

Empowering Marginalized Adolescents for a Developed India by 2047: Challenges, Initiatives, and the Path Forward

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Abstract

This research paper examines the challenges and concerns surrounding the education of marginalized adolescents in India, particularly in the context of achieving a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) by 2047. Adolescents, including those from marginalized communities, constitute a significant portion (27.2%) of India's youth population. The study's objectives were to review government schemes and initiatives for their holistic development, explore the obstacles they face in accessing quality education, and propose suggestions for their empowerment to aid India's transformation into a developed nation by 2047. An explorative research methodology was employed, analyzing existing literature, reports, and case studies. Key documents reviewed included the NEP 2020, NCFSE 2023, and reports from UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP, various Indian Ministries, and Census data. The analysis reveals that marginalized adolescents encounter significant barriers to quality education, such as social stigma, gender inequality, multilingual diversity, child trafficking, and caste discrimination. While the Government of India has launched numerous initiatives, existing data suggests these efforts are not yet sufficient to achieve a developed India by 2047, highlighting the critical need for 'Jan Bhagidari' (People's Participation). The paper concludes that collective efforts are crucial to dismantle societal taboos, social barriers, stigma, and discrimination, paving the way for a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

Keywords

Marginalised Adolescent, Challenges, Quality Education, Viksit Bharat

Introduction

India's large youth population represents a significant demographic dividend, poised to drive economic growth. As a nation of diverse cultures, traditions, and socio-economic strata, Indian society exhibits a complex tapestry of groups, with the caste system being a pervasive feature since the Vedic period. A substantial segment of India's population, both rural and urban, belongs to low socio-economic strata and deprived sections, collectively termed the 'marginalized human population'. These groups often experience limited or no access to social, economic, or political opportunities, being "outside the mainstream of productive activity or social reproductive activity" as defined by Peter Leonard (1984).

Adolescence, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is a critical developmental phase characterized by rapid physiological and physical changes, the development of secondary sexual characteristics, reproductive maturity, and the formation of adult identity. This period sees optimal energy production, maturation of the nervous system and brain, and

enhanced attention, concentration, memory, and work efficiency. Simultaneously, adolescents navigate issues like opposite-sex attraction, self-identity, and self-respect, alongside hormonal changes that can present challenges such as mood swings and the potential for sexual indulgence and crime. Adolescents are the most energetic and vibrant segment of India's population. According to a 2021 report by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, youth (15-29 years), including marginalized adolescents, comprise 27.2% of the total population. Providing quality education to this demographic is essential for equipping India with skilled and resourceful young individuals, vital for transforming the nation into a 'Viksit Bharat'.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes youth development through universal access to schooling, skill development programs, and increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports serves as the nodal agency for youth welfare policies, aiming to leverage India's demographic dividend for national development. While India is experiencing rapid economic growth, challenges persist, particularly in uplifting marginalized families who face societal stigma and discrimination. This includes groups like ragpickers, sweepers, and beggars, who often face social ostracism due to unhygienic living conditions. Despite government initiatives to integrate them into mainstream society and ensure their constitutional rights and benefits, individual zeal and effort are crucial for self-empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

This research paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore the challenges faced by marginalized adolescents in accessing quality education.
- To review the schemes and initiatives implemented by the Government of India for the educational development of marginalized adolescents.
- To provide suggestions for empowering marginalized adolescents to contribute to India's transformation into a developed nation by 2047.

Methodology

An explorative research methodology is used in the present study to gain insights into the research problem and find solutions. As defined by L.R. Gay (1992), exploratory research is a preliminary approach used to clarify and define a problem's nature or to familiarize oneself with a topic. The study involved a thorough review of existing literature and case studies related to the educational challenges faced by marginalized adolescents and government provisions. Secondary data sources, including government documents like NEP 2020 and NCFSE 2023, and recent reports from relevant ministries and departments of GOI, UNICEF, World Bank, and the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD), were extensively examined.

Challenges Faced by Marginalized Adolescents in Accessing Quality Education

Development and discrimination are inversely proportional; they cannot coexist. India faces a significant challenge with an estimated 18 million street children, the largest population globally, living and working in urban areas, near railway lines, and in sewers, according to the

United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR). Marginalized adolescents encounter various obstacles to quality education:

- **Educational Status Gap:** The Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) 2024 report highlights that education and information are vital for the development of marginalized communities. There is a notable disparity in the educational attainment of marginalized adolescents compared to the national average , largely attributable to cultural and social factors. Family culture and societal support play a crucial role in a child's educational success.
- **Limited Formal Employment:** Marginalized family members exhibit very poor participation in formal sector employment. For instance, Dalits constituted only 6.5% of the total formal sector workforce in India (National Sample Survey Office, 2015) , and only 6.6% held professional or managerial positions, compared to the national average of 15.6% (Census of India, 2020).
- **Social Stigma & Discrimination:** As per the report of Global Forum for CDWD (2024), only 10% of Dalit households have access to water, compared to 27% of non-Dalit households, often relying on the goodwill of upper-caste communities for public well access. Dalits are frequently prohibited from using taps and wells in non-Dalit areas , and water supply to Dalit villages can be withheld if they challenge discriminatory practices. Children of sweepers, ragpickers, or HIV-positive children often face continuous social stigma and discrimination in schools , where teachers may be reluctant to teach them, and classmates may avoid studying or playing with them.
- **Trafficking of Adolescent Children:** According to a 2018 UNICEF report, India has a high rate of human trafficking, both internal and international. India serves simultaneously as a source, transit, and destination country for children exploited for sexual and labor purposes, including domestic labor. Despite efforts by governmental and non-governmental organizations, progress in prevention remains slow due to a lack of clues and information.
- **Caste and Financial Discrimination:** Despite 70 years of India's independence, marginalized children continue to experience caste and financial discrimination , discouraging parents from sending their children to schools.
- **Gender Inequality & Discrimination:** For many slums and rural regions, educating girl children is often seen as a wasted investment, as girls are expected to perform household chores. This lack of parental support and motivation contributes to girls continuously falling behind in education and empowerment.
- **High Dropout Rate:** In spite of various central and state-level initiatives and schemes for marginalized students, retention in schools is still poor. As per a 2016 Times of India report, 81% of Dalit children (aged 6-14) were enrolled in school; however, only 60% of the same category (aged between 15-19) were enrolled. Further, for ages 20-24, this became 11%. As per research findings of Gupta, A. K. (2018), even 50% of students are not attending classes regularly at the senior secondary level. Recent data by UNICEF (2021) stated that every 1 out of 5 Dalit children drop out of secondary school.
- **Multilingual Diversity:** Many children from low-income families/tribal backgrounds have no access to books as reading material in their native language or mother tongue. The importance of linguistic variety, which defines India's cultural richness, is sometimes overlooked in schools. It's critical to have an impact on a multilingual reading and writing culture at the primary level to create interest among primary school learners.

- **Poverty:** As per the Census (2011), five out of six multidimensionally poor people live in families belonging to the head of ST, an SC, or an OBC community. While data might have improved, it is not significant, compelling adolescent children of these families to leave school before class 10 and start earning.

Government Initiatives and Schemes for Educational Development of Marginalized Adolescents

Education leads to the skill development and well-being of adolescents. The following are the programs initiated by the Government of India for the educational development of adolescents, including marginalized:

- **Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK):** To ensure the holistic development of the adolescent population, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched RKSK on January 7, 2014, to reach out to 253 million adolescents (including males and females) with a special focus on marginalized and underserved groups. The program expands the scope of adolescent health programming in India from sexual and reproductive health to nutrition, injuries and violence (including gender-based violence), non-communicable diseases, mental health, and substance (drug) abuse.
- **Free Educational Channels (SWAYAM-Prabha & PM e-VIDYA):** Marginalized students have limited access to the internet. So, under one of the flagship initiatives, SWAYAM-Prabha under the Ministry of Education is providing 34 free educational TV channels covering educational content for Schools and Higher Educational Institutions. Curriculum-based contents are being telecasted every day as per a pre-decided schedule which can be accessed by students at their convenience. There is a provision of one class, one channel for school education. Apart from that, PM e-VIDYA TV channels have been initiated to enable multi-mode access to education for all students.
- **PM SHRI Schools:** This scheme was launched in 2022 and aimed to provide high-quality education to all levels of students in an equitable, inclusive, and joyful environment. More than 14,500 schools (KVS, JNVS, and State Government Schools) across the country are to be covered in this scheme. These schools will take care of the diverse backgrounds, multilingual needs, and different academic abilities of children.
- **National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education:** This national scheme was launched in May 2008. The objective of this scheme is to establish an enabling environment to reduce dropouts to promote the enrolment of girls belonging to SC/ST communities in secondary schools and ensure their retention up to the age of 18 years. A sum of Rs. 3000/- is deposited in the bank account of enrolled girls as a fixed deposit. On reaching the age of 18 years and on passing the class 10th board examination, she can withdraw it.
- **Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Protsahan (PM-USP):** It is a central government scheme of scholarships for students who want to be admitted to HEI. The primary objective of the scheme is to provide financial assistance to meritorious marginalized students from poor families to meet a part of their day-to-day expenses while pursuing higher studies. Scholarships are awarded on the basis of the results of the 12th board examination.
- **Pre-Matric Scholarship for SCs and Others:** Financial assistance has been provided to the parents of children belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC) and other disadvantaged categories for the education of their wards studying at the Pre-Matric stage so that their participation can be improved, and the incidence of drop-out - especially in the

transition from the primary to the next level and elementary to the secondary stage can be minimized.

- **Post Matric Scholarship for SCs:** It is one of the oldest welfare schemes (started in 1944-45) of the country initiated by the central government. The objective of the scheme is to appreciably increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio of SC students in higher education with a special focus on students belonging to the poorest families. Maintenance allowances to hostellers, study tour charges, book allowances, etc. are included under this scholarship.
- **Construction of Hostel for OBC Boys and Girls:** This central govt. scheme was launched in 1998-99 to address the problem of educational backwardness of OBCs. The Scheme aims at providing hostel facilities to students belonging to socially and educationally backward classes, especially from rural areas, to enable them to pursue secondary and higher education.
- **Sabla (Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)):** It was launched on April 1, 2011, to empower adolescent girls aged 11-18 by improving their nutritional and health status, upgrading home skills and vocational skills. Under the Ministry of Women Child and Development, this scheme is implemented in 200 selected districts across the country.
- **Prevention of Alcoholism & Substance (Drugs) Abuse:** This scheme was implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment in 1985-86 with the objectives of creating awareness and educating people about the ill effects of alcoholism and substance abuse. Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCA) through which drug addicts are rehabilitated is part of this program. This program is implemented in all States and Union Territories.

Suggestions for Empowering Marginalized Adolescents for Viksit Bharat 2047

An adolescent can empower himself or herself by their zeal and efforts only. But in due course of time, guidance and counselling are also required to move them on the right path. The following suggestions are put forth for empowering marginalized adolescent students towards achieving 'Viksit Bharat':

- **Universal and Quality Education:** NEP 2020 recommended it, but the important role has to be played by intellectual teachers and knowledgeable citizens of the societies of India. Regular orientation and refresher courses are needed to change the mindset of teachers, enabling them to manage inclusive classes for marginalized students and ensure a quality teaching-learning process.
- **Vocational Training and Skill Development:** It may be fruitful for marginalized adolescents who are mostly first or second-generation learners of their family. Due to a lack of information and proper guidance at the right time, they fail to achieve higher education and get posts in various government sectors. So, during secondary education, vocational training and skill development of such students can ensure them a better livelihood and empowerment for the development of the nation.
- **Slum/Dalit Adult Education Program:** Slum/Dalit Adult education program is essential to uplift the lifestyle of these people. Most of them are illiterate and have zero knowledge about their body physiology and ways to keep their bodies disease-free. So, instructors cum counselors are needed to educate them about hygiene and sanitation, life skills for daily activities, family planning, etc..

- **Primary Level Books in Mother Tongue:** It is the need of the hour to think that readable books of the school at the primary level must be printed in the mother tongue. So that students of STs and other multilingual communities can feel good about attending the classes and will take an interest in learning in the school.
- **Inclusion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Literacy:** NEP 2020 strongly recommended making AI an important part of school education. It can help the teacher as well as students for individualized learning. But now we cannot fully rely on it due to its access issues in the government schools.
- **Role of Community and Civil Society:** In any society, the Community and Civil Society play an important role in awareing the rest of the people of the society about any superstitions, abolishment of stigma or discrimination, and other aspects that are directly or indirectly related to our ethics and values. So, to create a healthy and empathetic mindset among the people of society and educational institutes for marginalized students and their family members, they must play their role full of enthusiasm and potential to remove such stigmas and discrimination forever before the path of Viksit Bharat.

Conclusion

Empowering marginalized adolescents is not just a social imperative but an economic necessity for India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047. Through targeted policies in education, skill development, gender equality, and digital inclusion, India can transform its adolescent population into a driving force for national development. A collaborative effort involving the government, private sector, and civil society is essential to ensure that no adolescent is left behind in the journey toward Viksit Bharat. After Independence, India started its journey towards rapid development of the country. Many initiatives and schemes have been launched time to time by GOI. Recent reports from the World Bank and UNICEF indicated that the economy of India is growing fast and it has become the 5th fastest-growing economy in the world. Youth is its huge demographic dividend that has the potential to make the people of India free from poverty and create wealth through quality education and skill development. That's why the PM of India has evocated "Yahi Samay Hai, Sahi Samay Hai!". The next 25 years are considered as the "Amrit Kaal" of India to become a developed nation in the world. The generation of this period is called "Amrit Peedhi".

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