

Research Article

Primary Education of Scheduled Caste Children: The Hidden Truth

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ABSTRACT

Even after sixty-three years of independence, the education movement in India is still moving on with enhanced vigor and energy. The literacy rates of SCs (54.49 per cent) and STs (46.116 per cent) are far below the national average. The trend of education in India is on a new verge, as the Government in India has made drastic changes to educate its citizens to the maximum level of education. Virtually all of the Government policies connected to primary education in India have given requisite prominence on magnitude of schools and excellence of education but numerous issues have been unnoticed resulting in low education indicators of Dalit children. Dalit children are in tremendously susceptible situation in the primary education sector. This paper gives a fresh outlook on how Dalit children have been excluded from the primary education scenario. This paper is based on the various National Educational Survey reports.

KEYWORDS: Dalit, Education, School, Social Policy, Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion is a dynamic process that can be understood in social, cultural, spatial, economical, political and institutional context. The process of social exclusion can be understood through different hierarchy and framework. Dalit are socially excluded and discriminated on the basis of various reasons in the Indian society. Dalits are being treated as belonging to the bottom level of the society. Few of the recent reports have also revealed that Dalit children are deprived from education (Vimala, 2002).

A recent report has shown the population of Dalit children in India is about 17.38%. The state data showed that a bulky number of these children have been enrolled in schools. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary classes (I-V) is 88.30 %, for middle classes (VI-VIII) it is 71.86%. Further, some data found that the enrolment decreased as the children move from primary to middle stages. Reports show that enrolment levels of Scheduled Caste students are low because of the social stigma attached to the Dalit students which makes the teachers

prejudiced towards them. Admission to schools in the case of Dalit children, in the age range of 5-14 years has been comparatively low as compared to that of the general population. School attendance rates in rural areas of the country in 1993-94 were 64.3% for Dalit boys when compared to 74.9% for non-Dalit boys. Also it is noted that a total of 66.6% among Dalits dropped out in 1997-98 as compared to 60.5% for general population (Geetha, 1996; Planning Commission, 2007).

Further it is found that non-school going children and dropout rates among Dalits children are also more as compared to the general population. It is revealed that a total of 49.35% Dalit students dropped out at primary level, 67.77% at the secondary level and only 22.35% Dalit students crossed the secondary education level. An exhaustive countrywide survey, the Annual Status of Education Report-ASER 2006, conducted in more than 15,000 villages covering all major states in the country by Pratham, a civil society organisation, showed that 24.2 percent of the children are still out of school (Bajpai and others, 2008).

Dropout's rate among SC/ST Children (2006)

Categories	Andra Pradesh	Karnataka	Maharashtra	Orissa	Rajasthan
Dropout SC Boys I-V	44.09	6.12	17.02	44.99	53.07
Dropout SC Girls I-V	44.12	14.03	18.21	42.36	36.29
Dropout SC Boys VI-VIII	63.41	27.19	30.03	63.73	69.65
Dropout SC Girls VI-VIII	68.87	51.61	38.22	67.17	80.07
Dropout ST Boys I-V	63.29	4.88	34.42	59.58	52.19
Dropout ST Girls I-V	68.47	4.96	42.82	63.19	38.31
Dropout ST Boys VI-VIII	76.80	53.81	59.12	76.49	70.42
Dropout ST Girls VI-VIII	82.49	56.80	65.14	76.56	79.63

Source: Select Education Statistics (2006), Government of India, New Delhi.

CONSTITUTION HAS PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING ADEQUATE LEGAL MEASURES

According to Article 46 of the Indian Constitution, it shall be the responsibility of the State to promote educational and economic development of the disadvantaged sections of the society, focusing on Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. There is some provision that SC/ST students need not pay any tuition fees upto high school. Next Article 17 has abolished "Untouchability" in any form. To eliminate these social problems, Government of India has made unique provisions in the Constitution through its Articles 29(1), 46, 15(4), 350-A to promote education among SCs and STs. Also the Government has implemented a law to give free and compulsory education to creed. Children of all community in the age group of 6-14 years irrespective of their caste and race can get free education in any part of the country including Mid-Day Meal Scheme. However, studies found that the execution of this law and scheme faces several trouble such as shortage of funds, lack of enough number of schools, socio-economic status of the parents etc. (Mehta, 2005).

Despite some schemes the enrolment status of the Dalit children for the primary schools is moderately scanty. Among the percentage of schools having enrolment (including schools with zero enrolment) below 50, it is found that the percentage of such primary schools in many states is 40.2, highest in north eastern states of the country (Barua, 2007). The current aim of the paper is to give fresh elucidation to different Educational Statistics survey report focusing the plight of Dalit children in primary education in India.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis relating to the social exclusion of Scheduled Caste children from primary education

Table 1:Percentage of children completing Primary School Education

Survey	% Completed
NSS 52 (1995-96)	32.8
NSS 55 (199-00)	36.8
NFHS-II (1998-99)	37.7
RCHS-II (2002-04)	37.8

Sources: National Sample Survey

The 52nd NSS Report found that 32% of SC children have been excluded from primary education. The same 55th NSS round survey shows a medium increase in the exclusion category. NHFS (National Health and Family Survey) report shows a slight increase in exclusion of Dalith children from primary education scenario.

Table 2:Complete Rate of 10-12 years by caste (RCH 2002-2004)

Social Group	SC	ST	Others
Male	36.3	32.6	44.8
Female	32.3	26.6	44.1

This table shows that 36% of the SC population is underprivileged when compared to Other Backward Classes (44%) others. Further ST children are in some way even more disadvantaged than SCs in terms of education status because of poverty, problem with accessibility, geographical isolation and other reasons.

Table 3:Percentage of children in the age group of 7-17years who attended school (NFHS, 2005)

Caste/Religion of the Household Head	Never Attended	Ever Attended	
		Dropped Out	Currently Attending
Hindu S C	20.8	13.8	65.7
Hindu S T	29.7	13.9	56.3
Hindu Other(OBC)	7.6	10.6	81.3
Other	7.8	10.7	81.1

This table shows that 20% of Dalit children have never attended school and 13% of them have dropped out of school. It implies that only 65% of Dalit children are currently attending school. In case of ST 29% of children have never attended school where as 13% of them have dropped out of school. It signifies that only half of the total number of tribal children are attending school. In

case of OBC 7% of children have never attended school, whereas 11% of them have dropped out of school.

Table 4: Percentage of children in the age group of 10-12 years who have completed at least 5 years of Schooling across various economic groups and gender in rural areas (RCHS, 2002-2004)

Rural	Male			
	SC	ST	Other	Total
Poorest 20%	23.5	22.9	22.2	22.5
Richest 20%	50.0	56.9	54.2	52.9
Rural	Female			
	SC	ST	Other	Total
Poorest 20%	17.4	15.5	18.5	16.5
Richest 20%	52.5	45.4	55.1	53.0

This table indicates the disparities in rural areas among children from SC and also between the poorest 20% compared to the richest 20% of households using data from RCHS-II (Reproductive and Child Health Survey) for boys and girls. This survey is based on the economic status of the households and it reflects that girls are more disadvantaged than boys in the lower economic strata, where as it is less in the case of higher economic strata.

Table 5: Gender gap –Social group wise

Category	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
ALL	5.2	4.8	4.7	4.9
SC	5.8	5.3	5.0	5.3
ST	7.5	6.5	6.1	6.5

It shows the gender gap for SC and ST students is higher than for all students. The gender gap for ST students is significantly higher

Table 6: Reasons for Dropouts among Dalith Children (age group 0f 6-18 years)

Reason	Males		Females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Never Attended School %	6.4	8.6	9.0	14.1
Distance factor	1.5	2.4	3.2	3.3
Education not necessary	6.1	7.8	12.2	13.2
Required for work at home or outside for cash/kind	12.5	14.1	15.4	17.1
Education Cost is more	10.3	13.3	10.1	11.1
Socio-Cultural factors	8.2	12.5	12.0	14.1
Not interested in studies	37.4	27.4	22.0	16.2
Repeated failures	8.0	4.3	6.1	3.0
Dominance of Non Dalith teachers	5.9	4.5	5.3	5.0
Discrimination	3.8	5.7	5.1	4.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: Department of Education, 2006.

Table 6 shows that 6.4% of urban male SC children have never attended school where as 8.6% of male SC children have never attended school in rural areas. 9.0% of female SC children of urban areas have never attended school and 14.1% of females SC children of rural areas have never attended school. The female population of the rural areas is at a greater disadvantage as compared to the male population of rural areas. 1.5% of male SC children of urban areas and 2.4% of male SC children of rural areas have not been attending school because of distance factor. In case of females 3.2% of urban and 3.3% rural female children are not attending school because of distance factors. Social distance also plays a vital role. Majority of the SC families who have been isolated in a separate colony in rural areas are hesitant to send their children to schools located near to the hamlets dominated by higher caste people.

Further it is noticed that 6.1% of male children belonging to urban areas and 7.8% of male children belonging to rural areas have not been attending school because they are unaware of the role of education in one's life (education not necessary). 12.2% of female children belonging to urban areas and 13.2% of female children belonging to rural areas are not attending school because of the same reason. 12.5% of urban male children and 14.1% of rural male children are not attending school because they are the main bread wieners --earner in those families. Studies have further shown that these children are potential child labourers. In case of females they must be available at home to take care of the family in absence of the parents. 10.3% of male children belonging to urban areas and 13.3% of male children belonging to rural areas are not attending school because of lack of money (cannot afford) in their respective families. 10.1% of female children belonging to urban areas and 11.1% of female children belonging to rural areas are not attending school because of financial crunch. Next 8.2% of urban male, 12.5% rural male; 12.0% urban female and 14.4 rural female are not attending school because of various socio-cultural factors. 37.5% of male urban children and 27.0% of male rural children and 22.0% of female urban children 16.2% of female rural children are not attending school because of disinterest in studies.

8.0% of male urban children, 4.3% of male rural children, 6.1% of female urban children and 3.0% of female rural

children are not attending school because of repeated failures. Next 5.9% of male urban children, 4.5% of male rural children, 5.3% of female urban children and 5.0% of female rural children are not attending school because of dominance of non-Dalith teachers. It is also seen that 3.8% of male urban children, 5.7% of male rural children, 5.1% of female urban children and 4.0% of female rural children are not attending school because of different types of discrimination at schools.

CONCLUSION

The issue of discrimination in education has long remained unnoticed resulting in low educational percentage of Dalit children. This current data has shown that social exclusion of Dalit children in the education field is still going on in our existing society at large and particularly in the primary education field. Access to Education Caste factor, Retention problem, distance factor, environment with school and outside, non Dalit dominant teachers, and lack of roll model particularly affects in accessing education among Dalith children. Various governments have brought different schemes and programmes focusing Dalith and tribes for successful primary and elementary education. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also fairly failed in spotlighting the Dalith children's problem in accessing primary education particularly in rural India. This is the time to reframe our education policy for an inclusive education.

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