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POSITION AND ROLE OF 'ODL' INSTITUTES: A STUDY OF MARGINALIZED SECTIONS OF SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This Paper highlights the problems faced by Marginalized Sections of the society which hinders them for their individual, communal or professional uplift, despite of enormous policies and schemes by Government and Regulatory bodies. It suggests that education is the formalized channel that helps an individual to help themselves and also highlights the role of Open and Distance Learning Institutes (ODL) in the field of education for weaker sections of the society. This paper also suggests some guidelines for the institutions to provide a path for marginalized sections so as to bring awareness of the upcoming policies for their individual or social growth. The concept of Social Inclusion can be achieved only by facilitating the weaker sections of society, be it individual or strata or a complete section of people from a community, to attain basic, intermediate and higher education. Facilities based on financial, technical and moral requirements are also suggested for the Open and Distance Learning Institutes which invites the Government Policies to be more inclined towards the growth of such weaker sections.

KEYWORDS

education, marginalized, ODL, social inclusion, uplift.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social animals" and "Survival of the fittest" are two such phrases that made our society of ancient, medieval times and present day. In the era of civil society and very recently we have seen some unbalance in the society. This unbalance is nothing but the undue advantage to a group or individual of society by suppressing the other group or individual.

Social Exclusion is a concept used in many parts of the world to characterize contemporary forms of social disadvantage and relegation to the fringe of society. These fringes are nothing but an individual or a group as a whole who are discarded from the social mainstream. Thus, this particular section is also referred as **Marginalized Section** of the society. Silver, H. (2007) explained Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normative prescribed activities of the society in which they live.

The term social exclusion was first used in France and is widely used in United Kingdom and Europe. Social Exclusion is a term that is neither confined to time nor to a particular stratum. It is used across disciplines including education, sociology, psychology, politics and economics.

It is a process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources (e.g.; housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation and due processes).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In 1965, a French social commentator, Jean Klanfer, published *L'Exclusion sociale: Étude de la marginalité dans les sociétés occidentales* [Social exclusion: The study of marginality in Western societies] (Béland, 2007). Described as an anthropology of poverty, Klanfer's (1965) work argued that society rewarded personal responsibility with inclusion and personal irresponsibility with exclusion. If the work of Bourgeois was a primary influence on the solidarism movement almost 100 years earlier, the writings of Klanfer would fuel the imagination of René Lenoir (1974), most notably in his book '*Les exclus*'.

In his political tome, Lenoir contended social exclusion was a result of France's postwar transition from a largely agricultural society to an urban one (Davies, 2005). While the belief was that these events could lead to poverty, Lenoir argued that they could lead to a brand of social polarization also, which challenged the Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité ideals of the French Republican project.

Many have suggested that if there were a birth of the modern rhetoric of social inclusion, it would be here, in French thought that sought a means to reintegrate the large numbers of ex-industrial workers and a growing number of young people excluded from opportunities to join the labor force in the new economies of the 1970s and beyond.

Social Exclusion is widely divided into three major segments and can further be subdivided as:

INDIVIDUAL EXCLUSION

Social exclusion at the individual level results in an individual's exclusion from meaningful participation in society. An example is the exclusion of single mothers from the welfare system prior to welfare reforms of the 1900s. The modern welfare system is based on the concept of entitlement to the basic means of being a productive member of society both as an organic function of society and as compensation for the socially useful labor provided. A single mother's contribution to society is not based on formal employment, but on the notion that provision of welfare for children is a necessary social expense. In some career contexts, caring work is devalued and motherhood is seen as a barrier to employment (Lessa, 2006).

Single mothers were previously marginalized in spite of their significant role in the socializing of children due to views that an individual can only contribute meaningfully to society through "gainful" employment as well as a cultural bias against unwed mothers. More broadly, many women face social exclusion. Another example of individual marginalization is the exclusion of individuals with disabilities from the labor force. Grant (2009) discusses an employer's viewpoint about hiring individuals living with disabilities as jeopardizing productivity, increasing the rate of absenteeism, and creating more accidents in the workplace (Leslie, Leslie & Murphy 2003).

COMMUNITY/GROUP EXCLUSION

Many communities experience social exclusion, such as racial (e.g., black) and economic (e.g., Roma) communities. One example is the Aboriginal community in Australia. Marginalization of Aboriginal communities is a product of colonization. As a result of colonialism, Aboriginal communities lost their land, were forced into destitute areas, lost their sources of livelihood, and were excluded from the labor market. Additionally, Aboriginal communities lost their culture and values through forced assimilation and lost their rights in society (Baskin, 2003). Today various Aboriginal communities continue to be marginalized from society due to the development of practices, policies and programs that "met the needs of white people and not the needs of the marginalized groups themselves" (Yee, 2005).

Yee also connects marginalization to minority communities, when describing the concept of whiteness as maintaining and enforcing dominant norms and discourse.

PROFESSIONAL EXCLUSION

Some intellectuals and thinkers are marginalized because of their dissenting, radical or controversial views on a range of topics, including HIV/AIDS, climate change, green energy or third world politics. Though fashionable for a time to some, they are more widely regarded as intellectual freethinkers and dissidents whose ideas and views run against those of the mainstream. At times they are marginalized and abused, often systematically ostracized by colleagues, and in some cases their work ridiculed or banned from publication (Green, 2003).

SOCIAL INCLUSION: AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

How cultures and societies stratify and divide; how they account for customs around inclusion, exclusion, belonging, and togetherness; and how the processes that include and exclude are talked about, described, understood, and experienced, all provide some clues as to the role of social integration and stratification within a given society. Indeed, how stratification is conceived and discussed can obscure the very nature of the processes by which such divisions come to be. This is precisely why the discipline of sociology is so useful. Unlike natural order sciences, it does more than identify and posit explanations for social divisions. Sociology, in addition to this, can reflect also on the disciplinary discourses encircling discussions of these social partitions. For example, one of the means by which stratification is conceptualized and discussed could take as a reflective example, the pre-World War II writings of Sorokin (1998), who in considering stratification differentiated between horizontal and vertical social mobility. Sorokin suggested that horizontal mobility related to changes in occupational position or role, but not to changes within a social hierarchy, whereas vertical mobility did describe changes within the social hierarchy. Sorokin summarized his theory by reflecting that within systems of vertical and horizontal mobility, there could be individual social infiltration as well as collective social movement. Furthermore, that although it was possible to identify forms of mobile and immobile societies within different geographical and historical contexts, it was rare for a society's strata to be closed absolutely, and rare for the vertical mobility of even the most mobile society to be completely free from obstacles.

As proposed by Sorokin (1998), these types of social movements could often vary across time and space, yet even across time, trends—particularly as they might apply to vertical mobility—were unlikely to be writ in stone. Although autocratic societies might be less mobile than democratic societies, the rule was not fixed and could have exceptions.

While often used to describe low or zero labor market involvement (Foster, 2000), early definitions of social exclusion in time broadened to consider barriers to effective or full participation in society (Du Toit, 2004). These types of barriers were considered to contribute to progressive processes of marginalization that could lead to deprivation and disadvantage (Chakravarty & D'Ambrosio, 2006). As the exclusion concept took on currency, it began to reflect more than a simple material nature and to begin to encompass the experience of individuals or communities who were not benefitting or were unable to benefit relative to others in society (Davies, 2005; Levitas, 1998). In time, the concept would evolve to reflect lapses in social integration and social cohesion that plagued advanced capitalist societies (Chakravarty & D'Ambrosio, 2006). It would evolve also to refer to processes that prevent individuals or groups from full or partial participation in society, as well as the crippling and reifying inability to meaningful participation in economic, social, political, and cultural activities and life (de Haan & Maxwell, 1998; Duffy, 1995, 2001; Horsell, 2006)—a definitional approach that imbues exclusion in terms of neighborhood, individual, spatial, and group dimensions (Burchardt, Le Grand, & Piachaud, 1999, referenced in Percy-Smith, 2000).

In many ways, despite the contribution of the psychological and life sciences, and even the contributions of social policy, the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion are profoundly sociological. This is because at the very root of both classic and contemporary sociological thinking are concerns with social stratification, social inequality, and social class—key concepts which the social inclusion literature repeatedly touches upon.

Witcher (2003, referencing Burchardt et al., 1999) reflected that social inclusion and exclusion were concepts that were often poorly defined or theorized. Daly (2006) has suggested that although there is nothing inherent in the inclusion and exclusion concepts that defy or negate theorization, in general, sociology's attempts at their theorization could be inconsistent or facile.

Horsell (2006) referenced Crowther (2002) in suggesting that the contemporary interest in social exclusion and inclusion were reflective of similar attempts to conceptualize the dual influences of poverty and social deprivation. As such, these concepts signaled that somehow the cumulative impacts of poverty and social deprivation (or the cumulative effects of social exclusion in the absence of social inclusion) could represent a threat to social order.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Unequal access to education has been rampant in India. Discriminatory order in the caste system has been instrumental in perpetuating this. Over the generations one section of the society were enjoyed the fruits of the education and remaining majority of Indian communities particularly marginalized sections like Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), Religious Minorities and Women were denied the opportunity. Right since Jotirao Phule, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Dr. Zakir Husain, Narayan Guru, early education movements to present day education campaigns, strongly believe that 'education is enlightenment and enlightenment is empowerment'. It helps to make for a better future society. Dr. Ambedkar (1989) recognized the importance of education in shaping the future and cautioned the under-privileged not to lose any opportunity to get that right, and said "We may forego material benefits, but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent." He put all his efforts to guarantee the educational opportunities without any discrimination to all the citizens of independent India. But after 6 decades of its implementation, political order and the ruling elite of this country could not succeed in providing access to the "Right to Education" to its people.

In this background the paper briefly touches the present scenario of Education and the consequences in the context of globalization and examines the role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in democratizing the education in India.

DISCUSSION

RIGHT TO EDUCATION: A SOCIAL INCLUSION PERSPECTIVE

Equal access to education is among the basic human rights to which everyone is entitled. Yet, the educational gaps between various groups in many countries are staggering, as shown by many studies. If people's abilities are normally distributed, then a skewed distribution of education opportunities represents large welfare losses. The development of any nation depends on its educational system and it is proved that education is the key to human progress and social change. Education is a powerful tool for empowerment of individual. It helps in developing confidence in individual and community about their own capacities, inherent strengths to shape their lives and thus enhance the inner strength intellectual, political, social and economic against oppression, exclusion and discrimination. Empowerment is the enhancement of the political, social, economic or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment envelops developing and building capacities of individuals, communities to make them part of the main stream society. Education is the means by which societies have been known in history, to grow out of oppression to democratic participation and involvement. It is a powerful tool for empowerment of individual. It is intrinsic to human personality. It carries both intrinsic as well as instrumental values. If look back in to the history of India, education was never in reach of its entire people.

ADVANTAGES OF 'ODL'

The first and basic advantage of open education system is the flexibility. The flexibility in terms of time, pace, place, age, occupation certainly gives a new hope and fresh life to thousands of learners who were the victims of the Indian rigid traditional education system. Since the Open University is a learner-centered system, it provides education to large and diverse groups of students in a flexible manner. As far as the qualifications are concerned most of the learners who couldn't able to continue in the formal system, because of socio-economic and cultural reasons have the advantage of Open learning. Further the flexibility of entry into academic programmes irrespective of their age, qualification make the learner to pursue their higher education. In open Universities, particularly in Open & Distance Learning (ODL) Centers at various Central Universities, students can choose the subjects of study according to their interests. The flexibility in teaching and learning process is also an additional advantage for the learners. Since open learning system in India adopts multi-media approach learner can study the course material, watch audio visual programmes related to their courses in his own pace and place. To seek further help or information they can attend the counseling sessions in nearby study centers during the weekends. This facility helps the learners who work for their livelihoods. The examination and

evaluation system also gives greater flexibility for the learners. Thus the Open University system in India came in to existence with a popular slogan "Education at your door step" literally brought higher education closer to the people.

Second important factor for the success of open learning system in India is its Cost effectiveness. Education in the Open University is cost effective not only to the students but also to the institution. A student can gain while he is earning and learn according to his convenience and interest. Access in terms of reach, particularly geographical distance is another advantage of ODL. Providing education to all in a country like India in conventional methods is proved as a difficult task because huge population live in a vast geographical regions. In such a situation ODL made the access of higher education simple to the learners through study centers covering all the geographical areas. Thus the flexibility in terms of study, greater access compared to conventional education systems & the multi-media teaching learning package and the cost effectiveness attracted millions of people. It resulted in the equity, diversity and inclusiveness within the society.

ROLES OF ODL IN PROVIDING A PLATFORM FOR EDUCATION-BASED CHANNEL

1. **Awareness:** It is evident that people from marginalized sections are not fully aware of such programmes being offered at university level. It is compulsory for the ODL administrators to spread awareness among such sections so as to get complete benefits.
2. **Providing Learning Centers at Remote and Needed Places:** There are people who are keenly interested in such education system but due to lack of transportation and commuting facilities they lack in getting the benefits of education.
3. **Inclusion of policies that corresponds with Government Regulations:** There are enormous number of policies and schemes offered by central and state level government and regulatory bodies but the concerned group of social class could not get proper benefits from such schemes due to the absence of proper channel. In such circumstances ODL can prove to be a bridge that would diminish the gap aroused.
4. **Education for All:** This is not just a slogan but a revolution much needed in present times so as to bring the marginalized sections of society to stand together and build a bond so strong that will definitely be a rise of a new society which will be free from any marginalization.
5. **Scholarships and Fund Generations:** ODL can serve as a passive node which could work on behalf of government and funding agencies to enable the weaker sections of society. Especially, the fund which has to be spent on education for weaker or marginalized sections can be spent in a much more directional and comprehended manner and could be utilized efficiently. Also, ODL can provide a list of meritorious and needy students to the regulatory bodies for scholarships and free education of such students.
6. **E-learning Facilities:** This is an era of digitalization; where every industry is making developments on the basis of technological improvements. Digital world is not a new concept for us. It has been accepted world-wide and it is the time for marginalized sections to accept such changes and be a part of a world which is developing at this pace. Learning through internet and computer based application is the new trend in education and ODL nation-wide have accepted this change.
7. **Inclusion of Technical and Vocational Courses:** Not just the regular courses but the demand of present situation asks the students to be technically expert. Also, people who are already working or run their own home-based industry can study vocational courses to excel in their field. It will definitely help such people to rise from a marginalized datum line and work with the mainstream of the society.
8. **Providing Placement Opportunities:** An equal opportunity should be given to people from marginalized sections to get jobs in industries where they fit in.

CONCLUSION

It is clearly evident that Open Education System in India is playing a vital role in catering education to the needs of diversified groups of students including socially disadvantaged sections. Marginalized communities in India are suffering with lack of access to education in India for generations. For a quite long time marginalized sections were not allowed to enter to the doorsteps of educational centers and institutions. With a delightful slogan "Education at your doorstep" the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India brought education virtually to the door steps of several disadvantaged sections including SC, ST, OBC, Minorities and women. If this system gets more accessibility to the marginalized communities, it will definitely emancipate themselves from traditional bondages, exploitations and humiliations.

Open Education is considered as very effective for societies like India, where literacy and education levels are low. More over the system and its features are inclusive in nature. India tried its level best to provide free and compulsory education to all its citizens but it could not achieve its target in the last 60 years of its independence. It becomes a tough task to provide higher education with its limited recourses. In this context the distance education has emerged as an alternative model to the conventional education system.

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