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EDUCATIONAL DISPARITY: A HIDDEN ENGINE OF ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental right provided by the constitution of India¹ under Article 21A. Due to various reasons, the citizens of India have faced educational disparity such as urban - rural imbalance, public – private imbalance, caste exclusion and other social barriers, which have created differences in the educational system. The person who is facing educational disparity has a hidden root cause behind that, which is economic discrimination, that unequal distribution of income and wealth in society. The traces of the evolution of the educational system in India can be seen from the Vedic period. Education has the capacity to influence the opportunities and skill development for the people. The government has implemented various laws and policies, such as NEP, MGNREGA, etc, which are required to evolve with the times. However, they are unable to bridge this gap due to lack of proper implementation, which leads to unequal participation of the people in various activities such as research, development, innovation and leadership, etc., as a consequence. All these things have resulted in economic discrimination.

This paper highlights how disparities in differences in infrastructure, qualified teachers and learning environments affect the level of education. It also critiques the privatisation and commercialisation of the education by the private schools and the coaching institutions, as they have made the education unaffordable for many people.

Keywords: - Disparity, Holistic Development, Privatisation, Marginalised.

Introduction

The quality education is the 4th Goal in the Sustainable Development Goal which aims to provide equitable and quality education to all by 2030. However, in a country like India, which is highly diversified, access to education remains unequal and unevenly distributed across various sections of society. Education disparity and economic discrimination are both

¹ The Constitution of India, 1950

interlinking concepts. The effects of educational disparity can be visible in the economic status of a person. In layman's language, educational disparity can be defined as the differences in the education which a person faces, and economic discrimination means discrimination or disparity done on a monetary basis or economic basis. There are various reasons that the educational inequality leads to economic discrimination, as a person having a good level of education will have higher opportunities for skill development and his holistic development as compared to a person getting a low level of education; not just this, it also affects the job occupation of a person. The employees with a low level of education are more likely to receive less wages as compared to the employees with good education. The educational disparity is not merely about the differences in attendance or literacy rates but encompasses the broader gaps in quality, curriculum, etc. Such Educational disparity leads to economic injustice, which is a violation of the rights of citizens of India as provided by the Constitution of India.²

Historical and Social Context

The evolution of the Indian education system can be traced back to the Vedic period in India. In the Vedic Period the educational system was rooted in the Guru – Shishya tradition, where teachers imparted knowledge to students in Vedic schools and ashrams.³ During the Vedic Period, the teachings were done in oral format by the Gurus to their Shishya. The spiritual and religious values, civic responsibilities and social values were the teachings given during the early Vedic Period. As time evolved, the introduction of the Varna system took place in the later Vedic period. Under this Varna system, the society got divided into 4 different classes of people based on their occupation, i.e., Brahmin (the scholars and priests), Kshatriya (the warriors and the rulers), Vaishya (the merchants and the traders), and Shudra (the labourers and service providers); each Varna was associated with specific duties.⁴ Later on this Varna System turned into the Caste System, in which the varnas were decided on the basis of birth instead of occupation. The caste system got rigid in the colonial period.

During the colonial period, the people belonging to the Shudra category used to face atrocities by the people; they were treated as untouchables and were not given the opportunity to study. They were outcasted from the society, and the situation of the people got worse with time. Even

² The Constitution of India, 1950

³ Kunjlata Lal, Vedic Period Education, Volume 12 IJCRT, c974, Issue 8 August 2024

⁴ Anika Tripathi, Understanding the Varna System : Insights into Ancient India's social structure, Volume 4 IJLR, 943, Issue 4 of 2024

in the Vedic period it can be seen as the people belonging to the Shudra category didn't have access to the education. Such rigidity in the caste system led to the disparity among the people living in the society. It can be witnessed that due to educational disparity, people used to face economic disparity as well.

Disparity in Education

To protect the people from such disparity, the Constitution of India⁵ provides various fundamental rights to its people. Article 14, which states Equality before the Law, means everyone is equal in the eyes of law,⁶ Article 16, which deals with the Equality of Opportunity in matters of public employment⁷, *It provides the equality of opportunity for all the citizens in matters relating to employment or opportunity to any office or to promotion from one office to a higher office under the state.*⁸ Article 17 for abolition of titles, It strikes all the caste based practices and superstitions.⁹ Article 21A Right to education.

However, even after getting such rights for protection, people still face disparity when it comes to education. The reason behind such disparity is the investment of a person towards their education; if a person invests more in the education, he will get better opportunities as compared to others. For instance, a person studying at a good university will get opportunities like networking, improvement in communication skills, practical exposure, on - campus placement, etc. which a person who is not studying at a good university will lag behind in. There could be various reasons for that, but the socio-economic status of a person plays a very crucial role in the determining education. As sometimes this socio – economic gap leads to the education inequalities at the school from the very initial level of schooling of a kid, such as kindergarten.¹⁰ The education system in urban areas provides better infrastructure, such as digital classrooms for a better experience; facilities of laboratories, libraries rich in different journals, newspapers, magazines, and novels and experienced teachers who create a huge impact on the quality level of education. Providing extracurricular activities through which a student can groom himself in areas other than academics. These are the major things which

⁵ The Constitution of India, 1950

⁶ The Constitution of India, art. 14

⁷ The Constitution of India, art. 16

⁸ Govind Dattatray Kelkar v. Chief Controller of Imports and Exports, AIR 1967 SC 839

⁹ Adi Saiva Sivachariyargal Nala Sangam v. The Government of Tamil Nadu, AIR 2016 SC 209 : (2016) 2 SCC 725

¹⁰ Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss, Education inequalities at the school starting gate, Economic Policy Institute, (September 27, 2017) <https://www.epi.org/publication/education-inequalities-at-the-school-starting-gate/>

create a gap between urban and rural education systems. In many cases it can be seen that the private schools have better performance than the public schools or the government - run schools. During the Board exam results, the students studying in the private schools reflect better results comparatively to the public or government run schools. In the case of *Society for Un aided P school of Rajasthan v. Union of India*¹¹ the court ruled that the state, however, cannot free itself from obligation under Article 21A by off-loading or outsourcing its obligations to private state actors like unaided private educational institutions.

In many cases the students belonging to minorities or backward classes have faced discrimination in their classrooms by the teacher or by their classmates themselves such discrimination has led to the school dropouts.

Link between Education and Economic Outcomes

Education not only makes a person literate but also makes a skilled person. As a person will get knowledge from a school then to make a person skilful, he needs to apply that theoretical knowledge to practical experience. For an instance, a person has done his degree in the field of mechanical engineering. He has got all the theoretical knowledge from his institution; however, his skills will get developed only if he gets the practical exposure. And this practical exposure to the field will get him to the incredible economic outcomes.

There are few incidents in which the students get underemployment because of the mismatch of the job profile of the student. As per the reports of the National Statical Organisation, more than 50% of students complete secondary education in one of India's 12 official languages.¹² The scope of opportunity for students learning in Vernacular Language will get limited to a specific region only. They will get the job and income opportunities of that area only, where that particular vernacular language is used. For instance, if a person has done his education in Kanada as a medium and it is the only sole language in which he is well versed, then it will limit the scope of opportunities for him. Under such circumstances, the students belonging from the English as a medium in education get an edge over the students coming from vernacular language mediums.

¹¹ Society for Un aided P school of Rajasthan v. Union of India AIR 2012 SC 3445

¹² Sanjay Sharma, Empowering Education through Mother Tongue : The case for vernacular languages in India, TOI, Dec 13, 2024

Due to lack of education, the marginalised groups of the society get confined to the works such as agricultural labour, construction work, sanitation work and sometimes they exploited by the people as they get enter into a contract whose provisions are not clear to them and later get exploited by the same. There are instances in which it was seen that the people get into manual scavenging. For the protection of such labour and workers from atrocity and live life with dignity, the government has passed various legislation such as The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970¹³, Building and other Construction workers Act¹⁴ and the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008.¹⁵

Government Policies and Failures

The government of India has passed various legislations and provided government policies for improvement in the level of education and reducing economic inequality. The Article 21 A of the Indian Constitution provides the right to education. It states that the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the ages of six to fourteen years.¹⁶ There are various schemes introduced by the government, such as (MGNREGA) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation, it was aimed with the rural development. It will provide a legal guarantee for a least 100 days of employment, to begin with, on an asset – creating public works programmes every year at minimum wages for at least one able-bodied person in every rural, urban poor and lower middle-class household.¹⁷ This scheme got failed because it includes poorly planned projects. (PMEGP) Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme, it is a major credit linked subsidy programme focused at generating self-employment opportunities. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM). NEP 2020 National Education Policy 2020 aims to transform the old education system of India to provide equity and justice by providing a flexible curriculum and vernacular language as a medium in educational institutions. However, the delayed implementation and digital divide of NEP are resulting in failure.

¹³ The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, Act No. 37 of 1970 (India)

¹⁴ Building and other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, Act No. 27 of 1996 (India)

¹⁵ The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008, Act No. 33 of 2008 (India)

¹⁶ Ins. By the constitution (Eighty Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002

¹⁷ The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, No. 42 (Act of Parliament 2005)

Role of Privatisation and Marketisation of Education

During the independence the government of India took the responsibility to provide the education to its citizens. However, with the implementation of the LPG scheme (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation), whose effect can be seen in different sectors, which includes the educational sector as well. The educational sector is one of the sectors in which privatisation can be witnessed, as the private schools and universities growth can be widely seen. Private schools were more in urban than in rural areas. They constituted more than 50 per cent of the total elementary schools in urban areas of Rajasthan (73.92%), Sikkim (71.43%), Uttar Pradesh (64.95%), Uttarakhand (60.02%), Haryana (59.42%), Nagaland (58.92%), Gujarat (58.59%), Madhya Pradesh (56.01%), Karnataka (52.23%), Andhra Pradesh (55.46%), and Himachal Pradesh (51.90%). In contrast, government schools dominate in numbers in rural areas in states, except Delhi (36.44%) and Puducherry (35.99%), which have a small rural population.¹⁸ There are various reasons which have led to the promotion and establishment of private schools in India.

The introduction of private players in the educational sector has impacted the education system in India. Private schools fix selection criteria at the entry level that include the social and economic backgrounds of parents and the scholastic achievements of parents, and sometimes of their children. The seeds of inequality are sown at the entry point, which spreads to the entire education system.¹⁹ The privatization of the educational sector has increased the quality level of the education; on the other hand, it has increased the cost of education in India. This has created a trouble for people belonging to the middle and lower middle-class sections of society. Students who were weak in studies take extra classes in tuition for their better performance. In the race for better performance, the rise of various tuitions and coaching centres took place. In India there are various entrance exams which take place every year, such as UPSC, JEE, NEET, CAT, CLAT, etc. We can see various coaching institutions for various entrance examinations have been established, and these coaching institutions charges very high fees from the students. These coaching institutions have changed and have created a huge impact on the education system.

¹⁸ Ashok Pankaj , Poornima M, Ramandeep Kaur, Reach and Role of Private Schools in India, *Council for Social Development*, (Nov. 2021), <https://csdindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Reach-and-role-of-private-schools-in-India.pdf>

¹⁹ Ashok Pankaj , Poornima M, Ramandeep Kaur, Reach and Role of Private Schools in India, *Council for Social Development*, (Nov. 2021), <https://csdindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Reach-and-role-of-private-schools-in-India.pdf>

Places like Old Rajinder Nagar in Delhi and Kota in Rajasthan have become hubs for the aspirants aspiring for UPSC and JEE, NEET examinations where people in numbers reach to these places every year for the preparation of the examination, and the coaching institutions charge them in lakhs for the studies.

Such marketisation of coaching institutions has created a very huge impact in the minds of people. People are taking loans to study in these coaching institutions. There are so many people who are not able to afford the coaching fees, and this created a huge gap between the students.

Consequences of Educational Disparity

The education which enhances the capacity to think analytically and grow can be hindered if the person is undergoing any kind of disparity in the education. Following are the various consequences of educational disparity:-

1. The person lacking in quality of education will face the issue of mismatch of skills and jobs. This is the major reason why the number of graduates who are unemployed in India is so high: they didn't get the quality of education which is required for the holistic development of a student.
2. The gap between the rich and poor gets wider; the rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer. It means the people who have good education will get good job opportunities, and the people who are lacking in education will also lack job opportunities.
3. Unequal participation of the people in the various activities such as research and development, innovation and leadership.
4. The educational disparity will lead to a communal divide, the marginalised and the backward class section of the society, such as Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe, Other backward classes and The Economically Weaker Section of the Society.
5. The urban and rural regional disparity is another consequence of educational disparity. As urban education provides better opportunities, such as good infrastructure, qualified teachers, and atmosphere, as compared to rural education.
6. The educational disparity leads to the stagnation of national Development as it reduces the level of research and innovation of a country.
7. The rise of social tension also arises among the people, which leads to social unrest, protests and strikes against the government.

Course of Action

Boosting the public and government-run educational institutions by providing better infrastructure, such as labs, libraries, and smart classes, which makes learning interesting for the students. Well-qualified teachers for their guidance and mentoring.

Making education affordable for all the students. Due to the unaffordability of the education, it creates the gap among the people in the society. Providing the digital classrooms to the rural educational institutions to bridge the gap between urban and rural in the society. Proper implementation of government policies.

Conclusion

Education plays a very vital role in a person's holistic development. Economic equality is impossible without quality education. Until India ensures equitable access to quality education, there will be a gap between the urban and rural students. The concepts of educational disparity and economic discrimination are interlinked with each other. The disparity in the educational system has historical, social and economic factors. The government of India has taken various initiatives, such as the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), MGNREGA, and various other employment generation schemes; however, due to some or other factors, the initiatives are lagging behind, among which one of the major reasons is improper implementation.

Privatisation and commercialisation are other factors which have widened the gap between the privileged and underprivileged students. The marketisation of education has led to a rise of expensive private schools and coaching institutions, which is placing a financial burden on the families. Due to unaffordability many students are not able to get facilitated with the quality level of education. The mismatch skill is another factor which has led to many graduates being unemployed.

It is essential to strengthen the public educational infrastructure, making education affordable for all and ensuring, effective implementation of laws and policies made by the government. By addressing the issue of educational disparity, India can move towards a more economically, educationally and socially grown society.