



Role of Education for Social Justice: A Case of Musahar Community in Bihar

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ABSTRACT

Education plays an important role in promoting social justice by empowering individuals, promoting critical thinking, and increasing awareness of social issues. Which also enables marginalized communities to advocate for their rights, put forward their views and build a more equitable society. Social justice in education is critical to creating a fair and equitable society, ensuring that all classes, regardless of background, have equal opportunities and access to quality education, and empowering them to challenge injustice and advocate for positive change. Social justice in education is important for the Dalit community in Bihar, as it empowers them, promotes equality, and breaks the cycle of discrimination by providing access to quality education and resources, which ultimately leads to social and economic mobility. The present paper addresses the historical inequalities faced by the Dalit community towards the Musahar caste; highlights the challenges and difficulties faced by this community in accessing quality education, social mobility and economic advancement. We draw on a comparative study based on extensive qualitative in-depth interviews and participant observation, in rural areas of two districts in Bihar.

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Introduction

Education is the backbone of any caste, class, or community. Every advanced society globally possesses a robust educational infrastructure. It facilitates the attainment of values, attitudes, and knowledge. Literacy serves as a quantifiable indicator of the developmental status of an area or region. Elevated literacy rates signify enhanced empowerment for the Dalits, reduced disparity for Dalits in Musahar regions, and an increased social status. The complex caste system, which categorizes individuals into several social groupings, is deeply embedded in Indian culture. It is the conventional categorization of society based on familial lineage and profession. The Indian caste system comprises five main classes.

Priests and educators, or Brahmins, are the apex elite in Indian civilization. The warrior class, known as Kshatriyas, follows them. The Vaishyas, including farmers and merchants, are classified third, while the Shudras, consisting of laborers, are classified fourth (“The Caste System in Hinduism”). The Dalits formed the fifth group, viewed as so inferior that caste classification deemed them unworthy. These folks, sometimes termed “untouchables” in Indian culture, endure the most stringent and unjust restrictions (Desai & Kulkarni).

The longstanding adversarial interactions between classes result from the caste system's traditional framework and historical entrenchment in India. Dalits were prohibited from accessing tea shops, village wells, temples, and other institutions in rural regions. In many regions of the country, Dalits were prohibited from walking during the day, as their shadows were perceived as a source of pollution (Nambissan, 1011). The Dalits' efforts to improve their circumstances have often been obstructed by assaults, sexual violence, and homicides perpetrated by higher castes who are apprehensive of the Dalits' pursuit of equality, compounded by the severe and demeaning conditions they have faced (Bob, 173). The prevalence of brutal and unjust treatment of Dalits in contemporary society has diminished over time.

Importance of Education

Before examining methods for increasing literacy and primary school enrolment rates, it is important to comprehend why education is such an important topic in development studies. Education has proliferated globally over the past century. The disparity among different socioeconomic strata has expanded concurrently with the rise in education (Desai & Kulkarni). Individuals in poverty may enhance their earnings through education. Education facilitates the equitable distribution of growth advantages. From an economic perspective, education enhances individuals' productivity in both



professional and domestic settings. Such benefits can also be perceived to motivate economically and socially oppressed groups to seek political reform. Governments endeavor to establish social or economic equality for the public by citing several issues as rationales for advancing educational attainment.

The Musahar community among the Dalits is significantly marginalized and predominantly landless. The majority of this population resides in the four Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. The 2011 census indicates that the Musahar community in Bihar comprises 2,725,114 individuals. The Musahars constitute the third-largest scheduled caste in the state, following the Dusadhs and Chamars (Sahay, 2019). Historically, they have worked as bound laborers for the landlords due to customary obligations. Their survival was wholly contingent upon the landowners' uncertain benevolence.

The Musahars group has remained impoverished, landless, marginalized, illiterate, malnourished, and devoid of rights (Farmer, 2003; Herr, 1999; Kleinman, 2000). The Musahar community is arguably the most disadvantaged, oppressed, impoverished, and subjugated caste in society. In relation to social status, economic position, and political clout, it significantly trails behind other Dalits.

Objectives

To identify the major socio-economic parameters; e.g. literacy, marriage, occupation, standard of living, housing condition, drop-out and enrollment in primary education; and to assess the degree and nature of change in Dalits community.

Hypothesis

There is co-relation between change in socio-economic status of Dalits in Musahar community and emerging education system.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out in district of Nalanda. Nalanda is second most developed districts of Bihar in terms of Socio-economic indicators. Impact of modernization, level of literacy and level of consciousness is also higher in the district. Nalanda district has been purposefully selected to analyse the impact of education for Social Justice on Musahar community within this development scenario for comparative analysis two block has been selected- one developed block (Harnaut Block) in terms of



development indicators and another under-development (Nagarnausa Block). Sample size of the study has been 50 household. This study has been based on primary and secondary sources of data.

Findings

Most of the respondents were extremely poor and had mud tile houses to live in. Only 10% of the respondents were eighth pass, after which they start doing agricultural labour. Our study found that there are 100 children enrolled in primary school but only 25 children go every day. When asked about the reasons for not going to school, it was found that 40% of the children go to the Agricultural work place with their parents. 39% of the respondents say that other upper caste children harass them (abuse, tease, fight etc.) on the way to school; Whereas 21% of the respondents say that because the primary school is far from home and there is an upper caste hamlet/locality on the way, they feel scared in sending the child alone.

Case-I: Sona Devi, resident of Dwarka Vigha of Harnaut block, says that” बेटा के पढ़ेला भेजली स्कूलवा आ दुश्मनवा मार देहलक हमर बेटा के “In the year 2019, Rohit Kumar (10 years old), son of Sona Devi, was beaten severely by the owner of the garden for eating mangoes from the garden on the way to school, due to which he died.

Conclusion

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. Education provides individuals with the means to increase their income and to engage in economic activities. In addition, it can help empower individuals to lobby for social change through political activism. The lack of incentives to pursue education for the Musahar community in Bihar can be traced back to a long history of mistreatment and oppression. Still occurring today, caste harassment makes teaching environments unstable for caste children, it places caste homes on the outskirts of towns so that children have greater distances to walk to school, and it economically suppresses the Musahar community so that they are unable to pay for their children’s education. Instead of increasing enrolment, additional textbooks only had an effect on increased performance levels. Minor increases in incentives for Dalits to pursue primary education have been beneficial, but not sufficient in equalizing the enrolment gap between the Dalits and members of upper castes. In order for significant progress to be made in increasing the primary enrolment rates of Dalit children, development organizations must continue to



explore varying levels of incentives and pursue national social equality in India. For which primary school teachers and public representatives should run an awareness campaign about education in Musahar Tola.

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