

# Educational Inequality Among Marginalized Groups: Barriers and Solutions

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**Abstract:** *Every individual in the society has equal right to education. However, some countries are lacking in ensuring quality education and equal opportunity to every individual. Marginalized sections of society usually face deprivation in matters related to accessing their rights. Marginalized sections of society, including people with disabilities, indigenous communities, and other disadvantaged groups, are often excluded and deprived of their right to education. At times they are considered as inferior and weaker. Ensuring equal access to quality education remains a persistent challenge for marginalized communities. This review examines the key barriers to education faced by marginalized groups in India, including economic constraints, social discrimination, and policy limitations. Using secondary data sources, the study highlights the adverse effects of systemic exclusion and proposes targeted interventions such as curriculum redesign, active government monitoring, and expanded educational infrastructure. The findings underscore the urgent need for equitable policies and inclusive practices to bridge educational disparities.*

**Keywords:** Marginalized communities, educational inequality, social exclusion, policy interventions and inclusive education

## 1. Introduction

*“Education is the most powerful weapon you can utilize to transform the world.”-Nelson Mandela*

Education is a powerful weapon to which every individual should have access. It plays an important role in attainment of greater degree of social justice and equity. The establishment of an egalitarian society is possible only when each child gets the opportunity to draw out the best in him/her. However, it is concerning that even after more than seven decades of independence, a large segment of the population continues to be deprived of basic needs and education in India. This huge section includes the marginalized group. They are subjected to exclusion, discrimination and exploitation from multiple facets as they belong to more than one area of marginalization. Literacy is considered and acknowledged as the necessary first step towards social and economic uplift of these underprivileged sections. The central and state governments along with various non-government organizations have undertaken and implemented several initiatives for promoting education of the marginalized sections of the society, yet the rate of success is unsatisfactory. It is difficult to find the root cause of such unsatisfactory development among these people as their problems are diverse and multi thronged. It is necessary to find out the problem of each group and suggest possible remedies in-order to address their requirement and safeguard them from marginalization and exclusion. This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing education, identify the systemic barriers contributing to educational exclusion, and explore policy interventions to promote inclusive education. Understanding and addressing educational challenges faced by marginalized groups is essential for achieving social equity and sustainable development. This study provides insights into

the root causes of exclusion and suggests practical solutions for policymakers and educators.

## 2. Review of Literature

The challenges faced by the marginalized sections are an issue of concern for both developed and developing countries of the world. Several researches have been conducted to address the issue. From these researches it has been found that indeed education plays a positive role in the growth of every individual (Hanushek & Kimko, 2000) and yet marginality is an experience affecting millions of people throughout the world and it is strangely ignored in the psychological literature (Kagan & Burton, 2005). Mahon (2016) found that students from higher income background perform much better than those from lower income background. In India the problem is intensified as education, religion and caste are all closely linked (Borooah, et al., 2005). Nayyar (2016) found that the backward classes were deprived of substantial progress in the fields of education, business, employment and politics due to prevalence of economic and social disorders. Among these backward classes are the tribal people also. Yadav (2002) revealed that welfare and development of tribes was viewed in terms of material needs in India. In the same year Kumar (2002) found that after independence several constitutional safeguards, developmental provisions and reservation norms were ensured by the state for the empowerment of tribes. Despite such measures, Yadappanavar (2003) observed that tribal education was neglected by tribal administrators and policymakers in Andhra Pradesh, India. In matters related to women's education, research studies show diverse findings. Zaei et al. (2018) observed that women had gained better decision-making role in their families, in local society, enhanced levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem and heightened freedom of mobility to increase business and

social activities outside home while Srivastava (2018) remarked that absence of pro-active and holistic perspective on development interventions had impeded the progress of women. Education of marginalized children in India faces a common plight. Despite having a constitutional policy framework for children with disabilities, there are still multiple factors that hindered the progress towards increasing access to education (Limaye, 2016). Shohel and Mahruf (2013) reported that the child of sex worker is excluded from mainstream society and denied their most basic human rights such as health, education and housing due to number of factors like lack of political commitment, legal protection, trafficking, violation and extortion etc.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

- To understand the marginalized sections in India;
- Enumerate the challenges faced by marginalized groups in the field of education in India; and
- To explore the possible measures to overcome these challenges.

### 4. Methodology

The present study is purely a qualitative study which aims to explore education of the marginalized section of society-issues and challenges; with the help of secondary data sources.

First, identification and collection of the literature related to marginalized sections of the society were done. Next investigation regarding the challenges faced by the marginalized section in the field of education and exploration of other relevant document and reports to understand what measures should be taken to eradicate those challenges were done. Various online journals, thesis, books, vlogs, news reports were reviewed to conduct this study.

### 5. Marginalized Sections in India

Marginalized individuals or group are those who stay outside of mainstream society (Schatz & Schiffer, 2008). Marginalization is usually related to social inclusion and exclusion. According to International Geographical Union (2003), marginality is, “the temporary state of having been put aside of living in relative isolation, at the edge of a system (cultural, social, political or economic), ...in mind, when one excludes certain do-mains or phenomena from one’s thinking because they do not correspond to the mainstream philosophy” (Gurung & Kollmair, 2007). Marginalization is a multi-layered slippery concept and surprisingly whole society can be marginalized at global level like: from the dominant social order classes and communities can be marginalized, similarly, individuals, families and ethnic groups can be marginalized within localities (Kagan & Burton, 2005). Marshall (1998) defined marginalization as a process by which an individual or a group is deprived of access to various important positions be it religious, political or economic power within any society.

However, the definition of what is considered as marginalized are very much dependent on socio-economic and historical context of a particular society (Daniel, Fletcher & Linder, 2002). Economic developments and globalization had a huge influence on the economic condition of millions of people as well as their position in the society. India as the multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and secular country has the world’s largest democracy with almost 1.2 billion population. Of these 80% are Hindu, 13.4% are Muslims, 2.3% are Christians and others include a wide range of other faiths like Jains, Parsis, and Sikhs. In India there are 22 official languages and 1650 dialects (Makwana & Elizabeth, 2023). Recently the “State of World Population Report, 2023” revealed the demographic data from the United Nations Population Fund’s (UNFPA) that estimates India’s population at 1.4286 billion against 1.4257 billion to China. As the population increases, the problems of population explosion also increase. Population, poverty and fertility rate generally leads to increase in those aspects which may have adverse impacts on so many things including the quality of education (Sittisom, 2020). Culture, gender, race, sexual orientation, language, caste, class and socio-economic conditions are the factors responsible for the position of a person or a group in the society. Homeless people, migrants, ethnic minorities, sex workers, drug addicts, isolated older people, LGBT community; people with disabilities face extreme risks of marginalization as well as social exclusion. Their problems can be related to homelessness, poor access to health services, unemployment and poor living conditions (Schatz & Schiffer, 2008). The lack of integrated development of the Dalits is due to the dominance of political and economic powers under the changed circumstances. Marginalization as a universal tendency is also based on the social stratification. Based on the castes, the Indian Constitution classifies socially unprivileged groups, such as: Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Women and religious minorities. Women have still not achieved the goal of empowerment due to lack of professional, developmental and educational initiatives in India. The absence of holistic and pro-active perspective on developmental interventions had impeded the progress of women (Srivastava, 2018). This has been confirmed by the fact that media had not contributed adequately for the empowerment of women due to lack of commitment and will among the owners (Premlata & Jukariya, 2018).

### 6. Challenges Faced by Marginalized Groups in the Field of Education in India

Education is the necessary step for the holistic development of unprivileged communities across the country. Marginalized individuals usually face multiple challenges in almost every aspects of life and education is one of them. Marginalized individuals often lack access to qualified teachers, quality education, and adequate infrastructure. Sometimes societies marginalize people by denying them the space they required to advocate for their needs and makes their voice heard. Due to lack of opportunities their holistic development is hampered.

Gender discrimination in India has a long history like most of the developing nations. Women have to face more survival disadvantages as compared to men. Women are considered as weaker than men in various societal activities. Most people identify women as a gender that has to depend on men for living. It was observed that men and women do not enjoy equal opportunities and rights like, right to education, decision making, economic participation etc. In India, various indigenous communities are against the idea that women of their family would go outside the premises, and therefore education of women in such community is a distant dream. Sometimes parents perceive that daughters of the family will get married and will move to a different family so the amount invested in her education would be wasted as the parental family will not get any benefits from the investment. Census report of India (2011) shows that the total literacy rate in India is 74.4%. Whereas the female literacy (65.46%) is significantly lower than male literacy (82.14%). However, the report of Times of India revealed that Mirzapur village in Alwar, Rajasthan has recorded the female literacy of less than 10% in 2011 census and zero female literacy rates until the 2001 census of India (Khan, 2021). Marginalized women generally face problems of abduction, sexual violence, harassment and intimidation. In July 2013, at a Christian school in India four girls aged between 12 to 14 were abducted and raped (Briggs, 2017). Negative experiences and inadequate infrastructure discourage girls from attending educational institutions. There are no separate toilets for girls and boys in most schools, moreover there is lack of access to sanitary products and washing area which makes it difficult for girls to attend schools due to health concerns. Such disturbance in education exacerbates learning inequalities among girls. Srivastava (2018) opined that woman had not achieved the goal of empowerment due to lack of educational, professional and developmental initiatives in the country.

Students belonging to remote areas face difficulty in attaining quality education compared to students from urban area. They face challenges like poor infrastructure as many schools in rural area do not have basic facilities like toilet, clean drinking water, proper classroom, electricity etc. other problems include lack of quality teachers, lack of finance, communication gap, and lack of transport. Lack of attendance of students as well as teachers is also a major problem as sometimes teachers do not come to schools because students are not present. Most of the schools of remote area in India are run by the government and hence apathy on the part of government especially matters related to inspection and supervision, is a major challenge faced by the rural students. The NGO Pratham in its 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Status of Education Report (2018) stated that only about 73% students can read at least a Standard II text book among all children enrolled in Standard VIII in rural India and the number remains unchanged since 2016. According to the census report (2011) urban population (84.11%) have higher literacy rate than rural population (67.77%). Regardless of location, women's educational attainment tends to be significantly lower than that of their male counterparts. Even after so many years of independence, there still exist

disparities in access to quality education depending on geographical location and gender.

Poverty is an important factor that determines access to education. Many families cannot afford the fees of private educational institutions. Even in school/college where fees are not required, there is still some hidden costs like those of transportation, uniform and other educational resources which a family belonging to below poverty line may not afford. Many children are engaged in labour work and do not attend school. Parents of these children show indifference towards their education as the amount earned by the children for the family would be subtracted from family income if the child attended school. Sittisom (2020) found that poverty has significant impact in quality education. If the family deals with poverty, then they do not pay attention to the quality education of their child (Kauts & Kaur, 2016). A class XII student in rural area of Tamil Nadu, India was attacked by fellow students for being good in studies in spite of being from a poor family (Sruti, 2023). Sanghera (2018) revealed that 80% of children belonging from marginalized section of the society have reported that they were being punished by teachers. The reports of Agrasar, a NGO, is agonizing as it states that on an average 43% student reported that they were constantly beaten by their teachers nearly three times a week.

Though Right to Education Act (2009) promised education for children aged between 6 to 14 years of age. However students belonging from lower caste and Dalit community, does not always get chance to receive quality education. They are often ostracized from the education system. Sometimes they face violence from peer group in educational institutions due to their caste which de-motivate them to participate in educational process. On 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 Hindustan Times reported that in a government run school in Bihar, a 16 year old Dalit teen was physically assaulted by two of his classmates every day for two long years just because the boy performed well in academics. The constant discrimination leads them towards various psychological problems including stress, anxiety, depression etc. According to the census report of India (2011), the literacy rate of SC and ST male is 75.20% and 68.50% respectively. While female literacy rate is 56.50% and 49.40% among SCs and STs. Kumar (2001) revealed that Dalits had become most marginalized sections in the age of globalization due to absence of pro-social behaviors and lack of adoption of progressive economic reforms. Most of the developmental programmes designed for them were not properly implemented by the government agencies in India and a majority of the downtrodden communities remained disadvantaged in the country (Goswami, 2003). Thorat and Lee (2005) observed that caste discrimination afflicted the government's mid-day meal scheme and public distribution system in India. Basant and Sen (2016) revealed that there was no positive impact of the policy on the participation of OBCs in the field of higher education.

The LGBTQ community comprising of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer comprise a huge marginalized section as they are generally not been given equal rights and

treatment not only by people in the society but also through government initiatives. Lack of education in LGBTQ community is the prime reason of intolerance towards them. Sometimes they purposely isolate themselves due to the social stigma. They often face humiliation and discriminating attitude in educational institutions. Parents of normal children sometimes get offended if there is a student from LGBTQ community in the classroom due to social unawareness, lack of knowledge about sexual orientation or sometimes homophobic attitude. Homophobia is present in educational institutions through means like mocking, name calling, bullying and these results in serious mental health problem of LGBTQ students. The Trevor Project (2022) conducted a National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health and reported that in the past years around 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide while 36% of LGBTQ youth have been physically harmed due to their gender identity and sexual orientation. About 73% and 58% youths in the community experience symptom of anxiety and depression respectively.

Commercial sex workers as well as their children are also the victims of discriminating attitude of society, which results into social alienation, inferiority complex and poor quality of life (Deb, 2020). According to Sahni and Shankar (2011) the population of commercial sex workers in India is about three million and a huge number of them are under 18 years of age. A Report by National Commission for Protection of Child Rights on Educational Status of Children of Traditional Sex Workers in India (2018) revealed that most of the children did not dare to clarify their doubts from teacher. They are the victim of constant bullying. In case of girls of sex-worker mother, eve-teasing is a leading cause of drop-outs. Lack of motivation of student as well as parents is also a leading cause of irregular attendance in schools. Most of the children opined and their sex-worker mother confirmed that they were not much bothered about the education of their children.

Poor infrastructure and insufficient funding is a major challenge faced by children with special needs in the field of education. Most of the schools do not have sufficient fund to provide appropriate accommodation to children with special needs. Children with special needs do not get proper accessible facilities like ramps, elevator, barrier free toilets, visual aids, hearing aids, sufficient well-trained teachers, proper psychology based teaching-learning situation etc. Unfortunately discrimination and stereotype attitude of society have the potential to create barriers in attaining education leading to their segregation from mainstream educational setting. Prejudices also prevents students with disability from accessing education on equal terms like others. Children with disabilities face bullying and violence in school which hinders their enjoyment of right to education (UNESCO, School violence and bullying. Global status report, 2016). According to World Bank Report (2009) people with disabilities are subjected to deprivations, so they are the most excluded from education.

## 7. Possible Measures to Overcome Challenges

Government of India has introduced various programmes and projects to bring marginalized individuals into mainstream system of education. The 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan', 'District Primary Education Programme', 'Lok Jambish', 'Shiksha Karmi Project', 'Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya', 'Education Guarantee Scheme', 'Samagra Shiksha Scheme', 'Kanyashree' etc. are some of such policies and programmes.

UGC also provides various fellowship and scholarships for higher education to SC, ST, OBC, women and person with disability students. These include 'National fellowship for higher education for ST', 'National fellowship for Schedule Caste', 'Maulana Azad National fellowship-Minority', 'Indira Gandhi Scholarship scheme for single girl child', Post-Doctoral fellowship for SC & ST, PG scholarships for professional courses for SC/ST, Post-Doctoral fellowships for women candidates, 'National fellowship for persons with disability', 'Swami Vivekananda single girl child scholarship' for research in social science, 'Ishan Uday-special scholarship scheme' for North Eastern Region, 'National fellowship for students of Other Backward Classes (OBC)', 'Savitribai Jyotirao Phule fellowship' for single girl child.

The Government of India had ensured protective measures, constitutional provisions and policies of positive discrimination for the welfare and progress of minorities, Dalits and other backward sections of India. Srivastava (2018) suggested that a transformative approach to the empowerment of women should be developed in India. Media is not providing adequate space and time for the discussion of the issues and concerns women. Therefore it is imperative that media should promote a balanced representation of women in the present times (Premlata & Jukariya, 2018).

In order to provide required facilities to marginalized people, various programmes and projects have been undertaken by government in India. However there is still darkness under the lamp as most of the problems lie at the very grass root level. Just forming a committee or commission for the development of marginalized people will not solve their problem overnight. In case of women, at first the focus should be on their mentality. Girls should have the desire to be educated. Then the guardians must be convinced that educating girls can help to prevent child marriage, reduces violence, reduces poverty, and improves maternal health and decrease mortality rate. Schools should grow opportunities to develop talents outside academics like sports, painting, singing and other skills. Schools should arrange regular parents-teacher meeting and spread awareness and support them by suggesting required solutions regarding the problems of girl's education. Zaei et al. (2018) suggested that micro credit programs should be strengthened on the basis of adequate financial support and leadership development opportunities for women in India. A transformative approach to the empowerment of women should be developed in India (Srivastava, 2018).

Government and non-government organizations have undertaken various initiatives like 'Mid-Day Meal', 'Right to Education', 'Padega India Toh Badega India', 'Tech for India Campaign' to eliminate educational inequality in India. Initiative by philanthropists (Azim Premji Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), provide various grants and scholarships to promote education in remote area for poor students and students from other weaker sections of the society. However there is still need for supply of developed infrastructure, modern equipment, and quality teachers. Care should be taken that schools are not too far from home in hilly areas. Families struggling with poverty have to work with their minor children in order to earn two meals a day; education is nothing but luxury for them. So, it's not just about changing the mindset but there is need for arrangement of some alternative ways of earning. Vocational education can be very useful in solving this particular problem. Along with studies, the children will learn handicrafts and make various items which the school itself will take the initiative to sell and the earnings will be distributed to the family at every week interval.

It is very unfortunate that even after so many years of independence caste system plays an active role in some places. Despite the reservation in education and employment, STs and SCs are often subjected to mistreatment by their peers. Therefore, to eliminate this abominable custom, it is necessary not only to promote the lower castes but also to sensitize people from other classes of the society. The issue should be incorporated and properly addressed in the textbooks from lower classes of the school so that children become aware that denigrating someone on the basis of caste is as much a crime as stealing or murder. Family members of children who encourage this crime should also be punished accordingly. Yadappanavar (2003) suggested that there is need for alternative strategies for the development of tribes in India. Informal educational strategies should be given priority as it may boost tribal education and development in India. Both Government and non-government agencies should facilitate empowerment of the tribes by means of democratization, decentralization and localization of tribal developmental schemes (Yadav, 2002). Tribal development programmes should be implemented by taking progressive organizations into account (Goswami, 2003). Strict implementation of developmental programmes, adequate budgetary allocations, scientific monitoring and evaluation are of utmost importance in tribal development programmes. These steps should be undertaken to improve the status of tribal people in India.

The struggle of the people belonging to LGBTQ community is severe. First they fight with themselves, then with their family and later with the society. In this regard, there is a need to change the mindset of people at all levels of society. Government should provide educational facilities for them, various programmes should be organized to eliminate homophobic attitude among people and reservation should be increased in all cases. Last but not the least they should be convinced that education can remove darkness from their life and help in mainstreaming them. They should indulge in

education and not in begging or extorting money from people. Along with their education, government should give emphasis on various skill development and vocational courses. Most importantly everyone should understand that a person has the right to choose his/her gender identity, sexual orientation or sexual preference and there is nothing wrong in it. Well-being and safety for LGBTQ people can be created with the support of family, school, community and friends (Kolbe, 2020).

In case of sex-workers and their children the problem is very deep and its solution is very sensitive and requires the involvement of every person of the society. In India, sex is seen as something shameful and proper sex education is needed to remove this attitude. People of all section of the society should be made aware that sex is as important as food and sleep. Schools should be brought under CCTV surveillance to prevent mocking, bullying and teasing. Stakeholders should take initiatives to provide psychological assessment of mental health, arrange periodic counselling and help in their socialization. It is important that sex workers and their children be provided with alternative income generating technical and vocational education to earn and support their families (Shohel, 2012).

In case of children with disability, the problem is even more serious. They face discrimination in various phases of life. Bringing them in mainstream education is really a big challenge. Inclusion should not be mentioned in the policy only; it should be adequately implemented. The National Education Policy (2020) has mentioned that children with disability should be able to participate equally in all aspects of the education system. So, all the required facilities and equipment should be made available in all the educational institutions. UNICEF (2016) in its project "Making Schools Accessible to Children with Disabilities" suggested that everyone including non-teaching staff of the school is equally responsible for ensuring that the school is accessible to all children. Parents have to keep close contact with the school authority in order to ensure maintenance, upgrading and re-modification of infrastructure. For continuous accessibility of the child, school management committee should build associations with teachers for making schools more accessible for the children with disabilities. The civil work personnel should ensure that planning, implementation and monitoring be in such a manner that it aims at making school buildings and other facilities barrier free.

So, it can be said that arranging sensitization programme at regular interval for every person in the society, arranging various mental health campaign, provide financial support, implementation of equity instead of equality can help to bring the marginalized into mainstream system of education. Besides these, constant micro planning to provide quality education to every institution as well as every student, continuous verification to ensure enrollment, retention and successful completion of course, provide educational material for free to the poor students, open various skill developmental courses along with study, open more girl's educational institution mostly in rural and hilly area, provide all type of required

equipment for free to differently abled students and provide various added support to minorities can be beneficial.

## 8. Conclusion

Despite government initiatives, educational inequality persists among marginalized communities in India. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach, including curriculum reforms, policy enforcement, and targeted financial aid. Future efforts should focus on community-based interventions and inclusive policymaking to ensure sustainable progress. Bridging educational disparities is not just a policy requirement but a social imperative.

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