

From Social Exclusion to Entitlement: Inclusive Education and India's Knowledge Economy

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Abstract—Inclusive education is pivotal to unleash the full potential of India's human resources for inclusive and equitable development. It is inevitable for skills, training, innovation and critical thinking to transform India into a knowledge society. This paper analyzes the chronic issue of social exclusion in the Indian education system. It emphasised marginalised groups such as SCs, STs, Muslims, Women, and Divyang children. Despite various policy interventions, disparities in access quality education and outcomes prevail among these groups. This discussion traverses how these exclusions impede India's transition to a knowledge-based economy. The Authors accentuated inclusive policies and equitable resource allocation to ensure quality education for all by using secondary data and literature.

Index Terms—Social Exclusion, Inclusive Education, Knowledge Economy

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is significant for full utilisation of human potential. It enables individuals to make considerable decisions for a decent standard of living and to live with dignity. The modern complex and competitive world poses many challenges to marginalized groups to get equitable opportunities for inclusive and sustainable development. Formal education, training, skills, awareness and information maximises individual potential. It builds capacity to catalyse rising opportunities, mitigate threats and challenges of the ever-evolving knowledge- driven advanced technological world of AI, IoT, ML and big data analytics. This is the era of the knowledge economy where STEM- science, technology, engineering and mathematics plays a key role in shaping the civilisational landscape. Inclusive and quality education would be a cryogenic engine to transit India into the knowledge economy. India's demographic

dividend provides a conducive environment to reap the benefits of young minds. However, socio-economic vulnerabilities and backwardness is a barrier in the way to establish a knowledge based egalitarian society. Socially, economically and educationally backwards groups (SEEBGs) such as Schedule Castes (SCs), Schedule Tribes including PVTGs, OBCs, Muslims, Women and Children with disabilities (CWD) face discrimination. Therefore, social exclusion poses challenges to achieve equity, inclusivity and justice.

Inclusive education bridges the gap between marginalised and non-marginalised. India has made many constitutional and statutory provisions for equitable opportunities in the matter of education and opportunities. India has overhauled the education system in recent years. Despite various efforts, discrimination based on gender and religion still persists. Multiple forms of exclusion in Indian society are prevailing including caste, ethnicity, and social identities (Thorat, 2008). Henceforth, the Indian economy needs an inclusive, equitable, innovative, research-oriented and comprehensive education system. Recently, India has overhauled the education system through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It aspires to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.

“The world is undergoing rapid changes in the knowledge landscape. With various dramatic scientific and technological advances, such as the rise of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, many unskilled jobs worldwide may be taken over by machines, while the need for a skilled workforce, particularly involving mathematics, computer science, and data science, in conjunction with multidisciplinary abilities across the sciences,

social sciences, and humanities, will be increasingly in greater demand” (NEP, 2020). In this scenario inclusive, equitable and quality education would lead India into the knowledge-driven economy by harnessing untapped potential of marginalised human resources. This paper assesses social exclusion that has implications to transform India into a knowledge economy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social exclusion is rooted in historical divisions along caste, tribe, and gender lines. It emphasized that structural inequalities hinder the entire population of the country from seizing economic opportunities. Additionally, perpetuating cultural inequalities impeded marginalized groups to access markets, grave opportunities, voice and agency (World Bank, 'Poverty and Social Exclusion in India', 2013). Social exclusion affects marginalized groups as well as those who are displaced by development projects, slum residents, the poor, homeless individuals, child laborers, and street children, with both state and societal factors exacerbating exclusion (Puri, 2014). Therefore, the Indian Exclusion Report (2015) emphasised state intervention to prevent and exacerbate exclusion. It was endorsed to eliminate adverse selection and advocated the moral obligation of democratic state to counteract exclusion caused by social or market forces, ensuring equitable access to all public goods for every individual. Later, it was recommended that pro-poor policies addressing individual exclusion should concentrate on enhancing individual capabilities and entitlements (Thorat, et al., 2007).

Studies on educational stratification detected asymmetry in the Indian education system dominated by elites (Halsey, et. al., 1980; Hauser & Featherman, 1976). The educational disparities between various socio-economic strata are intact. Anitha (2000), Dreze and Sen (1995) observed that educational disparities stratified in India. The study revealed variations across caste, religion, and ethnic lines. The research work of Bandyopadhyaya and Subrahmanian (2011), Kulgar and Kumar (2017), Marphatia, et. al (2019), Prakash, et. al. (2017) and Warner, et. al. (2012), Duraisamy (2004); Velaskar (2005) explored gender inequality and addressed gender issues in India's education system. Jenkins (2009), Desai and Kulkarni (2008) and Basant

(2012) highlighted how marginalized groups such SCs and STs are facing destitution and deprived of access to equitable education opportunities. Bhalotra and Zamora (2010), Drèze (2003), Subrahmanian and Balagopalan (2003), Ramachandran (2004), Subramanyam and Sekhar (2010), Veerbhadraaika et al. (2012), and Bhatla (2017), highlight widespread socio-religious exclusions in access to education in India. Ethnicity and religion is also reflected in educational attainment with a vast quantity of literature documenting inequalities in the study of (GoI 2006; Govinda 2002; Probe Team 1999; Thorat and Newman 2009).

Peter Ducker (1969), coined the Knowledge Economy (KE), said that knowledge is the principal resource of the modern economy. It is the implication of 'knowledge to knowledge itself.' According to the OECD (1996), KE emphasizes reliance on intellectual capabilities rather than physical inputs or natural resources. Knowledge is key to drive economic growth (Romer, 1986; Lucas, 1988). This is known as the AK model defined as $Y = AK$, where K is knowledge as per Romer that was subsequently replaced by human capital by Lucas. Human capital is the principal resource of intellectual capital. Therefore, the authors examine recent trends and patterns of social exclusion. Additionally, they learn how it impacts educational equity and hinders the transformation of India into a knowledge driven economy.

III. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

1. To analyse educational exclusion among socially excluded groups in India.
2. To learn the implications of social exclusion on India's transition toward a knowledge economy.

IV. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

This research paper used explorative and descriptive methods to draw inferences on the basis of previous literature. Research work is based on secondary data extracted from the UDISE+ (2011-12, 2021-22, 2023-24), AISHE (2020-21, 2021-22), NSSO, Ministry of Education (GOI). The rationale of using secondary data is efficiency, accessibility, and to build a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

V. ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

“Education is the single effective tool for achieving social justice and equality. Inclusive and equitable education, an essential goal in its own right, is also critical to achieving an inclusive and equitable society in which every citizen has the opportunity to dream, thrive, and contribute to the nation (UDISE Report, 2023-24)”. The NEP 2020 reaffirmed to achieve inclusive and equitable education. India's school education system registered 24.8 crore students across 14.72 lakh schools with 98 lakh teachers (UDISE+ 2023-24). The NEP 2020 aims for a 100 % Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2030. The GER is 93% at primary level, 77.4% at secondary level and 56.2% at higher secondary level (Economic Survey, 2024-25). The overall literacy rate of India has risen remarkably to 77.7 percent in 2025 from 52.21 percent in 1991. A persistent gap between male and female literacy can be observed. As per 2011 census, female literacy rate was 64.63 and male literacy rate was 80.88 percent. This gap is pronounced on urban-rural, regional, social and religious lines. At the all-India level, 48.1 percent students are girls. However, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) is above 1 at all levels. It reflects that girls participate more than boys. Moreover, minority representation is approximately 20% in total enrollment. Socially, 45.2% students belong to OBC category, 26.9 % students belong to open category, 18% from SC and ~10% from ST category.

VI. SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND ENTITLEMENT

Development strategies primarily focused on socio-economic dimension instead of entitlement approach during 1950-80. Both the government policy and the development community were less concerned with outcome perspective (Jonsson, 2003). In contrast, social inclusion encourages a human rights-based approach of development that recognizes both outcome and process. “Participation, local ownership, empowerment, and sustainability are essential characteristics of a high-quality process (Jonsson, 2003, p. 45). A rights perspective is based on universality, indivisibility and interdependence. It also fixes responsibility and accountability to fulfill these rights. The state, parents and teachers have obligations to fulfill these rights (UNICEF, 2002). Social exclusion is a development as well as a human rights

issue. Henceforth, it requires a more comprehensive and process-oriented response (Jenkins and Barr, 2006). This paradigm shift of human right based approach of development has major implications that address social exclusion. There are affirmative actions of comprehensive, inclusive and process-oriented development strategy taken by the government such as 86th constitutional amendment (2002), the MGNREGA (2005), right to education (2009), food security act (2013).

VII. SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Social exclusion persists in different forms like (i) complete denial of access to social services; (ii) selective inclusion; (iii) deliberate and explicit exclusion; and sometimes (iv) implicit and unintentional patterns of social exclusion prevail in India. There are following barriers for the Socially Excluded Groups (SEGs) of children in the attainment of basic education. Drop out from school is a major factor in social exclusion. Enrollment, distance of school, worthiness of education, work to support family, cost of education, no interest in studies are substantial factors responsible for dropout (NFHS, 1998-99). The school dropout rates have steadily declined in recent years but it is still significant at secondary levels by 14.1%, followed by 5.2% at upper level. However, it is 1.9 % at primary level (Economic Survey, 2024-25). Poverty, inequality and joblessness of SEGs exacerbated exclusion. The unavailability of basic infrastructure facilities like potable water, toilets, electricity, computer and internet in schools worsening conditions.

VIII. LEAVING NO LEARNER BEHIND: SOCIAL INCLUSION MATTERS

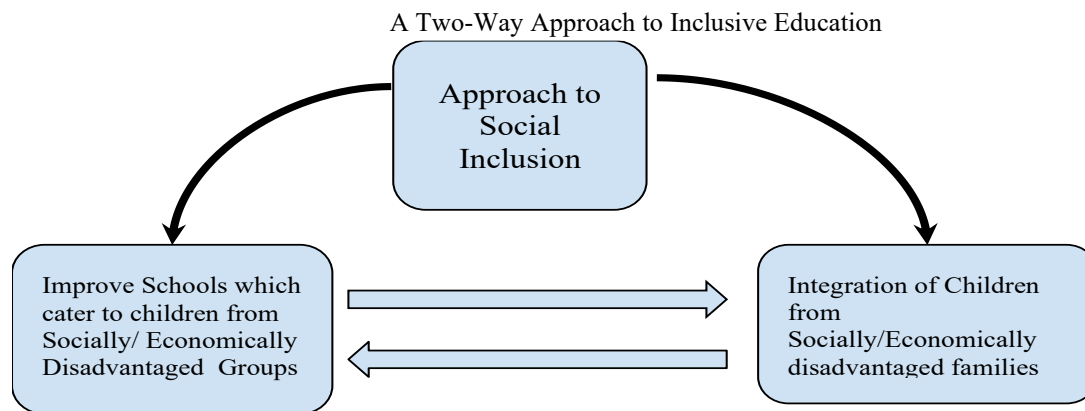
Inclusive education is the process of eliminating exclusion on the basis of social, economic and cultural background of the child in schools and other centres of learning. Education is an indispensable tool to achieve social equity (UNESCO 2009). The policy makers and the governments all across the globe adopt two principles of policies to increase access to education to all the individuals of the society.

The first principle is to allot extra resources to low-income public schools or the fully funded government

run schools which cater to students from the low economy or under-privileged groups and also to the children with disabilities, alternate schools for out of school children and other non-formal educational set-ups.

The second principle is to make schools accessed by children from affluent or high-income families accessible to children from the marginalized sections or disadvantaged or socially excluded groups. The second principle is more effective as the integration of these socially excluded groups of children into the private schools.

In India, the Government schools majorly cater to children from disadvantaged or underprivileged groups. SCs and STs had a total enrolment of 37.6% and 35.29% in government run primary and upper primary schools in 2012-13 (DISE 2012-13). Henceforth, the public schools are indispensable to be equipped with sufficient resources to provide quality education equivalent to the standards of private schools in the long-run. Additionally, it is requisite to increase access to private schools to children from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure equitable access to quality education.



Source: Authors

The drop out ratio is disproportionately higher among disadvantaged groups especially in STs and SCs in higher education and in rural areas. Girls' dropout rate is also considerable. In some regions, OBCs children's dropout ratio is relatively more (Gochhayat & Ravindran, 2025). Women, SCs, and STs have lower enrollment rates in higher education compared to the overall Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 27.1 percent (AISHE 2020-21)

Category	Primary Level	Upper Primary Level	Secondary Level
SC	1.46	3.56	12.55
ST	2.83	6.03	16.62
OBC	0.51	2.99	12.87
Girls	1.35	3.31	12.25
Overall	1.45	3.02	12.61

(Source : UDISE+ 2021-22)

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 aims to attain inclusive education through an integration approach through reservation. The cross-country empirical evidence shows that integration approach has a

positive impact on the performance of children from disadvantaged groups (Kahlenberg 2012). However, integration was not supported by the private schools. A different shift in the same private school could facilitate integration of these children. The government has launched several initiatives to eliminate social exclusion from the Indian education system like reservation & scholarship schemes for socially excluded groups, Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS), promoting awareness and addressing discrimination through Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Inclusive Education is an important pillar of NEP 2020 to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.

Implications for Knowledge Economy

Knowledge economy is defined as a system where knowledge is used in production, consumption and distribution. It required skill workforce, creativity,

innovation and technological know-how for all. Inclusive, equitable and quality education is inevitable to produce a specialised and skilled labour force. It drives production of intellectual properties like patents, trademarks, copyrights, trade secrets, industrial designs, geographical indicators, plant varieties rights. However, perpetuating inequality and social exclusion has economic implications on research & development, innovation, technological advancement, digitisation, and intangible assets. It widens the achievement gap between marginalised and non-marginalised groups. Social exclusion limits India's potential for creativity, innovation and productivity. Therefore, the government has been operating key schemes like Stand-Up India, National SC-ST Hub (NSSH), Venture Capital Fund for SC, PM Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), Woman Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) to mitigate the impact of social exclusion on innovation and inclusive growth. India is overhauling its education system through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy aspires to foster research, innovation, and multidisciplinary education to transform India into a knowledge-driven economy. It facilitates technological integration, industry-academia and international collaboration necessary for knowledge economy. In addition, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) can foster inclusion and innovation.

IX. CONCLUSION

Knowledge always matters. Education and knowledge are the new engine of economic growth. It produces skilled human capital, fosters innovation, ignites entrepreneur spirits, and develops problem-solving ability. However, India's ambition of a knowledge economy depends on its accomplishment of inclusive, equitable and productive education to all. Persistent social exclusion in the form of caste, sex, religion and economic inequality stand in the way to access education for marginalised strata. Structural inequalities remain ingrained in spite of various constitutional and statutory provisions. NEP 2020 provides a blueprint for a just, fair, inclusive and knowledge society which long-term outcome provides future scope of research.

This research highlights social exclusion is a challenge for development and human rights. The obstacle of access to education for Socially, Economically, and

Educationally Backward Groups (SEEBGs) undermined their performance and outcome and hinder national progress. Both Integration and strengthening public infrastructure approach required to bridge this gap.

India must implement inclusive and transformative vision in letter and spirit to channelise its potential of a knowledge economy that entitles every child to thrive irrespective of their background. A sustained investment, accountability, rights-based and outcome-based development essential for skill, innovation, and inclusive and sustainable growth.

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