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EDUCATIONAL STATUS of THE BACKWARD CASTES

Abstract :

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Therefore, education system is very important institution of society. India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, after China and the United States. Education associates to the culture and civilization of the society which determine the nature of institution. No educational system can operate without being influenced by the norms and values of society. Since ancient times, India has a strong tradition of higher education where education was mostly based on the Vedas and later Hindu texts and scriptures. The Vedic education system had been continuing for centuries in India but along with the emergence of caste system it became very rigid and discriminatory. The Brahman (priests) being the most privileged while, Shudras and women were excluded from the right to education as well as many aspects of social life. The current system of education, by and large, remained colonial. The researches in social sciences exposed the high level of illiteracy among the SEBC, SC and ST. The present research paper focuses on educational status in the lower castes i.e. SEBC and SC which is the based upon primary data of education of my Ph.D. research work. The research paper explains the current situation of education in lower castes of villages of rural Gujarat.

1. Introduction:

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Therefore, education system is very important institution of society. The education system and its structure are always vital not only for society but also for mankind. It is essential for the whole transformation of individual as well as society. It is an important determinates of the development of any country. India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, after China and the United States. Education associates to the culture and civilization of the society which determine the nature of institution. "Educational institutions are integral and sensitive part of society. No educational system can operate without being influenced by the norms and values of society."¹

CONCEPT:

"The word 'education' was derived from the Latin word 'educare' meaning to bring up, to lead out, to rise up and to educate. In its original sense, to educate means acting in order to lead out fully all the potentialities. Frankenna, a well-known writer in philosophy of education, gives a four-fold definition of education. Thus education is.....

- What parents, teachers and schools do, or in other words, the activity of educating the young.
 - What goes on in the child, or the process of being educated;
 - The result, or what the child acquires, or has in the end, namely 'an education';
- The discipline that studies, that is, the discipline that studies (1), (2) and (3). The field that on all of reflects the above to build up a body of knowledge is education; roughly, what is studied and taught in schools of Education."²

"Kaunda (1963) and Castle (1966) claim basically that education is transmission of culture from the older generation to the young. This concept is often expressed not only by educational historians but also by sociologists and psychologist who study education."²

Good (1945), who sees education as "the art of making available to each generation the organized knowledge of the past which is the process by which the traditions and culture of a society is passed on from one generation to the other, from the older to the younger ones."²

In short, education is a process of the socialization by which develops the self of individual and make him able to live the social life. Thus, education can be dividing into two levels like, informal and formal. The former related to socialization which continues life time of individual and later related to the school and college education. "The ultimate aim of both kind of education is nourishing a socially acceptable and balanced personality for the nation, for the whole world."³

BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN INDIA:

Since ancient times, India has a strong tradition of higher education. "In ancient India, during the Vedic period from about 1500 BC to 600 BC, education was mostly based on the Vedas (hymns, formulas and incantations, recited or chanted by priests of a pre-Hindu tradition) and later Hindu texts and Scriptures. Education in India in its traditional form was closely related to religion."⁵ "Language, logic, craft, discipline and building up character formed the basis of education in early India."¹ "Takshasila was the earliest recorded center of higher learning in India from at least 5th century BCE and the Nalanda University was the oldest university system of education in the world in the modern sense of university. Knowledge, intelligence and spirituality have always held a very important place in India. Later, temples also became centers of education; religious education was compulsory, but secular subjects were also taught. Students were required to be brahmacharis or celibates."⁴ The Vedic education system had been continuing for centuries in India but along with the emergence of caste system it became very rigid and closed at Braminical era. Education, at first freely available in Vedic society, became over time more discriminatory as the caste system, originally based on occupation, evolved, with the Brahman (priests) being the most privileged of the castes. "The main aim of education was the learning of the Vedas in the era. Shudras and women were excluded from the right to education. Education was given on the basis of caste rather than ability and aptitude. The higher education was imparted through schools of learning while the vocational and professional training was given within caste structure."¹

The current system of education, with its western style and content, was introduced and founded by the British during the British Raj, following recommendations by Lord Macaulay. According to Ahuja, "The pattern, by and large, remained colonial. A number of committees were appointed for suggesting measures to improve the quality of education system but the old pattern continued to persist. The tendency was to maintain the status quo. Currently, the vision and policy of the government in the field of education aim at universalization of primary education, vocationalization of secondary education and rationalization of higher education. On one hand, policies are being framed for stamping out illiteracy and arranging 'education for all' to ensure that all children between the age of six years to fourteen years get an opportunity to attend school and all illiterate adults learn to read and write. On the other hand, efforts are being made to improve the quality of education."¹

"The National Policy on Education (1986) modified in the 1992 by the P.V. Narasimha Rao government. We have introduced the Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA) in the year 2003. The project was concentrated on universalization of education-education for all. Now the Right to Education Act (RTE - 2009) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA-2009) have been introduced during the 11th five year plan. The project RMSA concentrated on Secondary Stage and it aims to universalize. But the Education in our country is still in the miserable condition. However, we are succeeded in the raise up the proportion of education in India, but the quality is very poor and anxious."¹ We have successful to increase the rate of literacy. 18.33% persons were literate in India according to 1951 census while 74.04% persons were literate in India according to 2011 census. ⁶

However, it is a fact that the rate of literacy in India is varied by states, regions, communities, religions, castes and sex. Kerala is the only state in India to have 100% rate of literacy. It is followed by Goa (88.7%), Tripura (87.22%), Delhi (86.21%), Himachal Pradesh (82.80%), Maharashtra (82.34%) and Sikkim (81.42%). The Bihar (61.8%), Arunachal Pradesh (65.38%) and Rajasthan (66.11%) have lowest rate of literacy in India. The Gujarat state has 78.03% rate of literacy according to 2011 census. There are notable difference in the rate of literacy in men (85.75%) and women (63.31%) of Gujarat. The present paper focuses on the nature and quality of formal education in rural Gujarat, particularly in the backward castes (Socially and Educationally Backward Class and Scheduled Castes) living in rural community. ⁶

METHODOLOGY:

The present research paper is the consequence of my Ph.D. research work entitled "Family Life of Lower Castes in Rural Community: Continuity and Change" where I used the social survey method. The study was sample survey and field work handled in purposively selected three villages (Goraj, Kuwar and Makhiv) of Sanand taluka of Ahmedabad district of the Gujarat State. The Sanand taluka and villages of field work are very near, 20 - 40 k.m., from Ahmedabad city. The unit of sampling was the caste, total 21 lower castes (SEBC - Koli, Nadoda, Thakor, Bharwad, Gadhavi, Khavas, Sadhu, Kunbhar, Darji, Suthar, Luhar, Valand, Vaghari, Ravar, Nayak, Gola Rana and SC - Garoda, Vankar, Senva, Chamar and Bhangi) have existed in these three villages. I have selected the head of household as a respondent, selected a household by systematic random sampling method, from every five households out of total households of every caste of village. Thus, I selected 126 households from 598 households from different 16 castes residing in Goraj village, 88 households from 401 households from different 16 castes residing in Kuwar village and 88 households from 404 households from different 20 castes residing in Makhiv village. As a result, total 302 head of the households selected as respondents from the various 21 lower castes of three villages by systematic random sampling method. The field work was handled during the summer of 2011. The present research paper is based on the collected primary data from the respondents. I focus here to explain the educational situation of the households of these backward castes which exposed the level and quality of the educational development of Gujarat state.

Educational Situation:

The present study related to the family life of lower castes though I have collected the primary data like, marital status, education, occupation, annual income of the households of different castes of the villages. I have tried to analyze the educational data of the present study. Traditionally the lower castes (including in to the Shudras and Untouchables) haven't right to take the formal education. First, I have collected the educational data of all the members of selected 302 households. According to the data there were 16 households (5.30%) who's not a single member was literate. Thus, more than one member in remained 286 households was literate. First, I would like to explain that which member of the household possesses the highest level of formal education. The following table displays the household status of the highest literate members.

Table 1: household status of the highest literate member

No.	Household Status	Frequency	%
1	Head of Household	77	26.92
2	Wife of the Head	11	3.85
3	Brother of the Head	07	2.45
4	Son/Grandson	150	52.45
5	Daughter/Granddaughter	29	10.14
6	Daughter-in-law	03	1.04
7	other	09	3.15
Total		286	100

It is clear from the above table that the male members of the households were more literate than the female members of the households. The table shows that the highest literate member in the household was males in the most of households (81.12% household = 234 household from 286) while the females were highest literate, mostly daughter, in just 43 (15.03%) households. The data represents the fact of inequality of male -female formal education prevailed in entire India. The table also shows that the son/grandson (52.45%) was the highest literate compare to other members of the households. That means the rate of literacy is increasing in new generation which can create the social change and social mobility in the lower caste.

Of course, it is important to know that the level of formal education of highest literate member of household. The data reveals that highest literate member of $\frac{1}{3}$ households (37.76% = 108 households) have taken just primary education, while the highest literate member of more than $\frac{1}{2}$ households (53.85% = 154 households) have taken just secondary/higher secondary education and the highest literate member of just 6.29% (18 households) households have taken the higher education. It is very low proportion compare to the national proportion of higher education (19%)

according to 2011 census of India. Thus, these castes are educationally backward.

Level of Literacy:

I have analyzed data about level of literacy of all the members of all the selected households. There were total 1,616 members of 286 households, where 864 males and 752 females which indicate the inequality in the proportion of male-female like all over the India. However, 10.89% (89 male + 87 female children) members of the households were the 0 - 6 age group, so they couldn't include in the further analysis. Therefore, I tried to explain the level of literacy in different age group of total males (775) and total females (665) which will be clear by the following tables.

Table 2: level of literacy according to age group of males

No.	Age Group (in years)	Educational Level					Frequency
		Illiterate	Primary	Secondary/Higher secondary	Higher education	Other	
1	06-21	09	166	115	05	07	302
2	22-35	28	74	97	09	02	210
3	36-60	71	97	45	06	02	221
4	60+	26	16	-	-	-	40
Total		134	353	257	20	11	775

It is clear from the above table that $\frac{1}{6}$ males (17.29% = 134) of the various age group of the sample households were illiterate. It is also derived from the above table that there was correlation between the illiteracy and age group i.e. rate of illiteracy are increasing with increased the age of males. That means the rate of illiteracy are increasing in the new generation of males than old generation i.e. the rate of illiteracy is less among the middle age males than aged, it is less in young than the middle age males and it is less among the adolescent than the middle age males of the selected households. It is notable that few cases of illiterates in the 06 - 21 age group is worried situation in the sense of Right to Education, 2007.

The above table shows that less than half males of the selected households (45.55% = 353) have taken just primary level of education while $\frac{1}{3}$ males (33.16% = 257) have taken secondary/higher secondary education. It is notable that very few males of selected households (33) have taken higher or professional education. Generally it is observed that they take education till the level of the village school, mostly the secondary level. However, the new generation is more oriented to formal education than old generation of males but the quality decreases compare to higher castes and urban community as well as national proportion. It can be expected that the new generation of males will take the higher education but the caste and village structure are major hindrances which is more affected to the female education. It can be cleared from following table.

Table 3: level of literacy according to age group of females

No.	Age Group (in years)	Educational Level					Frequency
		Illiterate	Primary	Secondary/Higher secondary	Higher education	Other	
1	06-21	30	173	43	-	01	247
2	22-35	96	49	22	02	-	169
3	36-60	149	38	05	01	-	193
4	60+	50	06	-	-	-	56
Total		325	266	70	03	01	665

The above table shows that half of the females (48.87% = 325) of the various age group of the sample households were illiterate. Female illiteracy or high level of illiteracy is one of the important criterions of Socially and Educationally Backward class which we can realize here. Moreover, it is also derived from the above table that there was correlation between the illiteracy and age group of

females i.e. rate of illiteracy are increasing with increased the age of females. That means the rate of illiteracy are increasing in new generation of females than old generation i.e. the rate of illiteracy is less among the middle age females than aged, it is less in young females than the middle age females and it is less among the adolescent than the middle age females of selected households. It is positive change in these castes which will be created modifications in the traditional social system. However, few cases of illiterates in the 06 – 21 age group of female, particularly in daughters (10 out of 30) and son in law (20 out of 30), is worried situation and challenge to the Right to Education, 2007.

It is very interesting to know the level of literacy in female members of research area. The table shows that $\frac{2}{3}$ females of the sample households (40% = 266) have taken just primary education while the half of them (130 out of 266) have taken formal education till the 4th standard. It is interesting to note that just 10.53% females (70 out of 665) of the sample households have taken secondary/higher secondary education, while the proportion of higher education among them was almost nil. I have observed that the girls have taken formal education just as the level of local school because the girls couldn't go to outside of village for taking the formal education. Moreover, child or early marriage is also an important hindering factor for low level of literacy in females of the present research area.

Both of the above table (2 and 3) reveals that three times of females compare to males (48.87% females were illiterate compare to 17.29% illiterate males) were illiterate in the present research area. Poverty and lower economic condition, agriculture, facility of just primary education at village level, responsibility of young child, detached attitude against female education, illiteracy of parents, traditional role of women, child or early marriage are the hindering factors in female education which I haven't examine here. Thus, status of caste and family situation are the major hindering factor in female education.

CONCLUSION:

I have derived some important conclusion from the analysis of the above data like,

- There were low level of literacy in the lower castes i.e. Socially and Educationally Backward Caste and Scheduled Castes. The data shows that there has been $\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{1}{3}$ members of sample households (31.88% = 134 males + 325 females out of 1,440 villagers) were illiterate. The rate of illiteracy in these castes is slightly higher (31.88%) compared to national level (25.96%) as well as Gujarat state (21.97%).
- The rate and level of literacy is higher among the children and young than the middle aged and aged members of the households. It is an important change in the community which may be the reason of social change in the backward castes.
 - Discrimination in education between the male and female has been widely acknowledged throughout the Indian society. The data shows that three times of females compared to males (48.87% females were illiterate compare to 17.29% illiterate males) were illiterate in the present research area which is slightly higher compared to national level of illiteracy in females (34.54%) as well as Gujarat state (36.69%).
- The level of formal education in these castes is worried. The proportion of higher education is almost the nil which is obstructing the national development.

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