

Why is Primary Education a critical program for Dalit empowerment?

- 1 Genesis of caste discrimination: For any freeborn child, Dalits included, discrimination (due to caste, sub-caste and gender) begins with socialization, of which education is an integral part. Primary education, which is currently an instrument to perpetuate caste discrimination, can be a powerful tool to abolish such discrimination.
- 2 Dalit children drop out from primary education and also from the path of liberation: One of the primary reasons for the increasing dropout rate of Dalit children from primary schools (50% of all Dalit children, and 64% of girls drop out) is discrimination practiced against them in school. By dropping out of school, these children lose the chance to follow the path of liberation.
- 3 Dalit children drop out from education and enter slavery: One of the reasons for Dalits' overt economic dependence on both non-Dalits and the wage economy (78 % of Dalits house holds are landless or nearly landless, depending on manual labour for a living)—and for their resulting exploitation—is a low level of education amongst Dalits. Most Dalit children drop out from schools to help their families as wage-earners.
- 4 Most children who drop out of school are girls: Most scavengers engaged in the obnoxious and degrading occupation of the manual handling of human waste are women. Most of the unorganized and unrecognized labour work force is composed of women. This is connected to the higher dropout rate of Dalit girls from primary education.
- 5 Children are deprived of empowerment: Navsarjan has realized the correlation between education and power. Today, Dalits suffer less from physical violence (though this is still a major problem) and more from powerlessness arising out of the increasing gap between Dalits and non-Dalits in education and empowerment.
- 6 Lack of education and continuance of caste-based occupations: The manifestation of caste discrimination is often through socially imposed caste-based occupations that further segregate Dalits from others. Education therefore is the key component to the eradication of caste-imposed occupations.

Objectives of the program:

- 1 Zero dropout ratio: To ensure that no Dalit children drop out before the completion of their primary education.
2. Ensure non-discrimination: To ensure through trained volunteers that no Dalit children face caste discrimination at school.
3. Link personal growth: Through community-based informal programs, ensure that Dalit children find an environment for personal growth.

4. Setting up a model: To set up a primary school model that can promote social empowerment.
5. Focus on female students: To ensure that Dalit girls get a priority-based opportunity in all education programs.
6. Focus on the most disadvantaged sections: To ensure that children of the most disadvantaged sections even within Dalits, such as the scavengers, get priority-based opportunities in all programs.
7. Social empowerment: Through primary education programs to ensure that children develop beliefs and values of the equality of all, and apply those values in practice.

Why is there a need for establishing model schools?

Navsarjan's long term goals for establishing model schools are:

- After 10 years, the children will become some of the torch-bearers in the Dalit movement.
- The children will not feel that they were born into a lower caste. Girls will demand higher education from their parents, instead of getting married young.
- Boys will not feel embarrassed to do tasks traditionally viewed as "women's work", such as sweeping, washing clothes, preparing chapati (Indian bread) or cutting vegetables.
- The children will demystify the myths on which caste and gender discrimination are based.
- The children will confidently demand their rights at school and in their villages.
- The children will sing the songs of Dalit empowerment, read and internalize the ideology of Dr. Ambedkar, the Dalit Leader and framer of the Indian Constitution.
- The children will ensure gender equality within their families, and dignity for their mothers.
- The children will strive to ensure the eradication of all forms of discrimination based on caste and gender.