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**Abstract:**

The EFA agenda and MGDs have had both positive and restrictive impact on the education scenario in India. India has taken significant education policy reforms and the Education for All campaign (a flagship program of the Government of India) has made phenomenal efforts to reach the remotest corners of the country to impart inclusive elementary education to children from all sections of society.

However, there has also been a progressive erosion of public schooling, a push for meeting enrollment targets often at the expense of quality. Heavily driven by restricted EFA agenda, the issues of equity, disability, learning achievement, children in conflict remain a neglected agenda. Gaps remain in terms of educational provision, availability of resources, infrastructure, and adequate numbers of qualified, trained and regular teachers. Much is desired for contextualized, relevant curricula and quality teaching and learning. Increasing privatization and commercialization of education have emerged as barriers, especially for social inclusion. Notwithstanding legal and policy measures, enhancement in enrollment, expansion of school infrastructure, narrowing of gender gaps in literacy and a reduction in child labour; 16 million children in India remain out of school, especially from the most marginalized sections including scheduled caste and tribes, urban poor and amongst them girls.

The Post-2015 deadline has an additional significance for India which finally has the Right to Education as a legal right after a century long struggle. The RTE Act expects all schools to be compliant with the infrastructure norms by March 2013, however, considerable challenges remain.

Evidence and knowledge must be used to shape post 2015 agenda, specially focusing on specific issues of quality and the marginalized.

**Sub-theme: Education and Knowledge**

## Background

India is a land of diversity and is often appreciated and looked at with interest by the outside world for this very characteristic. In diversity however, is a deeply embedded phenomenon of exclusion, rendering some people to be powerless in its society. These people are certain groups defined by caste, class, religion, gender, occupation etc. and are often called the 'marginalised'. The consequences of marginalisation lead individuals and entire communities of people being systematically blocked from availing of the rights, opportunities and resources (e.g. housing, employment, healthcare, education, civic engagement and democratic participation in social processes) that are usually available to all members of society. (45)

This has huge implications on the overall status of education in India, and thus in the achievement of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development goals (MDG). Reflections on the status of the EFA and MDG goals show progress and positive trends on some educational indicators such as school infrastructure, enrolment and movement of children across primary level and on significant narrowing of the gender gap.

The Net enrolment ratio (NER) shows crossing over 95% cut-off value in 2007-08 for achieving 2015 target of universal primary education for all children aged 6-10 years. A trend based on DISE 2 (District Information System for Education) data shows improvement in enrolment from 83% in 2000 to 95% in 2007-08, projecting the country to be well set to achieve cent percent primary education for children ahead of 2015. (21)

Gender Parity Index (GPI) in enrolment, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, shows steadily diminishing female-male disparity over the years 1990-91 to 2007-08, with GPI ratio increasing 29% from 0.76 to 0.98 in primary education, 42% from 0.60 to 0.85 in secondary education, and 30%<sup>1</sup> from 0.54 to 0.7 in higher education. (21)

Significant efforts have been made to universalize elementary education, by increasing number of schools from 210000 primary, 14000 upper primary schools in 1950-51 to 627000 and 190000 in 1998-99, providing access to 83 per cent of the total 1,061 thousand habitations to primary schooling facilities within 1 km and 76 per cent habitations to upper primary schooling facilities within a distance of 3 km. About 94 and 85% of the total rural population has access to primary and upper primary schools. (20)

The number of teachers at the primary and upper primary levels has increased many folds, from 538 thousand in 1950-51 to 1,904 thousand in 2000 (MHRD, 2000). The pupil-teacher ratio is at present 42: 1 at the primary and 37:1 at the upper primary level. (20)

Notwithstanding the positive data, the flipside shows depressing national averages with respect to some critical indicators. In spite of increased enrolment, the dropout rate is still high at 40% and 57% respectively at the primary and elementary levels. (20)

Around 38% boys and 52% girls in the age group 6-14 are enrolled but not attending school. The official data presenting a positive picture is questionable when compared with several other credible sources. (Selected Education Statistics, Government of India, 2006 claim 99% boys and

82% girls, aged 6-10 enrolled in schools as against 80% boys and 73% girls in rural areas and 88% boys and 85% girls in urban areas reported by National Sample Survey (NSS) 61st Round, 2004-05.)

The national averages tend to hide major disparities across region, caste, class, tribe and ethnicity, as well as the rural-urban and gender divide. For example, there is evidence to show that the contiguous regions of Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and parts of Madhya Pradesh have deplorable indicators vis a vis education of minorities, Scheduled Caster (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and girls. Some North Eastern states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Assam have extremely poor indicators for all children.(43)

Trends between the 1991 and 2001 Census reveal a disturbing pattern with respect to the minorities, showing steep fall in the enrolment rates of Muslim girls relative to the all-India average. (50)

The dropout data is high for rural and urban poor, SCs and STs being higher than the average drop-out rate. In 2003-04 there were 23.12 million SC children (10.36 girls) in primary and only 8.07 million children (3.34 million girls) in middle schools, with similar trends amongst ST children. Although, girls' enrolment at all stages increased quite sharply with almost 45% primary enrolment comprising of girls, the ratios of SC and ST children still remain far lower than the national average. Only 48.6% SC girls and 40.6% ST girls are enrolled in elementary level as compared to the national average of 56.22% for all girls. The sharp drop from primary to elementary is yet another clear indication of high drop-out rates, especially among the most deprived children who access government schools in rural and tribal areas. Data also reveals that states which are low in general and tribal literacy are also states with higher gender disparity (16).

National average for children's attendance showed a decline from 73.4% in 2007 to 70.9% in 2011 in rural primary schools. In some states, the decline is vividly sharp. (Bihar primary schools showed a drop in average attendance from 59% in 2007 to 50% in 2011. Madhya Pradesh 67% to 54.5%, Uttar Pradesh, 64.4% to 57.3%).(2)

The statistics clearly show that the aggregated national averages fail to reflect the micro picture and cannot be used to announce the health of the education in the country. Neither do they recognize the wide disparity amongst states and locations, the extremely positive status in one state or one location changes to a worrisome figure in another state or location.

Largely the poor indicators are pertinent for the children of the marginalized communities in our country, those who are excluded, those who have been denied the rights to several opportunities and resources, those who contribute to the missing figures in our country, those who silently exist in deeper, core areas and locations within the societal fabric of India.

If we were to broadly understand who some of these most marginalized are, then the two significant groups clearly emerge as the Dalits and the Adivasis.

### *The Dalits*

The term Dalit has been interchangeably used with Scheduled Caste, the term including all historically discriminated communities of India out-caste and Untouchables. The caste system in India is an exceedingly complex phenomenon characterised by an intricate web of hierarchical classification of castes and sub-castes. The most discriminated being the ones considered at the bottom of this system, ostracized socially, spatially, with untouchability being the worst kind of discriminatory practice against them. They constitute around 16% of the Indian population today and are listed as the Scheduled Castes in the Constitution of India. (17)

The economic exploitation and restriction to menial occupations continue to sustain and reinforce the degraded social position of the majority of the SCs. Those living in a rural context are predominantly landless and impoverished agricultural labourers and the women in these communities are subordinated in diverse ways. (26)

Chronic poverty is significant in these communities with low wages; insecure, casual employment; low-productivity smallholder agriculture. Analysis of the pattern of incidence of poverty has shown there is a 'geography of poverty,' since it is concentrated in the rural areas of certain states. There is also a 'sociology of poverty,' since the proportion of the poor is higher among certain social groups in these states (The Poverty incidence for 'wage earner' SC households reported as high as 50%). (12)

On education indicators, SC children, particularly girls, lag behind significantly. Non-attendance among SCs is higher than among the general population rates, around 20 % in the 6-10 and 29 % in the 11-14 year age group in 1998. The percentage of non-attendance is higher in rural (19.3 %) as compared to urban areas (9.7 %).

SC children compare poorly with non scheduled caste groups with only 43 per cent SC children completed primary schooling, and 42 per cent completing middle school in the respective age groups in 2000. Corresponding figures for the 'other' castes are much higher at 58 percent and 63 percent (27)

Primary school completion rates for SCs in Rajasthan (35.15 %) and Uttar Pradesh (30.52 %) are worse, West Bengal has only 19.28% completion rate for SC children aged twelve. (25). The primary level enrolment of SC children accounting to 20% of total enrolment reduces to 18% at the upper primary level. Additionally, the problem of poor participation at the secondary level is much more severe for girls and children from 'backward' castes. (4)

Apart from regional variation, girls and children from lower caste groups are the ones who fair poorly on school attendance, completion and transition.

The consistently poor/low indicators for SC over the years can be attributed to the factors that too have remained consistent for the same period.

- **Work at Home or Outside:** Most of the times the children have to work in order to earn money for the family. Many children, especially girls take care of household chores and their siblings when parents and older siblings go out to work. Sending children to school

translates into loss in terms of cash and/or kind and thus keeps the children from accessing educational facilities.

- **Cost of Education:** Though the State has made provisions of scholarships, educational subsidies, free textbooks, mid day meals and so on, there are certain hidden costs associated with education which families cannot bear and which largely affect transition.
- **Access:** The physical distance to school is often a barrier for children in India particularly at the higher levels of middle and secondary school, and is of particular importance for SC children as they often live in hamlets which are on the outer edge of the village.
- **Social Distance:** In many areas, villages are divided into separate hamlets, and children from one hamlet may be reluctant or unable to go to school in another hamlet due to caste tensions. (36)
- **Experiences of Schooling:** Untouchability still existing in the mindset of people, results in caste based discrimination and violence against SC children in and outside school. Teachers have very low expectations from children resulting in poor performance.
- **Teachers Perception of Students:** Another element of social exclusion of SC children from education is due to discrimination practiced by teachers. Anecdotal evidence and certain smaller scale qualitative studies suggest that teaching practices in the classroom negatively affect SC children and result in another 'push' factor from primary school. (43, 45).
- **Quality of Education:** Lack of quality education and child-centered learning, continuous and comprehensive evaluation, low teacher motivation remain elusive in the large government set up that reaches education to the most marginalized.

Within the reasons cited above, girls have a double disadvantage on account of their gender and community. In addition to the challenges faced by a male child in general they also experience harassment and abuse associated with her gender.

There are a number of factors which keep these girls away from schools, some being gender specific while others specific to the SC communities (48), like poverty, caste based discrimination and abuse, child marriage, customs and cultural practices, lack of female teachers in schools, lack of transport facility, molestation/abuse in school, inappropriate school timing, lack of toilet facility and hostels, gender discrimination.

In addition, deeper issues are revealed through some micro initiatives and research conducted in the geographies inhabiting these communities. PCTFI<sup>1</sup> longitudinal research on the impact of teacher development on participation and learning of students shows that teachers' attitudes, perceptions and practices have powerful impact on self esteem and participation of children. Marginalized children, especially girls, having lesser opportunities and resources for learning at home, are more sensitive to teachers' attitudes as teachers are the sole agents of ensuring access to learning opportunities in their case. Data over the years highlighted students' achievements to be low for all, but even lower for girls. The findings identify home-factors, students' inherent aptitude and achievement as overlapping constructions that are inextricably linked to the perceptions and practices of the teacher.

The issue of marginalization is a basis for viewing it as a different culture. For teachers, children belonging to marginalized communities can never perform better as their luck is sealed the minute they are born in these communities. (45).

### *The tribal/Adivasi context*

Traditionally referred as Adivasis, the communities identified as the Scheduled Tribes in the Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, are the other most marginalized groups in India. Constituting about 8% of the total Indian population (Census of India 2011), there are 645 tribes (many overlapping types in more than one State) in different States and Union Territories. The term 'tribal' is preferred in the Sixth Scheduled areas of the north East and hence used along with 'adivasi' in this paper. Tribals are defined partly by habitat and geographic isolation but more on the basis of social, religious, linguistic and cultural distinctiveness.

Most tribal regions are rich in natural resources, but remain poor and backward on a number of development and human development Indices. Adivasi communities are among the most historically disadvantaged social groups due to their spatial isolation and cultural differences. Among the notified tribes, some groups are still at most primitive stage. They continue to live in isolated areas and practice either primitive agriculture or are still in food gathering stage with almost stagnating population. (10)

A majority of Adivasis continue to live below the poverty line, have poor literacy rates, suffer from malnutrition, disease and are vulnerable to displacement. Among them extreme poverty, illiteracy, human rights violation, poor health conditions, unemployment, identity crisis are the major problems that they face. Regions that are particularly likely to have large numbers of chronically poor people include tribal and forested (or degraded forest) regions. The Poverty incidence for 'wage earner' ST households is reported at 51%. In social group terms, over 80% of the poor in the country now belong to socially disadvantaged groups like SCs, STs, the most backward castes among OBCs and weaker sections among the Muslims. (12)

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<sup>1</sup> Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative, a quasi experimental multicountry research initiative of CARE since 2009, is geared towards promoting gender sensitive- child centered teaching learning approaches in classrooms. It is conducted in Shravasti district, Uttar Pradesh, India inhabiting dalit communities.

The education status of the tribal children is a matter of grave concern. The tribal literacy rate at 47.10% is almost 17 percentage points less than the national average. ST students comprise of only 10.7% of total enrolled students, out of which 47.5% are girls. The dropout rate for ST is declining at a fast pace, yet there is a gap of 6.33% points at primary level and 16.01% points at elementary level against the national average. As against the national primary level dropout rate of 29% in 2009-10, that for tribal children is 35%, (34% for girls, 35% for boys). This rate increases sharply to 58% at the elementary level as against 42% national average, the girls dropout even higher at 61%. While at the primary level, ST children enrolment accounts for 11% of total enrolment, it reduces to 9% at the upper primary level (47).

Although there is no evidence of gender discrimination against girls in Adivasi families, girls lag in education even in this marginalized group. The educational deprivation and literacy gaps for Adivasi girls have been particularly debilitating, and the literacy gap between Adivasi men and women has increased over the years; from 16.67% to 24.41% from 1961 to 2001. (1)

#### Specific Issues:

- Access:

One of the major factors responsible for unequal provision and poor quality of education for tribals is the inadequate number of schools in the areas where they live. Children have to cover great distances and difficult terrains to reach schools. The Tribal Welfare Department has tried to address this problem by establishing residential or “Ashram” schools for tribal children but they have huge issues of quality and security. (47)

Even in places where schools are available, the enrolment rates are poor due to reasons like poor physical infrastructure, lack of basic amenities like clean potable water, provision of working toilets, poor implementation of school level policies like mid-day meal, inadequacy of qualified teachers, poor provision of teaching-learning material.

As the tribal groups in India depend majorly on agriculture and forest, women and children play central role in all the agriculture and forest related activities especially gathering fruits, medicinal plants, tubers, dried leaves and firewood, with children also involved in cattle grazing. These engagements often clash with the demands of regular schooling and so does the practice of family migration in certain seasons. The incidence of family migration to work in plantations, brick kilns, stone quarries and other similar work on piece rate payments is relatively high for tribal areas having adverse implications for children’s education.

While each of the tribal communities are similar in terms of being socially, educationally and economically backward, yet they have a distinctiveness of their own which sets them apart and makes them unique in terms of their habits, lifestyle, culture, marital practices, religion and spoken language. While men and women participate equally in the family livelihood, the significance of girls’ education and its enabling and empowering influence

in girls' lives, its specific role in promoting upward social and occupational mobility and improving the quality of girls' existence is not fully understood in these communities.

Most of the families face survival pressures because of meagre earnings and no sources for occupation or employment in and around the village. The relationship between education and employment is thus a remote idea for them. (44)

- Poor Quality of education in School

Children from Indigenous tribal minorities (ITM) face cultural alienation and linguistic barriers inside classrooms. (14, 22). Although the home language being different from the medium of instruction is an issue in many parts of the country, it is relatively more pronounced in tribal areas as the majority of tribes have their own mother tongue, often quite distinct from the dominant state or regional language. These children face more problems if teachers do not speak their home language at all (Ranganathan 2012). Many ITM children do not have provision for education in mother tongue and schools impose an unfamiliar school language on them leading to large-scale school failure and high push out rate. (22)

Teaching materials and textbooks tend to be in a language the students do not understand; content of books and syllabi ignore the students' own knowledge and experience and focus only on the dominant language and culture. Not understanding the school language and therefore the course content, the children are unable to compete in their classes, and eventually dropping out (47).

- Teacher quality & absenteeism

The majority of tribal villages face high rate of teacher absenteeism on account of generally being remote and scattered. Often there is the issue untrained teachers and that of disrespect of tribal culture by teachers who are more often non-tribal.

In addition to the regular schools, Ashramshalas (Residential Schools) have been set up to address the problem of distance, remoteness, poverty and poor attendance of children. However, these schools are not able to meet the quality standards. In most cases the teachers are on daily wages, less qualified and often untrained. There is high teacher absenteeism and turn-over.

- The 'blanket' approach

The state attempts to reach Adivasi children through the same monolithic school system that is determined by common curriculum, common student evaluation system, common school calendar and the like. If any concession or consideration is seen it now comes in form of attempts to introduce Multi-Lingual Education or in including Tribal motifs, practices or stories into the learning material. The lens of seeing the tribal ways as exotic and different and not of diversity is missing.

There has also been an oversight of history of change within these societies and their relationships with dominant societies. 'In such contexts, the deployments of culture as a



tool of resistance and assertions for new identities have also been overlooked. The fact that the content, orientation, curricula, syllabi and texts are all primarily from the dominant society testifies this'. (28).

- Mainstreaming Approach

A biggest concern around education of tribal children is the state's 'assimilation approach', with the entire system geared towards mainstreaming. The equity logic woven around this stresses the need to have the same opportunities as others. Again most Ashramshalas remain sites for sanskritisation that begins with changing Adivasi names to Hindu names, the proliferation of private religious schools including Christian Missionary schools in these areas is also a matter of concern. There is lack of acknowledgement and integration of tribal culture, context and knowledge into regular schooling.

- Paucity of Research

There is scarcity of research and documentation to understanding about various tribes, their hierarchies and ways of life, on learning styles of children from various tribes or the rich physical and cultural environment of tribal, in order to use it for education planning and discourse.

- Migration

Both development as issues of strife and security see massive displacement. A large number of tribals are displaced not once but over and over again from one district to another or from one state to another. When displaced in other states they lose their status and therefore entitlements as tribals. The issue of language, access to school and continuity make participation of children in schools difficult. The Out of School Children issue assumes particular significance in these circumstances.

The issue of migration is applicable to even the dalit community. In addition there is a significant issue of climate change impacting on quality of life and accessibility of both dalits and tribals to various services, including education and health.

## **Driving the Post 2015 agenda**

The above discussion builds a strong case for addressing the cause and needs of the marginalized communities in India in its development agenda. The adoption of a rights based approach to development has been advocated along with a search for an alternative approach to growth that is employment creating and poverty reducing. There can be no one blueprint for such an alternative. Multiple solutions and a multi-pronged approach need to be evolved to address country's diversity and the differentiated picture of poverty.

It is not simply a matter of implementing correct policies more effectively. Factors that cause entry into poverty, those that contribute to persistence of poverty, and those that can help in coming out of poverty have to be understood. These are not merely economic in nature but relate to caste, tribe, gender, age, occupation, health, conflict, politics and the like or a combination of these.

The association between education levels and income poverty is strong, with illiteracy and income poverty correlated strongly, and education beyond primary school associated strongly with not being poor. Which way causation runs may be debatable, but panel data evidence suggests having a higher level of education is a ticket to greater material prosperity. Education is also a 'portable asset,' and thus useful for migration. It is not subject to erosion in the way that material assets or savings are, and is therefore more secure once acquired.

However, the barriers to moving far enough through the system to make a real difference to the long-term status of a poor household are significant. These mean the demand for education is suppressed unnaturally: demand from the poorest households needs stimulating as much as supply and quality of education need investment.

The Post-2015 deadline has an additional significance for India which finally has the Right to Education as a legal right after a century long struggle. Through this Right to free and compulsory education 2009, a host of provisions can be made to perpetuate a turning point for the status of delivery of education in the country. If the priority in education is focused on improving the quality of basic education, fewer children will remain illiterate and the post-primary education will not have to compensate for the failures of the primary level. Finding ways of helping the children of poor households to continue through post-primary education to complete the full nine years of education allowed for in the Right to Education Act is the next priority.

'The haste to achieve "education for all" has been interpreted in policy terms as a race of numbers, rather than a shift towards the creation of the kind of education system that can embrace diverse groups and acknowledge and address economic constraints that limit education participation.' (14).

Generally the viewpoint around exclusion rests onus on the schools and fails to take into cognizance that many communities decide themselves to exclude themselves from education due to their own pressing concerns and circumstances. These relate from their perception on education being not useful enough to help them secure their livelihood, to certain political and social factors. This throws up several challenges for rights approaches in terms of making 'right to education' more meaningful in the context of fluid economic strategies and to achieve the right to livelihoods without compromising children's right to education. Without reference to these other dimensions of entitlement, education policy in itself is likely to be so narrowly conceived as to be of little relevance to precisely those groups that are persistently falling outside its purview.

Little has been done to alter in a meaningful way the relationships between state administrators, elite village leadership, teachers and the poorer, low-caste groups within their communities. Without an attempt to reorder these relationships through building alternative spaces and processes for hearing the perspectives of those excluded on what underpins their exclusion, what they feel about the education on offer, and how they see education fitting into their economic and social survival strategies, the right to education will have limited teeth for those who really would rely on it. Whilst many of these spaces are beginning to emerge in relation to education, far greater consolidation of these different actor groups is required through processes that enable excluded groups to develop and express voice. (52).

The right to education particularly in the context of girls in the marginalized communities is of particular relevance for social development and reconstruction, the purpose being to bring social development across variety of sectors, increasing economic productivity, political participation, health and sanitation, delayed marriage and making effective investment for future generation. Though there are many other possible ways and methods to achieve this national goal, but education of girls is an effective way which has simultaneous impact on all aspects. Thus girls in both these groups need the additional and forceful inputs in education. (6)

Looking at specifics, some micro initiatives and research conducted across multiple geographies inhabiting the marginalized have proved the necessity of having twin goals for the children of these communities, one of providing formal education and two facilitating their psychosocial empowerment. The Udaan experience of CARE India recognizes Formal education to enable children to have grasping power, wider exposure to life, thinking and reasoning abilities, which enables them to learn. The goal of psychosocial empowerment is rooted in the belief that if the girls are provided experiences that help them to build their self confidence, self esteem, sense of identity, critically examine their attitudes and beliefs and change them where necessary, discover their voice, agency and capacity to express resistance, then they can also become change agents and role models in their own community.

A research on the Learning Guarantee Program (LGP), a joint initiative of the Karnataka government and Azim Premji Foundation provide evidence that rural government schools demonstrate better learning outcomes when teachers are committed, head teachers provide leadership and the parents and community care about quality education. Better infrastructure or better qualified teachers by themselves do not lead to better learning. Five factors that made a positive difference are: presence of a committed head teacher, active involvement of teachers and parents, educational background of parents and good school practices (cleanliness, neatness and orderliness). These findings suggest that the government's heightened emphasis on better school infrastructure and formal qualifications of teachers, by themselves will not bear fruit. Qualitative improvements will happen through the leadership and commitment of head teachers and teachers and an active demand for good quality education from parents.

Within education the issue of quality, equity and identity needs to be brought in with much intensive focus along with inclusion of process indicators such as trained teachers, accountability at all levels of governance, sustainable development, partnerships, curricular reforms building in peace, inclusion, equity, diversity, role of community, empowered communities.

A new development agenda post 2015 should carry forward the spirit of the Millennium Declaration and the best of the MDGs, with a practical focus on marginalized communities, especially addressing exclusion, poverty, education and healthcare. It is important to prioritize their needs in planning for national investments and outreach.

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