

Editorial:

Education and Social Inclusion: Challenges of Diversity

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The third phase of the Intercontinental Seminar organized by the Salesian University Institutions and hosted at Sonada, Darjeeling, India, on the general theme **Education and Social Inclusion** upon the specifically Asian aspect of cultural diversity. Diversity is regarded as an Indian cultural heritage embodying the vast diversity of the Asian continent in a uniquely Indian way represented in the adage 'Unity in Diversity'. While there is an overall Indian Culture to which diverse peoples do subscribe, it does not negate or discount the vast linguistic, religious, regional and cultural diversity inbuilt within the Indian sub continental reality.

The issue of inclusion therefore becomes on the one hand a matter of necessary assertion by those at the periphery. This desire for assertion can be seen as arising from a here-to-unachieved integration of peoples into the mainstream. Therefore, even the demand for recognition and even autonomy need not necessarily be an evil as it only emphasizes the inherent democratic processes at work. In the case of tribal/indigenous peoples while the exclusion may be seen as the outcome of the demand and expression

of their rights to preservation of unique traditional life styles, in the case of Dalits it inevitably is an issue that needs redress for the prolonged periods of exclusion of a group from privileges to education, job opportunities and ritual participation.

In a society that has had a very long history of stratification and the colonial additions and exaggerations of these tradition bound discriminations, the attempts to redress it by means of development has over the years not fully borne its fruits. Therefore the urgent need to look at alternatives; and therein, inclusive education offers scope for a future course of action.

The papers presented at the seminar engaged with the question of social inclusion from the diverse regional, linguistic, religious and cultural perspectives so as to get a fuller picture of how society can be bettered and where the immediate action is required. A selection from among the papers is included in two parts - Euro-American and Indian - in this volume of the Journal. This issue thereby acknowledges the commitment of Salesian Higher Education Network to bring together the researchers taking on the challenges and responses from different cultural contexts addressing the issue of education and social inclusion.

The first set of papers take a tour of the central American countries Guatemala and El Salvador, proceed on to the Latin American Countries of Bolivia and Brazil and move on to the European context exemplified in the representational voices from Spain and Italy. All of them, except the Brazilian paper, have the direct context of diversity in these cultural regional setting and the application of inclusive education as a strategic move to enhance society.

The paper titled 'Social Exclusion and Violence in Guatemala and El Salvador: Education for a Culture of Peace' by Mario Olmos seeks to show, based on a historical and sociological analysis, the multicultural and multiethnic origin of Guatemala and El Salvador and the problems derived from building a new state that, at the time of independence from Spain, did not include the different cultures and ethnic groups that were present in the region. The analysis highlights the need to build a new relationship between the various groups based on the concept of education for a culture of peace. Ronaldo Zacharias in his paper titled 'Taking Inclusion Seriously: Towards an Ethics of Person-centered Growth' reflects on Burggraeve's indications and Martin's insights that aim at affirming an educative proposal that cannot exclude or leave at the margins those who find themselves in contexts far from the moral ideal. Willy W. Chambi's paper titled 'Bolivia: Language Recognition and Social Inclusion' attempts to study the diversity in the Bolivian cultural heritage that was not officially recognized for a greater period of time. The article shows the gradual process of including and promoting native languages as a language of instruction along with Castilian and a foreign language, though with huge challenges to achieve the ideal.

In the paper, 'Cultural Diversity and Education in Spain: The European Context', Sabino de Juan Lopez and Patricia Revuelta Mediavilla make an exposition of the social and cultural diversity, its manifestations and the manner in which it is to be approached in relation to society at large and, particularly in relation to education. The reflection proceeds from a description of diversity to its social management options and ends with its applicability in the arena of education towards the goal of a more inclusive Spanish society of the future. Renzo Barduca, in his paper examines the meaning of "social inclusion" in the Italian vista, and the measures and commitment needed or is undertaken by Europe towards integration, despite the extensive social exclusion faced by immigrants. In this light, he elaborates on the work of the Salesian Congregation in Italy towards inclusion or social integration, upholding the heart and passion of Don Bosco.

The second set of papers, selected from among the presentations at the intercontinental seminar, all but one, speak of the cultural diversity and the nuances of exclusion experienced in different parts of the Indian subcontinent by different marginalised social groups: women and children, rural youth and displaced young adults in metropolises. 'Social Exclusion of Females in Education: Evidence from *Nyishi* Tribe, Arunachal Pradesh' exhorts the immediate need for educating the tribal women with a motive to safeguard them against all forms of discrimination such as color, class, race, ethnicity and age thereby to empower and make them more participative in decision making and more productive in the growth of societies. This is being highlighted by taking into account the field survey conducted among the *Nyishi* Tribe of Doimukh Circle. This article suggests action plans to intensify social inclusion of females in education in the study area.

George Chempakathinal with over 15 years of experience working among the street children emphasizes in his article 'Social Inclusion through Education for Children in Street Habitat' the greater need of the street children's inclusion and the accompanying role of educative presence of an adult educator. The method employed by Don Bosco in his system of education based on 'reason, religion and loving kindness' is empirically argued as the best inclusion strategy where the psychological, psychosocial and psycho spiritual needs of children are met and basic personal and life skills are imparted as part of total inclusion. J. Henry Rozario looks at the role of youth groups in the social inclusion of SC/ST youth and summarizes his findings under two headings: firstly the role of youth groups by direct action where the emphasis is given to strengthening member commitment, training second line leaders, creating awareness about social exclusion, and enabling people to gain access to their rights and to government schemes and programmes, and secondly, the role of youth groups by advocacy where the emphasis is on lobbying for changes at the system and policy level, accepting the guidance and support from civil societies on networking skills and political lobbying and working towards changes in the education and legal system for social, political and cultural empowerment and material prosperity.

'An Explorative Study of the Role of A Don Bosco Institute in Empowering the Rural Youth' by John Borg focuses on the contribution of BICS as a facilitator in empowering the rural youth to be self-reliant and economically independent through its educational services. This empowerment or process of enabling is studied with a special focus on achievement motivation. It calls every rural institute to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their student community and bring out a model that will be effective. In this process, good curriculum and a constructive environment must be given a top priority. Perry Devanesan highlights some of the emerging trends that indicate both the inclusive as well as the exclusive dimensions of higher education in India by focusing on dimensions such as gender, community, native place, mother tongue and parent's educational and economic status. His reflection is based on a micro level study conducted among college students in Tiruchirapalli, a city situated at the heart of Tamil Nadu and he proposes that besides posing a challenge, cultural diversity holds out a great opportunity for initiating a healthy and holistic education that would be inclusive, liberating and humanizing. Kasturi Ghosh in her paper titled 'The Margin is the Mainstream: Differently-abled individuals in Film, Some Novel Representations' puts forward the idea of recognising the special needs of the differently abled, as represented in the filmy art world, in order to explore the increased accessibility that can be offered to them, and as showcasing new modes of treating individuals with dignity and respect.

Hence Inclusion is the concept which is being discussed World wide. The Indian constitution embarks upon the development of modern democratic India. Education is the legitimate institutional instrument by which this target can be achieved and thereby bring about the ideal socio economic transformation of a people envisaged in the constitution. The education system, irrespective of the location and the agent imparting it, is expected to build on and disseminate the values embedded in the constitution, empowering thereby the weaker sections. Inclusion of the disadvantaged and the marginalised into the school and college corridors can provide them with the resources needed to succeed in life.