

# Unit 12

## Role of Education for Empowerment of the Marginalized

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### Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to discuss the:

- present educational status of the marginalized in India;
- chief concerns of education for the marginalized; and
- major theoretical perspectives on education for empowerment.

### 12.1 Introduction

People/groups located in the mainstream are equipped with better resources and have better access to power and privilege, as opposed to the marginalized. The latter are vulnerable and have remained exploited, degraded and deprived of access to the existing socio-economic resources. Women, for instance, form a universal category of the marginalized. For centuries all over the world, they have been exploited and deprived of equal status with men. Their disempowerment is evident in the lack of the basic right to choose the way they want to live. In the face of prevailing patriarchal traditions, they lack the real power to decide whether to work, what to work as, whether or not to marry, whom to marry, whether to bear children and a number of other issues that have a direct bearing on their lives. Thus, they do not get to participate in the socio-economic structure as equals and get socially excluded from the place of power and privilege. Moreover, due to their peripheral position in society, they suffer from numerous disadvantages and atrocities which range from sexual harassment to female infanticide. Poverty and hunger too have a greater impact on the lives of women who are affected by these in greater degree and numbers as compared to men. Thus, the marginalization of women is evident in lack of education, malnutrition, poor health, mistreatment, and powerlessness that they suffer from on a daily basis. In other words they come to occupy a place of inferior social status and marginal location.

In this Unit, we will begin with the present educational status of the marginalized sections in society in India and then discuss how education is biased in favour of the cultures and social existence of mainstream groups. Having acquired a basic understanding of educational deprivation of the marginalized and the position of the marginalized in mainstream education, we will explore the major theoretical perspectives in education for their empowerment.

### 12.2 Educational Deprivation of the Marginalized

While discussion of the philosophical principle of equality dates back to Aristotle, 'equality of educational opportunity' grew only with the public education systems of the 19th century. Prior to the introduction and growth of these

publicly funded systems for learning, education had been a matter for private enterprise and was restricted to the elite. Indian education system has been, by its very nature, elitist and exclusionary from traditional times.

### Box 12.1: Process of Marginalization

The process of marginalization can thus be understood as having two aspects. The first aspect of the process of marginalization is that of the inferior location of these groups. They are located on the margins or the periphery. They don't form a part of mainstream society, as the privileged groups do. Such individuals are practically located 'outside' the strata of which they happen to be a part of either by ascription of achievement (Ram 1997). Owing to the 'outside' or the 'peripheral' location they don't enjoy the same benefits as the ones located in the mainstream do. The marginalized are in fact characterized by the least or minimal access to the socio-economic resources available.

The second aspect is the process of social exclusion. In an unequal and hierarchically organized society, not all groups enjoy equal amounts of power and prestige. Some groups or strata enjoy more power and influence at the expense of others. They are placed higher in the hierarchical social order which makes it easier for them to access the desirable goods and position in society. Consequently they are not able to fully participate in economic, social and civic life, and their inadequate access to material and non-material resources, exclude them from enjoying a quality of life and standard of living that is regarded as acceptable in society they live in. This puts them in a position of a major social disadvantage. In this way, the existential location of certain groups is less favorable in the social structural system as compared to other groups. In this sense, they are excluded from the sphere of power, prestige and influence through social, cultural and economic mechanisms.

Under the Vedic system, education was linked exclusively to caste and gender. True learning was the prerogative of male Brahmins. The Sanskrit texts and verses were conveniently deemed sacred matters reserved for them as "ritually pure" agents. While lower castes were under certain circumstances permitted limited instruction of a "non-sacred" nature, under no circumstances was education available to the lower castes and women. It was a categorically exclusive system. By the time the British East India Co. first ventured into the subcontinent in 1757, education there generally consisted of merely a small formal sector servicing the caste elite and male members and a larger non-formal sector for some others. Hindu women were largely denied access to any opportunity to receive formal education. Muslim women happened to be slightly more importunate as they went to religious schools which were generally located in the mosques. But it should be noticed that women were not granted entry to formal secular schooling.

The British devoted attention to education in India from 1813 to 1921. Unfortunately, interest in primary education was greatly diminished after 1835 when Macaulay's (in)famous "Minute" directed policy towards higher education premised on the "downward filtration theory." This postulated that, just as in Britain, the formally educated elite would, at least theoretically, disseminate kernels of knowledge to the masses. It was believed that the technique would work in India as well. Hence, the Vedic system of enclosure was only partially broken by the British. The pre-eminent Indian educator J. P. Naik has observed that the principal achievement of the British was in their making of non-discriminatory educational institutions, which theoretically overcame the monopoly of education held by the upper castes. However, their principal disservice was in differentiated education, which offset the advances made by permitting the upper castes to consolidate and, in fact, further formalise

their power through new social arrangements. Gandhi proposed a nationwide programme of vocation oriented primary education that was open to all children irrespective of class, caste and gender differences. He stressed the need to educate and empower women and make them politically active citizens of the country. He too failed to liberalize the educational system and rid it of its inability to overcome the distinctions and exclusionary policies based on class, caste and gender.

Constitution makers of free and Independent India understood the significance of education in terms of enhancing equality and social mobility. Thus, several constitutional provisions to enable free and fair access to the formal education system, to all the groups which had been earlier deprived of it, came into force.

**Box 12.2: Education in Independent India**

“Education in Independent India has in recent years received some attention from the planners and the public. The Constitution guarantees equality of educational opportunities to all, and favours some weaker section of society with a view to uplifting them. The Plans not only provide for the growth of literacy and education but also for compulsory free primary education. Further, education has come to be regarded as a form of investment to develop human resources, a necessary prerequisite of economic development. The idea of perspective planning envisages a dynamic relation between educational and economic development. All this is in consonance with the cherished goal of achieving the basic values of liberty, equality and social justice through democratic means” (Rao 1985: 148).

Article 15 forms the foundation of the quest for an egalitarian social order by announcing the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 46 of the Constitution reaffirms that “the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the scheduled castes.” Article 45 also includes universal elementary education as a directive principle, making it explicit that the State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. Unfortunately this remains an unfulfilled dream. One needs to examine how far the constitutional and state endeavours to bring education within the reach of all socio-economic groups have been realized and what are the problems and hurdles in achieving it.

Literacy is generally understood as the ability to read and write. In the modern context the term refers to reading and writing at a level adequate to enable one to successfully function at basic levels of the society. The literacy rate is considered one of the chief indicators of the educational status of any community or population, as it reflects on the actual number or percentage of individuals in a group who can read and write at a functional level. Literacy, an important tool for communication, learning, and information, is a virtual precondition for an individual's evolution and national development. Eradication of illiteracy has been one of the major concerns of the government of India since independence.

Another important aspect is that of accessibility of schools. As the term indicates, this concerns the actual availability of schools, and whether we have enough number of schools to educate all our children. Accessibility can be understood as having two dimensions. First is the availability of schools in terms of physical existence or geographical location. It is important to have a school in the physical vicinity of a habitation to enable children to enroll and attend classes on a regular basis. The crucial significance of the distance of

the school from the habitation was recognized by the state as it came out with the 1km (at least one primary school within the distance of 1 km from a rural habitation of a population of 300 and above) and 3 km scheme (at least one upper primary school within the distance of 3 km from a habitation of a population of 300 and above).

A second and equally important dimension is the social accessibility of the school. The groups which were traditionally excluded from the realm of formal education still find it difficult to gain acceptance in schools due to persisting social hierarchies. Hence, research throws light on the incidences of indecent behaviour towards children belonging to the marginalized sections by students and teachers. It thus becomes important to ensure that these children gain social acceptance and equal respect and treatment in the school by all the concerned parties (students, teachers, administrators)

Accessibility is connected with enrolment rates that usually reflect on the number of students who are formally enrolled in the schools, and attend classes on a regular basis. Measures to improve access and enrolment have to be coupled with the effort to retain children in the school long enough for them to complete the full cycle of school education. The general trend observed is that children, especially of the marginalized sections of the population, drop out of the school before completing the education, which forces one to examine the socio-economic factors as well as learning experiences of the students. Lastly, achievement or performance is another indicator which reflects on the actual result of the process of schooling. To be able to effectively use education as a tool of mobility by securing jobs and prestige, it is significant to perform well. Often the traditionally excluded groups show a trend of poor performance as compared to the other advantaged sections of society. This again leads one to ponder over the educational experience of these groups and the shortcomings of the present educational system.

#### a) Educational status of the Dalits

In India, Dalits form one of the most educationally deprived sections of the society. A survey conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research reveals that in the mid-1990s, only 41.5 per cent of Dalits in rural India were literate and 62.5 per cent of children in the 6-14 age group had been enrolled in schools at a certain point of time. Compared to the general population, the progress of schooling among Dalit children (5-14 years) has also been slow. Educational concerns of the dalits are, thus, of critical importance. Furthermore, their present educational status should be contextualized in the historical deprivation and denial of learning opportunities. Drawing on the data given in the fifth and sixth all India educational survey, Nambissan and Sedwal (2001) show how physical accessibility is always a problem for Dalit children. The number of schools available in a predominantly Dalit habitation is much less when compared to a general rural habitation. As a result, Dalit children have to go to upper caste habitations to be able to attend schools, which may not be accepting and welcoming them. Norms of purity and pollution still exist, and Dalit children may find themselves in hostile conditions. Research has pointed to cases where they are systematically discouraged or even forced to leave schools by other sections of the village community. In other words, social accessibility becomes an issue for these children. This is reflected in the poor attendance rates of Dalit children compared to that of general population. The poor performance of the state to be able to ensure the right to education becomes further clear, when the empirical data of the enrollment, retention and performance is compared with that of the other sections of the society. According to National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO 1999) sources, the school attendance rate in rural areas in 1973-74 was 64.3 per cent for Dalit boys compared to 74.9 per cent among boys from other (other than Dalit and tribal) social groups. In urban areas, however, the percentage was 77.5 for Dalit boys. Dalit girls had even lower attendance rates.

The high dropout rates remind us that caste dynamics still continue to affect the educational experience of these children. These children still find it difficult to be accepted and treated as equals in the classroom. According to the NCERT 1999 figures, Dalits constitute only around 11 per cent of teachers at the primary stage, nine per cent at the upper-primary stage and five to six per cent at the secondary and higher secondary stages. The social hiatus between teachers and Dalits has also had a telling effect on the student-teacher relationship. Chitins (1981) explains that the biases and stereotypical notions against the Dalits have refused to die. The poor performance is often attributed to the lack of ability and will of the students themselves, rather than the lack of structural and pedagogical support that these students face. The continuing economic vulnerability makes it all the more difficult for them to be able to invest time and resources in the educational enterprise. Poverty often forces the children to go out and work to be able to feed themselves rather than attending school.

#### **b) Educational status of women**

Education as a means to promote development in social, political, and economic spheres has been gender-blind, but in the late 1970s this perspective changed. Research concluded the existence of a high correlation between an increase in women's schooling level and a decline in infant mortality and fertility rates. Women who had completed basic education were able to make use of health facilities and service for their children and had a higher interest in sending their children to school. The year 1990 was proclaimed to be the International Literacy Year by the UN. The focus on education for women continued during the 1990 and resulted in the recognition of the significance of female education, not only as a basic human right, but also as a crucial factor towards national development.

The benefit that women have received from the initiatives of the state is evident from the constantly improving literacy rates of women over the past few years. According to Census of India 2001, the female literacy rate has increased from 39.29 per cent in 1991 to 54.16 in 2001 (i.e. by 14.87 percentage points); whereas in case of males it has increased from 64.13 per cent to 75.85 per cent (i.e. by 11.69 percentage points) during the same period. It means female literacy in the last 10 years has grown at a faster rate than the male literacy rate. This has resulted in narrowing the gender gap in literacy rate from 24.84 in 1991 to 21.69 percentage points in 2001. However, a common feature across all the districts of the country is the reduction of gender disparity in literacy rate with the overall increase in literacy rates of both males and females. But the decrease in the gender gap still remains far below the desirable levels.

It may be mentioned that improvement in literacy rate from 1991 to 2001 has not been uniform in all the states. There was variation from one state to another and within a state from one district to another. Chanana (2000) explains that this gap is wider in educationally backward states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan, which also happen to be highly patriarchal regions. Furthermore, SC and ST women seem to be the worst victims, for they show lowest literacy rates. Female literacy among the SCs is 23.76 per cent as compared to 49.91 per cent among the males. The corresponding percentage among the ST females is 18.19 as compared to 40.65 among the males (NCW 1994).

Data reveals poor literacy rates for rural women, as compared to their urban counterparts. Not only does it confirm the high disparity among women but also reveals that a large number of women have reached adulthood without access to basic literacy and innumeracy skills. This makes one ponder over the educational status of young women and the girl child. Usha Nayyar (2001) draws on data from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to

conclude that a fairly strong gender focus has resulted in a gradual improvement of enrolment figures for women at both primary and middle levels of schooling. There is a reduction in the enrolment figures for females, as one moves from primary to middle to higher stages of schooling. While the percentage of girls in school enrolment in primary stages in the year 1997-98 is 43.6, the corresponding figure for middle stage is only 40.1. One can, thus, conclude that women retention is low, and they find it more difficult to complete schooling or reach for higher levels of education. This certainly is a major handicap, as it limits their occupational opportunity, and hence avenues for upward social mobility. The same is the case with dropout rates which go on increasing from primary to middle to higher stages of schooling much more rapidly for girls as compared to boys. There are many obstacles to girls' enrolment and further participation in the educational system.

Economic factors too have a bearing on poor retention rates. Parents with low income have to make priorities whether it is economically viable enough to send girls to school. Boys are prioritized because they are the future providers of economic security for their parents, while girls' future role is to be married away. Traditional practices, also, discourage parents to let girls complete education. It is believed that this might interfere with their marriage prospects in a negative way. The low presence of women teachers too works negatively towards the parents' willingness to send their daughters to school. This is especially the case in the upper primary levels of education. Even if parents don't object to co-education they feel that presence of female teaching and working staff in schools ensures their child's safety and well-being. Thus, one can safely say that although significant progress has been made in provision of education for the girl child, the task of ensuring equality of condition and opportunity is far from complete.

### c) Educational experience of the Scheduled Tribes

One of the distinguishing features of the Scheduled Tribes is that the majority of them live in scattered habitations located in the interior, remote and inaccessible hilly and forest areas of the country. This also accounts for the fact that STs are highly heterogeneous, and diversity in terms of language, culture, location, customs, beliefs, traditions and socio-economic conditions is enormous. Latest data in fact make the disturbing revelation that STs lag behind all the other marginalized groups (and way behind the national average) in terms of educational progress. Given the diverse locations of tribal population the disparity among the states in terms of tribal literacy does not come as a surprise. A disparity to the extent that is witnessed in state wise figures, however, leaves much to be desired. While most of the north-eastern states and some educationally advanced states like, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have achieved satisfactory levels of tribal literacy rates, educationally backward states like Rajasthan, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh make the overall picture highly discouraging.

As already explained, tribal habitations are generally characterized by a secluded and interior physical location. This makes physical accessibility to schools a problem. Drawing on the data of the fifth and sixth All India Educational Survey, Sujatha (2001) insists that in almost all tribal populated areas, the number of schools within 1 km of habitation have increased. But difficult terrain and hilly regions make the distance of even 1km hard to cover considering the fact that children are expected to go to school and come back home on a daily basis. It further becomes impossible if the distance is more than 1km. Considering the fact that at least 10 per cent of tribal habitations have primary schools beyond a distance of 2 kms it shows how schools remains inaccessible to these children. Though, access still is far below satisfactory position, the enrolment rates among tribal population make a positive picture. Not only have the overall figures showed a significant improvement from 36.5 per cent in 1989-90 to 43 per cent in 1997-98, the gender gap too is seemingly reducing.

Sujatha further shows, a similar trend in the upper primary and secondary levels of schooling. Due to high dropout rates among the tribal children, schools fail to retain them. The chief reasons for this are high levels of absenteeism and large-scale failure of students in the year-end assessment. The problem is further compounded by poor achievement rates in the tribal population, as compared to non-tribals.

**Box 12.3: Qualitative concerns**

The discussion on the quantitative aspects of the educational status of the marginalized groups clearly shows that the gap between the constitutional commitment to provide education to all children below the age of 14 years, and the actual status of SC, ST and girl children, remains very large. This shows in the poor literacy and enrolment rates of the children of these sections. The educational status of these groups is further characterized by high dropout rates.

### 12.3 Mainstream Education and the Marginalized

This disturbing trend of dropouts after initial enrolment forces one to ponder over qualitative aspects of schooling and the real classroom experiences of the children coming from the marginalized sections of society. In other words, one needs to adopt a framework of social justice which looks beyond the aggregate concerns and towards the factors of social justice, identity issues and pedagogical concerns. The learning environment provided to these children is often characterized by poor infrastructure, lack of basic amenities and less than adequate number of teachers. Data on the state of schools in rural areas, backward villages and adivasi areas confirm this observation. Such schools account for a poor learning environment and have a negative impact on the motivational and aspirational levels of the students as well as the parents.

Centralized curriculum represents yet another issue. Krishna Kumar (1989) maintains that centralized curriculum reflects the culture and social existence of the mainstream groups. It fails to draw upon the factors, objects, experiences and issues, which the children of marginalized minorities live with. It, therefore, doesn't talk about the socio-cultural lives of these children. On the one hand such a curriculum fails to relate to the knowledge base of the students who find it irrelevant and meaningless, and on the other it also affects their self-identity and feeling of self-worth in a negative way. This leads to a conflict in the young minds, and an overall sense of disillusionment which is often large enough to force children to drop out of the formal scheme of education.

The curriculum is further characterized by the creation, and reinforcement of stereotypes of the marginalized sections that are often presented as negative. Hence, as Krishna Kumar (1989) suggests, the SCs and STs are often depicted as 'culturally backward'. Nambissan (2000) mentions that these communities are largely portrayed in subservient roles in accordance with what is perceived as their traditionally low position in the social hierarchy. This further feeds the discriminatory practices and adverse peer and teacher attitude in the schools, which contributes to a feeling of demotivation and discouragement in the students, besides damaging their self-identity.

Similar issues emerge due to gender stereotypes in the formal curriculum. Textbooks have been criticized for depicting women in traditional roles and stereotypical fashion, which leads to a setting of negative role models for the girl child. This also, strengthens the patriarchal state of mind and encourages the girl child to conform to the standards without questioning them or looking for better alternatives. It is in fact full of gender stereotypes and fails to construct new ways of viewing and establishing social relations between men

and women. The effect of the biased textbooks further shows up in discriminatory practices adopted by teachers and peers. SCs and STs are often ridiculed, avoided and discriminated against due to the traditional low socio-economic status. overt act of discrimination such as segregation in seating arrangements, refusal to let them use the common pitcher for drinking water, or to touch them and their notebooks and so on are not unheard of . Low expectations and lack of encouragement, also, show up in the poor performance of SC, ST and girl children. Furthermore, the formal curriculum is based on a model of direct instruction by the teacher, who holds authority and power. He is often supposed to discipline children's body and minds by encouraging a culture of rote learning. Such a classroom culture is often based on direct instruction from the teacher, where students are expected to take down notes, memorize and reproduce it in the exams without questioning either the process or the content. The teacher therefore, fails to provide any special assistance or creative support to these children, who often are first generation learners. With a knowledge base that is completely alien and a classroom environment that remains non-supportive, these children lose motivation to do well and complete schooling.

**Box 12.4: Education and the Disprivileged: Pedagogical Considerations**

The basic egalitarian premise in this matter has been that a uniform common curriculum, if not also a common school, leads to equality or lack of disprivilege in education. The light that psychology and educational theory throws on this matter tends to suggest, however, some modifications. First, human capacities and capabilities are not uniformly distributed. Thus with in a common school or a common curriculum, different pupils have to be helped to proceed at their own pace. To the extent that schools can provide for this through their own media or methods, etc., it might be desirable to present even the same curriculum through different media and methods. A more extreme view, which would have some justification, would be that a specialized curriculum, particularly after a common period of elementary or secondary schooling, would be farier to individuals with different manual, aesthetic, linguistic , numerical or social potentials.

Too rigid an insistence on uniform schooling can, in fact handicap children from less privileged backgrounds, while if it is too differentiated it could perpetuate these distinctions. The development of multipurpose, multilateral or multifaceted secondary educational higher education for different fields might be seen as a measure of equity, minimizing disprivilege. On the other hand, too specific a secondary or elementary education, without adequate emphases on linguistic and numerical skills, might provide a dead-end education which would handicap the individuals undergoing it. If the allocation of individuals to those specific courses appears related to or based on the caste or class origin of the pupils, the school would be perpetuating social inequalities already in existence, or even accentuating them" (Shukla 2002 : 320-21).

Furthermore, schools often fail to use their mother tongue as the medium of instruction. A number of policy documents have stressed on the pedagogical and cultural importance of the use of the mother tongue in schools, especially at the primary levels , but adivasis languages and local dialects find no place in the classroom. In fact they are discouraged and even ridiculed. This not only further alienates the child from the classroom, but also raises serious problems in comprehension and understanding, evident in the large number of failures and poor performance.

The exclusion of the child's language and culture from the medium and the content of school knowledge as well as the messages of inferiority and confirmation that are conveyed to the children are likely to affect the

motivation and aspiration of the children in a negative way. This accounts for the loss of interest and lack of effort to continue and gets reflected in the poor retention rates. Thus, what is required is a change in the formal curriculum to be able to accommodate the wider social reality and serious effort in order to give a place of rightful respect and dignity to these sections of society and their socio-cultural and economic environment. The formal curriculum should be able to voice the experiential reality of the Dalits, adivasis and the girl children to enable them to relate and derive meaning and relevance out of it. From the point of view of the girl child, it makes sense to give place in the curriculum to, an examination of women's subordination throughout history, women's contribution and participation in history-making, the value of work commonly performed by women — such as domestic work, the importance of women in the processes of decision-making, participation and organisation, and the incorporation of women's way of knowing and focus on women's experiences. This in effect means giving a more critical approach to the curriculum. Change in curriculum would, however, remain useless and ineffective unless a corresponding change in the pedagogical culture and teacher attitude is initiated which is more sensitive to, and shows a greater understanding of the social and pedagogical issues of the marginalized.

#### Reflection and Action 12.1

Visit two schools one which caters to students belonging to lowest socio-economic sections of society and the other which caters to students belonging to upper socio-economic sections of society. Find out the difference in the learning environment.

### 12.4 Perspective on Education for Empowerment

The subject of education for empowerment may be understood from two vantage positions. The first incorporates social privileges, power, prestige and influence while the second incorporates issues of economic growth, economic quality and educational opportunity. There is no denying that these are not mutually exclusive and independent, rather they are inextricably entwined with each other. Education is seen as a means of socialization whereby young members of society are trained into the accepted values and belief system of the society. It breeds similarity of thought and action between the individuals and thus leads to a feeling of oneness and similarity of goals and values. This leads to unity among members, hence social solidarity and cohesiveness.

In the present day non-egalitarian and unequal society complex power relations and hierarchization exist. Not all social groups enjoy equal access to the educational resources and hence 'equality of condition' that functionalists assume does not exist in the first place. In the name of preserving order and social cohesiveness, what is done is the promotion of the interests of the dominant sections of society. The poor and the marginalized are unable to perform as well as the rich and the privileged due to several material, social and cultural handicaps, and are forced to accept themselves as inefficient and unable. In other words, the marginalized and the deprived keep suffering from the cumulative deficiencies, in the name of the lack of ability or performance, and socio-economic inequalities get reproduced.

Schools promote the technocratic-meritocratic ideology, which uphold that economic success essentially depends on appropriate skills, knowledge, talents and abilities. In reality, economic success is often linked to a person's class, sex, race, etc and more so in a hierarchical, stratified and unequal society. Schools provide knowledge to fulfill a particular professional role. But more importantly they foster the attitudes and behaviors consonant with the fulfillment of these particular roles. By encouraging certain personality traits and discouraging certain other ones, schools shape the personalities of pupils

in accordance with the role capitalist society needs them to perform. They thus select some to play the role of active decision makers while others are required to obey passively. By rejecting the functionalist claim that education will create a more open and equal society, Bowles and Gintis in fact put the overall role of formal education as further contributing to the plight of the already disadvantaged.

This line of argument has been carried forth by Louis Althusser, a French philosopher, whose work forms the basis of the 'hegemonic-state reproductive model'. This argument lays stress on the overall role of the state in reproducing social inequalities. Althusser presents a general framework for the analysis of education from a Marxian perspective. He views, education as a part of superstructure, and argues that education provides ideological support to the rulers. You have read about this aspect in Blocks 1 and 2.

The issue of power and culture is critical to the functioning of schools. Being a part of society, education finds itself embedded in the political and social conditions, and cannot possibly bring about any radical change as an 'independent' variable. Does that mean that schools and education have absolutely no role to play in the empowerment of the disadvantaged? Can education not intervene in the existing unequal socio-economic order? Is it just another instrument to perpetuate inequality? Human agency is always at work, and one can always find innovative teachers, sympathetic administrators, and aware and creative students who refuse to take instructions and assignments at face value and without questions. In fact, education is seen as a major agency for bringing about a modern ethos of equality and freedom. It is thought that children trained in modern scientific-technological knowledge would find avenues of social mobility and in fact move towards equality.

Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze (2002) brought out the significance of education in terms of functioning and capability. Functioning refers to what a person does and achieves. Capability on the other hand refers to the range of choices and options which a person has in deciding the kind of life he/she wants to lead. Capability therefore is the real state of freedom that a person enjoys in choosing from the alternative combinations of functioning. For example a young child may be forced out of school due to several constraints like poverty, social prohibitions, family problems etc. Such a condition may severely limit the range of activities and life goals that he/she can choose from leading to an overall state of disadvantage and his/her functioning is reduced to that of a child labourer.

Sen and Dreze refer to such a case as 'capability deprivation' which may be understood as a severe limitation of freedom and an overall state of incapacitation to live and perform dignified labor. The expansion of human capabilities can be enhanced by important social opportunities like education and health care. These are significant ends in themselves. Education is understood to be a crucial factor in at least five distinct ways (i) Intrinsic importance: education seen as an act of learning leads to personal growth and self-development, which has an intrinsic value of its own. (ii) Instrumental personal roles: education enables one to get an appropriate set of skills and knowledge that enables him to make use of economic opportunities and get into a profession of his own choice. It also enables one to participate in a number of other valuable activities like playing sports, reading, participating in local forums of discussions etc. (iii) Instrumental social roles: education makes one more socially aware and politically assertive. An educated person is more aware of his/her social needs and political rights and asserts for them both on an individual level and at the collective level, which strengthens the democratic practice. (iv) Instrumental social processes: education makes a lasting impact on social processes and enables one to reject and fight against oppressive socio-cultural practices. It is a powerful means of getting rid of

social evils like neglect of girl child, child labor and so on. This would reduce the number and extent of deprived and deprivation. (v) Empowerment and distributive roles: greater literacy and educational empowerment enables emancipation of the marginalized sections of society by accommodating them in the mainstream. It also has a socially redistributive effect. It would lead to a fairer deal for the marginalized, not only at the level of a population or a group but also at the level of the family and the individual.

Thus, education is a tool for the empowerment of the marginalized, as it leads to an expansion of choices, freedom and real opportunity. In other words it leads to a greater capability to enable the individual to lead a valued and valuable life.

### Reflection and Action 12.2

Do you think education perpetuates social and economic inequalities? Discuss your point of view with other learners at the study centre.

Thus, Freire (1970) demonstrates how education can actually bring about a positive change and play a significant role in bringing about an egalitarian social order. But to enable it to bring about any positive change, we must look beyond the traditional practice of education and attack the oppressive systems inbuilt in this kind of education system. It is only by respecting the sense of inquiry and questioning present in the young minds, can we empower them to look beyond the existential reality and bring about a positive transformation, on the lines of egalitarianism, which still remains a distant dream. You may recall Freire's perspective on education which you have read in unit 3.

American economists Bowles Gintis and Simmons (1976), came up with an interesting piece of work titled 'Schooling in Capitalist America', which led to the growth of a perspective, which is now generally known as the 'Economic Reproductive Model'. They argue that in an unequal society based on a capitalist economic order, the role of education is to reproduce the required labor force. The nature of the labor force should be as per the requirement of the capitalist system of production. A capitalist society works on an arrangement where the majority of the proletariat works for a small number of rich capitalists. This in effect means that a minority are in the decision making place (the capitalists), while the majority play a minimal role in the process of decision making and stick to carrying out the orders of the decision makers (the workers). Schools seeks reproduce this very socio-economic order by placing a minority in the place of rich capitalists and a majority as poor proletariat.

## 12.5 Conclusion

The World Bank defines empowerment in terms of freedom of choice and action. It is understood that, the process of empowering people actually entails throwing open a range of options that she can choose from, and, thus, feel a sense of control and power over her life. It refers to a process by which the deprived individuals and groups gain power to control their lives and the ability to make strategic life choices. Education is one of the most powerful resources in bringing about empowerment. In the context of the marginalized groups, it functions to facilitate occupational diversity and mobility. It makes them more aware, of their rights and issues and enables them to assert for them both at an individual and collective level, in their rightful quest for power, prestige and an equality of condition.

The era of Enlightenment and modern ethos brought with itself a commitment to the cardinal principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. In the present day acceptable social order based on democratic ideas and participatory social system, it is necessary to strive towards an equal, just and fair social order.

where all individuals and socio-cultural groups enjoy equal access to the available resources of society. The challenge is to identify the socially disadvantaged, economically backward, and educationally deprived sections of society and accommodate them in the mainstream, so that they can enjoy equal access to power and prestige. To meet this challenge and promote a condition of equal participation and equal access to rights, the role of education, has been recognized as of crucial significance.

The school has emerged as a modern institution, which provides a forum for the spread of democratic ideas and participatory ethos. Its role in promoting the interests of the marginalized, however, has been a subject of major disagreements and heated debate among sociologists. A section of them look at school with a positive attitude, others question and reject the very ability of formal education to bring emancipation to the deprived. In the context of the social and educational deprivation that the marginalized have faced in the past, as well as the crucial role that education can play to empower them, one should examine the issue of the present educational status of these communities. The Indian state now recognizes the potential of education, but policy documents clearly reveal that the stress continues to be on the issues of quantity and provisioning. While access to schools still remain far below the satisfactory levels, social accessibility as an issue is yet to be recognized and given due attention. Discriminatory practices and oppressive social norms still persist. Hence the issue of equity in education becomes crucial. The quality of education that they receive too needs to be examined. It is time that we address the issues of importance of instruction through mother tongue for effective teaching and encouragement and incorporation of locally relevant content and curriculum, besides emphasizing the localized production of textbooks in local dialects.

Economic vulnerability has a negative impact on the overall educational status. Hence, poverty needs to be tackled not only as a consequence of illiteracy but also as a reason for it. Thus, to be able to give the marginalized sections, their rightful place in the social order, the issues of quantity, equity and quality need to be examined in conjunction with each other rather than independent of each other.

## 12.6 Further Reading

Nambissan, Geetha B. 2000. Dealing with Deprivation. *Seminar*, September

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