Book review

Deshpande, Satish & Zacharias, Usha (Eds.) (2013). *Beyond inclusion: The practice of equal access in Indian higher education.* New Delhi: Routledge

Reviewed by Vivienne Bozalek*

This edited collection provides a much-needed contribution to the gap in knowledge about the intersection between social justice and higher education in India. As the editors of this collection note, it is important to document and disseminate knowledge not only about policies which have been developed to address issues of access and social inclusion in higher education, but to understand how these policies are implemented and experienced on the ground. The particular contribution of this collection is that the authors have poignantly documented the actual lived experiences of students who have entered higher education through the system of reservation that is used in India. In addition to these experiences, the challenges and achievements of affirmative action in the Indian higher education system are made apparent through both quantitative and qualitative studies and discussion of epistemological and ontological issues. Engstrom and Tinto's (2008, p. 50) mantra "Access without support is not opportunity" reverberates across this collection of essays. That institutions do not intentionally exclude students from college does not mean that they are including them as fully valued members of the institution and providing them with the support that enables them to translate access into success is brought to life vividly in this edited collection. Thus, while appearing to give physical access, but not making it possible for students to succeed through a responsive institutional culture which causes alienation and further marginalisation, higher education is further entrenching inequities.

The collection of essays in this volume was commissioned by a grant to the Institute of Higher Education, to investigate the successes and failures of the implementation of quota policies in higher education institutions and the expectations and experiences of students and academics from marginalised groups who had been accommodated in the institutions. The book is divided into four parts addressing the following themes: Part I offers essays which broadly cover the history and philosophy of higher education inclusionary policies in India; Part II focuses on how inclusion plays out in different types of universities – from

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liberal to medical and engineering education; Part III consists of two essays written by members of marginalised classes and provides an insight into the struggles of students against the injustices they still face in the higher education system; and Part IV provides examples of three programmes which have started to address issues of social inclusion.

Social justice in India began with the Government of India Act 1935, which created schedules to name the castes and tribes (known as Scheduled Castes [SCs] and Scheduled Tribes [STs]) to be eligible for reservations of places in higher education. Since then reservation quotas have been used as constitutional safeguards to ensure the inclusion of students from marginalised castes and tribal identities, and more latterly extended to economically disadvantaged students - known in the system as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Chapter 1, "Caste Quotas and Formal Inclusion in Indian Higher Education", written by one of the editors of the book, Satish Deshpande, gives an useful overview of the history of the reservations policy in Indian higher education. This chapter explains how protective discrimination policies actually work and the implicit or explicit rationale behind these interventions. The caste quota reserves or sets aside a specific number of seats or places – usually expressed as a proportion of the total available – for eligible members of particular caste-groups legally recognised as legitimate claimants. In higher education, this takes the form of reserved seats for the SCs, STs and OBCs (and other groups such as the disabled or some other region-specific categories of entitlements) in educational institutions. The chapter also outlines changes which have taken place in the past two decades and makes explicit the hostile environment of resentment from those who are entitled towards encumbents of affirmative action.

The book also deals with other forms of marginalisation such as the rural/urban divide and Chapter 5 documents the ways in which Yadvindra College of Engineering successfully redresses this by providing the resources and opportunities for rural students to secure places in the institution. The essays document best practices in institutions on how to accommodate diversity and practice social inclusion. In Chapter 3, "Affirmative Action in Three Dream Institutions", for example, Devy critically examines the founding missions which were created to deal with diversity in three higher education institutions in western India which were established particularly to address social inclusion and the relevance of their present position. He concludes that it is not enough to merely grant access to marginalised groups, but that the subjugated knowledges and experiences of these groups should be incorporated into institutional knowledge and classrooms. If institutions were to do this, he asserts, this would add to rather than diminish the quality of these institutions.

The two chapters in Part III of the volume provide a 'view from below' of the experiences of Delhi and Adivasi students who are enabled to enter higher education because of reservations, but are faced with numerous challenges on arrival here. In Chapter 6, Singh highlights the contempt and opposition that these students face, especially in elite institutions. The success stories and tragic instances of suicide provide lenses to the realities on the ground, which are often elided in discussions about reservation policies. Chapter 7 "Quota's Children: The Perils of Getting Educated" explores how first-generation learners

from marginalised communities face humiliation and prejudice in academic, residence and extra-curricular activities, whilst at the same time having to struggle to gain epistemological access to new knowledges.

The concluding section of the volume includes a set of three chapters on different kinds of support for skill enhancement programmes for the marginalised. What I found most interesting was the final chapter, "To Race with the Able? Soft Skills and the Psychologisation of Marginality" written by Usha Zacharias, which provides some critique of merely providing skills programmes for disadvantaged students. The author aptly notes that slogans of access, equity and excellence are based on the assumption that disadvantaged students can ultimately compete with elite students in academic excellence, without acknowledging the different sets of opportunities open to them. It is both necessary to decolonise knowledge itself and to make students critically aware of the social origins of marginal identity, to prevent the burden of reform being shouldered by the marginalised student.

As one of the first full length texts about social inclusion in Indian higher education, this is a must read for any scholar, practitioner and policy-maker interested in the field of social justice and higher education.

References
Engstrom, C., & Tinto, V. (2008). Access without support is not opportunity. *Change*, 1, 46–50.