



Future of Education: Democratic state and the School Rationalization policy in Odisha

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ABSTRACT: The school rationalisation policy and the consolidation of schools in the state of Odisha have many sociological consequences. It has increased school dropout among most marginalised communities, including dalit and tribal communities, and has had a greater negative impact on girls' education. Children just stopped going to school because of the huge distance from their home to the new school due to the consolidation of schools. On this background, this paper presents an empirical study in the western part of Odisha, which is dominated by most of the tribal population. This region is recognised as the most backward region in Odisha, where both government and non-government organisations are continuously intervening to improve the socio-economic condition of the region. The major aim of the study is to explore the sociological significance of school rationalisation policy and its role in delivering educational justice for marginal communities.

KEYWORDS: School Rationalisation and Consolidation, State and The marginal Communities, Educational Justice and Equity

I. Introduction

Following India's independence, the government mostly concentrated on elite levels of education, such as secondary and university education. Under the direction of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the commission for university education was established in 1948 with the primary goal of advancing higher education. Under the direction of Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, a commission for secondary education was established in 1952 with the primary goal of advancing high school education. However, as India gains independence, the organisation and requirements for education change. The aim of the

nation's educational policy was to develop a system of universal primary education by 1960, following the several constitutional assembly deliberations. The government created education commissions to address these issues in light of the heterogeneous nature of Indian society.

According to the constitution, social justice has structured equality into educational opportunity through a positive discrimination policy. According to the National Policy on Education (1968), which was based on the Indian Constitution's proposal, children between the ages of 6 and 14 should be required to attend school. Additionally, it was advised that secondary schools should promote the usage of regional languages. The primary goal of the National Education Policy (1986) was to provide education to all societal segments, with a focus on women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other underprivileged groups, and other backward classes who had previously been denied access to school. Right to Education Act (2009) for free and obligatory education until the age of 14 and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) for universalizing primary education, now, national policy on education (2020) is interested in a variety of subjects in different disciplines and the educational structure of education.¹

II. School Rationalization Policy: Aims and Objectives

Odisha state introduced consolidation and rationalisation of school policies in 2018. In this policy, the government tries to merge the nearby schools with one another. Before Odisha, many

¹ *History of Education policy in India*, Module of E. Pathshala, Module ID: 5.a



states, such as Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Goa, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Maharashtra, had already applied this policy in their territories². The Odisha state government's policy of expanding access to school, as well as elementary and secondary levels, has been successful over the last two decades. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of educational quality.

According to NITI Aayog, states are now increasingly realising that there are surplus schools and initiating the process of rationalising small schools. For the implementation of policy, the state government defines some criteria, such as that schools should be located within a distance of one km, primary schools (classes I-V) should have roll strengths less than 20, and an upper primary school (classes I-VIII) with roll strengths less than 30 shall be treated as a low-roll strength school for the purpose of merger. Similarly, two-class secondary schools (IX-X) with fewer than 30 students and five- or seven-class secondary schools (VI-X/IV-X) with fewer than 50 students are considered low roll strength schools. However, in the case of EBB (educational backward block) and scheduled areas, primary schools with roll strengths of less than 10, upper primary schools with roll strengths of less than 20, second-class secondary schools with roll strengths of less than 20, and fifth- and seventh-class secondary schools with roll strengths of less than 40 are considered low roll strength schools for this purpose. The selection of schools for merger should be based on the following criteria (a) All schools being merged need to be located in the same district (b) The schools must be run by the government. (c) Madrasa, Sanskrit Toll, and Special Schools shall not be selected for merger. (d) The schools should be located on the same campus or within a 100-meter radius. The 100-meter distance restriction does not apply to schools with a low roll strength. (e) Schools separated by a state highway, a national highway, or a railroad line shall not be taken for merger. (F) Schools separated by rivers, forests, hills, or any other natural barriers shall not be merged. (g) An aided school shall not be considered for merger with a government school. (h) In case of a physical merger of schools not located

on the campus, the availability of class rooms in the school to which students of the closed school(s) shall be shifted must be properly verified. (i) In case of non-availability of the required number of class rooms to accommodate the students after physical merger, administrative merger may be taken up for the time being till construction of the additional class rooms.³

The rational of Policy: When western countries' policy strategies are good administrative work and provide a good environment for student achievement at the same time, the Indian strategy of this basically, Odisha state policy is mainly focused on quality education, the reduction of physical and intellectual resources, avoiding multi grade teaching, promoting access to schools, ensuring the retention of children in schools, creating a better teaching and learning environment, making schools RTE compliant, and fulfilling the teacher's shortages.

III. Conceptual and theoretical Intervention

This paper attempted to conceptualise equity and quality education in the school rationalisation policy that the government of Odisha introduced in 2018. It did so with the aid of conceptual frameworks provided by Bourdieu's on the reproduction of culture, Thomas Kuhn's on the paradigm, and Karl Marx's on annihilation theory. According to Pierre Bourdieu,⁴ through education, people distinguish themselves in society by acquiring status and respect. This type of social strategy may be consciously or unconsciously adopted. He employed the term "cultural capital," which means a group's or individual's potential to fit into society through shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and virtues. The role of education is very significant in that it allows privileged and elite class people to fix not only academic credit but also promote their ideology, and that ideology constitutes the rules of society, most of which are their own advantages. They maintained the intellectual spread of their knowledge and allowed people to practice it according to the rules of society.

² Guidelines for Rationalization of Small Schools across States for Better Efficiency - putting on the Website of the Ministry for inviting comments-regarding. *Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Education & Literacy* (2018, EE. 11 Sections)

³ Policy of Rationalisation of Schools. (The 14th May, 2018), School & Mass Education Department, Odisha.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*. translated by Richard Nice. London: Sage, 1990.



According to Bourdieu, education serves to reproduce the culture of the dominant class. It refers to cultural capital, which is framed by dominant class ideology, and the education system is the agency for promoting that ideology, which is translated into wealth and power. This means that upper class students are familiar with the educational environment, so they found themselves to be more skilled and knowledgeable. Students from lower socioeconomic classes are the most alienated in the educational system. Middle-class students are familiar with the upper-class environment, so they can capture the knowledge and skills framed by the dominant ideology. The performance of the student's dependence on their cultural capital. Language, pronunciation of words, grammar, delivery of content, and confidence always depend on cultural capital. As a result, upper-class students receive praise from teachers, while lower-class students are gradually eliminated from the educational system. Bourdieu sounds like Marx. Bourdieu has said about the educational system, and Marx has said about the economic system. Marx explains the relationship between the ruling class and the subordinate working class.

The state consistently upholds dominant ideologies that originate from the privileged class. Any public policy that the state adopts may also be framed by privilege. Through the simplification and consolidation of policy, people are now divided based on what Bourdieu refers to as their "cultural capital." The state of Odisha can be divided into three regions: the coastal, the north, and the south. South Odisha is a hilly territory with a large population of scheduled tribes, while coastal Odisha is an area with big towns and tourist attractions. North Odisha is the region where a lot of mining takes place. Due to their tribe, a segment of the population located primarily in southern Odisha lacks access to education. People with regional and local knowledge excel in Odisha's educational system.

According to Thomas Kuhn, in his book "The Structure of Scientific Revolution",⁵ he argued that our ideas and beliefs, knowledge, and understanding are chained to a dominant ideology or paradigm that may prevent us from drawing the right kinds of statements from the data we have. Our ideas gradually become constrained to a small area.

⁵ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

This is happening because we are uncritically socialised into more than one ideology. We always fail to notice how dominant ideologies influence the subject matter we study without our knowledge. As such, our current and future educational systems should require critical analysis of what many of us take for granted. First, we should understand what a systemic concern about education is, for us,, how to identify it, how it becomes problematic, and how to solve it. It is important to know what theoretical frame we use to interpret our education system and what theoretical frames we should use to interpret our education system. It may conflict with our present knowledge and understanding, but our future understanding will be enlightened and critical. All the processes require intellectual courage to question our present beliefs. Finally, we will come to pragmatic alternatives, but we should not consider these the final alternatives. Because every thesis has an antithesis and every antithesis has a synthesis idea according to their time requirements.

Due to the educational paradigm that private education is better in South Asian countries, Odisha is also influenced by the idea that private education is a better system for quality education. Many parents send their children to private school, resulting in low enrollment at government-run public schools. It's simply a case of a privileged class of people. What about children from lower socioeconomic groups, such as scheduled caste and scheduled tribe children? At a time when people are more interested in the private education sector, the government is attempting to close schools due to low enrollment. A privileged section of children is going to private school because they have money to spend on education and are trying to distinguish themselves and maintain status and respect. Lower-income communities lack economic resources and even social awareness. After the implementation of the consolidation and rationalisation of school policy, students have lost interest in going to other village schools, cause disruption between peers and teachers. Some village students are not going to school, which means they have completely dropped out, and most of the villages' students are irregularly attending school. In a month, they are going to school five to seven days in the south part of Odisha. Small children, such as primary school students under the age of nine, are becoming afraid to attend school in other villages. Parents tell us that if we do not go to work, we are poor; we cannot sustain and maintain our lives. Our daily lives will be impacted if we drop our children off at school. Now, slowly, our education system is creating "haves" and



"have nots" through this educational policy. The privilege group will now benefit from education, while the labour class, including ST and SC, will be denied access to education.

According to Karl Marx, 'alienation' is a process where individuals gradually isolate themselves from their meaningful existence. Individuals are first alienated from the product that they produce in industry, then from the process of production, then from their fellow members, and finally from their lives. Where all means of production, like educational ideology, belong to the dominant class, Because of the consolidation and rationalisation of school policy, labour and lower-class community students are losing interest in education and attending school irregularly. It means they will gradually be deprived of a good, secure, dignified life, cultural capital, social awareness, overall personality development, skills, better economic security, power, and so on, all of which are products of education. The second isolation criterion, access to education, refers to the production process. This policy creates dropouts, irregularities, fear among students going to other schools, and psychological vulnerability rather than automatically sending students back to school. If children do not have access to education, they will grow up in an environment that does not prepare them for life in a democratic society. They will deprive their peers, who will serve as their reference group. Nowadays, society is divided into two distinct labour divisions: "have" and "have not." It is one type of latent activity that is not understandable by the common man.

IV. School Rationalization Policy: An Empirical View

A. Objectivise of the study

The study's background and objectives were to determine how this strategy would deliver quality education at the micro level, be equitable now and in the future, and be sustainable for both primary and secondary education in Odisha. According to the UN report on education 2000, quality is defined on five spectrums like: quality learners, quality learning environments, quality content, quality processes, and quality outcomes. First, quality learners include students with good health and nutrition, good psychosocial development, regular attendance for learning, and family support for learning. The second element of quality learning environments includes: (i) physical

elements, i.e., quality of school facilities like toilets, electricity, and libraries; (ii) interaction between school infrastructure and other quality dimensions like material and textbooks, working conditions for students and teachers, and the ability of teachers. Third, quality content includes: (i) student-centered, non-discriminatory, standards based curriculum structures; (ii) uniqueness of local and national content, (iii) literacy, numeracy, life skills, and peace education. The fourth quality process includes: (i) professional learning for teachers, (ii) continuing support for student-centered learning, (ii) active, standards based participation methods; etc. Fifth, quality outcomes include: (i) literacy and numeracy achievement; (ii) using formative assessment to improve achievement outcomes; (iii) parentally desired outcomes; and (iv) outcomes related to community participation, learner confidence, and lifelong learning⁶.

The policy does not provide a clear outline of what constitutes quality education. It is unclear how the government intends to implement the policy on the ground while ensuring equitable participation of all segments of the population. In this sense, equitable participation in education is composed of achievement, fairness, and opportunity.

Achievement: The first aspect of equity in an educational institution must consider both student achievement and societal benefit. Previously, we discussed how a few dominant groups of people capture and exploit the educational system for their own gain, which is covered in education philosophy. However, educational equity entails providing for the vast majority of people in society—what we might call the "80% of people who have no community." They are basically diverse sections of people who believe in many ideologies.

Component fairness: This means that one's personal circumstances should not interfere with academic success. According to distributive justice, fairness concerns the socially just allocation of resources. In education, socially just resource allocation refers to the outcome of a student's excellence, and before we get there, the state should provide certain safeguards and policies to push the student's excellence.

⁶ *Defining Quality in Education*, A paper presented by UNICEF at the meeting of The International Working Group on Education, Florence, Italy, June 2000, (Working Paper Series, Education Section, Programme Division, United Nations Children's Fund, New York, NY, USA)



Opportunity: The term "opportunity" refers to those groups who do not have the financial means to attend school. Through policy, the state has created the opportunity to access an equal outcome in education. The three components are related to each other for an educational system's success. This is one of the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 in recognition of educational equity's importance. But inequity in education is hard to avoid because of inequities in socioeconomic standing, race, gender, and disability.⁷ A democratic state's future sustainable education must include equitable participation in quality education. Through their skills and knowledge, every human being should be able to achieve a sustainable future.

B. Methodological Intervention

Essentially, this study investigates physical access to schooling, which is made difficult by educational policy. Philosophically, this study is based on realism, which is the belief in physical existence. Challenges to accessing schooling exist, and studies try to explore them through survey research strategies. The study has followed the primary source of data collection with a qualitative research method. Questionnaires, interview schedules, and focus group discussions were used to collect data in the local tribal language as well as in Odia and English. The target groups are students, teachers, school management, community members, parents, educational bureaucrats, and civil society. The research is being conducted using a completely inductive approach. The universe of the study is the Nawarangapur district, which is located in the southern part of Odisha. Underdeveloped and highly illiterate countries are the selection criteria of the universe. This study is basically descriptive and analytical in nature.

A. The Respondents: Community, Parents, Students

According to RTE, community and parents' involvement are essential for better education. The local teacher narrated, "We resist and go to the collector's office and block the education office with a written application for a rethink about school closing, but government officials look at our matter as taken for granted because of our condition," said

Jagatuguda and Jhariguda community members. We are all uneducated and don't know about government officials' systems. We go to teachers for help, but they seem to be less helpful with government decisions. The path to the lead school is very scary because of the hilly and forested area, so we are afraid to send our small children to school. Majhiguda and Chalanguda community members said they don't know what the role of the SMC of a school is. When teachers told them to meet with the school official, they signed. Many community members said teachers are not holding any formal meetings to learn about our opinions about school being closed. Sankarda village community members and parents said their village school did not meet the criteria for a merger school. They don't know why their school is going to be closed. During the school's closure, there were 23 students enrolled. Without our knowledge, teachers collect signatures for school closure. They said that now our children are very irregular in attending school because of the distance. Some parents and village members are not aware of the school's closure under this policy. They think the school is closed due to COVID-19 until 2022.

Parents: Parents claimed that agriculture and day labour were our main sources of income. There isn't any other way for us to make money. Children's new school route passes through a forest that is dangerous because of wild dogs and other creatures. Although we frequently consider sending our kids to school, we are unable to do so due to conflicts with our job schedule and their school schedule, because managing our family comes first, followed by education. Another village's parents claimed that although they enrol their children in the Ashram school because it is 3 KM away from their home village's school, they worry constantly about their young charges because they are still too young to know how to wash their clothes, wash their hands, or use the restroom.

Students: Students claimed that the closure of their rural school made them feel horrible. We occasionally get into fights with freshmen at school because they are from another village. We all go to school in a group due to the steep and forested route. We all don't want to go to school alone if one day our friend decides not to go. Some pupils claimed that due to the *kachha* road, we had problems during the wet season. Our school clothes are being drenched and filthy, making it impossible to sit in the classroom.

⁷ Handbook on *Measuring Equity in Education, Sustainable Development Goals*. UNESCO, 2018.



V. Result and Discussion

Quality education is the policy's first goal, but states are losing access to schooling in order to achieve quality education. Students are losing interest in studying at lead schools (this is the main school where low-enrolment schools have gone to merge). The above study discusses many reasons, such as disruption with peers and teachers, conflicts between children's school time and parents' working time, and teachers who are not always supportive of students (as one of the parents in Kanaguda village, Nawarangapur stated). Without access to education, we cannot think about quality education. The objectivity of this policy is to mess with one another. There has been no clear-cut intention behind this policy. The second objective of this policy, like the reduction of physical and intellectual resources and the avoidance of multigrade teaching, is contrary to the first. If every school has sufficient teachers, then why are schools practising multi-grade teaching (teaching by one teacher at a time while combining more than one class's students)? It is happening due to a lower number of teachers (according to the number of classes or student-teacher ratio). Because of the hilly region and difficult communication facilities, many schools practise multi-grade teaching for communication reasons and teachers do not want to work in that environment. But unfortunately, there have not been any excuses or loose provisions in policy for certain areas.

One of the objectives is to also promote access to schools, but according to parents and community members, from Jagatuguda, Majhiguda, and Naharpadar villages, due to the closer policy, their children just stopped going to school because of the huge distance from their home to the new school. Due to the closer merger policy, children are attending school in a very irregular manner, and slowly they are going to drop out, when the contrary situation is happening through merger policy. How will the government ensure the retention of children in schools? Unfortunately, the government has no answer. There are no guidelines in the policy for a better teaching and learning environment, and new schools have the same working conditions for students and teachers as old schools.

RTE (Right to Education) Act, but parents, teachers, civil society organisations, and school administrations have petitioned the Supreme Court to overturn this policy because rationalisation school policy violates the RTE Act. The High Court gave a

decision that the government should stop the further implementation of the policy, rethink the decision of the school to merge, and put the school in question of merging as before, providing the necessary infrastructure for the smooth running of the same. This policy creates two clear-cut classes in the state. In urban areas, students are going to private schools because of a false perception of the quality of education that is provided by private schools. There are no difficulties for urban students, but in rural areas, they do not have sufficient money to go to private school, and the spread of private schools is also very small. The very important point is that in rural India, people are mostly illiterate and unaware of the value of education. When their village's school is about to close, irregularities and dropouts occur among lower caste and tribal students. So, before quality education, the government should ensure the inclusion of all sections of students in education, access to education, and fairness in the education system. But everything on the septum of justice, fairness, and inclusion of education for all is missing. Fair access to high-quality education will support the development of a future system of education that can support both the individual and the larger community. Here, a democratic state's future education.

VI. Conclusion

Many times, policies are implemented in a very arbitrary manner. If we critically assess the policy, the strategy will be like that: a centralization of the education system and a benefit to the private education sector. The government employs education as a tool to enhance differentiation and stratification in society. A quality learner who is motivated to study from the lower class is the basic quality education element. The study found that school rationalisation policies in Odisha lead to marginalising marginal populations, such as tribes and lower caste populations, by blocking their educational opportunities through the merging of schools. This leads to a large number of school dropouts among the poor families living in remote geographical areas.