

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF DALIT GIRLS IN INDIA: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

Dr. Meera Subramanian, The M. S. University of Baroda

Abstract

Education is at the core of all development efforts in advancing the economic and social well-being of the people. 1.4 billion People living in extreme poverty 1 billion (around 70 percent) live in rural areas. One of the major inequalities affecting the rural poor is their access to quality education, which is very important for social and economic development. The Dalit girls' education remains still a challenge due to socio-economic and cultural factors.

This paper focuses on the education of Dalit girls. The major objective of the study is to understand the current situation in terms of enrolment rate of Dalit secondary school girl students, and the number of trained teachers in the secondary schools in India and to predict the future trajectory towards quality secondary education. The statistical data obtained through secondary sources were critically analyzed with respect to the objectives of the study. The findings and the Issues and Challenges of Education of Dalit girls are presented.

Keywords: Education, Secondary Schools, Dalit girls, Issues and Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Education is at the core of all development efforts in advancing the economic and social well-being of the people. The educational system ought to produce individuals vested with the right skills and knowledge to be able to operate effectively. Despite unprecedented growth in world economies and unparalleled improvements in global standards of living over the past few years, poverty and hunger are still ground realities in several countries of the world. According to the IFAD report 2010 (International Fund for Agricultural Development) out of the 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty 1 billion (around 70 percent) live in rural areas. One of the major inequalities affecting the rural poor is their unequal access to quality education, which is very important for social and economic development. Quality education has the power to provide children with the protection which they need from the hazards of poverty, labor exploitation, and diseases and give them the knowledge, skills, and confidence to reach their full potential. Any attempt to readdress the challenges of increasing

inequity, poverty, and widening human development gaps is possible through access to relevant, equitable and effective education.

Access to education and the content and purposes of education should be the key element of promoting the concept and practice of human development. The Millennium Goals asserts the faith in the human development. The Millennium Goals are pertinent to the objectives of education for all as well as the educational activities serving these objectives. The policies and priorities of education have to be seen in a new perspective for educating the marginalized groups of children. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, proclaimed the right to education for all (Article 26) treaties and declarations on various aspects of the right to education. It also ensures the right of the child to education on the basis of equal opportunity progressively. Nevertheless, research finding gives a different picture.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature was reviewed on Dalit girls' educational status both from abroad and India. The research findings on educational stratification suggest that in spite of the educational growth inequality in education between different social strata continues and sometimes even widens in spite of educational growth (Halsey, Heath, and Ridge 1980; Hauser and Featherman 1976). Results from a path-breaking project comparing educational changes across 13 diverse countries show that with two exceptions, the impact of parental socioeconomic status on children's educational opportunity remained stable or even widened (cited from Sonalde Desai and Veena Kulkarni). In the higher levels of education widening socioeconomic differences are evident. Even in communist societies, too, father's educational level increased children's chances of gaining higher education (Treiman, Ganzeboom, and Rijken 2003), and even as access to education became universal in primary school, ethnic inequalities widened in high school (Hannum 2002). The situation is same even in the developing country like India. India has been a welfare state and after independence, the primary objective of all governmental endeavors has been the welfare of the rural mass especially the Dalit children.

Though the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - India: Country Report-2005 advocates, that "India is on track with regard to achievement of the MDGs, yet the challenges for human development remain formidable. There is a growing public consensus on the need for proactive measures to tackle the situation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups". The government has claimed that it is moving in the direction of achieving all the goals much earlier than 2015, but it is no more a secret that Government of India has already failed in keeping its promises made under the National Development Goals (NDGs). The education of the Dalit girls remains a question. With just two years to go to the target date for the goals set in the Dakar Framework for Action, progress towards Education

for All is at crossroads. Much has been achieved over the past decade in the Universalization of Elementary Education; the Universalization of Secondary education and higher education remains a distant goal.

Keeping these, the author attempted to study the policies, the issues, and challenges of the education of Dalit girls. This paper focuses on the education of Dalit girls in order to achieve the Millennium Goals especially the first and the second.

Objectives of The Study

The major objective of the study is to understand the current situation in terms of the enrollment rate of Dalit secondary school girl students, and the number of trained teachers in the secondary schools and to predict the future trajectory towards quality secondary education.

The data was collected from secondary sources, especially from the "Statistics of School Education 2007-08", Economic Survey 2010-11", "report from DFID" and DISE. The statistical data obtained through these sources were critically analyzed with respect to the objectives of the study. Findings revealed the major Issues and Challenges of Education of Dalit girls. This study also provides guidelines to the policymakers to achieve the Universalisation of secondary education for the Dalit girls in India.

DALITS IN INDIA

The name Dalit is derived from Sanskrit meaning broken people. The people belonging to those castes at the very bottom of India's caste hierarchy are called "Dalit" (Oppressed). Earlier, it was considered that the contact with them was contaminating, they have to be avoided at all costs, so they were called untouchables. Dalit's wants to gain the equality and respect hitherto denied to them by overcoming the injustices and indignities forced upon them and so there is a label of militancy attached to them. They are also known as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST). The condition of the Dalits has not been chosen by them; it is something which has been indicted upon them by others. Their caste is listed on the government; schedule caste members become eligible for a number of affirmative action, benefit, and protections. - Nearly half of the country's Dalit population is in four states according to the 2011 census. Uttar Pradesh stands first with 20.5% of the total scheduled caste (SC) population, followed by West Bengal with 10.7%, says the data released by the Union census directorate on Tuesday. Bihar with 8.2% and Tamil Nadu with 7.2 % come third and fourth. Dalits form around 16.6% of India's population. The different castes (Pariahs, Chamars, Mahars, Bhangis, etc.) share a common condition and therefore unite in a common struggle for dignity (The Dalit Situation in India Today by John C. B. Webster, International Journal of Frontier Missions, 18:1 Spring 2001). The name Dalit has been chosen by them. According to the 2011

census, Dalits – officially known as ‘scheduled castes’ – constitute 201 million people. These figures do not include Dalits who have converted or are born and raised within a non-Hindu religious community. It is, therefore, more than likely that the total Dalit population – including the millions of Dalit Muslims and Christians - by far exceeds the official 201 million (Census 2011).

TABLE 1
All India Population and Total St Population- Male & Female

Population	Male	Female	Scheduled tribe (total)	Scheduled tribe (male)	Scheduled tribe female)
12105695	62312184	58744773	10428103	52409823	51871211

Census of India 2011

EDUCATION OF DALITS

"A Dalit child that is educated is a Dalit child who has been rescued from the human trafficking." (Dr. Joseph D’Souza). To achieve the goals of MDGs and ensure the education for all (EAF) the Government of India has made reservations for the Dalit children;

- 15% reservation in Kendriya Vidyalaya
- Also, reservation based on the population ratio is allotted by State Government run schools
- GOI also reserved 27% in Higher Education

Apart from these, there are many provisions for encouraging Dalit children to study like scholarships, uniforms, books, mid-day meal (for all) etc.

In spite of these, there is a declining of the enrolment of students at higher levels. Table 2 gives a depiction of the enrollment rate of all girls, boys and girls, SC/ST girls and boys enrollment at different levels of education.

TABLE 2
Enrolment of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) at different Educational Level

S.no	Enrolment in school level	All girls	Total (b+g)	SC girls	SC (b+g)	ST girls	ST (b+g)
1.	Primary	48048	99975	802	1623	3281	6810
2.	Middle	34728	74233	698	1483	3253	6980
3.	Secondary	27958	58913	527	1098	2787	5790
4.	Hr. Secondary	14593	29200	217	451	1052	2079

SOURCE: Selected Educational Statistics 2010-2011

The gross enrolment ratio(GER) for SC students was 132.0 for Classes 1-5, which dropped to 92.3 in classes 6-8, 70.9 in classes 9-10 and 38.3 in classes 11-12. Likewise, the GER for ST students was 137.0 in classes 1-5, dropping to 88.9

in classes 6-8, 53.3 in classes 9-10 and 28.8 in classes 11-12. More than half the children had dropped out of school before completing elementary education.

Educational Status of Dalit Girls

The educational status of Dalit girls remains the same as earlier. Their enrolment is lesser and dropout rates are more compared to the Dalit boys and also their counterparts in the upper cast. This is seen in all levels of education. The SSA has provisions for the girls, which also holds good for the Dalit girls.

The provision for girls under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan include:

- Free textbooks to all girls upto class VIII
- Separate toilets for girls
- Back to school camps for out-of-school girls
- Bridge courses for older girls
- Recruitment of 50% women teachers
- Early childhood care and Education centers in/near schools/convergence with ICDS program etc.
- Teachers' sensitization programs to promote equitable learning opportunities
- Gender-sensitive teaching-learning materials including textbooks
- Intensive community mobilization efforts
- 'Innovation fund' per district for need-based interventions for ensuring girls' attendance and retention.

Of the limited number of Dalit children who were attending school, the majority was male; a trait which continues even today (Nambissan 2012). Between 1983 and 2000, improvements in access to education for all of India have been made, although the difference between education rates for Dalits, especially females, and those in higher castes remained constant. Even poorer results were observed when looking at the female Dalit enrolment rate, which inched from 15.72% to 32.61%, when compared to their upper-caste counterparts whose enrollment climbed from 43.56% to 59.15% (Desai & Kulkarni). The education gap can also be understood to translate through the entire schooling system, with the proportion of Dalit to non-Dalit success remaining at a constant low rate through primary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling. Although large improvements have been made to increase enrolment rates in India, statistics show that there has been little progress in decreasing the education gap between castes.

The second part of the paper focuses on the issues of Dalit girls' education and the reasons for dropout rates.

Issues on Dalit Girls Education and Reasons for their Dropout Rates

The Right to Education of the Constitution requires free and compulsory education for all children until age 14, and free from discrimination is not

secured for Dalit children. Although the caste system has been officially abolished in 1960, caste-based crimes against Dalits continue and they face problems in obtaining justice. Their traditional skills are not in a position to feed them. For the families' economic survival, a majority of Dalit children must work. In addition, their parents are far more likely to be illiterate. Also, Dalit children face considerable hardships in schools, including discrimination, discouragement, exclusion, alienation, physical and psychological abuse, and even segregation, from both their teachers and their fellow students. CERD has also noted the effects of this type of criticism in stating "that the degree to which acts of racial discrimination and racial insults damage the injured party's perception of his/her own worth and reputation is often underestimated." The issues are many-fold.

According to the GOI, there is a high-level enrolment. In reality, there is a higher level of drop outs are seen. The reasons are varied. It is due to policy problems, retention in school, educational provisions, quality of education, access to education, poor economic condition, and the continuing devadasi system. Children being asked to perform tasks like sweeping the school grounds, classrooms, etc. and untouchability in drinking water and mid-day meal scheme and the Dalit parents are also treated inhumanly by the administration. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also does not have any specific program for Dalit children. The issues are discussed in detail in the following document.

Due to their poor economic condition, the Dalit children are not able to perceive education as they think education is both a waste and a threat. Also, the Dalit teachers think Dalits are not meant to be educated and are incapable of being educated. Moreover, if they are educated would pose threat to village hierarchies and power. Teachers thinking and their segregation of Dalit children and their discriminatory attitudes in the classroom is a major issue in executing RTE. The high drop-out rate is also due to the abusive practices of the teachers serves to discourage and alienate Dalit children. The report also says that "teachers have been known to declare that Dalit pupils cannot learn unless they are beaten" (HRW, 2007). Discriminatory practices against Dalit children exercised by teachers may include corporal punishment, denial of access to school water supplies, segregation in classrooms, and forcing Dalit children to perform manual scavenging on and around school premises (IDSN and Navsarjan briefing note, 2010). According to the 2002 India Education Report, school attendance in rural areas in 1993-1994 was 64.3 percent for Dalit boys and 46.2 percent for Dalit girls, compared to 74.9 percent among boys and 61 percent for girls than other students. Though the Committee has made clear that States Parties should "reduce school drop-out rates for children of all communities, in particular for children of affected communities, with special attention to the situation of girls," the statistics for the enrollment of Dalit children, especially girls, are a cause for distress. (Commission on Human Rights) Low literacy rates for Dalits'

population especially girls are a clear indication of the ways in which the school system fails Dalit girls to educate.

Their late entry to school and absenteeism are the reasons for their lesser educational achievement. According to the survey conducted by the NCERT in 2012 in 6,602 schools revealed among class 5 students, SC/ST students constantly underperformed compared to other caste students when tested in reading comprehension, mathematics and environmental sciences (Mohanty and Basant Kumar,2012). Likewise, in the higher secondary examinations, SC/ST students continue to perform much lower than students in general. Of the students who passed the higher secondary education examinations in 2009, around one-third of SC/ST students (29.8% of SCs and 35.7% of STs) obtained below 50% marks and around 30% of SC/ST students (31.9% of SCs and 27.1% of STs) obtained first division marks as compared to 40.3% for all categories of student (MHRD,2010). Another reality is that the SC/ST students do not achieve the required marks for access to higher education institutes like the IITs and IIMs etc. where the admissions are now based on competitive exams as well as aggregate marks in Class12.

Literally meaning “female servant of god,” devadasis usually belong to the Dalit community. Once dedicated, the girl is unable to marry, forced to become a prostitute for upper-caste community members, and eventually auctioned into an urban brothel. The age-old practice continues to legitimize the sexual violence and discrimination that have come to characterize the intersection between caste and gender (Human Rights Watch, Broken People, p. 150).

Poverty has been the major factor causing school dropouts of Dalit girls. Because of this problem Dalit parents have been promoting child marriage. Due to the economic conditions, Dalit girls have inadequate access to information. The parents were not informed of the government and non government provisions to support Dalit girls. Because of this information gap, Dalit girls were compelled to give up their study. They were the last to be sent to school and first to be pulled out from the school for domestic chores. The expectation of getting scholarship support encouraged Dalit girls to enroll in school but misuse of scholarships by the school is also the reason for their dropout.

Within the school also girls face a large proportion of harassment. The unequal treatment of the Dalit girls as portrayed like (a) sexual harassment by the schoolmates, teachers, and community people even by the friends, making culture for the continued sex with the girl children. 38% Government schools, Dalits children have separate sitting arrangements. 20% Dalit children are not permitted to access drinking water from the same source.

The issues are endless for the Dalit girls from home, parents, school and the society. Only the youth and the social media can help the Dalit girls come up in the society.

Challenges

The challenges in the Dalit girl's education are many-fold and are discussed below.

1. The non-preparedness of the states to address the issue of caste, freedom, and attitude towards Dalit girls.
2. To understand and address the question of Dalit girls Right to Education in the wake of globalization.
3. The states itself are gender-biased.
4. To understand the failure and address the development of Dalit girls.
5. How to cope up with injustice due to harassment? As a grave consequence of harassment, a disproportionate number of Dalit students have committed suicide (The Death of Merit, 2011: A). Indeed, in India alone, 18 Dalit students have committed suicide in one of the country's premier institutions between 2008-2011, and this number only represents the official cases. Counting all the Dalit students whose families did not protest against the incessant discrimination that eventually led to suicide, the number is likely to be much higher (The Death of Merit, 2011).

SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

From the reports and the other studies the author has come to ascertain conclusion and suggests the following measures for the improvement of Dalit girls.

The government of India and the NGO's together needs to empower the Dalit girls economically by providing better education which will automatically ensure a social status for them. Hence, there should be no caste-based discrimination on the school premises. Anyone, including the teachers, violating it should be taken to task. At the same time, the Dalits' security ensured by the law should not be misused.

The projects like WESWA in Tamil Nadu and Navsarjan in Gujarat can be taken up by all states. WESWA is an organization in Tamil Nadu proposes to create a residential school for educational empowerment of the Dalit girls. Each group of girls hailing from the oppressed and depressed segments of 47 rural communities in Viralimalai area of Pudukkottai District will be imparted special education as prescribed by State Resource Centre, an authority of non-formal education promoted by Government of Tamil Nadu, Department of Education. Well - trained and experienced teachers will be recruited to teaching the special school girls. Simultaneously, the girls will have a scope for development of co-

curricular activities like computer, embroidery and dressmaking, artificial diamond making and beautician courses. Besides, the girls will also be educated in health and hygiene, environment, personality development, leadership promotion, child rights, child education, elimination of child labor, etc.

Navsarjan runs 3 residential schools near Ahmadabad in Gujarat specially catering to Dalit children living in the surrounding communities. In 2012-2013, these co-educational residential schools housed 322 children from grades 5 through 8. The Dalit children face harsh social and economic discrimination in the local government schools and communities. These schools impart not only academic education in a safe supportive environment but also essential life skills such as non-discrimination and equality. Also, these schools epitomize simplicity and function.

There is a severe lack of public education and awareness of caste discrimination in India. School authorities, administrators, teachers and parents have to be sensitized to the social issues of caste.

Forums for adolescent girls to discuss their own issues and motivate girls to attend a school which is started in Madhya Pradesh can a good model. One of them is Open learning for many girls who are unable to complete elementary education due to poor access. A tie-up with State Open School where there is a 50:50 cost sharing between SSA & State Open School for the girls' fees.

Education provides individuals with the means to increase their income and to engage in economic activities and it also help empower individuals for social change. There have been many attempts over the past one hundred and fifty years to help increase the quality of life for the Dalits of India through development focused on enrolment in primary education. The lack of incentives to pursue education for the Dalits due to caste harassment makes teaching environments unstable. Children have greater distances to walk to school, due to their homes being in the outskirts. Many suggestions, both traditional and modern, have arisen on how to go about resolving issues surrounding Dalit primary enrolment. Night classes and all-Dalit schools provided a safer learning environment for the Dalits but did not address any issues of caste conflict. The policies do help officially decrease some of the inequality and access to education. India still has a long way to bring equality in educational and employment improvement of Dalit girls. India needs to generate a community demand for girls' education through training and mobilization and make the education system responsive to the needs of the girls through targeted interventions.

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