

## CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES AND UNEVEN OPPORTUNITIES OF EDUCATION IN KASHMIR

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study was aimed to make a critical assessment of socio-economic disparities and their impact on the educational status of masses. The research was conducted in rural, urban and tribal areas of Srinagar where from a sample of 90 respondents including children, adolescents and adults was selected through stratified random sampling method. Srinagar city was purposively selected as the universe of study as it provides a living platform to multiple of groups with diversified socio-economic profiles. Besides this, the impact of emerging processes like globalization, liberalization, privatization and technological advancements can be seen on the totality of social institutions in Srinagar, of which education is not any exception. Efforts were made to assess the educational status of various classes with different modes of economy and social contexts with special emphasis on the issues and challenges faced by majority of the poor and marginalized. The variables selected were age, social status, economic status, occupational profile, educational status, gender and geographical conditions. In Kashmir, people have got differential access to education due to different socio-economic conditions. Some people enjoy a very high educational status due to their favourable contextual settings, while as the socio-economic disabilities of others force them to stay away from the light of education. The development of educational infrastructure across the valley is poor and uneven due to weak financial position and the local priorities and compulsions of the state government. The long run conflict between Pakistan and India has created a very turbulent history for the Kashmir valley and has a crippling impact on the development of this region. This conflict has taken resources and attention away from social welfare, thus causing education to continue to struggle. Despite of various constitutional provisions and educational policies declared over a period of time, equal opportunities of education for common masses in Kashmir is still a dream and there is the necessity of immediate initiatives on the part of government and the institution of education in particular to ensure the education for all, especially the majority of the poor and deprived.*

**Key words:** Differential Education, Economic Disparity, Social Disparity, Privatization, Technology.

### Introduction

Education is a process of learning in which knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, research, or simply through autodidacticism (Dewey:1976). Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels or acts. There is no denying that the meaning and the usage of the word were excessively pervasive and generalized till industrialism gained ground. Peters (1977) explains that the coming of industrialism was accompanied with greater demand for knowledge, skill and training which called for formal means of imparting these in specialized institutions that came to be referred to as 'schools'. Consequently, the earliest notion of education as training or transfer of skills got confined to schools or other formal institutions only. The scope of education got delimited to the development of knowledge or understanding over the period of time. In the past educational privileges were enjoyed by a miniscule part of the population. Later on it was realized that education has to become more inclusive and encompass larger sections of the population in order to ensure a widespread and sustainable development.

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To achieve several aspirations and developmental goals with respect to different institutions like political, economic, cultural, social, ethical, spiritual, human and religious, education is supposed to play a very potential and integral role. Education has been identified with progress, prosperity and a source of cohesion in a multicultural society like India. In fact, the spread of education is treated as an effective solution to the problems of economic decline, hunger and human poverty. This has led to the inception of the formal education system and education gradually becoming a social responsibility.

In contemporary societies education plays the central role towards economic development, technological advancement and effective social and political participation of people by paving the way for human resource development, upward social mobility and collective consciousness of society. Education as an enabling mechanism is a corollary to the process of empowerment and an important source of power. As an emancipator force, it has always been recognized as a means to improve personal and collective endowment and capacity, enhance human capital, and expand the bases of opportunities and choices of individuals and groups.

Education appears as a core area of concern in public policies in both national and international forums. 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. A right to education has been created and recognized by some jurisdictions. Since 1952, Article 2 of the first Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights obliges all signatory parties to guarantee the right to education. At the global level, the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 guarantees this right under its Article 13. According to UNESCO, the right to education is a fundamental human right. It occupies a central place in human rights and is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all other human rights and development. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.

The founders of Indian constitution included certain provisions to serve as beacons for the process of development of education. Several constitutional provisions and educational policies in India were framed from time to time to ensure education for all as a basic human right, irrespective of all the differences. Special provisions were made to safeguard the educational rights of socio-economically marginalized people and other weaker sections of the population. In the beginning, education was primarily a concern of state but in 1976, following a constitutional amendment (42nd), education became a joint responsibility of the central and state government. However, the constitution still places certain educational matters within the exclusive jurisdiction of the union. The National Human Development Report of India (2001) recognizes that education is not only a means to enhance human capital and productivity but also a critical invasive investment for bringing about social, economic and political inclusion and a durable integration of people, particularly those excluded from the mainstream of society.

Education for all as a basic human right is still a myth, despite of lot many efforts in the form of various constitutional provisions and educational policies. Education is not monolithic or uniform across cultures and periods of history. Due to several social, economic and historical reasons, all sections of population have not got equal access to education. Even among the literate or educated sections only a few had got access to higher, professional and technical avenues of learning. Consequently these vast sections of the population have remained deprived of the avenues and processes of human development and capacity building for upward social mobility. The state and the society have also remained deprived of the

human potentials of these sections of society. Inequality in access to education has been historically rooted and socio-culturally circumscribed. In India, for example, traditionally only the upper castes have had access to education and the lower castes and the indigenous people were deprived of access to education at all levels. Such situations are seen in many parts of the world as well. For example, in the North America countries of the blacks and the indigenous people lag behind in their educational achievements.

We need to understand the fact that education has encompassing scope, contributing towards the economic, social, cultural, political, technological, historical, psychological and philosophical developments. It has been realized and recognized that the lack of education and unequal access to education has emerged to be a potential cause of socio-economic backwardness, poverty, ill-health and all forms of human deprivation. Thus, there arises the need of active sources and resources to uproot the unequal access to education and this very institution need to be available for all instead of certain diversities, so as to witness sustainable development of nation. Education is an influential source to eradicate inequality and ensure social mobility but the disparity of education due to various socio-economic disabilities results in the uneven development and bring about negative consequences. Taking into account the significant role of education, several commitment have been made to enhance access to education both by the state, international bodies and the civil society organizations, so as to uproot disparities in the educational system. This has widely been reflected in the formulation of a global view:

“Education for All”

And

“Right to Education as a Fundamental Human Right”

#### **National Scenario of Uneven Development of Education**

Indian landscape is a unique example for its diversity. In India we find diversity regarding culture, religion, region, gender, caste, occupation, race, class, language, education and ethnicity. India is a largest country in population after china. Current population of India in 2012 is 1.22 billion of which males constitute 628.8 million and females constitute 591.4 million. Literacy rate of India as per census 2011 is 74.04%. Total literacy rate of males as per census 2011 is 82.14% and that of females is 65.46%. We find disparity of educational opportunities across different states of India due to diversified socio-economic differences. Disparity of education is also seen among various castes, classes, genders and different economic, geographical, occupational and cultural groups. A number of factors may be responsible for uneven distribution of education in India like conservative outlook, privatization of education, gender discrimination and unequal distribution of economy that hinders the overall development of India. Education is a source that can dilute all the differences and bring about social mobility among poor backward classes but the disparity of education acts as a precursor for lot many disparities or uneven development. India that embraces largest democracy of the world is still enclosing 25.96% of illiterate population as per census 2011. The state wise literacy rate of India is shown in table 1 below:

**Table 1: State Wise Literacy Rate of India**

State	Literacy Rate (%)	Male Literacy Rate 2011(%)	Female Literacy Rate 2011(%)
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	86.3	90.1	81.8
Andhra Pradesh	67.70	75.60	59.70
Arunachal Pradesh	67.00	73.70	59.60
Assam	73.20	78.80	67.30
Bihar	63.80	73.50	53.30
Chandigarh	86.40	90.50	81.40
Chhattisgarh	71.00	81.50	60.60
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	77.70	86.50	65.90
Daman & Diu	87.10	91.50	79.60
Delhi	86.30	91.00	80.90
Goa	87.40	92.80	81.80
Gujarat	79.30	87.20	70.70
Haryana	76.60	85.40	66.80
Himachal Pradesh	83.80	90.80	76.60
Jammu & Kashmir	68.70	78.30	58.00
Jharkhand	67.60	78.50	56.20
Karnataka	75.60	82.80	68.10
Kerala	93.90	96.00	92.00
Lakshadweep	92.30	96.10	88.20
Madhya Pradesh	70.60	80.50	60.00
Maharashtra	82.90	89.80	75.50
Manipur	79.80	86.50	73.20
Meghalaya	75.50	77.20	73.80
Mizoram	91.60	93.70	89.40
Nagaland	80.10	83.30	76.70
Orissa	73.50	82.40	64.40
Pondicherry	86.50	92.10	81.20
Punjab	76.70	81.50	71.30
Rajasthan	67.10	80.50	52.70
Sikkim	82.20	87.30	76.40
Tamil Nadu	80.30	86.60	73.90
Tripura	87.80	92.20	83.10
Uttar Pradesh	69.70	79.20	59.30
Uttarakhand	79.60	88.30	70.70
West Bengal	77.10	82.70	71.20
India	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India, 2011

The above data indicates a large magnitude of uneven development of education in India. Thus it is a matter of concern for the central government and all the state governments to ponder over this emerging crisis and improve all the indicators of educational development along with the eradication of all the barriers to achieve equal opportunities of education.

### Differential Opportunities of Education in Kashmir

Kashmir is the Northwestern region of Indian sub-continent. Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term Kashmir geographically denoted the valley between the Great Himalayas and the Pir-Panjal range. Today Kashmir denotes a larger area that includes the Indian administered state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Pakistani administered Gilgit-Baltistan and the Azad-Kashmir provinces and the Chinese administered regions of Aksai-Chin and Trans-Karakoram Tract. In 1970, state government of the Jammu and Kashmir established its own Education Board and University. Education is stratified into primary, middle, high secondary, college and University level. This is managed by Jammu and Kashmir state board of School Education (JKBOSE) and various other public and private schools are recognized by the board. Notably higher education or research in Jammu and Kashmir include Sher-e-Kashmir institute of medical sciences (SKIMS), National Institute of Technology, Srinagar (NIT), Sheri Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) and University of Kashmir. Like different states of India, we find a huge disparity of education in the valley of Kashmir. There are unequal opportunities of education among different, classes, castes, genders, economic, cultural, occupational and geographical groups. Table 2 gives the literacy rate of J & K State:

**Table 2: Literacy rate of J & K State**

Year	Total	Male	Female
1981	26.67	36.29	15.88
1991	N.A	N.A	N.A
2001	55.52	66.60	43.00
2011	68.74	78.26	58.01

**Source:** *Census of India: 1981, 2001 and 2011*

The above data reveals that there are uneven opportunities of education for two different genders due to the age long discrimination and disparity of female folk. Extreme inequalities and disparities persist both in access to education for women and educational outcomes in Kashmir and this large disparity places the greater burden on poor. Besides this, we find disparities of education among rural and urban masses in Kashmir. As per census 2011, average Literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir for Urban regions was 78.19% in which males were 84.90% literate while female literacy stood at 70.19%. Total literates in urban region of Jammu and Kashmir were 2,347,045. Average literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir for rural areas was 64.97 %. In rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir, literacy rate for males and female stood at 75.51 % and 53.36 % respectively. Total literates in rural areas were 4,898,008. Despite of lot many policies presently in vogue in the state, equal access to higher education and universalization of primary education is a far attainable target.

### Objectives

The present study entitled “Critical Assessment of Socio-Economic Disparities and Uneven Opportunities of Education in Kashmir” is conducted to assess the present scenario of education within

valley and the issues and challenges faced by socio-economically disadvantaged groups. It is an effort to inquire the variety of factors that are responsible for unequal access to education and that stimulate disparity of education among masses. The study is aimed to examine the impact of emerging processes like globalization, liberalization, privatization and technological advancements on the education of under privileged sections of society and the way these processes perpetuate the disparity in educational system.

### **Methodology**

In general the methods and techniques of a particular study are determined by the nature of the problem. The present study was conducted in rural, urban and tribal areas of Srinagar where from a sample of 90 respondents belonging to diversified socio-economic, cultural, occupational, educational and geographical settings was selected through stratified random sampling method. The rationale behind choosing the Srinagar city as the universe of study was that the area is pluralistic representing multiple groups of respondents, making sure the accuracy and generalization of results over the valley. Efforts were made to assess the educational status of various classes with different modes of economy and social contexts with special emphasis on the issues and challenges faced by majority of the poor and marginalized. The variables selected were age, social status, economic status, occupational profile, educational status, gender and geographical conditions. Household, school, college and university surveys were conducted to get information by in depth interviews, interview schedule, questionnaires and observation. Necessary information related to the origin, dimensions, features and other explorative factors related to education was sought from various secondary sources. Relevant literature, facts and figures published in the periodical reports of various agencies like Ministry of Human Development, UNICEF, UNESCO, UGC, NCERT, World Bank and other national and international organizations supporting the goal of improving access to education have been consulted.

### **Findings of Study**

1. In the backdrop of political inferences, the government educational institutions that are located within the vicinity of particular politician are having better infrastructure than those areas which are politically less influential. In this way politics somehow becomes a reason of generating educational disparity across different regions, just for the sake of seeking vote bank. Educational institutions residing in the jurisdiction of politicians get special treatment, periodical inspections and teachers are made to work in a best possible way. On the other hand, the educational institutions with less or no political influence do not meet the requirements of the students to that very desirable extent. This has resulted in spatial disparity of education.
2. Culturally there is disparity of education among two genders especially in higher education. Undoubtedly women education is enhancing with high pace, still there is a wide gap in the literacy level among males and females. Education of boys is still given more preference than that of girls especially in rural areas. Girls are not allowed too much to go for higher studies. In some culturally conservative societies, where the educational institutions are located far from the residential areas, the girls are forced to quit from education. In the field of sports and games, girls are least preferred.
3. There is disparity in education due to differential access to economy. People belonging to upper classes admit their children in private institutions where they receive quality education and are better able to compete for top most positions in both private and public sectors. Private institutions are regularly monitored by their own administrators as well as by the parents of students that

results in the production of good stock of students. In this way poor people are debarred from private education due to which the top most jobs are occupied by upper class people because of less competence of the later that results in the reproduction of disparity of education across generations due to economic disparity. Children from lower classes with weak economic profile are entirely dependent on government institutions where the potential of most of the students remains unexplored due to lack of attention by teachers towards these marginalized and poor. Children hailing from middle classes are having mixed opportunities of education. Some of them were admitted to private institutions and others were receiving education from government schools. Rich people have open access to higher education and other professional and technical courses but, due to economic disability of poor and some middle class people, a comparatively low proportion of students complete their higher education. Dropout rate and truancy among children of poor people is still a matter of concern. It is very hard for majority of the poor and some middle class to afford the growing expenditure of education.

4. The disparity of education is also boosted by teacher's community. Teachers of government institutes although highly qualified than that of private schools do not provide that type of attention as provided by private teachers. Government administered educational institutions are lacking quality education despite of lot many efforts by various agencies like NCERT, NAAC, UGC, SSA, RMSA etc
5. Privatization of education has enhanced the literacy level but it has reproduced a lot of educational disparity. People who are financially sound admit their children in reputed institutions for job oriented courses that will fetch market in the future by paying huge amount of money.
6. The fruits of modern innovative educational technologies are reaped by upper class students and a few middle class children that results in disparity in educational achievements and performance. There is differential access for different students towards these technological sources that results in uneven achievement of merits in education. Hence technological advancement transmits the existing educational disparities across generations.
7. Geographically, people belonging to rural and tribal areas are educationally backward than that of urban areas. Both the private and government institutions operating in rural areas reflect a very poor infrastructure and other related facilities than that of urban areas. Rural institutions are least attended by the government authorities as well as by the civil community. Besides this, the teaching staff is less qualified than that of their urban counterparts. It is to be mentioned here that the literacy level of rural and tribal areas is enhancing but it is still lagging behind than that of urban areas.
8. There are least possible facilities for physically challenged people or Children with Special Needs (CWSN) to get education. They are lacking special treatment to fulfill their educational dream. There is acute dearth of educational institutes and skill oriented courses for such people that render them economically dependent on family or society for the entire course of their lives. Sometimes they fail to sustain in the institution due to discrimination or lack of special treatment and in some cases the overall atmosphere of educational institution is not conducive for them.
9. Disparities in education transmit the existing inequalities across generations in societies. It has been observed that students from sound educational backgrounds with good occupation of parents usually perform better, although exceptions are also there.

10. In the earlier times, lower caste people were not too much conscious about the benefits of education but in the present scenario of change, their literacy rate is enhancing and they are doing very well in the system of meritocracy.

### **Suggestive Recommendations**

In Indian society, characterized by a legacy of rigid system of social stratification with a set of socially patterned inequalities, we find the process of transition not only towards modernization, secularism and democracy but also towards an open market, privatization of education and electronic communication etc. The study of the dynamics of socio-economic disparities and inequalities in education is of special significance and relevance. Following are some suggestions to be followed in up gradation of the educational system:

#### ***Strive for equality and excellence in education***

The Indian society is nearly five thousand years old with strong social, cultural and mythological traditions marked by immense diversities and disparities and a history of gross discrimination based on caste, class and gender. All these hindrances need to be uprooted at the earliest to unlock equal opportunities of education for all, irrespective of certain differences. Special constitutional provisions and policies to safeguard the education of poor need to be strictly followed.

#### ***Girl's education for bridging the gap***

During the post-independence period, literacy rates have shown a sustainable increase, but our constitutional directive of free and compulsory universal elementary education (UEE) up to the age of fourteen years remained unfulfilled even today. One of the main reasons for the non-achievement of this objective is the slow progress of girl education. Thus, special attentions need to be provided towards the education of girls. Efforts need to be taken at societal, state and central levels to uproot all the barriers in education of girls. Girls should be encouraged to participate in sports and games, professional programs and skill oriented courses. In case of extremely poor girls, incentives must be provided to their parents for admitting their daughters in schools.

#### ***Rightful education of Scheduled caste, Schedule tribe and Other backward Sections***

The schedule castes, schedule tribes and other backward classes are most deprived sections of society in our country. As such they have been provided statutory safeguards under the Indian Constitution, thereby making it obligatory on the part of the state to take special measures for their educational upliftment but right now they are excluded. There should be inclusive education for these deprived and marginalized sections. It is the need of hour to monitor and properly implement the constitutional provisions declared on the behalf of SC's, ST's and OBC's. Corruption in issuance of certificates must be checked.

#### ***Promoting education among minorities***

Although article 29 & 30 of the constitution of India guarantee the right of minorities to conserve the language, script and culture and to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, whether based on religion or language. But still minorities are not getting the rightful education. There should be the proper methodology for preserving educational rights of minorities.

#### ***Education of disabled children***

Another group of children which is educationally disadvantaged and requires special attention is disabled/handicapped or impaired children, better called children with special needs (CWSN). Corruption



in issuance of medical certificates is to be prevented, so that the benefits of reservation will be enjoyed only by the deserving candidates. Schools with well equipped infrastructure need to be established for their education as per their special needs.

#### ***Monitoring of private institutions***

Educational expenditure of private institutions should be strictly monitored by the government so as to make private education accessible even for majority of the poor. In these institutions, some seats should be reserved for extremely poor students. Handsome scholarship must be provided by the government to encourage the education of poor.

#### ***Evaluation of teaching community***

Performance of government school teachers need to be strictly evaluated. Competent teachers should be encouraged for their excellence and necessary actions must be taken for incompetent ones. There is the necessity of community intervention besides the actions of government.

#### ***Affordable price of educational technologies***

Even, if India has reached a satisfactory level of enrollment, other issues like skewed expansion of private institutions and technological revolutions are a major matter of concern due to their uneven distribution in the country. This uneven distribution is now employed as a means to create disparities in education between rural and urban, boys and girls, economically affluent and marginalized classes etc. The cost of educational technologies should be made affordable to all and these facilities must not remain confined to the upper class only. The poor and deprived sections should be provided equal opportunities to enjoy the benefits of these emerging technologies as enjoyed by the rich stock of population.

#### **Conclusion**

Education is a process of learning in which knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, research, or simply through autodidacticism. The scope of education got delimited to the development of knowledge or understanding with due course of time. In the past educational privileges were enjoyed by a miniscule part of the population. Later on it was realized that education has to become more inclusive and encompass larger sections of the population in order to ensure a widespread and sustainable development. To achieve several aspirations and developmental goals with respect to different institutions like political, economic, cultural, social, ethical, spiritual, human and religious, education is supposed to play a very potential and integral role. Education appears as a core area of concern in public policies in both national and international forums. According to UNESCO, the right to education is a fundamental human right. Several constitutional provisions and educational policies in India were framed from time to time to ensure education for all as a basic human right, irrespective of all the differences. Special provisions were made to safeguard the educational rights of socio-economically marginalized people and other weaker sections of the population.

Education for all as a basic human right is still a myth, despite of lot many efforts in the form of various constitutional provisions and educational policies. Due to several social, economic and historical reasons, all sections of population have not got equal access to education. The state and the society have also remained deprived of the human potentials of these sections of society. Inequality in access to education has been historically rooted and socio-culturally circumscribed.

We need to understand the fact that education has encompassing scope, contributing towards the economic, social, cultural, political, technological, historical, psychological and philosophical developments. It has been realized and recognized that the lack of education and unequal access to education has emerged to be a potential cause of socio-economic backwardness, poverty, ill-health and all forms of human deprivation. Thus, there arises the need of active sources and resources to uproot the unequal access to education and this very institution need to be available for all instead of certain diversities.

In Kashmir, people have got differential access to education due to different socio-economic conditions. Some people enjoy a very high educational status due to their favorable contextual settings, while as the socio-economic disabilities of others force them to stay away from the light of education. There are unequal opportunities of Education among different, classes, castes, and genders, economic, cultural and geographical groups.

The development of educational infrastructure across the valley is poor and uneven due to weak financial position and the local priorities and compulsions of the state government. Despite of various constitutional provisions and educational policies declared over a period of time, equal opportunities of education for common masses in Kashmir is still a dream and there is the necessity of immediate initiatives on the part of government and the institution of education in particular to ensure the education for all, especially the majority of the poor and deprived. To fight against illiteracy and neutralize all the socio-economic disparities in Kashmir need to be the primary slogan of state government, central government, community members and particularly of educational institutions operating at different levels.

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