

Higher Education and Cultural Diversity: The Challenge and Opportunity

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Abstract

Cultural diversity is "... having a heart and a mind that acknowledges, accepts, values and even celebrates the various ways that people live and interact in the world."¹ Culture may be a singular concept but a plural reality including cultures and sub-cultures. This cultural diversity simply refers to the diverse forms of culture or cultural differences prevalent all over the world. However, man has the unique capacity to convert the diversity and differences into some sort of stratification and hierarchy of high and low; superior and inferior; dominant and subordinate; mainstream and subaltern; great and little and pure and impure. Be it gender, language, race, caste, class, creed, colour, livelihood or any other form of diversity, man has the penchant for converting them into a hierarchical structure, institutionalize them and get them integrated into a culture and be enslaved to the same. What is supposed to be enlightening and enriching is perceived and presented as discriminating and dividing. This paper is an attempt to study whether and to what extent higher education as it is practiced today, is positioned to challenge these discriminations by being inclusive or reproduces them by being exclusive. Based on a micro level study conducted among college students in Tiruchirapalli, a city situated at the heart of Tamil Nadu, the paper highlights some of the emerging trends that indicate both the inclusive as well as the exclusive dimensions of higher education in India today focusing on dimensions such as gender, community, native place, mother tongue and parent's educational and economic status. Though a micro level study, some of its conclusions reflect the macro level scenario. Drawing inferences and reflections from the study the paper 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.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Discrimination, Backwardness, Social Uplift, Holistic Education

India is a fast growing economy with abundant natural resources, young and talented human resources and a robust and resilient democratic polity. As such India is projected to emerge as a super power over the coming decades even overtaking giants like the USA and China in due course. That in spite of the global recession, India is maintaining a steady economic growth is a pointer to what is in store for India in the 21st century. While all this is true and arouses our expectations and nationalistic pride, the one question that keeps checking on our real and/or projected development and growth is 'how inclusive is the success story of India', especially in such basic sectors like education and health. This minor research project supported by the UGC, is an attempt to survey, study and assess at the micro level the factors associated with inclusiveness or otherwise in higher education, in and around the city of Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu.

¹ Fort Hays State University, www.fhsu.edu/Diversity-Affairs.

Basically the concept of inclusiveness as a policy of governance and administration in a secular democratic society implies the recognition, respect and promotion of human rights especially of those sections of society that are kept for some reason or other at the periphery of development and progress. Though society consists of various groups that are, by tradition of socio-cultural beliefs and practices, mutually inclusive and exclusive, this belief and practice is unacceptable in a civilized, democratic society. The recognition and acceptance of socio-cultural diversity, which is the base for the formation of civil society, necessarily forecloses all forms of discriminatory beliefs and practices that covertly or overtly support exclusion, be it social, economic or educational or any other that pertains to human rights, dignity and equality of opportunity.

There is a consensus among all thinkers and practitioners of development that the opportunity to education and health is basic to the realization of one's human dignity and worth and this paper based on a micro level study focuses on the opportunity to education on which depends many other opportunities in life for the individual as well as the community. Equality of educational opportunity therefore cuts across all forms of socio-economic and cultural strata and is in fact understood today as the concept and practice of inclusive education – including the otherwise excluded, marginalized, neglected or under-represented: the rural population, first generation learners, female gender, the SC/ST/backward classes, minorities, migrant workers, informal sector, indigenous /nomadic communities and the differently-abled.

There is an increasing awareness today that an education which is not inclusive this way is nothing short of a violation of human rights. No doubt education needs to be qualitative but this qualitative education also needs to be inclusive. 'Education for all' should imply 'Quality education for all', and not 'Quality education for a few or elites and Cheap education for the masses'. Writing on education and diversity, Kugelmass makes the point clear when he says that the concept of inclusive education is understood broadly "as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners".²

Nicholas Burnett, Assistant Director-General for Education (UNESCO) elaborating on the theme states:

Inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all children – including boys and girls, students from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and to provide learning opportunities for all youth and adults as well. Its aim is to eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and a lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability.

Further, Burnett drives home the truth that, "... inclusive education is not a marginal issue but is central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the

² J. Kugelmass, *What is a Culture of Inclusion?*, School of Education and Human Development, USA, Binghamton University, 2004.

development of more inclusive societies, [and that] inclusive education is essential to achieve social equity and is a constituent element of lifelong learning”.³

There is need for the realization that only an inclusive education can bring about an inclusive culture and an inclusive society for, it is only an inclusive education that would effectively challenge the exclusive dimensions of culture and society. It is therefore implied that when the education itself is exclusive, it can only keep reproducing the culture and society of exclusiveness. With a country so vast and a society rich and diverse in its cultural heritage, it is imperative that the education system in India needs to be responsive to this reality and accord top priority to the same both in policy and practice. Education has to set right or undo the partial or total discrimination/exclusion sustained by an exclusive culture and society particularly in terms of caste/community, gender, rural-urban divide, mother tongue, parental livelihood patterns and income levels and other such elements. In order to accomplish this task education itself has to be free from these divisive and exclusive elements. A study is needed therefore to assess and ascertain the extent of inclusiveness of education and to take the remedial steps needed in this regard at the national and regional levels.

Introducing the study

The broad objective of the study is to identify the various factors that describe the socio-economic background of students and those that describe their present educational status and to assess whether significant association exists between the socio-economic variables and educational opportunity so as to indicate the main trends of inclusiveness or otherwise in higher education.

Considering the accessibility of institutions and the availability of students, the universe of the study has been confined to the third year UG and the second year PG students from the arts, science and professional colleges in the city of Tiruchirapalli and its immediate surrounding. Through random sampling procedure a sample size of 800 students including boys and girls was made from among 10 select colleges out of the 15 colleges in and around the city. A structured questionnaire was framed and shortlisted with needed modifications in the pilot study. The final questionnaire with codes for responses was limited to 20 questions. Out of the 1000 questionnaires distributed 800 were returned with filled in data.

The city of Tiruchirapalli, the head quarters of the District of Tiruchirapalli is located in the central part of Tamil Nadu and apart from being a centre of culture and tourism, trade, industry and business, the city is also known as a popular destination for academic pursuits next to the metropolis of Chennai. With universities (state and private), professional institutions, technical institutes, arts and science colleges

³ Foreword, Nicholas Burnett, Assistant Director-General for Education, *Policy Guidelines for Inclusion in Education*, UNESCO 2009.

(government, government aided and self financing, autonomous and affiliated) the city of Tiruchirapalli and its vicinity present a hub of academic, professional and industrial activities. There is a growing flow of migrant students and others who continue to throng the city seeking to pursue educational courses and opportunities. As the cost of living is also cheaper compared to other cities like Chennai and Coimbatore, Tiruchirapalli continues to attract students from far and near.

Conceptual Framework: Mandal on 'Backwardness'

In recent times, no one has better understood and better expressed the dynamics of individual and collective backwardness as has been done by Justice B. P. Mandal in the context of identifying and enumerating the list of backward classes in the Indian society. His explanation is as simple as it is profound. For Mandal, in the Indian society, the social backwardness in terms of caste and sub-caste is to be considered as the basic or fundamental factor, the economic status / backwardness as the derived factor and the educational status / backwardness as the linked factor. The insight provided by Mandal is that the social status (ones caste / sub-caste) is the non-negotiable and basic (crucial) factor from which is derived ones economic status and to which is linked ones educational status as a vicious cycle.

This reflects the general pan Indian social reality of the one-to-one relationship between social status and economic status. At the subsequent stage (spiral), Mandal proposes that the socio-economic status or backwardness is necessarily and sequentially linked to the educational factor. Here again, the reality and the logicity of the link between socio-economic backwardness and educational backwardness is highlighted. Mandal establishes that while social backwardness is to be seen as a logical, necessary link to educational backwardness, mere economic backwardness (that is not a derivative factor of social backwardness) is not to be seen as a logical necessary link to educational backwardness.

The implications are that for any individual or community in India:

There is in general, a correlation between the social and educational backwardness; The economic status that is necessarily derived from social status whether backward or otherwise, is to be distinguished from that which is independent of the social status and treated more as exception than rule; In the Indian social dynamics, the educational / economic status is a dependent variable while the social status is an independent variable; The economic status / backwardness is linked to the social or/and educational status. The socially backward are also educationally backward and vice versa and that the socially and educationally backward are obviously economically backward too.⁴

The insight provided by Mandal by way of the social dynamics of backwardness, also implies that neither the social factor (caste system) being a non-negotiable independent

⁴ Govt. of India, *Report of the Backward Classes Commission*, Part I, Chapter XI, 11.23, 1980.

factor nor the economic factor being a derivative of the former, could be addressed or tackled directly and that it is the educational factor that could be effectively addressed, which in turn would also bring about corresponding change in the economic and eventually in the social status. Also implied is the facts that as long as the social base remains formidably non-negotiable independent variable, the socially backward or disadvantaged need to be given protection and support so as to insulate them from the inherent adverse consequences of the system to which they remain linked. Moreover, given the dynamics of this three tier spiral, it needs to be stated that an education that merely terminates at some level of economic upliftment or an economic upliftment that merely increases the educational opportunities or choices is in fact in collusion with the social base and is subservient to the system, which can only reproduce and perpetuate the status quo.

Education for Quality & Equality

Article 46 of the Indian Constitution, besides guaranteeing equality of opportunity to all, directs the States to promote with special care the interests of the weaker sections of the society particularly those of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It is an accepted fact that the opportunity to education is important and indispensable and hence ensuring equality of educational opportunity is seen as being critical to the liberation and empowerment of the socially disabled / challenged.

Devoting a full chapter on *Education for Equality*, the NPE with regard to the SC and ST states that 'the goal of the Educational Policy is equalization with the non-scheduled population in all stages and levels of education. In the light of the above discussion, it may be concluded that in spite of some lateral expansion of educational facilities, both formal and non-formal as well as the 'not so formal', the scheduled population has not only been not equalized with the non-scheduled population, but instead their social backwardness has been subject to a kind of freezing of course under the garb of some sort of progress or lateral / horizontal mobility, which though an improvement, yet cannot be reconciled with as equality of rights and opportunities.⁵

The Right to Education Bill of the Government of India and the 'Equitable Education' of the Government of Tamil Nadu seem to hold out some hopes especially to the socially and educationally disadvantaged. The Right to Education Bill's essential features include "free education"; "compulsory education"; "quality education", with schools requiring to have facilities like playground, library; "quality teachers" (minimum qualifications for teachers would be a must, and those under-qualified would be given five years to upgrade themselves), "social responsibility" (private schools would have to keep one-fourth of their seats for the disadvantaged); "de-bureaucratization of school system", and "participation of civil society in school management committees" (where half of the

⁵ *National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986*, Chapter IV, Education for Equality, p. 7.

members would be women). There are also other welcome changes regarding content, teaching and learning methodology and evaluation patterns suggested in the Bill.

As for the *Tamil Nadu Government's 'Equitable Education'* the predominant feature is the creation of a single school system with uniform content and infra structural facilities so as to pave the way for a more equitable and egalitarian society. Evidently multiplicity of systems would only mediate the reproduction or the freezing of the multiple inequalities in the larger social system preserving and perpetuating the same. This is exactly a role an education system should not be performing, to say the least. Understandably, those opposing this move cannot accept the prospectus of losing the lead and the gap that has all along been maintained so systematically. This is reflective of the upper strata mindset that as long as the distance is maintained any reform is welcome.

Concerns Expressed by the Yash Pal Committee

Some of the concerns expressed in this paper are also seen reflected in the observations made by the Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education (2009), under the chairmanship of Prof. Yash Pal.

The slow but increasing democratization of higher education in India has meant that the university is no longer the preserve of the children of the elite, or of the educated/professional middle-class. As more youngsters from a different segment of society enter the universities, they look at higher education as a means to transcend the class barriers...⁶

The reason why vocational education has remained underdeveloped and continues to be perceived as a last option is because it is largely for the poor, who either cannot afford academic education or who pass out of poorly-equipped and uninspiring schools with low marks. This kind of stigmatization of vocational education, as a last resort and essentially for the poorer sections of society, needs to be overcome for speedy development of the skills necessary in the present phase of India's economic development...⁷

Analysis and main Findings: Significant Association between Variables

The focus of the study is concerned with how the select independent variables namely gender, community, educational level of father and and mother, the over all economic status in terms of family income are associated with the various dependent variables that include selection of courses and type of institution at the college and school levels, course streams (groups), medium of study and type of institution at the higher secondary level and the current level of fluency in the use of the English Language. The data also refers to the lack of English Language skills as the main challenge in academic performance

⁶ *The Idea of a University*, Report of the Committee to Advice on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education, p. 9.

⁷ *Challenges of the Higher Education Sector – Vocational Education*: Report of the Committee to Advice on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education, pp 24-25.

and having the mother tongue (Tamil) as the medium of instruction. The Pearson's Chi Square has been used to measure the level of significance. The major findings are presented as follows:

Gender

Level of fluency in English: (College level)

- 1 = can read, write and speak fluently
- 2 = can read, write and speak with difficulty
- 3 = can read, write and speak with much difficulty

The level of significance $0.000 < 0.05$ clearly indicates a very high level of association between gender and the level of fluency in English. The girl students are better than boys in this regard: 3% more than boys with regard to fluency and 9% less than boys with regard to inability to read write or speak the language. This finding could be probed further as to the social, psychological and physiological factors that could be associated with the general trend of association between women and fluency in language, English as in the present case.

Mother tongue or English as medium of education: (College level)

Variables Medium of Education

- 1 = For mother tongue as medium of education
- 2 = For English as medium of education

The level of significance at $0.039 < 0.05$ indicates to some extent the association between gender and the preference for the mother tongue as medium of instruction at the level of higher education. While a good majority of the boys (53%) are for having the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the level of higher education, an equally strong majority of girls (55%) are not for this option. This data could be seen in the light of the previous data which establishes a general trend of female domination in fluency with the English language.

Community: 1 = ST; 2 = SC; 3 = MBC; 4 = BC/OBC; 5 = FC

Native Place: 1 = Hill area; 2 = Rural; 3 = Semi-urban; 4 = Urban

Two points deserve to be noted: (1) The various communities from SC to FC, register steadily greater percentage (from about 20% to 37%) in the urban category, which shows that the general trend is to migrate to towns and cities from rural areas. (2) Between the SC and FC, while both these communities register about 15% each as living in rural area, the SC accounts only for about 20% in urban area, whereas the FC constitute about 37%

(the highest) in the same category. It may thus be concluded that by and large the FC population hails from urban centres. The level of significance too at $0.000 < 0.05$ clearly indicates a close association between community and native place implying that higher levels of social hierarchy are to be found more in urban than in rural areas.

Choice of Courses: 1 = Arts; 2 = Sciences

UG:

The level of significance at $0.181 > 0.05$ does not indicate any association between the social strata (communities) and the Arts and Sciences divide at UG.

However, the analysis shows the following interesting findings: For the SC category, the Arts courses show a greater percentage than the Science courses and the difference is about 11%. For the MBC category the same difference is just 2% (arts more than the sciences). For the BC and FC the percentage in the science courses is greater than that in the arts courses, with the BC having a difference of 8% and FC having a difference of 23%. The preference of the FC category with regard to the professional courses of study in higher education is therefore quite obvious.

Type of Institution: 1 = Government; 2 = Government aided; 3 = Self financing

College level:

The trend of the lower social strata patronizing the government institutions and the higher strata the self financing ones is clearly visible in the above analysis. For the SC the percentages under government and self financing institutions are about 28% and 22% respectively (a decrease of 6%), whereas for all other communities it is an increase between these two types of institutions: An increase of four times for the MBC; a near three times increase for the BC and over eight times increase for the FC). The self financing institutions imply as a rule, English medium and higher fees and comparatively better infrastructure. The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ is a clear indication of a close association between the various social strata (communities) and the type of educational institutions at the college (higher education) level.

Father's Educational Level: Father's Education Level by Community

As for the illiterate, the percentage is highest (12%) for the BC followed by about 11% for the MBC, 9% for the SC and 0% for the FC. Similarly for the PG, The MBC register about 6% followed by the FC and BC/OBC with 5% each.

The highest and lowest levels of educational attainment:

The SC has the middle school (36%) as its highest level and HS (10%) as its lowest level. The MBC has HS (20%) as its highest level and PG (about 6 %) as its lowest level. The BC/OBC reach the middle school level (25%) though they register nearly 17% and 16% for the secondary and HS levels respectively. Their lowest level is at PG (about 5%) For the FC, the highest level is UG (47%) and the lowest is PG (around 5%). The ST figure only in UG (75%) and HS (25%)

Mother's Educational Level:

As for the illiterate, the percentage is highest (29%) for the SC community and it steadily decreases to 20% for the MBC, 18% for the BC/OBC and to 0% for the FC. Similarly for the PG, the percentage begins with about 3% for the SC and reaches the highest at 5% for the FC.

The highest and lowest levels of educational attainment for each community:

The SC records the middle school (25%) as its highest level and PG (3%) as its lowest level. The MBC records HS (20%) as its highest level and PG (less than 1%) as its lowest level. The BC/OBC record the middle school as the highest level (24%) though they register nearly 17% and 14% for the secondary and HS levels respectively. Their lowest level is at UG (about 4%). For the FC, the highest level is UG (37%) and the lowest level is PG (around 5%). The ST figure only in the HS (75%) and the secondary levels (25%) The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ confirms the above analysis indicating a very close association between the social hierarchy (communities) and the level of mother's education.

Father's Occupational Category:

What is striking in this table is that while unemployment ranges between 13 and 18%, the percentage of the SC (44% and ST 75%) categories are employed mostly in other than the public and / or private sectors (as self employment or agricultural operations), whereas the FC category is employed mostly in the public (Government) sector (47%).

That the FC and the SC communities are more or less equally distributed in the public sector and in sectors other than the public or private respectively is strongly suggestive of the socio-economic trend in the Indian society today even after some six decades of independence. This trend indicates how far education and employment are inclusive processes and systems in the country.

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ very clearly indicates the close association between the various social strata and the general trend of employment and its related factors like health, education and the general standard of living.

Levels of family income: (in rupees)

Leaving out the ST and considering the other strata, for the first level of monthly income (Below Rs. 5000), the SC tops this lowest income level with 54% and the FC takes the last place with 26%.

In the second level of monthly income (Rs. 5000 - 10,000), while the BC occupies the top slot with about 31%, closely followed by the MBC (about 30%), the FC takes the last place with about 13%.

In the third level of family monthly income (Rs. 10,001 - 20,000) the picture changes with the FC taking the top slot with about 29%, followed by the MBC, BC and SC with 15%, 13% and 12% respectively.

In the fourth level of monthly family income (Rs. 20,001 to 40,000), the FC with 11% occupies the first place, followed by the SC with about 9%, MBC with 7% and BC with 5%.

In the fifth level of income (Rs. 40,001 - 50,000), the FC is conspicuous recording nearly 16% with the other communities trailing far behind (MBC 1% and BC 0.7%). In the sixth level of income (Above Rs. 50,000), the SC communities record around 6%, followed by the FC with 5%, BC with around 3% and the MBC with less than 1% (0.6%). It is quite revealing to find that even though about 54% of SC families have below 5000 as monthly income, around 6% of SC families record monthly income in the above 50,000 level. This finding is indicative of the economic upward mobility of the SC communities though it pertains to a small minority in the stratum.

The analysis clearly shows the almost one-to-one link between the rough estimates of income (as revealed by the respondents) and the various social strata. With one or two cases of exception, by and large the general trend is quite clear especially when it comes to the lower levels of income and the lower social strata.

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ clearly establishes the close association between the social strata or hierarchy and the levels of monthly family income in general. This trend also supplements the earlier data on parental employment / occupation.

English medium as the main obstacle: (College level)

Leaving out the ST, the SC, MBC and BC record greater percentage for the response YES, this means that for students of these communities the English medium is really the number one problem in academics.

The difference between the responses YES and NO is a drop of about 10% for the SC, 2% for the MBC and 8% for the BC / OBC. As for the FC, the response YES records far lower than the NO with the latter soaring up to about 82% (YES = 18%), leaving a gap of 64%.

Comparing this data with that of community and levels of parental education, as well as the data on the level of fluency in the English language, the exceedingly high percentage of NO (English medium not a problem) recorded by the FC is only to be expected. These different sources of data converge on one point namely, the influence of parental education on the academic achievement / progress of children.

The level of significance at $0.001 < 0.05$ reveals a high degree of association between the social strata (communities) and English as medium of education at the level of higher education.

Level of fluency in English: (College level)

As for levels of fluency in the English language, while the SC, MBC and the BC/OBC together record an average of 25% for level - 1 (Can read, write and speak fluently), the FC record an impressive 74%. The rise between level one and two for the SC, MBC and BC/OBC combine is from 20s to the 60s, the drop from level one to level two for the FC is from the 70s to below 20. For the level - 2 (Can read, write and speak with difficulty), while the MBC record about 68%, SC 63% and BC 62%, the FC record the lowest 18%. Similar pattern is to be found with regard to level - 3 (Can read, write or speak only with much difficulty).

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ is a clear indicator of a very close association between the various social hierarchy (community) and the levels of fluency of the respondents in the English language.

Mother tongue as medium of education: (College level)

This simple analysis pertaining to preference for the mother tongue or English as the medium of instruction at the college level (higher education), the emerging pattern is clearly reflective of the previous findings with regard to the medium of instruction. While the response YES indicates preference for the mother tongue as the medium of education, the response NO implies preference for English.

The percentages recorded for the responses YES and NO against various communities are as follows:

The SC = 63% and 37%; MBC = 43% and 57%; BC = 52% and 48% and the FC = 24% and 76%. The analysis shows a preference for the mother tongue or for English as medium by the various communities. The SC shows preference for mother tongue by 26%; the BC also shows preference for mother tongue but by a narrow 4%. The MBC shows preference for English as medium by 14% and the FC shows preference for English as medium by a whopping 52%.

The preference for the mother tongue (Tamil) or English as the medium of instruction in higher education (college level) as indicated by the various social strata falls in line with the earlier findings on the medium of education at school (HS) level, level of parental education and the levels of fluency in the English language. Particularly the analysis clearly points out the close association between the levels of parental education and the preference for English as medium of instruction as well as to the levels of fluency in the use of the English language.

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ strongly reinforces the above findings and establishes the close association between the various social strata (communities) and the preference for the mother tongue (Tamil) or English as the medium of study at the college level.

Educational Level of Father:

1 = Illiterate; 2 = Primary (1-5); 3 = Middle (6-8); 4 = Secondary (9 -10); 5 = Higher Secondary (11-12/Plus Two); 6 = College (UG); 7 = College (PG); 8 = Professional

Type of institution: (College level)

1 = Government; 2 = Government aided; 3 = Private (self financing)

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ reveals maximum association between parent's (father) level of education and the type of institution the children study in higher education. The association is amply clear with regard to the government and the private colleges where there is an inverse association with the former and direct association with the latter.

The analysis gives us the inference that as a rule, lower educational level of parents, government managed colleges (arts & science), Tamil medium and lower fees (cost) go together as against higher levels of parental education, private or self financing institutions, English as medium of instruction and high fees which also tend to go together as clearly divided clusters.

English medium as main obstacle: (College level)

1 = Yes; 2 = No

The significance level at $0.000 < 0.05$ clearly indicates a high degree of association between the level of parental (father) education and the students' finding English medium as the main obstacle for their academic performance. As the level of parental education increases from 1 to 8, the response NO also increases from about 30% to 82%, whereas, as the parental educational level decreases from 8 to 1, the response YES increases from about 17% to 74%.

The exposure of parents to higher levels of education has therefore a strong influence on the English language skills of children, clearly indicating the kind of educational environment prevailing in the family.

Level of fluency in English:

- 1 = Can read, write and speak fluently
- 2 = Can read, write and speak with difficulty
- 3 = Can read, write or speak with much difficulty

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ is a very clear indication that there is a maximum degree of association between the level of parental (father) education and the level of children's fluency in the English language. While the level of parental (father) education increases from 1 to 8, the level of fluency in the English language steadily increases from about 12% to 59% and the utter lack of fluency decreases from 28% to about 12%. The response 2 (can read, write and speak with difficulty) also decreases from 60% to 29%. The analysis besides highlighting the advantage enjoyed by the children of educated parents, also clearly indicates the kind of disadvantage or challenge faced by the first generation learners in higher education.

Mother tongue (Tamil) as medium of instruction in higher education:

- 1 = Yes; 2 = No

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ is a very clear and strong indicator that there is a high degree of association between the level of parental (father) education and the choice of children as to having the mother tongue as the medium of education. As the level of parental education increases from 1 to 8, the response 'an emphatic NO' also registers a steady increase from 35% to 85%. Inversely, as the level of parental education decreases from 8 to 1, the response 'a decisive YES' in favour of the mother tongue increases from about 15% to 65%.

It is beyond doubt therefore, that the exposure of parents to higher educational levels is a clear trend setter for the next generation.

Educational Level of Mother

- 1 = Illiterate; 2 = Primary (1-5); 3 = Middle (6-8); 4 = Secondary (9 -10); 5 = Higher Secondary (11-12/Plus Two); 6 = College (UG); 7 = College (PG); 8 = Professional

Type of institution: (College level)

- 1 = Government; 2 = Government aided; 3 = Self financing

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ reveals maximum association between parent's (mother) level of education and the type of institution the children study in higher education. The association is amply clear with regard to the government and the private colleges where there is an inverse association with the former and direct association with the latter.

The analysis gives us the inference that as a rule, lower educational level of parents, government managed colleges (arts & science), Tamil medium and lower fees (cost) go together as against higher levels of parental education, private or self financing institutions, English as medium of instruction and high fees which also tend to go together as clearly divided clusters.

English medium as a big obstacle: (College level)

The significance level at $0.000 < 0.05$ clearly indicates a high degree of association between the level of parental (mother) education and the students' finding English medium as the main obstacle for their academic performance. As the level of parental education increases from 1 to 8, the response NO (English medium is a big challenge) also increases whereas, as the parental educational level decreases from 8 to 1, the response YES (English medium is not a challenge) increases.

Level of fluency in English: (College level)

- 1 = Can read, write and speak fluently
- 2 = Can read, write and speak with difficulty
- 3 = Can read, write or speak with much difficulty

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ is a very clear indication that there is a maximum degree of association between the level of parental (mother) education and the level of children's fluency in the English language. While the level of parental (mother) education increases from 1 to 8, the level of fluency in the English language steadily increases from about 13% to 65% and the utter lack of fluency decreases from 18% to 0% and the response 2 (can read, write and speak with difficulty) also decreases from 68% to 20%.

Parental exposure to higher levels of education has therefore a strong influence on the English language skills of children, clearly indicating the kind of educational environment prevailing in the family that is associated with the development and sustenance of these skills.

Mother tongue (Tamil) as the medium in higher education: (College level)

The level of significance at $0.000 < 0.05$ is a very clear and strong indicator that there is a high degree of association between the level of parental (mother) education and the choice of children as to having the mother tongue as the medium of education.

As the level of parental education increases from 1 to 8, the response 'an emphatic NO (Not for Tamil as medium of education) also registers a steady increase from 42% to 86% Inversely, as the level of parental education decreases from 8 to 1, the response 'a decisive YES (For Tamil as medium of education) increases from about 13% to 60%.

It is beyond doubt therefore, that the exposure of parents to higher education is a clear trend setter for the next generation.

English Medium as the main Obstacle in Academics:

1= Yes, 2 = No

The level of significance at $0.001 < 0.05$ clearly indicates the close significance between the medium of instruction and academic performance of students. The data reveals beyond doubt that lack of English language skills is the single most important hurdle for academic performance of students in higher education. As such the presence of English language skills tend to include and its absence to exclude students in higher education.

Over all it may be stated that lower levels of socio-economic strata, lower levels of parental education and lower levels of fluency in the use of the English language (and the vice-versa) strongly tend to go together as a cluster of variables. This trend is observed despite the fact that there has been quite an impressive lateral increase in the number of educational institutions across the country and the phenomenal increase in the privatization (self financing institutions/courses) and the prospective globalization (the coming in of the foreign universities) of higher education in the country. The stark reality is that in the rat race for quality education, the socially, economically and educationally backward sections of society will lag behind and get progressively excluded from the main stream and stagnate as semi-literate/semi-skilled or even as illiterate and unskilled migrant workforce even as the country as such is progressively poised towards a double digit GDP and a prospective super power to be reckoned with at the global arena.

As such, education as a system is not adequately equipped to bring about an inclusive society where the divide between the castes and communities, genders, rural and urban populations, first generation learners and others and the different linguistic and cultural groups and regions would be eliminated or narrowed down. However it does not mean that all cultural differences should be eliminated but that they are to be respected, appreciated and accepted as inclusive dimensions of a democratic, pluralistic and multicultural society. It calls basically for a change of mindset and thought pattern rather than cosmetic changes. It is a disappointing fact that technology has only added to the lateral expansion of education while retaining and perhaps expanding the basics of division and exclusion.

Conclusion

The system of education needs to be liberated from the clutches of social and economic as well as bureaucratic hegemony and special attention needs to be given to ensure equal opportunity along with equal chances of success. This implies not only admitting the socially disadvantaged into the educational institutions but also to courses suited to their aptitude and choice irrespective of their capacity to pay.

While the premise that quality implies inequality is unfounded, unethical, undemocratic and unacceptable, the starting point has to be the belief that both quality and equality or excellence and inclusiveness can and should go hand in hand reinforcing each other making the system relevant and meaningful.

Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat, (former Chairman of the UGC), in his address to the National Conference on Development of Higher Education: Expansion, Inclusion and Excellence, (New Delhi, Oct 2007) has clarified that "...the equity and quality are not independent, but are complementary to each other and mutually inclusive... [And] that the objective of quality improvement is also mutually inclusive with the objective of inclusiveness."

To conclude, it needs to be reinforced as a national policy that for the socially disabled especially the youth, this would also imply not only providing them with admissions, but also following them up with a well planned, rigorous, systematic and ITC supported remedial teaching, personal coaching, mentoring and other empowerment initiatives and programmes so as to compensate for the many disadvantages to which they are exposed. Whatever the reform, (Right To Education Bill, Equitable Education, Central / State / Private Universities etc), bold decisions, radical reforms, rigorous implementation and professional monitoring would alone effectively challenge the social disabilities and usher in an equitable and integrated society and thus reassure the gains of freedom to our youth, the future India.

There needs to be a paradigm shift in thinking that inclusiveness and quality should go together and that it is only such an inclusive education which can take on the various forms of discriminatory exclusion and usher in an inclusive society. Policy making as regards education should be driven by this new paradigm of rationale which would call for appropriate reforms at all levels of education. Inclusive education is not a side issue or sub-issue but the single agenda that needs to be addressed with utmost urgency and seriousness. To conclude with the words of Nicholas Burnett who again drives home the truth that, "... inclusive education is not a marginal issue but is central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies, [and that] inclusive education is essential to achieve social equity

and is a constituent element of lifelong learning".⁸ That only an inclusive education can also usher in an inclusive culture and inclusive society needs to be understood, accepted and acted upon to journey together towards a society that is tolerant and integrated.

⁸ Burnett Nicholas, Assistant Director-General for Education, *Foreword, Policy Guidelines for Inclusion in Education*, UNESCO, 2009.

