Intersecting Identities in Rural India: A study of children outside school

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Abstract

Development in India is uneven and societies structured. The rural majority of India is a magnificent stage, displaying both underdevelopment and social stratifications. Rural societies become all the more complicated when identities intersect, thereby making denials deeper. In this study, an attempt has been made to understand these deprivations that pertain to an individual's identities and thereby entrenching the deprivations of being rural to begin with. The paper uses unit level data for the whole country as collected by the National Sample Survey Organisation. It uses 'children outside school' as an indicator of denial and tries to reveal the layers to exclusion that rural Indians encounter.

Keywords: *Rural Indian Society, Denial and Deprivations, Children outside school.*

Introduction

The society in India is an extremely complicated entity given the diversity the nation houses. Ahmad (1993) had very interestingly conceptualised the idea that the country's uneven development complicates the diversity and the society thereafter. This in turn gives rise to massive regional disparities, of which the rural-urban disparity is most profound. What is further interesting is the reality in India that everything else in this country is determined by these rigid social formations. Thus, the very beginning takes place on unequal platforms and the expected outcomes therefore are invariably unequal.

Interestingly, the extent of inequality in India is nothing but a manifestation of intersectionalities of identities. The Indian Subcontinent is characterised by varying identities signifying Caste, Gender, Language, Lineage, Occupation, Region, Religion and so on. Different identities cut cross to result in some kind of a mosaic of identities under a complex whole (Khubchandani, 1991). Plurality therefore has always been an integral part of the Indian identity which is definitely welcome. But discrimination along these very lines needs to be objected at all levels. Equal empowerment of all is desired for the true celebration of this plural existence. However, empowerment as Roy (2001) explains is a process of sharing and distribution and/or redistribution of power, rather than simply being mechanically attributing equality. Empowerment, instead shall come about with wider socio-eco-political changes in ideologies and practices, thereby doing away with conservative traditional mindsets. Needless to say, these mindsets are rooted deeper

in rural India than its urban counterpart. Therefore, an individual's rural existence entrench the intersecting denials further.

Given the evidence of all that existed or still exists, education and skill development was seen to be absolutely necessary to alleviate the deep-rooted social structures that infect India (Thorat, 2009). Inclusion in education somewhere provided the assurance that everything else will follow (Krishnan, 2012). But, the education system somehow has not been able to provide equally for all. The system firstly, finds it difficult to pull children to schools and secondly finds it all the more problematic to sustain those that have already been pulled into. The problem of dropouts therefore, is an inevitable phenomenon of the education system of this country. The number of students the system starts with keeps declining till a point that we have a pyramidal structure as we reach the top. The most vulnerable in these regards, that is, those who constitute the bulk of the never enrolled and the dropouts are usually girls, the socially and the economically backward communities or those coming from backward areas. Therefore, merely enrolling into the system is not enough, completion or at least sustaining up to a basic level is important. But a section always fails to remain within the confines of a school or even enter at the very first place. The paper therefore is a study of all those children who are currently outside the premises of schools and it tries ask 'who' these children actually are especially probing into the intersectionalities of their identities so as to understand the concentrations of deprivations given the larger social skeleton within which the nation breathes.

Literature Review

To remain outside the system of education has been established by a study of the Indian Institute of Education, Pune for the Planning Commission, Government of India in March 2006 like one final decision taken which had had several factors conditioning it. This study attributes discontinuation, dropping out or never enrolling as the outcomes of a whole complex of reasons. B. Levy in analysing the determinants of dropouts categorises the factors into economic, sociological and political.

Most studies confirm the economic factors among all to be the overarching problem, others just adding to this larger disadvantage. The labour market in this context is seen as an alternative platform with a school. And a study called 'Does Child Labour Displace Schooling? Evidence on Behavioural responses', sees being a student and a worker as dichotomous identities of a child, though there are studies which prove that a child can be both learning and working at the same time or doing none. But there are many studies that counter this argument stating that, sometimes the social identity can overpower the economic identity and act as a more prominent tool in keeping children outside school. In fact, the gender identity is something that acts irrespective of all others to keep girls outside schools.

In accordance with the National Sample Survey, a very popular response to the question on not enrolling, discontinuing or dropping out pertains to being 'not interested' in studies both by the parents and the pupils. Both Jayachandran and Reddy

and Sinha have shown how this particular response is a conditioned one. It is an outcome of other implied factors which may lead to the 'silent exclusion' of some. This response as Reddy and Sinha (2010) explains should be seen as a manifestation of how the system fails to inspire, leading to the exclusion of some children from the education system of the country, instead of an indication of children's absence of interest in learning. And once having dropped out, children do not usually 'wish' to 'return to schools'. Thus, children may not be able to enrol at all if they are poor. But, even after enrolling, children may discontinue education having faced discrimination along lines of caste, gender, religion and so on. Thus, an analysis of the reasons for never attending or currently not attending may not reveal these discriminatory practices explicitly but they definitely imply the same. Alternatively, a look at the composition of children who are outside school directly reveal social realities besides the economic. Also, it is important to ask, if the poor are outside school, then who exactly are the poor in this country? Therefore, an understanding of the overlapping identities of children outside school shall bring out a clearer picture of the true economic and social stratification of education in India.

Objective

The broad objective of the paper is to answer the question 'who' exactly is outside school in terms of intersections of a child's religious, caste, class and gender identities, given an overall rural identity of the child.

Database

National Sample Survey, 64th Round, Schedule 25.2 on Participation and Expenditure in Education, 2007-08, conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation of India.

Methodology

Children aged 6-14 years have been taken into consideration in order to look at the problem pertaining to the elementary stage of education. The attendance aspect of schooling has been taken up instead of enrolment. This is because simply enrolling does not ensure being 'in' school as the incidence of absenteeism is quite high in most parts of India. All these children outside school have been analysed in terms of their intersecting identities so as to find out the concentration of the problem.

Empirically, Naik's equality coefficient (share of a particular group in a particular category/ share of the same group in total population) has been calculated to find out the representation of different social and economic groups in different categories where > 1 indicates over representation and < 1 indicates under representation.

And, Sopher's disparity index {} has been calculated to look at discrimination along gendered lines cutting across all social and economic groups assuming that more girls (X_1) will be outside school than boys (X_2), i.e. $X_1 > X_2$.

Monthly Per capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) is calculated by diving the Total Household Consumption Expenditure by the Household size. Then, it is equally divided into five classes, where 0-20 represent the bottom 20 per

cent of the population and consequently 80-100 represent the top 20 per cent of the population with respect to MPCE. This, along with size of land holdings is taken as a proxy indicator for class.

A Binary Logistic Regression has been run to understand the overall story. The dependent variable being whether a child is in school or not, the categorical explanatory variables are MPCE, religion, social groups and sex.

The entire study has been conducted with respect to rural India only.

Analysis

It has already been established that the people of this country are arranged in multiple hierarchies. The hierarchies exist along lines of caste, class, region, religion and gender. The study therefore explores each category independently first and then tries to look at the intersectionalities. The gender divide runs all along body of the analysis. The study all through looks at the 'never attended' and 'ever attended but currently not attending' categories separately.

The identity called 'religion'

In the never attended category (Fig. 1), it is the Muslins who show the highest representation, in the sense that their representation in this category is almost twice their representation in the total population. Thus, the chance of never being able to attend school seems to be the highest among rural Indian Muslim children. This is in contrast to children belonging to all other religious groups except 'others' which is the sum total of many minor groups.

Among children who were once in school but currently are outside (Fig. 1), the story however is slightly different. The Sikhs show the maximum representation in this category closely followed by the Muslims. Therefore, a Muslim child stands the maximum chance of being outside school whereas a Sikh child stands the maximum chance of dropping out or discontinuing school. The Hindus however lie closest to the line of equality (1.00) and the Muslims show deprivation in both the cases.

Thus, if a child is a Muslim, it definitely entails some form of deprivation and if he/she is a Hindu, it is slightly easier. But it is also important to ask whether the child is a 'he' or a 'she'. More girls across all religious groups are seen to have never attended school as compared to boys (Fig. 1). The deprivation is highest among Sikhs followed by Hindus and then Muslims. Thus, in terms of never attending school, being Muslim is definitely disadvantaged, but what is also disadvantaged is to be a Sikh or a Hindu girl. In other words, Muslims are deprived, therefore both Muslim girls and boys are deprived, but Sikh and Hindu girls are deprived though Sikhs and Hindus in totality are not deprived.

Among children who have dropped out or discontinued education (Fig. 1), the Sikhs somehow show a complete turn over with more boys being outside school than girls. In fact the behaviour of the Sikhs seems a little confusing, they showed under representation for never attended and over representation for currently not attending with girls exceeding boys in the

first category and boys exceeding girls in the second. What is more persistent is the disadvantaged position of girls among Hindus and Muslims. Thus, what emerges throughout is the disadvantaged position of girls among Muslims with Muslims as a community being disadvantaged but the Hindu girls are disadvantaged though the community as a whole is not.
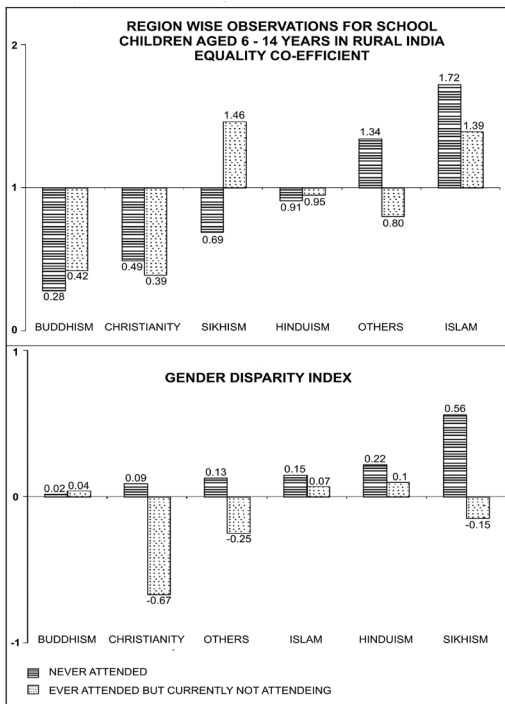

Fig. 1: Source: prepared by author using NSS data

But again, being Muslims in all parts of the country does not mean the same (Map 1). For example in Uttar Pradesh, more girls are outside school than boys irrespective of religion. In fact Muslim girls show particular deprivation in most parts of the country. Whereas in Tamil Nadu, more Muslim boys are outside school than Hindu

girls. Thus, being Muslim is a particular disadvantage in certain parts and being girls in others.

One aspect needs to be clarified, that is, it is not a disadvantage to be a Muslim but it is basically a disadvantage to associate oneself with certain practices and certain persistent discriminations the society is vested with. This has precisely been dealt in a study that asks "are the reasons (of under representation in educational spheres) intrinsic to the Muslims' religious identities per se or are there systematic biases against the Muslims keeping them away in one way or another from acquiring modern education? Or is it economic compulsion that most Muslim Households seem to face which is the culprit?" (Alam, 2012)
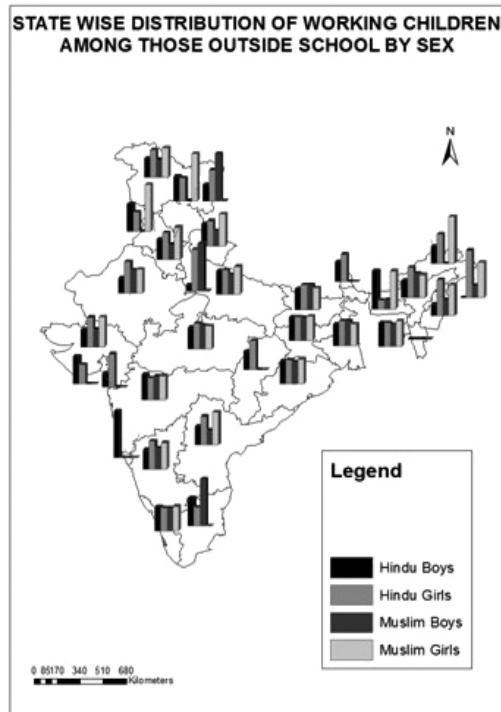
Map1: Source: Computed by author from NSS data

'Caste' as an identity

In the category of children who have never attended school (Fig. 2), all the backward sections show an over representation and only the 'others' majority of whom constitute the so called forward castes show an under representation. Whereas, in terms of those who have dropped out or discontinued education, both the 'others' and the OBCs show an under representation and the two scheduled communities (the SCs and the STs) show over representation. Thus, in both the categories, divides along social backwardness is extremely prominent.


Fig. 2: Source: prepared by author using NSS data

Girls somehow are a discriminated category across all social groups irrespective of the existing hierarchies. Most scheduled tribe girls find it difficult to

enter school and most scheduled caste girls find it difficult to sustain in schools (Fig 2).

K.L.Sharma (1985) explained that the tribes in India live in geographically contiguous areas whereas scheduled castes are a part and parcel of the general population with no spatial concentration. Thus, one could be discrimination in terms of absence of schools in tribal dominant areas and the other could be discontinuation or dropping out due to discrimination within schools faced after having enrolled.
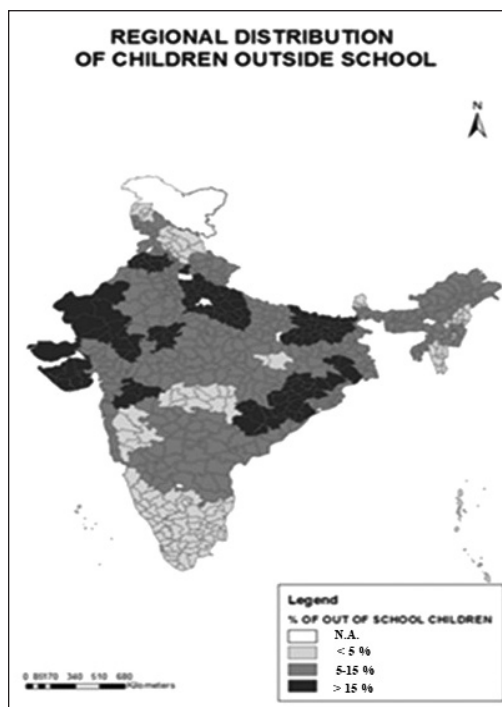
Map 2: Source: Computed by author from NSS data

Therefore the region is not a very distinct identity in this respect at least. If we look at the overall distribution of children outside school, the concentration in some

tribal areas like parts of Chhattisgarh, Bengal and Orissa is seen. But again other tribal dominant regions do not show any distinct pattern.

The class divide

The class divide also stands out quite prominently. With increasing monthly per capita consumption expenditure, the number of children outside school decreases but the proportion of children never attended exceeds those discontinued or dropped out in the lower economic classes whereas the opposite is true as one rises up the economic ladder (Fig 3). Therefore, if the poor have managed to enter school once, then they usually sustain whereas the rich show a larger proportion of dropping out or discontinuing education which in turn could be due to various reasons.

Again, all are seen to discriminate against girls irrespective of their economic status, in fact in the category of dropouts, the rich are seen to discriminate more than the poor. The rich send all their children to school irrespective of their sex but the rich girls seem to drop out more than the rich boys. But, being rich or poor is not the same for everybody; neither is being a girl or a boy (Fig 3). Thus, an understanding of the intersections is very important. But, the discussion on rural economic classes remains incomplete without any reference to land ownership (Fig 4).

The marginal farmers being assumedly the poorest have the maximum share of children outside school with the never
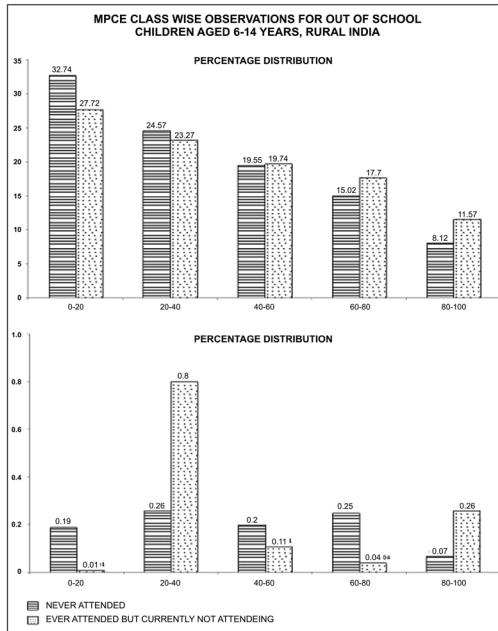

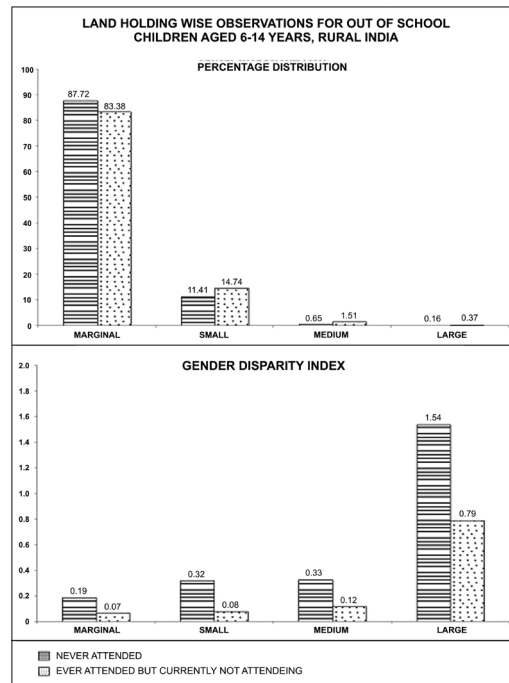Fig. 3: Source: prepared by author using NSS data

Fig. 4: Source: prepared by author using NSS data

attended exceeding the currently not attending category whereas the opposite is true for the others. This is thus in agreement with the MPCE classes as well. As far as gender discrimination is concerned, the large farmers overshadow the others in the 'never attended' group and the medium the 'currently not attending' group. Thus, confirming the notion that discrimination along gendered lines can take place irrespective of social or economic status. Thus, a look at the intersectionalities becomes important.

Intersection between class and religion

It is the poor of almost all religious groups who are unable to send their children to schools. But, a larger proportion of the poor Sikh children seem to have never attended school as compared to the other religious groups. Even among the top twenty per cent of the population of all religious groups the Hindus show the least proportion (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

Percentage distribution of children aged 6-14 years who have never attended school according to MPCE classes and religion in rural india						
	Religious Groups					
Mpce Classes	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Others
0-20	33.25	30.6	30.72	38.05	13.23	39.59
20-40	25.17	24.04	8.66	8.2	6.22	27.16
40-60	19.84	17.65	32.99	29.21	3.26	18.39
60-80	14.88	16.32	8.89	5.65	43.21	9.98
80-100	6.85	11.39	18.74	18.89	34.08	7.11

Table 2: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

Percentage distribution of children aged 6-14 years who had ever attended school but currently not attending according to MPCE classes and religion in rural india						
	Religious Groups					
Mpce Classes	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Others
0-20	28.57	26.12	14.34	17.57	0.00	24.62
20-40	23.03	25.2	19.52	17.59	41.31	23.71
40-60	19.91	18.98	28.92	21.33	1.82	21.98
60-80	17.55	17.91	32.19	15.42	51.94	25.69
80-100	10.94	11.79	51.51	28.09	4.92	4.00

In a preceding section, it was established that the Muslims are disadvantaged in comparison to the Hindus. But the question to be asked here is, what does it mean to be a poor Muslim and how does it differ from being a poor Hindu? Which is a more prominent identity – being Muslim/ Hindu or being poor? The answer is being Muslim is a disadvantage but being poor is a disadvantage for both Hindus and Muslims as 33% of poorest Hindus and 31% of poorest Muslims remain outside school. Thus, it is basically the poor who remain outside school. Therefore, we need to further ask, who are exactly the poor in this country?
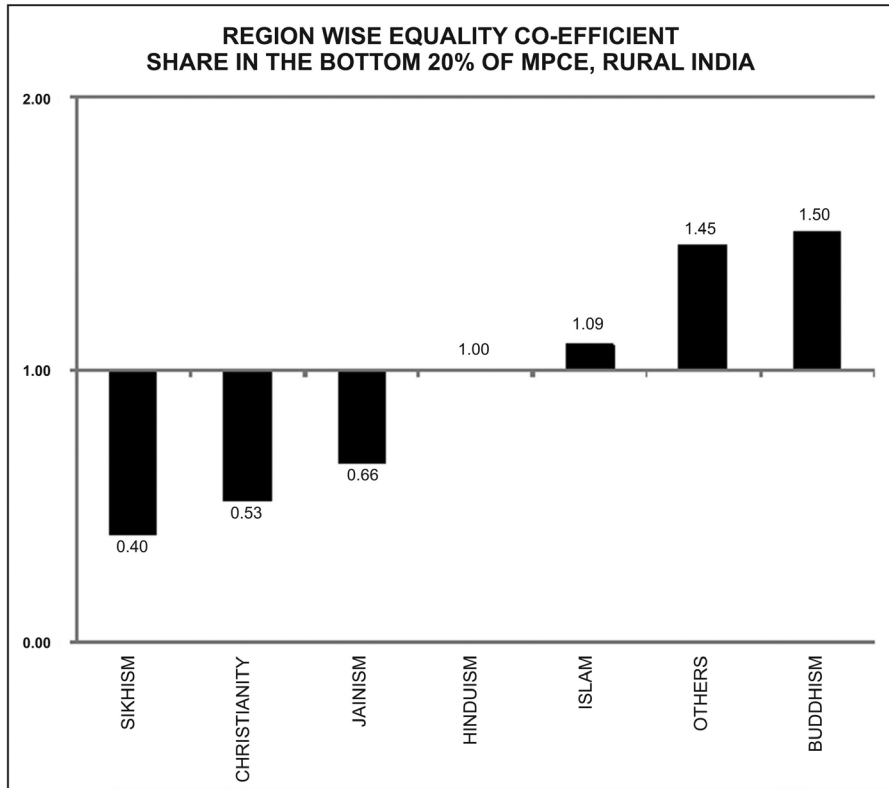

Fig. 5: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

Among the poorest in the country (Fig 5), the Muslims, the others and the Buddhists show over representation. The Buddhists have shown very abnormal patterns throughout, but in our comparison between the Hindus and the Muslims, it is clear that more Muslims are concentrated in the poorest category given their total population. Thus, mainly the Muslims and the poor are outside school and among the poor in the country; the Muslims show a high concentration. Thus, it is an overlap of class and religious identities. The Hindus have constantly shown concentrations

very close to 1, indicating perfectly equal representation. The patterns for the Sikhs and the Buddhists have been varied; therefore nothing concrete can be stated. The Christians have consistently shown very impressive figures in terms of under representations in both categories showing children outside school, very low discriminations, under representations in poverty and so on.

Intersection between class, religion and gender

The poorest Sikhs and the poorest Hindus have more girls than boys in the category 'never attended', whereas the poorest of the others have more boys in this category. The story is exactly the reverse for the richest. The only exceptions are the Muslims and the others. They are seen to discriminate against girls irrespective of their economic considerations (Fig 6).
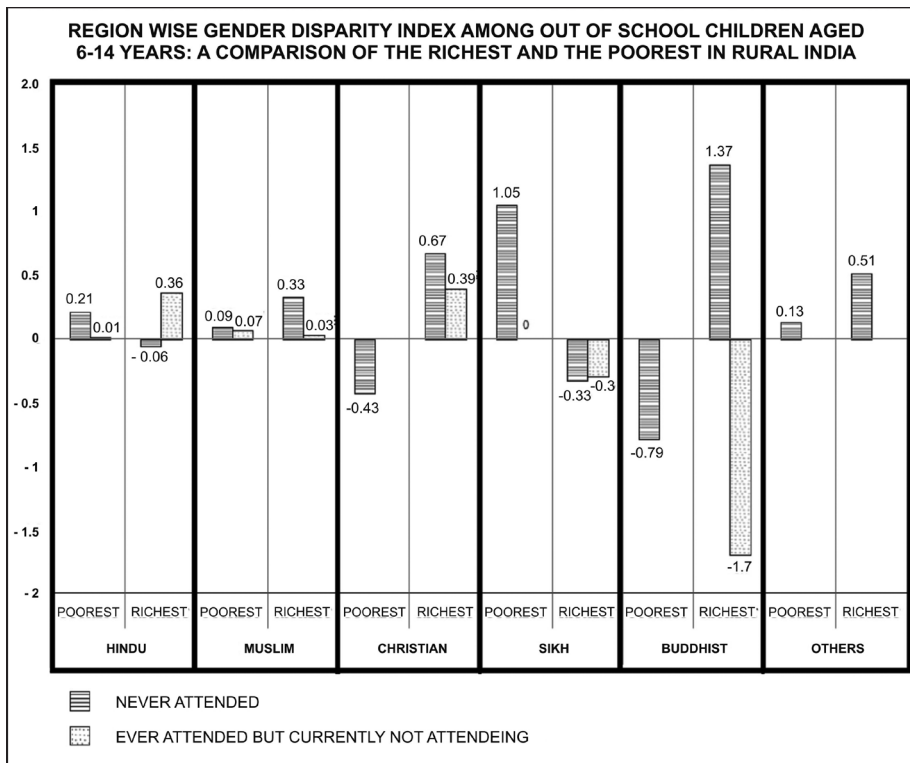

Fig. 6: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

The same pattern persists in terms of the Muslims in this category as well. The others show complex results.

Intersection between class and social group

Among all those who have never attended school and those that have dropped out or

discontinued, the maximum proportion among all social groups is that of the poorest. But the share of the poorest in both the categories is considerably more among the SCs and the STs as compared to the OBCs and the general population. This very clearly gets reflected once again in terms of the over representation of the SCs and the STs among the poorest in the country and the under representation of the OBCs and the general. Again, the social and economic divide seems to overlap (Fig. 7). That is not only to say that the scheduled categories and the poor are deprived but also, the scheduled categories themselves constitute the category called the 'poor' as well[1].

Table 3: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

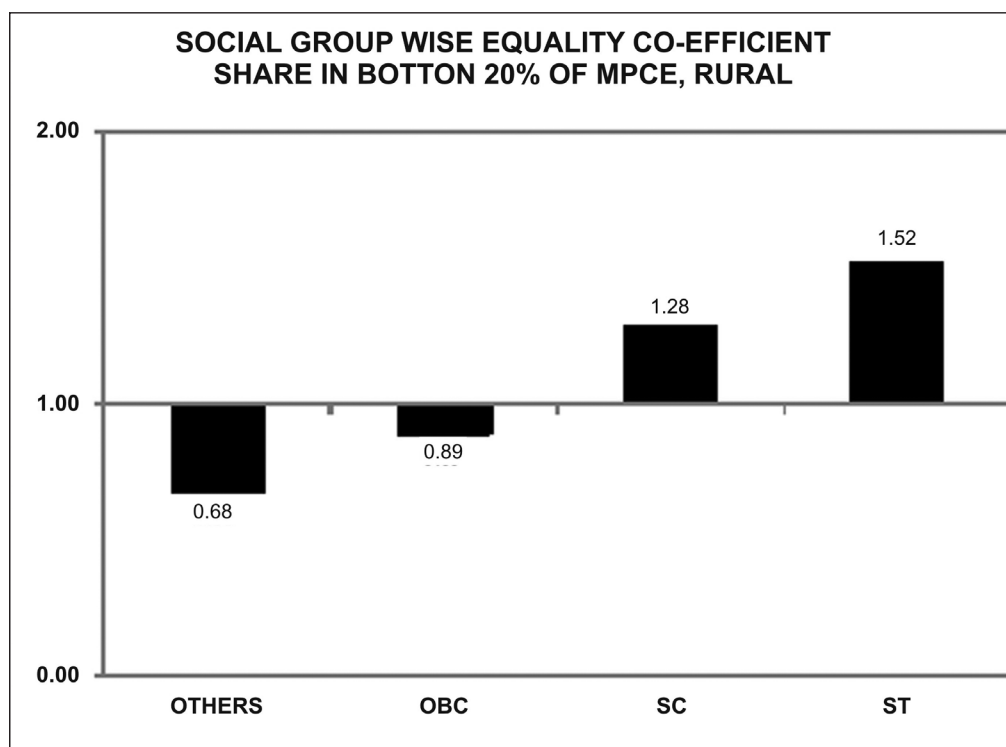| Percentage distribution of children aged 6-14 years who have never attended school according to MPCE classes and social groups in rural india				
	Religious Groups			
MPCE Classes	ST	SC	OBC	Others
0-20	43.67	37.28	27.23	31.39
20-40	24.01	26.24	25.11	19.82
40-60	15.75	17.62	22.14	18.24
60-80	10.75	12.26	17.5	16.4
80-100	5.82	6.59	8.02	14.15

Fig. 7: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

Table 4: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

Percentage distribution of children aged 6-14 years who had ever attended but currently not attending school according to MPCE classes and social groups in rural india				
	Religious Groups			
MPCE Classes	ST	SC	OBC	Others
0-20	36.58	34.78	21.7	23.69
20-40	21.76	23.52	23.09	24.5
40-60	20.15	18.98	20.81	18.24
60-80	15.49	14.28	21.22	16.77
80-100	6.02	8.44	13.18	16.81

6.7: Intersection between class, social group and gender

In the never attended category (Fig 8), the STs and the OBCs have more girls than boys irrespective of their economic divides. On the other hand boys are more than girls among the general population irrespective of their economic considerations. Poorest SCs have more girls than boys in this category whereas the richest SCs have more boys than girls. In the category of the dropouts (Fig 8), the richest have more girls than boys in this category irrespective of their social hierarchies. These observations do not yield any concrete results but it does not rule out the existence of discrimination along gendered lines which can prevail irrespective of one's social and economic position.
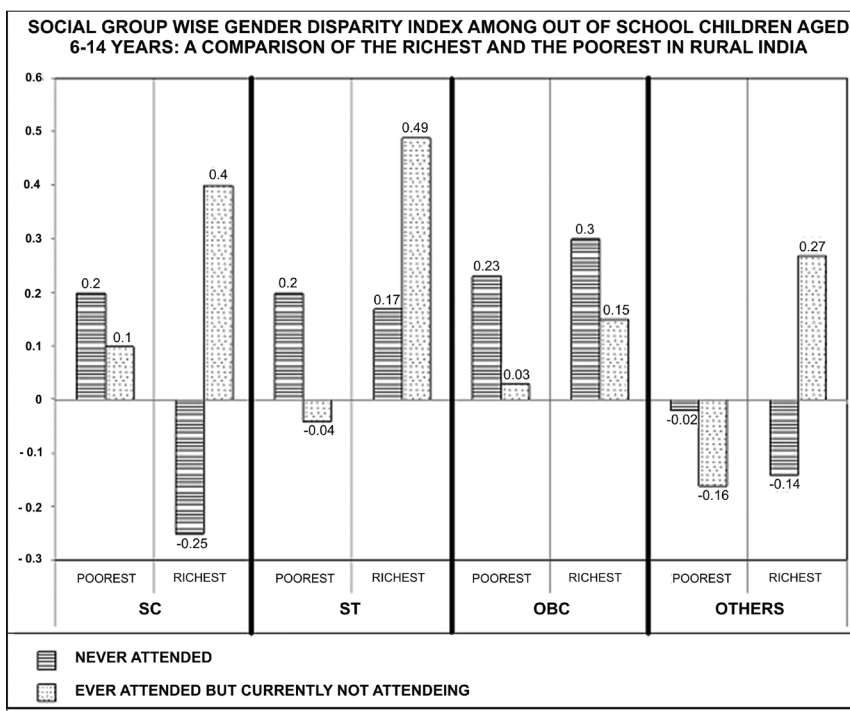

Fig. 8: Source: Prepared by author from NSS data

Overall observations

Binary Logistic Regression[2]

Source: Table 5: Prepared by author from NSS data

	Categories	Expected (B)
MPCE	**Poorest**	**1.000**
	Poor	**2.006**
	Middle	**2.421**
	Rich	**2.967**
	Richest	**4.827**
Religion	**Hindu**	**1.000**
	Muslim	**0.381**
	Christian	**3.576**
	Sikh	**0.589**
	Others[3]	**2.891**
Social Groups	**ST**	**1.000**
	SC	**2.787**
	OBC	**3.656**
	Others	**6.108**

Sex	**Boys**	**1.000**
	Girls	**0.925**

I.   With respect to the poorest, children of all the other economic groups have a higher chance of being in schools and this chance increases as one goes up the economic ladder.

II. With respect to the Hindu children, the Muslim and the Sikh children have lesser chance of being in school and the Christian and the other children have more chance.

III. With respect to the ST children, the SC, OBC and the general children have more chance of being in school and this chance also increases as one goes up the social ladder.

IV. With respect to boys, girls have less chance of being in school. The difference being marginal.

Matrices Of Intersectionalities

Source: Table 6: Prepared by author from NSS data

CLASS – RELIGION – GENDER

	Equality Co-efficient										
	Hindu		**Muslim**		**Christian**		**Sikh**		**Others**		**Total Share**
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Poorest	1.29[4]	1.58	1.93	2.30	1.21	0.88	2.45	3.82	0.82	0.62	**1.53**
Poor	0.95	1.33	1.57	2.06	0.34	0.63	0.83	2.16	0.69	0.71	**1.22**
Middle	0.74	1.08	1.39	1.76	0.99	0.61	1.84	2.39	0.38	0.72	**0.98**
Rich	0.59	0.86	1.22	1.56	0.43	0.27	0.69	0.73	0.98	0.50	**0.80**
Richest	0.33	0.51	0.77	1.29	0.14	0.32	0.42	0.42	0.29	0.52	**0.47**
Total Share	**0.77**	**1.09**	**1.39**	**1.83**	**0.46**	**0.44**	**0.79**	**1.23**	**0.66**	**0.63**	**1.00**

I.   Girls are worse off than boys across all the economic classes for both the Hindus and the Muslims.

II. But, Muslim boys are worse off than Hindu girls and Hindu boys are worse off than Christian girls across all economic classes.

III. Among Christians, girls are better than boys across some economic classes irrespective of direction.

IV. The Sikh girls are worse off as compared to the Sikh boys across all economic classes and they are the worst off as compared to all girls among the poorest, poor and middle income groups and the Muslim girls are worst off among the rich and the richest.

Source: Table 7: Prepared by author from NSS data

CLASS – CASTE – GENDER

	Equality Co-Efficient								
	ST		SC		OBC		Others		Total Share
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Poorest	1.54	1.99	1.46	1.87	1.21	1.55	1.49	1.37	**1.53**
Poor	1.14	1.63	1.04	1.57	1.03	1.43	0.89	1.10	**1.22**
Middle	1.03	1.42	1.00	1.22	0.82	1.16	0.55	0.95	**0.98**
Rich	0.81	1.35	0.73	0.99	0.69	1.01	0.54	0.59	**0.80**
Richest	0.48	0.75	0.56	0.76	0.39	0.65	0.28	0.42	**0.47**
Total Share	**1.11**	**1.55**	**1.01**	**1.38**	**0.81**	**1.16**	**0.62**	**0.80**	**1.00**

I.   Girls are worse off than boys across all economic classes and across all social groups except for the poorest General girls.

II. But, SC and ST boys are worse off than the General girls across all economic classes except for the poor.

III. Among girls, ST girls are worse off than SC girls who are worse off than OBC girls who are worse off than General girls except for the richest ST and SC girls, the gap being negligible. This is true across economic classes.

IV. Among boys, the General boys are better off than the OBC boys, the OBC boys are again better off than the SC boys who in turn are better off than the ST boys. This is true across economic classes except for the poorest and the richest SC and ST boys.

V.   Therefore, broadly the General boys are the most privileged section and the ST girls the most deprived.

Intersection between religion and caste is also possible which has been not taken into consideration here. Also, region plays a

very important role. The relations are not equally operative in all parts of the country. The interconnectedness among caste, class, religion and gender differ in different areas. Leaving out region is also a major drawback of this analysis.

Conclusion

The paper began with the understanding that deprivations are a result of intersectionalities. Therefore, problems tend to show concentrations. The paper thus ends with the finding that it is not just a question of multiple identities that determines the level of discrimination but it is also about the overlap of such disadvantaged identities. There are certain forms of discrimination that cut across all social and economic divides; precisely, those along gendered lines. Therefore, being a girl and being poor are disadvantages irrespective of one's caste or religion (exceptions of course exist) but being a poor Muslim girl or a poor tribal girl or a poor low caste girl are further handicaps. In other words, being a boy and being rich can, to a certain extent relieve a child of the disadvantages that is otherwise likely. All these deprivations exist within the umbrella identity of being rural.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1   There is a huge body of literature that deals with the overlap between caste and class. "there is a caste-bias of class and a class-bias of caste" but "caste is not reducible to class and vice-versa", (Sharma, 2001).

2   The first from each of the categories has been chosen as the reference category.

3   Others = Jain + Buddhist + Zoroastrian + Others (as given by NSS).

4   (Percentage of Poorest Hindu Boys Outside School to All Children Outside School / Percentage of Total Poorest Hindu Boys to All Children Aged 6-14 Years). All the other values have also been calculated in the same way. The total children out of school and the total children aged 6-14 years have been chosen as the respective denominators so as to represent the values in matrix form.