

Awareness of Education and Scheduled Caste: A Case Study

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Abstract: A trend has emerged of not defining education as a "human right" anymore, but of rather calling it a "human need". The Scheduled Castes are historically disadvantaged people who are given express recognition in the Constitution of India. During the period of British rule in the Indian sub-continent they were known as the Depressed Class. The caste system has created and sustained an unequal opportunity structure, which is anathema to the egalitarian principles which are the basis of a modern democratic society. What is worse, it intensifies and perpetuates the sufferings and servitude of disadvantaged caste class groups by reducing their access to development benefits vis-a-vis the higher caste class groups. The right to education originates from the apparent motion that it is obligatory for the state to provide education to its citizens. The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2010 describes the modalities having the provision for free and compulsory education for children between 6 to 14 years under Article 21A of the Indian constitution. This Act makes education as fundamental right of every child enforceable by law. Education is empowerment for socio-economic mobility, an instrument for reducing socio-economic inequalities, and equipment to trigger growth and development. In India, the total literacy rate is 74.04%. The male literacy rate is 82.14% and the female literacy rate is 65.46%. The literacy rate of Scheduled Caste males is 73.0% and that of the female is 52.1%. The study was conducted at Ramchandrapur village of Bangaon Sub-Division of North 24 Parganas covering both the sexes of the Scheduled Castes to understand the gender disparity, if any, in the studied villages. The objective of the study is to understand Right to Education and Right to Equality of Scheduled Caste, to study the nature and level of education of Scheduled Caste, particularly examining the disparity of education, if any, and to study educational rights and awareness about the rights among the Scheduled Caste.

Key words: Scheduled Caste, Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2010, human right.

Introduction

Education is both a human right and a vital means of promoting peace and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms generally. If it is potential to contribute towards

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building a more peaceful world is to be realized, education must be made universally available and equally accessible to all. The challenge is daunting. Education has an immense impact on the human society. One can safely assume that a person is not in the proper sense till he is educated. It trains the human mind to think and take the right decision. In other words, man becomes a rational animal when he is educated. It is universally accepted that education empowers the people for the full development of human personality, strengthens the respect for human rights, and helps to overcome exploitations and traditional inequalities of caste, class and gender. In India, the total literacy rate is 74.04%. The male literacy rate is 82.14% and the female literacy rate is 65.46%. The literacy rate in West Bengal is 77.1 %, with the male literacy rate is 82.7% and the female literacy rate is 71.2% (Census of India, 2011). The literacy rate of Scheduled Caste males is 73.0% and that of the female is 52.1%.(Government of India, National Sample Survey Organisation, Primary Data, 2009-2010). The Scheduled Castes (SC) are among the most socially and educationally disadvantaged groups in India. Scheduled Castes mostly women of the two communities have different histories of social and economic deprivation, and the underlying causes of their educational marginalization are also strikingly distinct.

The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2010 originates from the apparent motion that it is obligatory for the state to provide education to its citizens. The core of the right to education relates to its substance, which differs from education itself. Effective and transformative education should be the result of the exercise of the right to education, which is a universal human right.

The literature indicates that the term “education” has long been with mankind (Volio, 1979), but the notion of education as a fundamental human right is a relatively new concept (Huberman, 1979). Education became a matter of public concern and state responsibility only with the emergence of secular state. The right to education emerged rather belatedly in the history of civil liberties, despite its importance (Volio, 1979). Tagore viewed education as “a right which enables individuals and communities to act on reflection”. Education has its functionalism in almost all sphere of life. Its signification can never be marginalised. An educated society prepares the present generation for a bright future and enables the individual to galvanise the capacity of collective. Countries that have expanded opportunities for women and girls in education and work in recent decades have largely achieved greater prosperity and moderated population growth while limiting child mortality and achieving social progress for all, Sen said. “These greater opportunities and freedoms...have had truly astonishing results,” he said. “There is an overwhelming need to pay attention to the needs of girls and women” (Sen, 2012).It also adds tremendous value to society at the macro level. For Scheduled Castes, access to education has been a

focal point in their struggle for equity and social justice. Movements to abolish the caste system and end discrimination have always proposed education as the primary means to overcome caste oppression (Omvedt, 1993). Almost 113 million children, 60% of whom are girls have no access to education and at least 880 million adults are non-literate of whom majority are women (Khare, 1991). Availability is the first component of the right to education where “parents need to be educated as to the importance of the role of education”. There is compelling evidence that there is a strong bond between a woman’s education, her employment and income. While granting equality of rights to men and women in the polity, Indian society still accepts a distinction in the roles and spheres of activities of men and women. The social restrictions on women are largely derived from the religious conceptions and practices of woman’s basic characteristics, her ascribed ‘virtues’ and ‘vices’, and the stereotypes regarding her capacities and limitations (Majumder *et al*, 1983).

Over the last few decades, development in India has served to enhance the opportunities of many upper-class, urban women. These women now have greater access to education and employment, and as a result, are able to participate in the economy on a more equal basis with men (Karlekar *et al*, 1993). We live in a world in which women living in poverty face gross inequalities and injustice from birth to death. From poor education to poor nutrition to vulnerable and low pay employment, the sequence of discrimination that a woman may suffer during her entire life is unacceptable but all too common. Generalising from these privileged women to the larger female population, however, is quite misleading. The bulk of the female population in India still suffers from impoverishment. Estimates suggest that as many as 80 percent of the women in India live at or below a minimal subsistence level (Mukhopadhyay, 1984). The most extreme deprivation exists among women in the Scheduled Caste and Tribe populations; group’s designated as particularly disadvantaged in the Indian Constitution. The minority group status of these women interacts with India’s patriarchal culture to produce deplorable living conditions (Ghandially 1988). These ‘doubly disadvantaged’ women strive not for gender equality, but for their very survival (Mukhopadhyay, 1984). The extent of gender inequality in the Scheduled Caste and Tribe population of India is best understood in the context of both history, and the larger society. The illustrious sons of the soil rightly indicated that the root cause of the low status of women lay in the fact that they were deprived of all opportunities of education and that their ignorance and superstitions would only retard the progress of the nation further (Majumder *et al*, 1983).

Table 1: Table showing educational disparity between Scheduled Caste/ General population in India

Year	Scheduled Caste			General		
	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
1961	16.96	3.29	10.27	40.40	15.35	28.30
1971	22.36	6.44	14.67	45.96	21.97	34.45
1981	31.12	10.93	21.38	56.38	29.76	43.57
1991	49.91	23.76	37.41	64.13	39.29	52.21
2001	66.64	41.90	54.69	75.26	53.67	64.84

Though Right to Education has been accepted nationally and internationally but how much of these provisions are successful in enhancing educational facility still remains a question. Any detailed investigation of the empirical situation brings out the need to go well beyond the SC-ST characterization of social disadvantage to taking note of the historically conditioned economic and social disadvantages of these families (Sen, 2009).

Scope of the Study

Caste based discrimination continues to be an influential factor in the low educational achievement of Scheduled Caste groups, despite governmental programme that selectively targets to aid children from these communities. The Study intends to explore the state of education and the awareness of the disadvantaged groups towards right to education as a fundamental human right with special reference to Right to Education Act 2010. After reviewing the literature, it is noted that though different research works have been carried out on access to education or oppression of the caste and tribe and so on but the idea to study state of education, gender discrimination and more importantly the awareness about right to education as a fundamental human right are not addressed as per to the best of my knowledge. This may be due to the fact that the right to education act is quiet a new phenomenon and thus not have been addressed as it should have been.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to understand Right to Education of Scheduled Caste, particularly examining the disparity of education, if any, and to study educational rights and awareness about the rights among the Scheduled Caste.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Bangaon, Subdivision of the North 24 Parganas district in the state of West Bengal under Gopalnagar Panchayet I. Ramchandrapur has been selected on the basis of the fact that it is a multi-ethnic village with scheduled caste population residing more. Ramchandrapur is a small village with a total population of 1889, where the male population was 797 and female 755 belonging to Scheduled Caste population. The sex ratio was 947 in the area with 116 families.

Rural India is now the centre of attraction to all who want to focus their attention on the process of change that has been brought to bear upon the life and living of the people. One such place of interest in my study has been a rural village, in Bangaon, which is in North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Bangaon has a population of about 102,163 according to the 2011 census. From Bangon Subdivision, Ramchandrapur of Gopalnagar Panchayet I was selected for the study. Being a place closer to the border many have migrated to this place especially the Scheduled Caste, mostly from Bangladesh.

The tools of primary data collection included pre tested household schedules, observation, in depth interviews and case studies. The participants of both the sexes of the studied villages have been selected through purposive sampling after taking their full consent. The household schedules provided the demographic, socio-economic and awareness level of the participants of the studied villages. The household schedules included name, age, sex, marital status, age at marriage, enrollment rate and attendance, level of education, dropout rate and awareness towards education.

Table 2: Total population at Ramchandrapur Village

Total communities	No. of family	Male	%	Female	%	Total population
Scheduled caste	116	797	42.19	755	39.97	1552
Muslim	21	86	4.55	91	4.82	177
OBC	14	59	3.12	40	2.12	99
General	8	24	1.27	37	1.99	61
Total	159		51.14		48.86	1889

Ramchandrapur is also a small village with a total population of 1889, where the male population is 797 (51.35%) and female 755 (48.65%) of the Scheduled Caste population. The concentration of Scheduled Caste is more in this area as the total percentage of Scheduled Caste is more in the North 24 Parganas with Namasudra.

The literacy rate of the Scheduled Caste along the years is visible in the rural areas of India. However, during the years it can be seen that there is an upward movement in education but still there is a serious backwardness among the females.

But there is somewhat outstanding increase in literacy level from the year 1991 to 2001 to 2011. But still there has to be a lot of progress in terms of education in India, which is now a basic right in India.

Table 3: Literacy rate of Scheduled Caste (Ramchandrapur Village)

	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Literate	532	34.28	413	26.61	945	60.89
Non-literate	265	17.07	342	22.04	607	39.11
Total	797	51.35	755	48.65	1552	100.00

Table 4: Literacy level of Scheduled Caste (Ramchandrapur Village)

Literacy level	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Cannot sign	265	17.07	342	22.04	607	39.11
Can sign	101	6.51	98	6.31	199	12.82
Primary	154	9.92	135	8.70	289	18.62
Secondary	101	6.51	121	7.80	222	14.30
Higher secondary	97	6.25	43	2.77	140	9.02
Graduation	76	4.90	15	0.97	91	5.87
Post Graduation	3	0.19	1	0.06	4	0.26
Total	797	51.35	755	48.65	1552	100.00

It is evident that the number of literates is much more than the number of non-literates among the Scheduled Caste of Ramchandrapur village. However, it can be said that the educated parents encourage their siblings for education.

Education is the single most important instrument for social and economic transformation. A well educated population, adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a precondition for growth to be inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from the employment opportunities which growth will provide (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2001).

Table 5: Enrollment of Scheduled Caste students in the village

Enrolled	Non-enrolled			
29	9	38	76.31	23.68
Male (SC)				
Enrolled	Non-enrolled			
328	17	345	95.07	4.92
Female (SC)				
Enrolled	Non-enrolled			
281	36	317	88.64	11.36

From the above table it is evident that the enrolment rate is quite satisfactory but it must be mentioned in this context that the mid-day meal system is responsible for this high enrolment rate. The poor families send their children to school so that these children could get at least a single meal per day. The striking feature is that quiet a few people know about their basic Right to Free Elementary Education and specially the Right to Education Act, 2010.

Enrollment rate is less for girls than the boys. The disparity occurs mainly because of the lower status given to the girl child given within the family. The Right to Education Act, 2010 ensures free and compulsory education to children from 6 to 14 years of age irrespective of sex. In this case the prevalent gender discrimination prevents the family from sending their girl child to the school and even if where she gets the education, it is only because of the mid- day meal.

Table 6: Drop out at different levels of education of Scheduled Caste

Educational Scenario	Scheduled Caste Girls	Scheduled Caste Boys
Primary I-IV	167	137
Secondary V-VIII	171	154
IX- XII	101	98
Graduation	35	80
Total	474	469

Table 7: Dropout of Scheduled Castes (Ramchandrapur village)

Educational situation	Male	%	Female	%
Continue	328	41.15	281	37.22
Drop Out	469	58.85	474	62.78
Total	797	100.00	755	100.00

Table 8: Drop out reasons of Scheduled Castes (Ramchandrapur village)

Sex	Economic	%	Social	%	Psychological	%	Total	%
Male	289	30.64	9	0.95	171	18.13	469	49.73
Female	301	31.91	32	3.39	141	14.95	474	50.26
Total	590	62.57	41	4.34	312	33.08	943	100.00

From the table it can be noticed that the Scheduled Caste girls have dropped out mostly within the secondary standard. Due to the examination procedure many have failed in the board examination of X and XII. The rest which was left has dropped out in their graduation time and also the belief that graduation is the stage where the girls can get better husbands to get married. Whereas, an abrupt drop out can be noticed among the boys at the secondary level with an even slope towards the end.

Psychologically, only a handful of males and females are prepared to take up education seriously because of ignorance of parents and also they are more interested in family chores and earning money than study. Absenteeism is visible among the Scheduled Caste people due to financial problems and psychological factors, while for females there are social factors as well. About 30.64% of males leave their education to earn money whereas it is more about 31.91% with the females. But the social burdens are high with the females. Some of the men also have social pressure like attending father's business or sickness within some family which forces him to leave studies and attend such chores.

Few countries in the world have such a national provision to ensure child-centered, child-friendly education to help all children develop to their fullest potential. There were an estimated eight million 6 to 14 year-olds in India out-of-school in 2009. The world cannot reach its goal to have every child complete primary school by 2015 without India. The norms of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) have also been revised to implement the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education. India has become one of 135 countries to make education a Fundamental Right of every child. The awareness of teachers towards Right to Education needs significant teachers - people rapport for proper implementation of the Act and also the awareness of teacher plays an important role in success of any new system.

Table 9: Awareness of Scheduled Caste Population (Ramchandrapur Village)

Age Group	Male Yes	Male No	Male Yes (%)	Male No (%)	Female Yes	Female No	Female Yes (%)	Female No (%)
10+-20	30	78	8.47	23.42	34	80	10.30	24.53

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20+ -30	153	21	43.22	6.31	126	46	38.18	14.11
30+ -40	69	51	19.49	15.32	72	60	21.81	18.40
40+-50	56	75	15.81	22.52	64	42	19.39	12.88
50+ -60	38	43	10.73	12.91	27	38	8.18	11.66
60 & above	8	65	2.26	19.51	7	60	2.12	18.40
Total	354	333	100	100	330	326	100	100

It is evident from the table that the Scheduled Caste community is aware. Not much variation is seen between the male and female section. This might be because of the fact that the Scheduled Caste population is a little bit in a well of situation in terms of both money and concern about education and also that their parents are educated encouraging their children to pursue education.

More teacher parent's participation, seminars and workshops for teachers about right to education and how to implement them from the grass root level would definitely help increase the awareness rate to a hundred percentages. The right to education does not limit education to the primary or the first stage of basic education, or among children of a particular age range. The right to education is also not an end to itself, but an important tool in improving the quality of life. Equality between men and women and to equal partnership in the family and society should be given. Equality between the boy-child and girl-child in all areas, including education, health, nutrition, and employment should be encouraged.

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