

Education and Emancipation of Dalits Children: Analysing Human Development in Lens of Capability Approach Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades, the human development perspective and the capability approach have become increasingly more influential, not only in development economics but also in divergent academic and professional fields, such as in philosophy, education, gender, cultural, environmental studies and in the health sector. The Human Development and Capability Association (HD-CA), launched in 2004, offers a global network in which academics and practitioners from various (inter) disciplinary fields can communicate and exchange ideas on how the human development perspective and the capability approach contribute to their research and related practices of development and human well-being. In the area of education too, there has been a growing interest in the capability approach. Its central focus on what 'people are actually able to do and to be', is understandably very pertinent in education. Capability approach offers valuable new possibilities in thinking about social justice and education. All of them point to the importance of the intrinsic worth of an educational environment where the value of education goes beyond instrumental goals of measurable economic impact. This paper attempts to study the emancipatory practice of education among dalit children in relation to human development & capability approach perspective. Firstly, it aspires to attribute the caste relations through theoretical perspectives in socio-cultural context in India where existence of different social institutions defines the social status, roles, and descriptions of an individual belonging to specific social group. It also classifies the role of capability approach

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with respect to importance of human diversity in assessing equality after breaking the shackles of inequality which was constructed by caste as an institution and affected position of dalit children in the society leading to multiple forms of marginalisation, social exclusion, and discrimination. Hence historically emancipation of dalit community is linked with struggle against caste system where the hegemony of varna system exists over 'weak and marginal' sections of society (dalit community). Afterwards it will look into education as an approach of individuals to develop new-fangled economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments for human development frame with reference to children of dalit community. Furthermore it analyses the idea of capability approach to expand dalit children capabilities and association with human development because it would be underestimated if we won't discuss emancipation without linking it with capability approach & human development. Capabilities correspond to the overall emancipation which leads the life of a person with a reason to value. Hence it will also interrogate the interface among education, human development, and capacity building with reference to dalit Children (i.e. why capacity approach is important for human development & how capability approach is helpful in inclusionary for dalit children who are socially excluded).

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a means through which one inculcates knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes. It is regarded as an empowerment right, which enables marginalised persons and communities to transcend poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in community life. It is a major tool for socio-economic improvement of an individual and it also reduces social inequalities, political assertion, and income distribution.

The education has been instrumental in defining and mapping out the aims and objectives of an individual. It has the potentiality for creating awareness of the difficulties and obstacles that may hinder the path of development. Such awareness in a better way helps the deprived groups to go in search for alternative solutions of their problems for improving them lot and climbing the ladder of social hierarchy. The *dalits* have been subjected to various social disabilities of extreme nature; they were exploited and kept subservient mainly because they were illiterates.

Education shows a better way of life and plays a vital role in raising the standards of living and improving the quality of life of people. It is an empowerment tool through which a person gets equipped in basic social life skills and makes his world broader. It enables people to put their efforts for the upliftment and advancement of their socio-economic standard and to make their contributions not only for their personal growth and development but also for society and nation. Keeping this background in view, it is essential to make accessibility to education for inclusive development of all sections of society.

Dalits refer to a social group whose members are born with a strong social stigma of “untouchability” strictly attached with them on the ground of caste. This strictly connected social stigma is the consequence of traditionally followed four-level caste hierarchy based on the purity and pollution that gives a certain position, status, and power to its member. This caste hierarchy has been traditionally imbibed in Indian society which makes differentiation among its members in terms of occupation and status.

Dalits are one of the most vulnerable groups among all who have been traditionally oppressed and exploited by the non-*dalits*. They are oppressed group considered to be impure and polluting on the grounds of occupation and caste. Because of ranking low in social status, they are excluded from the main-stream society and are engaged in menial jobs.

Dalit refers to one’s caste rather than class and members of this caste face caste-based discrimination. They are denied to education, entering into public temples, using bathing *ghats*, using public restaurants, walking in the roads of upper caste people, and the like. Even their shadow is considered impure and polluted as a result of which they are inhabited outside the society. They are precluded to enjoy the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India. *Dalits* constitute 16.23% of India’s total population. One out of every six Indians is a *Dalit* constituting a very big segment of the society.

Dalits are educationally backward people who struggle to access social services and enjoy dignified social life. They are socially, economically, politically, and educationally backward people who strive for personal growth and development to achieve a higher degree of living standard and live a better way of life. They are ground-inhibiting people who bear discriminatory treatment on the grounds of social determinants.

DEFINITIONS OF EDUCATION

Education means an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man, body, mind, and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education not even the beginning. It is one of the means whereby man and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education (Gandhi, 1937).

Education has always been regarded in India as a source of illumination and power which transforms and ennobles our nature by the progressive and harmonious development of our physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual powers and faculties (Altekar, 1949).

DEFINITION OF DALIT

Article 341 (1) of Indian constitution says, the President may with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be *dalits* in relation to that State or Union Territory as the case may be (Constitution of India).

SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF CHILDREN

A child can be called socially excluded if he/she is not recognised by society and unable to participate in development. Another way of approach to social exclusion of children is failure of recognising the rights and capabilities that are necessary for the child to develop himself/herself to be a productive member of the society. Hence, in both of the cases the child is prevented from integrating into the society.

Berghman (1995) describes four different types of integration and participation: civic integration relating to the democratic and legal system (for example the legal status and treatment of children in general and minority or children belonging to *dalit* community in particular), economic integration mainly related to employment, social integration related to inclusion in the public safety net, and family and community integration relating to networks or what some observers have recently termed social capital.

The rights or capabilities-based approach used above in defining social exclusion says that if social exclusion is a violation of rights or capabilities, it immediately implies that a society that tolerates social

exclusion has some internal problem. As a result it has failed to grant basic rights or capabilities to its citizens, in this case children belonging to *dalit* community.

There are several reasons why the practice of social exclusion should be scrutinised. According to Stephan Klasen (2002), the social exclusion among children may, as a result of their exclusion, suffer from deficiencies in other important capabilities such as the ability to be healthy, well-educated, well-housed, or well-nourished.

EMANCIPATION THROUGH EDUCATION

Education as emancipation is a solution to liberate oneself from any kind of bondage. An idea of emancipation is to recognise problem and challenge status quo. Educated person is emancipated person and s/he is consciously aware about his/her rights and freedom. It appears that an educated *dalit* can contribute more efficiently towards their emancipation and autonomy. This sometimes changes basic power relationships in the society. This lays stress on the role of education as transformative which is inherent in freedom and emancipation.

Education is one of the most important factors affecting the holistic development of children. The significance of education in a child's life is immeasurable. The significance of education leads the UNO to declare that access to education is an important and very valuable capability. The educated children are the forbears of nation; hence children irrespective of their caste, creed, and birth should be given equal chance to get educated.

Gandhi defined that injustice, violence and oppression manifest from human heart and that education can play an effective role in developing a wholesome human personality capable of resisting war, violence, injustice and oppression and building a social order wherein man can live in peace and harmony with others. Since education is a potential instrument of man-making and social engineering, he concentrated on an education that could draw out the best in the child-body, mind and spirit-for developing a peace loving human personality. Gandhian philosophy is indeed rich in its educational and social values. It can transform the destiny of man and is capable of establishing an alternative social order if it is practiced sincerely and honestly in its true perspective.

However, it has brought a change in *dalit* children attitude by providing educational opportunities which has resulted in end of exploitation, thereby providing impetus towards equality in terms of occupational

mobility & agent of social change. In this context, the concept of capacity building plays an important role whereby it exhibits how *dalit* children make effort in addressing their issues, sharing experience, and knowledge. As a result, it helps in advocating *dalits*' emancipation and deconstructing stereotypical notion of caste relations in society & associated institutions.

EDUCATION AS A TOOL OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Education is a human development tool and can be a way to increase the incomes of impoverished people. Economic perspectives see education as a means to make individuals more productive in the workplace and at home. It can also be seen as a means of empowering socially and economically deprived groups into seeking political reform. By using any of these reasons as motivation to pursue educational development, governments are attempting to generate some form of social or economic equality for the population.

An alternative reason to educating is its ability to empower the individual to strive for an improved quality of life. A big factor impacted by education is that human beings often base their life goals and everyday actions on what they perceive to be feasible. Education expands the knowledge of possibility to poor individuals, and is often a necessary factor in providing incentive to escape poverty and social oppression (Wigley & Wigley, 1990).

EDUCATION AND CAPABILITY APPROACH

The capability approach started in the 1980s as an approach to welfare economics. In this approach, Amartya Sen brought together a range of ideas that were hitherto excluded from (or inadequately formulated in) traditional approaches to the economics of welfare. Initially Sen argued for the importance of real freedoms in the assessment of a person's advantage, individual differences in the ability to transform resources into valuable activities, the centrality of the distribution of welfare within society, the multi-variants nature of activities that give rise to happiness, and against excessive materialism in the evaluation of human welfare.

Subsequently, and in collaboration particularly with political philosopher Martha Nussbaum, development economist Sudhir Anand, and economic theorist James Foster, Sen has helped to make the

capabilities approach predominant as a paradigm for policy debate in human development where it inspired the creation of the UN's Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is the preferred framework for discussing equality of opportunity especially with respect to gender equity. Furthermore, since the creation of the Human Development and Capability Association in the early 2000s, the approach has been much discussed by political theorists, philosophers and a range of social sciences, including those with a particular interest in human health. The approach emphasizes functional capabilities ("substantive freedoms", such as the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, or participate in political activities); these are construed in terms of the substantive freedoms people have reason to value, instead of utility (happiness, desire-fulfilment or choice) or access to resources (income, commodities, and assets). Poverty is understood as capability-deprivation. It is noteworthy that the emphasis is not only on how human beings actually function but on their having the capability, which is a practical choice, to function in important ways if they so wish. Someone could be deprived of such capabilities in many ways, e.g. by ignorance, government oppression, lack of financial resources, or false consciousness.

This approach to human well-being/ human development emphasizes the importance of freedom of choice, individual heterogeneity and the multi-dimensional nature of welfare. The capability approach indeed challenges educators to think about how education can play a role in enabling people to 'lead a life they have reason to value', how education can enhance their well-being and support them in the development of their capabilities and in so doing, create more 'freedom to choose' alternatives in the social and political context in which they live. What matters here is not only the provision of education, access to schooling and how much of its gross national product a nation is willing to allocate to the sector, but also and more importantly, what actually happens in schools and in other educative practices in terms *what* is taught and *how* that is done. Education is not a neutral process in which undisputed knowledge is transferred, but involves active ethical and political choices about what knowledge is considered worthwhile to include in the curriculum and about how knowledge, skills and values are mediated in educational institutions.

These goals may vary in different education sectors and in different nations and are always historically contextualised. They may for instance be aimed at promoting social change or at becoming competitive in a global market, or set out to cultivate patriotism. Whatever the particular

content of these goals may be, the education sector is consistently seen as a terrain of citizenship formation where nations attempt to translate their economic, social and political agendas into specific policies and practices. What also appears to be a consistent phenomenon is that an educated citizenry is primarily considered to be the means to achieve various forms of growth and that the people themselves are not first and foremost seen as the ends in a process of education that contributes to improving the quality of their lives.

INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CAPABILITY APPROACH IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The capabilities approach presents illiteracy as a significant and avoidable form of capability deprivation. This distinctively modern orientation presents literacy, uncompromisingly, as a necessary condition of well-being and human development. It describes literacy as a key factor influencing people's achieved functionings (what they are actually 'able to do and be'), their future capabilities, and their freedom to lead a dignified life of the type they choose to value, and in case of children belonging to *dalit* community, it will help out to break the barriers of caste system existing in the society.

As Nussbaum highlights, the literacy rates shown in the Human Development Reports are a reminder of national and global insights and implications of the capabilities approach inequalities in human development. As Nussbaum shows, adult literacy rates show massive disparities in capabilities, not only at the national level (often along lines of class, gender, language, ethnicity, and caste) but also between many of the most wealthy and poorer nations. They powerfully illustrate the need for education and development policies to be grounded in a distributive form of social justice that can effectively tackle these ongoing disparities in opportunity and entitlement. To some extent, the distinction between literacy and illiteracy, like the concept of the 'poverty line', is somewhat arbitrary, and subject to variation over time and between social contexts. The ethnographic literature has deconstructed the idea of a 'great divide' between literacy and illiteracy, and notes that different levels of ability are required to engage effectively with different types of literacy events and practice.

Ethnographic accounts note that the process of translating knowledge and skills into effective literacy capabilities and functioning is often

contingent upon wider contextual factors, such as the nature of the literacy practices, the availability of mediation, and culturally informed aspects of agency and identity. How then do we make sense of these ongoing levels of inequality in one of the most fundamental aspects of well-being? It is clear that the scale of illiteracy reveals a significant failure in social justice at national and international levels.

This neglect cannot be attributed to either technical difficulties or limitations of human or financial capital; some of the world's poorest countries have managed to provide mass literacy programmes and universal education for everyone. Rather, it suggests that these ongoing levels of illiteracy can be attributed to the faulty rationale that informs education and development policies. Human capital approaches for example, are based on the logic of 'rates of return' — the assumption that they should provide reciprocal economic benefits to ones wider family, nation, or global economy. Such approaches provide a weak rationale for adult literacy interventions.

ANALYSIS & CONCLUSION

The well-being of any individual may plausibly be seen in terms of a person's functionings and capabilities: what he or she is able to do or be (e.g., the ability to be well-nourished, to avoid escapable morbidity and mortality, to read and write and communicate, to take part in the life of the community, to appear in public without shame) (Sen, 1990).

The capability approach is unique in its approach for human development and the most relevant one as it emphasizes that the inability to participate in the mainstream society is a violation of a basic right that should be open to all citizens (all residents). The rights - language considerably strengthens the case for society to ensure that it enables participation and integration of all its members. Social exclusion, as the denial or non-realisation of rights of citizenship which can be emancipated through education among *dalit* children, is very much similar to the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen, which calls for efforts to ensure that people have equal access to basic capabilities such as the ability to be healthy, well-fed, housed, integrated into the community and public life and enjoy social basis of self-respect.

It does not demand uniformity of outcomes but instead calls equal freedom for all to enjoy all aspects of citizenship. For example, participation in mainstream society may be seriously constrained for people like *dalit*

community and their children. Sen is a strong advocate of literacy as a goal of human development, and has regularly cited literacy and the ability to read and write as a basic capability and necessary condition for well-being.

As Sen's critique of utilitarianism illustrates, his concern is not with the essential features of goods nor with people's desires or preference, but with the ways in which they influence people's functioning and capabilities. Sen also notes the incompatibility of inequalities in basic capabilities with effective human development, and is critical of processes of aggregation that mask such inequality. In *'Development as Freedom'*, Sen discusses illiteracy, along with premature mortality and undernourishment, as "focal features" of capability deprivation. As such, it appears to be informed by a consequentiality concern with the achievement of freedoms and agency, and an awareness of the impact of unequal distribution of literacy on processes of development. In *'Reflections on Literacy'*, Amartya Sen describes six ways in which schooling and literacy help to "reduce human insecurity", the "routes through which education can help to make the lives of precarious people more secure, more safe and more fulfilled" (Sen, 2003):

- i) The reduction of illiteracy and innumeracy as deprivation and forms of insecurity in themselves,
- ii) Improving access to jobs and gainful employment (individual benefits and those of the wider economy),
- iii) People's ability to understand and invoke their legal rights,
- iv) Increasing people's opportunity for 'political voice participation,
- v) Improvement in women's wellbeing (including benefits to women such as access to employment, and participation in 'decisions within and outside the family' and to their family in terms of 'reduced fertility rates' and 'reduced mortality rates of children'), and
- vi) The impact of education and literacy on identity formation, its potential to influence conflict and the conditions of peace and security.

The description of the benefits of literacy in reducing insecurity and enhancing people's quality of life emphasizes empirically observed outcomes. While the mechanisms involved, the argument does not rest on the description of specific functionings and capabilities. Indeed, he sometimes uses the terms literacy and basic education interchangeably in the broad sense of an achieved educational capability. However, wider work on functionings and capabilities does offer theoretical insights into the ways that such benefits occur. In judging the well-being of the person,

it would be premature to limit the analysis to the characteristics of the goods possessed.

It has to be considering the ‘functioning’ of persons. The role of functionings in well-being (rather than the intrinsic characteristics of the goods) is clearly articulated in ‘*Commodities and Capabilities*’ by Amartya Sen. It is a recurring theme and one of the hallmarks of the capabilities approach. A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functionings are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions (Sen, 1987, p. 36).

Viewing literacy as functioning suggests a more specific focus on how it impacts the quality of life of an individual. Literacy functionings draw our attention to the role of literacy in ‘doing and being’, involving particular forms of social practice (practice of social exclusion & untouchability) and the embodiment of literate social identities. In contrast, literacy capabilities indicate the set of available functionings available to a person. In that sense, literacy capabilities are future oriented, as they relate to people’s potential uses of literacy, and how that enhances their wider freedoms and agency.

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