



Indian NEP 2020 and its goal of inclusive education: Mapping challenges in light of curriculum and teacher education in India

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: National Education Policy aims to insure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all by 2030. The government and educationists have worked in direction of implementing inclusive education in past also. Consequently, to educate—divyang, tribal, poor, children at brick kilning sites, girls and Dalit children and children in remote areas—many measures have been taken by the government to achieve the goal i.e. scholarships, bicycles, divyang-friendly infrastructures, establishing school in remote areas, mid-day meal, uniforms and books. To a great extent, governments have done their best yet the aim of inclusive education remained unfulfilled which is why in NEP 2020 the issue of inclusive education gets centre stage. When all necessary actions have been taken by governments and other agencies, what are the reasons which hamper the progress of achieving the target?

Aims/Objectives: To answer the question, this paper attempts to investigate conceptually the reasons and structures, other than infrastructure and requisite arrangement, such as syllabus, environment provided at school and behavior of teachers which may prove a great challenge in achieving the aim.

Methods: For this conceptual investigation, some Dalit autobiographical narratives, random overview of curriculum taught in schools, reports related to unprofessional behaviour of teachers and schools, and 'teacher training' will be scrutinized. For the purpose, Dalit criticism, postcolonial and psychoanalysis are used as tools for analysis of the textual material.

Result: The study proves that firstly the curriculum taught in schools is not inclusive which fails to make the students of marginalised groups feel at home culturally and nationally; secondly, if it includes the other cultures or iconoclasts these are subdued by teaching from different perspective. The teachers' attitude towards marginalised students and their culture is still discriminatory which infers that besides education, teacher training programmes have failed grossly to train the student-teachers into an egalitarian and human one which is why the exclusion continues.



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INTRODUCTION

National Education Policy 2020 focuses evidently on inclusive and equitable education for all in chapter its chapter number six focusing on the Sustainable Development Goal-2030. NEP (2020) seeks, by 2030, to “ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (p. 3). Consequently, the documents suggests various measures to mobilise students from different backgrounds i.e. poor, Dalit, girl, remote areas, distant from schools, children of migrant labourers, children involved in labour etc. are suggested to study some of which had been implemented in past also. There are ample possibilities of these objectives being achieved yet it cannot be denied that there are challenges too. At this juncture, the question arises that the measures this policy suggests have already been implemented more or less, however, the schools have been failed to attract children from underprivileged sections and keep their interest in studies.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to investigate the possible reasons that have hampered, and have been hampering still, the progress in direction of inclusive and equitable education for all. For this exploration, the study limits itself to the curriculum, which is exclusive, taught in the school and if somehow it is inclusive then the way it is taught. Further, it also tries to analyse the ‘teacher training’ by mapping the teachers’ behavior towards students of marginalised sections.

METHODOLOGY

This study conceptual study from Dalit perspective looks into the curriculum and ‘teacher training.’ For the purpose some Dalit autobiographical narratives as primary sources, other researches and national news related to topic from different sources have been used as secondary sources. For, this study, Dalit, postcolonial, and psychoanalysis approaches have been used as tools for data analysis.

DISCUSSION

Norman (1922) quotes John Dewey who argues that “Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not a preparation for life but is life itself” (p. 140). This infers that all those who could not have access to education were denied the life itself. In India, majority of people such as shudra, Dalits, tribals and women were denied right to education culturally and religiously owing to the caste hierarchy and dictates. But, consequent to colonial interventions and the movement of Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule and Ambedkar and other, all marginalised sections could have access to education. It is pertinent to note here that English too had not aimed at to educate Indian but to create a class of people as Anwar (2020) debates who would be interpreters between public and government besides clerks. In addition, Empire might have had other culturally and religious aims too in implementing the education for all. Whatever the purpose of the English be, it was very difficult for these sections to get education owing to the caste, class, gender, race and other problems. But, Indian govt. from its inception has been instituting various provisions to motivate students from these groups to join school and study. These include infrastructure, scholarships, uniforms, books, Mid-day-mil, distribution of bicycles and computers, opening of schools near locality and school at site in remote areas.

But, these provisions though to some extent paved way for their education but could not help achieving the goal of inclusive education. And one of the major obstacles in achieving the aim is caste that exists everywhere. Since it is an ideology—culturally, religiously, socially—it follows one even after death. Valmiki (2007), Pawde (1992) and Bama (2012) all debate the continuance of caste even after death. Singh and Tripathy (2018) argue that “All identities, except caste, cease to follow one after death. Caste identity continues even after death because it is primarily the social manifestation of a karma-ordained, caste-contained, marriage-maintained, until death-sustained worldview system which does not let powerless to rise above since caste and the entire chain is held to be divinely ordained. The ghost of caste follows one even after death” (p.7).

Since caste is all pervasive, educational institutions in India are not exception. So, it prevails in institutions also. It raises its hood in various forms, conspicuously and inconspicuously. In this regards Punetha (2021), mentioning a recent case of caste practice, reports that upper caste children denied to eat mid-day-meal cooked by a Dalit cook appointed at Government Inter College in Sukhidhang, Champawat district in Uttrakhand. The incident uncover that Indian education have been failed to undo caste complex from masses. If uppercase child is so casteist their elders could be imagined. Now question arises, would these academicians who come from mainstream society be open minded? Of course not. This is why Dalit students have to face constantly caste exclusion and discrimination one way or the other. In academic practices, Dalit themselves and their cultural and ideologies are misrepresented under cover of idealism and nationalism. In this regard, Illaiah (1996) contends that Dalit formation and integration do not find proper space in pedagogical/educational structures. He evidences how Dalit heroes find no room in syllabus, through his life experience. “For Brahmin-Baniya students there were their childhood stories, very familiar. . . . The boys bore the names of these Gods; the girls the names of the Goddesses. I distinctly remember how alien all these names appeared to me” (Illaiah, 1996, p. 13). He sarcastically remakes on literature taught in schools. Illaiah (1996) asserts that “The name of Kalidasa was alien to us as the name of Shakespeare. . . . In a word, our alienation from the Telgu textbook was more or less the same as it was from the English textbook in terms of language and content,” (p. 14). He continues to say that “a Telgu textbook which talked about Kalidasa’s Meghasandesham, Bommera Potanna’s Bhagavatam, or Nannaya and Tikkanna’s Mahabharatha. . . .? We did not share the contents of either; we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives” (Illaiah, 1996, p. 15)

Thus, he proves the exclusive nature of school syllabi that has no room for Dalit culture and tradition; their treatment and icons. The school syllabi is not enticing, inviting and interesting for Dalits as it makes them feel alienated. Alike Illaiah, Gaekwad (2009) too points out the incongruity textual narratives. He exposes the pseudo philanthropic catch line of dominant culture: ‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*’ means whole earth is a family; or ‘*Atithi Devo Bhava*’ which means guest is like god. He knows that treatment of Dalits is totally opposite to the catch lines. Therefore, he attests Illaiah (1996) and Durkheim (1956) and reveals in his autobiography that “When I opened the text-book for Marathi on the first page, I used to see: ‘India is my country, All Indian are my brothers and sisters, I am proud of its rich and varied heritage’” (p. 62). This compelled him to interrogate if it is true, why “we were being beaten with false allegations of theft, when in fact we had committed no theft; why they beat my mother, pulled at her sari and asked her to hand it over alleging it to be stolen property” (p. 62). He surprisingly mentions that even now, when he was full grown person, “I wonder if all Indian are brothers and sisters, why are not my brothers given jobs? Why do we not get land, decent houses? If we are all brothers, why are my brothers forced to resort thieving in order to feed our people at home” (p. 62).

Thus Gaikwad (2009) and Illaiah (1997) raise issue of exclusive syllabi taught in the schools. Consequent to the scholarship and other goals set by government, the school syllabi started including subaltern voices. The iconoclasts such as B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Birsa Munda, Charumati and others were incorporated in text school books different states but reluctantly. The intention of syllabi committee, theorisation approach towards Dalit iconoclasts and their contribution still remain a challenge. Furthermore, if teachers are able or really intend to teach these iconoclasts in true spirit has had a considerable relevance. In this regard, Bhog et al. (2010) debate that “It is well-established fact that the school curriculum is not neutral knowledge” (51). And Pedagogy doesn’t allow teachers and students discuss the issues from location of low. Thus, the subaltern ideologies are taught from hegemonic perspective which again seems alien to the students of these marginalised groups.

In this context, some examples from the school text books may be analysed. First iconoclast, for instance, is Ambedkar who fought against injustice marginalised sections underwent and for their human rights is taught with a bio-data strategy in text book of Uttar Pradesh. The movements he led against caste discrimination, atrocities, violation of Dalits’ human rights all through his life have been completely whitewashed. Further, Bhog et al. (2016) debate that Ambedkar is represented as a victim of caste system who by hard work and struggle rose to the position of law minister in Indian govt. His attack on caste system and Hindu scriptures besides different movements led by him were entirely ignored.

Likewise, Periyar, a leader and thinker in South India, has been incorporated in Tamil text books but his caste politics gets recognised merely an answer to untouchability. His rejection of religion, critique of casteist ideology, and radical ideology for change; all had been shadowed under Gandhian philosophy. Thus he is estimated hagiographic Gandhian. The fact is that Gandhi certainly not attacked on the caste system as B. R. Ambedkar and Periyar did. To withstand the hegemonic value system, the revolutionaries are categorised either liberalists or humanists. Thus, their ideological edge is blunted completely (Bhog et al., 2016).

This is not in case only of Dalit ideologues and radical activists but of women too. Charumati Yodha has also been a victim of the pedagogical dishonesty. She, being a spinster and boy-like dressing woman, was taught in Gujrat state’s Hindi text book. Her spinsterhood, consequent to Gandhi’s influence, is concocted not as a misandrist act but an act of philogynist one. Thus all her feminist moves have been projected as social service. Bhog et al. (2010) quotes that “She used to march off to save these women who had no support. She would knock sense into the husband, mother-in-law and sister-in-law of the woman” (81). In spite of her outstanding feminist movement, the educationists approbate her as “an amazing moral force and strength . . . warrior” (qtd. in Bhog, et. al., 2010, p. 81). Accordingly, the academicians disestablish the crux of these revolutionaries’ charisma and movements.

Contrarily it is pertinent here to remark that the cases of mainstream iconic leaders i.e. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Lala Lajpat Rai, Savarkar and others are complete reversal. To exemplify the case of Lala Lajpat Rai may be cited as he was roomed in text book of history in Haryana state. It was taught that he died consequent to beatings of colonial police for protesting against Simon Commission. But it is nowhere disclosed against which agenda of Simon Commission he was protesting. Evidently, Simon Commission had visited India to oversee the implementation of measures instituted for depressed class. This projection evidences how casteist ideologues are established as the great freedom fighters.

Same is the case of Savarkar who got space in text books of Rajasthan state. Being imprisoned in Cellular Jail for political reasons, he was addressed as 'Veer' [brave], some political groups still address, obfuscating the fact of his mercy pleas for release with a pledge not to indulge in any anti Raj activity in future. The Wire (2019) states Savarkar's apology in these words "Let me go and I will give up the fight for independence and be loyal to the colonial government." This matter got attention upon removal of honorific address as 'Veer' (brave) the Rajasthan government, from the book on pretext that he had appealed four times to colonial rule from Jail swearing for himself as "the 'son of Portugal' in his second petition on November 14, 1911" (Wire, 2019).

This confirms that exclusivist approach of the educationists and syllabi committees with regard to syllabus. But, teachers' behaviour is no less discriminatory, exclusionary and violence towards Dalit students. The Hindu (2021) reports of the arrest of a teacher for allegedly "flogging and kicking a Class XII student belonging to the Dalit community," although apex court of country has banned the corporal punishment, on pretext that student did not attend the classes. Beatings (with)out reasons, separately lining up or seated, forcing to cleaning toilets, asking them to bring their own utensils for mid-day-meal etc., these are every day ordeal of Dalit students besides sexual assault too sometimes. Valmiki (2007), Pawar (2008), Bama (2012) and Anand (1984) all also depict the same discriminatory practices at school. And, this is not the regional problem but national or say international too.

Now the question arises what makes these teachers so discriminatory and indifferent towards students of marginalised sections such. The sustained caste ideology in the society makes them so. In spite of being well educated and trained yet they fail to treat their students in a dignified and humane way, without any bias. Regarding school education, Bourdieu (1997) in his social reproduction theory argues that schools do not offer equal opportunities but perpetuate social inequalities. Further, regarding failure of teacher training to bring about the anticipated shift in teaching styles, Kumar (2008) argues that "Teacher training makes no difference. . . . On values and attitudes, the training process makes no impact; indeed, it is not intended to. The values imbibed from the dominant worldview of society are never challenged, so the young, trained teacher does not relate to policies which require a radical shift in values and attitudes"(p. 14). On education, Illaiah (qtd. in Singh, 2018) comments that the education is neither student centric nor critical; neither socially reforming nor liberating.

Thus, inclusive education, as Kumar (2008) continues to debate requires a "totally fresh perception of intelligence and ability. The dominant Darwinian view that only a few have talent is contradictory to the policy framework, yet it prevails because schools are rooted in it" (p. 14). It reveals that schools are microcosm of the society. And no education is capable to undo the cultural and social impact. The researches show that education has failed to transform the self-centric behaviour of human beings and communities into the communitarian and human one.

CONCLUSION

Thus study shows that first problem in achieving the aim of inclusive education was exclusive syllabus which consequent to the assertive marginal voices and interventions of governments incorporated the marginalised ideologues. But, these ideologues and their ideologies have been misrepresented by the experts of syllabi committees. They have been misappropriated in order to neutralise their scathing criticism of dominant culture, religion and social practices. Besides, the issue of syllabus, the casteist mindset, discriminatory attitude, and inhuman treatment of marginalised students are also the greatest challenges

which neither education nor teacher training is capable to undo. Therefore, until a society readies to be revolutionised wholly, the aim of inclusive education would remain and dream and the cultural, religious, and social hegemony prove to be the challenges for inclusive education in future too to endless period. The target may only be achieved if knowledge be teated as *tritiya netra* (third eye), beyond merely alphabetical proficiency, to understand the oppressive structures in order to dismantle it.

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