Phenomenology of Educational Exclusion at Secondary School Level in India

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Secondary education redefines the academic foundation of the child and serves as a link between the elementary and higher education, which in turns help in developing a reservoir of intellectual human resource. India envisioned having universalization of secondary education and substantial progress has been made in achieving the goal. Many of the children entering the schools are unable to complete education and multiple factors are responsible for their dropping out. It necessitates to a deeper probe into the problem of exclusion of children from secondary education. Present study provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of educational exclusion at secondary school level in India. Empirical Phenomenological approach was adopted to carry out this study. The study was delimited to one state of India i.e. Punjab. A sample of 72 dropped-out adolescents (54 boys and 18 girls), their parents (61) was drawn from the selected areas of Punjab

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using ppurposive sampling technique. Open-ended questions were asked to generate data that led to a textural description. Data analysis revealed nine composite textural theme swhich included (i) Gender Bias (in case of girls), (ii) Finnacial Constraints (iii) School Distance (iv) Family responsibilities (v) Physical disability (vi) Demotivating and Hostile teachers (vii) Learning Difficulties (viii) Failure (ix) Early marriage in case of girls.

1. INTRODUCTION

Secondary education serves as a link between the elementary and higher education, which in turns help in developing a reservoir of intellectual human resource. A sizable section of students gets excluded from the secondary school education. All programmes and plans aim at bridging gender and social gaps in retention, enrolment and learning achievement at the primary stage. At secondary school, level children acquire self and social consciousness which is essential ingredient to direct them on the path of development. To develop harmonious social order, egalitarian society and to socio - cultural development, it is imperative to focus, invest and strengthen the school education at the secondary level.

The government of India launched a major programme in 2009, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) to improve access, quality and equity in secondary education. The RMSA was the most recent initiative of government of India to achieve the goal of Universalization of Secondary Education (USE). The major objectives of RMSA according to 12th five-year plan on secondary education are to:

- Achieve near-universal enrolment in secondary education, with the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) exceeding 90 per cent by 2017.
- Raise the GER at the higher secondary level to 65 per cent.
- Reduce Dropout rate to less than 25 per cent by 2017.
- Raise the minimum level of education to class 10th and universalize access to secondary education.
- Ensure good quality secondary education with focus on Science, Mathematics and English.
- Reduce the gender, social and regional gaps in enrolment, dropout and improving retention.

Provisioning quality secondary education for all as per the mandate of SDG goal-4 is a humongous task. Although the gross enrollment ratio at secondary stage is rising and dropout rates indicating downward trends at national level yet there is considerable regional disparity in the magnitude. Many of the children entering the schools are unable to complete education and multiple factors are responsible for their dropping out of school. Nevertheless, exclusion of children in any form poses formidable challenges on the way to achieve universalization of education at school level. The challenges appear in the form of ensuring access of schools at relatively comfortable distances from the residences to all the children, increasing gross enrolment ratio, ascertain non-threatening academic environment for children, boosting attendance ratios and reducing the probabilities of children dropping out from the school. Failure in any of these leads to educational exclusion of children.

In the past years the stress has been laid on to enhance the enrolment figures at the elementary levels of education but little attention has been given to the children who enter at secondary schools. Numerous studies and reports have also shown that various factors interplay to compel children to exclude from the secondary education. Undoubtedly secondary level of education determines the overall size and quality of the knowledge pool in a country which is essential for the productivity and competitiveness of the economy as a whole. The exclusion of the children at the secondary level means the colossal wastage of human resources. Education is the worst form of exclusion because it excludes the person from other walks and activities of life. Punjab State is among the developed states in terms of per capita income and development index but unfortunately lagging in human development and further in gender development index. Intense unemployment and lack of skill push the children in the labour market in early stages of life. The silent exclusion of children from the arena of secondary levels of education lead to inequalities and social segregations. Thus,

pressing challenge before us is to know why the children opt to remain away from schools after completing elementary education. It is necessary to find out what really makes them quit the school? What exactly is the way the social dynamics works around such children? What compels the parents to accept the situation as such?

Previous studies have shown that socio-economic status plays an important role in exclusion of children's from secondary school education. There are different categories of children who are out of school due to different socio- economic background. Certain people are marginalized, excluded and therefore not getting a quality education are because of disability, poverty, gender, poor health, caste system, nutrition, ethnicity, conflict/ internal displacement, geographical location (rural people), illiteracy after school going age, child labour, orphans and vulnerable children. Issues such as caste, religion, economic status, place of residence, and knowledge of English have become significant markers in our social and political life [1] Greenberg, et al. [2]; Hammond, et al., [3]; Hill, et al., [4]; Joseph, [5]; Kinder et al. [6].

Academic atmosphere may also be responsible for exclusion of children's like distance to school, bad quality of education, insufficient arrangements, overloaded classrooms, unfit languages of instruction, inadequate parenting, high fee structure, irregularity of teachers and security problem of girls in school The absenteeism, corporal punishment as well as poor pedagogical practices are also responsible for poor performance of children. Different studies reveal that there is correlation of dropout rate with poor school attendance, poor academic performance, grade retention, and disengagement from schools. [7,8], (Balgopalan, 2003); [9-14].

Besides these, family factors also plays an important role in exclusion of children's from school. A number of factors like low socioeconomic status,high family mobility,low education level of parents, large number of siblings, parental death, family disruption,low educational expectations, low contact with school, parental occupation and sibling has dropped out. Parents involved their Children in household work instead of doing school work. It has been documented that the higher the education of the parent or the household head, the greater the chances of increased access,

regular attendance and lower dropout rates [15-23].

A significant mass of research work is available to study the exclusionary tendencies at elementary and secondary level. Number of studies intended to locate the prominent causes behind the eventual exclusion of children at secondary level. The multiple causes behind the silent exclusion of children at the secondary level came out at the fore are living under inadequate conditions, inadequate housing, lack of security and safety nets, financial crunch, irrelevances of curriculum, lack of employment opportunities after the education etc. UNESCO [24]; Sayed et al. [25]; Joshi [26]; Kaur [27]; Tilak [28]; Kale [29]; Lahon [30]; Tamim (2018); all tried to explore the major causes of educational exclusion. Nambissan [31]; Lahon [30] all reported educational exclusion due to class- caste trajectories, income inequalities, cost of education and the oppressive conditions for the socially vulnerable groups in the society. Some studies showed that exclusion from school happens due to factors like distance of school from home, inability in attending the school due to predominating other life demands, when teaching and learning processes prove unable to meet the needs of the learners, the language of instruction, irrelevance of school education with real life, discrimination, prejudice, bullying, violence and neglect inside the school. About the nature of educational exclusion, most of the studies reflected that educational exclusion is a process, which is hidden or sometimes unnoticed and never happens due to immediate single cause.

Though research in India and abroad has made significant contribution to understand the phenomenon of educational exclusion by exploring its causes and consequences, but there is a dire need to understand how social structures do and the experiences of schooling interplay to cause the educational exclusion of the children. Phenomenological understanding of the educational exclusion became vital to have deeper insight.

Moreover, the endeavours of inclusion of children into secondary education get more effective and stronger if we understand the factors that promote exclusion. The proposed study will lend clues regarding the different factors which interplay to push the children out of the secondary school system. In order to address exclusion in education effectively, it is necessary

to clarify who experiences exclusion. There is a need to identify the factors that obstruct the process of universalization of secondary education. A better understanding of the social phenomenon of educational exclusion would offer inputs to policy planning for achieving near universal secondary education.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

2.1 Main Research Question

Who cannot access secondary schools and why? Sub questions

2.1.1 Sub Questions

1. What caused the adolescents to dropout from the secondary schools?
2. Do the reasons given by excluded adolescents differ from their parents?

2.2 Objectives

1. To identify the reasons of exclusion as emerge out of the narratives of secondary school dropped out adolescents.
2. To recognize the factors that lead to the discontinuation of studies among adolescents at secondary education level as perceived by the parents.

2.3 Delimitation

The study was delimited to rural areas of Punjab state of India.

3. METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological approach was adopted to carry out this study. Since the focus of the study was to develop the understanding about the situations as narrated by the participants that led to their exclusion from secondary education, the approach used may be more precisely labeled as empirical phenomenology. "The empirical phenomenology acknowledges the central role of theory in research, as well as the role of unintended consequences. Hence, empirical phenomenology is not just storytelling from the actors' perspective" (Aspers, 2009).It thus conveys that the respondents' role is not only crucial but also most central to the analysis and final conclusions. As the study was delimited to Punjab State only,the core sample of the study comprised of individuals who dropped out either after elementary school or before completing 10th

class. Only those individuals were included who had dropped out from schools within a period of 3 years from date of data collection. A sample of 72 dropped-out adolescents (54 boys and 18 girls), their parents (61) was drawn from the selected areas of Punjab.Purposive sampling technique was applied to identify the students who dropped out.

The respondents were interviewed to have deeper insights about what they went through during the stage of dropping out and how they felt after that. Semi-structured approach was adopted where the respondents were asked to tell about them and their school experiences. As suggested by Creswell [32], open-ended questions were asked to generate data that led to a textural description (what participants experienced) and a structural description (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context) of the experiences.

Bracketing their own assumptions and preconceived notions about the phenomenon of educational exclusion the researchers approached the participants to make sense of their narratives. The focus has not been on the events but rather the way they experienced it. All the interviews were read several times over to grasp the participant's expression and meaning. Significant statements, sentences, and quotes were highlighted. Out of 72 participants only 23 participants discussed beyond the structured questions. The data was converted into descriptive codes. Topic coding involved identifying significant statements and grouping them in to meaning units, or invariant constituents, and patterns with supporting information. Invariant constituents are the unique qualities of the experience and are created by grouping the significant statements identified during horizontalization and grouped by meaning. Interpretations of the patterns and groupings were made with analytic memos.

Firstly, some individuals are briefly described in order to provide context and richness for understanding their experiences, later a synthesis of the information is provided for each individual in a paragraph that describes the *essence* of that person's experience. Then themes were developed through horizontalization and the creation of invariant constituents and described in narratives. Under these themes, textural descriptions have been presented which provide a narrative of what the participant experienced which led to leave the schools.

4. RESULTS

Data analysis revealed nine composite textural themes. These themes were derived based on quotes and invariant constituents as narrated by dropped out students during interviews. These include (i) Gender Bias (in case of girls), (ii) Finnacial Constraints (iii) School Distance (iv) Family responsibilities (v) Physical disability (vi) Demotivating and Hostile teachers (vii) Learning Difficulties (viii) Failure (ix) Early marriage in case of girls.

Multiple perspectives on lived experiences of the participants about their schools, studies and the conditions abetting their exclusion from educational process were shared by the participants. The multiplicity of narratives helps us in 'finding meanings' or 'making sense' of what the participants perceive about their experiences.

In some cases, hardworking students, belonging to economically less advantaged families finding studies interesting, teachers helpful and the school environment genuinely nice suddenly develop cold resistance from within and leave the studies. The knot in the mind gets complicated and never comes to the fore. In some other narratives the existential questions attain priority over pursuing education. Such children get all the support from home and school but are not able to focus on studies as every single moment of the day they are contemplating work to earn a bit more to sustain the families and ultimately leave to of course regret later in life. Yet another perspective emerges where the occurrence of learning difficulties and absence of some serious remedial intervention causes failure or the fear of failure leading to fading of interest in studies and subsequently exit of the children from the system. The demotivating teachers, taunting peer, not so friendly school environment and diminishing hope for any better future beats many a student to retreat from educational experiences. Girls invariably bear the brunt of collective fear of social insecurity and are withdrawn from educational process when the location of school is at a distance from the native place. Poverty coupled with poor health of parents put the onus of managing household and extract them out of the school. The governmental support in the form of facilities like uniforms, books, stipends, stationery, and nutritious food does help the students but a powerful feeling emerging out of the interaction was that such support is minimal and for receiving good education, one needs to invest handsomely which is the privilege out of bound for poor like them.

A large social class of dropped out children is busy with different types of works and tries to earn whatever possible for living but feels remorseful of the decision to leave. This group now believes that level and quality of education received by a person is related to decent employment opportunities. Self-reflection on the causes of their educational exclusion indicates their helplessness and more than that, it stands as severe indictment of the unjust economic regime and the prevailing public education system at work in a democracy which defaults on ensuring a dignified, affordable education of equitable quality to all without discrimination.

The parents whose children dropped out from schools were interviewed. Most of the parents interviewed had very meagre income per month. Majority of them were engaged as agricultural labourers. Some of them were employed as help in private concerns and a very few owned small-time businesses with exceptionally low returns. Among them, 39.7 percent parenst had three children, 33.73 percent had two children, 15.66 percent had four children and 7.22 percent had five children. Only 3.61 percent parents had single child. The views of the parents about the educational exclusion corroborate the perception of dropped out students. The parents in general were quite positive about the value of education, though a few sounded dismissive of the quality of education being imparted in schools, but they were constrained to agree to the discontinuation of their children from studies due to financial duress and the demanding household chores. Majority of them visited the schools of their wards when they were studying in schools to attend parent-teacher meetings, though the frequency of visits varied. Some of them grumbled about the behaviour of teachers which led to deadlocking of any meaningful dialogue about children's betterment. The worrisome observation reveals that they found their children as aliens to the school environment. The alienation quickens the process of exclusion. They wished their children could undergo vocational training and transform the nature of job from unskilled to skilled manpower. But only a few could afford. Given the chance to re-send their children to school, overwhelming majority did not seem enthusiastic to the suggestion.

To summarize, the crucial period of dropping out falls between classes 6 to 9 during which majority of students are forced to leave the school. Majority of them liked studies but faced difficulties in comprehending the nuances of the subjects taught with very few of them getting real help from their teachers to cope up. Ironically, this happened even when the students' perceptions about the behaviour of teachers and other staff in the school towards them was found to be complementary in nature. Financial limitations being faced by the families, pulls experienced from domestic responsibilities, distance of school from home and failure in faring well in studies were the triggers which sowed the seeds of despondency among them. The thoughts of leaving studies often crossed their minds. They shared their feeling mostly with their parents and majority of the parents could not dissuade them from leaving school, although they never wanted to demotivate their children. The pushed-out children regret their decision and value the connection of good studies with decent job possibilities. They wish if they were saved from abandoning the school which would have ensured a better living for them.

5. DISCUSSION

Findings of the present study are in congruence with previous literature on the issue. A significant mass of research work is available to study the exclusionary tendencies at elementary and secondary level. Number of studies intended to locate the prominent causes behind the eventual exclusion of children at secondary level. The multiple causes behind the silent exclusion of children at the secondary level came out at the fore are living under inadequate conditions, inadequate housing, lack of security and safety nets, financial crunch, irrelevances of curriculum, lack of employment opportunities after the education etc. [24-30], (Tamim, 2018).

Financial constraints came out to be a top predictor of dropouts. Parents involved their Children in household work instead of doing schoolwork. It has been documented that the higher the education of the parent or the household head, the greater the chances of increased access, regular attendance, and lower dropout rates [33,17,18,22,19,15,16,20,21].

In case of girls, household income and distance to school came out be the significant determinants of dropping out [34,35]. Boy's education is considered investment compared to educating girls; Parents' negative attitude towards education of girls emerged to be important factor that keep girls away from schools despite their willingness [36]. The high poverty rates, economic hardships create circumstances for the withdrawal of girls from schools, also less value ascribed to educating a girl emerged an important reason [36]. Lack of school fees wasthe reason for failed participation at school by the girls whereas girls from better socioeconomic conditions sustained in the school [37]. Lu et al. [38] called for an unhindered attention to dropout and concluded that age, gender that is girls and older students are more prone to drop out. Most common reason of dropping out of the school was financial constraint and equal desire to rejoin the studies provided conditions became conducive was found by researchers [39].

Academic atmosphere may also be responsible for exclusion of children. Namrata, [40] emphasize that there is myriad of factors that are responsible for the disengagement of students that further get translated into dropping out of school. These include the indifferent attitude of teachers that "double marginalize children of disadvantaged groups in classroom setting". Shardreck (2013) also advocated that inadequate teacher student relationship make secondary students to drop out.

Besides other factors, that have been repeatedly found in various studies conducted in India and developing countries, psychological issues faced by students were not researched much thus got little attention. As we found in case of "Jyotsana" who was a very good student and suddenly she became disinterested in study without herself knowing the reason. There may be many such cases that drop out due to unknown reason (that may be psychological) and need just proper counselling. In Western countries, a lot of emphasis is given on studying psychological issues as a cause of drop out. Quiroga, et al. [41] found, among other things that depression in seventh grade increased the likelihood of school dropout and that experiences of depression at the beginning of secondary school could interfere with school perseverance particularly for students. Esch, et al. [42] also found that internalizing disorders were reported to develop because of school dropout. Brière, et al. [43] conclude that the associations between internalizing symptoms and school non-completion are modest and that common school-based interventions targeting internalising

symptoms are unlikely to have a major impact on school non-completion.

About the nature of educational exclusion, most of the studies reflected that educational exclusion is a process, which is hidden or sometimes unnoticed and never happens due to immediate single cause. It calls for a concerted effort to retain these children in schools. As parents are not much aware and face financial problems, teachers have to take a proactive role as suggested by Khalkhali, Sharifi and Nikyar [44], that though teachers cannot control out of school circumstances nevertheless they can provide classroom controls nurture interest and development of internal motivation.

The negative association of teacher support with intention of students to drop out signifies the importance of teachers' role in preventing drop outs. The teacher student relation climate negatively and significantly associates with drop out problem [45]. Bergeron et al. [46] found out "positive relationship with teachers predicted low intention to drop out, while a negative relationship with teachers predicted high intention to drop out"

6. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDA-TIONS

Attempts to legally ensure free and compulsory education for all the children till class five were initiated almost a centuryago by Gopal Krishan Gokhale introducing a bill in 1911 in Imperial Legislative Assembly. The country was reeling under colonial subjugation. The bill was defeated in the assembly by majority vote. Provisioning of free and compulsory elementary education to all the children till the age of 14 years, leaving no one behind, was debated intensely in the Constituent Assembly constituted in 1948 to draft the Constitution of free India.It was appreciated by all the members of the Constituent Assembly that making education free and compulsory for all the children in the country was of critical importance for the task national reconstruction after getting independence from the colonial foreign rule. However, there were two kinds of arguments put forth in the debate. One favoured making elementary education free and compulsory as a *Fundamental Right* of the children till they attain 14 years of age. The other view was that the economic constraints may not allow the governments to fulfil their commitment and hence it should not be put in the category of Fundamental Rights and should be included in

the Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy. The second proposal found favour with all the members. Thus, a provision was placed in Article 45 in Part IV of the Constitution which read, *"The State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years."* The Constitution was adopted on January 26,1950.No other article in Directive Principles of State Policy, except on education, had asserted on a time frame. Fixing a time frame explained the urgency of the task. However, after ten years of commencement of Constitution the aim of education of all the children were not achieved. The states too enacted laws. The goal posts kept on moving forward as the desired results could not be achieved.

Eighty sixth Constitutional amendment recognising elementary education for all the children in the age group of six to fourteen years as their Fundamental Right under Article 21-A is a landmark in the history of education in India. It read '*The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine.'* With enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act - 2009, children were empowered with a justiciable right after enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act -2009(RTE).

Parallel developments in the arena of economic policies influenced education substantially. The liberal opening of education sector for private players deepened the existing socio-economic disparities and led to strengthening of dual types of education. The private funded and run institutions attracted the people having better economic fortunes and the public funded institutions served the rest. The private institutions propagated better physical infrastructure and academic environment. The public funded schools starved and just managed to work with whatever limited resources could be dispensed from the government resources. The schools run by private managements were kept out of it the purview of RTE. However sub-clause (c) of clause (1) of Section 12 of the Act mandated all the unaided schools not receiving any kind of aid or grant to meet their expenses from the appropriate Government or local authority to admit in class I, to the extent of at least twenty-five percent of the strength of that class, children belonging to weaker sections and

disadvantaged group in the neighbourhood and provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion.' It would have moderated the inequalities in the society and improved the diversity in private schools and consequently would have made education inclusive in the private sector. Nevertheless, most of the private managements thought otherwise. Ultimately it affected the diversity in government run schools too. Meagre resources of the government run institution and of the parents sending their children to such schools told upon the overall health of the school system.

In this backdrop ten years of implementation of RTE act assume significance. Attaining near universal access to education, equipping schools with better infrastructure, ascertaining the placement of qualified teachers in schools, and striving for better learning outcomes have been the goals all these years for public funded educational institutions. Continual monitoring and independent evaluations apart from indicating successes on many counts marked out many a gap to be filled. The most crucial of these were the quality of education being provided in schools and challenge of strengthening secondary education after the children complete elementary education. UNESCO's Agenda 2030 too endorsed constant action on these areas.

The access to education should not be misconstrued as enrolment alone. Neither the right to education should have been understood as merely right to schooling. Ramchandran(2018) while discussing unpacking access listed all the important education indicators which should be captured correctly while describing access. These include not only school infrastructure, enrolment also attendance, transition, retention, drop out and out of school children. These together will help in explaining the true landscape of education in terms of access. So, physical access is part of larger continuum where transition, retention and learning outcomes cannot be ignored when goal centres on universalization of education.

The comprehensive meaning of access and the realization that school dropout should be regarded as the last stage of a dynamic, cumulative and multidimensional process impelled the researchers to study the phenomenon of education exclusion in its entirety. The data to understand the phenomenon of educational exclusion flows from interaction with the students who were at risk of

discontinuing their studies, students who dropped out from schools, their parents, their teachers, and school principals. The findings have been elaborated in previous chapters.

It is imperative to look at the problem from where it arises. The school is the arena where the things are in making. An environment of belongingness in school instils a feeling of confidence among the students that they are owned, and they owe much to school. The in-school experiences of the students offer vital insights about the phenomenon of exclusion. The fundamental responsibility to make the school receptive to the students lies with the teachers and the principals. The teaching learning process thus attains centrality. Students come to schools to learn, and teachers are there to help them in their efforts to learn. Interaction with students, studying in schools but at risk of getting excluded and those who dropped out, reveals that most of them faced difficulties in understanding and learning the subjects of study. The difficulties experienced by them were of varying degrees. Feeble academic support system coming from teachers and absence of any substantial academic help from parents aggravated the trauma of students. Most of the teachers were not aware of any withdrawal signals. It hints towards thin possibility of teachers acting as emotional anchors to shaky students. Lack of empathy alienates the students from school and studies. This partially explains the diminishing interest of students in studies. The difficulty faced by such students in comprehending the nuances of various subjects resulting into poor academic performance implied that the pedagogical strategies adopted by the teachers failed to work effectively. The argument extends to the fallibility of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes.

The general environment of school gets tough and demotivating for students who are academically and socially vulnerable when at times they become the recipients of scolding, insulting comments, labelling and physical punishment from teachers and taunts coming from peer. It saps their self-confidence and the will to sustain in the system. Except few, most of the teachers appeared inclined to ascribe other than academic reasons for the exit of students from schools. They recognised the prevalence of curriculum related discomfort among children but believed these contributed minimally towards their leaving the studies. Precisely this is why the parents found their children as aliens to the

school environment. The alienation quickens the process of exclusion.

No matter how much the students valued the significance of education in their lives, wished to regularly attend schools, found the teaching learning process interesting and rewarding, enjoyed the enabling patronization of their considerate and humane teachers, the economic deprivation of the families dampened the prospects of their continuation in the schools, notwithstanding affectionate and moral support from families. Skeletal financial help from the State in the form of uniforms, books, stipends, stationery, and nutritious food were not regarded sufficient by academically sensitised students and their parents to get to quality education. They believed that for good education comes after paying handsomely for it which they could not and hence left with no other choice but to leave and work somewhere for mere survival. The domestic responsibilities descending upon young children due to ill health of parents restricted their journey on the path of education. Economic insecurities of the families trigger seasonal migration which has the potential to heighten the possibility of educational exclusion of the children. The children donned the mettle responsible adults and decided to leave their studies by taking their parents into confidence. Although the parents never wanted to demotivate their children but at the same time the grim realities restrained them from dissuading their children from leaving schools. In hindsight dropped out students regretted their decision of leaving studies as they valued the correspondence of good studies with decent job possibilities.

The social factors operating outside schools emerged as formidable reasons for educational exclusion. The most sensitive period of going out of the school falls between classes 6 to 9 during which majority of students are forced to leave the school. The girls were invariably the sufferers of the collective fear of social insecurity and are withdrawn from educational process when the location of school is at a distance from the native place. They were always at the altar when someone was to be chosen for managing the domestic chores and looking after younger siblings. The irony is that largely they accept their fate and readily agree to sacrifice their own future. Separated families and families in constant conflict affected the mental state of children and turning them into uninspired learners on the verge of going out. Differently abled children too face a constant fear of exclusion. The school system fulfils the enabling requirements mechanically. The children need more of a human touch which is sometimes heard to witness. A cold and lackluster approach drifts the children away from schools.

7. CONCLUSION

Strengthening public education system, ensuring education of equitable quality to all the children, and alleviating all the irritants that threaten their successful completion of learning courses are the pre-requisites of a thriving democracy. The report reflects upon the grey areas in school system which steepens the disengagement of children resulting in their exit and suggests strategies to overcome the infirmities within. We, the people of India, shall be able to redeem the pledge we made to ourselves while adopting our Constitution on January 26, 1950 of securing "Justice- social, economic and political' to all if we continue working to guarantee that no one shall be left behind and no one will be made to suffer exclusion from the genuine educational process.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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