

## **The Forms of Exclusion in Schools: A Case of Dalit Children in Hyderabad Slums**

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**Abstract:** Exclusion is a process through which a set of people being segregated from the common resource of society. Dalits are being excluded over many years in India. Though, Indian Constitution provided them equal rights to access to common resources but they are still been excluded based on their social-category. In India, the Dalits are being deprived of right to education, right to property, and right to protection. Social exclusion based on caste is practiced in various forms. Discrimination against certain castes is seen in Hindu society which distinguishes Dalits as the excluded category. In the case of primary education, Dalits children in Hyderabad Slums are victims of exclusion as a result of their social segregation or discrimination which is pillar of the society. They are being experienced various forms of social exclusion in connection to their socioeconomic conditions, cultural aspects, parents illiteracy, lack of proper encouragement, unable to incur fee-structure at private schools, seating arrangement in class based on social criteria, separate seating arrangement at mid-day meal, gender disparities of Dalit girl-children by boys from upper-castes, and exclusion of Dalit students in Games/Sports and Cultural Programmes due to unfair treatment and unaffordability to bear the expenditure.

**Keywords:** Dalit children, education, exclusion, Hyderabad slums.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Socioeconomic deprivation and its consequent social exclusion of Dalits in society are continuing even today. During 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jyothiba Phule, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and Periyaramaswamy, made several attempts for inclusion of the Dalits in Indian social system as equal partners. Later, government also initiated several measures to empower the Dalits in areas such as education, health, employment, livelihood and so on. However, the education of the Dalits still remains in deplorable condition that requires an enquiry to improve the situation. Even, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar noticed its importance in his perception of social development like 'education as a key instrument of liberation from the oppressive structure of Hindu Caste Order (Velaskar, 2012). His importance towards education can be seen in his slogan 'educate, organize and agitate'. Along with him, many Dalit intellectuals demanded of education for Dalits for their transformation because they believed in the ancient saying that 'knowledge is power', which was denied to them over thousands of years. In this regard, they realized that the constitutional provisions and protections required for upliftment of the Dalits on par with non-Dalits in India. In the absence of these rights, the Dalits cannot develop themselves in this Oppressed Hindu Society; these constitutional protections are very essential both for their protection as well as development (Ambedkar 1979). Generally, Dalits are vulnerable people in Indian society owing they have been pushed to the margin of the society. So, they are depressed physically, socially and economically. Finally, they became victim of both extreme poverty and economic exclusion. Now, it is cent percent true that Dalits are the most excluded category in India in all respects (Kantha 2003, Lee and Thorat 2006).

Even, recent studies also revealed that the education system in India has been benefited only to upper-castes and not to the Dalits (Satyanarayana, 2002). It is revealed that Dalits and the poor are at disadvantage in getting benefits from the education (Aikara, 2004). To eradicate stigmas special provisions are made by the government under the constitution, which are: 1) to provide reservation for Dalits in educational institutions and 2) to establish schools particularly in Dalit Localities, and 3) to establish hostels and Ashram Schools. The education of Dalits in turn is expected to aim for economic development of the community. But, the conditions in response to constitutional safeguards are worst because absence of educational institutions and drop-out rates are high among the Dalit community due to their social segregation and physical variables.

According to UNICEF, the dropout rate is higher among Dalits in India, which is about 44.27 when compared to non-Dalits at primary level of education because of various reasons. In some schools, Dalits are made to sit at the back of the classroom, result in not interested in education and irregularity (Omvedt 2006). In

In addition to that, it is noticed that majority of Dalits population remained illiterates owing to poverty. A few upper-castes and their children have negative perceptions towards their education that Dalit children are incapable to get education (Vasavi 1978). Such stereotype notion is still prevalent even among some of the school-teachers as it was revealed in the study of a school in Delhi (Bishwokarma 2010). In the light of circumstances of discrimination against the Dalit children in educational institutions, an attempt has been made in the present paper to examine the certain exclusionary practices towards Dalit children in schools. So, it is to comprehend the process of social exclusion of Dalits children in primary education schools located in four slums in Hyderabad i.e., *Gopinagar, Gopanapally, Shivarampally and Premavathipet*. For this study, it is taken into consideration of few aspects of cultural exclusion, caste discrimination, and gender discrimination, and inactive participation in games/sports and cultural activities.

## II. CULTURAL EXCLUSION:

In India the parents of Dalit children of the rural areas teach their children, to be indignity and tolerance with non-Dalits. A study of Dalit Children in selected villages of Gujarat and Rajasthan reveals that the Dalits parents give many cautions and, teach restrictions to their children regarding interaction with the upper caste people and to maintain physical distance (Acharya, 2010). Though they have constitutional protection to overcome such stigmas, but such protection is not completely protecting them from social exclusion and discrimination. Sometimes, they would get a strong criticism from their fellow non-Dalits who often criticise their rights. Omvedt (2006) observed the Dalits' Rights and Dignity have been abused by the dominant. In this context, the role of education is very important to empower them all. At the same time, Dalit children require complete support from their parents for their education. But, a few Dalit children have not been getting proper support from their parents as their parents are illiterate and economically vulnerable group. So, the parents might not engage in the educational process of their children. In the case of employment, a mere proportion of parents that accounts for 8.2% are only employed in organized sector and the rest of them are working in unorganized sector, as manual labourer, self-employers, and businessman. Among them, nearly two-third of parents is manual labours as seen in Table 1. They are all dependent on seasonal working patterns and not having regular working opportunities.

They earn very meagre amount of money to sustain their family. It is observed that an average earning of each of them per day is in-between Rs.50 to Rs.500 only. Generally, the earning of a family obviously connects with number of earners in a family, and the type of work its members are doing. There is variance in their wages that as seen in Table 2, nearly two-third of fathers earns approximately in-between Rs.50 to 300 only per a day. They work unregularly as they belong to unorganized sector. In literal sense, the consistency of employment opportunities in unorganized sector is unsure. So they are likely to earn whenever work is available. On the contrary, for a meagre proportion of their daily earnings are above Rs.500. Hence, it is very sure that the low-income among the Dalits is due to lack of education as well as inherited property. It is observed that they are trying hard to ride out of that situation and want to become economically sustainable through their children's employment in organized sector. Surely, education can change socioeconomic condition of upcoming generation of Dalit community. In this regard, the occupation and earning of father determine the career of a child.

**Table 1, Occupations of Fathers of Students**

Occupation of Father	Number of persons
Un-employed	3(1.1)
Self-employed	51(18.2)
Government	23(8.2)
Labour/worker	187(66.8)
Business	16(5.7)

If the parents are earning a meagre amount of money that would not be sufficient even to meet their family basic needs. Then, it would be impossible for parents to incur expenditure of their children education, resulting increase of dropout rates among Dalit children. The common expenditure on children for education such as school fee, private tuition, stationery, uniform, books, and transport, etc., increases the financial burden on the parents. So, there is an unbreakable bondage between economical status of a parent and type of school of his child. A generic fact is that the poor families send their children to government school whereas the rich parents send their children to private school. It is in the case of Dalits in slums, a large number of children are being attended to the private schools to escape discrimination at public schools.

**Table 2,** Everyday earning of father and monthly expenditure of child’s education at private school

Daily earning Range	Daily earning of father (A)	Monthly Expenditure on private education for their children (B)	Sending to government schools (C)
Less than 200	34(22.7)	12(8.0)	21(14.0)
201-300	63(41.9)	27(18.0)	12(8.0)
301-500	28(18.7)	21(14.0)	20(13.3)
501 and above	25(16.7)	33(22.0)	-
No expenditure	-	4(2.7)	-
NA	-	53(35.3) (Government School)	97(64.7) (Private School)
Total	150(100.0)	150(100.0)	150(100.0)

The primary problem lies in attending private schools is associated with payment of school-fee, transport charges, uniform, etc., that excludes means deliver children from continuing their schooling in private schools. For example, *Kusuma* was dropped out of a private school in the midst of 7<sup>th</sup> class because her parents were not able to pay her school fee and transport fee, and to buy uniform, the school shoes, and all the text books. Her parents also could not able to hire a private tuition for English and Mathematic subjects. In addition to that, she has also experienced ill-treatment of fellow students and teachers. As a result, she is now working as a housemaid in three households. Though, the parents earn a meagre amount of money but a large number of them irrespective of their financial hurdles are sending their children to the private schools. It implies their desire and dedication towards their children education. As seen from the above, one-third of total parents send their children to government schools because such schools are located nearby and their economic constraints.

### III. DROPOUT OF THE CHILDREN:

The dropout rate among the Dalit children is very common due to certain circumstances. Dropout is due to influence of other dropout friends in slums. Their friends, many Dalit children always influence the school-going children to discontinue their studies. On the other hand, parents have no concern towards education of their children education because they are completely involved into the getting livelihood opportunities to meet at least their family’s basic needs. In order to find work every day, they usually leave their homes at around 8 am and get back to their homes late in the evenings.

**Table 3,** the Reason for dropout and not studying at homes

Not Keen in Studies	2(1.3)
Helping household work	3(2.0)
Unable to pay fee	8(5.3)
Attained puberty	1(0.7)
Bad company of friend	4(2.7)
Ill-treatment of teacher and student	8(5.3)
Not applicable	124(82.7)
Total	150(100.0)

It is observed that in certain situations students themselves do not show interest to attend the school. A few students complained their parents about their health-problem for the sack of discontinuing the school. A group of students left the school in the midst when classes are still going on. According to few students, they leave the school whenever they feel not interested. In this regard, even teachers do not intimate the parents about dropping out of their children for no reason. Main reasons of dropping of children are: 1) not having keen interest in studies 2) engaging with household work 3) unable to pay the fee 4) attended puberty 5) bad company of friends and 6) ill-treatment of teachers and students. Further, fee and ill-treatment of students and teachers are also reasons for dropping out of Dalit children from the schools. Hence, there is a need to be taken into consideration of these aspects by the policy makers and government to make proper policies in order to reduce dropout rates among children of socially and economically excluded groups. Table 3 shows the reasons for dropping out of children.

In total, the reasons for dropout of Dalit children are indirectly or directly connected with socioeconomic and cultural aspects. For illustration, *Sivanand, Malleesh, Anil* and *Ramesh* actually are dropped out Dalit students staying in the slums of Hyderabad because of their social and economic vulnerability. It is observed that many students are first-generation as their parents are illiterates. Illiterate parents do not

comprehend the importance of their education. So their parents would, often fail/ neglect to pay school-fee. For example, *suresh* a Dalit boy, who discontinued his studies at 9<sup>th</sup> standard and a resident of *Shivarampally*, is working as a labour in the *Kattedan* industrial estate to pay school fees for his brother's education who is studying Intermediate. He is also dropped out student because of his teacher scolding every other day. Later, he did not get support and encouragement even from his parents as his parents could not acknowledge the importance of his education.

The culture set up of Dalits does not encourage their children to be studious. After school, most of them want to get leisure and not to spend time for studying and completion of class-assignment at home. It continues till school began in next day. That means, they don't have interest to study and complete assignments at home after school. Around 56% of students are not studying as they prefer to allocate such time for chatting and playing with their friends. In addition, around 21% of students straightway said they do not have interest at all in studies. So, they do not care about studies either at home or at school. But, only 23% children have expressed their interest of studying at home after school. They complete all assignments given by teachers, after school. Sometimes, they get help from the parents and elder siblings when they are studying at home. But, such assistance from parents and siblings is lacking there for Dalit children of slums. In a few cases, it is observed that educated parents in slums help their children by clarifying doubts in studies.

#### IV. CASTE DISCRIMINATION

In order to analyse the forms of social discrimination against Dalits children based on their social category, three prominent elements such as parents' observation over caste discrimination, sitting arrangement at midday meal, and known of student caste who sits next to the Dalit student in the class have been taken into consideration. Out of 150 parents, 43 of them stated that their children are being discriminated in schools based on their social category. On the contrary, teachers claimed that there is no discrimination taking place against these children. Out of 43 parents, 44.2% of them noticed that their children are being discriminated at midday meal and 20.9% parents said as their children are discriminated at maintaining physical distance with non-Dalit children in the class-rooms. Around 34.9% of parents acknowledged that a few upper-caste children called their children by caste, which is usually for sake of fun but not belittling them. Some of the Dalit parents observed that teachers allocate some of the works to their children by keeping social category in mind such as cleaning of premises and toilets in school. Such works are not being allocated to non-Dalit children and upper-caste children. It is also observed that few teachers called the Dalit children by their caste. Overall, it shows that Dalit children are being discriminated in schools even in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Table 4 shows the forms of discrimination in the classes.

**Table 4** Patients observation on caste discrimination

During Midday Meal	19(44.2)
Maintaining Distance	9(20.9)
Comments on Caste	15(34.9)
Total	43(100.0)

#### V. DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION AT MIDDAY MEAL

The caste discrimination against Dalit children is not exception at the time of midday meal in the school. Though primary intention of government is to eliminate caste discrimination among the students from their childhood, however it is observed that during the midday meal, the students prefer to sit together based on their social category. The caste discrimination is also sustained during the meal. For instance, headmistress at Primary School in *Shivarampally* shared her experience about caste-discrimination against Dalits in her previous private school in which a few upper caste children rejected the food prepared by the Dalit woman. Later, Dalit woman was replaced by another woman from Other Backward Community by intervention of *Sarpanch* who also belonged to OBC. In other incidents, the Upper Caste children avoided plates of Dalit children because of purity and pollution concept that had been taught to them by their parents from childhood. On the contrary, there is unity among the students in participating in preparing and serving food. She also mentioned that children from both Dalit and non-Dalit communities at *Shivarampally* are equally participating into cooking the food, cleaning vessels and washing the plates during the pre and post meal. The condition of Dalit students at *Shivarampally* are better when compared to few schools located in villages and in interior places because most of the Dalit students sat with non-Dalit students from both slum and non-slum areas during the midday meal.

**Table-5, Sitting Arrangement of Dalit Children at midday meal**

Slum Dwellers Non-Dalits (slum area)	70(25.0)
Same Caste Person (Dalit)	98(35.0)
Friend of Other Caste (non-slum)	29(10.4)
No applicable	83(29.6)
Total	280(100.0)

Around 35 students of Dalit community sat with their own caste students while 35.5% students sat with non-Dalit students during the midday meal. Out of 35.5%, there are 25% of students sat with non-Dalits from their own slum area and 10.5% sat with non-Dalit from non-slum areas. It is observed that though most of the non-Dalit students sat with Dalit students during the meal but it meant that they all completely gave up their caste' identity. In some incidents, the friendship between Dalit and non-Dalit students would be discontinued at the time of midday meal. In literal sense, they sit separately based on their caste-criteria during the meal.

### VI. SEATING ARRANGEMENT IN SCHOOLS:

The seating arrangement of students implies the caste segregation in the class. It is observed that non-Dalit students sit in the front-row of the class that implying their extreme interest in pursuing syllabus and scoring higher marks in exams. On the contrary, Dalit children sit at last row of the class to avoid teachers. According to an English Teacher in Zilla Parishad High School of *Shivarampally*, most of the Dalits students always prefer to sit at back-rows or benches in the class due to fear of being questioned about their knowledge in the subject by teachers. For instance, *Anil Kumar* a Dalit student prefers to sit in the last-row of the class to avoid the teacher as he wants to be relaxed because he works as server in the canteen of *Sameer* Gardens during the nights. He has been handling both responsibilities at a time due to poverty. In the case of sitting arrangement of Dalit students, most of them usually sit with their own caste students and very few of them sit with students of non-Dalits. Around 60.6% of Dalit students sit with their own caste children, followed by 32.1% with OBC, 4.1% with OC, and 3.2% with ST, respectively.

In addition, there has been an enquiry about awareness of Dalit student about students who sit next to them in the class. Out of 280 students, there are 78.9% students who became aware of castes of students who sat next to them. In this regard, it is observed that most of the Dalit children prefer to sit with their own caste students in schools of both private and public sectors. Overall, it is confirmed that the sitting position of students in the class reflects caste-identity of the students. Finally, it is also noticed that all students and teachers would aware of the caste, socioeconomic conditions and neighbourhood of the students.

**Table-6, Who sits next to a Dalit student in class**

SC	134(60.6)
ST	7(3.2)
Others	9(4.1)
BC	71(32.1)
Total	221(100.0)

### VII. GENDER AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION:

The gender discrimination is an evil not only in India but across the world. In the case of Dalit girl-children, it is quite higher when compared to girl children from non-Dalit community. According to few teachers, the girl children of Dalit community in slum areas are being excluded from education as many of their parents prefer them to stay back at home to handle certain responsibilities, which are taking care of siblings, attending household works, in addition to avoiding eve-teasing and sexual harassment. Sometimes, when a girl child matures, then her parents feel some problematic situation ahead because of this, as they neither provide protection nor control her behaviour. For instance, *Padma* a Dalit student discontinued her studies from a government school in the year of 2010, because of harassment of upper caste-children. *Lakshmi* a slum dweller of *Premavathipet Harijanawada*, was a 9<sup>th</sup> class student, had to walk quite far away distance of nearly 3 kilometres every day to attend classes. She said that some boys teased her by making of unwelcome gestures and comments while coming from school. Later, her mother did not allow her to continue schooling because of this incident. But she has a desire of continuing her studies as her father wants her to study at least up to intermediate level.

**VIII. EXCLUSION FROM GAMES/SPORTS:**

Generally, neither the non-Dalits nor the Dalits like to be abused or criticized by the others when they are emotionally charged and it is inescapable in the games and sports. Among students, abuses are acceptable by the same caste fellow, but not at all acceptable when it is shot by the other caste, particularly by the non-Dalits. In order to avoid such situations, a few boys or girls prefer to play with their own caste friends. Sometimes, it is observed that the Dalits do not mind if the non-Dalits play with them, and on the contrary, the non-Dalits do not allow the Dalits to play with them, as they cannot tolerate abuses hurled by the Dalits.

**Table 7, Friends of Dalit children during the playtime in the School**

Other Caste of Different Slums	62(40.3)
Other Caste of the Same Slum	33(21.4)
Friends of the Same Caste	59(38.3)
Total	154(100.0)

In addition to that, financial matter also involves in participation into games and sports. Whenever the school organizes games, sports, or cultural programs, the students have to contribute each a small amount of money toward the fund required for purchasing the prizes. But, financial contribution is a constraint for the Dalit students. So, they forgo participating into these events as they are unable to contribute the expenses.

**Table-8, Reasons for not participation in Games/sports and cultural activities**

Reasons for not participation in Games/sports and cultural activities	Games/Sports	Cultural Activities
Slum dweller	9(7.1)	22(13.2)
Caste discrimination	16(12.7)	30(18.0)
Poor background	30(23.8)	35(21.0)
Poor in studies	20(15.9)	8(4.8)
Not interested	51(40.5)	72(43.0)
Total	126(100)	167(100.0)

Nearly a half of total Dalit students are playing games/sports. Among them, more number of students plays with non-Dalit students. The rest of half students have not interested to play games/sports due to certain reasons (Table 5). Such reasons are slum-dwellers, caste discrimination, poor background, poor in studies and not interested. Nearly a half of 126 students have disinterest towards playing of games/sports. Out of these 126 students, most of them have been excluded from participating in the games/sports because of their poor-background and poor in their studies. Caste also played a prominent role in excluding students from participating into games/sports in the school.

**IX. EXCLUSION FROM CULTURAL PROGRAMMES:**

A few students are participated in cultural activities taking place in schools. Out of 280, around 167 students are not participated in cultural activities. Though, they have interest to participate in such activities, but failed because of certain reasons, which are primarily residents of slum area, socially backward category and economically vulnerable section. Whenever the school organizes games, sports, or cultural programs, the students have to contribute each a small amount of money toward the fund required for purchasing the prizes. But, financial contribution is a constraint for the Dalit students.

**X. CONCLUSION**

Ancient India made Dalit an excluded category from the mainstream and its consequences are still widening the gap between Dalits and non-Dalits. As a result, Dalits children are still being excluded from schools. Forms of discrimination against Dalit children are noticed at various stages in schools. The discrimination appears directly or indirectly in the forms of sitting arrangements in classes and at midday meal, extensive harassment of Dalit girl children sexually, inactive participation of Dalit children into games and cultural activities, facing disrespect from non-Dalit students and teachers. As a result of the discrimination, there is constant increase of dropout rates and loss of interest towards education among the Dalit children when compared to non-Dalit children. Though, they have special safeguards for pursuing education with dignity and equality, there is a problem with implementation. Hence, there is a need of hour to modify education system in India through imposing a strict penalty over those who discriminate Dalit children in schools. The welfare funds of Dalits must not be missed at any cost. The Officers concerned should be accountable to both government as well as Dali community. The safeguards of the constitution must be taught to students in schools.

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