

## ANDRAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIA

\**Queen Hlakanyane,*

\* Shivaji University, Kolhapur (416004) (Maharashtra)

### Abstract:

NEP 2020 promotes democracy in all faculties in education including those of adult learning and lifelong learning. In so doing, the policy advocates for equity and total inclusion. However, good as it may sound, achieving equity and total inclusion are end goals that have to be achieved through some challenging proceedings, dealings and endeavours in a nation grounded in the believe of caste system. The proceedings, endeavours and dealings to achieving total inclusion and equity in education have not been explicitly elaborated in the policy document hence leaving room and opportunity for scholars, researchers, etc to make a contribution. For this reason, this paper intends to analyse how human rights promotion could be utilised as a catalyst to promote the six principles of andragogy in the context of the oppressed lower caste students in high education institutions (HEI) in India. The paper does so by evaluating secondary literature on; the complexities surrounding the status of lower caste discriminations in high education institutions in India. It tries to bring to light how low caste students are discriminated in some high education institutions in India making it difficult to excel and to complete their studies successfully. The paper concludes that human rights promotion could be used in achieving andragogical teaching and learning.

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### Introduction:

Approaching an adult in different scenarios will not be similar as approaching children. Educators therefore, need to use particular teaching and learning methods appropriate for adults learning and teaching. Fortunately, Malcom Knowles discovered a theory that could assist educators and adult learners to successfully achieve the teaching and learning process. As an end goal of the principles of andragogy, adults should be able to understand the reasons behind learning particular objective, thus, somehow adults need to be involved in planning and evaluating their teaching and learning instructions (Knowles M, 1984). Adult learners have a need to direct themselves and are eager to discover new things. They are not interested in memorisation since their desire and motivation to learn becomes driven by their career and a need to solve particular problems in the society, however, the road is not a smooth one for lower caste students.

India owns an intact caste system which has practices that are still evidently prevalent in high education institutions although it should be appreciated that there is a remarkable growth in higher education in the past thirty years. Issues of caste and equity remain unaddressed (Pathania & Tierney, 2018). Literature and studies on the subject matter is totally scarce and studies based on caste discrimination in HEIs remain an under-researched topic. Empirical evidence shows high drop-out rates hence low literacy rate among low caste groups. Although the government of India is trying to achieve total inclusion and equity of low caste groups through

positive discrimination, all the learning processes take place in high education institutions hence these are the same institutions that will determine the completion of the lower caste students' studies. The Quota Policy cannot be considered a final step to achieving success in the inclusion of lower caste students in HEIs. What matters is for HIEs to strive to keep a 100% retention rate of lower caste students. High education institutions need to be well equipped with all the necessary conditions favourable enough to accommodate the lower caste students in order for them to successfully complete their studies. Recent empirical evidence reveals discrimination, manipulation and abuse of low caste students in some universities. It is not solely about their enrolment; it is about the treatment they experience in these learning institutions pertaining the teaching and their learning.

NEP 2020 emphasises a holistic development of adult learners through engaging adult teaching methods that promote independent learning. It emphasises high quality teaching methods where learners need to learn through experiences. NEP 2020 emphasises applied examinations and a development of dimensions that will encourage good psycho-social well-being, good health and reasonable ethical grounding. It advocates for a strong system that supports learning and cares for students' learning. In general terms, NEP alludes for the promotion of human rights of the learner under the support of very strong and competent leadership (Development, 2020). If it's the case, the question is; practically and in reality, are lower caste students' rights promoted to fully accommodate andragogy principles? Is leadership involved in the education of adult learning competent enough to promote lower caste learners' rights?

#### **Literature review:**

#### **The six principles of andragogy:**

##### **1. The need-to-know reasons for learning:**

Adults are likely to be willing to learn when reasons behind learning a particular subject or activity is explained. They demand an explanation of the benefits of partaking a particular learning activity. The benefits could be personal growth, professional development or a contribution they think they will make through participating in that learning activity.

##### **2. The need to build self-experience:**

Adult learners have already gained experience in different life dimensions. For this reason, whatever experience it may be, their learning should be connected or attached to it. Experiences become a foundation of their learning. When their experiences are incorporated with their learning, they become inspired or motivated.

##### **3. The need to feel responsible for their learning:**

When adults are given the independence to control their learning, they become responsible for directing themselves towards achieving that objective that they know they need to achieve in learning. In other words, they become ready to take accountability and responsibility.

##### **4. Willing to learn when the targeted objective is intended to solve a particular problem or issue:**

Adults learn best when an objective or training is intended at solving a particular problem. They get motivated when they possess an aim or a self-directed goal which they intend to achieve. There is increase in motivation for adults when they own a positive reason to learn.

### **5. Desiring problem focused learning or training:**

Adult learners desire to learn particular skills and knowledge in order to discover a particular problem. They become motivated to learn when they realise that the training will assist them to solve a particular problem. In this case, the educator's role is to assist adult learners to identify the problem that will be solved through the knowledge and skills acquired from the training. Consequently, it will assist adult learners focus on that particular training.

### **6. Learning as a result of intrinsic motivation:**

Adult learners are internally rather than externally motivated to train. In this regard, the role of educators is to discover the adult learners' intrinsic motivators. Adults are motivated to learn things that will develop them professionally or make them feel better. Self-intrinsic motivation lasts longer in an adult learner than extrinsic motivation (Knowles M, 1984).

### **A brief summary of the caste system in India:**

The Indian caste system is a complicated aspect to understand. The strong Indian caste system which can be traced from 3000 years ago can be defined as a group of indigenous people whose associates is hereditary and share a particular common name, occupy a particular profession and own a particular origin (Pathania & Tierney, 2018). Originally, the Hindu caste system is divided into four major groups namely; believed to be the superiors, are first the *Brahmins* who are known to be the teachers and the priests. The *Kshatriyas* who are regarded as the warriors follow the *Brahmins* in the hierarchy then the *Vaisyas* who are the merchants, moneylenders and traders. Lastly in the hierarchy are the *Shudras*, who follow the *Vaisyas*. The *Shudras* occupy the lowest position in the hierarchy and are expected to serve the first three groups and occupy the lowest paying jobs. Outside the four major group are the *Ati Shudras* who are known as the untouchables. They are treated like slaves and expected to do the dirtiest work in the society (Pathania & Tierney, 2018). The lower castes are categorised thus; the *Shudras* as Other Backward Caste (OBC), the *Dalits* as the Scheduled Caste (SC) and the *Tribals* and the Scheduled Tribes (ST) by the constitution of India. The major reason for this social stratification is the belief that the lowest category in the hierarchy might pollute the ones in the upper position in the hierarchy thus the issue of cleanliness and pollution.

### **Human rights and the status of human right regarding lower caste students in tertiary education in India:**

Practices of casteism are altogether human violation violations. Although the Government of India condemns casteism in its constitution; cultural, political, legal, economic and social factors still influence human rights violation in India (Qian, 2020). Goonesekere (2014) argues that weak institutions and stereotypic gender relations are common factors that hinder progress in the promotion of human rights. For us to achieve equality in the society, we need a new model of developmental and legal actions. The new initiatives should be in a position to link social policies, resource allotment as well as promote change in attitude (Goonesekere, 2014). NEP 2020 does not explicitly stipulate what exactly will be done to assure that all institutions of Higher Education learning are in a good position to keep lower caste students for a successful completion of their studies. This gap has given room for many institutions in India to freely discriminate and manipulate lower caste students in their institutions.

In 1948, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly advocating for a novel humanistic order to facilitate and nurture all human beings across the globe to live in dignity which India adopted in 1950. In general, the Declaration indicates the four freedoms thus; freedom of expression, freedom from want, freedom of faith and freedom from fear (Landman & Carvalho, 2009). All governments therefore, including the Government of India are mandated to create and maintain favourable conditions under which all citizens would enjoy freedoms and rights including those of learning in all aspects as set forth in the declaration. Generally, the rights were categorised thus; personal dignity rights, political rights, social rights and due process rights. This implicates that lower caste students have full rights to know reasons for learning a particular subject. In fact, they have the right to choose what they want to study. This should not end with a choice, rather, institutions need to assure that they support their rights of learning through various means. Lower caste students have a right to further their studies and as well make a contribution in solving problems in their societies like everyone else. Again, all institutions should promote this right.

#### **Casteism in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in India:**

Discrimination against lower caste group people can be categorised in 3 forms namely institutional, individual and cultural (Sue *et al.*, 2007a as cited in Rathod 2017). Individual casteism can be described as any intentional, conscious and direct action done by an individual to a member or members of the lower caste group. At individual level, it can be done through actions like avoiding any form of physical contact by upper caste people, preventing upper caste people to marry lower caste people, preventing lower caste people to live in the same location with upper caste people etc. Cultural casteism is when lower caste people are being exploited through various forms of cultural practices. Lastly casteism in high institutions can be described as any proceedings, practice or procedure, structure, rule or policy in any education, business legal, religious, educational etc whose actions and decisions encourage unethical acts against lower cast people in order to gain financial favours or any other forms of favour at the expense of violating the rights of lower caste groups (Sue *et al.*, 2007a as cited in Rathod 2017).

#### **How casteism hampers the development of andragogical principles amongst lower caste students:**

Forms of behavioural discrimination of lower caste students' groups by upper caste people were termed as microaggressions by Sue *et al.* (2007a). He developed a model to explain the types of behaviour that explain the forms of behaviour that can be demonstrated as actions by upper caste individuals to lower caste individuals, especially those that are in authority in learning institutions. This can be a teacher, administrator or faculty member of an upper caste group discriminating a lower caste student in the same institution. Dr. Sue posits that these microaggressions could be termed and explained follows; microinsults, microassaults and microvalidations.

Microinsults are rude behaviours and insults directed to a lower caste student in order to demean, disrespect or humiliate them. This has happened in many incidents; where high caste teachers and students insulted a lower caste student. Some students have become introverted since they face humiliation in front of other students. It has led to lack self-esteem which has resulted in some lacking confidence in making major decisions in their lives that could have benefited them positively. If teachers believe in casteism and practice it in their classrooms, lower caste students will not excel in their studies since such teachers have the power and authority over the

lower caste student and may abuse their authority to make the student fail. This right to learn of the lower caste student will be violated. Microassaults are violent attacks thus verbal or non-verbal directed to a lower caste person which include name calling and others done purposefully to discriminate the victim. Microvalidations are often done by the perpetrator which include verbal utterances or actions that rule out the psychological feelings and thinking of a lower caste student. If a teacher believes that a lower caste student cannot be intelligent or deserves to fail, there might be unfair allocation of marks by that particular teacher. In this case, lower caste students need to agree to the marks they have been allocated and the teachers always need to explain how the student came to get that particular mark. In case the teacher fails to do so, there needs to be some measures taken for fair solution to the problem. Ascription of intelligence is when an upper caste person belittles the intelligence of a lower caste person and accords them a certain level of limited intelligence for their low caste and treating them lesser than other students in the group and displaying bad communication styles pretending that caste actions are non-existent or does not recognise them; the person who belongs to the high caste system denying actions and their casteism conducts.

#### **Evident examples of discrimination among lower caste students in HEIs:**

According to a very recent study in 2015-2016 gross enrolment in higher education, only 11,68% for scheduled caste and 4,14% scheduled tribes constituted to the gross. The literacy rate for ST is 59% and that of the SC is 66.1% compared to the 73% of the general. The literacy rate for ST adults is 51.9% compared to 69% for all in 2011 (Kanmony, 2022). In spite of the Government of India having adopted the positive discrimination strategy, the *Tribals* and the *Dalits* have not attained much in the field of education as compared to the less privileged upper caste people and the underprivileged Brahmins (Kanmony, 2022)

There have been some instances in particular higher education institutions where lower caste students, especially the *Dalits*, they experienced some severe forms of discrimination. In their studies, while making some observations, an unnamed university in India, Pathania and Tierney (2018) found that since the *Dalits* had been accommodated in the university through a reservation they were looked upon by administration, faculty and their own classmates. Those students developed low self-esteem and become introverted as a result. The reservation category becomes a stigma by the general category and the general category consider themselves superior over the reservation category. Instead of appreciating the government's efforts and those students for honouring the government's offer, they look at them as students who benefit from a charity. In their studies, Tierney et al. (2019) found that lower caste students in some university lack social networks that deprive them of social capital creation. Additionally, efforts by institutions to create social capital for low caste students is low.

A study listed names of students that died by committing suicide as a result of discrimination in different higher education across India. The study questions if *Dalits* are not human enough like any other human-being, is it not that they deserve honour, dignity, integrity and respect like all other human beings? (*A Study on the Crucial Suicides of Dalit Scholars in Higher Education of Caste Discrimination*, 2016). A Non-Governmental Organisation known as Insight Foundation reported a well detailed investigation on seventeen suicide cases in 2005 to 2012. Findings were that the *Dalits* faced some discrimination, harassment and intimidation by high caste peers, administration and faculty members. Of all the cases, only one out of all the seventeen left a suicide

note (Rathod, 2017). Another official report was investigated by Thorat Committee (2007) which was appointed by the Government of India Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry to conduct an investigation in all on discrimination claims that were apparently existing in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). The committee entirely posited that there was prevalent discrimination against low caste students in the institution. One of the forms of discrimination reported by around 72% of the ST and SC happened in the classroom. Around 76% of the participants posited that they were asked to disclose their caste background and 88% reported that they experienced various forms of social isolation (Rathod, 2017).

At Hyderabad Central University (HCU), an investigation was done by Avenshi Law Committee for rustinating 10 Dalit Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA) office bearers. Findings were that Dalit students experienced harassment, alienation, exclusion and segregation by administration, faculty members and students from higher castes. The same committee found and reported that the Dalit students at the same university encountered microaggressions in hostel, classrooms and social relationships.

In 2016, at HPU a Dalit PhD student leader; Rohith Vemula committed suicide. The student was advocating for the Dalit students' rights in the same university. He had to experienced persecutions like suspension from the university for a period of a semester, expulsion from hostel from the authorities for advocating for social justice for the Dalit students and faced harassment of unnecessary investigation (Henry, 2016 as cited in Rathod, 2017). The Ministry of Human Resource Development disregarded the case as a caste discrimination case. The argument however is; if the government of India is mandated at eliminating caste-based discrimination in high level institutions, why would it dismiss the findings from investigations properly done and reported? Another PhD student; Senthil Kumar committed suicide since he faced discrimination to the extent of not being allocated a supervisor. When committee was appointed to investigate the university, they found that the School of Physics was vigorously discriminating against the interest of the *Tribal* and *Dalit* students. In some universities *Dalit* students' sits are separated from the higher caste sits while sitting for entrance examinations (Neelakandan & Patil, 2012).

#### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, all institutions, especially the government should promote lower caste students' rights through different programs, initiatives, supplementary policies and leadership. Social institutions need to safeguard the rights of lower caste students through policies that focus on promoting their rights in all aspects.

#### **Recommendations:**

- A nation-wide investigation on the causes of low enrolment rates and high dropout rates needs to be conducted.
- A study to find if there is significant relationship between lower caste students and dropout rate.
- A comparative study on how different institutions across India treat lower caste students.
- Benchmarking in other countries that have achieved elimination of social issues like racism.
- Placement of lower caste people in higher positions in HEIs, example Vice Chancellors
- A national policy deduced from the theory of microaggression which all universities will have to adopt, own and use to evaluate their status concerning lower caste students' discrimination.

- Semester ending report on lower caste discrimination by a lower caste students' representative from the university.
- Intensify laws on lower caste students' discriminating institutions.

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