

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF MARGINALIZED SECTIONS AS A CHALLENGE IN TRANSFORMING INDIA THROUGH THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION

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Introduction:

India, the world's largest democracy, has a rich historical legacy in education. Ancient centres of learning such as Takshashila and Nalanda once attracted scholars from across the globe, symbolizing India's early engagement with internationalized education. However, the contemporary educational landscape in India is shaped not only by its aspirations for global integration but also by enduring social hierarchies rooted in the caste system and other forms of structural marginalization. Marginalized sections of Indian society comprising Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis), religious minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community continue to face systemic barriers in accessing quality education, thereby hindering their participation in the process of internationalization and broader national transformation.

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Historical and Socio-Economic Context of Marginalization:

The caste system, particularly the *varnashrama* framework, institutionalized exclusion and continues to manifest in contemporary forms of social and economic discrimination. Despite constitutional safeguards post-independence, including the abolition of untouchability and provisions for affirmative action, these communities remain socio-economically disadvantaged.

- **Scheduled Castes (SCs):** Constituting around 16% of the population (Census 2011), Dalits have historically been excluded from the mainstream due to untouchability and caste-based discrimination. Although legal protections exist, social and economic deprivation persists, leading to significant barriers in accessing quality education.
- **Scheduled Tribes (STs):** Representing approximately 8% of the population, Adivasis often inhabit remote and forested regions. They face forced displacement due to development projects, loss of traditional livelihoods, poor healthcare, and limited educational infrastructure, further isolating them from mainstream educational opportunities.
- **Religious Minorities:** Muslims, the largest religious minority (around 14%), along with Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis, experience social and economic exclusion. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) highlighted the educational and economic backwardness of Muslims, with lower representation in salaried jobs and public services, and frequent exposure to communal violence.

- **Women:** Despite comprising nearly 50% of the population, women face entrenched gender discrimination in education, employment, and political participation. Issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, dowry, and child marriage continue to hinder their advancement. Dalit and Adivasi women are particularly vulnerable to intersectional oppression.
- **Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and LGBTQ+ Communities:** Estimated at 5 to 8% of the population, PwDs face societal stigma and limited access to education, healthcare, and employment. Despite legislative frameworks like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), implementation gaps remain. LGBTQ+ individuals continue to encounter discrimination across all sectors of life.

Reports from the National Health Survey, the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), and NITI Aayog consistently reveal disparities in literacy, school retention, and labour force participation among marginalized groups. High dropout rates, especially at the secondary level, and limited access to health and employment services underscore the systemic neglect of these communities.

Government Efforts to Uplift Marginalized Communities:

The Indian Constitution provides a robust framework for safeguarding the rights of marginalized communities through Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. Key constitutional guarantees include the right to equality (Article 14), prohibition of discrimination (Article 15), abolition of untouchability (Article 17), and the promotion of educational and economic interests of weaker sections (Article 46).

To operationalize these principles, both the central and state governments have implemented various affirmative action policies, including reservations in education, public employment, and political representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Additionally, multiple welfare schemes have been launched targeting education, skill development, housing, health care, and livelihood support for these communities.

Some prominent initiatives include:

- Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships for SC/ST/OBC and minority students.
- National Fellowship and Scholarship for Higher Education of SC and ST students.
- Stand-Up India and Startup India schemes promoting entrepreneurship among disadvantaged groups.
- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, aimed at addressing gender disparities in education.
- National Action Plan for Skill Development of Persons with Disabilities and Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan for greater accessibility.

However, despite these policy frameworks and programmatic interventions, implementation remains inconsistent and inadequate. Social prejudices and systemic discrimination, especially within administrative structures and educational institutions, continue to impede the effectiveness of these measures. Corruption, lack of accountability, and poor outreach further dilute the intended impact of these welfare schemes.

Challenges to Internationalization of Education in India: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to globalize Indian education through international collaborations and the promotion of a globally competitive workforce. However, without addressing the socio-economic barriers faced by marginalized communities, the

internationalization of education risks deepening existing inequalities.

1. Access and Equity

International education opportunities, whether in premier domestic institutions or abroad remain prohibitively expensive for students from marginalized backgrounds. Inadequate access to scholarships, digital infrastructure, and career guidance exacerbates exclusion. Moreover, families struggling with poverty often prioritize immediate employment over long-term educational investment.

2. Participation Gap in Global Mobility

Students from privileged backgrounds disproportionately benefit from study-abroad programs and international exchange opportunities. Even when scholarships are available, the high cost of living abroad remains unaffordable for marginalized students. Furthermore, institutions serving these communities often lack the infrastructure and visibility needed to participate in global partnerships.

3. Unequal Preparedness

Indian education is marked by stark disparities in quality and language instruction. Students from marginalized backgrounds often lack the academic preparedness, English language proficiency, and digital literacy required to succeed in international programs. This limits their ability to engage meaningfully with global educational opportunities.

4. Risk of a Two-Tier System

The push towards internationalization may create a divide between elite, globally connected institutions and under-resourced colleges serving marginalized populations. Such stratification undermines the goal of equitable transformation by consolidating privilege within already advantaged groups.

5. Curriculum Relevance and Inclusivity

Globalized curricula may prioritize Western epistemologies, sidelining indigenous knowledge systems and cultural contexts that are vital to marginalized communities. An inclusive curriculum must recognize and integrate diverse perspectives to ensure meaningful engagement for all learners.

6. Resource Allocation

Significant investment in elite institutions for global recognition may divert funds from foundational improvements in higher education access and quality. Marginalized communities, who require the most support, are thus further marginalized in terms of resource distribution.

7. Unequal Distribution of Benefits

The outcomes of internationalization—such as improved skills, global networks, and research outputs—may not percolate to the grassroots level. These risks skewing national development in favor of privileged groups while neglecting the specific needs of marginalized communities.

Conclusion:

The socio-economic status of India's marginalized sections presents a critical challenge to the equitable realization of the internationalization of education. Without targeted interventions—such as fully-funded scholarships, digital inclusion strategies, inclusive curriculum design, and institutional support—

internationalization may reinforce existing inequalities. A just and inclusive approach is essential to ensure that all sections of society can contribute to and benefit from India's transformation into a global knowledge economy.

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