



## **SCHOOLING AND INEQUALITY IN THE *MUSAHAR* COMMUNITY OF BIHAR: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Despite continuous effort to universalize Education in India, the most deprived Musahar children of Bihar still are ignored and held responsible for their Educational backwardness. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to understand the schooling condition, teacher student relation and peer relation, taking into account the perspective of Musahar children, their parents and attitude of teachers and non-Musahar peers in Government schools of Patna, Bihar. Qualitative methods such as observation, interviews and focus group discussion were used as the data collection procedures. While the school itself becomes a major barrier against the attainment of Primary Education, the matter of further schooling becomes a far fetched cry.*

**Key words:** Dalit children, Musahar community of Bihar, right to education, formal schooling, discrimination and inequality.

The Indian society has been traditionally stratified into four *varnas*. An iniquitous, hierarchical social order legitimizing the marginalization and exploitation of some communities by those enjoying a dominant position in the hierarchy. These caste groups are further divided into numerous *jatis*, with the notions of purity and pollution associated closely

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with almost every aspect of their life and work. The erstwhile untouchable communities fell outside the four fold *varna* system and were known by various names, reflecting their untouchable status like, *Achut*, *Panchamas*, *Atishudras*, *Avarnas*, *Antyaja*, *Asparshyas* and Pariahs or government-assigned designations such as Depressed Castes and Scheduled Castes (Valmiki 2003).

Despite several Constitutional provisions and abolishment of untouchability in India, the menace associated with it still continues. For years these communities have been denied basic human rights and the right to live a life of dignity. Among these communities, the position of *Musahars* is particularly worse as they are placed lowest among all scheduled castes in India. Even among the *Dalits*, they are called *maha dalits*. They are the most disadvantaged groups and are the poorest of the poor. (Joshi and Kumar, 2006, Kumar 2006, Kumar 2009, Narayan 2002, Patel and Patel, 2011, Prasad 2005, Prasad 1986, 1988, 2007, Singh 2005, Sharma 1999, Tiwari 1988).

Out of twenty three Scheduled Caste in Bihar, *Musahars* are the third highly populous after *Chamars* and *Dusads*. But their literacy level is lowest among all *dalits*, i.e. just 4.6% (Census of India, 2001) . They are held responsible for their educational backwardness and negatively portrayed in most literatures. It is widely believed that they are unable to understand the relevance of education, mentally not accustomed to school work, seen as attending schools only for midday meals, disinterested in formal schooling and steeped in a culture of silence. Apart from this some other factors such as, the indifferent attitude of parents to educate (particularly female child), poverty, unawareness, and early marriage are also held accountable for their educational backwardness. (Narayan, 2002, Prasad 1988, 1986, 2007, Prasad, 2005, Bajracharya ET.AL, 2006, Hernandez ET.AL, 2008),

Most literatures reflect the ethnocentric approach to analyse the reason for their educational deprivation. These views appear (pseudo-Frierian understanding (Kidd, Kumar, 1981) of the *Musahar* community and reasons for their backwardness, as they themselves are often blamed for not only their pathetic and abysmal economic and living conditions, but also for their education. However, none of the research studies has explored the crucial reasons for the educational gap from the perspective of *Musahars*. Hence, the present empirical study at Patna has attempted to understand the ground reality from their perspective and explore the social factors that have resulted in their backwardness in the field of education. This is done with the objective of documenting their (both children and their parents) experiences in Government schools and their perceptions regarding the relevance of formal education in

their lives. Also done to examine the conditions of their schooling and identify factors responsible for their present educational levels particularly— understanding the attitude of school teachers, staff members and non *Musahar* classmates towards them.

The Right to Education Act 2009, emphasized on the equal opportunity for all the children to acquire education. However, the findings of the study revealed that, *Musahar* children are deprived of even the basic rights of survival. They are not only discriminated and excluded by the non-scheduled caste populous but by their scheduled caste counterparts as well. Maximum youth in *Musahar* community aged between 25-30 were observed to be illiterate; as even among the *dalits*, the *Musahars* are particularly excluded from the Education system. Among them, very few received the opportunity to be enrolled in the primary schools. After overcoming constant obstacles, very few succeeded in completing matriculation, but none could pursue education beyond. Though the community aspired to educate their children, but most of them were not enrolled in any of the government primary school located near their habitation. Teachers and staff members expressed reluctance regarding the admission of *Musahar* children. They remarked, ‘*yeh, sab Jati kay log humaray yaha nahi aatay hain*’ (these type of caste people don’t approach our school). The only primary Government school in which *Musahar* children were identified, was situated in *Musahar* area, and the school was recognized exclusively for *Musahar*, but few other *Dalit* children too were enrolled along with them. The significant observation was that, even though majority were *Musahar*, but still these children were particularly excluded, discriminated and treated inferior as compared to other *dalit* children in the school.

### **Basic necessary Resources**

The school shortlisted for the study was observed to be in deplorable condition; it did not have the facilities for children to study suitably or lacked equipment to cater to developmental and recreational activities. Basic sanitary resources like water and toilet, were a far cry. There was a lone washroom constructed, but was often locked as it was meant to be used by teachers alone. It did not have an electric connection, so when there was no proper sunlight, the classrooms were very dimly lit. During the hot summers the children were distracted due to the scorching heat and they would continuously perspire.

It had a single classroom catering to students of 1st to 5th standard. The students had to struggle for availability of space to be seated on the floor. The remaining children, who couldn’t get a place, had to sit outside in the verandah. The school does not have a separate

kitchen constructed, so the mid day meal was also cooked in the same classroom. The smoke from the fire wood added to the disruption. The cluttered classroom, the space constrains and the lack of basic amenities resulted in obstructing the *Musahar* children from availing quality education.

The mid-day meal program was initiated with the objective to raise enrolment, attendance, retention, and nutrition level among children (Samson, ET.AL, 2007). But the current study depicted the poor quality and quantity of the food. The *Musahar* children shared that, ‘the grains used for MDM seems to be low-standard, broken and blackish. The cooked food appears watery, salty, full of turmeric, and partially cooked. Consequently, we often are unable to consume the flavourless meal prepared. Also because, on several occasions food seems unhygienic and dirty with mud, insect and worms, ‘*Mitti, Kira, Makora, Pillu*’, in them. Once, even we observed a dead lizard, ‘*mara hua chipkali*’, inside the food’. Along with children their parents too expressed the similar concern arguing that, ‘*Khichri*’ (a dish from South Asia made from rice and lentils), appears as if ‘it is cooked for animals’. They also observed that the quantity served is too less to satisfy the hunger of a child. Despite this, our children are instructed to share satisfactory information with the externals, regarding MDM’. Moreover, the provision although is to appoint two cooks, but because of the prevalence of corruption, the school authorities have called upon a single women to cook meal for the entire school.

The government of Bihar initiated a special scholarship provision to provide Rs. 1200/- per annum to each *Musahar* student for their educational development. But, due to the erratic nature and delay of distribution of scholarships in school, they did not benefit. It was found that children enrolled in school for three to five years received five hundred rupees, only on one occasion. The confusion of their identity in the documents deterred them from availing the scheme. In some cases, the names of *Musahar* student were included in the list of scholarship beneficiaries, but they were deprived of it. The irregular distribution of textbooks further created much hindrance. They were provided books only once in 4 years, as a result they had to purchase books at their own cost. The irregularity, delay and confusion in dispatching the scholarship and the text books were a huge challenge for the children of *Musahar*.

As compared to other government school, where a single teacher is available, teacher student ratio seems to be better. Although four teachers are appointed, it doesn’t serve any significant purpose, because due to mutual understanding between teachers, two of them

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mostly take turns to take leave. Out of the two teachers present in school, one was observed to be often engaged in non-academic and documentation activities and the other handled all the classes simultaneously in a single classroom. Mostly, one teacher among them who takes the opportunity to be inside the classroom, is observed unwilling to perform her roles adequately and in none of the occasion seems to be teaching the students. All of the teachers expressed that, ‘our objective is just to provide basic literacy to the children and nothing more than that’. Because of such attitude soon after attendance, the teachers engaged themselves in performing personal task like knitting, relaxing and chatting among themselves.

### **Schooling and the Reproduction of Inequality**

In the Indian tradition, teachers are considered equivalent to God. And primary school teachers are perceived like a mother who acts as an agent of socialization for any child (Parsons, 1964). But the current study depicted that the teachers in school belong to dominant caste background, have an ethnocentric perspective, prejudgment and superiority complex and maintain hierarchical relationship with majority of the children who are *dalit*. They especially have a notion of repugnance towards *Musahar* children, don’t have the heart to teach them, openly exhibit their dislike in their everyday approach by devising numerous strategies to avoid teaching them. The *Musahar* children expressed helplessness that,

On rare occasions if teachers happen to teach, they don’t follow any sequence of the syllabus and would teach randomly without proper explanation. Consequently, we couldn’t grasp the lesson, but when we approach the teachers to clarify the queries and doubts, they throw our notebooks, scold and ask us to sit at the back. Sometimes when teachers instruct us to memorize the lesson, becomes in vain because instead of listening when we are prepared the next day, they ask questions after long, by then we forget and are unable to answer. So teachers become annoyed and throw sticks from the distance to hurt us. Mostly we are instructed to keep quiet and sit idle inside the classroom, but if we happen to open our notebooks to complete our tuition teacher’s homework then the school teachers tear our notebooks and beat us mercilessly. Unlike other non-*Musahar* children they instruct us to leave the school soon after distribution of meal. But since we wish to stay back to study and play with our friends, teacher neither allow us to participate in classroom activities nor encouraged us to mingle with our peers.

Similarly, their parents expressed that, “teachers are disinterested to teach and just beat our child, even after passing primary classes, children are unable to read the basic text”.

The teachers without being sensitive towards the mixed groups of children from diverse background present in the class, question particularly the food style of *Musahar* children. They embarrass them, because of their choice to consume rats. In front of entire class they threaten them arguing, “*Agar isi tarah chuhay khatay rahogay to sarashwati-mata kabhi gyan nahi dengi*” (if you continue to eat rats then Goddess Saraswati will never impart knowledge). These children are also undermined for earning their livelihood through rag picking. Besides their food habits and occupation, they also are de-motivated for their caste status and skin colour. Teachers have excluded them, they practice untouchability, are reluctant to come in contact with them, and treat them as inferior, dirty, polluted and stinking groups.

Consequently, the new generation *Musahar* children enrolled in school have developed inferiority complex to accept the fact that their community relishes to eat rats. They are embarrassed to continue their eating habits and feel proud to express that they don't have it. This approach of the school system will further gene stratification among the *Musahar* community of “*educated and uneducated*”. The educated *Musahar* who stopped eating rats will consider themselves superior than those who are uneducated and still prefer to eat rats.

Teachers have a preconceived notion against *Musahar* children that they are ‘*uneducable*’ (Sachchidananda, 1974 in Nambissan 1996). They claim that *Musahars* are eligible only for rag picking and are unfit for any other occupation. They de-motivate the ambitious *Musahar* children and question their mental ability. For instance when a child was asked regarding his ambition, he answered, “*Main CID officer banna chahta hu*”, (I want to become a CID officer”). The teacher quickly remarked “*Ye sab kya karega, ye sab kachra chunega*, (“What will these people do, they will only go for rag picking”). These teachers with elitist mind-set try to carve in their minds that they belong to *Musahar* caste whose family occupation is rag picking and make them believe that aspiring for higher education and better career is not their cup of tea. Such de-motivating attitude psychologically impacts the learning ability of these ambitious *Musahar* children.

Teachers particularly favoured “*dominant groups*”. Here, “the dominant groups are those groups of *dalit* children who are privileged by the teachers as against *Musahar* children”. *Musahar* children are particularly forced to serve their teachers and their classmates by performing menial task for them. They were sent to fetch water when the teachers wanted to use the toilet and since water was not available in the school premise, they had to fetch from a distance. Further, they had to wait outside the toilet with a jar of water till the teachers

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comes out of the washroom so that they can pour water for the teachers to wash their hands and feet. They were made to clean the washroom, and if they refuse had to pay certain amount to the sweeper. Hence in order avoid the hassle, most of the time they cleaned by themselves. In spite of it all they were prohibited to use the toilet and had to go home to attend to their nature's call. To comfort the teachers the *Musahar* children hand-fanned their teachers during hot summers and during the cold winters, they kept the firewood burning. Many a times they had to massage their leg too. They had to serve the non-*Musahar dalit* children, as they were given the responsibility to spread the floor sheets before the class started and fold it after the classes. They were entrusted to sweep the school and to assist the cook in preparing the mid day meal. If they did not conform to these duties, they had to bear the adverse consequences that followed which came in the form of physical violence. For instance a *Musahar* child was bleeding because she was brutally beaten by the teachers for not folding the sheets for her other *dalit* class mate. Another *Musahar* child remained ill continuously for 3 days as she was beaten-up by a teacher without citing any suitable reason. Sometimes the teachers would throw the stick from distance intentionally and very often the children were injured. These teachers dictated ruthless rules and norms according to their convenience and there was no custodian to protect the rights of these children. Whenever they deviate from persisting norms, rules and regulations then teachers employ the method of repression and subjugation to control them, so that 'they do not apply their own thinking and listen to their teachers' (Althusser, 1977). The children tolerated obediently without questioning. Their tolerance was taken advantage of by the authorities and other *dalit* children and was constantly burdened with task and exploited regularly. The never ending petty responsibilities and tasks kept the *Musahar* children busy all through the day. The fear of being penalized for their disobedience silenced the *Musahar* children to remain oppressed and were thus was further victimized.

The privileged children especially those who have fine appearance are appointed monitors of the class. These monitors are handed over the responsibility to distribute the MDM among the children. Influenced by teachers the monitors developed a prejudice approach towards *Musahar* children and treated them as inferior class. Accordingly, the monitor would segregate *Musahar* from the non-*Musahar dalit* children and then the later group was served first. The *Musahar* children struggle and anxiously wait for long in a queue for their turn while the monitor serves the other children first. Discrimination was also observed in terms of quantity of food as the privileged groups received more food than the *Musahar* children. Monitors are sometimes given the responsibility to teach the children and maintain order in

the class. They take the advantage of this given opportunity to harass the *Musahar* Children. They would scold and beat them if they were not content with their behaviour or without any reason. *Musahar* children feel helpless both in the hands of the teachers and the appointed monitors who have been given the authority by the teachers. They are not expected to speak anything against it and are accustomed to bear it in silence. Hence, such unequal distribution of power among different groups of children generates superiority complex among the dominant groups and inferiority complex among the deprived ones.

The sitting arrangement is done on the basis of their caste status, appearance and skin colour. *Musahar* children expressed that, “*We are dark in colour so the teachers understand that we are Musahars and force us to sit at distance place, far away from all the other dalit children*”. Since the school follows dominant ideology so teachers force *Musahar* children to sit at the back because they intend to impart knowledge particularly to the comparatively privileged non-*Musahar dalit* children. This depicts the Foucauldian notion of the “*technique of space*” through which formal education system unequally places *Musahar* children and their other *dalit* friends so that teachers can continuously rank, hierarchise, control and unequally distribute knowledge to different groups of students. Many a times they instruct them to stand outside the classroom without providing any valid reason as they do not wish to see or observe the *Musahar* children. Here the Foucauldian notion of keeping a gaze on each student fails because teachers even do not want their presence in school. Though they use these techniques of stratifications to unequally impart knowledge but in reality they want complete exclusion of *Musahar* from learning and attaining knowledge. This stratification also internalizes a sense of backwardness among *Musahar* children that they are inferior to their classmates.

There are some strict rules in the class for the children and they compulsorily have to conform to it, but these rules are more stringent especially for the *Musahars*. While the MDM is being cooked, the classroom turns smokey and suffocating but the *Musahar* children are restricted to sit at the same place. Ironically, these rules are applicable only to the children so the teachers save themselves from the discomfort depart the classroom leaving the children to bear. The teachers often communicate among themselves but the *Musahar* children are restricted to do so otherwise they have to bear physical violence. They are punished and beaten-up even if other *dalit* children are responsible for making noise in the classroom. Due to the space constrains in the school the children have to struggle, as they are not given the opportunity to search for a comfortable place. Even if they try and manage to find a suitable



place the teachers use the measure of repression to control them. For instance, if these children happen to stand up, they are immediately beaten up or if by mistake if they step on others' bag then again they are targeted. These formal schools restrict the personality growth of the most disadvantaged children and intend to produce 'docile bodies which are subjugated, hierarchized and controlled'. (Foucault, 1977).

They clearly discriminate between the children according to the caste and always give priority to non *Musahar dalit* children in every aspect. The formal school thus, have formulated two unequal groups of children and segregated them on the basis of superiority and inferiority. The teachers favouring the dominant groups made it obvious while remarking "*Musahar jat kay bachhay ko alag karo, hum usay nahi padhayangay, vo ganday hain, ganday kapray pahentay hain aur mahektay hain*", ("Separate the *Musahar* children, we will not teach them, they are dirty, wear dirty clothes and stink"). On few occasions the teachers falsely alleged and accused the *Musahar* children for stealing money from their wallet, embarrass them in front of the whole class and force them to pay the missing amount. Cases have also been observed of *Musahar* children being detained or suspended from the school on the basis of the complaints received from other *dalit* children, mostly without any valid reason.

The negative perspective and approach of the teachers have generated a feeling of incompetency and inferiority in the minds of the other *dalit* classmates towards *Musahar* children. The non-*Musahar dalit* students believe that the *Musahar* children are polluting so they maintained distance with them. These privileged students take advantage of their dominant status to subordinate the disadvantaged ones. The dominating children unite among themselves and they become the powerful group with the support they receive from the teachers. When they see a *Musahar* child, they close their nose and whisper among themselves that "*Ismain mat chuaana, yay Musahar hain*", "Do not touch them they are *Musahars*". If *Musahar* children make any effort to befriend other children, they maintain distance from them and tell them to stay away treating them like a piece of some dirt. These groups of children often beat *Musahar* children collectively for some or the other reason but the teachers do not utter a word against these atrocities against *Musahar* children as they are themselves engaged in this violence. *Musahar* children fail to participate in school prayer because other *dalit* children shout at them, beat them and tell them that "You are polluted, so we will not allow you to pray". They are completely isolated from the school; they are not only discriminated by the teachers and their classmates but also by the non-teaching staffs in

school. For instance, the gatekeepers often use to beat, threaten them and say that “*You Musahar, do not dare to enter the school, leave the school immediately and never return back*”. Hence, such discriminatory school environment has developed a kind of relationship of hatred amongst the school authorities, their co-learners and the *Musahar* community as a whole.

The school environment is not favourable for these children to acquire education and knowledge. The condition is the worst for the *Musahar* children who are restricted to voice against these exploitations. Their parents also are not given the opportunity to raise these concerns to the school authorities. The Right to Education Act 2009 recommends regular Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM), however, they are never invited for PTM, but are summoned to complain against their children and meanwhile their signatures are taken to indicate the occurrence of the PTM. Instead of having a discussion regarding the progress of their children in the school, the teachers often suggest them to appoint a tuition teacher for their children without considering the reality that they struggle hard even to acquire two meals in a day.

Sometimes if parents themselves take initiative to enquire regarding their children’s performance in class, teachers behave very rude and respond- “*Musahar* children are not interested in education instead are only into playing”, and in sarcasm questions their ability saying that “They do not understand anything, so do we dissolve the book in the water and make them to drink?”. When their parents raised their voice against this injustice, then teachers claim that they are “uncivilized, quarrelsome and do not know to behave and talk properly”. Moreover, the principal who holds the highest position in the school was found to be insensitive towards the social background of these children. She has a negative approach towards *Musahar* community as a whole and remarked that “Their thought process is not oriented towards education and learning. They are illiterate, *Murkh* (fools) who do not understand the value of education, so they want their children to engage in household work, looking after children and rag picking, rather than attending school”. With the ethnocentric mind-set, the principal and the teacher compared the socio-economic and educational condition of the *Musahar*’s with their own children and other non-*Musahar dalit* children, concluding that the *Musahars* are inferior and backward because of their unwillingness to change their situation. They compared that their performance in comparison to the later is zero by zero. They argued that their children are more superior and intelligent than *Musahar*,

because unlike them *Musahar* parents do not take the responsibility to teach their children but instead completely depend on the teachers for the same.

Further, they stated that the *Musahar* children are unable to solve mathematics and other lessons taught in the class because their parents do not sit and teach them at home. The teachers blamed the parents that they made excuses of being ignorant and inability to teach so that the children can be sent for rag picking. They compared that unlike them, the non-*Musahar dalit* parents encourage their children to study even though their socio-economic and educational condition is not that good. The school authorities had an attitude of repugnance towards their living style and compared their own with *Musahar* saying that “Unlike us they do not have a sense of hygiene and cleanliness”. They opined about the food habits of the *Musahars* that it is very unhygienic, filthy, stale and polluted. They observed that the *Musahars* do not wash the food before cooking, do not cover the food, do not eat fresh food and do not warm it before eating and because of their unhygienic lifestyle and dirty environment the *Musahars* often suffer from diarrhoea and other infection. They felt disgusted that the *Musahars* earn their livelihood out of the waste thrown and the children were often found playing in the drainage. They described the children as dirty and stinking as they never take bath. Due to this, both teachers and *Musahar* community has developed a relationship of conflict with each other.

Teachers further opined that “Since *Musahar*’s mentality is not oriented towards education, any Government scheme to ameliorate their social, economic and educational status will not benefit them.” They put forward a view that “if the government stops mid-day meals and scholarship provisions, teaching and learning would be far better, because they attend school just to access these benefits and not for education”. This reflects that the formal school functions on the dominant ideology and often locates the fault in the oppressed itself, and intend to change the consciousness of the oppressed rather than changing the oppressive structures. (Frierre, 1972).

Studies revealed that *Musahars* exist in a culture of silence and do not speak against any injustice fostered on them. In fact, this is a pseudo Frierrean perspective as they are not ignorant regarding atrocities against them but are compelled to be silent and tolerant by the teachers in school. *Musahar* children, no doubt are aware of the injustice and discrimination practiced against them in class but are forced to be silent and not reveal the mistreatment to others. Instead, they are instructed to report to others that they are being loved by the teachers and that the school environment is very much inclusive for them. If they go beyond the set

norm, then they have to bare the adverse consequences the very next day and have to suffer even more atrocities by the oppressive authoritarian teachers. Such an exploitative school environment do not provide even a little space to *Musahar* children to think on their own, hence are continuously oppressed, subjugated, hierarchized and controlled.

As per the norms of dominant groups the oppressed should not raise their voice against any kind of injustice and exploitation fostered upon them, so that the dominant groups can maintain their own rule over the oppressed. Hence, whenever parents of *Musahar* children raise their voice against the injustice practiced against their children in school regarding physical violence, caste based discrimination, non-receipt of scholarship, and dissatisfaction with teachers training etc. then teachers criticizes them by saying that they are uncivilized and ignorant. The school teachers have a notion that the oppressed themselves are responsible for their pathetic condition. And in the process, instead of listening to their queries of their dissatisfaction with the school, overburden them by complaining against their children and during several occasions make them realise that there is problem in their culture, living style, thought process and their overall home environment which is opposite to education. And this is the most important reason why their children are unable to progress in education. Hence, these elite class teachers internalises a sense of inferiority complex among *Musahars* that their failure is the result of their own deeds.

In order to raise their educational status the oppressive structure of the formal school environment demands *Musahars* who are the victim of oppression, to bring about change in their overall living style and perspective towards education. Therefore, teachers repeatedly de-motivate *Musahar* children and internalises a feeling among them that they are not meant for education. They compare them with other scheduled caste children with the intention to show that they are inferior to their classmates. They also believe that none of the Government schemes will benefit them, until and unless they change their mentality towards education. In fact inclusive policy of education is just on papers, as formal school further creates hierarchy and inequality in the society. Every day these highly ambitious *Musahar* children are demotivated in school as they are conditioned to think that they are backward and not suitable for acquiring education.

With such a hierarchical and negative approach of the formal school educators it is questionable that the objective of the education policy of 1986 to universalize educational opportunity for all will be achieved. The Right to Education Act, 2009 resulted in accessibility of education among few creamy layers of the society but the condition of *dalit-*

*Musahars* in particular are seen to be struggling to obtain basic primary education. They are exploited and oppressed to such an extent that many of them choose to drop out from school and rather stay peacefully at home. Some of the students managed to cross the initial barrier but couldn't be enrolled in secondary school, since the provision of free education is available till elementary level. Some of them enrolled in non-formal school to acquire education with the aspiration that they will someday get a renowned job after completing their education. But in this competitive world they are unable to compete with the privileged ones who are better qualified. The reservation policy for Scheduled castes provides benefit for employment to the *dalits* but the *Musahars* are not in a position to compete with their other *dalit* children because they are unable to fulfil the minimum eligibility criteria. It was also observed that after studying in primary school, the *Musahar* children feel uncomfortable to go for rag picking but are compelled to do so as they are unable to find any other livelihood options. For instance, a *Musahar* boy was identified to be working as a rag picker even after passing matriculation because he could not bargain with the dominant groups for better occupation.

*Musahars* are socially excluded because of the stigma attached with their identity. This stigma is further strengthened by the formal schools which promotes discrimination against *Musahar* and creates stratification, unequal and hierarchized society. Instead of bringing about attitudinal change in such hierarchical social structure and education system towards *Musahar*, they themselves are held responsible for their pathetic, social, economic and educational condition. They are deprived of social support system which is conducive for their all round development. Now the question arises that in such an anti-*Musahar* society, will the *Musahars* ever be heard?

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