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DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION IN EDUCATION

Education is considered to be an important factor for the development of communities. Enrolment of children in schools is one of the indicators of human development. Several studies have shown that low levels of educational attainment is related to persistent social and economic inequalities. In recent times, national governments and international agencies have advocated for the right to education inspiring several movements for universal primary education and Education for All (EFA). The international community has coined the slogan “leave no one behind” with Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals aiming to provide quality education for all girls and boys by the year 2030. In spite of these efforts at the national and global level, one in five children, adolescents and youth are out of school, including 64 million children of primary school age, 61 million children of secondary school age and 138 million children of higher secondary school age. In India, there has been significant progress made in universalising primary education through flagship schemes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. However, in spite of these noble efforts of successive Governments, there continues to be millions of children from marginalised sections of society, who have no schooling or have dropped out of school. Low educational attainment levels of marginalised sections of society is often due to poor socio-economic conditions accentuated by discrimination based on caste, class, creed, ethnicity, race and gender, which leads to social exclusion and exclusion from the education system. The challenge of addressing discrimination and exclusion in education is an uphill task due to several factors. Firstly, the forms and causes of persistent inequalities, discrimination and exclusion are socio-historical processes which are diverse and complex in different social contexts. The contexts may include living under conditions inadequate for health and well-being, inability to pay fees, inability to fulfil eligibility criteria, inadequate facilities in schools, lack of sanitation and toilets in schools, inability to attend school regularly and the teaching and learning processes being irrelevant to the learner’s needs and capacities. In addition to these contexts, exclusion from education also takes place on account of discriminatory practices against children on the basis

of their caste, class, creed, ethnicity, race and gender. These discriminatory practices include separate sitting arrangements, lack of attention given, humiliation meted out to these children, disparaging remarks by teachers and isolation by peers. In such situations, even if children are enrolled in schools, they are unable to bear the discriminatory practices and humiliation meted out to them in the school and are compelled to drop out of school before completing their schooling. Secondly, the relationship between education, inequalities, discrimination and exclusion are highly complex. Patterns of inequalities, discriminatory practices and social exclusion in society is often reflected on patterns of inequalities and exclusion in education. Exclusion in education can further lead to social exclusion. At the same time, education can also be a means for reducing inequalities, discrimination and exclusion in society. Thirdly, education systems do not encourage critical thinking of existing socio-cultural practices and therefore schools often conform and reinforce existing socio-cultural practices that at times are discriminatory, which results in the perpetuation of inequalities and social exclusion. Therefore, efforts should be made to address inequalities, discrimination and exclusion by re-orienting education systems towards more inclusive and just societies.

This issue of *Social Action* is an attempt to bring the issue of discrimination and exclusion in education in the mainstream of academic discourse. It contains articles that try to understand the different manifestations of the phenomenon of discrimination and exclusion in education. Paul D'Souza and Teena Anil shares the outcome of an empirical study on children of households belonging to "Unclean" occupations from different States of Northern India in their article, "Discrimination and Exclusion in Education: A Perspective from Below". The article examines the phenomenon of discrimination and exclusion in education of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy within the analytical framework of Accessibility, Availability, Acceptability and Adaptability. The authors also situate their study in the context of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan that focuses on cleaning India, and suggest several educational initiatives for the children of those engaged in "unclean" occupations, who are actually cleaning India. The article on "Discrimination and Exclusion in Education: A View of Bihar" by Jose Kalapura is a research article based on primary data collected on major Dalit communities in five Districts of Bihar. The findings of this study reveals that Dalits experience discriminatory treatment by teachers in school, lack of support mechanisms and subjection to stigmatisation, stereotyping, shame and humiliation which affect their psychological

growth and career development. Abdullah Khandakar's article titled "Exclusion in Education among *Char* Dwellers of Assam: An Empirical Analysis" is a fascinating study on life of two million people who live on river islands in the Brahmaputra river, commonly known as Chars. These people are vulnerable to frequent floods, which keeps them in poverty, devoid of livelihood opportunities and basic civic infrastructure, which leads to exclusion from the education system. The study has shown that even well-intentioned policies such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) have not been able to address the exclusion of Char dwellers from the education system. The article on "Educational Exclusion of Scheduled Castes in India: A Psycho-Social Perspective" by Deepak Nayak focuses on psycho-social disabilities of Scheduled Castes due to centuries old experience of stigmatisation, oppression and marginalisation which have been internalised and manifests itself in deep-rooted low self esteem leading to exclusion in education and various other social processes. The phenomenon among children of scavenging communities of dropping out from school due to lack of interest has been deconstructed by Ratnesh Katulkar in his article titled "Exploring Lack of Interest as a Cause of Dropout of Children of Scavenging Communities". The author shows how factors such as lack of parental care; lack of attention, support, motivation by teachers; inability to share issues arising in school with illiterate parents; non-conducive environment of residential locality; poor health conditions; large family size, and frequent humiliation, leads to lack of interest in pursuing educational goals. This lack of interest is manifested in emotional disturbance, absenteeism, poor performance and dropping out of school. Sandeep Singh's article titled "The Fence that Excludes: Narrating School Education along LoC in J&K" is a well researched paper on the exclusion from school education experienced by people living in forty five 'fenced out' villages along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch and Rajouri districts of Jammu and Kashmir. The author points out that the impact of the border conflict between India and Pakistan is multi-dimensional leading to poor educational infrastructure and physical casualties resulting in their marginalisation and exclusion from the education system. The article on "The Chakma, 'Medical Quota' and Higher Education in Mizoram: Gleaning Discrimination and Exclusion in Education" by Anup Chakraborty documents the complex lived experiences of discriminatory practices and exclusionary policies that result in the exclusion from education of the Chakma tribes, regarded as foreigners or illegal immigrants by the predominantly majority Mizo tribe in Mizoram.

Swetashree's article on "Discrimination and Exclusion in education: Experience of Dalit Girls in School Settings in Odisha" highlights the discrimination and exclusion of Dalit girls in Odisha since they are doubly cursed due to their gender and caste. The article highlights the caste based abuse and discrimination faced by Dalit girls which affects their academic performance and mental health leading to high dropout rates and exclusion from the education system.

These articles examine the phenomenon of discrimination and exclusion in education from different parts of India and suggest ways to address them in order to build inclusive and just societies. It is hoped that greater attention is paid to address different dimensions of discrimination and exclusion in education of marginalised communities in order to fulfil the global goal of quality education for all children at the earliest.

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