



Educational Empowerment of the Subaltern- a Human Rights Issue

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ABSTRACT

In this era of globalization, men and women are forced to plan and decide for their destiny within the sphere of a new world order which is concerned with commercial and market gains, rather than social justice, cultural sensibility and economic priorities for the poorest of the poor. Marginalization of a vast majority of people on account of poverty, colonial influence, class, exploitation, globalization and income inequality, has amplified the existing malaise. Creating a global network of men and women towards disseminating the noble cause of human dignity and equality—is the need of the hour. Hence, this article aims to drive home the hypothesis that subalternity need not be a perpetual condition for anyone and that they can emerge victorious through education, which is a form of empowerment.

Keywords : Subaltern, Conscientization, New Human Race

Introduction

Men and women are designed to live in peace and harmony. Noble ideals of this sort seem Utopian today. Disparity and discrimination of every kind is an everyday event. When the question of equality and human dignity comes up, people normally shrug their shoulders and pass the buck to the government or human rights watchdogs. Nevertheless, wise men and intellectuals of good will have contributed their literary might towards the noble cause of human dignity and equality. Creating a global network of men and women towards disseminating this vision for conscientization and transformation would be a positive response to the aspirations of the subaltern. Hence, this article aims to drive home the hypothesis that subalternity need not be a perpetual condition for anyone and that they can emerge victorious through education, which is a form of empowerment.

1. The Context

The term 'subaltern' means a general attribute for subordination. A global view of this term leads readers to understand that during the days of the British Empire, subalternity was viewed in terms of race difference. This is evident from *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell which portrays the reality of how the British colonized many countries and exploited their resources. They thought that it was their burden to civilize the people whom they called heathens and savages. Again, *Freedom at Midnight*, authored by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre vividly recalls the events in the Indian independence movement. Subalternity during the colonial era polarized humans into superior and inferior races. Europeans were considered superior and Indians inferior. In the postcolonial era, race was no more a dominant criterion for discrimination in India. Racism was supplanted by casteism in the Indian psyche. Scheduled castes were considered subaltern in India. Things have not changed to a great extent yet. In India, despite many laws against the ill-treatment of scheduled castes, discrimination and cruelty still exist in all states in India, as is evident from reports in the media. Moreover, a vast majority of the Indian population is denied education. Without education, there can be no prosperity. Illiteracy is also a cause for income inequality. Therefore, looking from the perspectives of workers, lower castes and women, the need of the hour is a clarion call for the tangible actualization of human rights.

1.1. A Critical Development of the Term Subaltern

The term subaltern was originally used by the Italian Marx-

ist thinker Antonio Gramsci to "refer in particular to the unorganized groups of rural peasants based in Southern Italy, who had no social or political consciousness as a group, and were therefore, susceptible to the ruling ideas, culture and leadership of the state"(Morton 2007). The term has further initiated studies in varied disciplines such as history, anthropology and literature as a consequence of postcolonial criticism. Postcolonial criticism has challenged the concept of colonialism and western domination, and seeks to present a radical rethinking of the idea of Euro centrism which generalizes historiography as the history of the West. Thus, a colonial critique becomes the starting point for subaltern studies (Guha 1986).

2. Educational Exclusivism

Education paves the way for right living coupled with employability and improved economic condition. Illiteracy and lack of education, on the other, exert exploitation of human resources and contribute to inequalities and imbalances in society. While education is made available to all, it is not an exaggeration to state that it has been the exclusive privilege of many at the exclusion of some of the poor and unfortunate. Marginalization of a vast majority of people on account of poverty, colonial influence, class, exploitation, globalization and income inequality, to name a few, has contributed to the already existing educational exclusivism. An overview of poverty thus becomes inevitable to substantiate this view in order to arrive at the quintessential need for education as a human right.

2.1. Poverty—an Overview

Despite remarkable growth in the past few decades, Asia still faces many developmental challenges. As per the report of the President of the Asian Development Bank, Takehiko Nakao, there are over eight hundred million people reeling under poverty in Asia. He lamented that in spite of rapid growth, in many areas so many people have to live under absolute poverty. This is a new challenge. Even though multi-lateral lending agencies such as the Asian Development Bank are there to lend a greater helping hand, absolute poverty is still rampant. This also poses a concern for the 'middle income group,' which is able to live only a hand-to-mouth life. Poverty is also a concern for many financial agencies because investments of surplus resources are mostly loaned to the European countries, but the returns are very low due to low interest rates. Therefore, a sustainable lending level is to be created to eradicate poverty and by making infrastructure de-

velopment such as making access to education, medicine, technology and sanitation (Dasgupta 2013).

This attitude enables noble hearts to transcend traditional boundaries to live with the poor at the grassroots level. Service is never static or rigid. Scientific advancement, together with globalization and liberalization, has also made the poor, poorer even though they have played a significant role in development. The developmental means have, on the one hand, increased progress, but on the other hand, have contributed to inequality in incomes. They have also increased the problems of climate change, the rise in sea levels, and ozone depletion, which together pose a very serious threat to humanity. Scientific advancement, powered by human intelligence, may claim victory in genetic engineering, cloning and nano technology. But, there are also serious concerns about human values that this scientific progress propagates (Being 2008).

3. Right to Education as Human Rights

The history of humanity is replete with the struggle against injustice and exploitation. The remarkable outcome of this struggle is the recognition of human rights at the national and international levels. There is no agreed terms and conditions to define human rights. It is dynamic because it adapts itself according to the situation and place. Human rights and security at the national and international level are related and interdependent. Individuals can demand human rights only in an organized community of the state (Bajwa 1995); and "Unless all human beings are able to enjoy their rights adequately, there will not be peace, harmony and happiness in the universe" (Mohanty 2003). A clear understanding of human rights tells us that human rights are an outcome of natural law (Bajwa 1995). The ancient *Vedas* have emphasized the three fold duties of a man. They are: *Devaruna* – a man's duty towards God, *Pitru-runa* – a man's obligations towards his parents; and *Rishi-runa* – a man's acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. Nevertheless, Veda Vyas, in the *Bhagavat Gita*, adds one more dimension to these obligations, namely *Manav-runa* – man's duty towards society. This is remarkable because societal obligation can alone give humanity prosperity, respect and equality (Mohanty 2003).

4. Impact of Education

The Rights to Education (RTE) guarantees automatic promotion to higher levels, to children at the end of eight years regardless of the knowledge and skills acquired by them. Though it may be considered a boon, this too has its sorry side. Automatic passing will hinder the natural tendency for the children to use their potentials and skills. Hardships and difficulties allow children to excel in life. One such example is the case of Sarathbabu Elumali. He once sold *idlies*, as a child to support the family and did not have food to eat while his schoolmates had enough to eat. His determination to

study made him look at life with hope. Now he is recognized as the CEO of "Foodking Caterers," an enterprise which supplies quality food to colleges and restaurants. He has realized his dream of serving the society through sheer determination of positivity and perseverance. Now he wants to become the education minister of the country which is his dream, to see a hunger free India (Menon 2013). Everyone in the country deserves an equal opportunity to education and employment. Only education can rid the country of its poverty, ignorance and inequality.

5. Summation: Network for the Creation of a New Race

In this era of globalization, developed countries are forced to plan and decide for their destiny within the sphere of a new world order which is concerned with commercial and market gains, rather than social justice, cultural sensibility and economic priorities of the people (Kalliath 1999). Even in developing countries, there is an increase of marginalization in society because of catching-up markets and free market policies. Now-a-days, people do not believe in institutions like political movements, trade unions and social-struggle movements because they are handled by the power centers of globalization. Today, in their place, a variety of movements have taken centre stage, focusing on the needs of environmentalism, social justice and community identities. These various movements outside the main stream are collectively known as Subaltern Movements.

Human beings are the most beautiful creation of God. When He created them, He intended their goodness and well being. Well being is possible when all live in peace and harmony. There have been reports of violence on account of race, colour, caste, ethnicity and religion all over the world. If this violence goes on uncontrolled, there will be chaos and annihilation. The evil designs of violence is seen in the form of terrorism, human flesh trade, trafficking of women and children, bonded labour and practice of untouchability, caste and racial discrimination. Additionally, natural calamities like global warming, the green house effect, ozone depletion, deforestation and rising sea levels too have become a great threat. These problems have to be addressed reasonably and scientifically. If violence overpowers human beings and takes precedence over human values, then the very purpose of God's creation of men is defeated.

If everyone thinks of a possibility of a flowering of a new era, then there will be room for tolerance, selfless service and the understanding of others' needs. In this way, respect for the freedom of others will be an automatic choice; dignity and emancipation of women will be the crowning point of human progress and development. A life of harmony among men and women of all races, castes, colours, creeds and religions will be the guiding principle for everyone.

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