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Sociology Of Education

BLOCK – 4

EDUCATION, SOCIAL AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

UNIT 11 ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIAL AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: EMERGING PERSPECTIVES

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

*   explain the concepts of social and human development;
*   discuss the initiatives at ,international and national levels that are geared to integrating education with social and human development; and
*   describe experiments in education at the grass-roots that cross-link education with social and human development.

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11.1   INTRODUCTION

For long education has been identified with progress and prosperity. In fact, the spread of education is treated as an effective solution to the problems of economic decline, hunger, and human poverty. Education appears as a core area of concern in public policies in national as also international circles. We find governments in different countries pursuing the goal of widening the spread of education at one level and international agencies such as the United Nations pursuing the target of universalizing primary education as part of millennium development goals which, in effect, means ensuring that by 2015, children (boys and girls alike) in all parts of the world are able to complete a full course of primary schooling. What is/are the major objectives of education? Apart from bringing in prosperity and material affluence, does education have any other role to play in ameliorating human suffering? Does it have a bearing on social and human development? You have studied the multiple dimensions of the concept of education and the viewpoints of major thinkers on education in Block 1. You have already learnt about the articulation of the ideas of some of them in specific settings as the Rishi Valley School which is founded on the principles and perspective of J. Krishnamurti. In addition, you are aware (from reading units 9 and 10) of the role of education in bringing about social change and social mobility. You would have realized that the scope of education is not confined to the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic). Education has a distinct role to play in society. In this unit we will explore the basic issue of education in the context of social and human development. We begin with acquiring an understanding of the twin concepts of social and human development. Then we will delve into the role of

education within this framework. In the next unit you will learn about the role of education in the empowerment of the marginalized people which is a significant component of social and human development.

11.2 Social and Human Development Indicators

You have already read in detail about the twin concepts of social and human development in Block 1 of MSO-003 Course (Sociology of Development). The World Bank (2005) defines social development as the process of increasing the (i) assets and capabilities of individuals to improve their well-being, (ii) capacity of social groups to transform their relationships with other groups, and participate in development processes, and (iii) ability of society to reconcile the interests of its constituent elements, govern itself and manage change. As early as the 1990s, it was accepted that in its widest connotation, the concept of development had more to do with the general sense of human well-being than with the growth of material output. The annual human development reports have forcefully initiated the shift in focus from expanding incomes to non-income dimensions of well-being in understating human development.

Box 11.1 : Human Development Index

The UN Human Development Index (HDI) is a measure of poverty, literacy, education, life expectancy, childbirth, and the fact others. It was developed by the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq in 1990 and has been used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1993 to measure the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development. These are (i) long and healthy life expectancy at birth; (ii) knowledge as measured by adult literacy and combined primary, secondary and tertiary groups' enrolment ratio; and (iii) standard of living as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita at purchasing parity (PPP) in USD. Every year, the UNDP ranks UN member states in accordance with the HDI.

The Human Development Report 2005 clearly states that human development is about freedom and about building human capabilities which encompasses the range of things that people can do and what they can be. This range gets narrowed when conditions of poverty, illness, illiteracy, social and economic discrimination, and unrest prevail. The basic capabilities for human development are, leading a long and healthy life, being educated, having adequate resources for a decent standard of living, and social and political participation in society.

11.3 EDUCATION FOR CAPACITY BUILDING OF THE POOR AND THE MARGINALIZED

For long, it has been said that education seems to protect the poor and the marginalized from exploitation by generating awareness of their rights, capacities and capabilities. The role of education hence seems to be confined to awareness generation and at best opening opportunities for employment and in this sense providing security of income. Certainly, this is a limited and highly restricted view of

the scope of education in society. What often remains unattended is the role of education in the empowerment of the poor and the marginalized for several reasons — the chief among them being the ease of governing the disempowered people. When people become empowered to make choices, take decisions for themselves, and challenge the decisions of administrators, governance becomes difficult. It is for this reason that despite the fact that plan documents do contain expressions such as, 'community participation', 'people's movements' that convey a sense of decentralization, they are prepared and implemented by the bureaucracy and those who have no understanding of the social reality of those for whom they plan and make policies. The participation of local communities is often for namesake. According to Dreze and Sen (1995), the education system has served to safeguard the interests of the privileged and powerful groups of people leaving behind the socially and economically disadvantaged. Rampal (2000: 2524) writes, "If education is really to be a means of reducing social inequities and redressing the skewed course of development followed in the last few decades, it shall have to be reckoned as a site of struggle for power. The classroom shall have to relocate the power to critique and change - the power also to decide what shall count as legitimate content for curricula, to choose enabling pedagogies, negotiated when, where and ultimately for what purposes. The educational discourse would need to consciously give voice to the silenced majority and redefine its objectives by valuing their lives on their terms. Strong and visible affirmative action in favour of the disadvantaged and disempowered will have to redefine the educational priorities of the countries in this [South Asian] region."

Equally important is to address the issue of the content of teaching. It is live that the curriculum is rooted in the urban middle class background of those who design the curriculum. There has been widespread acceptance of the need to develop curriculum based on the 'social context and life experience of the disadvantaged section of society. It is said that when this happens learning would be both joyful and meaningful to the children. What happens, however, is that the children belonging to the disempowered and disadvantaged families are treated as 'backward' and 'inferior'. They have, therefore, to be made to 'catch up' with their counterparts belonging to the empowered and privileged families. Furthermore, they need to be 'told how to conduct their lives, what to do, what not to do. All this is through the process of education in the course of which they are fed on bits and pieces of information. There are fragments of information may not be completely comprehensible to the children, for they do not relate with their life situation, neither are they able to make use of it. A natural consequence of bias in the education system itself and lack of interest of students is a rise in the number of dropouts.

Contrary to the understanding that children of marginalized families are deficient in basic capacities and capabilities of learning is the fact that they are more sensitive to, aware and conscious of the conflicts and complexities of life. It is unfair to judge them on the basis of their performance in standardized formats and centralized criteria of assessment of their capacities to learn and articulate information that is by no means close to their own lives. Consider, for example, tribal children who grew up learning indigenous ways of measuring rice. Now, when they are introduced to the

modern counting system in elementary classes, there is a great likelihood that they would not be able to understand and perform well in examinations. If, however, their indigenous system of counting is integrated with the teaching process, it is expected that they would learn with ease and with greater comprehension. The need, therefore, is to (i) establish pedagogy of emancipation in place of the pedagogy of the oppressed and articulate Freire's ideas on education, and (ii) develop faith among the people in their own rationale, and wisdom as worthwhile for perusal. In fact, traditional knowledge, for example, about water harvesting, local food processing, fish farming, metal casting, have significant potential for inclusion in the school curriculum. This would empower the people at the grass-roots and provide opportunity for enriching their living conditions.

Box 11.2: World Declaration on Education for All (EFA)

Human Development is clearly reflected in the World Declaration on Education for All which states:

"Every person — child, youth and adult — shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and to continue learning. Moreover, whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development - for an individual or for society - depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as.a result of these opportunities, i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in allowing learners to reach their fullest potential" (cited here from Rampal 2000:2525).

Incorporation of human rights into education prepares the children to accompany and produce desired societal changes, increase their capacity to participate in decision-making processes leading to social, cultural, and economic policies. The endeavour of making human rights a component of education brings in profound reform in the entire education system, more so because it has a bearing on curriculum framework, methods of teaching, classroom management, and assessment procedures. In its full sense, human rights education implies that rights are not only communicated as part of teaching but also implemented as part of the teaching-learning practice leading to decentralization, democratization of education as also respect for human dignity.

11.4 EDUCATION FOR ACCELERATION OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES

In September 2000, the UN Millennium Summit provided the forum for world leaders to commit their nations to strengthening global efforts for peace, human rights, democracy, strong governance, environmental sustainability and poverty eradication, and to promoting principles of human dignity, equality and equity. The result was the

Millennium Declaration which was adopted by 189 countries. It was felt that the commitments in the Declaration could be made possible stating the goals, targets and indicators. Consequently, 8 goals, 18 targets,-and 48 indicators were identified. Out of these one of the goals was: to achieve universal primary education and the corresponding target was to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. The other goal that is of significance in this context was: promote gender equality and empower women, and the corresponding target was to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education not later than 2015. It was realized that the cost of education hits the poor people hard, constituting as it does a large share of limited economic resources. School dropouts, hence, can be considerably lowered by bringing down the direct and indirect costs of education (Human Development Report 2003).

Box 11.3: Ending Discrimination against girls

Gender differences in enrolments and dropouts are acute in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Countries that have eliminated gender disparities offer the following lessons:

- "Getting and keeping girls in school requires that schools be close to their homes. School mapping can identify least-served locations, aiding the establishment of multigrade schools in remote areas.
- Lowering out-of-pocket costs prevents parents from discriminating between boys and girls when deciding whether to send children to school-and in times of declining househo1.d income, to keep children from dropping out.
- Scheduling lessons flexibly enables girls to help with household chores and care for siblings.
- Having female teachers provides girls with role models- and gives parents a sense of security about their daughters" (Human Development Report 2003:95).

Governments in most countries do tend to finance public services- basic health care, primary education, water and sanitation - in order that they become accessible to all. The spread of basic education, for instance, benefits not only the individual or group of individuals who acquire it but has a bearing on the wellbeing of all the members of society. When poor people are coerced to pay for primary education of their children, many of them prefer or are forced by circumstances to stay away. In developing nations particularly several families cannot afford to send their children to school. It was found that where school fees have been removed in Africa, attendance in schools has risen considerably. Despite the planning, gaps in opportunities for education remain large. About 115 million children have no access to basic primary education. A large number of them belong to sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Gradstein (2003) notes that political pressure results in bias in favour of the rich and powerful. Bias in political influence resulting from extreme income inequalities generates social exclusion of the marginalized. This is often followed by a deepening of inequality as public spending on education is severely hit.

In India, the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan represents the effort of the government to universalize elementary education based on community ownership of the school. Panchayati Raj institution, school management committees, village slum level education committees, Parents-Teachers Associations, Mother-Teacher Associations, Tribal Councils and other local institutions are assigned the task of elementary school management. The objective is to impart useful and relevant elementary education to children between 6 and 14 years of age. Children are encouraged to learn about the natural environment that envelops them, work for each other's wellbeing and develop both spiritually and materially. It is expected that (i) all children in the relevant age group will complete 5 years of primary schooling by 2007 and 8 years of elementary education by 2010; (ii) the stage of universal retention of children in school would be achieved by 2010; and (iii) gender and social gaps at primary education level will be plugged by 2007 and at elementary education level will be plugged by 2010. Surely, a large number of educational reforms will be planned and executed. There would be community ownership of school-based intervention through decentralization.

The Tenth Five Year Plan has identified education as a critical factor in human resource development as also in the economic growth of the nation. Literacy rate was recognized as the major determinant of other indicators of socio- economic growth. The enrollment drive launched in the second year of the Tenth Five Year Plan with the mission to get all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years to attend school has resulted in considerable reduction in the number of out of school children from 42 million at the beginning of the Plan period to 8.1 million in September 2004. It is found that the gender gap in literacy has narrowed during the last decade. The government has, in addition to several schemes for spread of formal education, initiated schemes in the non-formal education stream.

Alternative schooling efforts under Education Guarantee Scheme (FSS), Alternative Innovative Education (AIE), Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi, residential and non-residential courses bride courses under District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA). These are particularly of use in groups that are very difficult to reach. Often, non-formed education is regarded as an interim arrangement in the phase of transition from out-of - school situation to that of attendance in mainstream school, The provision of vocationalization of secondary education ensures diversification of educational opportunities leading to enhancement of the individual's employment opportunities, and reduction of imbalance between demand and availability of skilled manpower (Mid-term Appraisal of 10th Five Year Plan 2005).

With a view to empower women in rural areas particularly those belonging to socially and economically depressed groups, the Mahila Sankhya was initiated in 1998. It is implemented in 33 districts of seven states. The target in the Tenth Five Year Plan is, however, to enroll 240 districts in 17 states. The Mahila Shiksha Kendras offer residential bridge courses with components of vocational training including life skills for out-of-school children. Another recent endeavour to ensure access and quality education to girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and minorities in low female literacy districts is the Kasturba Gandhi Balika

Vidyalaya (KGBV) launched in 2004-05. It operates through 750 residential schools with boarding facilities at the elementary level. There are also several programmes for adult education that combine formal education with vocational programmes.

Reflection and Action 11.1
Discuss the initiatives of the international agencies for employing education for social and human development.

11.5   INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION AT THE GRASS-ROOTS

Consider the rising trend in our own country to acquire competence in reading, writing, and speaking in English. A class of people that speaks English but thinks partially in English and partially in one of the Indian languages is emerging. These are culturally split personalities. This split seems to be the major handicap of Third World Countries which had been under colonial rule. This surely does not mean that one should not study, appreciate or assimilate other cultures. What is important is to study one's own culture too with rigour so that one may remain steadfast and not be swayed. It would also help to see one own culture in a broader perspective and promote indigenous scholarship (Naik 1998).

Indigenous vision of education in a general sense consists of expanding the spheres of existence by generating social awareness, initiating self- transformation, and developing creativity. This stands out in sharp contrast to modern education that envisages a way of life focused on consumerism, competition, and specialization often at the expense of integrity, peace and strength of character. In order to explore the possibility of promoting these elements and integrating traditional forms of education with the modern system, several experiments have been undertaken in different parts of the world. We will discuss some of them here.

a) Barefoot College in Tilonia

Tilonia is a small village in Rajasthan. Way back in 1972 a group of students from some of the better-known Indian universities established The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) under the leadership of Bunker Roy. This group was greatly inspired by Gandhian principles. 'They set up the Barefoot College in Tilonia with the mission of tapping local wisdom and initiative in order to empower the villagers themselves. The Barefoot College does not draw on the expertise or experience of professionals from the formal education system, rather the villagers are encouraged to identify and use their own skills, knowledge and practical experience to make provision for drinking water, health, education, employment, fuel and other' basic needs. The Barefoot College is committed to the idea that hands-on-approach and not educational degrees are effective in developing the means to meet people's needs and empower them. The Barefoot College prepares the illiterate rural poor to gain control of and manage technologies without input from outside experts. It challenges the need for formal education to develop and maintain technologies. The issue of availability of drinking water is a case in point. While the engineers and other technologists believe that the problem of drinkable water shortage is acute and requires bigger and deeper wells which are an expensive endeavour, the Barefoot

College experts ask for simple, cost-effective ways of harnessing rain water and processing it for use. It is cheaper to construct a tank (using low cost, readily available resources) in a school located in brackish water areas than to exploit the ground water or pump water from a permanent water source through pipes.

The Barefoot College Campus is the only fully solar electrified one in the country. Interestingly, the Barefoot technologists have solar electrified several thousand houses in at least eight Indian states, installed hand pumps in the Himalayas (a task which could not be accomplished by urban engineers), and planned and implemented piped drinking water. Apart from the technologists, the Barefoot educators serve as trained pre-primary and night school teachers. About 3000 boys and girls attend more than 150 night schools run by the Barefoot educators. The schools are supervised by a children's parliament. The Barefoot communicators employ puppets to generate awareness about practices such as child marriage, rights and wages of women, child literacy and several others. Barefoot architects and masons have constructed the college out of low cost and locally available material resources. What comes out clearly is the understanding that the single conviction that local people are bestowed with insurmountable capacity to resolve their own problems that is articulated in the multiple tasks undertaken by the Barefoot College workers. The College operates on a decentralized and non-hierarchical basis wherein community issues are discussed in the village council. The Tilonia case challenges the need for formal education and managerial skills to operate as for example, health-care workers, solar engineers, hand-pump mechanics and teachers in local communities. The approach of empowering the people at the grass-roots by reposing faith in their wisdom and decentralizing power and control (i) brings together people belonging to different castes and classes (ii) provides engagement to rural youth who are labeled as 'unemployable'; and (iii) provides viable, simple, cost-effective alternatives to use sophisticated technology to improve the quality of life.

Against this backdrop, can the illiterate people working in the Barefoot College be treated as uneducated and backward? Perhaps there is a need to enlarge the concept of education itself to accommodate creative learning that ameliorates human suffering.

b) Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme
Anil Sadgopal (currently on faculty of the Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi) along with some like-minded scientists set up the Kishore Bharati Centre for Rural Development and Education at Hosangabad in Madhya Pradesh. They approached the Madhya Pradesh government with the proposal to develop alternative materials for teaching science (now better known as Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme) in government run schools. This was spearheaded by Sadgopal's firm belief that the curriculum needs to be decentralized, drawn from local physical environment and experience of the community. They invited the scientists from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai and the Indian Institute of Technology to visit Madhya Pradesh along with experts from the Regional Colleges of Education, the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and government middle school teachers of the state to deliberate on new ways of teaching experimental science. They succeeded in decentralizing the curriculum and

motivating the teachers to make use of locally available resources and experience in teaching. The inspiration came from Gandhi's idea of integrating work with knowledge in the educational system. What started as the science teaching programme expanded to include social science teaching and language teaching through increasingly creative ways. Work experience was woven with scientific theories. Students and teachers would experiment and participate in the teaching-learning process as partners. More importantly, the team sought to improve agriculture and cattle breeding, and to bring migration of distressed agricultural labour under control. Ringwell fabrication emerged as a small-scale industry; forest cover was restored; and environmental degradation was checked. The Hoshangabad Science Training Programme provided the model on which some statewide programmes were developed in Madhya Pradesh and Ekalavya — a centre for educational research and training, was established.

The Hoshangabad experiment demonstrates the possibility of democratization of education wherein meaningful education becomes accessible to all children irrespective of their caste, class, language, gender, or community. In fact, Sadgopal raises a basic issue of why government schools have not been able to evolve a common school system for all children in his oft quoted book, Shiksha mein Badlaav ka Savaal (2000). The concept of common school system mentioned here refers to 'Lokshala' or people's school which is founded by the state. Here each local community runs its own complex of elementary schools and high schools with provision of equal rights for all children. Sadgopal constituted the Bharatiya Gyan Vigyan Jatha (BGVJ) in 1991 which provided the forum for articulating the demand for 'lokshala' in collaboration with local communities. 'The endeavour brought together those working in the fields of education, health and technology. Anil Sadgopal was the convener. This was closely connected with the All India People's Science Jatha which involved 50,000 villages and several towns. The conference was held in 1994 in which more than 1000 delegates participated. One of the outcomes of this conference was the initiation of the 'lokshala' process in 1995. Lokshala combined academics and activism geared towards institutional transformation as part of social change. With support from the University Grants Commission, the BGVJ set up Advance Field Laboratories in at least 10 states out of which 4 lay in the north-eastern part of the country. The Advance Field Laboratories were engaged in preparing the ground for the development of 'lokshalas'. Here, people's perception was taken note of in determining priorities which provided the basis for intervention.

'Lokshalas' emerge as one of the viable resolution of the private-government schools dichotomy. Often government schools suffer from lack of funds, and red tapism. They are treated as places where children who are too young to work with their parents are deposited. These children are pulled out of the schools soon after they are able to contribute to family income. Those who are better off prefer to send their children to private schools. The dropout rate is high, expenditure on them is considered to be uneconomical and wasteful. Not surprising then, several of them are on the verge of closing down. In fact, government schools seem to have failed in both Madhya Pradest, and Kerala. The lokshalas acquire an edge over both government and private schools in that they involve not only scholars but also local people.

Further, they are not governed by a singular, uniform pattern; rather, each one is specific to the social and geographical environment in which it is situated. It is hoped that 'Lokshalas' would attract more and more students to acquire knowledge that they will be able to put to use to enrich their lives.

Box 11.4: Lokshala experience in Jahanabad, Bihar

"The group worked on the premise that no effective intervention would be possible without understanding the political and socioeconomic context. They also underscored the need to win the support of the community and to build an interface between ground realities and educational 'experts.' Jahanabad is a district particularly prone to violence because of radical peasant movements. There was police presence in most schools, which was hardly conducive to their functioning. One initiative taken by the group led to the removal of policemen from schools. Local young men were encouraged to work on a project documenting local history. Some initiatives were also taken to raise questions on the appointment of part-teachers. This had some impact on policy makers.

Perhaps more important were the long-term changes in attitudes and ideas that had been generated by these activities. Education is now recognized as a political issue in the area and has generated a lot of debate within the community. People now understand the difference between education and mere literacy, and can raise these issues with their political representatives, like Members of Parliament, and Members of Legislative Assembly. Social activists have developed a deeper understanding of the political context and have created a space of critical analysis of the existing .situation. This process has opened up avenues to search for alternative educational strategies in a region which is undergoing violent eruption" (Louis, www.hurights.or.jp).

C) Poverty and Education: The Samanwaya Vidyapith

Dwarko Sundrani established the Samanwaya Ashram in 1954 at Bodhgaya. Here, apart from helping Musahar and Bhokta communities to fight illness, poverty, and violence, he undertook the task of educating the children belonging to these communities in a residential school. Here, development work is carried out for the benefit of families. Their children are educated in the Samanwaya Vidyapith following which they are established on the land that is given to their families. The purpose is to hold back the educated people in villages. This is important because there is widespread migration of educated villagers to urban areas. Now, it is not possible for each one of them to secure a job in cities. This leads to depression and frustration. Education in Samanwaya Vidyapith is entwined with activities such as cultivation, dairy farming, repair work, motor winding, and jeep driving. No certificates, degrees are awarded; rather, the thrust is on learning and developing the potential to earn. Children are taught language, arithmetic, and science in a way that ties up with growing vegetables and fruits, making compost and maintaining health and hygiene.

The approach of Samanwaya Vidyapith is twofold. It seeks to engage the students and

teachers in village development work e.g. growing vegetables, disinfecting drinking water, and making compost manure from waste in villages. At the same time it takes complete responsibility of the social and financial condition of the children as they grow up. No wonder then, children admitted at the age of 5 years grow up to be self-reliant and fully prepared to undertake manual work with a sense of pride. The Vidyapith takes upon itself the task of marrying these children after completion of education and of setting them up in villages. Equally important to note is the fact that religious harmony and cooperation prevails and are instilled in children of the Vidyapith. In the words of Sundrani (1998:38), "Samanwaya means harmony. The objective of this institution is to bring harmony. At present we are passing through a period of transition which is unprecedented in the annals of human history.... There is a necessity to give education in harmony. Harmony can be established only through mutual understanding. Mutual understanding can be created through service to one another. The Samanwaya Vidyapith is working on these lines. The poor children are being educated without any caste; colour, creed or religious considerations. They work together, and they serve together and they live together. The haves are sharing with the have-nots... The Samanwaya Vidyapith stands for the education of the masses and not of the classes. It is through education that we can establish a classless and casteless society, which is the need of the hour."

d) Rural Context of Primary Education

The Indian Institute of Education developed an action-research project, "Promoting Primary and Elementary education' for which the acronym PROPEL was adopted. The scope of this project extended to 137 villages. The basic assumption upon which PROPEL was founded was that a successful education system needs to relate itself to the needs and convenience of local communities basing itself or their lifestyle. Failure to establish the belongingness of children to the community in the educational system is a major reason for discontent with the system of schooling. PROPEL has been selected by UNESCO as a mobilizing showcase project which demonstrates a repeatable alternative which makes primary education accessible to all the children. Its importance is enhanced by the fact that it gives due regard to people's lifestyle and their expectations.

Box 11.5: Significant aspects of PROPEL

"The culture-specific aspects of the PROPEL project are: (a) curriculum, which emphasizes (i) free scope to recite folk tales, sing traditional songs, and hold conversations about daily experiences, jii) language and mathematics, beginning with local language and ways of calculation, leading to progressive assimilation of expected levels of learning of 'standard' language and mathematics, (iii) understanding of nature through exploration, analytical discussion, and reasoned argument, (iv) developing aesthetic sensitivity through observation, appreciation and use of colour, shape, sound, rhythm, with a view to fashioning of plastic and graphic art works in an untutored manner related to the learner's natural surroundings, (v) health and hygiene in daily life, (vi) physical and mental relaxation through simple

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yogasanas, and (vii) explorations, with the help of the family and community elders, in local history and geography for discovering their relevance to local conditions and to the needs of local development; (b) class-climate for collaborative learning through verbal and non-verbal communication by means of (i) a circular, face-to-face seating arrangement in which the instructor too in included, (ii) shared learning materials which reflect the cultural ethos of non-acquisitiveness and unselfishness, (iii) songs and skits based on the community's environmental and cultural contexts, (iv) learning to make speeches on local subjects, and (v) group work for participatory 'peer-group' learning along with regeneration of the individualized but non-competitive, stress-free pedagogy of pre-British indigenous character" Bapat and Karandikar (1998: 44-45).

Teachers in PROPEL are those, who belonging to the community, remain accountable to it. They tend the children with much affection and concern. It is ensured that a Village Education Committee is set up by each Gram Panchayat. This committee makes sure that the culture-friendly learning system is maintained without lapses. Pupils from several learning centres (referred to by them as *Apla Varg* meaning, 'our class') meet once in about 165 days to participate in Children's Fair in which they not only sing, play games, present dramas, and tell stories but also engage in taking tests in language and mathematics which greatly demystifies the examination process even as confidentiality of performance gets exploded. The fair provides a relaxed environment for examination. It is found that girls perform better in curricular studies, social skills, and understanding of environment than boys. They particularly enjoy reasoning exercises and simple experiments in science.

PROPEL has provided a means to bridge the gap between knowledge acquired by children as members of the community and that imparted in state-run schools. The expectations of the users of primary education in state run schools are seldom enfolded in the curriculum and pedagogy which creates a situation in which the full potential of the child is not tapped. The parents are not able to understand either the content or the relevance of what is taught to the children. The result is that many of them withdraw their children from such schools. The children are only too happy to return to the familiar familial environment. PROPEL obviated this problem by attending to cultural parameters in rural primary education, more so in the case of dropouts and of those who were never enrolled in the formal system of education. It is believed that this kind of education would preserve the culture and value system of the people.

Reflection and Action 11.2
Do you think innovations in education at the grass-roots are worthwhile? Discuss with your co-learners at the study centre.

11.6   CONCLUSION

It is evident that the scope of education is no longer confined to the teaching- learning process in schools. In fact, the role of school in society is subject of discussion as much as the social context and content of education. It is being realized that meaningful education is not one that ensures economic security rather one that leads

to the flowering of the complete potential of children and prepares them to lead a life of fulfillment. The foundations of this aspect of education were laid by several thinkers - Paulo Freire, Gandhi and others about whom you have read in earlier units. Here we have seen how traditional vision of education can be integrated with the modern system of education.

1 1.7 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 12 ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF THE MARGINALIZED

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to discuss the:

- present educational status of the marginalized in India;
- chief concerns of education for the marginalized; and
- major theoretical perspectives on education for empowerment.

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

People groups located in the mainstream are equipped with better resources and have better access to power and privilege, as opposed to the marginalized. The latter are vulnerable and have remained exploited, degraded and deprived of access to the existing socio- economic resources. Women, for instance, form a universal category of the marginalized. For centuries all over the world, they have been exploited and deprived of equal status with men. Their disempowerment is evident in the lack of the basic right to choose the way they want to live. In the face of prevailing patriarchal traditions, they lack the real power to decide whether to work, what to work as, whether or not to marry, whom to marry, whether to bear children and a number of other issues that have a direct bearing on their lives Thus, they do not get to participate in the socio-economic structure as equals and get socially excluded from the place of power and privilege. Moreover, due to their peripheral position in society, they suffer from numerous disadvantages and atrocities which range from sexual harassment to female infanticide. Poverty and hunger too have a greater impact on the lives of women who are affected by these in greater degree and numbers as compared to men. Thus, the marginalization of women is evident in lack of education, malnutrition, poor health, mistreatment, and powerlessness that they suffer from on a daily basis. In other words they come to occupy a place of inferior social status and marginal location.

In this Unit, we will begin with the present educational status of the marginalized sections in society in India and then discuss how education is biased in favour of the cultures and social existence of mainstream groups. Having acquired a basic understanding of educational deprivation of the marginalized, and the position of the marginalized in mainstream education, we will explore the major theoretical perspectives in education for their empowerment.

12.2   EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION OF THE MARGINALIZED

While discussion of the philosophical principle of equality dates back to Aristotle, 'equality of educational opportunity' grew only with the public education systems of the 19th century. Prior to the introduction and growth of these publicly funded systems for learning, education had been a matter for private enterprise and was restricted to the elite. Indian education system has been, by its very nature, elitist and exclusionary from traditional times.

Box 12.1 : Process of Marginalization

The process of marginalization can thus be understood as having two aspects. The first aspect of the process of marginalization is that of the inferior location of these groups. They are located on the margins or the periphery. They don't form a part of mainstream society, as the privileged groups do. Such individuals are practically located 'outside' the strata of which they happen to be a part of either by ascription of achievement (Ram 1997). Owing to the 'outside' or the 'peripheral' location they don't enjoy the same benefits as the ones located in the mainstream do. The marginalized are in fact characterized by the least or minimal access to the socio-economic resources available.

The second aspect is the process of social exclusion. In an unequal and hierarchically organized society, not all groups enjoy equal amounts of power and prestige. Some groups or strata enjoy more power and influence at the expense of others. They are placed higher in the hierarchical social order which makes it easier for them to access the desirable goods and position in society. Consequently they are not able to fully participate in economic, social and civic life, and their inadequate access to material and non-material resources, exclude them from enjoying a quality of life and standard of living that is regarded as acceptable in society they live in. This puts them in a position of a major social disadvantage. In this way, the existential location of certain groups is less favorable in the social structural system as compared to other groups. In this sense, they are excluded from the sphere of power, prestige and influence through social, cultural and economic mechanisms.

Under the Vedic system, education was linked exclusively to caste and gender. True learning was the prerogative of male Brahmins. The Sanskrit texts and verses were conveniently deemed sacred matters reserved for them as "ritually pure" agents. While lower castes were under certain circumstances permitted limited instruction of a "non-sacred" nature, under no circumstances was education available to the lower castes and women. It was a categorically exclusive system. By the time the British East India Co. first ventured into the subcontinent in 1757, education there generally consisted of merely a small formal sector servicing the caste elite and male members and a larger non- formal sector for some others. Hindu women were largely denied access to any opportunity to receive formal education. Muslim women happened to be slightly more importunate as they went to religious schools which were generally located in the mosques. But it should be noticed that women were not granted entry to formal secular schooling.

The British devoted attention to education in India from 1813 to 1921. Unfortunately, interest in primary education was greatly diminished after 1835 when Macaulay's (in) famous "Minute" directed policy towards higher education premised on the "downward filtration theory." This postulated that, just as in Britain, the formally educated elite would, at least theoretically, disseminate kernels of knowledge to the masses. It was believed that the technique would work in India as well. Hence, the Vedic system of enclosure was only partially broken by the British. The pre-eminent Indian educator J. P. Naik has observed that the principal achievement of the British was in their making of non- discriminatory educational institutions, which theoretically overcame the monopoly of education held by the upper castes. However, their principal disservice was in differentiated education, which offset the advances made by permitting the upper castes to consolidate and, in fact, further formalise their power through new social arrangements. Gandhi proposed a nationwide programme of vocation oriented primary education that was open to all children irrespective of class, caste and gender differences. He stressed the need to educate and empower women and make them politically active citizens of the country. He too failed to liberalize the educational system and rid it of its inability to overcome the distinctions and exclusionary policies based on class, caste and gender.

Constitution makers of free and Independent India understood the significance of education in terms of enhancing equality and social mobility. Thus, several constitutional provisions to enable free and fair access to the formal education system, to all the groups which had been earlier deprived of it, came into force.

Box 12.2: Education in Independent India

"Education in Independent India has in recent years received some attention from the planners and the public. The Constitution guarantees equality of educational opportunities to all, and favours some weaker section of society with a view to uplifting them. The Plans not only provide for the growth of literacy and education but also for compulsory free primary education. Further, education has come to be regarded as a form of investment to develop human resources, a necessary prerequisite of economic development. The idea of perspective planning envisages a dynamic relation between educational and economic development. All this is in consonance with the cherished goal of achieving the basic values of liberty, equality and social justice through democratic means" (Rao 1985: 148).

Article 15 forms the foundation of the quest for an egalitarian social order by announcing the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 46 of the Constitution reaffirms that "the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the scheduled castes." Article 45 also includes universal elementary education as a directive principle, making it explicit that the State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. Unfortunately this remains an unfulfilled dream. One needs to examine how far the constitutional and state endeavours to bring education within

the reach of all socio-economic groups have been realized and what are the problems and hurdles in achieving it.

Literacy is generally understood as the ability to read and write. In the modern context the term refers to reading and writing at a level adequate to enable one to successfully function at basic levels of the society. The literacy rate is considered one of the chief indicators of the educational status of any community or population, as it reflects on the actual number or percentage of individuals in a group who can read and write at a functional level. Literacy, an important tool for communication, learning, .and information, is a virtual precondition for an individual's evolution and national development. Eradication of illiteracy has been one of the major concerns of the government of India since independence.

Another important aspect is that of accessibility of schools. As the term indicates, this concerns the actual availability of schools, and whether we have enough number of schools to educate all our children. Accessibility can be understood as having two dimensions. First is the availability of schools in terms of physical existence or geographical Location. It is important to have a school in the physical vicinity of a habitation to enable children to enroll and attend classes on a regular basis. The crucial significance of the distance of the school from the habitation was recognized by the state as it came out with the 1km (at least one primary school within the distance of 1 km from a rural habitation of a population of 300 and above) and 3 km scheme (at Least one upper primary school within the distance of 3 km from a habitation of a population of 300 and above).

A second and equally important dimension is the social accessibility of the school. The groups which were traditionally excluded from the realm of formal education still find it difficult to gain acceptance in schools due to persisting social hierarchies. Hence, research throws light on the incidences of indecent behaviour towards children belonging to the marginalized sections by students and teachers. It thus becomes important to ensure that these children gain social acceptance and equal respect and treatment in the school by all the concerned parties (students, teachers, administrators)

Accessibility is connected with enrolment rates that usually reflect on the number of students who are formally enrolled in the schools, and attend classes on a regular basis. Measures to improve access and enrolment have to be coupled with the effort to retain children in the school long enough for them to complete the full cycle of school education. The general trend observed is that children, especially of the marginalized sections of the population, drop out of the school before completing the education, which forces one to examine the socio-economic factors as well as learning experiences of the students. Lastly, achievement or performance is another indicator which reflects on the actual result of the process of schooling. To be able to effectively use education as a tool of mobility by securing jobs and prestige, it is significant to perform well. Often the traditionally excluded groups show a trend of poor performance as compared to the other advantaged sections of society. This again leads one to ponder over the educational experience of these groups and the

shortcomings of the present educational system.

a) Educational Status of the Dalits

In India, Dalits form one of the most educationally deprived sections of the society. A survey conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research reveals that in the mid-1990s, only 41.5 per cent of Dalits in rural India were literate and 62.5 per cent of children in the 6-14 age group had been enrolled in schools at a certain point of time. Compared to the general population, the progress of schooling among Dalit children (5-14 years) has also been slow. Educational concerns of the dalits are, thus, of critical importance. Furthermore, their present educational status should be contextualized in the historical deprivation and denial of learning opportunities. Drawing on the data given in the fifth and sixth all India educational survey, Nambissan and Sedwal (2001) show how physical accessibility is always a problem for Dalit children. The number of schools available in a predominantly Dalit habitation is much less when compared to a general rural habitation. As a result, Dalit children have to go to upper caste habitations to be able to attend schools, which may not be accepting and welcoming them. Norms of purity and pollution still exist, and Dalit children may find themselves in hostile conditions. Research has pointed to cases where they are systematically discouraged or even forced to leave schools by other sections of the village community. In other words, social accessibility becomes an issue for these children. This is reflected in the poor attendance rates of Dalit children compared to that of general population. The poor performance of the state to be able to ensure the right to education becomes further clear, when the empirical data of the enrollment, retention and performance is compared with that of the other sections of the society. According to National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO 1999) sources, the school attendance rate in rural areas in 1973-74 was 64.3 per cent for Dalit boys compared to 74.9 per cent among boys from other (other than Dalit and tribal) social groups. In urban areas, however, the percentage was 77.5 for Dalit boys. Dalit girls had even lower attendance rates.

The high dropout rates remind us that caste dynamics still continue to affect the educational experience of these children. These children still find it difficult to be accepted and treated as equals in the classroom. According to the NCERT 1999 figures, Dalits constitute only around 11 per cent of teachers at the primary stage, nine per cent at the upper-primary stage and five to six per cent at the secondary and higher secondary stages. The social hiatus between teachers and Dalits has also had a telling effect on the student- teacher relationship. Chitins (1981) explains that the biases and stereotypical notions against the Dalits have refused to die. The poor performance is often attributed to the lack of ability and will of the students themselves, rather than the lack of structural and pedagogical support that these students face. The continuing economic vulnerability makes it all the more difficult for them to be able to invest time and resources in the educational enterprise. Poverty often forces the children to go out and work to be able to feed themselves rather than attending school.

b) Educational Status of women

Education as a means to promote development in social, political, and economic

spheres has been gender-blind, but in the late 1970s this perspective changed. Research concluded the existence of a high correlation between an increase in women's schooling level and a decline in infant mortality and fertility rates. Women who had completed basic education were able to make use of health facilities and service for their children and had a higher interest in sending their children to school. The year 1990 was proclaimed to be the International Literacy Year by the UN. 'The focus on education for women continued during the 1990 and resulted in the recognition of the significance of female education, not only as a basic human right, but also as a crucial factor towards national development.

The benefit that women have received from the initiatives of the state is evident from the constantly improving literacy rates of women over the past few years. According to Census of India 2001, the female literacy rate has increased from 39.29 per cent in 1991 to 54.16 in 2001 (i.e. by 14.87 percentage points); whereas in case of males it has increased from 64.1 3 per cent to 75.85 per cent (i.e. by 11.69 percentage points) during the same period. It means female literacy in the last 10 years has grown at a faster rate than the male literacy rate. This has resulted in narrowing the gender gap in literacy rate from 24.84 in 1991 to 21.69 percentage points in 2001. However, a common feature across all the 'districts of the country is the reduction of gender disparity in literacy rate with the overall increase in literacy rates of both males and females. But the decrease in the gender gap still remains far below the desirable levels.

It may be mentioned that improvement in literacy rate from 1991 to 2001 has not been uniform in all the states. There was variation from one state to another and within a state from one district to another. Chanana (2000) explains that this gap is wider in educationally backward states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan, which also happen to be highly patriarchal regions. Furthermore, SC and ST women seem to be the worst victims, for they show lowest literacy rates. Female literacy among the SCs is 23.76 per cent as compared to 49.91 per cent among the males. The corresponding percentage among the ST females is 18.19 as compared to 40.65 among the males (NCW 1994).

Data reveals poor literacy rates for rural women, as compared to their urban counterparts. Not only does it confirm the high disparity among women but also reveals that a large number of women have reached adulthood without access to basic literacy and innumeracy skills. This makes one ponder over the educational status of young women and the girl child. Usha Nayyar (2001) draws on data from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to conclude that a fairly strong gender focus has resulted in a gradual improvement of enrolment figures for women at both primary and middle levels of schooling. There is a reduction in the enrolment figures for females, as one moves from primary to middle to higher stages of schooling. While the percentage of girls in school enrolment in primary stages in the year 1997-98 is 43.6, the corresponding figure for middle stage is only 40.1. One can, thus, conclude that women retention is low, and they find it more difficult to complete schooling or reach for higher levels of education. This certainly is a major handicap, as it limits their occupational opportunity, and hence avenues for upward social

mobility. The same is the case with dropout rates which go on increasing from primary to middle to higher stages of schooling much more rapidly for girls as compared to boys. There are many obstacles to girls' enrolment and further participation in the educational system.

Economic factors too have a bearing on poor retention rates. Parents with low income have to make priorities whether it is economically viable enough to send girls to school. Boys are prioritized because they are the future providers of economic security for their parents, while girls' future role is to be married away. Traditional practices, also, discourage parents to let girls complete education. It is believed that this might interfere with their marriage prospects in a negative way. The low presence of women teachers too works negatively towards the parents' willingness to send their daughters to school. This is especially the case in the upper primary levels of education. Even if parents don't object to co-education they feel that presence of female teaching and working staff in schools ensures their child's safety and well-being. Thus, one can safely say that although significant progress has been made in provision of education for the girl child, the task of ensuring equality of condition and opportunity is far from complete.

c) Educational Experience of the Scheduled Tribes

One of the distinguishing features of the Scheduled Tribes is that the majority of them live in scattered habitations located in the interior, remote and inaccessible hilly and forest areas of the country. This also accounts for the fact that STs are highly heterogeneous, and diversity in terms of language, culture, location, customs, beliefs, traditions and socio-economic conditions is enormous. Latest .data in fact make the disturbing revelation that STs lag behind all the other marginalized groups (and way behind the national average) in terms of educational progress. Given the diverse locations of tribal population the disparity among the states in terms of tribal Literacy does not come as a surprise. A disparity to the extent that is witnessed in state wise figures, however, leaves much to be desired. While most of the north-eastern states and some educationally advanced states like, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have achieved satisfactory levels of tribal literacy rates, educationally backward states like Rajasthan, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh make the overall picture highly discouraging.

As already explained, tribal habitations are generally characterized by a secluded and interior physical location. This makes physical accessibility to schools a problem. Drawing on the data of the fifth and sixth All India Educational Survey, Sujatha (2001) insists that in almost all tribal populated areas, the number of schools within 1 km of habitation have increased. But difficult terrain and hilly regions make the distance of even 1 km hard to cover considering the fact that children are expected to go to school and come back home on a daily basis. It further becomes impossible if the distance is more than l km. Considering the fact that at least 10 per cent of tribal habitations have primary schools beyond a distance of 2 kms it shows how schools remains inaccessible to these children. Though, access still is far below satisfactory position, the enrolment rates among tribal population make a positive picture. Not only have the overall figures showed a significant improvement from 36.5 per cent in 1989-90 to 43 per cent in 1997-98, the gender gap too is seemingly reducing.

Sujatha further shows, a similar trend in the upper primary and secondary levels of schooling. Due to high dropout rates among the tribal children, schools fail to retain them. The chief reasons for this are high levels of absenteeism and large-scale failure of students in the year-end assessment. The problem is further compounded by poor achievement rates in the tribal population, as compared to non-tribals.

Box 12.3: Qualitative concerns

The discussion on the quantitative aspects of the educational status of the marginalized groups clearly shows that the gap between the constitutional commitment to provide education to all children below the age of 14 years, and the actual status of SC, ST and girl children remains very large. This shows in the poor literacy and enrolment rates of the children of these sections. The educational status of these groups is further characterized by high dropout rates.

12.3 MAINSTREAM EDUCATION AND THE MARGINALIZED

This disturbing trend of dropouts after initial enrolment forces one to ponder over qualitative aspects of schooling and the real classroom experiences of the children coming from the marginalized sections of society. In other words, one needs to adopt a framework of social justice which Looks beyond the aggregate concerns and towards the factors of social justice, identity issues and pedagogical concerns. The learning environment provided to these children is often characterized by poor infrastructure, lack of basic amenities and less than adequate number of teachers. Data on the state of schools in rural areas, backward villages and adivasi areas confirm this observation. Such schools account for a poor learning environment and have a negative impact on the motivational and aspirational levels of the students as well as the parents.

Centralized curriculum represents yet another issue. Krishna Kumar (1989) maintains that centralized curriculum reflects the culture and social existence of the mainstream groups. It fails to draw upon the factors, objects, experiences and issues, which the children of marginalized minorities live with. It, therefore, doesn't talk about the socio-cultural lives of these children On the one hand such a curriculum fails to relate to the knowledge base of the students who find it irrelevant and meaningless, and on the other it also affects their self-identity and feeling of self-worth in a negative way. This leads to a conflict in the young minds, and an overall sense of disillusionment which is often large enough to force children to drop out of the formal scheme of education.

The curriculum is further characterized by the creation, and reinforcement of stereotypes of the marginalized sections that are often presented as negative. Hence, as Krishna Kumar (1989) suggests, the SCs and STs are often depicted as 'culturally backward'. Nambissan (2000) mentions that these communities are largely portrayed in subservient roles in accordance with what is perceived as their traditionally low position in the social hierarchy. This further feeds the discriminatory practices and adverse peer and teacher attitude in the schools, which contributes to a feeling of

demotivation and discouragement In the students, besides damaging their self-identity.

Similar issues emerge due to gender sterq6types in the formal curriculum. Textbooks have been criticized for depict' g women in traditional roles and stereotypical fashion, which leads to a setting of negative role models for the girl child. This also, strengthens the patriarchal state of mind and encourages the girl child to conform to the standards without questioning them or looking for better alternatives. It is in fact full of gender stereotypes and fails to construct new ways of viewing and establishing social relations between men and women. The effect of the biased textbooks further shows up in discriminatory practices adopted by teachers and peers. SCs and STs are often ridiculed, avoided and discriminated against due to the traditional low socio-economic status. overt act of discrimination such as segregation in seating arrangements, refusal to let them use the common pitcher for drinking water, or to touch them and their notebooks and so on are not unheard of . Low expectations and lack of encouragement, also, show up in the poor performance of SC, ST and girl children. Furthermore, the formal curriculum is based on a model of direct instruction by the teacher, who holds authority and power. He is often supposed to discipline children's body and minds by encouraging a culture of rote learning. Such a classroom culture is often based on direct instruction from the teacher, where students are expected to take down notes, memorize and reproduce it in the exams without questioning either the process or the content. The teacher therefore, fails to provide any special assistance or creative support to these children, who often are first generation learners. With a knowledge base that is completely alien and a classroom environment that remains non-supportive, these children lose motivation to do well and complete schooling.

Box 12.4: Education and the Disprivileged: Pedagogical Considerations

The basic egalitarian premise in this matter has been that a uniform common curriculum, if not also a common school, leads to equality or lack of disprivliege in education. The light that psychology and educational theory throws on this matter tends to suggest, however, some modifications. First, human capacities and capabilities are not uniformly distributed. Thus with in a common school or a common curriculum, different pupils have to be helped to proceed at their own pace. To the extent that schools can provide for this through their own media or methods, etc., it might be desirable to present even the same curriculum through different media and methods. A more extreme view, which would have some justification, would be that a specialized curriculum, particularly after a common period of elementary or secondary schooling, would be fairer to individuals with different manual, aesthetic, linguistic, numerical or social potentials.

Too rigid an insistence on uniform schooling can, in fact handicap children from less privileged backgrounds, while if it is too differentiated it could perpetuate these distinctions. The development of multipurpose, multilateral or multifaceted secondary educational higher education for different fields might be seen as a measure of equity,

minimizing disprivileged. On the other hand, too specific a secondary or elementary education, without adequate emphases on linguistic and numerical skills, might provide a dead-end education which would handicap the individuals undergoing it. If the allocation of individuals to those specific courses appears related to or based on the caste or class origin of the pupils, the school would be perpetuating social inequalities already in existence, or even accentuating them" (Shukla 2002 : 320-21).

Furthermore, schools often fail to use their mother tongue as the medium of instruction. A number of policy documents have stressed on the pedagogical and cultural importance of the use of the mother tongue in schools, especially at the primary levels , but adivasis languages and local dialects find no place in the classroom. In fact they are discouraged and even ridiculed. This not only further alienates the child from the classroom, but also raises serious problems in comprehension and understanding, evident in the large number of failures and poor performance.

The exclusion of the child's language and culture from the medium and the content of school knowledge as well as the messages of inferiority and confirmation that are conveyed to the children are likely to affect the motivation and aspiration of the children in a negative way. This accounts for the loss of interest and lack of effort to continue and gets reflected in the poor retention rates. Thus, what is required is a change in the formal curriculum to be able to accommodate the wider social reality and serious effort in order to give a place of rightful respect and dignity to these sections of society and their socio-cultural and economic environment. The formal curriculum should be able to voice the experiential reality of the Dalits, adivasis and the girl children to enable them to relate and derive meaning and relevance out of it. From the point of view of the girl child, it makes sense to give place in the curriculum to, an examination of women's subordination throughout history, women's contribution and participation in history-making, the value of work commonly performed by women - such as domestic work, the importance of women in the processes of decision-making, participation and organization, and the incorporation of women's way of knowing and focus on women's experiences. This in effect means giving a more critical approach to the curriculum. Change in curriculum would, however, remain useless and ineffective unless a corresponding change in the pedagogical culture and teacher attitude is initiated which is more sensitive to, and shows a greater understanding of the social and pedagogical issues of the marginalized.

Reflection and Action 12.1
Visit two schools one which caters to students belonging to lowest socio- economic sections of society and the other which caters to students belonging to upper socio-economic sections of society. Find out the difference in the learning environment.

12.4   PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT

The subject of education for empowerment may be understood from two vantage positions. The first incorporates social privileges, power, prestige and influence while the second incorporates issues of economic growth, economic quality and educational opportunity. There is no denying that these are not mutually exclusive and independent, rather they are inextricably entwined with each other. Education is seen as a means of socialization whereby young members of society are trained into the accepted values and belief system of the society. It breeds similarity of thought and action between the individuals and thus leads to a feeling of oneness and similarity of goals and values. This leads to unity among members, hence social solidarity and cohesiveness.

In the present day non-egalitarian and unequal society complex power relations and hierarchization exist. Not all social groups enjoy equal access to the educational resources and hence 'equality of condition' that functionalists assume does not exist in the first place. In the name of preserving order and social cohesiveness, what is done is the promotion of the interests of the dominant sections of society. The poor and the marginalized are unable to perform as well as the rich and the privileged due to several material, social and cultural handicaps, and are forced to accept themselves as inefficient and unable. In other words, the marginalized and the deprived keep suffering from the cumulative deficiencies, in the name of the lack of ability or performance, and socio-economic inequalities get -reproduced.

Schools promote the technocratic-meritocratic ideology, which uphold that economic success essentially depends on appropriate skills, knowledge, talents and abilities. In reality, economic success is often linked to a person's class, sex, race, etc and more so in a hierarchical, stratified and unequal society. Schools provide knowledge to fulfill a particular professional role. But more importantly they foster the attitudes and behaviors consonant with the fulfillment of these particular roles. By encouraging certain personality traits and discouraging certain other ones, schools shape the personalities of pupils in accordance with the role capitalist society needs them to perform. They thus select some to play the role of active decision makers while others are required to obey passively. By rejecting the functionalist claim that education will create a more open and equal society, Bowles and Gintis in fact put the overall role of formal education as further contributing to the plight of the already disadvantaged.

This line of argument has been carried forth by Louis Althusser, a French philosopher, whose work forms the basis of the 'hegemonic-state reproductive model'. This argument lays stress on the overall role of the state in reproducing social inequalities. Althusser presents a general framework for the analysis of education from a Marxian perspective. He views, education as a part of superstructure, and argues that education provides ideological support to the rulers. You have read about this aspect in Blocks 1 and 2.

The issue of power and culture is critical to the functioning of schools. Being a part of society, education finds itself embedded in the political and social conditions, and

cannot possibly bring about any radical change as an 'independent' variable. Does that mean that schools and education have absolutely no role to play in the empowerment of the disadvantaged? Can education not intervene in the existing unequal socio-economic order? Is it just another instrument to perpetuate inequality? Human agency is always at work, and one can always find innovative teachers, sympathetic administrators, and aware and creative students who refuse to take instructions and assignments at face value and without questions. In fact, education is seen as a major agency for bringing about a modern ethos of equality and freedom. It is thought that children trained in modern scientific- technological knowledge would find avenues of social mobility and in fact move towards equality.

Amartya Sen and Jean Drez'e (2002) brought out the significance of education in terms of functioning and capability. Functioning refers to what a person does and achieves. Capability on the other hand refers to the range of choices and options which a person has in deciding the kind of life he/she wants to lead. Capability therefore is the real state of freedom that a person enjoys in choosing from the alternative combinations of functioning. For example a young child may be forced out of school due to several constraints like poverty, social prohibitions, family problems etc. Such a condition may severely limit the range of activities and life goals that he/she can choose from Leading to an overall state of disadvantage and his/her functioning is reduced to that of a child labourer.

Sen and Drez'e refer to such a case as 'capability deprivation' which may be understood as a severe limitation of freedom and an overall state of incapacitation to live and perform dignified labor. The expansion of human capabilities can be enhanced by important social opportunities like education and health care. These are significant ends in themselves. Education is understood to be a crucial factor in at least five distinct ways (i) Intrinsic importance: education seen as an act of learning leads to personal growth and self-development, which has an intrinsic value of its own. (ii) Instrumental personal roles: education enables one to get an appropriate set of skills and knowledge that enables him to make use of economic opportunities and get into a profession of his own choice. It also enables one to participate in a number of other valuable activities like playing sports, reading, participating in local forums of discussions etc. (iii) Instrumental social roles: education makes one more socially aware and politically assertive. An educated person is more aware of his/her social needs and political rights and asserts for them both on an individual level and at the collective level, which strengthens the democratic practice. (iv) Instrumental social processes: education makes a lasting impact on social processes and enables one to reject and fight against oppressive socio-cultural practices. It is a powerful means of getting rid of social evils like neglect of girl child, child labor and so on. This would reduce the number and extent of deprived and deprivation. (v) Empowerment and distributive roles: greater literacy and educational empowerment enables emancipation of the marginalized sections of society by accommodating them in the mainstream. It also has a socially redistributive effect. It would lead to a fairer deal for the marginalized, not only at the level of a population or a group but also at the level of the family and the individual.

Thus, education is a tool for the empowerment of the marginalized, as it leads to an expansion of choices, freedom and real opportunity. In other words it leads to a greater capability to enable the individual to lead a valued and valuable life.

Reflection and Action 12.2

Do you think education perpetuates social and economic inequalities? Discuss your point of view with other learners at the study centre.

Thus, Freire (1970) demonstrates how education can actually bring about a positive change and play a significant role in bringing about an egalitarian social order. But to enable it to bring about any positive change, we must look beyond the traditional practice of education and attack the oppressive systems inbuilt in this kind of education system. It is only by respecting the sense of inquiry and questioning present in the young minds, can we empower them to look beyond the existential reality and bring about a positive transformation, on the lines of egalitarianism, which still remains a distant dream. You may recall Freire's perspective on education which you have read in unit 3.

American economists Bowles Gintis and Simmons (1976), came up with an interesting piece of work titled 'Schooling in Capitalist America', which led to the growth of a perspective, which is now generally known as the 'Economic Reproductive Model'. They argue that in an unequal society based on a capitalist economic order, the role of education is to reproduce the required labor .force. The nature of the labor force should be as per the requirement of the capitalist system of production. A capitalist society works on an arrangement where the majority of the proletariat works for a small number of rich capitalists. This in effect means that a minority are in the decision making place (the capitalists), while the majority play a minimal role in the process of decision making and stick to carrying out the orders of the decision makers (the workers).Schools seeks reproduce this very socio-economic order by placing a minority in the place of rich capitalists and a majority as poor proletariat.

12.5   CONCLUSION

The World Bank defines empowerment in terms of freedom of choice and action. It is understood that, the process of empowering people actually entails throwing open a range of options that she can choose from, and, thus, feel a sense of control and power over her life. It refers to a process by which the deprived individuals and groups gain power to control their lives and the ability to make strategic life choices. Education is one of the most powerful resources in bringing about empowerment. In the context of the marginalized groups, it functions to facilitate occupational diversity and mobility. It makes them more aware, of their rights and issues and enables them to assert for them both at an individual and collective level, in their rightful quest for power, prestige and an equality of condition.

The era of Enlightenment and modern ethos brought with itself a commitment to the cardinal principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. In the present day acceptable social order based on democratic ideas and participatory social system, it is necessary

to strive towards an equal, just and fair social order, where all individuals and socio-cultural groups enjoy equal access to the available resources of society. The challenge is to identify the socially disadvantaged, economically backward, and educationally deprived sections of society and accommodate them in the mainstream, so that they can enjoy equal access to power and prestige. To meet this challenge and promote a condition of equal participation and equal access to rights, the role of education, has been recognized as of crucial significance.

The school has emerged as a modern institution, which provides a forum for the spread of democratic ideas and participatory ethos. Its role in promoting the interests of the marginalized, however, has been a subject of major disagreements and heated debate among sociologists. A section of them look at school with a positive attitude, others question and reject the very ability of formal education to bring emancipation to the deprived. In the context of the social and educational deprivation that the marginalized have faced in the past, as well as the crucial role that education can play to empower them, one should examine the issue of the present educational status of these communities. The Indian state now recognizes the potential of education, but policy documents clearly reveal that the stress continues to be on the issues of quantity and provisioning. While access to schools still remain far below the satisfactory levels, social accessibility as an issue is yet to be recognized and given due attention. Discriminatory practices and oppressive social norms still persist. Hence the issue of equity in education becomes crucial. The quality of education that they receive too needs to be examined. it is time that we address the issues of importance of instruction through mother tongue for effective teaching and encouragement and incorporation of locally relevant content and curriculum , besides emphasizing the localized production of textbooks in local dialects.

Economic vulnerability has a negative impact on the overall educational status. Hence, poverty needs to be tackled not only as a consequence of illiteracy but also as a reason for it. Thus, to be able to give the marginalized sections, their rightful place in the social order, the issues of quantity, equity and quality need to be examined in conjunction with each other rather than independent of each other,

12.6   FURTHER READING

Nambissan, Geetha B. 2000. Dealing with Deprivation. *Seminar*, September

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UNIT 13 EDUCATION AND THE POLICY OF POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

• describe the social and historical context in which policies of positive discrimination acquire relevance;

• explain the concepts of positive discrimination and affirmative action in the context of education; and

• critically discuss the issues of access, retention, and performance of students who avail the policies of positive discrimination.

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13.1   INTRODUCTION

Several societies have inherited inequalities of one kind or the other from their past, be it in terms of race, caste, ethnic group identity, gender, social class, etc. This has led some of the modern democratic states to redress these inequalities through a policy initiative which is aimed at ameliorating the deficiencies of the past. John Rawls (1999) refers to this as a 'principle of redress', which attempts to eliminate undeserved inequalities. The principle holds that in order to treat all persons equally, to provide them equal opportunities, society should give more attention to those who are marginalized and to those born into less favorable social positions. In this context the practice of positive discrimination is imperative to promote equality in favour of the disadvantaged.

The term 'positive discrimination' is defined as the practice of preferential selection of members of under-represented groups to widely esteemed positions. According to Thomas Weisskopf (2004), what makes discrimination 'positive' is that it is intended to elevate members of groups that are under- represented in esteemed positions and thus under-represented in the upper strata of society. However, as Weisskopf argues, it may also be kept in mind that 'negative' discrimination denotes a policy of exclusion of such members. The term 'affirmative action' is usually used in the American context to connote the preference given to the deprived group, other things being equal. These policies are also called the policies of 'reverse' or 'compensatory' discrimination. In India, it is used to connote the special privileges, concessions or

treatment better known as the 'reservation' policy or the policy of 'positive discrimination' in the Indian context.

In a wider spectrum, the policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action describes those practices that attempt to correct past or present discrimination and prevent future occurrences of discrimination. Different societies have different historical distortions, which have prevented certain groups from entering the mainstream of social development. Particularly, the disparities between the educational levels of different social groups have been the cause and consequence of the differentials between their levels of socio-economic development. The concern for inequalities in education arises from a commitment to the socially and economically deprived groups. From the point of view of nation-building also, there can be no proper development of human resources unless all segments of the population receive evenhanded attention and support. The social cohesion of a society is threatened if the resources and opportunities are unevenly distributed among individuals and groups. It is the belief in shared values and purposes that contributes to cohesion in a civil society. In this context, education systems across the world now encounter the problem of redefining their role in a new situation arising out of the increasing individual and group differences. Moreover, education is endowed with the responsibility of turning diversity into a positive and constructive contributory factor in enhancing the understanding of various social groups. Especially, higher education is viewed as a mechanism through which individuals or groups are to be equipped to obtain occupational and economic mobility in order to attain a social status.

In this Unit we will discuss the context in which the policies of affirmative action and positive discrimination emerged in various societies. The focus here is on social inequalities in the Indian society and the history of the evolution of policies of positive discrimination. We will also examine the impact of policy of affirmative action on higher education in particular and explain the issues of access, retention, and poor performance of students from disadvantaged sections.

13.2 SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Caste is the most pervasive dimension of social stratification in India. It is a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between the castes are governed, among others, by the concepts of 'purity-pollution', 'division of labour', 'segregation', etc. The hierarchic divide between the castes is governed by the degrees of 'purity and pollution'. Those at the top (i.e. Brahmins) are said to be the most clean and pure and those at the bottom of the hierarchy (i.e. Sudras) are most impure or unclean. This particular group of ex-untouchables are deprived of any relationship with other members of the social hierarchy and had to live a life of social seclusion and isolation imposed through the practice of untouchability.

The practice of untouchability is reported even today in certain parts of the country and it evokes a national level uproar and condemnation every now and then.

Sometimes it results in conflict between the 'upper castes' and the 'untouchables'. It is unthinkable in the present age of egalitarianism, civil democracy and post-modernism that some people would consider themselves to be polluted merely by the touch of one section of people. Therefore, the section of people whose touch have been condemned to live, over generations, a life of complete seclusion, deprivation and humiliation. The social group which experienced in the past an era of deprivation, now, being termed as 'Scheduled Castes' (SCs) or 'ex-untouchables' or 'depressed castes'. Mahatma Gandhi named them 'Harijans' or the 'children of the god'. The position of SCs has a bearing on the social structure of the caste Hindu society. They constitute a large and important segment whose problems differ from region to region, from urban to village settings, and in different occupations.

Another social group which remained outside the fold of education is Scheduled Tribes (STs). However, the problems of STs are different from those of SCs. STs have been traditionally separated in terms of territorial communities. Though some of the tribes are still pursuing shifting cultivation, most of them have taken to agriculture as settled communities. These STs are not part of the settled Hindu society in villages and towns. Mostly they live in isolated areas such as mountains and forests. Therefore, the STs are geographically, economically and culturally isolated from other sections of population. Besides SCs and STs, there are certain castes which are slightly above the SCs and below some of the intermediary peasant castes within the fold of Sudras. There are the artisan castes such as blacksmiths, barbers, cow herders, washer men, etc. These artisan castes are also educationally and socially backward and are referred to as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India. Their deprivation may also be explained in terms of the 'purity-pollution' concept. OBCs in certain parts of contemporary India are better off than the upper castes in terms of their hold over land, economy, and polity. It is interesting to note that these castes undertake the same practices of oppression as their upper caste counterparts to enforce their dominance in the social hierarchy.

Box 13.1 : Backward Classes

Backward Classes include all depressed and weaker sections such as SCs, STs and other backward artisan castes, minorities, etc. But, the Constitution of India specifies the categories such as SCs, STs, and mentions a few provisions for a category called other socially and educationally backward classes. This category was extensively referred to as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by the Mandal Commission Report (1978) to include social groups such as artisan castes. The term 'Class' is used because, in the Indian context, the measure of inequalities and stratification is caste or group but not the individual. Therefore, backward classes are nothing but the backward castes. Further, the term 'depressed classes' was replaced by 'Scheduled Castes' to denote the untouchables in 1936 and lists of these castes were notified in a Schedule. Simultaneously, the term 'primitive tribes' was replaced by the term 'backward tribes'. The term 'Scheduled Tribes' was used only after independence in 1947 (Chanana 1993:122).

13.3 EVOLUTION OF THE POLICY OF POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN INDIA

Concern for the welfare of disadvantaged sections in India is not a post-independence phenomenon. It has a long history of advocacy and implementation even before Independence in 1947. There were contestations to the rigid Hindu caste structure and hierarchy even in the ancient Indian society exemplified by the emergence and spread of religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and movements like the Bhakti Movement that deceived the caste system. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, their cause was taken up by some of the nationalist leaders and enlightened social reformers like Vidya Sagar, Ram Mohan Roy, Gandhiji, Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar, and others who voiced concern for them much before the colonial rulers' legislative action for the amelioration of the living conditions of these sections of population, was planned.

As a result, British rule in India formally introduced the principle of equality of all citizens before law. The Caste Disabilities Act of 1850 is the earliest. As far back as in 1885, the provincial Madras Government made a provision for education of children from disadvantaged sections. Later, as a consequence of the non-Brahmin movement, the Madras Government reserved positions for the non-Brahmins in government services. Another significant development in the early part of this century was the appointment of a Committee (1918) by the Maharaja of Mysore for the upliftment of the non-Brahmin sections of society under the Chairmanship of Sir Leslie Miller. The Committee recommended that within a period of seven years, not less than half of the higher and two thirds of the lower appointments in each grade of the service and so far as possible in each office, are to be held by members of the communities other than the Brahmins, preference being given to duly qualified candidates of the depressed classes, when such are available (Miller Committee Report 1918, cited in the Report of the Karnataka Third Backward Classes Commission, vol.1, 1990:12).

At the all India level, the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) envisaged representation of deprived sections in several local self-governments and public bodies. Further, the Government of India Act (1935) provides for reservation to the depressed castes in the legislative assemblies of different provinces. The reservations for SCs were made for the first time in 1943 when 8.33 per cent vacancies in government services were reserved for them through a Government Order. In June 1946, this was raised to 12.5 per cent to correspond with their proportion in the population (Chanana 1993: 122). Special support to the backward classes was offered in education along with a scheme of the award of post-metric scholarships which was introduced in the year 1945 initially for the SCs and later extended to STs in 1948-49 (Government of India 1984: 55).

The commitment of the Indian Constitution to social justice and equality emerges out of the conviction that education is a basic instrument of social mobility. Article 46 of the Constitution states, 'the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the SCs

and STs and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation'. Various commissions and policies on education in the post-independent India explicitly stated the commitment envisioned by the Constitution. Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) on university education states, "Education is the great instrument of social emancipation by which a democracy establishes, maintains and protects the spirit of equality among its members" (Government of India 1950: 49).

The Education Commission (1964-66) in its Report provides the vision for Indian education as a contributory mechanism to achieve the civil society. The Commission notes, "One of the important social objectives of education is to equalize opportunity, enabling the backward or underprivileged classes and individuals to use education as a leveler for the improvement of their condition. Every society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of the common man and cultivate all available talent must ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population. This is the only guarantee for building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the weak will be minimized."

Education is also viewed as an instrument of social change and social equality for all groups through social justice and integration (Government of India 1986). This concern was also shared by the two Commissions which were appointed by the Government of India in 1953 and 1978 on the backward classes. The first was headed by Kaka Kalelkar and the other by B.P. Mandal. Kalelkar Commission's recommendations were rejected by the then Government as because of differences of opinion among the members on the issue of identifying the backward classes. Mandal Commission Report was implemented only in the year 1990 after widespread public debate and resentment.

Box 13.2: Mandal Commission

Mandal Commission identified the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) on the basis of caste and evolved certain criterion for judging whether a particular caste is backward or not. It also noted, based on the 1931 census that they constitute 52 per cent of the total population and reserved 27 per cent of government jobs for these sections. It was shelved for a decade till the Government under V. P. Singh decided to implement. It may be noted that this decision by the then government evoked violent demonstrations from students belonging to the so-called 'upper castes'. This percentage of reservations is in addition to the reservations provided to the Scheduled Castes (15 per cent) and Scheduled Tribes (7.5 per cent).

After Independence, in response to the special obligation placed on the Government of India by Article 15 (4) of the Constitution to make special provisions, the then Ministry of Education, for the first time addressed a letter on 23.11.1954 to the Chief Secretaries of all state governments suggested that 20 per cent of seats be reserved for-the SCs and STs in educational institutions with a provision of 5 per cent relaxation in minimum qualifying marks for admission. This was slightly modified in April 1964, when a distinct percentage of 15 for SCs and 5 for STs was laid down and was also made interchangeable. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare also

came forward and separately issued letters to the Vice-Chancellors of the universities having medical faculties to reserve 15 per cent seats for SCs and 5 per cent for STs with 5 per cent relaxation in minimum qualifying marks for admission to all medical and dental colleges. The University Grants Commission (UGC) also issued guidelines to the universities and colleges under their respective control to ensure that SCI ST students were allowed due concession in all undergraduate and graduate courses in various streams. The percentage of reservation for STs was revised upwards from 5 per cent to 7.5 per cent in 1982. At present, 15 per cent and 7.5 per cent of seats are reserved for students from SC and ST categories respectively in all educational institutions.

Besides reservations, the Government of India took a number of steps to strengthen the educational base of the SCs and STs. Provision of educational institutions on a priority basis in the areas predominantly inhabited by these communities, provision of incentives like scholarships, provision of coaching classes for competitive examinations, remedial coaching and provision of hostels are some of the steps which have contributed a great deal in raising the educational levels of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The scheme of remedial coaching for SCIST students aims at improving the academic skills and linguistic proficiency of the students in various subjects and raising their level of comprehension in such subjects where qualitative techniques and laboratory work are involved. Yet another important step taken by the UGC in recent years is to appoint a monitoring committee to oversee the implementation of reservation policy in central universities. For state universities, the UGC has set up regional committees for the effective working of the affirmative action policy in higher education. In a recent directive to the universities, UGC has given warning to those universities which are not implementing the policy on admissions as well as appointments in their institutions. If a university does not implement the quota of reservations, their funding may be stopped or reduced as per the new initiatives.

As of today, the policy of positive discrimination or reservations does not envisage reservations for OBCs in the higher educational institutions at an all- India level, though such reservation in envisaged in the near future. However, different states have varying percentages of reservation for OBCs in their respective states. For instance, Tamil Nadu reserves 50 per cent and Andhra Pradesh reserves 25 per cent of seats for OBCs in higher education. It may be noted that the total percentage of reservations in Tamil Nadu is 69 per cent which is the highest in the entire country - 18 per cent for SCs, 1 per cent for STs, 50 per cent for Backward Classes (BCs) and Most Backward Classes (MBCs). Tamil Nadu has the unique distinction that it differentiates the BCs from the MBCs. Karnataka also reserves seats for OBCs in the educational institutions besides reservations in jobs.

13.4 SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There is no doubt that a considerable improvement has been made in terms of the enrollment of SC and ST students in higher education after the commencement of the policy of positive discrimination. However, this may not be adequate keeping in view

the proportion of SCIST population still outside the fold of higher education or even the minimum levels of literacy. This section reviews the progress made over many years of implementation of affirmative action policy in the country. It is found (UGC 1990) that the enrollment of SCs in higher education is very low (7.77 per cent in 1996-97). Though the actual enrollment increased from 180,058 in 1978-79 to 512,291 in 1996-97, the percentage share in total enrollment did not show much improvement. On the other hand, the enrollment of STs marked a growth of little over one per cent during the period 1978-79 to 1996-97. Their share in total enrollment was 1.6 per cent in 1978-79 and 2.73 per cent in 1996-97. That means, the coverage of ST students in higher education is only one-fourth. While the period 1978-79 to 1988-89 noted only a marginal increase in the percentage share of SCs and STs to the total enrollment, the period 1988-89 to 1995-96 showed a sudden increase in both the categories. The actual enrollment of SC and ST students in higher education is far below the stipulated quota of reservations, namely, 15 per cent for SCs and 7.5 per cent for STs. Inter-state differences are also quite significant. In 1979-80, Uttar Pradesh had the highest percentage (11.62) of SC students enrolled at the undergraduate Level, followed by Tamil Nadu (8.97 per cent), West Bengal (8.36 per cent), and Punjab (8.29 per cent). Jammu & Kashmir recorded the lowest percentage of SC students in the undergraduate courses (UGC 1990). The reason for this could be low percentage of SCs in the state. As regards the STs in 1979-80, the state of Meghalaya in north-east India where STs are the predominant population had the highest percentage (66.88 per cent), followed by Bihar (6.86 per cent) and Assam (6.72 per cent).

There has been a far lower participation of SC/ STs in prestigious faculties which are in demand for high salaried jobs. In 1978-79 and even in 1996-97, a majority of the SC and ST students enrolled at the undergraduate and graduate levels are in the arts faculty. It is followed by science and commerce. Both arts and commerce taken together account for more than 7 out of every 10 SC students and with the enrollment in science, the three cover nearly 89 per cent of all SC students at the under-graduate level in 1996-97. Their participation in professional courses such as medicine, engineering, and education is very low and far from satisfactory. Significantly, there was a considerable decrease in the percentage of SC students enrolled for the medicine course in 1996-97 from that of 1978-79.

The enrollment of SC students at the graduate level is similar to that at the undergraduate level. Around 95 per cent of SC students are enrolled in science and commerce faculties in 1978-79. The proportion of SC students in the professional stream at the graduate level is very low. For instance, only 0.8 per cent, 0.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent of SC students have enrolled in graduate courses in education, engineering and medicine respectively. This is indicative not only of their low share in enrollment but also of the higher rate of attrition as they move up the educational ladder. As regards the enrollment of STs at the undergraduate level, the situation is the same as that of the SCs. About 90 per cent of the ST students are enrolled in arts, commerce, and science faculties, i.e. for every 10 ST students, 9 are enrolled in these streams. In 1996-97, the proportion of ST students in undergraduate courses in medicine, engineering and technology, and education was very low.

Therefore, the share of SC and ST students in the total is higher in the case of arts, commerce and other general courses, wherein the reserved category students are admitted to meet the constitutional obligations. The enrollment in the professional courses for which the job market is attractive is extremely low. The proportion of SC/ST students .in the emerging areas of information technology, biotechnology, etc., is either negligible or even none.

Thus, inequality has a particularly pronounced characteristic in higher education. Inequalities exist between SCs/STs and non- SCs/STs and men and women. If one considers the case of a woman belonging to Scheduled Caste or a Tribe from a village in a backward region, the chances of her finding a place in higher education are extremely remote (Chanana 1993). What holds true of women is equally true for other disadvantaged population. The lower the position of a person in the social hierarchy, the greater is the chance of her1 his being deprived of higher education. Further, these structural imbalances not only distort the expansion of educational facilities but also reflect on the issue of excellence in education.

Reflection and Action 13.1
Find out from at least four SC/ST students the extent to which they have benefitted (if at all) from the policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action.

13.5 ISSUES OF ACCESS, RETENTION, AND POOR PERFORMANCE

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the marginal representation of students from SCIST is, even today, a reality and it is an indicator of unequal educational opportunities. In other words, the reach of the higher education system is not commensurate with the national goal of equality. The analysis of the reasons for poor access and retention and the resultant educational backwardness among the SCISTs mainly relate to their school education (Chanana 1993: 144). For instance, the single most important factor at the school level is the absence of schools in areas which are accessible to SCs and STs. However, in recent years, there has been a thrust on more effective coverage of areas where there is a concentration of SCs and STs and those areas which create more problems for women (such as hilly and remote areas) in the primary and secondary education programs in order to provide equal opportunity and access.

It may also be noted that higher education in India is urban based. Those who spent most of their life in urban areas, namely, towns and cities, are the overwhelming majority in higher education. The major portion of SC/ST students in the general higher educational institutions are from the rural background and are first generation learners or beneficiaries of higher education. Their parental occupations and education is generally low and are often engaged in wage earning agricultural labor or artisanship. Therefore, poverty and lack of economic resources in the family and the utility of extra hands to eke out a living, to some extent, affect the educational chances of the SC/ST.

The quality of feeder streams of education is also an important factor so far as the access of SCs and STs to higher educational institutions is concerned. The quality of schooling that most SC and ST students get is vastly inferior to the schooling available to the class of children who find their way into the prestigious courses and institutions (Chitnis 1988: 161). In recent times, efforts have been made to upgrade the merit of SC and ST students by setting up residential schools. Those students who are selected under this scheme are provided extra coaching both remedial and special with a view to remove their social and educational deficiencies. Remedial coaching is provided in subjects such as language, mathematics and science whereas the special coaching is provided as per the requirement of the competence to be attained by the student for passing the entrance examinations conducted by various higher educational institutions.

SC/ST students in the professional colleges and institutions are found to be from families with middle or higher occupational status. This gives rise to the argument that the professional educational institutions are socially exclusive and that they are accessible to the social groups occupying top positions in the social class hierarchy. The reasons for poor access and retention of SC/ST students in higher education are also the cause of their poor performance level. The differences in the performance levels of SC/ST and non-SC/ST students may be observed right from their entry into the institution either through an examination or through percentage of marks in the previous courses of study. The case of central universities and Indian Institutes of Technology is a very good illustration. About two-thirds of the marks obtained by the last candidate in general category is judged as a cut-off for SC/ST candidates to get selected to the IIT system. The performance differential between SC/ST and non-SC/ST candidates in the case of IITs is sometimes 40 percent at the time of entry. Such a large divergence in entry performance has brought into the institutions a significant number of academically deficient students who have considerable difficulty in coping with the system in spite of remedial measures (Indiresan and Nigam 1993, 357-58). The reason for poor performance, however, need not necessarily be entry level differential. It cou1d also be due to certain institutional factors such as exclusion and discrimination within the institutions as well (Rao, 2006). Further, of those admitted, almost 25 per cent are asked to leave the institutes due to their poor academic performance. The Twenty Sixth Report of the Commissioner for SC/ST (1978:39) brings out this drawback in the system: "It is reported from various studies that the performance of these (SC/ST) students after admission was not very satisfactory. Even after the special coaching, several students left the courses and a number of them could not withstand the strain of a five-year course".

One of the major considerations for the weaker sections is the preparation of a separate All India Merit List for the SC/STs, so as to ensure that adequate number of students from these sections get admission. A further concession being made is a preparatory course for academically weak students from these groups who do not even make the grade even with the reduced cut-off level. Once the students SC/ST take admission to these institutions, the differential is narrowed with various institutional strategies such as faculty advisor, remedial coaching, seniors as

counselors, summer-term programs, etc. In some cases, however, the performance levels are not bridged to the extent that the reserved category student can acquire the required credits to get promoted to the next class. In spite of the facilities of extra semesters to the reserved category students, there are instances of students either leaving the institutions without completing a course or dropping out of the course.

Kirpal and Gupta (1999) in the course research on the issue of academic performance of SC/ST students and its linkages with socio-economic background, educational background, deficiencies in English, noted that SC and ST students feel segregated and delinked from the mainstream on account of their lacking upper class and upper caste characteristics and because they do not feel financially on par with the others. On the other hand, they also are not able to develop academically to the standards expected in the institutions. They feel helpless and demotivated and that contributes to the divide on the academic front. It is the social divide that seems to affect them deeply.

The discussion on quantitative expansion and access reveals that the higher education is still not accessible to a large proportion of socially disadvantaged sections such as SC/STs. The actual enrollment of SCs varies from faculty to faculty and even department to department in the same institution. It may also be noted that the policy of reservation is implemented more effectively in some courses/subjects of study and in some other it is not. This dichotomy is clear in recruitment of faculty in the disciplines of arts/commerce as against engineering/medicine. It is often explained in terms of the Lack of students applying for professional courses compared to general courses, enabling colleges/institutions to evade their social responsibility. This may not be acceptable since reservations are determined according to the population of SCs and STs in the region or state, and the task is to cover these sections as early as possible to help them to achieve upward mobility. It would also be imperative on a nation which is committed to the ideals of social justice and equality.

The problems of access, retention and performance have, therefore, to do with their socialization into the general pattern of an education system. Sometimes, the caste prejudices also affect their decision to enter and stay on in the institutions of higher education (Chitnis 1988: 163). Several Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes students are not adequately equipped to cope with the academic pressure and competitive climate of the institutions. Further, these students are the ones who would not, but for the policy of reservations, have found their way in.

Reflection and Action 13.2

In your opinion, should the government continue with the policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action in education? Debate with your co-learners at the study centre.

13.6 CONCLUSION

In this context, where do we place the educational advancement of the SCs and STs in India? As discussed earlier, the participation of SCs and STs in the sectors contributing to the emergence of a 'knowledge society', namely, electronics, information technology, software development, etc., is likely to be very low or even negligible because these courses are offered either in self-financing private institutions or in the elite institutions of technology and management which are out of reach for these students. The bulk of the courses and employment in these fields is not covered under the Constitutional scheme of reservations and lie mostly in the private sector. The job scenario is also shifting to the private sector as a result of the reduction in the number of jobs now available in the government. Therefore the large number of SC/ST students graduating in liberal arts, commerce and sciences without a basic understanding of information technology will prove redundant to the job market. Today the question is not the question of exploitation of some segments by others. The problem today is one of exclusion because these sections become invisible as they cannot participate in a 'knowledge society'. The priority of the affirmative action policy is, therefore, how to include the SCs and STs, who have fallen out of the system of 'knowledge society', where key assets are information and know-how.

Yet another dimension which is crucial in the context of an emerging society is what will happen to the social stigma that is attached to these castes despite their advancement in terms of social class, wealth and power. It has been the experience in this country that increasing levels of education have not really changed much the attitudes of hatred and discrimination in the minds of the so-called 'upper castes'. An SC officer is not simply referred to as an officer by his position or by his name, but by his ascribed status, no matter how brilliant he is at his job! Even at the village level, their being educated is seen not as a positive sign of the development of the marginal groups, but seen as a negation of the traditional authority of the upper castes.

Some manifestations of the conflict do occur in contemporary India in the form of agitations, protests, struggles and sometimes violent incidents. Some of the massacres of disadvantaged groups by the upper castes and instances of retaliation by the disadvantaged groups against the upper castes reflect the growing caste consciousness, identity and hatred towards each other rather than understanding the diversity in a positive manner with a concern for the deprived groups. Vindictive attitude on the part of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, taking recourse to the Law for every act of omission and commission, also sometimes vitiates the trust among each other. Will the emerging 'knowledge society' contributes to the emergence of a more 'just' and 'civil' society or will it further widen the 'gap' between both the groups, the oppressors and the oppressed, is a question to be debated and answered by the policy-makers in twenty-first century India.

One of the factors which the policy has not addressed so far and which needs to be addressed before we embark upon a new direction and future of affirmative action

policy is the levels of social, economic and educational deprivations within the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The deprivations differ across region, sub-caste, tribe, and gender. It may not be feasible to have a uniform policy across the country because of the varied conditions, diversity and attitudes prevalent in different regions/states. There is, therefore, a need for evolving indicators so that the facilities reserved for these communities are not utilized by a particular stratum among these communities denying benefit to several others who are not so articulate and knowledgeable. There is an urgent need to identify these neglected groups among the SC/STs and educational supports may be extended comprehensively right from the lowest levels of the educational ladder, i.e., primary and secondary schools, and also particularly given to the first generation learners among the SC/ST and women. Even in the context of bringing them into the fold of 'knowledge society', the feeder streams to higher education need to be strengthened and given impetus.

Another important policy issue is that of developing mechanisms for socio-psychological integration of the SC/ST students in order to enhance their self-confidence and self-esteem to take on the challenges of adjusting to the climates of higher educational institutions so that the problems of dropping and non-performance could be tackled. Therefore, greater emphasis can be placed on the basic structural changes in the economy and society through the formulation of an affirmative action policy suiting the requirements of the future. If attempts are not made to arrest inequality that continues to increase in the country, maximum damage will occur only to the members of these castes/tribes because their condition is already bad. These attempts may pave the way for at least the 21st century India emerging as an egalitarian civil democracy in which each one has a role to play in the development process and social cohesion.

The material in this unit is heavily drawn from the author's article, 'Equality in Higher Education: Impact of affirmative Action Policies in India'. In Edgar F. Beckham(ed.). 2002, *Global Collaborations: The Role of Higher Education in Diverse Democracies*, Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC & U), Washington D.C.

13.7   FURTHER READING

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