SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Social exclusion and inclusion are two terms that are making inroads in policy discourse, especially in developing nations including India. They are not part of a binary, although inclusion should be understood in the context of exclusion. In the Indian context exclusion revolves around societal institutions that exclude on the basis of group identities such as caste, ethnicity, religion and gender.

INTRODUCTION

In India the discourse of inclusion in elementary education is largely in the realm of education of children with disability and special educational needs. A significant emphasis in policy and programmes in India has been given on hitherto educationally deprived groups such as Dalits (SC), Adivasis (ST), religious minorities and girls who comprise the majority of children who are out of school. As indicated by Gross Enrolment Ratio statistics, many parts of the country have achieved near universal enrolment. While the majority of Dalit (SC) children are now being included in schools at the point of entry, the terms of their inclusion in relation to institutional structures and processes are discriminatory. At the same time it needs to be recognised that institutional interventions in primary/elementary education also provide opportunities for enabling education among disadvantaged groups and must be expanded and strengthened. Inclusion as merely in relation to quantitative indices of school entry, attendance and completion rates that are presently used to assess social parity, or equality of education opportunity as understood in policy documents. To stress that inclusion is viewed in education as a far more complex process that positions social groups differently in relation to valued resources: knowledge, skills cultural attributes, future opportunities and life chances, sense of dignity, self worth, and social respect. Referring to the concepts of 'adverse incorporation' or 'problematic inclusion' as against 'privileged inclusion' Attention to the importance of interrogating the process of institutional inclusion of hitherto excluded groups from the perspective of equity that is, against the criteria of social justice and fairness.

Key Words : Social Exclusion And Inclusion, Group Identities, Discrimination, Equality of Education, Social Justice And Fairness

Social inclusion and exclusion

This study is about social inclusion in schools, it recognizes that the concepts of 'social inclusion and exclusion' are not well defined and, especially in educational contexts, scholars have employed them in different ways; some have limited the conceptual boundaries to encompass only certain disabilities, while the others have included various other categories of children who are marginalised and disadvantaged due to structures of caste, patriarchy, ethnic, religious, and class hierarchies. The study is based on documentation of the practices of schools that profess to be socially inclusive. The rationale for such a study hinges on the need to identify, study, and share the efforts of schools and teachers that manage to practice and promote inclusion and equity. The present study aims to provide some insights into institutional perspectives, motivations and processes underlying social inclusion in schools. It is hoped that the study will provide insights into the complexity of the processes underlying inclusion within the formal institution of the school. The observations and findings of the study are categorised into a) school policies and (b) curriculum and pedagogy. The study is still in its initial stage and hence preliminary findings are shared.

Social exclusion and inclusion are two terms that are making inroads in policy documents of various developing nations including India. Social inclusion andexclusion are not part of a binary, although inclusion should be understood in the context of exclusion. While social exclusion is a reality that exists in societies and in schools, social inclusion is a value that is aspired for. In Indian context according to Thorat and Newman (2010, p 6.) exclusion revolves around societal institutions that excludes on the basis of group identities such as caste, ethnicity, religion and gender.

Inclusion in elementary education

In India the discourse of inclusion in elementary education is largely in the realm of education of children with disability and special educational needs. In India the use of term 'inclusion' in various policies targeting poverty has now found way in educational reports such as the Status of Education in India National Report prepared by the National University of Education Planning and Administration which focuses on inclusion in education encompassing issues concerning education of children from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Muslim community, girls and children with disability.

This research about social inclusion in schools recognizes the fact that the concept of 'social inclusion and exclusion' are not well defined and especially in educational context scholars have employed them in different ways; some have limited the conceptual boundaries to encompass only disability while the others have encompassed other categories of marginalized children who are at a disadvantage due to structures of caste, patriarchy, ethnic hierarchy and class hierarchies as well.

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The research recognizes that the current education in schools legitimates and reinforces through specific sets of practices and discourses class-based, caste based, religion-based, and patriarchal systems of behavior and dispositions that reproduce the existing oppressive structures. The students not only internalize the cultural message of the school through the official discourse in schools but also through the symbols and the 'not so significant' practices of daily classroom life. The situation can be challenged and in long term transformed by bringing in new language, qualitatively different relations and new set of values.

Inclusion and Exclusion in Elementary Education in India

A significant emphasis in policy and programmes (in India) has been on hitherto educationally deprived groups such as Dalits, Adivasis and minorities (and girls) who comprise the majority of children who are out of school.

According to data available at the national level, the country has achieved near universal enrolment in many parts of the country, as indicated by Gross Enrolment Ratio statistics. A progress in enrolment is observed, however even in 2009-10 about 28.86% of children drop out at the primary level itself. About 75% of ST children drop out of schools by the time they reach grade ten, The drop-out rate is highest for ST girls at all the three level of education that is primary, elementary and secondary. The likelihood of exclusion is compounded if the children live in rural areas and are female. Tribal girls in rural areas are in the most disadvantaged position, as only 51% of them are enrolled in schools, whereas around 80% of all girls in urban areas are enrolled.

According to the mass entry of children from hitherto excluded communities represents a structural change in itself it is not one that has been able to overthrow the deep-rooted structures of inequality. While majority of Dalit children are now being included in schools at the point of entry, the terms of their inclusion in relation to institutional structures and processes are discriminatory. At the same time it needs to be recognised that institutional interventions in primary/elementary education also provide opportunities for enabling education among disadvantaged groups and must be expanded and strengthened.

Nambissan argues that she does not view inclusion as merely in relation to quantitative indices of school entry, attendance and completion rates that are begin presently used to assess social parity, or equality of education opportunity as understood in policy documents. She refers to Kabeer (2000) to stress that inclusion is viewed in education as a far more complex process that positions social groups differently in relation to valued resources: knowledge, skills cultural attributes, future opportunities and life chances, sense of dignity, self worth, and social respect. Referring to the concepts of 'adverse incorporation' or

'problematic inclusion' as against ' privileged inclusion' draws attention to the importance of interrogating the process of institutional inclusion of hitherto excluded groups from the perspective of equity that is, against the criteria of social justice and fairness.

Globally the experiences suggest that even when the excluded do have access, they can be excluded from good quality learning. Economically poorer communities generally only have access to poorer quality education. Even if geographical differences are overcome the dominant cultures at schools may continue to alienate certain groups of learners.

In her study points out that there are spaces within the school that provide opportunities for equitable inclusion. The study focuses on classroom processes, day to day experiences of students and teachers and does not analyse reproduction of discrimination and oppression from a macro perspective. The approach of study wherein school is considered as a unit, classroom and school practices are studied; that creates a scope to even put our fingers at the possibilities of inclusive practices that teachers, students and schools experience and go through. A study conducted in six states of India recognised certain practices of inclusion in government schools which at the moment are considered to be aberrations. The study concludes that 'despite the fact that larger socio-political environment is becoming more stratified and divisive, there are islands of hope across this vast and diverse country. It also presses the need to study inclusion and exclusion in schools and work at all levels to bring about lasting change on ground.

Theoretical Framework

Researching the issue of inclusion and exclusion in India and South Africa, Sayed et al. Use an 'interlocking framework' where race, gender, class, religion and language, all intersect in ways that recognize an individual or group's unique and particular experiences. The researchers note that the 'central in this analysis is recognizing how dominant forms of oppression and exclusion articulate and mobilize other forms of these phenomena to reconstitute constantly the experience of exclusion.' For purpose of their research 'Education Exclusion and Inclusion: Policy and Implementation in South Africa and India' the researchers have applied the interlocking framework to institutional contexts, using four domains:

1. The point of institutional access: Access policies determine who does and doesn't have access to particular institutions.
2. Institutional setting and ethos: Researchers confer that the institutions may continue to subtly exclude the learners even after formally including the learner.
3. The curriculum: The curriculum according to the researchers is focus of power. According to them the curriculum should address not only the diverse needs of various learners but also those aspects that reinforce inequality.

4. Institutional setting and policy: The researchers recognize that relations between institutions and wider social context have to be considered, further they note that the policies related to access and institutional cultures have to be understood in terms of how they are implemented.

Site for Study:

The research explores a socially inclusive school located in an urban area. The school is located on the outskirts of a city having legacy of Mahatama Gandhi, which has witnessed equally dark days of communal clashes between Hindu's and Muslim's time and again, the worst one was in the year 2002.The school was setup in the year 2001 by a young woman educationist who is a trained teacher, a communications design graduate.

The school has total strength of 375 children from nursery to grade twelve. With the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE) coming into force, the school began to enroll children from weaker sections of the society since 2010. Section 12 of the Act makes it mandatory for private schools to ensure a twenty-five percent quota in grade one of school of children from weaker section and disadvantaged groups in the neighbourhood and ensure completion of their elementary education free of cost.

Key facets of school life are being studied; classroom observations are undertaken to observe classroom processes and explore interactions amongst students, student teachers and amongst teachers. Certain key activities such as school assembly, sports event, parent teacher meetings, teacher development programmes are also being observed. In-depth interviews are planned with students, parents, teachers and school leadership.

Observations

The preliminary observations are categorised under the following:

School Policy; and Curriculum And Pedagogy.

According to 'institutional rules and norms can spell out particular patterns of inclusion and exclusion, they cannot cause them to happen. It is the social actors who make up these institutions, the collectivities they form and the interactions between them, which provide agency behind patterns'. The initial field observations focuses on micro actions that go into building the larger pattern of school life. The observations indicate that the inclusion of student from the weaker sections is not to merely mark their representation. The school's pedagogy and the student-teacher relationship that are based on schools ethos make the representation meaningful by extending it to the pedagogy, school environment, co-curricular activities and teacher behavior.

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