
A Study of Scheduled Caste and Higher Education Scenario in India

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Abstract: Modern education has brought the changes in the social and economic life of the Scheduled Caste community in India. But, all the castes included under the category of Scheduled Caste and women of Scheduled Caste category are not incorporated in the mainstream of higher education. Thus present study is about the Scheduled Caste and higher education. It mainly studies higher education scenario among Scheduled Caste, constitutional provisions for the educational development of Scheduled Caste and factors influencing higher education status among Scheduled Caste. The castes included under Scheduled Caste category are characterized by extreme social, educational and economic backwardness occurred due to traditional practice of untouchability. Hence certain provisions for the educational and economic development of scheduled castes were incorporated in the Constitution of India which is discussed in the present paper. The data about literacy and higher education enrolment among Scheduled Caste students in India is showing positive trend but the increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio is gradual. As well as it can be reflected that enrolment in the higher education is lower compare to primary and secondary level of education. The factor influencing higher education includes adverse economic condition, family background, discrimination in higher education, Language, government provisions, or facility, reservation policy, privatization, gender disparities, syllabus/curriculum etc. which discussed in detail in the present paper.

Keywords: Scheduled Caste , Higher Education, Constitutional Provisions, Gross Enrollment Ratio

Introduction: In India modern education is seen as a significant tool to bring about justice, liberty, equality and fraternity among the citizens of multilingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. Education in this respect is conceived as an instrument of social and economic change for the future democratic society. Today, illiteracy and low level of education is a general problem for the country which is critical across caste, religion, and region. Even though this is an issue of national concern, it is also a reality that education has proved to be the most powerful instrument for the social and psychological changes among different communities in India including scheduled castes. It has also influenced productivity and has brought economic changes. Among the Scheduled Castes it is observed that now their educational standards have been upgraded and they are able to acquire better positions in the society along with the others. Still, there is a need and scope for improvement in socio-economic conditions of this group because all the castes and all the people especially women belonging to scheduled castes, are not incorporated in the mainstream of higher education. In this context present study is an attempt to find out higher education status among SC in India. So, present study is based on the following objectives.

Objectives of the study

- (1) To Study Constitutional Provisions for the educational development of SC in India
- (2) To study higher education scenario among SC in India
- (3) To explain the factors influencing higher education status among SC in India

The following part of the paper defined the need of higher education for Scheduled Castes.

➤ Scheduled Caste and Need of Higher Education

Historically, the Scheduled Castes were known as Dasas, Shudras, Anaryas *Dalits*, *Pad-Dalitas*, *Harijans*, Untouchables, Depressed castes, backward castes etc. They were found at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and were outside the four *Varnas*. They are victims of hierarchical caste system in India. In the cast system

those who performing traditional, unclean or supposed polluting tasks were considered as low castes and untouchables. The practice of untouchability and the concept of impurity have denied the untouchable caste members the ownership of productive assets like land, as well as basic rights like education and equality, which resulted in extreme socio-economic deprivation of these castes.¹ Phule, Ambedkar and other thinkers have studied caste from all the aspects and their critiques of caste system explore true nature and practice of caste system. They found that ‘rejection of fundamental right to education’ as an important reason of backwardness among this social group and hence they suggest the program of spread of education, mainly higher education among the *Shudras*, *Atisudras* and women i.e. untouchables or Scheduled Castes.

Scheduled Castes’ are defined in Article 366(24) of the Constitution of India, as: “Such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of the Constitution.” In India, the total numbers of castes included in the schedule are 1241 (by adding new castes). The castes included are characterized by extreme social, educational and economic backwardness occurred due traditional practice of untouchability. Hence certain provisions for the educational and economic development of scheduled castes were incorporated in the Constitution of India.² These are discussed in the same paper.

Dr. Ambedkar has explained the need for higher education in the words: “The backward classes have come to realize that after all education is the greatest material benefit for which they can fight. We may forego material benefits, we may forego material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent. That the importance of this question from the point of view of the backward classes who have just realized that without education their existence is not safe”.³ *Phule, Ambedkar* also has assumed higher education as a source of material well-being and power. They also considered it as an important responsibility of government.

➤ **Constitutional Provisions for educational development of SC in India**

In the context of educational development Article 46 and its clauses, Article 15 (4), Article 29 (2) of the Indian Constitution are the important articles. Article 46 states that, “**The State shall promote, with special care, the education and economic interests of the weaker sections people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation.**” This article gives protection to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and weaker sections from social injustice and exploitation. The important clauses of the Article 46 are discussed here. The clauses mainly discuss the issue of financial responsibility of state and union government for the higher education of Scheduled Castes as stated below:

) “Governments both Union and State shall be required to assume financial responsibility for the higher education of the Scheduled Castes and shall be required to make adequate provisions in their budgets. Such provisions shall form the first charge on the Education Budget of the Union and State Governments.

) The responsibility for finding money for secondary and college education of the Scheduled Castes in India shall be upon the State Governments and the different States shall make provisions in their budgets for the said purpose in proportion to the population of the Scheduled Castes to the total budget of the States.

) The responsibility for finding money for foreign education of the Scheduled Castes shall be the responsibility of the Union Government and the Union Government shall make a provision of rupees ten lakhs per year in its annual budget in that behalf.

) These special grants shall be without prejudice to the right of the Scheduled Castes to share in the expenditure incurred by the State Government for the advancement of primary education for the people of the state”.

From the above responsibilities in the draft of Ambedkar, it is clear that the overall educational development of Scheduled Castes is the responsibility of both the State and the Union governments. It can be concluded that, Article 46 simplifies the concept of ‘**distributive justice.**’ The concept suggests the elimination of educational and economical inequalities by rectifying injustice resulting from the dealing between unequal groups of society. Thus, this is a significant article in India for the removal for educational and economic inequality.⁴

Along with this article two more articles are studied here are Article 15 (4) and Article 29 (2). Article 29 (2) states that “No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.”⁵ Thus, this article provides the protection from discrimination in admission in any government aided educational institutions on the basis of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Article 15 (4) states that “Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.”⁶ This article enables the government to make special provisions for the development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Under this provision state has reserved the seats for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students in educational institutions run by the Central and State government and government aided Educational institutions.

Under the Article 15(4) various welfare schemes are run by the Central Government itself and also through the State Governments. The schemes include grants for hostels, book banks, Ashram schools, voluntary organizations, research and training, low literacy pockets for girls, vocational training centers, scheme of village gram bank, post matric scholarships, national overseas scholarships, coaching and allied scheme, scheme for liberation of scavengers etc. The implementation of the provisions of the Constitution on priority basis has made these facilities available to the Scheduled Castes. Central Government is covering all activities given above through its various Ministries such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. As well as State Governments also have standing committees of State Assembly (*Vidhan Sabha*) on the welfare of these two communities. It implements its scheme parallel with central ministries through Department of Social Justice and Welfare.⁷ The effects of the schemes can be observed with the help of higher education scenario among SC in India as discussed below.

➤ **Higher Education Scenario among SC in India**

Table No. 1

Population of Scheduled Castes in India

(Figures in %)

Sr. No.	Census year	India (% to total population of India)
1	1991	16.48
2	2001	16.20
3	2011	16.60

Source: India, statistical abstract 1991, 2001 and 2011

The above table shows the increasing trends in the population of Scheduled Castes between 1991 and 2011. The percentage of Scheduled Caste population to total population of India was 16.48 per cent; this has increased to 16.60 per cent in 2011.

Table No. 2

Literacy rate in India (7+ group)

(Figures in %)

Year	Total Population			Scheduled caste Population		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1961	40.40	15.35	28.30	16.96	3.29	10.27
1971	45.96	21.91	34.45	22.36	6.44	14.67
1981	56.38	29.76	43.57	31.12	10.93	21.38
1991	64.13	39.29	52.21	49.91	23.76	37.41
2001	75.30	53.70	64.80	66.64	41.90	54.69
2011	82.1	65.5	74.0	75.2	56.5	66.10

Source: Census of India 1961 – 2011

The Literacy among SC has been increasing over a period of time is reflected from table 2. Literacy rate is an indicator of knowledge of understanding language and numbers. The information shows that there is gradual increase in the literacy among total population and there is a sharp increase in literacy rates among Scheduled castes, mainly after the year 1991. The literacy gap among scheduled caste females and total female population in India is higher compared to literacy gap among males of both categories. Thus, gender differences are also sharp in both the categories. The literacy is not enough to achieve better social and economic status. Following table shows GER in higher education.

Table No. 3

Gross Enrolment Ratio of Scheduled Caste and General Category students in Higher Educational in India (18 to 23 years age group)

Year	General category			Scheduled Caste		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2001-02	9.28	6.71	8.07	7.67	3.64	5.76
2002-03	10.30	7.47	8.97	8.00	3.73	5.97
2003-04	10.59	7.65	9.21	8.34	4.34	6.44
2004-05	11.58	8.17	9.97	8.10	5.20	6.72
2005-06	13.54	9.35	11.35	10.14	6.40	8.37
2006-07	14.53	10.2	12.39	11.52	6.96	9.35
2007-08	15.87	11.05	13.58	13.79	9.08	11.62
2008-09	16.1	11.3	13.8	13.2	8.6	11.0
2009-10	17.1	12.7	15.0	13.0	9.0	11.1
2010-11	---	---	21.44	---	---	13.5
2011-12	---	---	23.27	---	---	14.9
2012-13	---	---	23.59	---	---	15.12

Source: Compiled from various reports of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, India

The gross enrolment ratio among scheduled caste students demonstrated increasing trends during the period of 2001-02 to 2007-08. Thereafter, it has declined. For the general category students' enrolment in this period always increased. The gross enrolment ratio of female students has been increasing for both the categories. The gender gap has also increased during these years. The gap in the gross enrolment ratio of general category female and scheduled castes female students remained constant, that is between 2% to 3%. It can be concluded that, though gross enrolment ratio at higher education level for general category students and scheduled caste students has increased, the increase is not significant and it requires more efforts for improvement in the ratio.

From the above data on education it can be concluded that there is lowest enrolment at higher levels of education. Compared to primary education level and other levels of education also enrolment in higher education is lower.

Thus, lower enrolment in school and in higher education and higher dropout are the major causes of educational deprivation of SCs and marginal increase in enrolment is the result of efforts of government of India. Despite policy interventions qualitative and quantitative attainment among SCs not taking place due to

following factors, which are influencing on the education status i.e. enrolment, dropout and academic achievements of SCs.

➤ **Factors influencing higher education status among SC in India:**

Adverse Economic Condition: High dropout and lower enrolment rates are natural outcomes of poverty and unemployment among SCs in India. The chances of SC and ST students being educated beyond higher secondary level are comparatively lesser than that of non-poor and upper castes.⁸ The opportunity cost of sending children to school is very high among SC and ST as children make valuable contribution to the household economy as wage earners. Generally SC, ST children afford government school and grantable colleges, because it has been said that no fee is charged for these students. But, reality is that, the direct costs of education on special fees, examination fees, cost of reading and writing materials, clothing, travelling, study tours, donation to Parent Teacher Association and private tuition etc. practically make education out of reach of the poor. Direct cost is more than the income forgone of these students. Here thus the opportunity cost becomes a significant factor in schooling decisions.⁹ Government provides different types of financial assistance to meet the cost of education but the assistance becomes inadequate for meeting the total expenses in the degree education and professional courses. High stagnation or dropout rate at college level and discontinuation at primary level are the results of financial problems, domestic problems and lack of educational facilities in the governmental schools and educational institutions.¹⁰

Family background: Family plays important role in shaping personality and determining the wellbeing of the children. Family background and environment in the family are the major factors which influences enrolment, dropout and academic performance of the student in SC category. Firstly, occupation and income of the parents determines future economic and social life in the matter of acceptance or rejection of educational opportunities. Secondly, the children of the parents with high status occupation and higher family income perform well in academics compare to the children having low status occupations and lower income background. Because, in a better financial position, parents of high income category have time and money to invest in their children. Thirdly, the educational background of the parents also play important role in the education of the children. The parents who had attended school or colleges are literate and are more likely to send their children to school. The children of the parents with strong academic background perform well in the academics. In the case of SC students parental academic background is not positively influential, hence at all educational level including higher education, low enrolment, poor academic achievement and high dropouts are the results.¹¹

Discrimination in Education: The Practice of untouchability, caste and casteism prevails in the schools and higher education institutions. The inequality of opportunity and caste based discrimination are responsible for the low educational status of Scheduled Castes. The caste based discrimination is intense in technical and professional education compare to general higher education. Major and possible situations for such discrimination are caste records, internal examinations, experiments, viva-voce, classrooms and hostels etc. Though caste based discrimination exist it is very difficult to prove it as caste based discrimination. The academic success or failure and social adjustment or maladjustment of students from Scheduled Caste and tribal groups in higher education is strongly depends on their place within the social structure, which identifies them as stigmatized and assigns them various labels as 'not capable of success' and 'destined to fail'. This affects their educational achievement, mental health, creates inferiority complex and force to suicide also.¹²

Language: The education system which stresses the common language as a means of achieving a common nationhood is a significant factor which damages child's self esteem and reduces possibilities of successful learning of the later years. The denigration of home languages of students denies knowledge and it is a loss of a certain way of knowing the world at the school level. In the case of higher education, the access to higher education through entrance exam is possible for upper castes, which are reaping the benefits of education since a long time. Scheduled Caste students having poor language backgrounds mainly English language; did not feel comfortable to answer in English and hence denied access to higher education. Thus, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who are taking primary and secondary education in the languages other than English face various problems to complete higher education. Even though government of India given option to answer in the vernacular language of the student, the medium of instruction remains in English and

suggested reference material is also in English.¹³ This adversely affects the will to enroll in higher education and academic performance of the student.

Government Facilities or provisions: The provision of scholarships, special hostels, mid-day meals, book loans etc. have enabled many Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students to enter and persist in the school and higher education. Though this support is not adequate to meet all economic need and social needs of students, it influences positively the decision of students to continue their education. But these programs had very limited implementation, and their operation suffered from harsh bureaucratic apathy. The coverage of the programs continues to be inadequate and there is no effective monitoring arrangement for the actual operation of these programs, quantifying achievement targets and determining financial outlays. As well as the actual benefits are obtaining by the relatively more powerful and better off Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups. Quantitative expansion usually occurs as a result of political pressures and enhanced awareness. Over utilization and overcrowding in granted hostels, unhygienic living conditions, poor quality of food, nil medical facilities in hostels and Ashram schools, delay in disbursement of scholarships etc. reports inefficiency, mismanagement, partiality and corruption in the mechanisms of government facilities. Despite several weaknesses that have pointed, there can be no doubt that the positive discrimination provisions in education for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes plays important role in enabling access to all levels of education including higher education.¹⁴

Reservation policy: The increasing share of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe enrolments in higher educational institutions is the result of India's reservation policy in the admissions. It is very difficult to estimate just how much difference this policy has made. But, this policy always not plays positive role in the educational and social mobility, because caste is the base of this policy and this base has generated controversies, conflict and violence during last few decades in the society in general and in education in particular. According to critics, this policy lowers the academic standard and providing benefits to undeserving section of the society. So, this policy has become a subject to hatred of the public. In reality, in the private financing as well as public financing institutions reservation policy has not followed properly. Even government department, schools, universities and colleges has not considered caste quota in some states after 2000. ¹⁵ Thus positive discrimination policy itself had led to negative discrimination.

Privatization of Education: After new economic policy adopted by government, educational institutions are emerging like mushrooms. There are self financed institutions established at various educational levels mainly offering the professional courses like medical, nursing, engineering, MBA, MCA, teachers training etc. These institutions did not consider caste parameters during the process of enrolment of education. Government has to interfere for the caste quota. The privatization has also increased cost of education. Professional education become more expensive for Scheduled Caste, thus they cannot enroll for these courses due to high fee structure. Thus, in the A-class business management institution the Scheduled Caste participation is low or is near quota and not higher than their population proportion.

Gender Disparities: In the society the parameters of gender, class, caste and region are crucial in determining the access to higher education. Gender is the crucial determinant of women education in India. Girls' enrolment in India is low because of the low socio-economic status of the parents, who are more interested in their daughter in helping at home, taking care of siblings or earning income for the family. The dropout among girls is generally higher in secondary school, thus very few girls being able to enroll for higher education.¹⁶ Other than this early age marriages of girls in rural areas, dowry system and illiteracy of the parents are responsible for the low educational status of Scheduled Caste women.¹⁷

Syllabus /curriculum: Scheduled caste sought education as a mechanism to transform as well as enter mainstream society, but in the educational institutions the ideas of dominant group, their culture, religion, language etc. is reflected in the curriculum. The knowledge which is considered as useful is that which is linked to the values and lifestyle of dominant groups. This makes study useless and interest less for the students of Scheduled Caste and tribes as they do not find similarities with their culture and life style. Here the central question is the representation of the knowledge and culture of Scheduled Caste and other social groups becomes important. According to Kancha Ilaih, the knowledge and the language are rooted in and structured around production processes of lower caste and around socio-economic surrounding of their

habitat. This knowledge and skilled based vocabulary is did not find place in the curriculum. Contemporary Dalit literature is similarly ignored in curriculum and also does not reflect the historical significance of caste, gender, and tribe nor of the challenges faced by them. The scheduled castes and their issues and problems have remained unimportant to the curriculum and their representation if at all has been weak and vague.¹⁸

Conclusion: Above study shows enrolment among Scheduled Caste students in higher education in India is showing positive trend but the increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio is gradual. If government implements reservation policy, various programs and policies for educational development of Scheduled Caste students effectively; do the changes in syllabus, as well as tackle the problems discussed above, it is possible to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio and the decrease dropout.

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