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India: The Struggling Education System and the Call to Action

Located in southern Asia, India is surrounded by six countries: Pakistan, Bhutan, China, Nepal, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. It is the seventh largest country in the world by land area. Even though India is not one of the top five biggest countries in the world, it is however, the second most populated country in the world behind China. Today, India is estimated to have around 3.35 billion people (“India Population”). India is believed to have surpassed the United States and China in the amount of cropland in their country (Durisin). A major issue that has plagued India is their education system. The lack of teachers has caused an influx of students to drop out of schools because students are not receiving the attention they deserve. The discrimination of Dalit, or “untouchable” children, has discouraged these kids from going to school and many are dropping out before completing their education. By uniting India’s nationalism and accepting every caste to be equal, Indians can help each other to grow into a leading country in this world. Since India is so vast in area, there is an incredible amount of diversity when it comes to the culture of India’s people. In India, they have more than a thousand languages and dialects spoken by the people. India’s official language is Hindi. In elementary and secondary schools, the study of Hindi is a prerequisite. Hindi is understood and spoken by as much as two-thirds of the Indian population (V. Lal and A. Lal). In the business world, English is commonly the language spoken between educated people who have gone to a college and/or university. The Indian government has hypothesized that imposing Hindi onto non-Hindi speaking locations would then increase the national unity felt by the citizens. The non-Hindi speaking people were frightened that they would be differentiated by employers. As a result, states in India were formed for people with knowledge of a specific language. Each state still contains people with the ability to speak different languages and dialects (V. Lal and A. Lal).

In India, the majority let their families be the central point of their lives. The interests and needs of an individual in India take a backseat letting the requests of the family mandate what happens in their lives. This institution of family affects many aspects of an individual’s life, including their marital status, choice of partner, and career choice (“India – Family”). Families in India often have a clear hierarchy present in the family with the father at the top. In addition to the household structure, there are distinct gender roles present among families. Practiced more in northern India and amongst conservative Hindu or Muslims, the custom of ‘*pardah*’ is practiced which calls for the seclusion of women in specific situations (Pier). In conformance with *pardah*, women are expected to leave the household only if she is veiled and escorted by a man.

An average of 70 percent of Indians live in villages (Associated Press). Villagers are normally farmers who reside near their farms. Therefore, inside the villages is where India’s most basic business and agriculture takes place. Despite popular thought, Indian villages are not simplistic and are both social and economic. (“India Society”). Housing in a traditional Indian village is commonly an assembly of mud-and-straw houses but the wealthier families tend to live in concrete or brick homes. The typical family size is 4.8 people. Traditionally, Indian families live

with their extended families, when three generations live together in one household (V. Lal and A. Lal). Customarily, counsels of important men, chosen by the villagers, settle disputes that may come up in their respective villages.

In India, arranged marriages are not uncommon. Many parents see marriage as a union of families. Once married, the woman goes to share a home with her new husband and his relatives, leaving her parents' home. Indian couples are expected to have a baby shortly after being married. In many rural areas, it is more favorable for a woman to have a son because the sons are expected to take care of the family and to help with the farm land (V. Lal and A. Lal). In contrast, girls are seen to drain family resources as she will eventually leave the family to go on to join her husband's family. ("India Society").

Notably, India has the most school aged students than any other country in the world with 260 million kids (Trines). It is well known that Indian schools are not successfully educating their students. For example, it is estimated that out of ten-year-old Indians, only around half would be able to read a paragraph intended for seven-year-old students ("India Has"). At the same time, India offers free education for children aged six to fourteen through the Indian Constitution. Most Indian children do get schooling of some sort but only around half of the ten-year-old and older kids stay in school (V. Lal and A. Lal).

India has struggled securing enough teachers to educate their youth. In 2017, India was short by more than one million teachers than the authorized number needed (Singh). In Bihar, India, they conducted a Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) and only seventeen percent of the applicants who took the exam were qualified. Many states have freed prospective teachers from successfully taking the TET in efforts to fill the need for teachers (Ralhan). Some teachers in India have even paid bribes in hopes that they could be hired to be a teacher ("India Has"). If they are hired, they treat the job as if it requires little or no work, and they get a profitable pay by doing so. Teachers in India need to be chosen for the job differently in order to successfully educate the youth. Teachers should be trained additionally if they are going to be working with students from poor urban and rural areas. Teachers need to have the ability to take in consideration their students backgrounds (Dixit). A student who is hungry or neglected is not going to be able to learn efficiently (Vakil). Students should not be going to school just for receiving information. Aiding students in developing social values and respect of others is an important part of an education. After teachers are trained, they should be evaluated periodically to make sure that they are leaving a positive impact on their students. There needs to be a government certified group that can successfully observe the teachers and make sure that they are teaching at a standard that the government wants to be performing in. If teachers are supervised, they can receive constructive criticism on how they can improve their teaching methods (Dixit). The evaluation of a teacher is only the first step in the process to fix the practice of a teacher (Range). Instead of using the evaluation as a label of how well a teacher is performing, it should rather be used as a resource to give insight in what educational resources are needed.

India has over one-third of the world's stunted, or chronically malnourished, children. Currently, around 38.7 percent of children under five years of age in India are stunted (Arya). Children who go hungry to school suffer from the incapability of concentrating, and they often find themselves behind academically compared to well-fed children (Seaton). Malnourished children hungry

have a larger probability of missing school due to illness. As a result, hungry children in schools are more likely to drop out of school. A way that India's government can battle the fight against having students in school hungry is by making a free lunch program for everyone.

On the 15th of August 1995, India's government implemented a program with the intention to improve enrollment and attendance in their schools, better known as the Mid-day Meal Scheme ("Midday Meal"). The Supreme Court of India passed a mandate on November 28, 2001 stating, "We direct the State Governments/Union Territories to implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every Government and Government assisted Primary School with a prepared mid-day meal" ("MDM – Mid"). The scheme has had two major benefits since its creation. The first being that the overall health of the students has dramatically improved after participating in the program. Secondly, it has been effective in bettering the attendance and enrollment of students across India (Tnn). Even though some aspects of the program have been a success, it has not been the solution for the large number of school children that are still malnourished.

By attempting to execute a program in such a grand scale, the Midday Meal Scheme was bound to have some difficulties and issues. Thus, the first problem to rise is the poor quality of food. One of the contributors to this issue is the falsifying reports by the educators. Teachers have been giving dishonest reports to the program in an attempt to gather more food for their students. Consequently, when the number of meals needed are not factual the level of quality of food lessens because the budget of the program remains the same ("Midday Meal"). There needs to be a way to truthfully find the number of students so that a good quality meal can be served.

An additional issue with the execution of the Midday Meal Scheme is the lack of positive nutrients in the meals provided. For an attempt to counteract the lack of useful nutrients in the Midday Meal Scheme, schools should build a community garden for the cooks to use in the meals that are served to the students. The teachers should make sure that the students are participating in growing the garden. There are many benefits for having the students help create and cultivate these community school gardens. For example, teaching the students how to grow a garden will aid them in building their own gardens at their home. Furthermore, children will grow in awe on how having the patience to wait for the crops to be ripe will be so gratifying. At the same time, growing a garden together would help children to learn how to work with others. ("How Gardening"). The government has told schools to grow the veggies in a garden because the vegetable sold in the markets have pesticides and chemicals (Belur). An extra step that the government could take is making sure that all the schools have enough room to make sure that the schools can successfully build these community gardens. Fixing the education system in India is bound to be a long process but feeding India's next generation will improve their country as a whole.

For much of India's history, there has been a caste system in place. A caste system is a method of grouping people together in social groups (Manian). This caste system determined what profession a person would be able to hold. In the caste system, there are four major groups that were written in an ancient Hindu text: Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The Brahmana and Kshatriya were the two upper caste and they were formally thought to be superior to the two lower castes (Deshpande 15). In the past, there were various rules that governed the

relations between these social standings. For example, people from different standing were not allowed to dine together in the city. Since the Hindu law books never noted a fifth caste group, the tribal people in India were not accepted in their society (Deshpande 15). This oppressed group was given the name “the untouchables”. The untouchables were given the jobs that none of the other individuals wanted to do. Many of the upper-caste members thought that they would be dishonored if they were to be touched by an untouchable. Laws and societal norms kept the untouchables’ homes outside of the cities and away from everyone else (Deshpande 15). Through the Indian Constitution, the discrimination against the untouchables is illegal, but the oppression of the untouchables is not completely abolished (V. Lal and A. Lal).

In India, discriminating based on someone’s caste is prohibited by the Indian Constitution in 1950 (“Education for”). The untouchables, also called the Dalits, are still oppressed in modern day India and this cruelty falls onto the shoulders of the children. Presently, schools are under an obligation to accept children from all castes, including Dalit children. Many of these schools are not taken care of and are barely functioning (“Educating for”). In schools that allow them to attend, the Dalit children are treated with malice and they are not treated as equals. Consequently, these children drop out of school at an early age to work. Even though the discrimination of the caste system has been outlawed by the government, the teachers and students still continue to treat the Dalit children unjustly. According to a government report, around seventy-three percent of Dalit students drop out of school in their secondary schools (Wax). If Dalit students did not have to face abuse from their teachers and fellow peers, they could focus in school and they could grow to be successful contributing members of society. The government in India could help by inputting education policies for the whole nation to follow (Jenkins). These policies could focus on training teachers how to encourage positive attitudes and equal views in their students towards their lower-caste schoolmates. Also, there should be programs in place to make sure that teachers can empathize with their students who are in lower-castes. By being able to empathize, teachers would be able to treat these Dalit children like any other students.

In the end, India has such a great population of children that should be getting quality schooling and the resources available to dream of a future where they can change their country for the better. By training teachers to better relate to their students, they are bettering each student’s lives by giving them the tools to succeed in life. If India’s government can implement a free universal food plan, then students would not be hungry throughout the day, which has been proven to increase Indian students test scores. In order for Dalit children to go to school, teachers need to be educated on how to teach young children, so all have an equal opportunity regardless of their caste. Under these circumstances, India’s future as a whole would be more promising if the younger generations are being prepared to receive and fix this up-and-coming nation.

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