

Intersections of Education and Civil Society in India: Working Towards an Sustainable Future

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Abstract

I stood at the back of a classroom in Kolkata, totally distracted by the noise of loud car horns blaring in the background. This classroom had only three walls, the fourth was open into a hall and courtyard of the school. The noises of the street were overwhelming as we strained to hear the instructions the teacher had given to her students. On the board she had written “My Dream for India is...” and students were asked to finish the statement and draw a picture. The class of over forty students included students from beautiful homes that lined the suburbs of the city, students that lived in the slums, and students that lived on the streets. Dressed in their uniforms it was impossible to tell the students backgrounds. Breaking the cycle of affluence and decreasing the gap between rich and poor is an important concern for education for sustainable development.

In this paper I will discuss the importance of education for sustainable development, and what this looks like in India, specifically focusing on individuals and issues in West Bengal. From Rabindranath Tagore experimenting with leadership models, to Mahatma Gandhi’s fight for independence, and Mother Teresa serving the poor in Kolkata, India has many amazing examples of individuals seeking to bring balance to an extraordinarily diverse country. This paper will also outline the reasons why education for the poor is an interregional part of sustainable development education. I witnessed several educational organizations that work creatively with the poor in India, empowering individuals at the grassroots level providing tools to break the cycle of extreme poverty. Hayden Hall in Darjeeling, Loretto Day School, and SASAC (the Saint Alphonsus Social and Agricultural Center) are just three organizations that have used the concept of sustainable development in its many forms to serve their communities.