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Inclusiveness in School Education: Romantic, Rhetoric or Realistic?

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Abstract: While the problem of education has always, from an ontological point of view, been development's central problem, it now marks the character of an inescapable concern. Concern for educational attainment among the marginalized communities leads to once to the recognition of exclusion and adoption of inclusion, not only a praxiological possibility but as an analytical reality. As literature suggests, 'the contemporary reality of schooling of children belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities who have been historically excluded from formal education – the former due to their oppression under caste feudal society and the latter due to their spatial isolation and cultural differences and subsequent marginalization by dominant society'. Of late, inclusive education as a framework of development has emerged as an answer to the long-persisting issue of marginalization. The framework of inclusive education considered as a conceptual category is often contemplated as 'pedagogy of the marginalized'. This alternative pedagogy aims at translating the transformation of the historicized deprivation of these marginalized communities in accessing education. One such experiment has been experimented in Government Girls' High School, Pallupai, Rayagada, Odisha.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Structure of Education, Structure of Accommodation and Student-Teacher Interface

Background of the study

While the process and practice of 'marginalization' continue to be a matter of intriguing debate in contemporary development discourse, inclusion, however, is considered as the means of reaching the unreached in human society. As a process of development, inclusion as a framework minimizes the process of marginalization [for example, SCs, STs and women] in society. In fact, one of the significant aspects of inclusion is its tendency to reach the

unreached especially the SCs, STs and women, majority of whom are out of school leading to a situation of 'seclusion'. The SCs, STs and women are considered as socially and educationally disadvantaged sections in India. They have different histories of social, cultural and economic deprivation, and the underlying causes of their marginalization are also strikingly distinct. The process of deprivation especially in education among these communities is a matter of paramount concern among the academicians, policymakers, and nonetheless, the development practitioners. In contemporary times, it has been visualizing that the framework of social inclusion has gained universal validity in several areas of social life including education.

Literature review

While the problem of education has always, from an ontological point of view, been development's central problem, it now marks the character of an inescapable concern. Concern for educational attainment among the marginalized communities leads to once to the recognition of exclusion and adoption of inclusion, not only a praxiological possibility but as an analytical reality. As literature suggests, 'the contemporary reality of schooling of children belonging to SC and ST communities who have been historically excluded from formal education – the former due to their oppression under caste feudal society and the latter due to their spatial isolation and cultural differences and subsequent marginalization by dominant society'. Over the years, the situation has been improving yet inadequate provision continues to serve as the most fundamental of educational deterrents to educational participation of SC and ST children. Recent studies show that there is an increased demand for education among SCs and STs (Dreze and Sen 2002).

Of late, inclusion as a framework of development has emerged as an answer to the long-persisting issue of exclusion. The framework of inclusion considered as a conceptual category is often contemplated as 'pedagogy of the marginalized'. This alternative pedagogy aims at translating the transformation of the historicized deprivation of these marginalized communities. Based on this alternative pedagogy, the inclusive education emphasizes the foundation of an emancipatory society that attempts to overthrows the issue of marginalization on the one hand and celebrates the inclusion of excluded categories i.e. SCs and STs and women in the process of educational attainment on the other. Plethora of literature has been authored by policymakers, educationists, and nonetheless, the development practitioners – Ferguson (1996), Udavi-Solner (1996), Thomas et al (1998), Mittler (2000), Jha (2008) – who have extensively engaged with the reforms in school education based on the framework of social inclusion.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education' adopted at the 'World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality' in 1994, UNESCO defines major principles of inclusive education. These are:

The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their

students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school.

In view of the international initiative in achieving inclusive education, appropriate measures for the enforcement of 'inclusive education' has been initiated by several national governments; India is not an exception. It has implemented inclusive education with the implementation of 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)' or universalization of education and RTE, 2009, which have also been ratified by several state governments; Odisha is not an exception. The Government of Odisha has been implementing inclusive education especially after the establishment of the ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare Department (SSD) in order to mainstream education among SCs, STs and women in society. Government Girls High School, Pallupai, Rayagada (henceforth GGHS) is one such institutional initiative of SSD to develop education among SC and ST girls.

Rational of the study

What has been happening to 'inclusive education' is the fundamental rational behind the study. This fundamental rational of the study revolves around the following questions: What has been happening to the system of education especially 'system of school education' after the adoption of the framework of inclusive education? Does it a mere romanticization of the process of education? Or is it rhetoric in (re) constructing the existing reality? Or is it an alternative panacea in transforming the existing reality?

Objectives of the Study

The study is based on the following objectives:

1. To understand the perception of girls students towards inclusive school education.

2. To examine the processes and practices practiced towards the implementation of inclusive education.

3. To figure out the problems and possibilities confronted by framework of inclusive education.

Research Questions

The current study is based on the argument that the SSD initiated school, to what extent, facilitates an avenue for 'inclusiveness' in school education especially in GGHS. The study is based on the following objectives: What are the perceptions of marginalized girls towards inclusive school education? What is the process of enrollment of the girls in GGHS? What are the nature, structure and operational structure of GGHS? How do the girls perceive about the facilities provided by GGHS? What are the basic problems, if any, confronted by these marginalized girls while accessing inclusive education in GGHS?

Methodology of the study

As initiated by the SSD, GGHS has been purposively selected for the current study in order to rationalize the 'romantic/rhetoric/realistic' nature of the 'inclusiveness' in school education. As a residential school for girls, GGHS is situated in Sundhi Dhamuni Gram Panchayat of Ramnaguda block of Rayagada district of the state of Odisha. This school provides education from class 6th to 10th. The study has selected randomly 20 respondents from each class. Thus, the current study is based on 100 respondents. These hundred girl students are from fifty-nine villages of twenty-nine gram Panchayats that come under five blocks of Rayagada. Out of hundred students, ninety-five are from ST category (seventy-three from Kondh tribe and twenty-two from Soura tribe) and only five from SC category (*Dombo* caste). Based on the interview guide, the study has gathered information by using interview and observation methods. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of information.

Findings and Analysis of the Study

Established by SSD on April 01, 2008, GGHS has been functioning to cater educational needs of the marginalized sections of the society especially SCs and STs girls. It provides admission to students belong to other category, however, these students don't receive hostel facility as provided by the school. It provides free teaching as well as accommodation facilities. Initially the school was started with an approved seat of 275; thereafter it has been increased to 375 due to the increasing demand of enrollment of the students. The total area allotted for the establishment of the school as well as hostel premises is 51.08 acres of land.

The organizational structure of the school is structured at three levels: micro, meso and macro. The Commissioner and the Director, SSD, Government of Odisha are located at the macro level; the District Collector, Rayagada, the Project Administrator (PAITDA), Gunupur and District Welfare Officer (DWO), Rayagada are located at meso level; and the Welfare Executive Officer (WEO), Ramnaguda block, Rayagada and the head mistress (HM), GGHS are located at micro level. That apart, GGHS consists of two institutional committees-School Management and Development Committees (SMDC) and School Management Committee (SMC) – that are instituted for the academic development of the school. The function of the SMDC is to make the perspective and annual work plans for the school. The SMDC, GGHS consists of seventeen members: head mistress, GGHS as Chairman, four teachers from GGHS, one male guardian, one female guardian, two members from Panchayat/ward members, one representative from SC/ST community, one representative from economically backward community, one representative from women's group, one representative from village education development committee, three expert representatives from humanities, arts, sciences and culture, and one representative from SSD nominated by circle inspector of schools. The SMDC meets once in every three months. The major functions of SMC are: planning for educational development of the school, ensuring continuous enrollment drive especially for the non-enrolled children, distribution and access to school facilities, and ensuring mid-day meals, text books and other allied study materials.

The SMC, GGHS consists of sixteen members: five representatives from ST male guardian, five representatives from ST female guardian, one representative from SC male guardian, one representative from SC female guardian, one representative from Panchayat/ward member, one teacher representative from GGHS, one student representative from GGHS, and head mistress, GGHS. The tenure of SMC is only for three years. The Committee meets once in every three months.

The admission is an integral part of any school. The continuity and sustainability of any school depends on its fair and scientific structure of admission; GGHS is not an exception. Table 1 shows the year-wise enrollment of the students since its inception:

Table 1 Year-wise enrollment of students in GGHS, Rayagada

Class	Academic Sessions					
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Class VI	65	65	48	68	147	51
Class VII	47	56	63	47	71	140
Class VIII	64	55	55	63	60	75
Class IX	18	65	49	55	72	60
Class X	NA	14	64	44	55	72
Total	**194**	**255**	**279**	**277**	**405**	**398**

(Source: Data obtained by authors from their fieldwork in 2014)

In 2008-09, total number of students from Class VI to Class IX was 194. There was not a single admission in Class X during 2008-09. During 2009-10 total 255 numbers of students had enrolled in Class VI to Class X; out of which 65 students are from Class VI, 56 students are from Class VII, 55 students are from Class VIII, 65 students are from Class IX and only 14 students are from Class X. The first batch of students appeared HSC examination during this academic year. During 2010-11 total 279 students had enrolled in the school from Class VI to Class X; out of which 48 students were from Class VI, 63 students were from Class VII, 55 students were from Class VIII, 49 students were from Class IX and 64 students were from Class X. During 2011-12 total 277 students had enrolled in the school from Class VI to Class X; out of which 68 students were from Class VI, 47 students were from Class VII, 63 students were from Class VIII, 55 students were from Class IX and 44 students were from Class X.

During 2012-13 there was an increasing progress in the process of enrollment. During this session total 405 students were enrolled which was very high in comparison to the previous academic sessions. Out of 405, 147 students were from Class VI, 71 students were from Class VII, 60 students were from Class VIII, 72 students were from Class IX and 55 Students were from Class X. During 2013-14 total 398 students were enrolled in the school; out of which 51 students were from Class VI, 140 students were from Class VII, 75 students were from Class VIII, 60 students were from Class IX and 72 students were from Class X.

The study has also made an attempt in understanding the category-wise enrollment of students since the inception of the school, which has been shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Category-wise enrollment of students in GGHS, Rayagada

Class	Academic Sessions																	
	2008-09			2009-10			2010-11			2011-12			2012-13			2013-14		
	ST	SC	OC	ST	SC	OC	ST	SC	OC	ST	SC	OC	ST	SC	OC	ST	SC	OC
Class V	59	06	00	59	05	01	40	08	00	65	03	00	132	15	00	50	00	01
Class VII	42	05	00	53	03	00	57	05	01	39	08	00	67	04	00	125	15	00
Class VIII	62	02	00	46	09	00	52	03	00	57	05	01	52	08	00	71	04	00
Class IX	17	01	00	63	02	00	42	06	01	52	03	00	63	08	01	51	08	01
Class X	NE	NE	NE	13	01	00	62	02	00	38	06	00	52	03	00	63	08	01
Total	180	14	00	234	20	01	253	24	02	251	25	01	366	38	01	360	35	03
	194			255			279			277			405			398		

ST: Scheduled Tribe, SC: Scheduled Caste, OC: Other Caste, NE: Not Enrolled

(Source: Data obtained by authors from their fieldwork in 2014)

Table 2 shows category-wise enrollment of students from Class-VI to Class-X during 2008-09 to 2013-14. Table 2 unearths that out of total enrolled in each academic session, more students have enrolled from ST category – 92.78% in 2008-09, 91.76% in 2009-10, 90.68% in 2010-11, 90.61% in 2011-12, 90.37% in 2012-13, and 90.45% in 2013-14 – followed by students from SC and OC (Other Category) communities. During 2008-09, students from ST and SC communities only enrolled in GGHS. While enquiring about the less number of enrollments of students from OC, the head mistress of GGHS opines 'GGHS

only provides residential facility to the students especially from ST and SC communities; students from OC only get access to the school without any hostel facility. The students from OC only receive school uniforms from class to VI to Class VIII'. Thus, it is clear from the above table that the ST students' enrollments are significantly very high in comparison to other categories.

The processes and practices of school education that comprise of structure of language, curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation and teacher training and commitment characterize major ethos of any inclusive school education. While interrogating these aspects, the study has gained mixed responses. Poor performance of tribal students and the below average situation of primary education in tribal areas is driven by interrelated factors. Language is a medium of communication and hence education should be imparted in the mother tongue that facilitates better understanding of learners, richer classroom inter-action, greater participation of learners, and yield better learning outcomes (NCERT 2006). As mentioned above, GGHS is located in a tribal region. GGHS uses the state mainstream language for teaching and communication, which is most often not familiar to the tribal girl students of GGSH. They are thus unable to fully comprehend classroom teaching and activities. One of the students from Class X argues:

We feel relatively discomfort during the initial stage of the school because of two major reasons: the curriculum and medium of instruction. Firstly, the content of curriculum has not been structured by taking into consideration of the life-situation of the tribal children. It has been developed by looking into the life-situation of the children from mainstream society. In fact, while developing any quality curriculum, it must highlight the cultural aspects of the children belong to that particular society, which will certainly give meaning to the children. Since the school is situated in a tribal region, GGHS instead of neglecting the tribal culture, it must supplement the ethos of tribal culture while developing the course curriculum for us. It will certainly ensure quality curriculum as well as understanding among the students. It is a form of discrimination if the students from SC and ST communities cannot secure their basic right of quality primary education in their own mother tongue. They are also deprived of a curriculum that has relevance to the surroundings in which they live and this impairs their improved learning outcomes and skills development. Secondly, in spite of being ethnically and linguistically diverse, the mainstream language i.e. Odia is predominantly used as the medium of instruction in the school that certainly creates a sense of discomfort among the students during initial days of the schools because the students neither properly interact with the teachers nor efficiently understand the teaching from the teachers. Hence GGHS should use the local tribal language in addition to the Odia or the mainstream language in the school. The use of the tribal language in the initial years can develop a sense of comfort for the tribal children who come for learning. The major reasons for promoting tribal language during initial years of the school are: tribal language instruction makes the process of education and learning easier and more natural; by affording a sense of assimilation, such a practice can aid in reducing drop-outs; and this can also help increase a child's participation in learning processes at school. It must be the first language and taught

as a means of acquiring knowledge of tribal culture, ethnicity, literature and the arts. The children can be exposed to the state language i.e. Odia steadily, which is imperative for integration into mainstream schools and society. Assuming that the tribal children receive multi-lingual education, other additional languages (e.g. Hindi and English) can also be promoted in course of time as medium of instruction.

While interrogating the opinion of head mistress, GGHS in this regard, she strongly denies the application of tribal language as the medium of instruction. She asserts:

Though the tribal language is very essential during initial days of the schooling of the child, the medium of instruction cannot only be the local tribal language because of certain practical constraints. Such an orientation for instruction for the students will develop a tendency of stiffness for other languages when the student is instructed in a particular tribal language. Speaking more significantly, the dominant motto of the establishment of GGHS is to invigorate the educational standards of the tribal children thereby mainstreaming them in the mainstream dominant society. That apart, we live in a multicultural and multilingual society, hence, the students should be taught in such a language through which it will be easier on their part to understand 'others' more comfortably. Thus, though class room transactions must be such that they show respect for the child's language, identity and social background, however, the tribal language cannot be promoted in classroom because it will create more gaps between the tribals and non-tribals leading to a process of more trivialization of tribal education.

There are two significant aspects of any school: teaching and examination. The school under examination is not an exception. GGHS is purely an Odia medium school. Most of the subjects are taught in Odia language but the subjects like English, Hindi and Sanskrit are taught in respective languages. During the study, one student of class VIII mentions:

We are relatively facing little difficulty in understanding the subjects that are taught to us in Odia language; however, we are facing problem in understanding the English language. In the school almost all subject specialized teachers are present but more numbers of teachers are required for the students since ours is a residential school.

The teaching method in the class is not participatory in nature. A student from Class VII argues:

During teaching time the teacher comes to the class and delivers the teaching and goes away and we are facing problems in understanding the teaching taught by the teacher. The teacher needs to spend certain time soon after the completion of each lesson. This will certainly enhance teaching method, which will also increases participatory nature of teaching method.

In addition, a student from Class VI strongly emphasizes the use of audio/visual aids in teaching learning process. According to her, 'there is no provision of using audio/visual tools during the time of teaching though the school is having plenty of audio/visual aids. If the

teachers deliver teaching through these aids, the students will be more comfortable in understanding the method as well as the content of the teaching of the teacher'.

Examination is one of the important features of the school. It means a formal test of knowledge or proficiency in a subject or skill. To increase the standard of the students, GGHS conducts several term end and mid-term examinations. GGHS conducts unit test of 20 marks in every month, which is mandatory for all classes from Class VI-X. That apart, the school also conducts half yearly and annual examinations for class VI-IX and pre-test and test examination for Class X. In addition, the teachers are also engaging the students by giving home task to all the students. This home task, if not evaluative in nature, certainly helps in shaping deep understanding of the students.

Teacher qualification, training and motivation play a vital role in influencing improved learning abilities and overall development of children. In government primary, upper-primary and high schools, teaching is provided by regular and contractual teachers. Initially the government's idea was that if contractual teachers were recruited for regular schools, they would assist the regular teachers rather than teach themselves independently. But in most cases, they function as normal regular teachers without any proper incentives as received by the regular teachers. In Odisha, these contractual teachers are popularly known as sikshya sahayaks. While interacting with one of the contractual teachers of the school, the researcher finds certain interesting facts relating to these contractual sikshya sahayaks. According to one of the contractual sikshya sahayaks of GGHS:

We are now eight contractual sikshya sahayaks who are functioning for this school. We are providing teaching regularly as per the routine prepared by our head mistress. As you know, GGHS is a residential school; we are also performing the task of official administration as well as the residential administration of the school as assigned by our head mistress. But what we receive is very negligible. Though the amount of work is more than work of a regular teacher, the amount of salary, in return, is extremely negligible as compared to the regular teacher of the school. It is too difficult to maintain the family with this nominal amount of salary. In addition, when the government has planned for the right to education among the children, it must have planned for the right to appropriate salary of the contractual teachers because the salary is quite important for sustenance of life of the contractual teachers. Now, I am planning to switch over from this school.

Low wages or incentives and job insecurity can be perceived as unfair and may force contractual sikshya sahayaks to pay more concentration on saving their jobs rather than focusing on providing quality primary education Another contractual sikshya sahayak of GGHS has rightly justified this argument while the researcher has developed an intense interaction with her. She clearly opines:

There are several conditions that affect the motivation level of the contractual sikshya sahayaks. We are now concentrating more on protecting our contractual job rather than on providing innovative and quality primary education to the children. We have

been dedicated in our profession and taken pride in it. However with passage of time that practice has faded away since we are recognized as sahayaks and not as regular teachers. Our efforts have not been credited or even recognized as par with the regular teachers of government schools both by the people as well as by the government school teacher. We are denied of social recognition and moreover our jobs are contractual and wages are very low. And in spite of our age we are still continuing teaching.

The abovementioned statement states a symbolic gesture of the motivation and the commitment of the teacher as well as his teaching and pedagogy. In fact, the credibility and reliability for innovative teaching remains a question in schools especially in GGHS. This symptomatic view of the contractual sikshya sahayak symbolizes the quality teaching prevailed in GGHS. It is quite significant that teacher motivation contributes to more teacher-learning than teacher competence.

A comfortable accommodation facility is another significant aspect of inclusive school education. The study finds that GGHS provides hostel facility to the students since its inception, which has been shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Total intake and students admitted in hostels in GGHS, Rayagada

Year	Total Intake	Students Admitted	
		ST	**SC**
2008-09	275	181	13
2009-10	275	234	20
2010-11	275	251	24
2011-12	275	250	25
2012-13	375	340	35
2013-14	375	340	35

(Source: Data obtained by authors from their fieldwork in 2014)

Table 3 shows about total intake capacity and category-wise admission of the students into hostels. It shows that since 2010 to 2014 all the seats are filled up. It proves that the hostel facility facilitates more number of students into inclusive education. The hostellers used to get conducive environment for study and also getting financial assistance in hostel which they don't get in their home. A hosteller from GGHS mentions:

In hostel we get good friend circle, knowledge from teachers, direct contact with teachers, chance to participate in several competition, chance to participate in several curricular and co-curricular activities, facilities of sports activities and good quality of food. As the hostel provides all sorts of facilities, we don't get these facilities when we are at home. Hence the hostel regarded as an appropriate place for education than home.

However, GGHS has not been free from certain practical problems encountered by the hostellers. The hostellers have mentioned the following problems at the time of interview:

> *No doubt GGHS provide us good quality and sufficient quantity of food, we are satisfied with the timing of food but we are not satisfied with the menu of food. If the school changes the food menu and provides us a good curry, some fruits and sweets in our food, we will be happy.*

The school provides all sorts of infrastructural and allied facilities like beds, mosquito nets, blankets, sweaters, fan etc. to all the hostellers. That apart, there are certain problems in the hostel like electricity problem; fans are not working properly, they are required to repair or replace. There is a major problem in the hostel that is water problem. There are two tube wells present in the hostel premises and the students are using the tube wells for their sanitation. As there is water tank connections, therefore the toilet and bathrooms and the water is stored in the tank through motor pump, however, most of the time, the motor pump is not working. As a result, the hostellers are compelled to depend upon tube-wells. For drinking water the hostel provides two numbers of drinking water tanks and out of two, one is not working and the remaining one drinking water tank is not sufficient for 375 students.

Conclusion

The situation of scheduled tribals and scheduled castes and their exclusion from the sphere of education is both a historical as well as a universal category. This historical and universal category has been romanticized after the adoption of inclusive education by the government. The government has been initiating several measures at various levels in order to mainstream them in the process of educational attainment of these categories. It has been enchanting in creating a democratic space for education for all through SSA as a universal strategy to ensure universal primary education and as a form of new social movement to reduce social inequalities and exclusion, which has also been legitimatized in its latest legislative instrument i.e. RTE. The establishment of GGHS is one such initiative, which is triggering education among excluded sections of the society especially among the SC and ST girls of the society.

However, despite creating legal obligations regarding educational rights for SC and ST children, realization of such rights remains a distant dream. Mere opening of inclusive schools (GGHS for example) with much hyped slogan of accommodation for excluded communities in education won't provide any realistic result. The current study has reflected several spectrums of the functioning of inclusive school. However as unearthed in several phases of the study, these inclusive schools are not away from certain practical problems and are suffering from several challenges. In fact, we need to adopt certain context-specific strategies in the process of inclusive education especially among the excluded sections of the society if we are really realistic in achieving this much romanticized rhetoric. Following suggestions would certainly facilitate the smooth adoption of inclusive education and its applicability at ground reality:

i. The strategy of universal education should be much serious in addressing the practical problems encountered by the particular sections of the society i.e. SC, ST and women.

Specific attention should be given towards their socioeconomic and cultural systems while drafting and developing inclusive education.

ii.   The excluded sections whose culture and living environments are very different from rural and urban ones, a curriculum that is silent about their histories, environments and lifestyles would be inappropriate. Hence, an alternative pedagogy in line with their socioeconomic and cultural systems needs to be initiated for achieving inclusive education as a reality.

iii.   The schools located in moderately underdeveloped regions should possess basic infrastructural facilities – proper teacher-student ratio, secure sanitation, safe drinking water, competent and committed teachers, conducive study environment, and appropriate accommodation – while triggering inclusive education into a reality.

iv.   There should be strengthening of teacher education, knowledge and practical training.

v.   Last but not the least, the government as well as the civil society at large should take an active role in minimizing the practical problematic aspects if the government is really serious in achieving an inclusive education among the excluded sections of the society. The current study is just a tip of the iceberg.

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