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DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE INDIAN EDUCATION DURING COVID-19: CONTEXTUALIZING BOURDIEU'S FRAMEWORK

Abstract

There was a drastic transformation due to increasing COVID-19 cases since the Mid-March of 2020; all the educational institutions of India were partially closed. Physical classroom teaching was jeopardized, whereas online teaching was the common phenomenon. For a short period, the country was experiencing a bit of normalcy. However, the second wave (Delta plus) has created havoc and online teaching was back again. Due to effective vaccine interventions, there was a ray of hope. Again, with sudden spread of the new variant 'Omicron' during December 2021, the teaching was continued in online as well as in blended mode. During this transition from offline, online to blended teaching; digital divide was clearly visible across the social groups. This article broadly attempts to locate the prevailing notion of digital divide during e-learning, its causes, major sites and its reflection in the context of Bourdieu's different forms of capital.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Omicron, Digital Divide, Economic Capital, Cultural Capital, Social Capital.*

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered unprecedented disruptions across all aspects of human life, profoundly impacting education and pedagogy. The global lockdowns, particularly in India, have significantly distorted the teaching-learning process. Since the mid- March of 2020, all the schools, colleges, and universities have remained closed, leading to the suspension of traditional classroom instruction and forcing a shift in educational practices. The entire communication systems of the world in general, and India in particular have been forced to switch from the physical modes to online modes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has compelled the whole world to digitalize every sector of human social communication and transaction. The internet emerged as a crucial lifeline during this period, demonstrating its indispensable role in enabling various activities. It facilitated online classes for teachers,

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work from home for employees, and access to real-time updates on the current situation. Simultaneously, people relied on the digital platforms for essential services such as video conferencing, making e-payments, e-commerce, instant messaging, using information, telemedicine, social media, e-governance, and entertainment, highlighting the vast utilities of technology in maintaining connectivity and continuity amidst unprecedented challenges. However, in the domain of education, we have witnessed a significant shift from traditional, in-person teaching methods to online ones, particularly during the lockdown. Throughout the country, the educational institutions have altered their classes to digital mode with the help of Google Meet, Zoom, etc. Although it is a great opportunity to be familiar with a technologically advanced teaching-learning system, it cannot reconstruct the teaching-learning setting that a classroom builds in the physical presence of students and teachers.

The classroom teaching and learning play a vital role in enhancing students' abilities by fostering focus, determination, peer interaction and inter-cultural communication skills. In a physical classroom, direct interaction between students and teachers transcends socio-economic and cultural diversities, creating a participatory and engaging educational environment. This dynamic approach to the teaching-learning process is lost in online settings, where students are reduced to mere images in digital displays. Teaching space offers limitless opportunities for teachers to engage with students, understand their expectations and monotonies. However, during the first phase of COVID-19 lockdown, educational institutions worldwide suspended in-person classes and shifted to online modes of teaching, learning and assessment. This shift disrupted the organic connection between teachers and the students, altering the educational experience fundamentally. It has not only compromised our pedagogy but also created a new form of inequality in India, *viz*., digital divide, apart from the existing discrepancies on the grounds of caste, class, gender and religion (Mishra and Mishra 2020). Online education has been conducted during the entire year of 2020 since the pandemic gripped India in March; it was also again continued in 2021 due to the unpredictability of the situation and the apprehension of the second as well as third waves of COVID-19. The second wave (Delta plus) peaked in the month of April. The third wave seems to spread out by the name of 'Omicron,' a new variant of the pandemic in the last phase of 2021.

Some classes had partially begun in physical mode with COVID-19 guidelines in January 2021. The national vaccination program against the SARS-CoV-2 virus started in India particularly on 16 January 2021. However, the emergence of the second wave has forced the initiation online teaching once again all over the country. The second wave of COVID-19 had spread much faster than the first wave in the year 2021. The Indian government had imposed weekend lockdowns, full lockdowns, mini lockdowns, and night curfews in many states on account of the rapid spread of the virus. Those classes started

in physical mode in secondary, higher secondary, and higher educational spheres were forced to stop because of the faster spread of the virus. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation, both the HSC and the CBSE 12th examination of 2021 were called off. The higher education department advises all the universities and colleges to conduct online examinations for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. COVID-19 triggered a digital divide on a large scale in the country. However, this new variant during the third wave seems to have fewer health complications compared to the second wave. Subsequently one can witness the teaching-learning process going through the steady transitions from online to offline to blended mode. This article is an attempt to explore the digital divide in Indian education system COVID-19 era through the lens of Bourdieu's framework of economic, cultural, and social capital, highlighting its impact on online education.

Objectives of this Paper:

1. To demonstrate the digital divide in the Indian education during the three waves of COVID-19 pandemic
2. To analyze the major factors and sites of digital divide in India
3. To examine the notion of digital divide in the light of Bourdieu's various forms of capital

Methodology:

The present article is a review-based analysis of the emerging notion of the digital divide in Indian education during the three phases of global pandemic COVID-19. The key notion, i.e., the digital divide in the Indian education system, has been discussed in the context of Bourdieu's various forms of capital. The first section of this article reflects the notion of the digital divide and subsequently analysis has been made in the context of global and Indian scenarios. The next section examines the major sites of the digital divide in Indian education throughout COVID-19. Key factors responsible for the emerging trends of the digital divide in the Indian education system have been critically discussed in later part. The last section highlights the evolving trend of the digital divide with regard to online education and has been contextualized with Bourdieu's different forms of capital in multiple ways.

II. The Notion of Digital Divide

The concept "Digital divide" is first thought up by Larry Irving. It denotes the unequal and disproportionate pace of development in societies on the sphere of accessing the digital infrastructure and services. Digital divide characterizes the gap among people and social groups having access to the modern technology for information and communication in comparison to those who don't have the access. It also shows the discrepancy between those having regular, effective

access to digital and information technology and those without the access. It encapsulates inequality among social groups on use of hardware expertise, physical access, skills and resources. There are few stages of digital divide noticed everywhere in the globe. The perceived digital divide is noticed among the people, residing in urban and rural areas, between various socio-economic groups and among the economically developed and under-developed countries. Lastly, the inequality also survives between the educated and uneducated population (Steele 2019). Besides the above stages of digital divide in global context, the concept of digital divide may present globally, nationally, regionally and state-wise. Global digital divide reflects the differences in accessing the technology between countries. The regional digital divide denotes the differences in access to technology between regions (Continents). The national digital divide explores the difference in technology access between states within a country. Lastly, the state digital divide refers the differences in technology access within a state (Khan and Mahakud 2020:353-372).

As per the definition of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2001), the term digital divide states the gap between people, households, business and geographic extents in diverse socio-economic stages with regard to their opportunities to access Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The digital divide existed among the students with different class and regional boundaries in the context of education during the pandemic. The notion of the digital divide also has pictured the gap between haves and have-nots based on the capacity to access technology (Singh 2010:1-15).

Digital Divide in Global and Indian Scenario

At the outset, the notion of the digital divide is reflected in two major contexts in the field of education during the global pandemic COVID-19. Not only the Indian education system experienced digital inequality during the pandemic, but also the entire world was affected. The intensity and the extent of the digital divide in both the global and national spheres are explicated below.

Global Scenario

The global crisis because of the massive worldwide pandemic COVID-19 in 2020 pushed people into a digitalized world. However, everyone was not ready to grip a more digitalized existence. This pandemic enhanced the established challenges where billions of people remain without internet access, which can be considered a human rights issue (Rose 2021). Many rural and low-income communities across the globe could not have proper internet access on account of the pandemic. Generally, it is believed that technology enhances equality, but during this pandemic the means of division were more glaring. The gap between different groups having different social class status is widened

in both developed and less developed regions. On the positive side, the pandemic accelerates the uptake of digital solutions, tools, and services and speeding up the global transition towards a digital economy.

The least developed countries (LDCs) were the most suffering segments in terms of social and economic consequences of the pandemic, and further, they lag behind in the sphere of digital read at the downside. The education gap also expands in developing countries because of the multiplicity of inequalities. Low broadband quality destroys the ability to use teleconferencing tools. Mobile data costs also remain expensive across the developing countries. The global outlook of the digital divide is even grimmer. As to the report of the International Telecommunication Union (2019), in the developed world, around 87% of people have used the internet, which is 19% in least developed countries (LDCs) and 47% in developing, countries respectively. People without robust internet access are being left behind academically and economically. The entire globe faced the same problem because of the rapid spread of the second strain of COVID-19 in 2021. The entire world had again experienced the crisis for the spread of the Omicron variant in the form of third wave in 2021, which had affected many people from the younger generation, though its health effect was of lesser intensity. All three waves of COVID-19 variants severely affected the education system in the world in general and India in particular.

Indian Scenario

The shift towards online education in India creates many hurdles for all the universities, schools, and colleges. The union government had advised all the educational institutions across the states of India to take online classes as well as to conduct online examinations to avoid the spread of the pandemic since the mid- March of 2020; this was during the beginning of the nationwide lockdown. Some educational institutions were partially opened up, and few classes were conducted in physical mode in the beginning of 2021. However, due to the spread of the second wave (Delta plus) and third wave (Omicron) in 2021, again the teaching-learning system shifted to online as well as to blended mode. The online classes, online discussions and examinations were gradually inevitable for all the educational institutions across the country. Ever since the global pandemic, online education was like a painkiller to cure the paralyzed form of the teaching-learning system across the country as the physical classes are discontinued. A drive towards online education also disrupts the active teacher-student socialization. At the phase of online education, teaching becomes a "product" for marketing due to liberalization and privatization, respectively.

It has been noticed that, as per the report of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) on social consumption of education (2017-18), only 9% of the scholars joined in any course and got access to essential digital infrastructure. Undoubtedly, during the pandemic, online education has become invincible to the students. However, it is very difficult for many students,

especially the socio-economically disadvantaged students, to access the internet and online education. The report has revealed that students having access to computers with the internet, students with only computer access at home, and students with access to the internet by any electronic equipment constitute only 2%, 3%, and 10 %, respectively. Other disadvantaged students from the Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) backgrounds did not have access to technology for online classes. The data indicates the huge socio-economic disparities for technological access.

As per the data of UNESCO-October-2021 (India Case Study: Situation Analysis on the effects of and responses to COVID-19 on the education sector in Asia), the students studying in the government schools were the hard sufferers of Covid-19; more than 80% of school students in the states of Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh could not receive any educational supplies during the lockdown. The failure in the Indian education system was mainly because families did not have access to digital devices and e-learning tools. WhatsApp was the prime mode for sending education in both private and public schools during the pandemic, but more than 75% of parents had difficulties because of the absence of internet connection or the incapability to afford it. Keeping in view the picture of the digital divide in Indian education during the pandemic, some of the pertinent sites are described below.

III. Major Sites of Digital Divisions during the COVID-19

The term digital divide is a very complex phenomenon. It varies from nation to nation, state to state and region to region in accordance with the socio-economic and cultural settings of the locality. Apart from that, it also varies from group to group, rural to urban, male to female, government to private institutions, mainstream to tribal society, last but not the least, from normal to the special needs students at large. Remarkable sites of the digital divide during the pandemic in Indian education are explained below.

Urban versus Rural Students

The internet plays a very pivotal role in integrating as well as communicating with people. It brings people closer, having similar interests, and strengthens the relationships. In the context of the internet usage, social stratification is prominent on the basis of those having access to technology with internet and those who do not have it. People without access to technology are marginalized because they are unable to share and connect with larger social groups. Online education during the lockdowns has triggered the sharp difference between the economic classes. Students in the rural areas do not have smartphones and internet connections in comparison to the students of urban areas. The picture of online-education in rural areas was highly gloomy. Students from the families in rural areas having no smartphones, depended on a borrowed phone from the neighbors and distant relatives to attend the

online classes. People had a lack of money for the internet pack during the crisis of lockdown, though some families were used the smartphones. India is a rural based country where more than 68% of its population resides in remote villages. As per the NSSO data on social consumption of education 2017-18; it was revealed that against 42% of urban households, only 15% of rural households have access to the internet. With regard to the use of computers only 10% of students in rural areas know the operation of computers against 32% of students in the urban households. Joining classes for the students, who had left for home during the lockdown, was very challenging. There was a huge gap between rural and urban households in accessing online devices along with access to internet during the three waves of the pandemic, COVID-19.

Government versus Private Educational Institutions

The digital learning readiness gap between the government and private educational institutions of India initiated another sort of digital divide. Private educational institutions in India are quite quick and alert in shifting from physical to online modes of teaching and learning in the higher educational field. Apart from a few top-ranking institutes like IITs, IIMs and NITs and some well-established central universities, many government-run educational institutions struggled to adapt to the shift from traditional classroom teaching to online learning. Some pertinent issues, like the content suitability for online platforms, inadequate teacher training to use appropriate technology for online transactions, limited access among students to digital equipment, and financial issues to afford technology at large, are profoundly responsible for the encounters faced by the government institutions during the sickness (Kharbanda 2020).

Marginalization among Tribal Students

During COVID-19 pandemic, when the teaching-learning system switched to online platforms, tribal students faced significant challenges in attending the online classes due to a lack of access to electricity, television and smartphones in their homes. Students in the tribal areas were left from the online classes. Electricity is a kind of luxury in the tribal community and they focus mostly on livelihood issues, rather than their education (Lobo 2020). Many students with no classes spend their time playing with friends. Young students suffer the hurdles of not having electricity, computers, smartphones, television etc. The parents of tribal students are mostly engaged in agricultural work and private jobs; their earning sources were closed due to the hit of the pandemic, and they were unable to buy the equipment for online education such as smartphones, laptops etc. (Ahmed and Godiyal 2021:23-35). Online education has fueled another form of inequality for the tribal students and isolated them from education during the phase of lockdowns.

Students with Special Needs

The students with special needs were the worst affected section at the platform of online education; they have the intelligence and ability but lack the orientation and motivation to access technology. The special needs persons were mostly facing the challenges of the digital divide owing to lack of education, skills and inadequate broadband infrastructure, etc. They face multiple challenges initially for having special needs and for not having relevant technological access while facing social isolation during the COVID-19 lockdown next (Manzoor 2020).

Male versus Female Students

India is one of the developing countries with very high gender gaps in accessing technology. As per the report of India's Fifth Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-20), there was a significant digital divide in the country in relation to having rural women with the least internet access. The report has revealed that in the towns of India, the proportion is to some extent higher, with 56% of women having ever gone online in comparison to 73.76% for men. However, in rural areas only 33.94% of women have used the internet in comparison to 55.6% for men. Consequently, the section of women who always used the net is significantly dropped in rural India. The five states namely Bihar, Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Gujarat conveyed the lowermost percentage of urban women using the internet. On the other hand, the states such as Kerala, Goa, and Sikkim were the only three Indian states that reported more than 50% internet practice among countryside women (Krishnan 2020).

Digital divide in the education system of India is multidimensional in nature. The online teaching-learning platform has enhanced the gap between the privileged and underprivileged, rural and urban, normal and disabled students in many aspects. There is a lack of digital set-up for both the educators and scholars, which led to the gap in case of internet connection and access to devices. All the students are not able to own desktops or laptops and smartphones in the country, which is more essential for education in the online medium. Online teaching will be fruitful when it reaches every student. The penetration of the communication network to rural interiors must be of paramount importance, and financial backwardness of some students would be addressed by the government in the near future (Konikkal 2020).

India is the largest nation with many geographical disparities, which made the education process very difficult during the period of COVID-19. Now virtual reality becomes a widespread reality but it has also its own restrictions. The most remarkable one is the digital divide because of the absence of high-speed internet in the rural and isolated areas; especially the underprivileged segments are deprived of the online teaching-learning system. The second

important issue is that the economic backwardness of scholars to pay for devices for online classes. The third major issue is the lack of skills, knowledge and accessibility opportunities among the students in different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds across the country.

IV. Factors Responsible for the Digital Divide in India

India is a diversified country where multiple linguistic, cultural, religious, racial groups have been residing since time immemorial. Diversity may vary from region to region, state to state, and locality to locality. To provide online education in a diversified country like India is a difficult task for the government. The pandemic COVID-19 has encapsulated additional discrepancies (digital divide) apart from the exiting notions (caste, class, gender, religion, etc.). There are so many factors like social, geographical, cultural, and economic, those are responsible for the digital divide in the country. Some of the crucial factors are given below:

Low Literacy Rate

Low literacy among the parents in rural and tribal India has enhanced digital divide during the pandemic in particular and also in normal times in general. As per the Census report of 2001, literacy rate of the country has improved at 65.38%. It has shown that the male literacy rate was 75.66% in comparison to female literacy, 54.28%. As per the Census report, Kerala was the top literate state in the country, having a 90.86% literacy rate. Again, as per the Census report of 2011, the total literacy rate in the country was 74.04%, 82.14% for males and 65.46% for females. The gender gap in literacy rate enforced digital inequality between the male and female students in rural and urban sites during the pandemic; the literacy rate in rural areas was 68% (Male: 78.57, Female: 58.75) and in urban areas 84.98% (Male: 89.67, Female: 79.92). There was the wide gap between urban and rural literacy rate which triggered digital divide during the three waves of pandemic. The illiterate parents are unaware of online education and have a lack of will to provide the online equipment to their children.

Language

India is a linguistically diversified country where languages vary from state to state and region to region. Now in the age of information, the teaching-learning system is based on the English language (Panda et al. 2013:1-7). There are around 1576 mother tongues in India; students face the language problems to understand subjects effectively during the pandemic situation. Students face fewer language issues because the teacher is concerned to clear all the doubts in the physical classroom. However, there are the least chances to clear the doubts of students related to language in digital learning.

Gender Discrimination

Female students have less chance to access the internet in comparison to their male counterparts in the patriarchal society of India. The economic barriers are not only responsible for girls owning the mobile phones, but also some socio-cultural norms play very crucial roles. India is a patriarchal society where parents always emphasize their son's education compared to the daughters. Girl students spend a lot of time in doing domestic work by ignoring their studies. This prevailing notion of gender discrimination further intensified the inequality viz., the digital divide during the stage of COVID-19. As data has shown in the above discussion, girls have less chance to own mobile phones and other online equipment in comparison to their male counterparts.

Attitudinal Factor

It relates to the cultural and behavioral attitude towards technology and its use for the "binary" segments of people, i.e., male and female. Attitudinal factors are also culturally based in relation to personal communication and durable family and kinship networks. Thus, the use of computers for communication purposes may not be the higher priority for the female students (Bansode and Patil 2011:58-68).

The aforementioned factors are deeply associated with the prevailing notion of the digital divide at the platform of online education during COVID-19. The patriarchal setting of India impinges on digital inequality considerably. Besides that, the other three elements, such as usability, accessibility, and quality of use, are deeply connected with the digital divide in the context of Bourdieu's notion of capital significantly.

V. Reflecting the Digital Divide in the Context of Bourdieu's Notion of Capital

Pierre Bourdieu is broadly considered among the greatest late-twentieth-century social theorists. He is famous for his research in the domains of education and cultural stratification, which brings lots of theoretical ideas to social sciences. Bourdieu is best known for his important concepts of capital, field, and habitus to explore difference and stratification in disciplines of social sciences. Bourdieu is now also popular for his analysis of digital sociology.

Many theorists analyzed the notion of capital in multiple ways. As per the idea of Hodgson, capital now can be considered anything that has some social or economic significance; this explanation refers to everything that can be considered as capital in relation to economic value. Taking into account the view of Ignatow and Robinson (2017), capital can be understood as the co-opted ability and aptitude, which are interlinked with the scarce and socially valued resources. Bourdieu's notion of capital is different from Marx's idea of capital based on economic value. As per Bourdieu, 'capital' can be social, cultural or

symbolic in nature in various forms like the cultural, economic, and social. Apart from it, he is also famous for the notion of digital capital.

Digital Capital and Digital Divide During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Besides these three forms of capital, *viz*., the economic, cultural, and social capital, Bourdieu also focused on digital capital very well. Digital capital refers to the digital capabilities and their accumulation, including information and communication, security, content formation, problem resolution, and digital technology at large. It also enhances social inequality like all other capitals. As per the idea of Bourdieu, digital capital is a set of "internalized ability and aptitude" (digital competencies) as well as "externalized resources" (digital technology) that can be accrued and transformed from one ground to another. The degree of digital capital possession among the people influences the quality of internet experience and can be converted into other forms of capital in social sphere.

Weber (1949) also explores the notion of digital capital. "Digital capital is a bridge between online and offline life chances," opines he. It permits prior capitals to be exploited competently on the digital sphere before and after the online platforms (Ragnedda and Ruiu 2020).

During COVID-19, all the educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities) in India were declared closed, and they instantly digitalized their teaching-learning system by taking online classes which led another form of inequality called digital divide. Online teaching enhanced a new form of inequality on the ground of accessibility and adoptability of internet as well as instruments. More specifically, the three elements such as accessibility, usability, and quality of use, become profoundly connected with the modern notion of the digital divide. The digital divide in connection to accessibility refers to the potential that people have to access the resources between various socio-economic groups in regions and states. The digital divide in relation to usability signifies the lack of digital and ICT skills, like how to send an e-mail and to arrange a Google class. Ultimately, the digital divide in connection to quality of use refers to the skill and capability of conduct and using digital devices along with technology successfully; for instance, people faced problems while accessing good and relevant journals through the respective institution sites and also from the ID. In addition to the above-described factor, again the Digital Access Index (DAI), made by the ITU groups, viewed about five responsible factors for the digital divide, such as the quality, infrastructure, knowledge, accessibility, and use. Besides, the other factors like computer knowledge, use of the internet, acquaintance with English, economic inequality, device accessibility, physical disabilities, gender and age bias are also responsible for the digital divide at large. The accumulation of digital capital is very much intertwined with the possession of economic, cultural, and social capital in multiple ways.

Economic Capital and the Digital Divide in Indian Education

Economic capital represents the wealth and family income. As per the view of Bourdieu (1984), economic capital refers to the material assets that can be converted into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights instantly and reliably. Better life chances can be conserved as it includes all sorts of material resources. It also helps to enforce inequality and stratification in society. Economic capital is the paramount base of society to maximize inequality and exclusion. It has also generated a digital divide in the field of education during the period of three phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Van Deursen and Helsper (2015:29-53) have opined that socio-economically advantaged people can attain greater perceptible benefits from the internet practice compared to the disadvantaged sections. It means the socio-economically beneficial groups use the internet differently than the less advantaged counterparts, which further reinforces the already existing disparities.

At the time of a growing number of COVID-19 cases, the Prime Minister of India declared a national lockdown since mid- March of 2020. All the educational institutions were declared shut down and digitalized their sectors to continue education. However, inclusive education cannot be possible while some poor segments of the population are deprived of digital education. It is hard to visualize the use of digital platforms by such poorly equipped communities to access public services. As education is the public good, and it should be equally accessible irrespective of class, caste and gender divides. A new form of inequality has emerged owing to the unexpected digitalization of educational institutes in India during the pandemic COVID-19 without any pre-planning.

As most of the rural-based students, tribal students, children of migrant workers and people with disabilities, they are the worst affected during the pandemic (Paltasingh and Bhue 2021:138-151). They are unable to purchase smartphones and laptops for online classes as they live below the poverty line in India. The students, who belong to the richest, are able to own smartphones and laptops to access online classes, but the marginalized segments and the poor students are deprived of the online education. Unequal access to resources has led to the digital divide in the field of education (Sharma and Babbar 2020). Online mode of teaching further enhanced the notion of survival of the fittest as the elite and privileged segment of students having the capacity to afford as well as access smartphones and laptops may survive in the digital world. However, the students who belong to the underprivileged segments, such as tribal, rural poor, slum dwellers, and disabled are being eliminated from the online education system. Thus, as a result, the economic capital plays a vital role in creating a digital divide in India during the three waves of COVID-19.

Cultural Capital and the Digital Divide in Indian Education

Well-known French sociologist Pieree Bourdieu (1986) proposed cultural capital theory. His radical thought was based on the forces controlling the social classes in the 1960s. Bourdieu argues that socio-economic condition not fully explain the class differences in society, suggests some non-financial cultural capital that influenced social class formation. Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital can be inherited by several means to foster cultural depth for social movement.

Cultural reproduction can evolve from the sentiments, customs and habits of people. It is also linked with family inheritance and learned behavior. Cultural reproduction can also make class mobility in society, like the social and economic differences. In other words, cultural capital signifies all the cultural resources that people hold in social structure. Accomplishment of cultural depth comes from the combined effects of continued socialization, assimilation and indoctrination. The added accomplishment of the cultural capital activates the higher status among individuals.

Cultural capital is a person's implicit and explicit behavior which is expressed in the refined culture of the upper class, characterized in the form of social recognition (Meng and Hsich 2013 :82-87). Bourdieu categorized cultural capital into three different states, such as in embodied, objectified and institutionalized spheres. These spheres of cultural capital can be contextualized in relation to skill, education, knowledge and benefits which can help to achieve other resources. Focusing on Bourdieu's three states of cultural capital, first, the objectified cultural capital signifies the investment of tangible cultural items such as the attainment and possession of property, food, luxury goods, clothing, networks, etc. However, the embodied cultural capital comprises the intangible qualities like the conversation style, appearances, taste, cultivated demeanor, etc. Lastly, the institutionalized cultural capital generally refers to the official diplomas that individuals received from the institutions. Cultural capital is pertinent in the digital field, where education, knowledge, and their interface with digital capital might create advantages to obtain other resources on both online and offline platforms.

The users may take the benefits and become the dynamic proponent of cultural outcomes, when they see the positive relation between digital and cultural capital. They can contribute to the participatory culture and can create new knowledge by accessing different online resources. The negative relationship between the cultural and digital capital may have different consequences, these could be restricted the ability to contribute in participating culture; less opportunity to build new knowledge, disparities in retrieve different online resources with variations in cultural base.

As digital capital is unequally distributed in society, it can be accumulated and transferred from generation to generation (Rojas and

Straubhaar 2004:1-23). All the educational institutions of India declared a shutdown because of the rising cases of COVID-19 during the mid- March of 2020 and again in 2021. Online education acts as the catalyst to continue the teaching-learning system in India and also across the globe at that time. There was the paradigm shift in the system of education from classroom to virtual mode of classes. Against the problem of shutdown, all the educational institutions in India adopted online teaching method, and teachers were moving towards online classes, trusting in E-TECH platforms to conduct teachings from Skype calls to Whatsapp group discussions, Google Meet, Zoom apps, etc. These technology-assisted solutions permitted students to attend online lectures. However, there was another painful side of this story: the millions of Indians who lack internet access. The Digital divide has created a huge learning gap during the pandemic (Jain 2020). Bourdieu's notion of digital inequality has shown the inequalities in the field of IT access and internet usage. Command of digital aids is a prerequisite for the attainment of information during online communications. Not only do the more skilled internet users gain the profits by finding wanted information with a lesser amount of effort, but also, they use the internet in a more elastic and versatile manner than the less-skilled users (Ignatow and Robinson 2017:960-966).

Virtual classrooms would work properly when every student has to access the internet quickly; a laptop or smart phone and at least a reliable electricity connection are needed for it. The current report shows that, out of India's 1.2 billion people, only 600 million are associated to the internet specifically by the smartphones. This gap generated enormous barriers for the students (especially in rural areas) to access education during the online classes. While the academic year goes on, the same agenda across the nation, the unconnected scholars again lag behind in comparison to connected peers, as classes continued in online mode. Even the students with internet connections were unable to access the 4G speed required to properly online-spill video talks (Shahani 2020). Tribal students were struggling to have education owing to lack of access to electricity, television and smart phones at their homes during the pandemic COVID-19. Electricity is a luxury in few tribal villages. The tribal communities mainly rely on produce to live (Lobo 2020). Thus, online education for the tribal students is a daydream.

The above discussion reflects that apart from the economic capital, cultural capital also plays a very crucial role during the pandemic to enhance the digital divide on the grounds of accessibility, connectivity and usability skills.

Social Capital and the Digital Divide in Education

Social capital can be analyzed in multiple ways. Coleman (1990) explains social capital as the outcome of human and physical capital differences. Putnam (2001) describes social capital as a multidimensional capital that consists of

values, trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement. Bourdieu describes that social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources that are related to ownership of a strong network of more or less institutionalized relationship of shared acquaintance and recognition. Many studies argued that social capital has promoted the digital divide by analyzing the influence of digital capital on rising inequities for its possession. Online activities may enhance social, human, and economic capital at large. The major criteria, like human interrelationship, faith and environmental norms are becoming very essential to enhance social capital. In this context, Coleman analyzes that social capital has a variety of objects having two characteristics in common: initially, it consists of some features of a social structure, and later they enable certain actions of individuals who belong to the structure. Social capital is the deep-rooted relationships among the people in every society. In other words, social capital is the resource that can be used by the actors to realize their interests. As per the view of Coleman, two elements are inevitable for the formation of social capital: initially the dependability of an individual's social environment and, next, the extent of obligations among the individuals.

Putnam explains that social capital can be considered as norms of reciprocity, networks, faith and civic trust. All these can increase the capability of society by flattening the reciprocation among individuals. Social affiliation allows access to the group in which a person belongs. The remarkable elements of social capital include the social bonds, quality and number of networks, member's role and involvement in the network, information, trust and freedom of the individuals, etc. (Ragnedda and Ruiu, 2017).

Taking into account the view of Ragnedda (2018), the negative interrelationship among social capital and digital capital can be revealed in the following ways:

(a) Restricted ability to strengthen virtual social networks.

(b) Restricted capability to join in unofficial or official social systems.

© Partial ability to connect in diverse sorts of virtual social setups

Weak ties create digital inequality among the people at the time of COVID-19 because social networks were disrupted. As soon as the educational institutions declared shut down, many students left hostels and gone back to their homes. Students' interactions and mutual relationships are affected. The online mode of education could not reach each and every section of students. Some segment of the students was unable to access online classes due to a lack of social interaction among students. Generally, internet enhances social ties; however, lack of access to internet also leads to the isolation and exclusion of certain segment of people. Social relationships and social networks were, to a certain extent, disrupted among the students due to weak ties during the period of lockdown in India; all students were not able to form one group to

interact with each other. Online education could not get by all the students because of weak ties and lack of communication among multiple sections of students. Lack of values, trust, reciprocity and social ties among students during the lockdowns has emerged in a new form of divide in the field of education, *viz.*, and the digital divide.

The above depiction of the digital divide in the context of Bourdieu's various forms of capital during the pandemic COVID-19 reflects the vivid picture of the degree of prevailing digital discrepancy in multiple grounds. India is a diversified country where multiplicities of inequalities are traditionally prevalent, while the shift from offline to online education during the pandemic insisted on a new form of inequality that was ignored in the long past. Government and non-government organizations should take care of the problem, *viz*., digital discrepancy among students during the three phases of the COVID-19 pandemic while adopting the online mode of the teaching-learning system. Effective government planning is inevitable in the field of online education to solve the problem of the digital divide in the upcoming future.

VI. Conclusion

The worldwide massive COVID-19 pandemic has affected multiple, unexpected, and uncontrolled disruptions in each aspect of human social life (Chaudhury 2021:173-185). There was a paradigm shift in interaction patterns among the people during the pre- and post- prevalence of the pandemic. Human social interaction and communication systems were transformed into new patterns, from offline to online, from classrooms to online screens. The educational institutions in India are being partly paralyzed when the Prime Minister of India declared a national lockdown and shutdown. All the educational institutions of India (schools, universities, colleges) were closed from the mid-March of 2020 (first wave) and again in 2021 (second & third wave). Taking into consideration the students' education during these academic years, all educational institutions digitalized their segments by adopting online classes. However, the online education system has created a new form of inequality, *viz.,* the digital divide. Looking at the causes of the digital divide during the pandemic, one can find the linkages of Bourdieu's notion of economic, cultural, social, and digital capital with the prevailing notion of digital divide. The three forms of capital, like the economic, cultural, and social capital, are related with the digital capital and enhanced the digital divide in the field of education during the pandemic and still in the current scenario. Undoubtedly, all three waves of the COVID-19 virus have reflected some unexpected inequalities, including the digital divide across the globe, and the adverse consequences were more felt in the developing nation like India. However, though the pandemic seems to be normal in the present society but the online teaching and meetings are becoming popular in educational institutions. Nowadays, online interaction in the educational sphere is becoming the new-normal

phenomenon, though the physical classes started usually like prior to the pandemic. Digital divide is also an unsolved issue for the socially disadvantaged sections due to incapacity to access and afford the digital equipment's. Hence, further study needs to locate digital divide in post pandemic situation.

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