

Dimensions of Educational Inequality in Rural India: A Study of Two Villages of Unnao District in Uttar Pradesh

Supriya Singh*
D.R. Sahu**

Abstract

The paper is an outcome of the wider study of social inequality in the two villages in Bighapur block of Unnao district in U.P. One of the important features of Indian education system is its inherent unequal nature. The most negative point about government schools have been lack of teaching atmosphere in the schools as teachers are not interested in teaching. Not only this, unequal treatment met with some lower castes students is another serious issue. The structural conditions (mainly class and caste) of lower castes are such that they are unable to send their children in private schools and in government schools because of lackadaisical attitude of teachers they are deprived from quality education. Serving mid day meal in schools on one hand have included children in education by attracting them on the other hand it has also excluded them from quality education as well by treating them on unequal grounds. The present paper on the basis of intensive fieldwork and interviews tries to locate the factors which are reproducing educational inequality at village level.

Key Words: Educational Inequality, self-fulfilling prophecy, Mid-day Meal, Exclusion

One of the important features of Indian education system is its inherent inequalitarian nature. Over the decades some progress has been made in improving the literacy rate. However there remains a substantial gap, in the literacy rate, between the various population groups. The figure for SC/ST was lower than the national averages for men and women. The STs were the most deprived in terms of literacy; in 2011, not even 50% of ST women were literate. Another dimension of disparity is between rural and urban areas. The literacy rate of rural women is 62%, while the rate is much higher among urban women at 81%. The corresponding rates for men are 83 percent and 91 percent respectively. Except for primary education, the dropout rates were far higher for ST children in all levels of school education (India Inequality Report 2018:52). Educational facilities are unequally distributed among the socio-economic, sex, regional, caste and occupational groups of the population (Tilak 1978). One of the major concerns of studied done regarding educational inequality have been inequality in educational opportunities. Educational planning in India after so many years of independence suffers from countless loopholes. In spite of several endeavours to provide quality education, all the educational facilities are unequally distributed among the socio-economic, sex, regional, caste, and occupational groups of the population.

* Supriya Singh is Assistant Professor in Khun-Khun Ji Girls P.G. College, Lucknow

** D. R. Sahu is Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow

There have been mainly two broad streams regarding educational research. One has focused on how schools reproduce inequalities and social injustices through misdistribution (Bourdieu and Passeron 1997, Bowles and Gintis 2002) and the second considers how conditions in school or other learning sites offer resources or conditions through which learners can contest or change inequalities (Stromquist 1998, Mcleod 2005 Lynch and Baker 2005). The first group of writers, who see school as contributing to injustice and inequalities, tend to pay attention to outcomes and functioning. For the first group of authors, large structures or systems, associated with class or race or gender, will always form the condition of justice. For the second group, there is a space of human action in which these structures are contested and where equalities in education can be formed and how schools might contribute to developing equalities and conditions for social justice, analyze aspects of the transformative space of schooling even if it is imperfectly realized. In the capability approach, education is assumed (and expected) to be empowering and transformative (Walker, Melanie and Elaine Unterhalter 2007:7).

Critical perspectives see education as reproducing social inequality and according to them the main function of schooling is reproduction of dominant ideologies and their forms of knowledge and the distribution of knowledge and skills in a manner that will reproduce the structure of inequality. This perspective opines that education system has functioned as a mediator of caste, class and gender inequalities (Velaska 1990). Velaskar (1990) in his paper effort towards understanding how and to what extent schooling has functioned to reproduce and consolidate caste, class and gender inequalities in India. The main functions of schooling, according to him are the reproduction of dominant ideologies and their forms of knowledge, and the distribution of knowledge and skills in a manner that will reproduce the structure of social inequality. In both the studied villages' schools are reflections of the prevailing inequalities in education system in rural areas.

The present paper is aimed to identify inequality in terms of Mid-day meal served in village primary schools; to examine the relationship between inequality and educational opportunity and to analyse gender inequality in educational system at micro level. Two representative villages of Bighapur block of Unnao district in Uttar Pradesh have been selected purposively taking into account various operating factors. One village is developed and other selected village is underdeveloped in many criteria of development. Total 150 respondents from both the villages have been selected for study through stratified sampling. The qualitative method of research was adopted in the research mainly for two reasons – being a village study in-depth analysis was needed and secondly the topic of research was inequality and for understanding its nuances at village level it was necessary. For the sake of validity of data, it was needed. The descriptive research design has been used to describe the different dimensions of educational inequality. Observation and interview guide have been employed to collect primary data of the selected villages. Secondary data has been collected from block office, the statistical publication, the village school and the Aaganbadi centre.

Social Inequality and Education

Both the villages have government schools but Bharthipur because of being bigger both in size and population in comparison to Lalman Kheda has two government schools one primary

school and another junior high school. The interaction with village people revealed that they are not much satisfied with the level of education their children are provided in the schools. In both the villages the disgruntlement about careless attitude of teachers was obvious. Velaskar (1990:136) broadly classified all existing schools into a four-tiered system. The top tier constitutes the elite schools which include the exclusive public schools and the unaided private schools. The fees are high, rendering them an exclusive preserve of the upper classes. The next layer comprises government central schools and 'good' quality private aided schools. The third tier includes private schools, aided or unaided, of average or indifferent quality. Both types cater largely to the upper middle, middle, and increasingly the lower middle strata of society. Finally, there is a stratum of provincial or regional government/local body schools that is meant to cater to the poorer segments. With exceptions, the schools in this last category are considered to be 'inferior' in quality to the private schools.

Table 1: Problems of Government School

Caste	Undisciplined Atmosphere	Students and Teacher both Remain Absent	No Study	Biases and Differentiation with students
Upper Caste	0	6	36	0
Middle Caste	0	0	18	0
Lower Caste	1	2	41	14
Muslims	0	0	2	0
<i>Note: Data represents only those respondents where this was applicable</i>				

The above data shows that what has been the most negative point about government schools is that there is no teaching atmosphere in the schools as teachers are not interested in teaching. Not only this some lower castes complained that their children were not treated on equal grounds in the schools and teachers avoided their children. Some complained that lower caste children were given less food in comparison to other castes. It was observed that teachers of the school maintain distance from lower caste students and those teachers who himself belong to lower castes treated the children in better way in comparison to upper caste teachers. Seventeen lower caste respondents told that they do not send their children in privately run schools as firstly they are unable to afford the high fees required by these schools and secondly they require more time and regular attendance in case of which their children will not be able to help in earning money by assisting them in their work. This reflects that the structural conditions (mainly class and caste) of lower castes are such that they are unable to send their children in private schools and in government schools because of lackadaisical attitude of teachers they are deprived from quality education.

Mid-Day Meal and Unequal Behavior

The offer of social services has emerged as a motivation and has contributed to a certain extent in increasing the number of attendance in schools. This is applicable to certain extent in other countries of the world as well. But on the other hand these social services have also contributed in increasing inequality born out of these social services. While analyzing the educational inequality

in the schools of Brazil, De Castrol and Menezes (2008:90) mention that for some children, school meals are the only regular meals they receive in a given day offering school meals is a factor that fosters inclusion because students come to school to eat. But at the very same time the administrative effort to offer meals at school reduces the time and resources that would otherwise be invested in educational services. The same thing is happening in India with wide range of mid day meal programmes focusing more on serving food to school children rather than providing quality education at the same time.

Except this even in serving mid day meal students are treated on unequal grounds. In Bharthipur village there are two cook in both primary and junior high schools. Krishan Kumari belongs to middle caste and another cook Shanti belongs to lower caste. As the first cook is from middle caste (*Kaharin*) she has been entrusted the cooking work and the woman who belongs to lower caste (*Pasi*) is employed to clean the utensils. This adjustment was done as the teachers of the schools denied to eat the food cooked by a lower caste even the parents of upper caste did not like that their children should eat the food cooked by a lower caste woman. The school provides plates to students and a person to clean them but most of the students clean their respective plates after eating mid day meals and every caste student have separate places to put their plates. This is done to avoid mixing of plates of different caste students as majority of children belong to lower castes. Boys and girls are made to sit at different places not only during their classes but also while taking mid-day-meal. Serving mid day meal in schools on one hand have included children in education by attracting them on the other hand it has also excluded them from quality education as well by treating them on unequal grounds. De Castrol and Menezes (2008:123) highlight educational inequality in Brazilian schools. According to him the policies of providing school meals and transport for children made access to education possible to a large number of poor children, but offering the services had a negative effect on the quality of education offered by the system. These two underfunded policies functioned as a palliative to the real problem of poverty and exclusion.

Inequality in Educational Opportunity

Lack of trained and professional faculty in government run village schools is another problem. The schools located in a single village can contribute in unequal education if one school is run by trained teachers and another by single teacher. In Lalmankheda which is underdeveloped village there are only three teachers to handle five classes and most of the time all students are made to sit together and taught jointly without keeping in mind the level of imparting knowledge in different sections. On the other hand in Bharthipur the school is in a bit better position.

In most modern countries there is a high direct relationship between educational attainments and occupational attainments. But in India this direct relationship does not hold good. We find in India a direct relationship between caste and educational attainments on the one hand, and caste and occupational attainments on the other, resulting in no direct relationship between education and occupation (Tilak 1978:424). In the primary school there were 105 children enrolled which was reduced to 57 in 2018. In the last few years the number of private schools has increased, in one kilometre area there are at least three schools. Every parent who is able to afford private education prefers to send their children in those rather than government schools. Because of these reasons the number of students has decreased in government schools.

The poor performance of the schools is not because of infrastructural lacunas rather people's conception about government schools and their subsequent behaviour is also the main cause behind it. Men respond not only to the objective features of a situation, but also, and at times primarily, to the meaning this situation has for them and once they have assigned some meaning to

the situation their consequent behaviour and some of the consequences of that behaviour are determined by the ascribed meaning (Merton 1948:194). The school teachers opined that we cannot compete with private schools as majority of children is from lower castes and one cannot make them bright like upper caste children even if one does his best. What is subjectively thought by the teachers is objectively reproduced by them by putting lesser efforts on their parts resulting in low performance of lower caste students. This meaning which the school teachers are providing to the low performance of the students becomes real in consequence as they put less efforts to teach them and consider that their efforts will go in squander even if they do their best to teach them. Not only this village people have a clear cut view that private schools are much better than government run schools and if their children perform poor it is not their fault rather it just a consequence of school. In the same family son is enrolled in the private school and daughter is in government school, though intellectually daughter may be better but just because of their preconceived notion of school she is destined to opt arts stream on the other hand her brother opts science as girls are not supposed to understand science well .

When asked about the reason of opting different streams the most common answer the researcher got was that arts is better for girls and they cannot handle science while boys are not meant to study arts as it's a subject for those who are poor in study. Those boys who had opted arts was just because their parents' thought they are not good in study so they cannot study science.

Even lower castes are excluded from school management. In the villages the government schools have a management committee which consists of parents of the children. The committee has one president, vice-president and other members. The selection of these is done by the parents itself in the presence of village Panchayt members, ANM, Lekhpal, village head and all teachers of the school. After every two years this committee is changed and new members are elected. Though most of the children belong to lower castes but the president is always from upper caste reflecting a dominance of upper caste people in school management and lower castes hold an unequal position in rural society.

Gender Inequality in Education

Gender inequality in education is an unrelenting problem in Indian society, especially for girls from rural areas and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Gender inequality in education is a persistent problem in Indian society, especially for girls from rural areas and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In India, despite improvements in educational access over the past several decades, social background is still found to be associated with learning outcomes. Girls' under-enrolment in private schools is of special concern given that private schools and government schools may differ in educational quality and outcomes. The number of girls is always higher in government school because parents do not want to invest much on girls education on the other hand they afford high expenses for their boys by sending them in private schools. Desai et al. (2010) considers that Gender differences in educational outcomes are also related to community and family attitudes regarding the education of girls. These attitudes are embedded in cultural norms and are influenced

by marriage and kinship patterns which may lead parents to invest more emotional and financial resources in educating sons rather than daughters (White et al. 2015).

Issues of gender inequality in schools within developing countries have been gaining increased attention globally over the last three decades, especially since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. Janigan (2008:125) mentions that school factors also act as barriers to girls' education. Quoting Kelly (1984) he says, making schools available to women needs to be distinguished from making them accessible to women. Barriers within school range from curricular issues such as gender stereotyping in textbooks, and the effects of the "hidden curriculum" in the form of teachers' negative attitudes towards female students, to issues of personal security and comfort in the classroom and on the journey to and from school. Rural India is still facing these problems when it comes to educate girls.

Table 2: Number of Girls and Boys Enrolled in Government Primary School in Bharthipur

Class	Boy's Caste					Girl's Caste				
	Upper	Middle	Lower	Minorities	Total	Upper	Middle	Lower	Minorities	Total
1	-	-	01	-	01	-	-	-	-	01
2	-	02	03	-	05	-	-	10	-	15
3	01	01	02	-	04	-	01	06	-	11
4	-	01	07	-	08	-	01	06	-	15
5	-	-	05	-	05	-	01	01	-	07
Total	01	04	18	-	23	-	03	23	-	49

The number of students in both the government schools is very less in comparison to the village population of school going children. Mostly village people who can afford private schooling do not send their children in government schools. In both the schools majority of children enrolled are from poor family background. Interestingly from Muslim community only one girl is enrolled in the schools. The number of boys is less than the number of girls enrolled in schools. This fact is common in both the villages irrespective of their caste. In Lalman Kheda there is only one government primary school but in the matter of enrolment ratio of boys and girls of Lalman Kheda village is no more different. The number of students enrolled in school is higher mainly because of poor economic condition of their parents as they are not capable to afford private education of their children. Not a single middle caste child is enrolled in the village school and only two girls from upper caste study in the village school. Which reflects both caste and gender inequality in education.