

THE PRIVATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE MARGINALISED CLASSES IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Education is the only key which plays a crucial role in transforming a society into a knowledge society. The role of higher education is even more essential as it directly contributes to the growth and sustenance of a knowledge society. Despite serious handicaps of means and resources, during the last sixty years, a very large system of education has created a vast body of men and women equipped with a high order of scientific and technological capabilities, robust humanist and philosophical thought and creativity. During the last decade, education was given a more important status by the state as well as private players. There was an increased participation of the private sector in the field of higher education. Though India is the largest provider of global talent, a source for aspiring learners and also a role model for the high-quality affordable education system, it remains as a developing country for many years. On the other side, Indian society is highly stratified on the basis of caste, class, gender, and race. The marginalised sections like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are deprived of education and its amenities for decades, though there was a slight difference in the educational status of these groups currently, these marginalised groups are being expelled from enjoying the fruit of positive impact and also bear the disproportionate burden of adverse effect of Privatisation of education in general and higher education in particular. In this regard, this paper

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is to demonstrate the positive and negative implications of the privatization of higher education on the marginalized classes, especially the Scheduled Classes in India.

Keywords: Higher Education Privatisation Marginalised Classes.

Introduction

Education is one of the important elements which plays a major role in shaping the human behaviour. Education plays a key role in transforming a society into a knowledge society. The role of higher education is even more critical as it directly contributes to the progress and sustenance of a knowledge society. Despite serious handicaps of means and resources, during the last sixty years, a very large system of education has created a vast body of men and women equipped with a high order of scientific and technological capabilities, robust humanist and philosophical thought and creativity.

In India, activities of the educational system have been funded and directed mostly by the state.³In the year 1997, the finance ministry, of the Government of India, declared the secondary and higher education as a non-merit good subsequently drastically reduced the subsidies. Later The globalisation and liberalisation of the educational services under the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), 2005 has posed a major challenge to the stakeholders of education in general and higher education in particular. The Profit-oriented and commercial institutions, whose motive is only to earn are expanding their tentacles all over the country. There was a time where all the liquor shops are run by private players and education was the responsibility of the government but today the situation has reversed it seems the government had taken the responsibility to serve Liquor universally whereas the quality education has become the property of private players and the education becomes a major source of income. In the last two decades, the higher education has gained more importance and it had experienced the increased participation of the private players, particularly in higher education. Today, India is the largest provider of global talent, a source for aspiring learners and also a role model for high-quality affordable education system but, it remains as a developing country for many years. On the

³Patel, V. (2009). Private higher education in India—changing scenario. *International Journal of Education Economics and Development*, 1(1), 36-46.

contrary, it is evident that neighbouring countries like China, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, have transformed from developing to the advanced economies in a short span of time owing to a larger vision that correlated development to reforms in education generally and higher education in particular. The major difference between these countries and India lies between the social structures and stratification of the society.

History of Indian Education System

Historically, India claims as the Hindu majoritarian society, the Hindu society is based on “Varna system” which commands the society to divide into four Varnas as Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Gradually there was an emergence of the fifth varna which is popularly known as Panchama or Untouchables of this society. Each and every varna assigned a particular job with restricted boundaries inter-dining, intermarriage, inter sociability is prohibited between these Varnas. Education was not a common good, The Brahmin, has the only right to education, Kshatriya is to be the protector of the state, Vaishya is the trading community and the Sudras are the service providers to the above three Varnas. The Panchamas were kept out of the Varna system and made them as untouchables, and they are completely ignored and humiliated by treating least then animals. Education for them considered to be a sin and the effort to learn will be considered as a severe crime and there were prescribed cruel punishments to those who violate the law that is ‘Manudarma Shastra’ (Code of Manu). The situation remains no change till the arrival of European powers like Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British to the Indian subcontinent. According to A.N Basu, “the beginning of a present system of education in India can be traced to the efforts of the Christian missionaries that came to India along with European traders”. According to A.N Basu, “*the beginning of a present system of education in India can be traced to the efforts of the Christian missionaries that came to India along with European traders*”⁴.

The Europeans who came to India as traders were the Portuguese, the French, the Dutch and the English. Though they came as traders their main aim was to disseminate Christianity and establish European hegemony. To achieve this purpose they chose educating the Indians as a way. So that they can propagate and make understand the principles of Christianity. It can be considered that, the Portuguese missionaries as the originators of the modern education in India.

⁴Basu, A. N. (1947). *Education in modern India: A brief review*. Orient Book Company.

They started a college of higher learning in Goa, Bassein, Bombay, and other places. The Dutch missionaries started their institutions in Tanjore, Madras, Cuddalore, and Trichinopoly. They started charity schools and taught the English language to India children.

East India Company and the English missionaries opened a number of schools like Calcutta charitable school in 1729; free school in 1789 and 115 such schools were opened in Calcutta and other places. During this period Bible was translated into 32 Indian languages and books were published in schools through various missionaries. Though various missionaries and religious groups had brought the same basic education to Indians, it was through the Charter Act of 1813 that a state system of education was officially introduced in India. The act can be considered as a turning point in the history of Indian education because of three reasons- one, It was the first time that the British parliament by recognizing the importance of education and set aside a definite amount for education and its encouragement. Two, from then missionaries received full freedom for conducting educational activities as they choose. Three, missionaries began to rush into India and established schools and colleges since then. Consequently, the Macauley's minutes of 1835, Woods Dispatch of 1854, Hunter commission of 1882 have contributed and gave a small push for the education of marginalized classes during the pre-independent era.

At the time of independence, Indian literacy reached 16.67 percent (1951). Very soon the importance of literacy was realized by the national leaders and aimed at universal literacy. The policies and programs introduced by the successive governments resulted in a gradual but steady increase in literacy rate in independent India. It recorded 28.30 percent in 1961, 29.45 percent in 1971, 36.23 percent in 1981, 42.84 percent in 1991, 64.83 in 2001 and 74.04 percent in 2011. These statistics of the census is considered on the basis that according to our code of census anyone who is able to read and write can be considered as the literates, but in reality, the situation might be different, the growth of a country can be estimated by the quality of education is being imparted by to the people. Accordingly the international adult and life skill survey (2005), literacy has been defined as *“The ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work, and in the community – to achieve one’s goal and to develop*

one's knowledge and potential."⁵. In this case, the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes are the most vulnerable sections, which are being denied of quality education both at primary as well as higher education.

Educational Status of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes

Scheduled castes are those castes which have been listed under the article 341 of the Indian constitution. The scheduled caste is not a homogenous group but is divided into many sub-castes. Chaturvarna system of Hindu religion puts them at the bottom of the social hierarchy. India is home to 16.6 percent of Scheduled Caste against the total population. The literacy rate among scheduled castes increased from 10.27 percent in 1967, 14.67 percent in 1971, 21.38 percent in 1981, 37.41 percent in 1991, 45.02 percent in 2001 and 66.10 percent in 2011.

Article 366 (25) of the constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities that are recognized in under article 342 of the Indian Constitution. These tribal communities live in different ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains, forests, hills and other inaccessible areas. These communities have various stages of social – economic and educational development. The scheduled tribes are notified in 30 states or union territories. The total population of STs according to 2011 census is 10.43 crore constituting 8.6 percent of the total population. 89.97 percent of them live in rural areas and 10.3 percent in urban areas. Education is essential for the improvement of their socio-economic status in India. The literacy rate of STs increased from 8.53 percent in 1961 to 58.96 percent in 2011.

Current Scenario of Higher Education in India

There has been the unprecedented growth of higher education in the country since independence and the growth can be discussed in three phases, the first phase from 1947 to 1980s which evident the growth of grant-in-aid institutions or private aided institutions. The second phase of 1980 to 2000 covers the various developments in the national education policy and the wake of economic reforms in the early 1990s. The New Economic Policy of 1991 has invited the role of privatization in the field of education by reducing the public expenditure in the social sectors. Later in 1997, the government has identified the large scale of social and economic services and

⁵Boundary district plan, July 2009, Columbia Alliance for Literacy

it also divided them into three categories as public goods, merit goods, and non-merit goods and proposed to reduce the subsidies for the non-merit goods and education up to the elementary level considered as a merit good and the later stage of education including higher education considered as the non-merit good. The third phase, from the year 2000 onwards had to experience the demand of deemed-to-be universities.

After independence, the government of India was busy with the issues and problems of post-partition. The government was also concerned regarding the development of human resources. However, since the early 1950's higher education has been diversified and extended its reach and coverage quite significantly. Currently, there are 864 Universities, 40,026 colleges, and 11,669 stand-alone institutions in India. Among the 824 universities, 1 Central Open University, 44 Central Universities, 33 Deemed Universities (Government), 5 Institutions under Legislature Act, 100 institutions on National Importance, 79 Deemed Universities (Private), 233 State Private Universities, 13 State Open Universities, 345 State Public Universities, Deemed Universities-Government Aided.⁶ In addition to this, there are various bodies regulating the higher educational institutions at various levels like NAAC for quality assessment of higher educational institutes in India. NBA, AICTE, AB, ICAR and more.

WTO-GATS Agreement

World Trade Organisation is the only international organisation dealing with global rules of trade between the nations. Till the year 1996 public services such as education, healthcare, and many other important services are classed as domestic activities, not included in the International Trade Agreement and it was difficult to trade across the boundaries. The General Agreement on Trade in Services was a part of the trinity of Agreements upon in the Uruguay round included the 161 activities including education in the international trade agreement. According to this agreement educational systems are not exclusively provided by the public sectors and education particularly the higher education is no more becomes the free good and the agreement led to the financialisation of higher education.

⁶MHRD (2017). *All India Survey on Higher Education report of 2016-17*. New Delhi, India.

India's Higher education issues and challenges

In India, poor people go to public Institutions and the most of the private Institutions are remained opened for the elites and other affordable sections. Though private institutions are funded and subsidized by the state, it doesn't have any say at the administration level. Privatisation of higher education may yield little good, but the marginalised classes like Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes are still facing many problems related to equity, access, and quality.

Accessibility

Private institutions in education are basically doing the profit-making business, these institutions are primarily deprived of Social Ideas, Social Objectives, they look people at their economic status. Though it is evident that most of the children from the Dalit community and other marginalised communities are out of school and dropping out only by the reason of economic deprivation no private institutions have come forward to provide or reserve seats for the socially and economically disadvantaged sections and no private institutions are ready to educate the rural mass with low-cost fees, they only concentrated in the urban world where it can exploit the readily available resources.

Quality Education

The social structure of the Indian society is diversified comparatively to the other nations of the world. The demography of India reveals that more than 80 percent of the marginalised classes are still deprived of quality education. Out of 85 percent of marginalised classes, only 8 percent of Dalits, 6 percent of Tribes and less than 9 percent of Muslim children are able to graduate from class 12. It can be evident that more than 70 percent of children from the marginalised are still studying at the publicly funded institutions; the recent developments in the educational system have made them become dropouts due to various reasons associated with accessibility and quality.

Equity and Poor Economic Background

There is no equality in terms of enrolment for the students especially to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. More than 60 percent of the population in the country lives in poor economic

conditions, added to this there is an increased participation of private players in the education sector particularly in the higher education and the allocation of budget for education is reduced by 2 percent in the year 2015. These private institutions are charging higher fees and only those who can afford are reaching to those institutions. It is unfair to a country like India to educate only the 10 percent of the affordable classes to learn and keeping aside bright future of the 90 percent of the population. It will also affect the quality of education in overall.

Shortage of Teachers in the Education System

Teachers are the major medium of communication in which student can learn directly by observing their virtue of knowledge. The privatisation of higher education is not only creating a gap between the students and teachers but also making as teaching profession as an unattractive profession. It is because the teachers are gradually replacing by the Online courses and lakhs of teachers across the nation are still appointed on an ad-hoc basis.

Conclusion

Today, the education for a person is more than a necessity in order to achieve the personal as well the societal goals, the development of the society can be understood with the degree of the educational attainment of the members in it. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes are deprived of education for several ages as a result still they remained as vulnerable sections. Whatever the development that they have achieved today is because of the publicly funded education which was started by the European powers and continued by the Indian government at various stages. Today the entire system is changing rapidly, the publicly funded institutions are shutting down and the private players are mushrooming all around the country. These private players are basically profit oriented and they would not have any concern for the Access, Quality, Equity and the major losers of this is from the marginalised classes like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These groups due to their inability to reach the economic standers that the private players are demanding, they are losing the battle of education and they are dropping out in the schooling level itself. The people only from the cream of those societies are able to reach the private institutions, even there also they are experiencing a kind of discrimination. Finally, publicly funded Institutions will provide the equal opportunity to every person in the society, if the public funded institutions stop functioning the marginalised classes won't be having any

scope in it. Therefore India should also learn a lesson from the small country like Finland where it never allowed any private players in the education system and today it is evident for the good education system which is accessible to all. It is the duty of the good governance to look at the welfare of society as a whole by equipping the communities with special skills and the tools of providing skills through higher education institutions should not be discriminatory in terms of enrolment and participation. It requires a dramatic shift in approach, transforming its young population into a talent-skilled-knowledge capital, then only the envisioned state of 2030 is possible otherwise we would have wait for some more years to make it happen.

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