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RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND DIGITAL DIVIDES DURING COVID: GLOBAL SOUTH PERSPECTIVE

AUTHORED BY - ABDUL RAZZAQ

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has undertaken comparative research to analyse the difference in access to the right to education during covid between the global south and the global north and also tried to know a better understanding of digital divides through community divides, gender divides, and rural/urban divides. The methodology adopted is focused on the under-studied subjects by analysing the patterns of exclusions and marginalisation of the marginalised due to the unavailability of the resources.

The researcher has also employed qualitative and quantitative methods of research to reflect the ground reality of the global south and the impact of covid on education and related rights, which are guaranteed under various national and international covenants. Through content analysis and data analysis, the researcher has tried to establish causal research and patterns to show that the difference or the unavailability of technology during covid has jeopardised the right to education due to the socio-economic differences existing within different societies.

The present project focusing on the above said approaches as a methodological framework is an attempt to show the lacunas under the existing social and legal framework, which leads to the subjugation of marginalized people by denying them the basic right that is right to education in every situation.

INTRODUCTION:-

The emergence of coronavirus has presented unpredictable obstacles in various aspects of everyday living, and every measure has been taken to contain the spread of the virus. One of the most notable measures is the implementation of mandatory lockdowns by governments in numerous countries. The effect of the lockdown reflected on the education system and led to the closure of educational institutions, due to that, 1.6 billion students were affected in over 190 countries.¹ As per the data released by UNICEF, during the latter half of 2020, there were 86% of students in developing countries were unable to access primary education, whereas only 20% of students in developed countries faced the same challenges.² It can also be seen that the 1 year of covid has seen more significant changes in remote learning than the previous 12 years.³

Coronavirus the infectious disease which devastated the chain of getting an education in such a short time. There were many people across the Global South countries who were affected by this and the output of this infectious disease again showed the difference between developed and developing countries. The devastation caused by the coronavirus in Global South countries was much higher than in developed countries, and we also know the development of Global South countries is negatively backed by neocolonialism. The system of education in Global south countries somehow follows the Western system of education. The right to education is guaranteed through international law, which includes Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which gives the right to education to everyone,⁴ Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social

¹ Analysing the Impact of COVID19 on Equal Access to Education in India, THE JFIEL CONFERENCE (2022), <https://jindalforinteconlaws.in/2022/05/03/analysing-the-impact-of-covid19-on-equal-access-to-education-in-india/> (last visited Apr 4, 2023).

² COVID-19: At least a third of the world's and two-thirds of Nepal's schoolchildren unable to access remote learning during school closures, new UNICEF report says, <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/press-releases/covid-19-least-third-worlds-and-two-thirds-nepals-schoolchildren-unable-access> (last visited Apr 4, 2023).

³ The Lancet, *COVID-19: the intersection of education and health*, 397 THE LANCET 253 (2021), <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0140673621001422> (last visited Apr 5, 2023).

⁴ Article 26 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.humanrights.com/course/lesson/articles-26-30/read-article-26.html> (last visited Apr 3, 2023).

and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which also recognize the right of children to education,⁵ Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child(CRC), It also guarantees free education,⁶ and Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guarantees that everyone has access to quality education that is inclusive, equitable and provides lifelong learning opportunities.⁷ Beyond the white paper, there is the existence of a reality that Global South countries faced at the time of the pandemic because of a lack of access to technology. Many Global South countries lack the infrastructure & resources to provide education to students through these technologies. They had restricted financial resources and struggled to allocate those during the pandemic due to economic challenges. On the other hand, Global North countries were able to manage all the necessities, and they had resources to invest in learning technology. At the same time, marginalised students were disproportionately affected by the virus because of limited access to resources, technology and support. Global North countries were criticised for their inadequate efforts in assisting these students.

DISPARITIES OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION BETWEEN GLOBAL NORTH AND GLOBAL SOUTH DURING COVID

Firstly, it is important to know the difference between Global North countries and global south countries. Global North countries refer to developed countries that possess economic and political stability. They are also advanced in technology, unlike global south countries.⁸ Global South countries are mostly developing countries and are located in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. They have less developed; they are economically and politically unstable.⁹ Whether it is Global North countries or global south countries, most of the countries have ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and every country is entitled to get the right to education in

⁵ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights> (last visited Apr 3, 2023).

⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child, RIGHT TO EDUCATION INITIATIVE, <https://www.right-to-education.org/resource/convention-rights-child> (last visited Apr 3, 2023).

⁷ Goal 4: Quality education, THE GLOBAL GOALS, <https://globalgoals.org/goals/4-quality-education/> (last visited Apr 3, 2023).

⁸ Will Kenton et al., *What Is a First World (aka Developed or Industrialized) Country?*, INVESTOPEDIA, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/first-world.asp> (last visited Apr 5, 2023).

⁹ Global South Countries 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/global-south-countries> (last visited Apr 5, 2023).

a qualitative manner in every situation. Apart from UDHR, Many countries like the United States, through the 14th Amendment of its constitution, give the right to get an education. India, through Article 21A of its constitution, provides free education for ages 6 to 14 years.¹⁰

The covid-19 impacted the right to education worldwide, but it affected both developed and global south countries differently. Schools and universities were recommended to maintain communication with the students through virtual mode, but due to a lack of appropriate digital resources, both teachers and students faced difficulties. Global South countries had sufficient means, advanced technology and digital resources by which they were able to quickly transition to the online medium of learning. However, there were still challenges to transit full-fledged learning through online platforms.¹¹ Global South countries faced more crucial challenges because of a lack of necessary infrastructure and resources, which further resulted in difficulties in transitioning learning methods to online and providing support to students. Despite these differences, there were many students from Global North countries also, who faced challenges unequal access to education, especially those who come from low-income families or with disabilities. In terms of government efforts, Global North countries are well-equipped to maintain parity in offline and online education. They have allocated resources for schools and universities to bring remote learning and make sure that students have access to tools and resources for successful remote learning. As per the survey conducted in 2020, the United States had successfully transitioned to remote learning. However, there were disparities in learning among any students, for low-income and rural students.¹² While on the other side of the world, Indian students had no option to go for online study; there were only 8% of households have computers with internet.¹³ While in Lebanon, nearly 70% of the students used a

¹⁰ Right to Education | Ministry of Education, GoI, <https://dse.education.gov.in/rte> (last visited May 2, 2023).

¹¹ Jeffin Thomas Mammen, *North–South digital divide: A comparative study of personal and positional inequalities in USA and India*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/20421338.2022.2129343?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab> (last visited Apr 5, 2023).

¹² Remote instruction and online learning aren't the same thing (opinion), <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/02/03/remote-instruction-and-online-learning-arent-same-thin-g-opinion> (last visited Apr 5, 2023).

¹³ Protiva Kundu, *Indian education can't go online – only 8% of homes with young members have computer with net link*, SCROLL.IN (2020),

first-time online method, and 60% of the students were using their mobile to attend online classes.¹⁴ These comparisons show the struggle to get an education varies from country to country. The output of covid 19 showed the exact inequalities among nations, and it is just as mathematical equality, not rational basis equality. Qualitative education is a standard that the global south aspires to reach. The first struggle to reach that standard is qualitative means, and global south countries like India and Lebanon etc, are still struggling with means to reach that standard.

Digital Divide: An Comparative Analysis of Indian and the American Scenario

Globally the internet has become a necessity, and people rely on it in almost every aspect, like finding jobs, getting an education or for healthcare. Multiple indicators show that India, which has the second-largest internet user population, still has about half of its population without access to the Internet.¹⁵ However, reports also show that 93% of adults in America have internet access.¹⁶ Digital divides are characterised by some disparities like age, location (urban/rural), language (English/non-English speakers), and education level, This shows the complexity of the digital divide. A similar digital divide exists between the Global North and South, in which both India and the US are good examples. The unequal distribution of access to digital resources within a community can lead to bad consequences, including limited political participation and ineffective implementation of technology-based government schemes, ultimately hindering the overall development of a country.

Individual categorical disparities, The global digital divide is further exacerbated by the gender digital divide, which is a significant concern. Due to lower literacy rates among women in

<https://scroll.in/article/960939/indian-education-cant-go-online-only-8-of-homes-with-school-children-have-computer-with-net-link> (last visited Apr 5, 2023).

¹⁴ Yvonne El Feghaly, Raymond Bou Nader & Nizar Hariri, *Online Education in Lebanon During the Covid-19 Crisis: An Ongoing Coping Phase*, in DIGITAL ECONOMY. EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND BUSINESS INNOVATION 197 (Rim Jallouli et al. eds., 2021).

¹⁵ Vrishti Beniwal, *As digital divide widens, India risks losing a generation to pandemic disruption*, <https://theprint.in/india/education/as-digital-divide-widens-india-risks-losing-a-generation-to-pandemic-disruption/568394/> (last visited Apr 30, 2023).

¹⁶ Demographics of Internet and Home Broadband Usage in the United States | Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/> (last visited Apr 30, 2023).

developing countries compared to men, this inequality is also reflected in their level of digital literacy.¹⁷ In India, the gap between male and female mobile ownership is 50% and 20%. It gets worse when you compare mobile ownership and ability regarding the use of computer internet by urban females with rural females.¹⁸ The proportion of rural women using computers is only 7%, and in urban areas, it is 26.9% who have similar skills. There are many reasons for not having access to computers in rural areas, like high cost of data, computers and insufficient knowledge of technology. Many patriarchal notions like women are less adept at utilising technology, also backed for not having mobiles and access to computers for women in rural areas, instead, they are controlled by male members of their family.¹⁹ The US is one of the few countries where women access the internet more than males from any place, 93% of the women have internet access.²⁰ So gender divide also played a quintessential role during covid for lacking in online education.²¹

To know the digital divide, we also must look into the Community gap in India and the US. In India, the community is also divided through caste (OBC), Other Backward class, (SC) Scheduled Caste, and Scheduled Tribe. The ownership of computers, access to the internet, and internet literacy exhibit significant disparities across different caste groups. These disparities are rooted in complex historical, cultural, and social factors.²² As per the report published by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in 2019, there was a significant difference in smartphone usage rates among different caste groups in India. The study found that 43% of the upper caste population use

¹⁷ Amy Antonio and David Tuffley, *Digital literacy in the developing world: a gender gap*, <https://theconversation.com/digital-literacy-in-the-developing-world-a-gender-gap-28650> (last visited Apr 30, 2023).

¹⁸ Basu Chandola, *Exploring India's Digital Divide*, ORF, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/exploring-indias-digital-divide/> (last visited May 1, 2023).

¹⁹ Mitali Nikore and Ishita Uppadhyay and Mitali Nikore, *India's gendered digital divide: How the absence of digital access is leaving women behind*, ORF, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-gendered-digital-divide/> (last visited May 1, 2023).

²⁰ TU. 2021. *Digital Trends in Asia and the Pacific 2021*. Geneva: ITU Publications, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2020.pdf> (last visited May 1, 2023).

²¹ Jeffin Thomas Mammen, M Rugmini Devi & R Girish Kumar, *North-South digital divide: A comparative study of personal and positional inequalities in USA and India*, AFRICAN JOURNAL OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/20421338.2022.2129343>.

²² Vaidehi Rajam, A. Bheemeshwar Reddy & Sudatta Banerjee, *Explaining caste-based digital divide in India*, 65 TELEMATICS AND INFORMATICS 101719 (2021), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0736585321001581> (last visited May 1, 2023).

smartphones, while the corresponding figures for OBC, SC, and ST groups are 30%, 25%, & 23%, respectively, We also keep in mind that 70% of India population is shared by OBCs, SCs & STs.²³ In the case of the USA, I divide the community on a minority and majority basis, So if we take and compare the accessibility of computers from India and the USA then 79% of white Americans, 61% Hispanics, and 66% of African who are living in America have access to broadband internet.²⁴ Almost 50% of the Americans who lacked access to the Internet were from Black or Hispanic communities, and within those groups, around 20% of Black and 16% of Hispanic individuals are not adequately prepared to utilise the Internet.²⁵

Third perspective to understand the digital divide between the USA and India is Geographical differences within the states. In India, Uttar Pradesh & Bihar are on the top to have very few people utilise the internet. Also, low-income states like Assam & Madhya Pradesh are very low in using the internet. On the other hand, if we compare rich states in income, like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab, they are far ahead in utilising and accessing Technology.²⁶ There are many states where tribal people live, for them, it is more difficult to utilise the services of the internet during covid, States like Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh. So the disparity in their economic development is also because of unequal access to the internet; they cannot increase their revenue above a certain point, then it is also further reflected in getting education through online mode during covid. Further, If we see the USA with the same lens, then the states vary in broadband accessibility and internet speed. Montana has the lowest internet speed, which is 20.3 Mbps, among the US states. New Jersey leads in terms of internet speed with 52 Mbps and with 99% broadband coverage.²⁷ The rural South, which comprises Arkansas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, have low internet utilisation rates because in these states, mostly tribal people and Indian people reside, and

²³ *Digital Trends in Asia and the Pacific 2021*. Supra note 20

²⁴ Monica Anderson, *Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2019* | Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/06/13/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2019/> (last visited May 1, 2023).

²⁵ Bhaskar Chakravorti, *How to Close the Digital Divide in the U.S.*, <https://hbr.org/2021/07/how-to-close-the-digital-divide-in-the-u-s> (last visited May 1, 2023).

²⁶ Tanushree Agarwal & Prasant Kumar Panda, *Pattern of Digital Divide and Convergence in Access to ICT Facilities among the Indian States*, 10 *JOURNAL OF INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT* 37 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974930618809171> (last visited May 1, 2023).

²⁷ Tyler Cooper, *Report: US States With the Worst and Best Internet Coverage 2018*, <https://broadbandnow.com/report/us-states-internet-coverage-speed-2018> (last visited May 1, 2023).

their accessibility to the internet is lower than the other US ethnic groups.²⁸

So for the developed nations it was only regional disparity, and the situation of the developing nation like India was more than that. There were only two students out of ten who got the chance to take their online classes in the least developed countries. In countries like India, Rural citizens were facing more problems than urban ones in getting vaccination because it required digital knowledge and skills.²⁹

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN EDUCATION

The outcome of Covid is not only the vaccines we developed or effective globalisation, but the reality behind the parity exposed the existence of a deep digital divide. On the one hand, there were people who had the technology to continue their education through online mode and others who had no access to technology to continue their education, The Existence of unequal access to technology among the groups defines the digital divide.

There are several international measures going on to bridge the digital divide:

-The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 4 of this aims to provide equality in the quality of education, This goal also includes boosting digital literacy among countries.³⁰

- The Global Education Coalition by UNESCO: It also aims to unite governments, International organisations and private sectors to assist countries in distance learning methods and providing education to the most vulnerable students.³¹

²⁸ Council of Economic Advisers. 2015. *Mapping the Digital Divide*
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/wh_digital_divide_issue_brief.pdf (last visited May 1, 2023).

²⁹ Abhirup Roy et al., *High-tech hunt for scarce COVID-19 vaccines in India raises fear for fairness* | Reuters,
<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/high-tech-hunt-scarce-covid-19-vaccines-india-raises-fear-fairness-2021-05-05/>
(last visited May 1, 2023).

³⁰ Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4> (last visited May 2, 2023).

³¹ UNESCO's Global Education Coalition | UNESCO, <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-education-coalition> (last visited May 2, 2023).

-The Educational Global Practice by the World Bank is also working to assist countries in improving their education systems. Promoting digital literacy is also included in their initiatives for bridging the digital divide.³²

-The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE): It also offers development and provides opportunities for teachers around the world to enhance technology in education worldwide.³³

-The Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GeSCI): This organisation collaborates with governments and helps teachers and students for a better understanding of digital literacy.³⁴

Above mentioned international measures are designed to improve the online learning environment, But due to a lack of focus on addressing underlying inequalities in education, Limited sustainability due to inadequate funding & support, and technological challenges such as slow internet connectivity, global south countries struggle to afford and also lack of local community involvement for the enhancement of digital education.

There are some measures by which bridging the gap is possible:

-Infrastructure Development: Investment into infrastructure can lead to improving the quality of online education. The area in which the government needs to invest is computer laboratories in educational institutions and broadband networks. This can help the student to get an education through online mode and also help to improve digital literacy.

-Mobile Learning: Using mobiles for education is a cost-effective way to bridge the gap between the digital divide, as it is not usually run through broadband or fixed internet. So for the rural areas, mobile application-based learning will be beneficial for low-income families.

³² Education Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview> (last visited May 2, 2023).

³³ International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) response - Global Education Coalition, <https://globaleducationcoalition.unesco.org/Members/Details/255> (last visited May 2, 2023).

³⁴ Home - The Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI), <https://www.gesci.org/> (last visited May 2, 2023).

-Teacher training: The role of the teacher is vital in digital learning; they are the basic structure for bridging the digital divide. As they are the means for learning and they should be digitally trained to deliver quality education to students.³⁵ In India we can witness the scenes in which teachers are unable to communicate digital education to students as they themselves don't know how to use it.

-Public-private partnerships: Government can provide funding and guidelines, and with collaboration with NGOs and Private companies, they can provide technical assistance and resources. By working together, they can develop and implement innovative solutions for bridging the gap, such as low-cost digital devices, Online education platforms and mobilelearning initiatives. The sustainability of digital infrastructure and technology may be promoted through these collaborations, which may help to assure long-term funding and support.

CONCLUSION:

Avoiding reality does not mean a solution, another virus will come again and show reality again. Digital divide, the problem is not only that students do not have the internet, it is also necessary for students to have a mobile or computer. They should also have the money to buy those mobiles or computers, so then the internet will be required for things to happen. The second thing is that there should be online tools in the school by which teachers can easily convey the message to the students. The third thing is that the teacher should know everything about online education because they are the means for better understanding. For that, teachers should get good training at the grass root level. It is difficult to end the digital divide with international efforts unless there are efforts at the domestic level because, as we discussed above, digital divides include many divides like Gender divide, Community Divide, Age divide, and urban & rural divide.

The actions at the grass root level are important to induce instinct that would assert an interest in formal education beyond mere affirmative action. We used to go to watch TV in other's houses to watch cricket matches or serials in childhood because we had the instinct to watch matches or serials, but studies are unlike that when we study then we understand its importance, Like now I see in my

³⁵ Manjiri Shete, Why teacher training becomes an essential part of online education?, LEAD SCHOOL (2020), <https://leadschool.in/blog/why-teacher-training-becomes-an-essential-part-of-online-education/>

(last visited May 2, 2023).

village that everyone has mobile phones, but they watch Instagram reels instead of studying, so it is vital to have instinct at grass root level only then the fight between grass root and cabin ends. Actions follow instinct; the instinct to use the era of the internet beyond a source of entertainment to a source of creativity, knowledge, and education would come from an instinct to know.

Merely on the basis that rights are written on white paper doesn't change reality; organisations must do something substantial by which online education may improve.

