exclusion occurs by manipulation of the delivery of educational goods and services to favour some individuals and groups at the expense of others or discriminatory attitudes towards particular children (Sayed, Subrahmnian and et.al., 2007).

### Process of Social Exclusion: Implications for Education of The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Indian society is characterised as multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. There are different forms of social exclusion associated with social identities such as caste, class, tribe, gender, religion, etc. In India, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

have been socially underprivileged, educationally backward and economically deprived for centuries. Historically both the groups were denied the social access to education. Scheduled Castes socially designated as 'untouchables' were systematically segregated from the village and were denied access to education. The exclusion of the Scheduled Tribes on the other hand based on different set of social and cultural factors. One of the studies they were defined as the "*double disadvantaged group*" owing to their socio-economic and spatial marginalisation (Sujatha 2002).

Review of related literature on access to education for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India can be viewed and perceived differently related to their socio-economic necessity. Evidence shows that for Scheduled Castes, access to education has been a major thrust for equity and social justice. Attempts to abandon the caste system and end the social discrimination have always proposed education as the primary means to overcome caste discrimination (Omvedt, 1993).While for Scheduled Tribes, access to education remained a secondary issue ( Surajit, 2002).

Despite special provisions in the constitution to meet the educational requirements of groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the likelihood of exclusion is compounded if the children live in rural areas and are female. The recent statistics reveals that there is a wide gender and social disparity in enrolment, retention and learning achievement at the primary stage. Both the demand and supply factors combine to restrict educational access for children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. While Scheduled Castes' students have much greater access to elementary education than Scheduled Tribes' children, they frequently encounter overt and covert acts of discrimination, prejudice and rejection from teachers and fellow students (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008). In other words, while public schools may appear to the places in which integration can take place, prejudices against Scheduled Castes persist in the classroom, playground and in the micro-practices of schooling (PROBE, 1999).

The likelihood of exclusion is further accentuated for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' girls. Most of the studies on them indicate a severe education disadvantage from multiple sources of exclusion: girls from impoverished families, girls from tribal, ethnic, or linguistic "minority" communities, girls living in remote settings, and girls from lower castes are less likely to participate in education and more likely to stay in school if they enroll at all (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006). The extent of their disadvantage can be realised in primary schooling figures across caste, class and region in India. Tribal girls in rural areas are in the most disadvantaged position, as only 51 per cent of them are enrolled in schools, whereas around 80 per cent of all girls in urban areas are enrolled (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008). The dropout rate is much higher among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe girls at the elementary level. In 2004-2005, the dropout rate for

Scheduled Caste girls was 60 per cent (compared to 55 per cent for SC boys) and for Scheduled Tribe girls it was 67 per cent (compared to 65 per cent for ST boys) at the elementary level.

More or less the government's reformative approach to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' education for bringing equity in the system is being questioned.

## *Section-II*

The nature of "conditions of access" determines the nature and extent of exclusion in public participation. While examining the concept of equity and exclusion in the educational context of marginalised groups, there are certain empirical studies which prove the exclusion of these groups in the educational system beyond the context of access, participation and outcomes. Kaul (2001) in her study, has clearly mentioned that how many Scheduled Caste children were scared to talk about the unequal treatment meted out to them, such as verbal abuse, physical punishment or avoiding touching, by some of the upper caste teachers in their schools. She has also explicitly dotted that prejudice and discrimination were not practiced very openly in the classroom and the peer group appeared friendly in school, attitudes changed outside the school. Children of upper castes did not invite the Scheduled Caste children home to play and there was no social intermingling outside the school (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008).

In policy terms, addressing social exclusion can be understood as compromising a number of processes.

The proper understanding of the policy processes is influenced by the different discourses on inclusion and exclusion. Dyson has provided four-models of discourses on inclusion and exclusion with relevance to education policy (Dyson, 1999).These are :(i) a rights and ethics discourse, (ii) an efficacy discourse, (iii) a political discourse, and (iv) a pragmatic discourse, which influence the inclusive frameworks of different countries.

**The rights and ethics discourse**

This discourse emerged in 1950s, with the intention of "equalising opportunities and spreading economic and cultural benefits more widely through society" (Dyson, 1999:39). This approach focuses on the notions of inclusion and exclusion provides governments with "measures" to determine whether development targets in relation to social rights are being achieved.

**The efficacy discourse**

This discourse argues that inclusive schools are more cost-efficient, socially beneficial and educationally effective than segregated special schools.

**The political discourse**

In this discourse, marginalised groups argue for their political rights under the rubric of securing inclusion.

**The pragmatic discourse**

This discourse is focusing on the dimensions of inclusive education as well as the means by which it may be enacted. This discourse also advocates "inclusive pedagogy" which relates to theories of instruction and learning (Dyson, 1999:42).

**Joined-up policy discourse**

This discourse has emerged in recent years. This focuses on the development of joined-up policy making as well as joined up delivery. It is based on holistic approach to the given problem. It is evident that exclusion is perceivable not only in "poor policy" but practices of exclusion evident in service delivery (Gardener and Subrahmanian, 2006).

**Process of Exclusion and Policy Text**

Understanding the dynamics of policy discourses on inclusion and exclusion in education, it is quite apparent that the concept of social exclusion potentially displaces a strong policy concern with equity (Sayed et. al, 2007).

The second policy concern about the notion of social exclusion is that it essentialises the categories of the "excluded". Thus, the excluded may be treated as one homogeneous category in which differences between men and women and other social groups are subsumed into one, thereby displacing the particularities of experience of exclusion. Therefore, it is really difficult to interrogate the excluded from the included and vice versa.

However, it is equally difficult to present the varying degrees of exclusion between and within these social groups. The point is to be critical for Indian context, where caste for instance is represented as a homogenising group and denying the deep seated differences of class, gender, and of location which characterise the divides that exits within the social group. A particular caste for instance, targeted for inclusion might have deep seated gender differences may be ignored at the policy context.

Another important point is that there is a failure to draw a clear distinction between the exclusion of an individual, on the one hand and group exclusion, on the other, which has often led to profound confusion, particularly in discussions on inclusive policies.

Nevertheless, the appropriate strategy for addressing the complex process of social exclusion at the policy level needs to be taken into account all dimensions of social injustice faced by the marginalised.

**Analysis of Policy Context for Inclusion in India**

The concerns for equity in policy making in education are addressed through the concept of inclusive education. But the very concept of inclusive education is based on inclusive growth. The term-inclusive growth implies the development strategies to focus on the poor, the marginalised, the neglected, the disadvantaged and deprived sections of society, and the backward regions of country. Thus inclusive growth pre-supposes inclusive education- good quality education that is accessible to all (Tilak, 2007).

The commitment to equality provisions in the Constitution is both varied and wide ranging. While the Constitution may indicate the direction where we are to move, it is the social structure which decides how far we are able to move and at what pace. However one can see the policy environment for inclusion in India under three broad headings: such as-

Table 1

**illustrates these policies in detail.**

| Policies for Inclusion | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Anti-discriminatory policies* | *Promotion of equal opportunities* | *Welfare and economic development programmes* |
| • Article 14: all are equal before law.<br>• Article 15: prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, sex and place of birth.<br>• Article 17: Abolition of untouchability.<br>• Article 46: The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of people and in particular of SCs and STs and shall protect from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. | • Reservations in educational institutions, jobs·<br>• Positive discriminations·<br>• Scholarships | • Special Component Plan, for the socio-economic and educational development of SCs.<br>• Tribal Sub- Plan·<br>• ITDPs·<br>• Modified Area Development Approach·<br>• Ashram Schools·<br>• Mid-day Meal Schemes·<br>• Mahila Samekhya·<br>• Kastuba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya |

Anti-discrimination policies incorporate legal safeguards against discrimination in multiple spheres of the society, polity and economy as the first remedial step. But legal provisions alone are not enough, as law have their limitations in overcoming the consequences of historical exclusion through the denial of the rights to education and other rights.

The features of equal opportunity policies in the forms of reservations, affirmative actions and others are governed by the core principle of caste system which is not inequality alone, but 'graded inequality'–unequal entitlement of rights to various castes. With this principle every caste except the higher castes suffers a degree of denial and exclusion. But it is also true that all sufferings castes do not suffer equally. Some suffer more and some less. Therefore, the loss of rights is not uniform across caste groups. And these dimensions of inclusion (reservation and affirmative action, etc.) vary across various discriminated groups depending upon the nature and form of their discrimination and deprivation.

There are certain state level programmes and policies aimed to ensure access and quality education for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs' children.

In concrete policy text, the *National Policy on Education 1986* and *Revised 1992 National Policy* broadly emphasises on themes of equality within education in respect to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Similarly, the concept of inclusion in policy as process is reflected through many central government programmes like DPEP and SSA. DPEP through decentralising planning addresses the issue of inclusion by specially targeting on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and emphasises priority attention.

In Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan emphasis was put on the educational development

of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes children.

However, owing to the hierarchical structure of Indian society, caste plays the detrimental factor of the life chances of the masses, where access to social and educational opportunities for the deprived sections of society is always questionable or doubtable.

Moreover, policy environment leaves open to question who is to be included and who is to be excluded. The structural component is so complex that it is really difficult for policy intervention. Giving the evolving nature of social categories and the exiting differences within a caste and between the jatis it is really difficult to point out who are more vulnerable to exclusion than others and the difficulty lies in the "fixed" nature of explanation that policies rely on to determine the choices made. Thus, the whole educational policy frameworks fail in terms articulating what are the bases of exclusion that the policies will address (Sayed et. al, 2007).

## Section-III

The Annual reports of MHRD 2007, shows that the number of out of school children in India is 7.05 million. While the overall reduction in number is substantial in spite of several programmes target at reducing inequalities in access, the problem of social inequality remains significant.

Similarly the 61st NSS (2004-05), (GOI 2006) analysis reveals that physical access to school is only a minor reason for low participation or dropout. Thus non-availability of schools, is therefore,

no longer is the key impediment to educational access for marginalised communities, and the focus now needs to change.

Keeping these alarms in mind, there must need an urgent change in the policy context in its approach and orientation for the policy of inclusion to address the issue of exclusion. An enabling policy for inclusion needs to incorporate these points as followed:

• **A rights based policy approach**

This approach is important because it ensures that policies of inclusion are conceived of as rights rather than incentives. Such approach sees the "excluded" not as backward people suffering as exclusionary deficient, but bearers of rights whose dignity need to be reaffirmed and whose needs became the drivers of policy. Of course recently it is conceived as access to elementary education not just a matter of policy but also a matter of right needs to be strengthened more through public awareness.

• **Holistic, integrated Policy**

Inclusion policies must be integrated with broader educational policies. Inclusive education needs to take account of the contradictory nature of exclusion that address the various ways in which exclusion is manifested at all levels of society.

• **Participatory Policy**

Involvement of marginalised in development of policy formulation should be promoted actively. Sometimes it is required expanding

the role of non-state actors in terms of participation in policy making and implementation and in strengthening the role of non-governmental organisations as representatives of the excluded.

• **Inclusive School Policy:**

Policy decisions at the institutional level are very important for sustaining the national policy decisions. At this level policies must consider how to include "Previously excluded" students in the system as a whole. School level policy is critical to ensure that the school as an institution is aware and focused on actions which tackle exclusion. Under this institutional policy level, "inclusive curriculum" i.e., reflects the wide ranging perspective and opinions and the content is free of biases, prejudices and casteism by teachers and school administrators.

These are certain suggestions which could be made at policy level for policy of inclusion but effective policy of inclusion can be possible only when it is coupled with proper implementation. Thus along with

policy making, policy implementation should be addressed adequately to overcome exclusion.

**CONCLUSION**

Getting education in the deep rooted diversified socio-cultural context is a complex process for a common man. It is true that for some children physical access to school is difficult, others fail to access school due to socio-economic reasons. Some join school, but are silently excluded and rarely participate in the educational process and termed as risk children. However, restriction of access to educational institutions due to interplay of structural and ideological factors is a great concern for policy formulation. Social access will be achieved only when, social distance within the communities in habitations and villages are eliminated. Therefore, in spite of effective inclusion policies adopted, for providing greater access of education to the marginalised, need for a change in the existing social attitudes and practices towards the deprived sections of society is required to have equitable education, which is considered a necessary pre-condition for educational equity and equitable society.

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