Marginalization to Emancipation: Striving for Social inclusion of Higher Education sector in India

Deboprosad Biswas
PhD Scholar
Department of International Relations
Jadavpur University

Marginalization is the common phenomena of all the societies in the world where society is divided and equality is not yet achieved. In every society, there is marginality in any form. However, the core bases of marginalization differ from society to society. In Indian society, division of population on the bases of birth as per the preambles of Varna system became core base of marginalization. Marginalization is a multidimensional process that denies opportunities and outcomes to those 'living on the margins' while enhancing the opportunities and outcomes for those who are 'at the center'. Caste and class prejudices, in many societies across the globe, exclude many communities and hinder their effective participation in economic and social development. My paper makes an attempt to use the Constitutional provisions to understand the equity through Higher Education in India and also highlighted, about the implementation of various programmes, policies and schemes launched by the government of India for educational development of each and every student from Marginalized groups.

Higher Education is the joint responsibility of both the Centre and the States. The management and determination of standards in institutions is the constitutional obligation of the Central Government. The Central Government provides grants to UGC and establishes Central Universities in the country. Meritorious students, from families with or without basic means, need an incentive or encouragement to keep on working hard in their studies and go to the next level of education in their academic career. This is where the scholarships and education loans play a crucial role. Following are some significant fellowship schemes/scholarships awarded by the various institutions: • Scheme of Apprenticeship Training. • National Scholarships. • Post-Doctoral Research Fellow (Scheme). • Junior Research Fellowships for biomedical sciences. • All India Council for Technical Education Scholarships. • Department of Science and Technology grants and fellowships. • DST's Scholarship Scheme for Women Scientists and Technologists. • Biotechnology fellowships for doctoral and postdoctoral studies by DBT. • Sports Authority of India promotional schemes. • Scholarship Schemes for ST Students by Ministry of Tribal Affairs. • Post-metric Scholarships for SC /ST students. • Scholarships for Minority Students.

A recent study says that casteism is not only prevalent but also institutionalized in the Indian higher educational institutions particularly in the technical fields of medicine and engineering. However, these institutions rarely acknowledge the discrimination and willfully ignore both subtle and overt forms of casteism.

The study entitled 'The Steady Drumbeat of Institutional Casteism', was led by the Forum against Oppression of Women, Forum for Medical Ethics Society, Medico Friend Circle and the Peoples' Union of Civil Liberties, Maharasthra. The study focuses on the various ways in which casteism is practiced and even normalised in the current higher education system of the country. It may exist in the direct form of abusive casteist slurs, gestures, comments and physical exclusion or in its indirect ill-informed opposition to the constitutionally mandated policy of reservation and routine biases inflicting psychological harm upon the victims. It was conducted in the aftermath of the tragic suicides of Payal Tadvi and Rohit Vemula. The study refers to their suicides as 'institutional murders', while highlighting the culture of victim-blaming and apathy towards the victims of such institutional murders for calling them 'mentally weak' even after their death. Such an approach is also observed in the cases of sexual harassment of women too.

As per study, persons who share experiences of caste-based discriminations in higher educational institutions get accused of being 'obsessed with caste identities' or being 'over-sensitive' or 'paranoid' about it.

This culture of not recognizing and dismissing discrimination without the willingness to appreciate the experiences of persons from their own 'locations', contributes to the further marginalization of such persons and their experiences. According to study, the Hindu religion founded on caste hierarchy has been continuously striving to perpetuate the hierarchical caste divisions to establish hegemonic ideological power over Indian society. The rate of inter-caste marriages, even as recently as 2011, was merely 5.82% and there has been no upward trend over the past four decades.

A number of teachers and students cutting across disciplines who belong to the Dalit community and are teaching and studying in different universities and colleges say that a very different kind of social exclusion, discrimination and humiliation exists on the campuses of higher education in India. Discrimination crops up many a time in its ancient and crude form of caste discrimination such as not sharing a room (hostel rooms for Dalit students and staff rooms for Dalit teachers), not sitting at the same dining table or drinking water from the same tap used by Dalits. New forms of discrimination have been added such as upper caste hostel mates not allowing Dalit students to put up posters of their icons in the hostel rooms, discrepancies in grades of Dalit students when graded by upper caste teachers, professors and university employees not signing scholarship forms of Dalit students, and Dalit student names being displayed with their categories. Yet, most of the time discrimination and humiliation is very subtle and sophisticated. It is camouflaged in the ornamental and symbolic language used, body gestures, and in the garb of implementing objective institutional rules. It is the individual experience each being so different and unique that it is difficult to develop a typology. However, we can still go forward a typology on the basis of resemblances and repetitive experiences of Dalits on campuses.

In a diverse country like India that is characterised by caste-based exclusion (Thorat, 2006), family background plays an important role in determining access to resources. Empirical studies suggest that access to education is highly unequal across social, religious and income groups (Khan, 2015, 2017; Thorat & Khan, 2017). Since the commencement of the constitution, emphasis has been laid on the universalisation of elementary education. Although it has almost been achieved in terms of attendance, the quality of education and retention remain major concerns. As far SHS and higher education are concerned, universalisation is still a distant dream. With the adoption of economic reforms, the role of private sector has significantly increased and resulted in reducing the State's commitment towards social sector under the pretext of fiscal discipline.

Against this background of expansion of education along with privatisation, it would be worthwhile to analyse whether the expansion during the previous two decades has been inclusive or not. This article, thus, seeks to analyse how the expansion in school and higher education has affected the access of marginalised groups such as scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). Although there have been studies focusing on access to higher education (Deshpande & Yadav, 2006; Dubey, 2008; Srivastava & Sinha, 2008; Sundaram, 2006), identifying the barriers to access for the marginalised groups needs to be investigated comprehensively. This characteristic of higher education makes it an attractive sector for private (non-state) investors, although the profit maximising motive hampers the social benefit from higher education due to underinvestment (Musgrave, 1959; Samuelson, 1954). Second, discrimination may make some groups more vulnerable to accessing public resources compared to the others. Broadly speaking, SCs and STs are both regarded as marginalised groups in the Indian social structure. However, presence of caste barrier may reduce effectiveness of affirmative action among SCs as compared to STs. It is to be noted at outset that caste is seen as conferring privilege only on the higher or forward castes and disadvantage for the SCs, while it can potentially confer advantage as well as disadvantage to the other backward classes (OBCs) (Deshpande & Yadav, 2006). The empirical evidence shows that OBCs have benefitted during the recent period of privatisation, which resulted in reducing the gap between OBCs and others. However, SCs and STs continue to remain the least benefitted social groups despite expansion of higher education (Khan, 2017).

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Caste prejudice and discrimination against Dalit students at the University of Himalaya and its affiliated colleges is a reality, albeit a subtle one. Examples include humiliating Dalit students by asking their surnames to decode their caste affiliation, ignoring Dalit students in offering academic support by faculty, Vol. 20, No. 3 International Journal of Multicultural Education 2018 33 stereotyping Dalit students as lazy and studying only for scholarships by faculty and administration, showing differential treatment towards senior Dalit scholars by UC junior scholars in terms of offering respect, and avoiding Dalit students for making friendship. Socialization on campus is another area of concern.

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