



The Importance of Education for Sustainable Livelihood

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Abstract: Notwithstanding all the flaws in the current educational system, people having good education are more capable of combating “vulnerability and marginalization” in contemporary society. However, the reality is that India’s educational system is extremely “diverse” in many ways, with the majority of the people being restricted to “educational arrangements that are,” in so many ways, inadequate or substandard, while a relatively small group of youngsters from the wealthy classes enjoy great - frequently extraordinary - educational prospects. A small percentage of students are positioned on the highest rung of the educational ladder by the facilities they receive, while others are limited far below it, from their primary schooling to their higher education. In line with the broad separation between “the favoured and the rest” in Indian society, the “social, economic, and organisational” aspects of the “Indian educational system” do appear to ensure that only a small number of students out of a large pool are able to receive a quality education. To improve the quality and performance of education in India, the entire education system of the country will have to be transformed.

Key Words: Education, Livelihood, Inequality, Poor, Caste, Development.

1. INTRODUCTION:

As defined by Robert Chambers, livelihood “can include food, health, a strong family, wealth and income. It can be described as a level of wealth and of stocks and flows of food and cash which provide for physical and social well-being and security against impoverishment. To this may be added access to basic goods and services, but while these are important, for the poorest they may only come second to subsistence and security.”¹ From the point of view of the poor, the state should take steps to ensure sustainable livelihoods for the people. The level of education in a country is directly impacted by sustainable livelihoods.

Education system should be designed to ensure “broad-based capacity building”, as the future of the economy, society, political system, and culture of a country depend on it. The “inequalities of class, caste and gender” can be significantly reduced if quality education is imparted to the people.² Access to education is one of the most fundamental economic and personal freedoms. For the “economically and socially marginalized” people, the shortest route to escape the travails of poverty is to become educated. Education is “a key to both individual and collective empowerment [and] involving not only the transmission of knowledge and the acquisition of skills but an awareness of the self and a capacity and a will to effect change”.³ In a powerful diagnosis, Rabindranath Tagore said: “in my view the imposing tower of misery which today rests on the heart of India has its sole foundation in the absence of education.”⁴

¹ Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, Longman Scientific and Technical, Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex, England, 1993, p. 148. See also Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*, Intermediate Technology Publications, London, 1997. Quoted in John Lawrence and Sean Tate, *Basic Education for Sustainable Livelihoods: The Right Questions?*, Discussion Paper presented to the United Nations Development Programme “International Working Group on Sustainable Livelihoods”, New York, November 19-21st, 1997. Available at <http://humanitarianlibrary.org/sites/default/files/2014/02/UNDP_BasicEducationSustainableLivelihoods.pdf> (accessed 02 November 2016).

² Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions*, Penguin Books, 2014, p. 126.

³ Glen Peterson, “Education Changes the World”: The World University Service of Canada’s Student Refugee Program, *Refuge*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2010, p. 112. Available at <<http://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/34728/31558>> (accessed 04 November 2016).

⁴ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., p. 107.



Our level of education and acquired abilities have a significant impact on our “economic opportunities and employment prospects”. In the era of globalised trade and commerce, the need for education has grown tremendously. In the age of globalisation, education has become increasingly important.⁵ In order to solve our nation’s “unemployment problem”, we must prioritise education. All this can happen in a prosperous nation with flourishing “trade and commerce”. So, the best strategy to increase “economic growth,” combat poverty, and enhance public health is to “invest in education”. A workforce with a high level of education promotes economic expansion. It is obvious that education acts as a catalyst for the development of new goods and services. Educated people share ideas and generate fresh concepts that contribute to the expansion of the economy. Because people who live in poverty may forgo attending school in order to find employment, they may not have the “literacy and numeracy skills” necessary to further their careers. Years later, their children find themselves in a comparable predicament, with little money and little options other than to drop out of school and find employment. The key to breaking “the cycle of poverty” for “families,” “communities,” and the world at large may be education. Children who have access to knowledge are better able to imagine “a better future” and have the “confidence” to pursue quality education, which will benefit future generations.

In many ways, education helps to end poverty. For educated individuals job possibilities open up. One can support themselves through employment and live a decent life. Education promotes “economic security,” generates employment possibilities, and enhances the standard of living for those who are less fortunate. Through the abilities that are developed during the process of learning, education further reduces poverty. “In non-formal economies,” knowledge of “carpentry, plumbing, and masonry” is useful. These abilities can be learned “through technical and vocational” education. Through education, people can rise above poverty by acquiring the skills necessary to enhance their standard of living. Gains in productivity are also produced, which support economic expansion. Economic growth is necessary for “sustained poverty reduction” even while it does not necessarily eliminate poverty. Education has a direct impact on the economy and society’s ability to develop sustainably. A country’s “human capital” is its most valuable resource. People who have greater education are more mindful of each other. They are capable of becoming businesspeople, scientists, and farmers. Today’s world is dominated by “Information Technology”, and a developing nation’s ability to prosper economically may depend on their expertise in this area. The most effective way that education fights poverty is through skills. Men and women who have higher education have a greater chance to not only be employed, but also to hold occupations that are more dependable, offer respectable work environment, and pay a living wage. This way, education can prevent people from “falling - or falling back - into poverty” in addition to helping lift them out of it. Notwithstanding all the flaws in the current educational system, people having good education are more capable of combating “vulnerability and marginalization” in contemporary society. An educated labourer is “comparatively better placed to avoid exploitative work conditions, or to demand the legal minimum wage, even if he or she has never heard of Marx at school.”⁶

2. NEED FOR QUALITY EDUCATION:

The quality of education in India is exceptionally low over a wide range of institutions.⁷ Even though the country’s literacy rates are rising over time, very few people in it have completed a college degree. Poor people’s inability to benefit from the expanding “non-farm” economy is mostly due to “low levels of educational attainment”. They are also denied new possibilities due to a lack of skill development.⁸ Given the extensive “individual and social roles” that education plays, this failure has contributed significantly to a wide range of social issues that we are currently dealing with, including issues of “public accountability, social inequality, and democratic practice”. Today, India is more aware than ever before of the importance of education for growth. It is necessary to move beyond these basic stages and, in particular, to put much more emphasis on “the quality of education,” even though substantial progress has been made in expanding the reach and infrastructure of the educational system.⁹ From the standpoint of a person’s livelihood, the issue of educational quality is becoming increasingly important. The privatisation of education has rarely offered a solution; instead, it has just enlarged and intensified the stark differences that always existed. The unchecked growth of “technical institutes”, run mostly by the corporate sector and with little regard for maintaining standards, is a significant issue that India must solve. A 2003 AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) Report¹⁰ has observed

⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, Oxford University Press, 2002, New Delhi, p. 145.

⁷ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., p. 120.

⁸ “Livelihood Assessment Report” of Tamil Nadu Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Project, Institute of Development Alternatives, Chennai, December 2004. Available at <http://www.tnrd.gov.in/externallyaidedprojects/livelihood_ida.pdf> (accessed 01 November 2016).

⁹ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

¹⁰ “Revitalizing Technical Education”, September 2003.



that: “a serious situation has arisen in recent years because of the mushrooming of a large number of private technical institutions and polytechnics. Barring some exceptions, there is scant regard for maintenance of standards.”¹¹ “It is a matter of great concern to find that over 90 per cent of technical and engineering graduates are studying in non-accredited institutions,” the report observes.¹² “There is neither any independent check nor has the review committee seen any evidence of such institutions having a transparent and rigorous independent audit on the quality of education they are imparting,” the report has said.¹³ In addition to the general “lack of educational attainment”, a large portion of the population has very little skill development. Only a very small percentage of them—almost negligible numbers—have received “formal skill training”. The majority of those who have been successful in finding “non-agricultural” work have managed the same “with informal training” or are working in positions that don’t demand a lot of ability. So this sharply narrows their work options and income potential. Because of this, the majority of employees who have left the villages seek jobs as unskilled manual labourers in urban centres, getting extremely poor wages with little assurance of a long-term job. In consequence, this greatly “increases their vulnerability”. It has a detrimental effect on the possibilities for a living and their long-term viability. It has a huge impact on both that generation and, more significantly, the one after it. Undoubtedly, education has a function beyond securing a lucrative job. It is preferable to get work “in the secondary and tertiary” industries given their higher wage levels. If the current circumstances are allowed to persist, the transition from the “primary sector to other sectors” will remain a pipe dream with the current “level of education and skill” acquisition. Under the Right to Education Act of 2010, “automatic promotion” from one class to the next is guaranteed until class 8, irrespective of what a child has learnt. This kind of pupil evaluation and school assessment has adversely affected the ability of disadvantaged sections of the people to gain skills for a meaningful livelihood.

2.1. PRIVILEGED EXCELLENCE AND SOCIAL DIVISIONS:

The disparity between the poor “quality of Indian education” and the widespread acclaim given to Indians with advanced degrees presents an intriguing paradox. Given its severe flaws, Indian education frequently earns dazzling praise from overseas. This has real concerns since it could foster a delusion of satisfaction that everything is, on the whole, operating satisfactorily in Indian education.¹⁴ We are told that skilled Indian professionals are displacing Westerners, who weren’t in danger before, by grabbing decent employment. Certainly, a small percentage of Indians in India have access to top-notch education. There are prestigious schools, “advanced centres of higher learning”, and a culture that appreciates and honours quality education.¹⁵ However, the reality is that India’s educational system is extremely “diverse” in many ways, with the majority of the people being restricted to “educational arrangements that are,” in so many ways, inadequate or substandard, while a relatively small group of youngsters from the wealthy classes enjoy great - frequently extraordinary - educational prospects. A small percentage of students are positioned on the highest rung of the educational ladder by the facilities they receive, while others are limited far below it, from their primary schooling to their higher education. In line with the broad separation between “the favoured and the rest” in Indian society, the “social, economic, and organisational” aspects of the “Indian educational system” do appear to ensure that only a small number of students out of a large pool are able to receive a quality education. The choosing is done through differences that are fuelled by “economic and social” inequity connected to “class, caste, gender, location, and social privilege” rather than any organised effort “to keep anyone out”.¹⁶

What is wrong is a system where “the performance of a small (and largely self-contained) elite” is used to determine the success of the education system, “ignoring the rest,” and where there is a striking “social insensitivity to the unfairness and injustice” of such glaring inequities, which contributes to the continuance “of a highly stratified Indian society”.¹⁷ We must acknowledge that, Indian education system is incredibly careless in terms of both “coverage and quality”, notwithstanding the remarkable achievement of the affluent strata of people. In addition to being incredibly “unjust”, India’s rigid “educational hierarchy” is also incredibly ineffective in creating the foundation for a thriving “economy and a progressive society”. We can better comprehend “how much the country loses by its” exceptional focus on a small number of people while ignoring the overwhelming “majority of Indians” who are impeded by low income,

¹¹ R. Ramachandran, “Warning bells”, *Frontline*, Volume 21, Issue 06, March 13–March 26, 2004, available at <<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2106/stories/20040326003610500.htm>> (accessed 01 November 2016).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 129.



“caste” differences, “class barriers, gender inequalities, and social gaps” connected to “ethnicity and community” when viewed from that “structural perspective”.¹⁸

2.2.THE GRIP OF INEQUALITY:

To some extent, inequalities in educational attainments in India are “a reflection of class, caste and gender inequalities”. Inequalities “in access to schooling, learning abilities, parental education, and so on” also influence the outcome.¹⁹ Other significant socioeconomic differences exist in India as well, frequently strengthening the ones already mentioned. Rammanohar Lohia, for instance, has highlighted the gap between people “who know English and those who don’t”, and was convinced that “high-caste, wealth, and knowledge of English are the three requisites, with anyone possessing two of these belonging to the ruling class.”²⁰ Learning English offers several openings, even for those with less-than-ideal qualifications. With no efforts towards creating a uniform system of public education, the elite “English-medium” schools prevail over the rest in the job market. So, addressing inequality has become an impossible task.²¹

The “class, caste, gender and other inequalities” in India reinforce each other, and hinder “social progress” as well as economic development in many ways.²² The “upper-class – and upper-caste – bias” in India is reflected in the educational poverty of the masses.²³ Good performance of students belonging to the “disadvantaged” castes is a significant challenge to the traditional belief of dominant castes that education is neither important or desirable for those in “the lower orders”.²⁴ Numerous historical texts can be cited as evidence to prove that such beliefs had a powerful influence in society. According to *Manusmriti* (also known as the *Mānava-Dharmasāstra* or Laws of Manu: 2nd or 3rd century CE), the lower castes were to refrain from reading or listening the *Vedas*. A majority of the population was not permitted to learn and study Sanskrit as it was the language of the *Vedas*. Secondly, to maintain the caste system “colonisation of knowledge” was essential. If a Shudra listens intentionally to the *Vedas*, the *Gautam Dharma Sutra* says, his ears must be filled with molten tin or lac.²⁵ Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni (973 – c. 1050) mentioned “those castes who are not allowed to occupy themselves with science”.²⁶ Traditionally, women’s education has been seen with a similar mindset.²⁷ Even in the nineteenth century it was a common belief that women would become widows if they received education.²⁸ It is true that such beliefs are not that powerful today, but the discrimination against the “underprivileged” continues to be a norm, if not the rule.²⁹ One of the major factors of social backwardness in India is indeed the caste. Dr B. R. Ambedkar has rightly said that it is “a pernicious division of human beings into iron-curtained compartments”.³⁰

Rammanohar Lohia articulated the harmful effects of the caste system in the following way:

“Caste restricts opportunity. Restricted opportunity constricts ability. Constricted ability further restricts opportunity. Where caste prevails, opportunity and ability are restricted to ever-narrowing circles of the people.”³¹

The factors that kept India backward, both before and during the colonial rule, are briefly described by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson:

“In India, institutional drift worked differently and led to the development of a uniquely rigid hereditary caste system that limited the functioning of markets and the allocation of labor across occupations much more severely

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

²¹ Ibid., p. 216.

²² Ibid., p. 216.

²³ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁴ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, op. cit., p. 145n.

²⁵ Arundhati Roy, “The Doctor and the Saint”, in B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, Navayan Publishing Pvt Ltd, 2014, p. 96.

²⁶ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, op. cit., p. 145n.

²⁷ Karuna Chanana (ed.), *Socialisation, Education and Women: Explorations in Gender Identity*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1988. Quoted in Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, op. cit., p. 145n.

²⁸ Malavika Karlekar, “Woman’s Nature and the Access to Education”, in Karuna Chanana (ed.), *ibid.* Quoted in Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, op. cit., p. 145n.

²⁹ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, op. cit., p. 146. See also Myron Weiner, *The Child and the State in India: Child Labor and Education Policy in Comparative Perspective*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991.

³⁰ See particularly B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1936, reprinted with an introduction by Arundhati Roy by Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2014.

³¹ Quoted in Lion Agrawal, *Freedom Fighters of India*, Vol. II, Isha, Delhi, 2008, p. 212. See also Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., p. 35.



than the feudal order in medieval Europe...³² Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson contend that caste structure was a significant obstacle to the growth “of inclusive economic institutions in India”.

2.3. LACK OF ANY PARTICIPATORY CHARACTER IN INDIA’S GROWTH PROCESS:

The Indian economy has not been growing evenly. The lower segments of the population have seen very little improvement in their earnings and incomes as a result of “jobless economic growth”. While agricultural miracle preceded the industrial growth in China, India’s recent economic expansion has been primarily led by “services”. The “services” is a diverse category. The “skill-intensive” areas (like, “software” industry, “financial services”, etc.), have grown faster than the “traditional labour-intensive” industries. Although this has made it possible for the highly educated minority to get relatively high earnings and benefits, the majority of the population is slogging away in less remunerative agricultural and other “informal sectors”. Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen have appositely stated that “even if India were to take over the bulk of the world’s computer software industry, this would still leave its poor, illiterate masses largely untouched.”³³ In the same vein, Kotwal et al. opine that “...there are two Indias: one of educated managers and engineers who have been able to take advantage of the opportunities made available through globalisation and the other – a huge mass of undereducated people who are making a living in low productivity jobs in the informal sector – the largest of which is still agriculture.”³⁴

2.4. THE PRIVILEGED AND THE REST:

It is a fact in India that the poor, illiterate people, labouring long hours for little pay, face significant barriers to “social and economic opportunities” that might enable them to advance. Having little say in how the country is run, this lower stratum is treated with shocking insensitivity by “the class-conscious police”. The Indian society is characterised not only by castes but also by “a pre-eminent division” between “haves” and “have-nots”. The overlap of disadvantages simply widens the chasm “between the privileged and the rest” in specific domains and segregates individuals into compartments that are wholly unique. For India’s quest for equity, this presents a significant problem.³⁵ Parliamentary democracy in India has, in several respects, failed to meet the difficulties it encountered “in the economic and social” spheres - particularly in terms of tackling the continuation of fundamental disparities as well as the lack of accountability that the Indian people often experience. This necessitates a thorough analysis of the causes of this failure as well as potential strategies to widen the scope of Indian democracy.

2.5. THE ROLE OF STATE:

The classic problem of education in India has been underfunding by the state.³⁶ As “education and development” are directly related to each other, “educational transformation” can be brought about by the dedicated and efficient use of “public services”. This was recognised by Adam Smith, who advocated “greater use of state resources for public education”, and said:

“For a very small expense the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education.”³⁷

The European countries have shown that the welfare state can promote and sustain “economic and social development” by funding quality public education. These examples were later successfully followed by the rising economies of Asia with remarkable results.³⁸ To improve the quality and performance of education in India, the entire education system of the country will have to be transformed.

3. SOLUTIONS:

- Education helps people to earn a decent living. “It is true that” not all jobs require only high academic achievement. Additionally, it depends on a nation’s economic development stage. An educated person does have a possibility of

³² Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, Profile Books, London, 2012, p. 118.

³³ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., p. 32.

³⁴ A. Kotwal, B. Ramaswami, and W. Wadhwa, “Economic Liberalization and Indian Economic Growth: What’s the Evidence?”, *Journal of Economic Literature*, 49, 2011, p. 1,196.

³⁵ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., p. 242.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³⁷ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Natures and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, republished in R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (eds.), *Adam Smith: An Inquiry into the Natures and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, I.ii, p. 27, and V.i.f, p. 785. Quoted in Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., p. 110.

³⁸ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, op. cit., pp. 110-111.



landing a solid career with pay that will allow him to support himself. A well-educated person can readily provide for their fundamental material necessities.

- So, education must be acknowledged as an essential component “of the asset base” for “sustainable livelihoods”.
- It is critical to pay significantly more attention to educational quality.
- At the grassroots, the programmes to eradicate poverty should place “equal emphasis” on healthcare and education. That will establish the groundwork for a variety of prospective economic advantages, such as stable jobs with higher pay in other industries, the development of professional-run microbusinesses, etc.³⁹
- Reservations have not significantly improved the “levels of educational attainment” among the disadvantaged sections of society. To assist the underprivileged sections of the community in receiving high-quality education, special initiatives are required.
- It is necessary to focus on the quality education for girls.
- Panchayati Raj institutions must be roped in fill the gaps in providing quality education to the historically oppressed people.
- The expansion of “vocational education” should be prioritized.

³⁹ “Livelihood Assessment Report” of Tamil Nadu Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Project, Institute of Development Alternatives, Chennai, December 2004. Available at <http://www.tnrd.gov.in/externallyaidedprojects/livelihood_ida.pdf> (accessed 01 November 2016).