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UNSEEN CLASSROOM: MEDIA AND LITERATURE FOSTERING INCLUSION

Swapna Deb¹ & Dr. Papiya Upadhyay²

¹ Assistant Professor of Special Education & Research Scholar, School of Education, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata, India, Email: debswapna1@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor of Education, School of Education, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata, India, Email: papiyaupadhyay@wbnsou.ac.in

Abstract

Education must transcend conventional barriers to promote inclusiveness in its broadest meaning in the increasingly diverse and interconnected world of today. The transformative potential of media and literature as informal but potent learning environments that upend preconceptions, encourage inclusive attitudes, and elevate underrepresented perspectives is explored in the present study entitled, "Unseen Classroom: Media & Literature Fostering Inclusion". Beyond textbooks and structured curriculum, the "unseen classroom" fosters social awareness, empathy, and critical thinking. These platforms function as both windows and mirrors, providing insights into lives far different from one's own and mirroring personal identities and experiences. Through intellectual and emotional engagement, media and literature have a special ability to dispel prejudices, elevate underrepresented perspectives, and encourage inclusive attitudes in aspirants and youth. Learners are exposed to a variety of viewpoints that humanize complicated topics pertaining to caste, class, gender, racism, disability, and more through stories, movies, news, and digital content. These stories help create more inclusive and caring school cultures by fostering a greater awareness of equality and justice. This subject looks at how literature and the media can be used as transformative teaching tools to help learners and teachers confront prejudices, reconsider social norms, and work together to build inclusive and sustainable learning environments. The article starts to unravel the "unseen classroom"—a place of silent but substantial influence that affects values, identities, and actions—by looking at a few case studies, theoretical frameworks, and useful tactics. The study further amplifies the significance of incorporating inclusive narratives outside of formal education by drawing on interdisciplinary connections from media studies, and literary theory to education. Teachers and educators can facilitate more equitable and sustainable learning environments that speak to a range of learner identities and life experiences by utilizing these cultural instruments.

Keywords: Unseen Classroom, Media, Literature, Inclusion, Education, Society

1. Background

Education needs to change beyond its historical confines to fully embrace inclusiveness in the more diverse and interconnected world of today. Beyond textbooks and structured curriculum, the "unseen classroom" refers to the unofficial but potent learning environments influenced by literature and the media—spaces that foster social awareness, empathy, and critical thinking. These platforms function as both windows and mirrors, providing insights into lives far different from one's own and mirroring personal identities and experiences. By involving pupils on an intellectual and emotional level, literature and the media have a special ability to dispel prejudices, elevate underrepresented voices, and encourage inclusive views. Learners are exposed to a variety of viewpoints that humanize complicated topics pertaining to caste, class, gender, racism, disability, and more through stories, movies, news, and digital content. These stories help create more inclusive and caring school cultures by fostering a greater awareness of equality and justice. The function of literature and media as transformational pedagogical instruments is examined in this topic, which encourages educators and students to confront prejudices, reconsider conventions, and jointly establish inclusive learning environments. We start to discover the "unseen classroom"—a place of silent but substantial influence that affects values, identities, and actions—by looking at case studies, theoretical frameworks, and useful tactics. We turn and focus on some literature underpinning and substantiating the present concern of our study:

Ghatak and Kumar (2024) explores in their study the adoption of social media among tribal women in Jalpaiguri District, revealing both opportunities and challenges in bridging the digital divide. It examines how socio-economic, cultural, and technological factors influence social media use, highlighting limited digital literacy, poor infrastructure, and social restrictions as major barriers. Despite these challenges, social media has positively impacted tribal women by enhancing communication, self-expression, awareness of rights, and economic opportunities. However, risks such as misinformation and privacy issues remain. The paper recommends culturally sensitive digital literacy initiatives, improved infrastructure, and supportive community efforts to ensure safe and meaningful social media engagement, promoting digital inclusion and gender equality.

Pal (2021) described in his thesis mainstreaming society in overcoming difficulties based on various differently abled characters described in selected Bengali fiction. Invisibly there is a subtle touch of inclusion here.

In their study, **Mitra and Das (2023)** examined the transformative function of community media in India, emphasizing its capacity to advance inclusive development and fortify democracy. The study looks at how community media promotes local content, varied viewpoints, and participatory communication using secondary data and case studies from India and other comparable sociopolitical environments. Community involvement, empowerment, cultural preservation, and development challenges are among the major themes that were discovered through a qualitative method that included a study of the literature and thematic analysis. Community media may empower underrepresented communities, promote local involvement in media creation and decision-making, and develop ownership, as demonstrated by successful efforts like Radio Namaskar, Radio Mewat, and

Radio Ada. According to the study, community media works to maintain cultural heritage and solve local issues, but it also faces obstacles like low media literacy, financial limitations, and legal restrictions. The study ends with legislative suggestions to support community media in India, highlighting the necessity of removing current obstacles and utilizing digital capabilities to increase influence. All things considered, it adds to the continuing conversations about how community media may support democracy, inclusive development, and social transformation.

Navigating through such literary transcription, the theme of the present study carries huge significance in the context of the society in general and education in particular.

The importance of this subject is found in its capacity to change the way that inclusion is viewed in educational environments. Conventional teaching methods frequently ignore how literature and the media subtly but significantly influence students' opinions, ethics, and worldviews. By acknowledging these factors as a component of the "unseen classroom," educators and legislators can use them to advance social justice, diversity, and equity.

Key points of significance include:

- **Amplification of disadvantaged Arguments:**

Literature and the media give marginalized populations a forum to express their experiences and stories, which are sometimes missing from traditional curricula. This is one of the key aspects of significance. This promotes empathy and unity while assisting pupils in comprehending the realities of underrepresented populations.

- **Challenging Biases and Stereotypes:**

Being exposed to a variety of stories fosters critical thinking and aids in the destruction of damaging stereotypes pertaining to socioeconomic class, gender, race, caste, and disability.

- **Promoting Identity and Belonging:**

Students' experiences are validated and a sense of belonging is fostered when they see their identities represented in literature, movies, and stories. This is important for their emotional and intellectual health.

- **Developing Inclusive Pedagogical Practices:**

Learning becomes more comprehensive and conveying humanity when inclusive literature and media are incorporated into instruction. Additionally, it pushes educators to embrace thoughtful and culturally sensitive methods.

- **Developing Social and Emotional Skills:**

Media and literary narratives frequently arouse empathy, fortitude, and moral reasoning-skills necessary for inclusive citizenship and cooperative learning settings.

- **Promoting Civic Engagement and Advocacy:**

Literary analysis and media literacy can motivate students to confront contemporary issues, challenge structural injustices, and take an active role in promoting inclusivity both within and outside of the classroom.

2. Focus of the study

This review based content analysis proffers diverse representations in literature, movies, and digital media affect students' comprehension, acceptance, and empathy for underrepresented groups in learning environments, i.e., **to explore how literature and the media influence**

students' and teachers' inclusive views. This entails selecting and analyzing texts and media that illustrate diversity, equity, and social justice topics, as well as assessing how they affect students' attitudes and actions so that **successful literary and cultural works that promote inclusive teaching methods could be advocated.** Also, the study intends to focus on creating teaching strategies and classroom procedures that leverage inclusive content to encourage discussion, critical thinking, and a feeling of community among all students, i.e., **proposing possible instructional plans for incorporating inclusive literature and media into the curriculum.**

With these focuses, the subsequent section delves further through reviewing some notable media and art-based contents namely, movies, stories, poems, policy documents and essays to reaffirm the potential of unseen classroom in the realm of inclusion and inclusive culture.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 – Integrating Diversity into Learning

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 was developed by the NCERT and encourages inclusive teaching strategies and child-centered learning. One of its most notable achievements is the integration of diverse perspectives, including as gender, caste, disability, and regional identities, into language and literature courses. The NCF encourages educators to use local stories and community narratives that reflect students lived realities rather than relying solely on urban, elite-centric content.

Consequently, Bengali textbooks now incorporate folktales and regional literature. Storybooks that use Santal, Rajbanshi, and Namasudra folktales, for example, have been used to promote linguistic and cultural diversity. Classroom activities mirror the framework's emphasis on inclusivity since the curriculum is more approachable, inclusive, and grounded in regional difference.

Sukumar Ray's "Abol Tabol" – Nonsense Literature as Inclusive Space

Abol Tabol (1923), a collection of fanciful, absurd poetry by Sukumar Ray, has long been a mainstay of Bengali children's literature. By dismantling inflexible meaning structures, Ray's work democratizes language and information, despite its seeming apolitical or humorous nature. All youngsters, regardless of cognitive or linguistic capacity, can enjoy, inquire about, and fantasize in his absurdist world.

Ray's writings have been used by progressive educators, such as those in Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan, to promote innovative, nonjudgmental learning environments. 'Abol Tabol' makes literature accessible and inclusive by utilizing wordplay, fantasy, and satire to encourage involvement from all social groups.

Ray's poetry has been transformed into multisensory plays and animations by theatre companies and educators in contemporary contexts, improving accessibility for kids with learning disabilities.

Children's Movies by Satyajit Ray: The Media as a Reflector of Social Justice

Famous director Satyajit Ray challenged societal injustices through children's films in addition to providing amusement. Themes like authoritarianism, class distinction, and the

power of knowledge are addressed in films such as '*Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*', '*Hirak Rajar Deshe*', and '*Pikoo*', frequently in nuanced, metaphorical ways.

In Bengal, school film clubs and NGO workshops regularly use these films to spark conversations about cooperation, bravery, and justice. For instance, many educators utilize Hirak Rajar Deshe's portrayal of a tyrant who restricts education to talk about the value of critical thinking and freedom of expression.

These movies are very inclusive since they employ straightforward speech, music, and visual storytelling, which makes them suitable for kids of all reading abilities as well as, when modified, people with hearing or vision impairments.

3. Discussion

It is essential to look at how literature and the media shape inclusive viewpoints in both teachers and students in order to understand the larger role that education plays in advancing social justice and equity. In a time when digital content is influencing society increasingly, media, literature, and movies have become effective means of promoting empathy, dispelling myths, and enlarging perspectives. These platforms function as transformative educational tools that can destroy ingrained prejudices and foster an inclusive culture in addition to being informational and entertaining sources.

Literature and media provide windows into realities that are frequently overlooked or excluded in popular discourse by showcasing a variety of narratives, whether they are focused on socioeconomic status, gender identity, ethnicity, language, or disability. Students' emotional intelligence and social awareness can be greatly improved by immersing themselves in such stories. Students are inspired to think critically and compassionately when they come across stories that represent lives and difficulties that are different from their own. By fostering tolerance and respect for diversity, this method helps to lessen discriminatory attitudes and actions both inside and outside of educational settings.

The material that teachers interact with has a significant impact on them as well. Teachers may be prompted to evaluate their own presumptions, attitudes, and teaching strategies by being exposed to inclusive literature and media. In order to change classroom dynamics and create environments that are accepting and affirming for all students, this self-awareness is essential. A teacher who reads a book on the difficulties faced by a child with a disability, for instance, might become more aware of accessibility concerns in the classroom. Likewise, documentaries or movies about gender nonconformity might assist teachers in recognizing the importance of gender-neutral language and practices. In this sense, inclusive material changes pedagogy while simultaneously enhancing classroom discussion.

Social and educational disparities still exist in Bengal, which makes such inclusive media even more relevant in the Indian setting. The experience and access to education are still influenced by long-standing caste, gender, class, and linguistic hierarchies. Media and literature that subvert these conventions are essential counter-narratives that give voice to the voiceless and validate their experiences. Pluralism and cultural justice are greatly aided by community-based films in local languages, works by local writers, and grassroots digital storytelling platforms.

This study looks at how inclusive narratives in educational settings promote social cohesiveness, empathy, and a sense of belonging through their themes, characters, and storytelling approaches. The study intends to highlight the significance of incorporating such content into the curriculum by assessing the effects of these narratives on students and teachers. In the end, this strategy urges curriculum developers, educational legislators, and teacher preparation programs to go beyond symbolic efforts. In the classroom, inclusion should be a lived reality rather than just a declared policy. A more just and equitable society where diversity are not just accepted but celebrated can be established by including varied viewpoints into regular educational opportunities.

The foundation of inclusive teaching is the idea that learning must take into account and adapt to students' varied social, cultural, and individual identities. Literature and cultural texts have long been a transformational force in the Indian and Bengali environment, reflecting and influencing society ideas toward justice, equity, and inclusion. In addition to being artistic expressions, successful literary and cultural works also function as teaching resources that support teachers in creating inclusive learning environments. These pieces foster empathy and critical thinking by allowing students to deeply connect with themes like caste, gender, class, and disability.

Rabindranath Tagore's contributions in Bengali literature serve as a fundamental source for inclusive teaching methods. Works like *Chandalika* and *Ghare-Baire* demonstrate Tagore's appreciation of uniqueness, his condemnation of strict social standards, and his stress on universal human ideals. The struggle between tradition and modernization, women's agency, and caste hierarchies are all examined in these writings. Mahasweta Devi's moving tales, like *Draupadi* and *Stanadayini*, also address state aggression, tribal rights, and caste injustice. Her stories are political and unvarnished, which makes them perfect for conversations about social justice and underrepresented voices. Another level of understanding is provided by Tamil Dalit author Bama's *Karukku*, especially with regard to the ways in which caste and gender interact from the viewpoint of a Christian Dalit lady. In addition to reflecting social reality, these literary works encourage critical thinking on structural injustice, empowering students to confront prejudices and develop inclusive viewpoints.

Indian film has made a substantial contribution to inclusive pedagogy in addition to literature. The eyes of a misunderstood youngster are used to delicately depict learning problems, especially dyslexia, in films such as *Taare Zameen Par*. The movie questions inflexible academic systems and emphasizes the value of compassion and individualized instruction. Similarly, *Stanley Ka Dabba* explores the unseen hardships of kids from disadvantaged homes while quietly criticizing socioeconomic disparities in schools. Students can better understand abstract ideas like empathy, equity, and belonging thanks to these films' emotional relevance.

By incorporating such texts and movies into their syllabi, educators can transcend textbook-centric methods. They can design dialogic classrooms where students participate in critical analysis, role-playing, creative writing, and reflective debates with the goal of promoting inclusivity. These cultural products broaden the scope of learning and make it more

compassionate and holistic by providing windows into living experiences that are frequently left out of standard education.

Studying these works also makes it possible to create a pedagogical archive, which is a collection of powerful and culturally relevant materials that teachers may use to create inclusive learning environments. This method helps teachers identify and handle diversity in their classrooms while also enhancing students' cognitive and emotional involvement. It enables education to transcend the transfer of knowledge and become a tool for social change.

In conclusion, compelling narratives that promote inclusive education are offered by well-known literary and cultural works in Bengali and Indian contexts. Teachers can create more equitable, compassionate, and inclusive learning environments by recognizing, assessing, and incorporating these works into their educational approaches.

It is imperative to create organized teaching methods that purposefully include inclusive media and literature into classroom environments. Works that represent a range of cultures, identities, abilities, languages, genders, and social backgrounds are referred to as "inclusive." In order to enable all students to recognize themselves reflected in what they read and experience, these lesson plans aim to promote equality, representation, and empathy in the classroom.

Curriculum Relevance:

The choice of media and literary works must both captivate students and be in line with accepted academic standards and aims in order to successfully advance inclusive education. This guarantees that inclusion is viewed as an essential component of the learning process rather than as a "add-on." Novels, short tales, poetry, movies, documentaries, or digital content should all encourage critical thinking about issues of social justice, equity, and diversity. These materials ought to encourage students to consider questions of privilege, marginalization, and identity as well as to challenge stereotypes and comprehend many points of view.

Most importantly, these inclusive resources need to be carefully aligned with the curriculum's stated learning goals and key skills. This entails:

- Recognizing the critical thinking, communication, empathy, and cultural literacy abilities that inclusive texts foster. Using a story about caste discrimination in a social studies class to accomplish objectives linked to understanding social structures and justice is an example of aligning material with subject-specific goals.
- Ensuring cultural relevance and age appropriateness so that students can relate the content to their own experiences.
- Including evaluation techniques that look at the growth of inclusive attitudes as well as academic comprehension.

Students' cognitive and affective development is promoted by this curricular alignment, which guarantees that inclusive pedagogy is not only significant but also quantifiable.

Representation:

The deliberate selection of texts and media that represent the diversity of society and elevate underrepresented voices is essential to inclusive education. All students will see themselves and others represented in the curriculum if materials written by or about members of underrepresented communities—such as members of various ethnic and indigenous groups, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds—are given priority.

It helps break down preconceptions, confront systemic prejudices, and create a sense of belonging among students from different backgrounds. Representation is not just about inclusion; it's also about validation. For example, include stories that portray the real-life experiences of Dalits in India, indigenous groups, LGBT writers, or those with physical and mental impairments enables students to interact with viewpoints that are frequently left out of the mainstream conversation.

All pupils' perspectives are also expanded by this kind of depiction, which exposes them to various historical, social, and cultural situations. This fosters cultural competency, empathy, and critical thinking—skills necessary for surviving in a pluralistic society. Teachers are essential in helping students understand the complexity of identity and inequality by sensitively and mindfully leading conversations about these subjects. Diversity in representation in educational content is therefore a social necessity rather than just a pedagogical decision.

Pedagogical Strategies:

Effectively incorporating inclusive texts into the classroom requires a deliberate and structured pedagogical approach that moves beyond mere inclusion to active engagement. Inclusive texts should not simply be add-ons or token examples; instead, they must become central to classroom discourse, assessment frameworks, and learning activities. This can be accomplished through several dynamic strategies:

a) Reflective Journaling:

In order to reflect on the themes, characters, and storylines found in inclusive books, students should be encouraged to keep personal journals. By encouraging reflection, empathy, and a greater comprehension of various perspectives, this technique enables students to relate books to both their personal and societal contexts.

b) Comparative Analysis:

Discussions regarding representation, voice, and bias are sparked when teachers encourage students to contrast inclusive books with popular or canonical works. Students gain an appreciation for various cultural and social contexts, challenge prevailing narratives, and critically analyze how underrepresented identities are portrayed.

c) Project-Based Learning:

By creating group or individual projects centered around inclusive books, students can investigate practical applications of the topics covered. Students could, for example, undertake research and interviews, develop multimedia presentations, or launch community

awareness campaigns that go deeper into topics like caste, gender, or disability that are brought up in the texts.

d) Classroom Discussions and Debates:

Critical thinking and polite conversation can be fostered through organized discussions that focus on the ideas presented in inclusive books. These conversations allow for a variety of viewpoints and assist students in expressing and questioning their preconceptions.

e) Performance and Creative Expression:

Students can artistically convey their understanding when they engage with inclusive literature through narrative projects, spoken word poetry, visual art, or dramatizations. Additionally, it encourages emotional and physical participation with intricate societal issues.

f) Integrated Assessment:

Additionally, inclusive pedagogy should be reflected in evaluation techniques. Analytical essays, multimedia portfolios, and peer-reviewed presentations are examples of assessments that place more emphasis on understanding, critical thinking, and individual reactions to various narratives than on rote memorizing.

By incorporating these tactics into regular classroom instruction, teachers may guarantee that inclusive books are not just read but also experienced, serving as the cornerstone of a life-changing, socially conscious learning environment.

4. Teacher Preparation

In order for inclusive education to be implemented successfully, instructors must be well-prepared to handle delicate and complicated situations in the classroom. Structured training on how to lead challenging discussions about issues like race, caste, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic inequality is part of this. Teachers need to be prepared not only with subject-matter expertise but also with cultural competency, emotional intelligence, and methods for fostering an open, courteous, and safe learning environment.

Teachers also need to be able to critically assess classroom resources and instructional materials for instances of harmful stereotypes, implicit prejudice, and tokenism. This includes having the ability to spot instances in which minority voices are featured in a superficial rather than meaningful way, when content perpetuates dominant narratives without question, or when it presents communities in a constrained or biased manner.

Incorporating modules on inclusive pedagogy, intersectionality, and anti-bias education into pre-service teacher education programs and continuing professional development is crucial. Teachers can gain the competence and self-assurance to advance equity and inclusivity in the way they offer curriculum and interact with students in the classroom through seminars, peer conversations, and reflective practices.

5. Impact Assessment

Integrating thorough tools and techniques for evaluating the impact of inclusive content is crucial to ensuring that it significantly improves educational results. This entails assessing the long-term effects of inclusive materials on students' cultural sensitivity, empathy, and academic engagement.

- Changes in attendance rates, performance on assignments involving inclusive texts, excitement for learning, and involvement levels can all be used to gauge **academic engagement**. Formative evaluations, classroom observations, and reflective diaries are some tools that can show how inclusive resources help various student populations find learning more relatable and inspiring.
- Qualitative instruments like peer reviews, empathy scales, reflective writing, and organized conversations should be used to evaluate **empathy development**. It is possible to assess how well pupils comprehend and emotionally relate to the experiences of others by asking them to adopt various viewpoints, particularly those of marginalized people.
- Being **culturally sensitive** entails appreciating, respecting, and acknowledging diversity. Surveys conducted before and after tests, attitude inventories, and project-based assessments (such as service learning or intercultural group projects) can all be used to measure how students develop their understanding of cultural variety and lessen prejudices.

Teachers may improve curriculum design, adjust teaching methods, and make sure inclusive education promotes not only cognitive growth but also social-emotional learning and intercultural competency by gathering this data. Additionally, it enables organizations to advocate for more extensive systemic change by showcasing the concrete advantages of inclusive pedagogy.

Schools can establish more inclusive learning environments that not only affirm the varied identities of their students but also equip them for a pluralistic society by creating such lesson plans.

6. Delimitation of the study

This study is restricted to investigating the ways in which specific media and literary genres support inclusive education in classroom environments, with an emphasis on secondary and tertiary education. In particular, it looks into how fiction, non-fiction, movies, documentaries, and digital media might be used pedagogically to emphasise diversity, equity, and social justice. Only resources that focus on the experiences of marginalised groups—such as those based on caste, gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status—are included in the scope.

The study excludes early childhood education and primary educational settings, and it does not assess the larger structural or policy-level obstacles to inclusive education. Furthermore, it doesn't explore the technical production components of media material or offer a thorough examination of media effects. Rather, the focus continues to be on how teachers understand and apply inclusive narratives in curriculum development, classroom dynamics, and student involvement.

The primary geographical focus is on Indian educational situations; only when necessary for comparative understanding are global examples presented. Because the study is based on qualitative analysis and interpretive frameworks, quantitative evaluations like statistical measurements of the influence of media on academic performance are not included.

7. End Reflections

Incorporating inclusive media and literature into teaching methods has a profound impact on promoting empathy, equity, and social justice in the classroom. Teachers can question prejudices, validate marginalised identities, and foster a deeper understanding among students by carefully choosing books and narratives that are culturally relevant, especially those that represent the many realities of Bengal and India. In addition to widening viewpoints, inclusive teaching methods help students develop social awareness, emotional intelligence, and a sense of belonging.

This study emphasises how important it is to prioritise accurate representation, match inclusive resources with curriculum objectives, and give educators the tools they need to handle delicate subjects with tact. Furthermore, evaluating the effects of such techniques guarantees that inclusion in education is a quantifiable, lived experience rather than a theatrical gesture. Ultimately, schools can become really democratic places that equip students to succeed in a pluralistic and equitable society when inclusive content is methodically incorporated into lesson planning, teacher preparation, and classroom discussions.

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