

Schools Marginalize Children in Multiple Ways: Language Policy, Right to Education Act and Classroom Practices in India



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Primary Education in India

- Approx. 30% children of above three years age are not attending any kind of pre-school/ Integrated Child Development Centers(ASER-2008-2009)
- Percentage of girls' enrolment-48.38% in primary school(DISE-2008-2009)
- Retention rate at primary level-74.92% (DISE-2007-2008)
- Transition rate from primary to upper primary level-82.68% (DISE-2008-2009)

The Context

- Education has always been a political agenda of the dominant class whereby the native languages and cultures of the socio-economically marginalized communities are been poorly placed in school policies and teaching learning practices. Unfamiliar school languages (reflected in the medium of instruction and as compulsory subject), socio-culturally isolated textbooks and teachers from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds marginalize vast sections of children in multiple ways.

The Context

- Due to unfamiliar languages and school culture, ethno linguistic minorities, scheduled tribes and migrant children not only perform poorly in schools, but are also bound to drop out. This is a significant challenge for the recently passed Right to Education Act, 2009, which provides a fundamental right to free and compulsory education to every Indian child in the 6-14-years age group.

Challenges

- However, in terms of the target towards universalization of elementary education in socially disadvantaged communities, the achieved numbers are yet inadequate. STs/SCs share the highest percentage of school dropout children which was 42.3% for ST children and 34.2% for SC children.(DISE-2006)

Language Policy and Practice

- India is a multi lingual and multi cultural society having 22 recognized official languages and around 400 other languages which are being used by the people of different states and cultural zones.(MapsofIndia,2010)
- Three language formula is a guiding principle but in practical terms tribal children do struggle in the school at the entry level. This complexity can be understood with a case of *Korku* children of Maharashtra. Children of this community speak *Korku* , understand *Hindi* but medium of instruction is *Marathi* (the state language) and *English* is a compulsory subject in primary grades. Majority of teachers posted in this region speak Marathi and don't understand Korku.

Language Policy and Practice

- *Only **Bodo, Garo** and **Khasi** from Tribal language group are being used as medium of instruction in North-East. In other parts ,tribal children are being educated through state languages even when the number of estimated schools having more than 50 percent children from the Scheduled Tribes group were 1,03,609 in 2003-2004. (Jhingran,2005)*
- In schools less than 20 languages as medium of instruction.
- Teacher's Support and Written Examination

Commitment of the State-RtE,2009

- The progression of the growing demand for schooling, commitment of the state to universalize education and advocacy efforts by the civil society resulted in the formulation and enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 in India; education thus became a requirement rather than a privilege, however, in practice the road ahead is still uphill
- Though constitutional provisions have been made to protect languages and facilitate primary schooling in mother tongue but use of mainstream languages of formal schooling such as English,Hindi and state languages is increasing enormously. Jhingran , 2005 estimates that almost 25 percent of all primary school going children face a moderate to severe learning disadvantage owing to their language background. Specially ST-SC-Minority groups

Missing Links

- There have been minimal efforts to prepare text books, learning materials in regional languages or standardizing local languages to facilitate a strong foundation of learning for the disadvantaged children.
- Rather, states have been taking initiatives to introduce English as a medium of instruction and a compulsory subject from standard-1 instead of using a transitional approach helping children to shift slowly from mother tongue to language of school in primary classes. (Delhi, Maharashtra etc.) Currently less than 20 languages are being used as medium of instruction .

The Concern

- *Urdu* speaking children of A.P study in *Telegu* medium schools, *Hindi* speaking children in *Bengali* medium schools in West Bengal and *Korku* children of Maharashtra studying in *Marathi* medium schools.
- Dialogue between teachers and students is a key element of learning process and if teacher comes from a different language background and does not understand the children's language, learning can't be a good experience for children. Limited interaction in the classroom results in low levels of learning and pushes out some students in the early years of schooling.

The Concern

- Teacher's negative attitude towards language and culture of the children , unfamiliar cultures and values presented in the text books also contribute to make the context challenging for the children as found in some states text books which have not given enough value and space to tribal people.
- In mid 2009, it was estimated that 8.1 million children are out of school.(UNICEF, 2010).

RtE & Challenges

- Right to Education Act, 2009 (RtE) which is significant for the children who are still out of school because gives guarantee for every child to take admission in schools but does not put emphasis on language issues and makes provisions of Multi Grade and Multi Level teaching by placing teachers as per number of students rather than making provisions of five teachers for five classes.
- The number of classrooms will also be determined by the number of teachers posted in the schools as norms mentioned under RtE. If there are 60 students in the schools, only two teachers will be allocated for the school.

Pre-School is not part of RtE

- RtE does not guarantee for pre-school education for the children below six years which could be a foundation of learning for disadvantaged children and quality inputs are also missing.
- As percentage of children in Std 5 in government schools who can read at Std 2 level text has been around 50% for the last four years. So children's learning level is behind their current grade in the school. Standard 5th children could not perform well in Math's also as from 2007 to 2009; the ability to do division problems has declined from 41% to 36 %.(ASER, 2009).

Different School System for Different People

- Discrimination also takes place through provisions of different sets of schools for different people in government set up- *Kendriya Vidyalaya, Navodaya Vidyalaya, Sainik* Schools represent quality education schools however, they are out of the gambit of RtE.
- The remaining primary/middle schools(not Pvt Schools) run by state governments look excluded in terms of infrastructure, grants, teachers availability and learning level of the children. So some students would get better quality education even without using RtE as a tool and majority of the children would get in to 'excluded' schools with the support of RtE.

In the Classroom-Teacher's Social Perception

- Majority of the teachers have a pre-conceived notion of the un-educability of students coming from disadvantaged background and often make use of their family business, caste, native place, mother language as a tool to make insulting remarks. (*Kabadi, JuggiWale, Bihari etc.*) Due to regular discrimination, children feel hesitant to engage in group activities and learning process and start developing *skipping attitude* and low self esteem.
- National Curriculum Frame work, 2005 observes the lack of space for social experiences and voices of children in classroom process and put emphasis on attitudinal changes of teachers, textbook writers etc .

In the Classroom-Teacher's Social Perception

- *Teachers at elementary school in Gaya where Musahar children are being educated attribute their underachievement to their “impure” culture in which parents indulge in practices like rearing pigs and eating pork. They are considered to lack “sanskara” – the sociability to be eligible to learn.(DeshKal,2010)*
- A section of teachers believe that poor learning levels of disadvantaged children are not because of ineffective learning processes but due to hereditary reasons and children of marginalized communities are mentally incapacitated to achieve much from schooling

In the Classroom-Teacher's Social Perception

- Teachers put ahead the social condition of marginalized children to hide their failures in the improvement of learning levels of the children.
- One teacher reacted on the efforts of making Parents-Teacher Association functional “these are the children of beggars and rag pickers and we find it difficult to handle them. If we will allow their parents to enter in to the school premise, then it would be hard to protect things in the school and control them’.
- In another school teacher blamed students of disadvantage communities that they only come school to get Mid Day Meal than the education

Migrant Children & Educational Challenges

- Seasonal migrant children do not attend schools at the destination state/ near work sites because often the medium of instruction differ from one state to another.(Mother Tongue would be a challenge with in the state so it's multiple challenge to comprehend) RtE, 2009 makes provision for admission in any government schools but provisions need to be made to resolve pedagogical issues of migrant children.
- Hesitation on the part of states to coordinate with neighbouring states since it would reflect badly on the source states if they accept inter -state migration officially and centre does not interfere in the matter of two states!

Non-School Going Children & Work Force

- Alienated migrants do not get access to basic government services - ICDS, School, PHC. This cycle creates a potential opportunity for non school going children to join parents at work and to employers to get all the family members to work at a cheaper rate.



Poor Quality force parents for Tution

- The improved trend for tuition is visible from rural to urban locations as pointed by ASER, 2009 that 17.1% children in Std 1 take tuition and this proportion rises to 30.8% in Std 8 in government schools. In private schools also, almost every fourth student take private tuition even in Std 1.

Transition from Primary to Upper Primary

- The ratio between primary schools and upper primary schools is still 2.32% as reported by DISE, 2008-2009 which means all the students who graduated from the primary schools could not be accommodated in the upper primary school. The government data shows transition of 82.36% children only from primary to upper primary (DISE-2008-2009) which means 17% children are still dropping out after 5th standard

Way Forward

- Challenges before the tribal and migrant children are not only related with language and pedagogy but poor infrastructure ,less number of upper primary schools , lacking inter-state coordination, missing forward linkages etc. contributes to keep them vulnerable and they fail to break the vicious cycle of exclusion.
- The three language formula came in to existence four decades ago and very less effort has been done to facilitate learning in mother tongue of the disadvantage people and making languages standardized. So a new language policy need to be designed as RtE 2009 also does not put much emphasis on language issue.

Way Forward

- Poor quality education would make them more vulnerable as they would be counted as 'educated' but actually they are not so by making all the efforts for quality education(start with mother tongue), enrollment and retention of the disadvantaged children could be ensured and Millennium Development Goals could be achieved timely as Bernstein says- **“Those who are good in language are good in all other subjects and those who fail in language fail in every other subject”-**.

Many Thanks to All of You

