



Margins of Learning : Addressing Intersectional Inequities in Rural Teacher Preparation

Mr. Malay Kanti Acharya

Assistant Professor, Department of B.Ed., Purba Medinipur B.Ed College
Email: acharyamalaykanti@gmail.com

Abstract:

This research article explores the layered and intersectional inequities present in rural teacher preparation systems in India, with a particular focus on caste, class, gender, language, and geographic marginalization. While rural education policies have long been concerned with quantity and access, this study delves deeper into the qualitative dimensions of teacher training, examining how structural disparities influence the identity, agency, and professional trajectory of teacher candidates. Drawing on critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and intersectionality, the study analyzes the disconnect between national education policies and local realities, where teacher preparation programs often fail to address the socio-cultural needs of underprivileged communities. The article offers a critique of current teacher education curricula and institutional structures and suggests transformative practices for inclusive, just, and context-sensitive rural teacher preparation.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Rural Education, Teacher Preparation, Caste, Gender Equity, Critical Pedagogy.*

Introduction:

Rural India, home to nearly 65% of the population (Census of India, 2011), represents a microcosm of the country's social stratification. Schools and teacher education programs situated in these geographies are deeply embedded in structures of caste, class, and gender discrimination. Despite the Right to Education Act (2009) and the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the lived realities of teacher trainees from rural and marginalized communities continue to reflect systemic neglect.

Rural teacher education is often conceptualized as a neutral process of content delivery. However, this view masks the ideological underpinnings that shape whose knowledge counts, who becomes a teacher, and what forms of social capital are necessary to succeed in teacher training institutions (Apple, 2004). Teachers are not only curriculum transmitters but also agents of social reproduction or transformation (Freire, 1970). Therefore, the way in which they are prepared directly influences classroom discourse and community engagement.

Review of Literature:

Mitra (2025) argues that without understanding how caste, gender, and class coalesce in rural India, educational interventions will remain ineffective and exclusionary. His study on Dalit and tribal women teacher trainees across Odisha and Chhattisgarh illustrates how institutional mechanisms of oppression—such as language barriers, residential segregation in hostels, and the upper-caste domination of faculty—reproduce social inequity under the guise of formal education.

Likewise, Thapan (2023) explores the lived experiences of rural women from Scheduled Caste and Muslim communities pursuing teacher training in Maharashtra. She highlights the emotional labor, microaggressions, and epistemic exclusions these women face as they navigate spaces that are structurally dominated by dominant-caste, urban norms. These studies affirm that intersectional marginalization operates both overtly—through discriminatory policies—and covertly—through exclusion from curricular representation and cultural capital.

Recent research has emphasized that caste and class remain primary axes of exclusion in the rural teacher preparation pipeline. Rout and Das (2022) conducted a study of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) across Jharkhand and Bihar and found that students from Scheduled Tribes were underrepresented, poorly mentored, and lacked access to academic support. Even when affirmative action policies ensured access, lack of infrastructural and pedagogic sensitivity created a high dropout rate among tribal and Dalit students. The cultural alienation in textbooks and the use of Hindi or English as the medium of instruction further deepened learning gaps.

Significance of the Study:

This study is significant for its critical examination of how intersecting inequalities—such as caste, class, gender, geography, and language—impact rural teacher trainees in India, particularly those from marginalized communities like women, Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities. While rural education has received policy attention, most interventions overlook these compounded forms of marginalization.

Aligned with the inclusive vision of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the study highlights the disconnect between policy and the lived realities of rural teacher candidates. It reveals how dominant urban-centric, upper-caste pedagogical models alienate rural and indigenous voices, calling for the decolonization of teacher education.

Practically, the study offers pathways for reform, including equitable digital access, culturally relevant curricula, mentorship support, and increased representation of marginalized voices in educational leadership. It contributes to broader conversations in critical pedagogy, intersectionality, and social justice, advocating for rural teacher education as a transformative and inclusive space rather than a uniform system. This research, therefore, is both timely and policy-relevant, aiming to reshape rural teacher preparation to ensure equity, dignity, and meaningful participation for all.

Understanding Intersectionality in Rural Teacher Preparation:

The concept of **intersectionality**, first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), refers to the interlocking nature of social identities and the cumulative impact of discrimination. In rural India, identities of caste, class, gender, religion, and tribal status are not merely additive but mutually constitutive.

- **Caste and Structural Discrimination:** Dalit and Adivasi teacher candidates face daily indignities in teacher education colleges—from microaggressions to exclusion from peer networks and even institutional gatekeeping. Even where reservations exist, the culture within many teacher training

institutions remains Brahmanical and exclusionary (Guru, 2002). Discriminatory practices extend to field placements, where candidates from marginalized castes are often sent to poorly resourced schools, further limiting their exposure and professional growth (Deshpande, 2011).

- **Gendered Expectations and Limitations:** For rural women teacher trainees, gender norms act as a double burden. While teaching is often deemed a 'suitable' profession for women, they are expected to manage domestic responsibilities alongside training, often without infrastructural support such as hostels, transportation, or childcare (Kumar, 2015). Married women, in particular, face scrutiny over mobility and interaction in co-educational environments. The notion of the "ideal woman teacher" as docile and nurturing silences assertive female voices and constrains leadership potential (Nambissan, 2000).
- **Class and the Language of Capital:** Class inequalities manifest not only through economic hardship but also in access to English language and digital literacy, both of which are increasingly essential for navigating contemporary teacher education curricula. Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital is instructive here—students from affluent, urban backgrounds enter the teacher training field with forms of social and linguistic capital that are validated within institutional structures, while rural candidates are systematically disadvantaged.

The Curriculum and the Crisis of Relevance:

- **Urban-Centric Pedagogy:** Most teacher education curricula are modeled on urban contexts, with little room for local knowledge, rural life experiences, or indigenous pedagogies (Mukherjee, 2018). This mismatch not only alienates rural teacher candidates but also erodes the potential for contextually relevant teaching. Instructors often lack the training or sensitivity to engage with rural socio-political issues or vernacular mediums.
- **Ignoring Socio-Political Literacy:** Critical awareness of caste, gender, and class is often absent in teacher education syllabi, which treat education as a value-neutral enterprise. However, the omission of socio-political discourse leads to the reproduction of dominant ideologies in classroom practices (Kumar, 2004). There is a pressing need to embed critical pedagogy within the curriculum—enabling future teachers to question existing hierarchies rather than unconsciously perpetuating them.

Institutional Barriers and Hidden Curricula:

- **Gatekeeping Through Assessments and Internships:** Selection criteria for teacher education often favor urban, upper-caste candidates due to emphasis on English-medium schooling, interviews, and standardized assessments. Field internships, which are key to professional development, are also skewed. Elite institutions may offer better mentoring and exposure, while rural institutions lack basic infrastructure and staff support (Govinda & Josephine, 2004).
- **The Hidden Curriculum of Silence:** Beyond formal syllabi, teacher trainees internalize a 'hidden curriculum'—a set of unstated norms and expectations that reward conformity over critique. Students from marginalized backgrounds learn to self-censor, often hesitating to question authority or assert alternative viewpoints (Apple, 2004). This tacit reproduction of compliance undermines the development of democratic and critical educators.

Transformative Possibilities: Towards Inclusive and Just Teacher Preparation:

- **Decentralized and Contextualized Curriculum:** Curriculum reform must begin by decentralizing content to reflect local histories, struggles, and pedagogical traditions. Community elders, local educators, and even folk artists can be integrated into teacher preparation to foster appreciation for context-sensitive knowledge (Batra, 2005).
- **Affirmative Pedagogies and Feminist Interventions:** Training modules should include gender sensitization, caste consciousness, and anti-bias pedagogy. Programs like the *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya* have shown the value of feminist mentoring models in developing both confidence and competence in rural female educators (Vimala Ramachandran, 2010).
- **Institutional Accountability:** Teacher education institutions must be held accountable through equity audits, student satisfaction surveys, and social inclusion benchmarks. Recruitment of faculty from marginalized backgrounds, anti-discrimination committees, and student support cells are essential steps towards democratizing access and voice within these spaces.
- **Critical Pedagogy as Method and Vision:** Freire's (1970) vision of critical pedagogy—where the teacher-student relationship is dialogic and consciousness-raising—must be central to rural teacher education. Through praxis-oriented training, teacher trainees can become not only educators but also reflective practitioners who challenge injustice in and outside the classroom.

Policy and Structural Recommendations:

- **Integration of Intersectionality in NEP Implementation:** Future iterations of India's National Education Policy must move beyond gender and socio-economic inclusion as tick-box indicators and engage with the complex intersections that shape access and outcomes.
- **Rural Fellowship Models:** Initiatives like *Teach For India* must be ruralized, with strong partnerships between NGOs, teacher education colleges, and local governance bodies.
- **Infrastructure and Incentives:** Rural teacher training institutions must receive infrastructural support—hostels, digital access, libraries, and safe transportation—to ensure equity of participation.
- **Participatory Research Models:** Encourage participatory action research within teacher education, where trainees investigate local issues, document their findings, and co-create solutions with their communities.

Conclusion:

To address intersectional inequities in rural teacher preparation is not merely to tweak curriculum or improve infrastructure—it is to reimagine teacher education as a site of social justice. By foregrounding the voices and experiences of the marginalized, we challenge dominant discourses of who can teach, what is worth teaching, and how education should function in society.

"Margins of Learning" is not only a metaphor for neglected geographies but also a call to action: to transform rural teacher education from a space of passive reproduction into one of critical reflection, resistance, and renewal.

References:

- Apple, M. W. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum*. Routledge.

- Bagchi, M., & Bairagya, S. (2021). Concept and context of teacher education. In *Teacher education: Contemporary issues, practices & prospects* (Vol. 1).
- Bairagya, S., Mete, J., & Ghosh, S. K. (n.d.). A study on the relative effectiveness between concept attainment model and traditional method of teaching in economics. *Journal of Education*, R.B.U., 9(1), 109–114.
- Bal, M., & Maity, A. (2019). Impact of economy & sociability on educational development of tribal women. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 6(2).
- Barsha, B., & Maity, A. (2025). Employee performance in relation to motivation and job satisfaction: A survey on MSME. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 9(1), 987–992.
- Batra, P. (2005). Voice and agency of teachers: Missing link in national curriculum framework 2005. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(40), 4347–4356.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* Greenwood.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), Article 8.
- Dandapat, A. K., & Maity, A. (2022). Relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance of the B.Ed. students in Paschim Medinipur. In *2 Day International Seminar on Swami Vivekananda College of Education*.
- Dasgupta, A., & Bairagya, S. (n.d.). Social values among school children through the teaching of value-based contents in Bengali. *Journal of Education and Development*, 7(14).
- Deshpande, S. (2011). Caste and castelessness: Towards a biography of the ‘general category’. *Economic and Political Weekly*.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Ghosh, S., & Bairagya, S. (2010). Attitude of secondary school teachers towards teaching profession in relation to some demographic variables. *Edusearch: Journal of Educational Research*, 1(1), 55–59.
- Govinda, R., & Josephine, Y. (2004). Para teachers in India: A review. *National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration*.
- Guru, G. (2002). How egalitarian are the social sciences in India? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(50), 5003–5009.
- Kumar, K. (2004). *What is worth teaching?* Orient Blackswan.
- Kumar, R. (2015). *Gender and education in India*. Routledge India.
- Maity, A. (2020). Collaborative active learning: An effective study at training colleges. In *Transition from traditional teaching methodology to online teaching* (ISBN: 978-81-946375-3-0). Redshine Publication.

- Maity, A. (2020). Investigating the benefits of project-based learning in science education. In *New trends of teaching, learning and technology* (Vol. 1). *Redshine Publication*.
- Maity, A. (2023). National curriculum framework for teacher education: A new horizon in teacher education as envisioned in NEP 2020. *Journal of Education, Ethics and Value*, 2(9), 45–50. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15738450>
- Maity, A. (2025). Teacher effectiveness in relation to ICT acquaintance among secondary teachers of Medinipur District of West Bengal: A study on demographic variables. *American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research*, 6(5), 1108–1118. <https://globalresearchnetwork.us/index.php/ajshr/article/view/3641>
- Maity, A., & Maity, N. (2025). Disparity in political participation in the local bodies: A case study of Ranchi. *American Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies*, 3(6). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15738399>
- Maity, A., & Sanuar, S. (2020). Women's access to higher education in West Bengal in open distance learning system. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 7(3).
- Maity, A., Sanuar, S., & Ghosh, D. (2024). An assessment of the socio-economic status of the minority girls students at secondary level in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 9123–9127. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i5.4522>
- Maity, A., et al. (2023). Correlation between study habit, test anxiety and academic achievement of the male and female B.Ed. college students. *Journal for ReAttach Therapy and Developmental Diversities*, 6(9s), 1872–1880. <https://doi.org/10.53555/jrtdd.v6i9s.2660>
- Maity, A., et al. (2023). Job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in Paschim Medinipur district in the present context. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Negative Results*, 14(3).
- Mukherjee, S. (2018). Contextualizing curriculum for rural India: A forgotten need. *Indian Journal of Rural Education*, 12(3).
- Nambissan, G. B. (2000). Identity, exclusion, and the 'education of the marginalized': The case of Dalits in India. In M. Bloch et al. (Eds.), *Globalization and education*.
- Ramachandran, V. (2010). *Gender and social equity in primary education: Hierarchies of access** SAGE.
- Roy, S., & Bairagya, S. (2019). Conceptualisation of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of science from Shulman's notion to refined consensus model (RCM): A journey. *Education India Journal: A Quarterly Refereed Journal of Dialogues on Education*, 8(2), 55.

Citation: Acharya. Mr. M. K., (2025) "Margins of Learning : Addressing Intersectional Inequities in Rural Teacher Preparation", *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-3, Issue-07, July-2025.