
Role Of Education In Sustainable Development: Centring Caste And Casting Gender

Sustainable development is the need of hour to make a society human centric and egalitarian. To achieve this, education plays a vital role yet the world has miles to go. Nelson Mandela emphasizing the importance of education argued, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." This change means the change from hierarchical to egalitarian, conservative to modern, superstitious to scientific and savaged to humane society. The dream of sustainable development cannot be achieved until the dignity and human rights of every human being are ensured otherwise it will be a nightmare forever. If 'Ek bhi baccha chhoot gaya, suraksha chakra toot gaya' [If only one missed, the security circle is broken] is the catch line of polio programme similarly serious engagement is necessary for the sustainable development.

Even after such a long period of human civilization and the spread of education, we witness daily brutality and bloodshed on the axis of caste class, gender, race, colour, ethnicity, region and religion etc. Even though education has contributed largely over the years yet it raises some questions. May formal education help positively to achieve sustainable development? In what respect education has failed in? To what extent it has helped? How and what roles does education play in lives of people on axis caste and gender? What role of education has been in dealing with the diverse set cultures and customs? What kind of education is needed for sustainable development? In the backdrop of caste and gender, this paper attempts to answer these questions by scrutinizing of some Dalit women's autobiographical narratives.

Introduction

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

--Nelson Mandela

Education is, undoubtedly, the greatest mean to change the world. It has brought visibly some positive changes in lives of people across the world by helping formulation and implementation of policies. The growth and development is visible but it is not sustainable as education has failed indeed to transform the society into an egalitarian, cosmopolitan and a humane one. The people, including educated ones and in countries with high literacy rate, still undergo sectarian, caste, class, gender, race and ethnic violence. Rohingya genocide, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, other communal violence, institutional murder of Rohit Vemula, Pranay Preumal Kumar's honour killing etc. are recent anti-development incidence in the society on diverse axes. In addition to it, in India, women are still paraded naked, gang-raped by orders of caste/Khap Panchayats and murdered in broad days light is quite common.

The men and women who defy the social casteist codes in India are killed in name of honour as is the case of Bhavna Yadav who is killed in Delhi and likewise are killed the lower caste boys who marry high caste girls (The Indian Express). Dalit man was killed for owning/riding horse in Gujrat (BBC News), and a Dalit man's head skin is peeled off for wearing turban (NDTV).

These are everyday happening in India. All these raise question as what role educational institutions, educationists and education itself actually do play? The available data in this connection may reveal a very glossy picture but the experiences of underprivileged people speak the truth. The situation of educational institutions in India is different from what they are meant for.

Centring Caste

In India, the domination and violence continue to occur on diverge axes i.e. caste, class, gender, race and ethnicity etc. All identities, except caste, cease to follow one, at least after death, but caste identity continues even after death for it is, fundamentally, the social manifestation of a karma-ordained, caste-contained, marriage-maintained and until death-sustained worldview system which does not let incapable any kind of freedom. The ghost of caste follows low caste people even after death. The vicious cycle of caste is so intact that one never gets past the caste as Omprakash Valmiki underscores in Joothan “One can somehow get past the poverty and deprivation but it is impossible to get past caste” (18). The death defeats life but fails to defeat caste. In this regard, Kumud Pawade argues that “What comes by birth but can't be cast off by dying- that is caste” (79). The education, money, power or position does not help relegate the sting of caste for lower caste people. Bama in her autobiography underlines that “Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever, you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy” (26).

Omprakash Valmiki uncovers the treatment underprivileged are meted out in schools. He mentions that he not only was harassed by students in school addressing him ‘Chuhre ka’ [son of scavenger] but also by the teachers who thrashed him without reasons. Besides making him sit outside the classroom he reveals that “Whenever I dared to ask my school teachers to answer my doubts, I got punished. They beat me up, gave me lower marks in the examinations. The taunts of my teachers and fellow students pierced me deeply. ‘Look at this Chuhra ka, pretending to be a Brahmin’” (62). In this regard, Sukhadeo Thorat regarding institutional caste discrimination argues that even as the student population has become increasingly diverse, the high incidence of suicide among Dalit students points to continuing discrimination, exclusion and humiliation (The Hindu). The education has not been able to bring positive change in mind of caste people regarding caste practices. The attitude of teachers of Omprakash Valmiki in post-independent era is similar to that of Bakha's, in pre-independent era, as is discernible in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable. And it still continues till date. As hunger and undernutrition have become endemic among children in India at least 39 per cent of the children are chronically undernourished, says the latest National Family Health Survey of 2015-16. The impact is severe among those who are impoverished and socially disadvantaged. To overcome this govt. runs Mid-Day-Meal school under National Food Security Act, 2013 but Dalit students undergo discrimination either while serving Mid-Day-Meal or in other activities at school (Down to Earth).

This discriminatory attitude of teachers against Dalit children is consequent to sustained caste ideology. Since caste ideology is imbibed at home, not only education but ‘Teacher Training’ also fails to unmake the casteist mindsets of young teachers. With regard to it, Shri Krishan in an article quotes Krishna Kumar's book *A Pedagogue's Romance: Reflections on Schooling* which points out the reason why teacher training has been incapable to bringing about the anticipated shift in teaching styles:

Teacher training makes no difference.... On values and attitudes, the training process makes no impact; indeed, it is not intended to. The values imbibed from the dominant worldview of society are never challenged, so the young, trained teacher does not relate to policies which require a radical shift in values and attitudes. For instance, inclusive schooling requires a totally fresh perception of intelligence and ability. The dominant Darwinian view that only a few have talent is contradictory to the policy framework, yet it prevails because schools are rooted in it. (14)

Omprakash Valmiki being from lowest caste group was subject to harassment without rhyme or reason. Since he belonged to scavenging community, teachers ordered him “All right....See that teak tree there? Go. Climb that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after all, your family occupation. Go... get to it”(4). The fate of Dalit children like Omprakash Valmiki remains static in school as well as society as the treatment Bama undergoes at school verifies it. The headmaster of the school, she attended, insulted, “You have shown your true nature as a Paraya . You climbed the coconut tree yesterday after everybody else had gone home, and you stole a coconut. We cannot allow you inside this school. . . . He abused me [Bama] roundly, using every bad word that came to his mouth” (19). Thus educational institutions indeed are not different from society rather a microcosm of it.

Perpetuation of inequality in educational institutions is not a regional phenomenon but a global one which is why Urmila Pawar also faces discrimination and violence at hand of both students and teachers. She reveals that teachers always made her do the dirty work, like cleaning the board, the class, collecting the dirt and disposing it off. Besides, her school verandah was used as a sort of toilet by buffaloes and cows. Students in every class took turns cleaning it. When it was the turn of her class, she mentions, “I alone was forced to clean the entire mess” (67). Likewise Sharankumar Limbale was forced to “smear cow dung paste on the floors and the walls of the school” (4). The attitude of high caste teacher and taught hardly differ on the issue of caste. This clearly indicates the ineptness of education in context of caste ideology. In this regard, Bourdieu in his social reproduction theory argues that schools are not institutions of equal opportunity but mechanisms of perpetuating social inequalities.

Further Urmila Pawar points out the dogmatic attitude of teachers in government schools as they “examined their slates, from a distance and hit the children with stones if they made any mistakes” (17) and upper-caste-run schools never allowed Dalits even to go near the boundary. The discriminatory treatment meted out to Dalit students purposes to deprive them of education. It has been continuing the same in post-independent India as Mulk Raj Anand exposes in 1930's that “the master wouldn't teach the outcastes lest their fingers which guided the students across the text should touch the leaves of the outcastes' books and they be polluted” (44). Why education has failed to bring some positive changes in society regarding caste practices the answer may be found in textbooks and syllabi. As schools, teachers and training all represent the dominant worldview so do the textbooks and syllabi. This partial fractured representation in syllabi deforms the Dalit self. Dalit thinker Kancha Ilaiah contends that Dalit self does find its proper formation and integration within the existing educational/pedagogical structures. He records the reading of the textbooks with stories of Rama and Krishna:

For Brahmin-Baniya students there were their childhood stories, very familiar. . . . The boys bore the names of these Gods; the girls the names of the Goddesses. I distinctly remember how alien all these names appeared to me. . . . The name of Kalidasa was alien to us as the name of Shakespeare. . . . In a word, our alienation from the Telugu textbook was more or less the same

as it was from the English textbook in terms of language and content. . . . a Telugu textbook which talked about Kalidasa's Meghasandesham, Bommera Potanna's Bhagavatam, or Nannaya and Tikkanna's Mahabharatha. . . .? We did not share the contents of either; we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives. (13-15)

The alienation that Kancha Ilaiah feels is for the fact that education is neither student-centric nor critical; neither socially reforming nor liberating. It helps to continue the prevalent system as Durkheim perceives education as a social phenomenon through which a society assumes its own continuity by socialising the young in its own image. The kind of relationship society has with the other basic institutions i.e. family, religious institutions, State, polity and economy will clearly be visible in education system. Alike Kancha Ilaiah, Laxman Gaekwad too finds discrepancy in lived experiences and textual narratives. He attests Kancha Ilaiah and Durkheim revealing in his autobiography that:

When I opened the text-book for Marathi on the first page, I used to see: 'India is my country, All Indian are my brothers and sisters, I am proud of its rich and varied heritage' I used to wonder if all this were true, we were being beaten with false allegations of theft, when in fact we had committed no theft; why they beat my mother, pulled at her sari and asked her to hand it over alleging it to be stolen property. Even now I wonder why if Bharat is our country we are discriminated against, why our race is branded and treated as a thieves' community. If all Indian are brothers and sisters, why are not my brothers given jobs? Why do we not get land, decent houses? If we are all brothers, why are my brothers forced to resort to thieving in order to feed our people at home? (62)

The education in fact continues to inflate pride and prejudice of caste people. Where caste consciousness is instilled deep in psychology of young minds at home, how can school education spill it? Caste ideology is imbibed at home is evident in Bama's revelation how the rich children in school where she was a teacher would say, "We don't want to sit next to those ones, they are dark-skinned, they are poor, they are ugly, they don't wear nice clothes, even in a play or dance performance the rich children didn't want to put on the costume of the poor" (112). Thus education in schools, syllabi and teacher training all fail to annihilate the caste practices that prove an insurmountable hurdle in attaining the goal of sustainable development. Until the caste ideology affects the life of people the goal of sustainable development may be achieved.

Casting Gender

The marginalized sections undergo discrimination and violence in society more than the educational institutions. The (un)educated caste people in rural as well as urban area, at private property or govt property discriminate Dalits equally. Likewise, women face sexist treatment across the world. Mainstream women face discrimination on axis of gender but Dalit women in India undergo discrimination manifold on the intersection of caste, class, gender and religion. Therefore, all women are not homogenous rather are heterogeneous. Omprakash Valmiki in his autobiography Joothan records how before renting out the house people first ask the caste and as soon as they come to know the tenants' low caste status either they deny rent out or ask to vacate it. He mentions shockingly that he was not even allotted a house in government colony.

Likewise Urmila Pawar faces the same at Ratnagiri, the landlady Malathibai Ajgaonkar saw

Ambedkar and Buddha portrait in the room of Urmila Pawar, a tenant, she summoned her through one of her servants to her room and she “fixed her eyes on the lizard on the wall. . . . Go find a room elsewhere!” (205) on the pseudo pretext of cleanliness. In the second instance she points out how the daughter of her Kunbi landlady—an illiterate widow in रतनगिरी-Ratnagiri who was bringing up her children working as maidservant—comes to borrow Urmila’s white sari but lost her voice having known that latter was Buddhist and they wear a white sari for wedding. Consequently picking the brocade sari walked off overlooking her offer of tea. On complaint that the sari was returned soiled-and-stained, the landlady said “Look for another room!” (204) Explicitly it is because of Urmila Pawar’s low caste status that other women treat Dalit women disgustingly.

In one case landlady is a maidservant and in second landlady is a Municipal Councillor. One illiterate and other educated and a public personality, nevertheless “the maid and the honourable councillor were united on one point: caste” (206). The hegemonic structural position of upper caste people differentiates them from Dalits who are at the lowest rung of the hierarchical structure. When a Dalit woman possesses equal or higher education, designation, salary and powers than the mainstream people do, a Dalit does not get the due respect one deserves. When Urmila Pawar got promotion and sat in chair, the mainstream people did not bother but grumbled “‘Why should she [Urmila Pawar] expect to be addressed as Bai Saheb?’ ‘Why should we ask for her permission?’” (235). It is sheer result of her being low caste woman.

Likewise, Bama underlines caste discrimination into the convents. No interaction but showers of instructions by Mother Superior stung Bama deeply. She laments how painful it is to live in isolation, like a patient of consumption; segregated even after equal education, equal designation, and equal status. She exposes that “the sisters there wouldn’t even talk to me. They would only talk amongst themselves. They took no notice of me whatever. The Mother Superior there would only tell me what my tasks were, nothing else (126).” In addition to it, as all women have to undergo the patriarchal oppression at their houses but Dalit women undergo the same at home as well as outside. Irrespective of education, designation and location it remains the same. Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar have to face patriarchal violence like any other women at their homes and discrimination outside on part of upper caste women. Urmila Pawar underlines this caste-power dynamics when Dalit women standing with empty pitchers were begging the Maratha women, “Sister, please give us some water, please, oh, please” (201). This is not the relation of just haves and have-nots rather caste that attributes the resources according to caste hierarchy.

Therefore, if half of the population of any country remains out of the view how can one think of the holistic development. The life of women of any nation must be the main marker of the development. But still women undergo segregation during menstruation. Total 37% of women committing suicide in the world are Indians (Times of India). Women are raped still in broad daylight. One third of malnourished children are in India. According to Global Hunger Index (GHI) 52% of married women have anaemia and the malnutrition during pregnancy causes the child to have increased risk of future diseases, physical retardation and reduced cognitive abilities. There are other issues of women also such as education, hunger, starvation, deaths, diseases and discrimination at intersection of caste, class and gender. Therefore, without the gender equality the development is hollow and the sustainable development is a mirage.

Education and Development

The changes education brings may not be negated. Of course it brings economic change in lives of Dalits if one gets a job. Due to economical upward mobility they may get sufficient food; own a beautiful and bigger house; pick the desired profession; drive cars; wear good clothes; get handsome salaries etc. The economic mobility of Dalits seems to have blunted the edge of casteism. But, in reality, caste acts more sharply than it seems to appear in modern time. Urmila Pawar scrutinizing the caste and says that "Like wild animals fast disappearing from woods, caste seems to have 'disappeared'. Yet like a wild animal hiding behind bush, it remains hidden, poised for attack. People travelling in fast vehicles may not notice the wild eyes looking at them, but those who walk do and are struck with terror (Preface xii)."

Likewise, education brings changes in lives of women but it does not help loosen patriarchal strong hold on women. Women face continuously an environment of tyranny at home or at outside. The verbal, physical and sexual abuse they are prone to at every time and every location. Women alike Dalits struggle for human rights, identity and dignity in their respective communities and society at large. Dalit women being poor have to work for livelihood also. Their free movement to work makes them prone to sexual and physical abuse of the upper caste men and discrimination by upper caste women.

In this regard, Boocock indicates that "education reproduces social classes" (123). It involves all types of socialisation processes including one "that occurs within family structure and educational institutions" (Bourdieu 5). This reproduction of social hierarchical orders sustains regular discrimination against marginalized sections. Contrary to Bourdieu, Ambedkar enchanted for Dalits 'Educate, unite and Struggle.' Ambedkar knew that education will alone not safeguard Dalits' human rights but only will prove a medium to their unity which may erupt in a struggle. Therefore, education in general may have never been the tool to help sustainable development.

Moreover, Bourdieu argues that pedagogic practices promote the cultural capital of the dominant class. The cultural endowments of the dominants are valued and legitimised in society, and confer privilege to those who possess and continue these. These cultural codes, aesthetic values, practices and dispositions are transmitted through the process of family socialization or in Bourdieu's term habitus. Thus the education does not prove an effective tool to dismantle caste and sexist system completely and likewise to help sustainable development because, as Paulo Freire sought, school neither develop nor adopt a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' that would produce revolutionary subjects, empowered to overthrow oppression and create a more democratic and just social order.

Conclusion:

Thus the education system brings only superficial changes and that too slowly. It helps underprivileged sections improve their economic status. In addition, it has made them conscious of their victimization. Consequently, they assert for their rights, dignity and identity. The plethora of Dalit and (Dalit) feminist literature evidently testifies their consciousness for the oppressive structures and the kind exploitation they undergo. Mohammad Noor Hasan Azad, regarding impact of education, argues that Aadmi padhne ke baad ghulami bardasht nahi karta [The educated person does not tolerate slavery]. Likewise disadvantaged sections assert but

assertion is not guarantee of equality. They have to undergo discrimination on axis of caste, class and gender equally. They experience discriminatory treatment when they are poor vis a vis they are economically well off. The illiterate as well as educated ones treat them inhumanly. The education system and institutions have failed to help purge off casteist and sexist attitude of the dominant sections.

Thus in order to make a developed society through education we should place a greater weight on practical knowledge rather than pedantic knowledge and education should be functional and realistic so as to address society's needs. To achieve this, the primary school curriculum should be suitable to the students' contexts. The education can become a tool of sustainable development only if we treat knowledge as tritiya netra, the 'third eye', or knowledge that went beyond merely alphabetical proficiency to the power to see through hegemonic ideology, to understand the system of oppression in order to be able to dismantle it. Only then we can achieve the goal of sustainable development. Even though we achieve this goal in terms of health, literacy rate and per capita income and life style of the people but without social, economic and gender equality with human rights and dignity of every individual the concept of sustainable development is hollow.