

EDUCATION AMONGST THE SCHEDULED CASTE CHILDREN - AN INTENSIVE STUDY OF THE STATE OF RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

This research paper has highlighted the factors that emphasize upon the education amongst the scheduled castes children in the state of Rajasthan. The main areas that have been taken into account include, educational schemes developed amongst the scheduled castes, the advancement of education amongst the scheduled castes, development of primary education in Rajasthan, the schooling experience in Rajasthan, learning achievements in Rajasthan, and extent of education services in rural Rajasthan. The scheduled castes also comprise a considerable proportion of the Indian population, and they are in most cases stricken by the problems of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and backwardness; hence it became essential to conduct research on the education of the scheduled castes children within the state of Rajasthan, how educational opportunities are developing amongst them and they are forwarding towards improvement.

Keywords: *Educational Schemes, Scheduled Castes, Primary Education, Learning Achievements, Education Services*

INTRODUCTION

The scheduled castes (SC) comprise approximately 16 per cent of the Indian population in the present world. There are noticeable state and regional variations in terms of these fractions. Punjab has the highest percentage of 28 per cent and Gujarat has the smallest percentage of SCs of 7.41% in India. From a sociological point of view, apart from their increasing visibility, the most noteworthy existing actuality concerning the Scheduled Castes is their growing political declaration and identity structure as dalit. However, economic exploitation, economic weaknesses and continued attentiveness in unskilled occupations kept on to prolong and support the disgraced social position of the majority of the SC. Rural SC are predominantly landless and deprived agricultural labor. Women are multiply subordinated and are at a disadvantage. In general the lessening of disparities and inclusion within mainstream urban and rural society has taken place in predominantly stigmatized, abused and repressive ways for vast sections of SC, particularly for those located in the relatively more tradition-bound and socioeconomically underdeveloped states or areas. Under the post 90s influence of global processes the poorest SC have been most unfavorably affected and become more poverty stricken. Studies have pointed

out to growing incidence of poverty, rising levels of rural unemployment, wage squeeze, underdevelopment, rising levels of mortality and illness as well as increasing levels of consumption shares, malnutrition, illiteracy, real wages, population explosion and consumer monthly per capita expenditure among the scheduled castes (National Focus, n.d.).

EDUCATIONAL SCHEMES DEVELOPED AMONGST THE SCHEDULED CASTES

Special schemes being appropriate to school education of SC/ST children presently include: a) free supply of textbooks and stationery at all stages of school education b) free uniforms to children in govt. approved hostels and ashrams schools, and in some states also for children in regular schools; c) free education at all levels; d) pre-metric remunerations and scholarships to students at middle and/or high school stage; e) special scheme of pre-metric scholarships for children of castes and families engaged in impure and hazardous employment opportunities such as scavenging, tanning and flaying of animal skin; f) girls and boys hostels for SC/ST students and lodging facilities in hostels of backward classes including SC/ST; g) ashram schools for tribal children established with the purpose of overcoming the hardships of provision in remote areas and also rather patronizingly to provide an environment which is educationally more advantageous as compared to the tribal habitat. In addition, several states have instituted schemes such as scholarships to SC students studying in private schools, merit scholarships, attendance scholarships for girls, special school attendance prizes, coaching classes, compensation of expedition expenses and prerequisite of mid-day meals. The provision of mid-day meals has been proposed as an essential element in schooling by the Working group on Development and Welfare of the Scheduled Castes during the Eighth Five Year Plan, which was from 1991-1996 (National Focus, n.d.).

THE ADVANCEMENT OF EDUCATION AMONGST THE SCHEDULED CASTES

Recent studies and research has illustrated that there has been an increasing demand for education amongst the scheduled castes children; they have developed an interest and enthusiasm for education and aims at accomplishment. There has been an increase in the rate of literacy amongst the scheduled castes children and this shows that how they are progressing towards education. The rate of literacy is slow amongst this population but it is progressing, and clearly depicts the advancement of education amongst the scheduled castes. In accordance with the 2001 census, the scheduled castes children comprised of 17.4% of the total youth population. In the 6-11 age cohort, scheduled castes children consist of 23 million, in the 11-14 age cohort, they are 13 million; this shows that there has been a considerable number of scheduled castes children, not only at the elementary level, scheduled castes children even opt for higher education and further advancement (Sedwal & Kamat, 2008). In schools, colleges and educational institutions

there has been number of reserved seats for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. Therefore, this shows that they are given recognition and preference in the field of education.

Education is an imperative component for human resource development, as it enhances ones knowledge, skills, capabilities and wisdom; the advancement of education in India has been low as compared to the other countries of the world. The rate of literacy amongst the scheduled castes has increased from 10.27 in 1961 to 45.20 in 2001; this shows that during the period of 40 years, there has been an increase of 34.9 percentage points. From this data, it has been adequately understood that 55% of scheduled castes are deprived from the fundamental and indispensable constituent of human development. The main reason behind this deprivation is that, the scheduled castes populations are poverty stricken and are under the influence of socioeconomic backwardness (Singh, 2009).

DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN RAJASTHAN

In Rajasthan, the main challenge confronting the education strategies is the education of the girl child, especially amongst the scheduled castes populations. The system of education in Rajasthan needs to be reformed in order to improve the access of marginalized groups, these consists of women especially girl children, dalits, migrants and nomadic people etc. There is a method, approach to organize the system of education in such a manner that it should cater to the livelihood needs of the people and should enable them to exercise greater control over their lives. Agriculture and animal husbandry are stated to be the major sources of livelihood, with no significant manufacturing industries or sectors, there have been acute variations in parts of terrain, livelihood, dispersed patterns of settlement and social identity in Rajasthan (Jain & Kumar, 2013).

The expansion of education in Rajasthan was reinforced by the constitutional commitment to universalization of education, as it has been stated in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India. In 1949, at the time of the development of the state, the overall numbers of primary schools were 3,195; 2,864 for boys and 331 for girls, by 1981 they increased to 23,125, and these in turn increased to 39,335 by 1991. During the Eighth Plan period (1991 to 1996), the number of primary schools increased by 13 percent and upper primary schools by 32 percent, resulting in a total increase of 17 percent. In Rajasthan, there has been initiation of number of major programs in order to improve the system of education. These are: Non-Formal Education Program, Shiksha Karmi Project, Lok Jumbish Pariyojana, Rajiv Gandhi Swarn Jayanti Pathshalas and District Primary Education Program (Jain & Kumar, 2013).

The Non-Formal Education Program

The Non-Formal Education Program (NFE) was introduced as a supple, low cost and controllable substitute to the formal education structure, which could not provide enough schools, institutions and educators. People perceived NFE as an effective alternative. A justification as

well as a conception of non-formal education was developed. According to this concept, NFE was believed to be liberated from the troubles of the formal system, being manageable and responsive to the children and their requirements (Jain & Kumar, 2013).

Shiksha Karmi Project

The Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) was launched in the year 1987-88 after awareness that UPE would not be achievable in 10-15% of the villages in Rajasthan due to the reason of teacher absenteeism solely. The objective of the program is to make provision of primary education to children living in secluded, mountainous and unapproachable regions. In these regions, the project aims to regenerate and expand primary education through settling the problems of teacher absenteeism, which is 50-60% and school drop out rates of girls which is 25% (Jain & Kumar, 2013).

Lok Jumbish Pariyojana

This scheme has certain goals which are making available primary education to all children between 5-14 years of age, children should get enrolled in regular schools or Sahaj Shiksha centers, improvement in the quality of education by promoting active learning and child centered processes, creating necessary structures and processes to lead to women empowerment, there should be equity in education to all the members of the society and no discrimination on any grounds, the procedure and methodology should be organized in such a manner that it should be in accordance to the people's environment, cultural traits and working conditions and finally, this scheme actively involves individuals in the preparation and administration of education (Jain & Kumar, 2013).

Rajiv Gandhi Swarn Jayanti Pathshalas

The Rajiv Gandhi Swarn Jayanti Pathshalas scheme has been operating in regions or habitations where there were still absences of primary schools. The state government has decided to launch 16000 RGSJPs in the entire state, on demand from the gram sabha or the ward sabhas. The norm for the choice of habitations where to open these schools are: population of at least 200 people, 40 or more children in the age cohort of 6-11 years and there should not be any school within the radius of one kilometer (Jain & Kumar, 2013).

District Primary Education Program

The District Primary Education Program (DPEP), commenced in 1994, seeks to operationalize the purpose of the World Bank Program of Action of 1992, which envision district-specific projects modified to the districts specific needs and possibilities. Aiming to be an efficient instrument in the universalization of elementary education, it aims districts with very low female literacy rates (Jain & Kumar, 2013).

THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCE IN RAJASTHAN

A considerable percentage of the 11-14 year age group enrolled in school in Rajasthan's villages were in the primary classes, either in primary or upper primary schools. The upper primary classes in the upper primary schools had moderately low enrolment; class sizes were quite small the average size was 21. The lower enrolment at upper primary level was partially on account of higher direct and indirect costs of schooling at this level but also recounted to the deprived worth of the schooling system. Substantial infrastructural facilities have been superior in secondary and senior secondary schools, but they also had extremely large class sizes, possibly because they had a massive catchment area. In the villages communities in Rajasthan, there have been certain factors of schooling experience which have been stated as follows: (Samson, De & Noronha, n.d.).

1. There was a high rate of absenteeism amongst the teachers; they often wanted to get a transfer to another institution and always attempted to look for better job opportunities.
2. The students who have been in school for at least five years, amongst them there has been lack of confidence and fluency; therefore, due to this reason, teaching itself appeared to be minimum consideration.
3. There has been increase in the harsh behavior of the teachers with the students, the students who are in the 11-18 age group reported that they feel apprehensive and dropped out of school because they experienced ill treatment at the hands of their teachers.
4. The classes were organized in the open areas; hence due to this reason students could easily skip classes on common basis.
5. Teachers were generally males and belonged to upper castes, they also possessed the discriminatory attitude amongst themselves, a young scheduled caste boy reported that the teacher insisted him that he should drop out of school as he would be unable to achieve major things; the teachers were insensitive to caste and gender concerns (Samson, De & Noronha, n.d.).

LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS IN RAJASTHAN

The learning achievements of students of grades IV and V in language and math in government, private aided and private unaided schools in Rajasthan have been taken under consideration. In India as in most developing countries, the public sector is the central contributor of primary education. Government supervised and sponsored primary schools that are in theory without restraint available to any child of school going age. In accordance to the official data, nearly ninety percent of all primary school going children in India focus upon government schools. Together with free public education, there is a growing sector of private

unaided schools that charged fees. These schools are administered and financed privately, often along profit-making principles. Children, who belong to poor families and economically backward sections of the society, are getting enrolled into these schools in major and increasing numbers. There also exists a mixture variety of schools in India known as government aided/private aided primary schools; these schools are managed by the private sector but largely financed by the government. In accordance with the Census of India 2001, the western state of Rajasthan had a population of 56.5 million with a literacy rate of 60.4% as compared to the national average of 64.1%. Of the 9.96 million children in the age cohort of 6-14 years enrolled in school in 2004-05, nearly 22% were admitted to private schools. Historically, Rajasthan has had lower than average economic growth and human development indicators (Goyal, 2007).

EXTENT OF EDUCATION SERVICES IN RURAL RAJASTHAN

In the rural areas of Rajasthan, focus has to be laid upon certain areas that have been stated as follows: (Bajpai & Dholakia, 2006).

1. Children who belong to the economically backward sections of the society and have dropped out of school due to some reason, they should be enrolled into the school again and there should be effort rendered towards achievement of higher levels of excellence in their primary schools.
2. There should be availability of scholarships, stipends and more emphasis needs to be laid upon the education of the girl children, special programs needs to be initiated in accordance with the appropriate curriculum and instructional methodologies that should be best suited to the needs and requirements of these children.
3. Textbooks of all the different subjects such as English, Math, Science, Social Science and so forth need to be modified and the syllabus has to be in accordance to the requirements of the rural children. Tests, assessments and other class assignments should be made available so that the children feel what they are learning is proving to be beneficial to them.
4. The physical environmental conditions should be suitable to the children, there should be at least three classrooms in a primary school; the repairs of the classroom should be conducted and students should feel comfortable while they are learning; 35% of the classrooms in rural Rajasthan require either minor or major repairs.
5. There has been a single teacher in 39% of the primary schools and the enrolment in primary schools is 25%, therefore, efforts needs to be made, plans need to be formulated to have more teachers, more students, good learning materials and equipment, appropriate curriculum and instructional technologies and enhanced quality of learning and erudition.

CONCLUSION

Education is considered to be an imperative concept that is essential to development amongst all the individuals, irrespective of caste, class, race, religion, ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic background. Educational opportunities need to be adequately planned, organized, administered and implemented amongst especially the underprivileged, deprived and backward scheduled castes within the country. With respect to the state of Rajasthan in India, it has been looked that there has been initiation of major educational programs such as the Non-Formal Education Program, Shiksha Karmi Project, Lok Jumbish Pariyojana, Rajiv Gandhi Swarn Jayanti Pathshalas and District Primary Education Program. Provision of appropriate curriculum and instructional methods, stationary, books, uniforms, lesson plans, chapterization of relevant contents and syllabus, materials and equipment, proper repairs and physical conditions within the classrooms and above all proper teaching and attitude should be possessed by the teachers towards the students.

The scheduled castes children tend to drop out of school on very frequent basis, especially girls; therefore, more focus should be laid upon the education and detainment of girls within the schools. Financial problems can be cumbersome, in order to find remedies to financial problems, there are measures such as availability of stipends, scholarships and financial assistance. Lesson plans should be formulated in accordance with the standards and should not be very advanced so that students find them extremely difficult to understand. There should be comfortable environmental conditions, so that students feel comfortable and learning can become a pleasurable activity for them. Students should feel that learning, acquiring education should always prove to be beneficial for them and help them in earning a better livelihood.

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