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Inequality, Difference, and the Politics of Education for All

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Introduction

With its commitment to *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* in the beginning of the new millennium, India has joined the global "Education for all" movement. The *Right to Education Act* (RTE) in 2009, which foresees the provision of free and compulsory education for all children aged 6-14, elevated the access to elementary schooling to the status of a constitutional right. In the international development discourse "Education for all" is firmly established as a measure to promote democratic citizenship and human development, which can be seen from the report series issued by the UNESCO from 2002-15.[1] Safeguards instituted in India for the representation of disadvantaged groups in educational institutions, politically contested as they remain (Thorat et al. 2016), further affirm the promises of modern education to function as a pathway to social inclusion and social mobility.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, anti-caste movements, feminists, and social reformers have invested in modern schooling to bring about social change. Literacy and learning were to enable the lower and lowest castes (the "shudra-atishudras", to use a political term from nineteenth century Western India), to reflect on the causes of their oppression, and to work for their communities' betterment (O'Hanlon 2002; Mhaskar & Tschurenev 2017). Their struggle for education expressed women's desire for political participation, their demand for

professional skills, and economic independence. It was intimately connected with the development of literary self-expression (Chakravarti 1998; Bagchi 2009). Education thus became firmly embedded in Dalit and feminist politics of the twentieth century, both in the inter-war period, and in post-independence India (Basu & Ray 2003; Akhtar 2013; Paik 2014; Zelliot 2014). In the twentieth century, women's movements started to provide new channels for Indians' encounters with like-minded Asian, American, and European women; they also came to facilitate global pedagogical exchange (Allen 2018; Horn 2018a).

In effect, however, education proved a rather 'contradictory resource' for the marginalised (Higham & Shah 2013). Sociologists and social historians of education have shown time and again, that modern education systems are key to the reproduction of social stratification and the production of privileges, exclusions, and inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Crook 1996; Bhattacharya 2002). This includes the introduction of new patterns of differentiation among the marginalised (Ciotti 2006; Higham & Shah 2013). Until today, caste, practices of untouchability, gender, and poverty have a crucial impact on educational opportunities. In addition, Muslims as a group, and particularly Muslim girls and women, face major educational disadvantages (Nambissan 1996; Thorat et al. 2007[2]; Gupta 2015). It is not only the problem of access to quality education, but also the everyday practices and experiences of discrimination, which hinder marginalised students' educational opportunities (Rege 2010; Mhaskar 2016[3]). This translation of social inequality into educational inequality, in turn, shapes the distribution of cultural and economic resources within the next generation.

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In this FOCUS section, the issues of social inequality, cultural difference, and diversity are discussed in relation to educational expansion and the efforts to implement "education for all". From the nineteenth century onwards, diverse actors were involved in building, contesting, and reshaping the colonial education system and its successor in independent India. Administrators, missionaries, social movements, and various reform associations have pursued diverse strategies to increase the reach of formal schooling, improve its quality, or adjust its social and political agendas. The case studies presented in this FOCUS section cover a period from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. They explore both, efforts directed at the supply and regulation of modern education—such as institution-building, teacher-training, and the spread of pedagogical knowledge (Allen 2018; Caruso & Moritz 2018; Horn 2018a)—and policies to encourage school attendance (Bonaker 2018). All these efforts, in different ways, responded to, and reshaped social inequality, and participated in the making and managing of social and cultural difference.

Building on the literature on the complex social history of modern education in India (for instance Kumar 1991; Bhattacharya 2002; Allender 2007; Kumar 2007; Kumar et al. 2013; Rao 2014), this introductory essay aims to stress four interrelated issues, which will be further reflected on in the contributing research articles. First, I highlight a fundamental tension, which has characterised the politics of universal education from the early nineteenth century onwards, i.e., the problem of "education for all" in an unequal, differentiated social context. Secondly, I want to combine the view of Indian education as a 'contested terrain' (Bhattacharya 1998) with approaches that study international, transregional and global connections (Möller & Wischmeyer 2013; Bagchi et al. 2014; Mann 2015). Though global power asymmetries persisted in the interaction of Indians with education reformers abroad, the twentieth century also saw the emergence of more egalitarian frameworks of mutual exchange. The third section reflects on different strategies to increase the reach of schooling and the tension between empowering and social disciplinary tendencies. The final section problematises the concept of cultural difference, in relation to educative measures directed towards marginalised groups, such as Dalits and Adivasis.

The politics of educational expansion and differentiation

Colonial education policies most blatantly demonstrate the tension of educational expansion and differentiation. Often, they were drafted in an explicitly hierarchical social framework (Chavan 2013) and embedded in the making of a 'colonial grammar of difference' (Stoler & Cooper 1997; Tschurenev 2011).

In the early nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries were the first to suggest means towards the spread of cheap, efficient forms of vernacular schooling among the mass of the population of the Indian subcontinent. The limited vernacular literacy they envisioned for male Indian subalterns clearly differed from the higher education available to the Indian intellectual elites; at the same time, it was clearly distinguished from the bi-lingual instruction suggested for the poor European and Eurasian population of the colonial cities. While the latter ones were to take an intermediary position between European masters and "native" servants, Indian peasants and labourers were to continue their occupations, but benefit from missionary education's "moral improvement" (Marshman et al. 1816, 1817). The approach adopted by British missionaries in India fit with the contemporary debate on "education of the poor" in England, which emphasised the dangers of popular schooling. Elites feared that working people, once educated, would forget their social place and aspire to higher things (Kaestle 1976). Educational agendas were thus formulated within the envisioned colonial social order, which combined class and racial hierarchies (Rao 2013).

Moreover, gender was a crucial category of differentiation. Efforts to spread schools for girls explicitly aimed at reforming the domestic sphere (Chapman 1839; Midgley 2000; Kumar 2007; cf. Caruso & Moritz 2018). The highly gendered nature of "female education", and its focus on care, domesticity, and familial relations persisted well into the twentieth century, and characterised even the educational politics of the national women's movement (Hancock 2001). Some projects of "female education" were further framed in terms of differences among women. This can be said for the essentialist trope of the "ideal Indian woman", which characterised the position of British and other European orientalist-minded women, such as Annie Besant (Horn 2018a; Singh 2018). Moreover, it refers to the implicit caste politics, which marked the educational efforts of some Indian feminists (Tschurenev 2018).

In the colonial period, schooling thus emerged as a "social technology" (Caruso & Moritz 2018), which allowed for the management of group relations within colonial society. Due to the initiative of missionaries, and Indian radical reformers, groups hitherto excluded from formal literacy instruction, and particularly from Brahminical Sanskrit learning, gained access to the emerging space of modern public elementary schooling. The efforts of untouchable students to access schools, and the setting up of schools for girls, met with an outspoken, sometimes violent opposition (Keer 1974; Constable 2000). The slow and uneven process of educational expansion, which accompanied the establishment of the colonial education system, not only implied the displacement of prevalent forms of teaching and learning (Shahidullah 1996; Seth 2007). It was, at the same time, a process of differentiation. Colonial administrators, missionaries, conservative Indian intellectuals, and moderate reformers usually asked "how and how much" should subalterns be taught (Rao 2002). This was not exclusive to the nineteenth century contestations over "female education" (Chakravarti 1998; Rao 2002; Mhaskar & Tschurenev 2017). Workers' children, and children from untouchable communities, also received limited, gender-differentiated forms of industrial and vocational training, and education which emphasised manual labour (Kumar 2017; Kannan 2018). Thus, even an endorsement of "education of the poor", mass education, or "female education", did not imply a commitment to social equality. On the contrary, those social radicals who did strive for a democratisation of education and of society—such as the early Western Indian anti-caste movement—remained a remarkable exception.

There is a second major problem connected with the project of universal education, even for reformers who do not pursue an explicit politics of inequality. The question is, how to achieve an appropriate reflection of existing social, cultural, religious or linguistic differences. Managing diversity, is, after all, a major challenge faced by educational policy-makers all over the world. Against the background of diverse populations, education reformers often formulate their

goals in response to the perceived special needs of target groups. This can be a sensible approach to education reform. "Difference-blindness" entails its own problems. The Macauleyan strand of colonial education policy, which was characterised by a rampant Eurocentrism, is maybe the most obvious case of a failed "universalistic" approach. The monopolisation of cognitive authority, the centralisation of knowledge-production in the metropolis, and the de-legitimation of prevalent South Asian knowledge systems were part of the Anglicist imperial-hegemonic aspirations (Bhattacharya 2002a: 3).

However, the access to English-language instruction and the degrees and cultural capital associated with it, were objects of intense power struggles between the colonisers and the colonised as well as within Indian society. While vernacular languages were often valued for their potential to bring school and life-worlds of students closer and facilitate students' active appropriation of school-knowledge, English education came to symbolise the aspiration towards upward social mobility. This meant that the provision of higher education in English for the intellectual elites, as separate from vernacular mass schooling, transformed, but also renewed social power relations (Frykenberg 1988; Chandra 2012). For the marginalised, it was modern English education, which became associated with the breaking of traditional hierarchies, and individual and community advancement (Rege 2010). For educational policy-making, this implies that even efforts respecting local knowledge, linguistic difference and cultural diversity can thus reaffirm social inequality.

Interactions: education as a 'Contested Terrain'

In the nineteenth century, a multiplicity of actors was involved in building the colonial education system and providing alternatives outside its fold. In contrast to colonial administrators' rhetorical emphasis on the importance of educating India—as a means to bring about moral and material progress (Mann 2004)—financial investment remained remarkably limited. From the 1850s to the 1880s, building the colonial education system took the form of a standardised regulation, with the supervision of educational institutions at times leading to a phenomenon of over-governance (Allender 2016). At the same time, colonial administrators aimed to stimulate civil society initiative and investment, and relied on missionaries for the provision of schools, even if the relationship between the state and missionaries was often conflicted (Bellenoit 2007).

Given this diversity of actors, education in colonial India became a highly 'contested terrain'(Bhattacharya 1998). The national education movement, which took shape from the 1880s onwards, competed with the colonial state for control over public education. This struggle, however, was entangled with another contestation, the struggle for hegemony within Indian society (Bhattacharya

1998a: 6f.). Several efforts to use education as a means for national revival, religious community-building, or the anti-colonial struggle, also entailed conscious efforts to re-institute caste and gender hierarchies (Fischer-Tiné 2003; Rao 2010; Manchanda 2014). Besides such major social conflicts, many local struggles occurred over funding, insufficient supply, or curricular reform. The lack of religious instruction in government-funded schools, for instance, was a major issue addressed in the debates surrounding the Indian Education Commission of 1882, also known as the Hunter Commission (Whitehead 2004). In the twentieth century, technical and professional training assumed centre stage in educational policy debates.

From the early nineteenth century onwards, interactions and exchanges over education policy, pedagogy and the expansion of schooling in India took place within an imperial frame (Midgley 2000; Tschurenev 2013; May et al. 2014; Allender 2016). From the perspective of 'connecting histories of education' (Bagchi et al. 2014), the contested terrain of Indian education appears embedded in wider, trans-regional developments. The missionary project to evangelise India did not only include numerous British missionaries, but also German-speakers and US-Americans in significant numbers (Constable 2000; Liebau 2013; Kannan 2018; Allen 2018). This means that educational policy decisions made by missionary societies' central agencies could have a major impact on their Indian agents' educational initiative. An example would be the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions' (ABCFM) decision in the early 1850s, to no longer invest in secular schooling as a means for conversion, which led to a closure of many successful American Mission schools in Western India (Wilder 1861).

While Eurocentrism, Anglo-Saxon supremacy and the politics of cultural assimilation characterised several missionary educational projects in India, including the non-British ones, missionary attitudes towards Indian students and Indian society changed significantly towards the end of the colonial period (Allen 2013; Bellenoit 2014). From the 1880s onwards, patters of trans-regional interaction emerged, which to some extent transcended, or at least refashioned imperial hierarchies—a topic which contributions to this focus section will explore further (Allen 2018; Horn 2018a). Indians started to partake in global educational movements, such as the spread of the Fröbel kindergarten—an institution to reach pre-school children with the help of a new pedagogical approach (Allen 2017, 2018)—or the early twentieth century new education movement (Brehony 2004; Mann 2015; Horn 2018, 2018a). Indian reformers, such as Pandita Ramabai travelled abroad to study, teach and gather educational expertise. Ramabai's successful fundraising efforts in the US, though reinforcing American women's imperial mind-set, enabled her to pursue her educational projects in

Bombay and Poona (Jayawardena 1994; Kosambi 2003; Allen 2018; Tschurenev 2018).

During the interwar period, Indian teachers and students visited the sites of pedagogical experimentation in continental Europe and participated in the New Education Fellowship congresses. Prominent Indian nationalists, such as Mohandas K. Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were much admired among the new educationist international community. For German seekers of spiritual wisdom, who were also to be found among members of the new education movement, India assumed a special symbolic meaning. Against the background of the German "Indophilia"—a romanticist variation of orientalist imaginations— India was even cast in the role of being Europe's teacher, thus reversing the imperial notion of knowledge flows from the centre of civilisation to its peripheries (Horn 2018). The question that persists is how such a romanticist-orientalist mind-set German new educationists' encounters with the "real India" (Horn 2018a).

Strategies: increasing the reach of schooling

Administrators, missionaries, civil society organisations and individual educationists have pursued different, sometimes complementary, sometimes also contradictory strategies to expand the reach of modern schooling in colonial and post-colonial India. On the one hand, such strategies were directed at improving educational supply by means such as institution-building, teacher-training, lobbying, and the spread of expert knowledge. On the other hand, educational expansion often depended on the creation or stimulation of a demand for new schools. With the arrival of colonial education, parents familiar with indigenous forms of knowledge-transmission, or hitherto unschooled communities, needed to be convinced to send their children to attend new types of schooling. As research on early nineteenth century England has shown, working class parents' demand for their children's education and their rejection of institutions not fitting with their everyday lives had an important impact on the patterns of educational expansion (Laqueur 1976). The communities targeted by educational intervenetions also shaped the contested terrain of public schooling. Moreover, if we perceive children as active agents within adult-defined frameworks (Ellis 2009), the significance of pedagogues' and policy-makers' efforts to make schooling relevant and attractive to them becomes even more apparent. From any school-reformer's perspective, the regular attendance of students is, obviously, key to achieving their social or educational goals.

Globally, the nineteenth century was a period for the 'assembling [of] school systems' (Miller 1998: 183). Colonial India was not exempt from this. This implies that state agencies centralise control over educational provision, standardise teaching methods and curricular content, and build professional expertise.

Colonial administrators in India were rather invested in teacher-training, not only because qualified personnel were much needed for setting up standardised schooling. The funds needed for teacher-training were also limited, compared to the provision of fully-funded state schools. Investing in training teachers, from the colonial governments' point of view, could show commitment to the cause of public instruction while the costs for actually running schools would be out-sourced (Allender 2016).

From the 1850s to the 1880s, a period in which the basic structure of the colonial education system was established, many colonial administrators promoted the so-called pupil-teacher system as the basis for teacher training and educational expansion (Caruso & Moritz 2018). In the Bombay Presidency, a regulation of 1857 foresaw its implementation in all government schools (Director of Public Instruction 1859: 448). In pedagogical terms, the pupil-teacher system was part of the transition to modern classroom teaching. It formalised earlier experiments with group instruction, which relied on more advanced students teaching their peers (Caruso 2015; cf. Tschurenev 2011). In a context of an expansion of modern schooling, pupil-teachers were part of a cycle, where the graduates of the new-model institutions often assumed teaching functions themselves. This was best seen in the case of girls' education, since teaching was one of the first professional option for literate, formally schooled women (Caruso & Moritz 2018).

Another impetus towards the professionalization of teaching came from the international Fröbel kindergarten movement. This shifts the perspective away from colonial administrators, towards women's organisation and female activists, who were concerned with the opening of new professional opportunities for women. In the US and Germany, kindergarten teaching emerged as a distinctly female professional field. The participation in the kindergarten movement, at the same time, was part of women's aspirations to political participation and democratic citizenship. The spread of kindergarten teaching became a cause of American women's missionary and educational activism abroad. At the same time, Indian women reformers discovered it for their own agenda to promote women's education, and women's emancipation (Allen 2018). For Pandita Ramabai, teaching, including kindergarten teaching, would be a viable alternative for upper-caste Hindu widows, who were precluded from married life (Chakravarti 1998; Kosambi 2003; Allen 2018; Tschurenev 2018).

This close intersection of women's activism and the institutionalisation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which characterised the Fröbel kindergarten movement, already appeared in the case of female missionaries promoting infant schools in the early nineteenth-century British Empire (May et al. 2014). In the twentieth century, the national women's movement in India took up the

cause of kindergartens, nursery schools, and crèches, for furthering pedagogical innovation and social welfare. They did so, in close association with both, the congress-led national education movement and new educationists from abroad. In the case of German-speaking new educationists travelling to India in the interwar-period, this connection of women's professionalism, women's rights and kindergarten and Montessori teaching can be observed too (Horn 2018a).

In terms of educational expansion, the history of ECCE—in India, but also in other countries, such as the US and Germany—is of double relevance (on ECCE in India: Verma 1994; Kaur 2009). One the one hand, infant schools, kindergartens and nursery schools are directed at an age group, which is often considered too young for formal elementary instruction. The definition of this age group varies, but usually ECCE is directed at children under the age of six. In the current international development discourse, ECCE is considered the foundation of young persons' overall human development; it is often conceived of as a preparation for formal institutional instruction.[4] Thus the reach of educational institutions is expanded in terms of a new age group. On the other hand, the institutionalisation of ECCE led to an increased participation of women in higher education and the extension of professional training courses and institutions. Pedagogical transformation also resulted from formal education reaching out to younger children. It was particularly in the field of ECCE, that pedagogical innovations such as object lessons, play and the stimulation of sensory development were brought forward, which then became part of the standard repertoire of pedagogical reform directed at older children and youth as well (Brehony 2004; Mann 2015; Powell 2017).

Innovative pedagogy and the provision of stimulating, positive learning environments can make schooling more attractive and thus increase student enrolment, attendance and participation. Improving curricular relevance and tailoring educational supply to local needs are alternative strategies for enhancing attendance. In the context of liberal governance, educational administrators often use mixed strategies of compulsion and encouragement to get children into schools. The formulation that children have a *right* to free and *compulsory* elementary education, in the *Right to Education Act*, is indeed striking. Compulsory education has been a core demand of education reformers, who sought to democratise education and to ensure universal access to schooling since the late nineteenth century. Measures to enhance school attendance of poor, working, and marginal children, however, often display social disciplinary and coercive tendencies (Balagopalan 2014).

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, commonly referred to as Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), allows for an exploration of these ambiguities (Bonaker 2018). Launched in 1995, the MDMS reached

close to 99 million children in 2016-17. The MDMS primarily aimed to improve poor children's school attendance along with their nutritional status. The free school lunch was meant as an incentive for poor parents to ensure their children's attendance. Moreover, the MDMS can be contextualised in a wider policy agenda of "social inclusion". The experience of eating together and the employment of Dalit cooks were suggested as means to counteract practices of casteism and untouchability. In practice, however, the stigmatisation of poverty and marginal caste and religious communities is often re-enforced in schools that participate in the MDMS. The meals are regulated by upper-caste Hindu food norms, such as vegetarianism, which are thus imposed on other communities. Moreover, the MDMS's potential 'to reduce social inequalities on the larger societal scale through better education levels of children from disadvantaged families, is limited by the overall trend of the increasing divide between government and private education' (Bonaker 2018: 3).

Although school enrolment numbers have, in fact, increased steadily during the last decade, studies have found that the quality of learning in government schools even decreased after the RTE was introduced. At the same time, the proportion of children enrolled in private schools has increased (Bonaker 2018: 1f.). This brings us back to the tension of universal education and differentiated, or segregated schooling. While marginalised children remain in public schools, those who can afford it, opt for the private sector, a process that reinforces social divisions (Nambissan 2015).

Cultural difference, local knowledge, and social inequality

It has been said that under the post-colonial condition 'many existing education systems still bear the hallmarks of the colonial encounter in that they remain elitist, lack relevance to local realities and are often at variance with indigenous knowledge systems, values and beliefs.' (Crossley & Tikly 2004: 149) The building of the colonial education system, the epistemological Eurocentrism, which marked its curricular orientation and English as a medium of instruction have been associated with a widening gap between students' life-world experiences and the school (Kumar 1991). This problem was even reflected in the efforts of colonial educators, such as British Fröbel-specialist Isabel Brander, to adapt educational playthings and instructive stories to the local environment. Educator Susie Sorabji equally emphasised the need to "localize" the songs and games used in Indian kindergartens (Allen 2018: 17; cf. Powell 2017).

Feelings of cultural alienation also mark the experience of Dalit children and youth in upper-caste dominated classrooms. Teachers' attitudes, discriminatory practices and school-imparted knowledge, which is often distant from their own cultural environments, prevent students from developing a feeling of belonging

(Rege 2010; Mhaskar 2016; Bonaker 2018). Against this background, efforts have been made by policy makers and social movements to incorporate subalterns' knowledge and life-world experiences into schools and educational settings. The literacy camps run by women's rights groups as part of the Mahila Samakhya programme, launched in 1988, are a case in point. These literacy camps aimed to empower rural Dalit women and ensured that the attendees participated in the creation of literacy primers in the spoken vernacular. They were thus approached not as recipients of canonical knowledge, but as co-creators of learning environments (Ghose 2002). The question that thus arises is—Under which conditions can the integration of subaltern knowledge into formal education empower people and promote human development? Adapting or limiting educational provision to perceived local needs can lead to a freezing of the status quo. If it is taken for granted, for instance, that Adivasis (or "tribals") inhabit a distinct life-world 'outside of modernity and its attendant political and economic imperatives', a focus on 'the preservation of their cultural practices' implies the need for Adivasis' continued isolation (Balagopalan 2003: 57).

This conflict between different approaches towards overcoming educational and, hence, social marginalisation, can be illustrated by contrasting the Gandhian concept of nai talim, or, new education, with the educational politics of the Ambedkarite anti-caste movement. Both educational reform projects aimed at making education more accessible for the marginalised. Nai talim, in conversation with the international new education movement, suggested to make a basic craft the core of mass elementary instruction. Pedagogically, this aimed to stimulate an integrated learning process, involving "head, heart, and hand." Through a "method of correlation", students would, for instance, connect the manual activity of spinning with a reflection on India's economic development and the politics of import-substitution. Craft-centred learning would not only help to universalise education, by making local schools economically self-sufficient: the schools' craft production would be part of the village economy. By making manual labour, which was often associated with caste stigma and untouchability, the core of schooling, the idea was to give it new value and dignity (Holzwarth 2014, 2016; Oesterheld 2015). This strategy was not only problematic for evoking the romantic trope of an authentic Indian past—a common trope in the new education movement (Horn 2018a; Mann 2015). It failed precisely because many elite and upwardly mobile parents rejected such an alternative model, which did not promise social recognition and access to white-collar jobs. It thus rather kept manual labourers' children in the same position as their parents.

The Ambedkarite anti-caste movement, in contrast, emphasised the need for Dalits to access higher education, on par with everyone else. Against the background of persistent exclusions, Dalit Colleges became important centres of political mobilisation and community formation (Paik 2014; Jenkins 2014). Alter-

native, or segregated educational institutions for the marginalised, it seems, can help further social mobility, if they provide the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed in a modern, formally educated world.

Endnotes

[1] Unesco. *Education for All Global Monitoring Reports, 2002-2015*. https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/allreports [retrieved 05.12.2018].

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[4] This is expressed, for instance, in UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals: 'By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.' https://en.unesco.org/node/265600 [retrieved 05.12.2018].

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