

## **EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN INDIA AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: A STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLMENT BY SOCIAL GROUPS**

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### **Abstract**

For the last two decades, the country has been registered a significant growth endorsed to the higher education system which has been able to generate skilled manpower for the rapid industrialization and knowledge-based economy but the progress which has been registered in last two decades has not reached all sections of the society. This study has been done in order to examine attainment and enrolment by social groups and the prevailing inequalities in higher education in the light of affirmative action in India by using data from NSS (64<sup>th</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup>) round.

**Key words:** Higher Education, Inequalities, Affirmative action, Social group, NSS

## **Introduction**

Human development incorporates many dimensions. Among which Education has a pivotal role that can felicitates processes of human development. Education is considered responsible to develop manpower for different sections of society thereby improving quality of life. It help poor masses to come in the main stream of the nation, by making them self reliant and empowered. (GoI, 2016). Education is taken as the process which carries impact right from his birth till the person is alive. Thus during the course of his passage through various stages of development, a newborn comes into contact with the process of education which enables him to imbibe several important aspects of the ways of life his society (Siddiqui, 2004). It is a strong instrument of socio-economic empowerment and everyone needs the education to recognize one's meaningful life. The policy makers understand its importance and emphasize on its dissemination in their policy document on higher education in the XIIth plan (2012-2017) as "Education is the single most important instrument for social and economic transformation. A well-educated population, adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a precondition for growth to be inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from the employment opportunities which growth will provide." (Para 10.1 as described in approach to XIIth Five Year Plan). Thus education is a prerequisite for the overall growth of an individual so that he can contribute to nation building. In a big and diverse country like India, the educational attainment model is not similar and having a wide gap as Tilak (1992) found the inequality in the Human capital formation based on educational level attained by rural and urban population. The year of schooling is considered as the component of human capital which has created gap in urban and rural population. Inequality in any form affects the national growth which largely depends on the Human capital. Furthermore, gender based inequality in education is one of the pull back factor for socio- economic status and creates a growth lag. Additionally, educational inequality that are somewhat aligned with social, political, and economic fault lines creates resentments that leads to conflict and instability (Byrd, 2012). Thus it is essential that every section of the society have fair chances to attain education.

## **Objectives:**

Considering the present situation study specifically aims at

1. Assess inequalities in Higher Education levels by social groups, at the national level.

2. Analyse the current enrolment and attendance ratio by the social group in higher education.

### **Data Sources and methodology**

Among the prominent sources of data, the data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) 64<sup>th</sup> round 2008, and 71<sup>st</sup> round 2014, were used in the analysis. Enrolment rates, attainment rates, and completed rates at higher education level generated and compared by gender, social groups, and religion at the national level.

### **Social and Education Inequality**

Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality is one of the gutsy critics of modernity ever written. He distinguishes two types of inequality (i) Inequality by nature dispose by nature (such as differences in "age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or of the soul and (ii) social inequality authorised by the consent of men" (Rousseau, 1920) that can be, inequality in income, status, power, and honour. Rousseau devoted himself to explore the origin of the second one. Most of the social scientist works on latter kind only. Reply to social inequality falls into two distinctive categories: (i) exertion to justify the existence of inequality and assured acceptance of it either by reason or by forcing the underprivileged to accept by coercive power, and (ii) efforts to eradicate the causes and setting of inequality (Tilak, 1979). The advocator of the first category emphasizes the social structure and occupational specialization and it has arisen out of the needs of the society. The other school of thought asserted that inequalities are neither just, nor necessary, and on the other hand they are inapplicable to socio-economic development. In the modern world, particularly in India the policymaker also believe in this approach. Besides availing, this approach in a broader sense, Indian society is suffering marginal inequalities in terms of employment, caste-based income and education, gender, ethnicity and religion. The UNDP also define the Inequality as, "the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities, is a concept very much at the heart of social justice theories" (UNDP, 2015). Furthermore, the inequality is also associated with the opportunity of education which is measured by the 'range of well being conditioned which is beyond the control of individuals' (Asadullah, 2010). Social inequality has its deep roots in the unjust and unequal distribution of resources. "Social inequality exists when people frequently receive more of a society's 'valuable goods' than others owing to their position in the social network of relationships." (Hradil 2001:30 cited in Hoffmann, 2008). Thus society experiences inequality due to unfair ownership of resources.

The Sachar committee report highlights the inequality based on religion and the relationship between Educational inequalities and the economic inequalities as

Economic disparities are perhaps the most insidious, consequently perpetuating the cycle of inequality across generations. While educational inequalities are not the exclusive determinants of economic status, they contribute in creating disparities in earnings. Caste-based differences in education, income and other aspects of wellbeing have long been acknowledged. In recent years, similar religion-based imbalances have also been observed where Muslims are particularly vulnerable when compared with other religious groups such as Jains, Zoroastrians, Hindus, etc. (Basant & Shariff, 2009; GoI, 2006).

Equality of opportunities can be considered worth when it depends only upon the factors, for which persons can be considered responsible irrespective of the attributes which are outside their control. It further propounds that ethnicity, familial background; gender must not determine the outcomes of opportunities. Practically, it exists when individuals are compensated for their disadvantageous situations. (UNDP, 2015).

### **Affirmative Action and Implication**

Empirically these inequalities are the results of historical wrong; for which the social policies are designed to compensate these historical wrong through the affirmative action (AA). In Indian context, the programmes of affirmative action are primarily caste-based, which segregates whole population broadly into three, and now four, groups: Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), considered as a heterogeneous group of low castes Hindus, some non-Hindu communities and some tribes which are not included in the STs) and the General (others) (Deshpande , 2012). The reservation for the SCs and STs in educational institutions provided since the adoption of the constitution, the reservation to the major group OBCs which share 52% of the country population in 1980s now shrunk around 41% of the total population, provide on the recommendation of Mondal commission report which suggest 27% reservation in public employment and educational institutions. Besides educational expansion, there is hardly any reduction in educational inequalities which is described on the basic of their social origin; some studies have examined the failure and success rate of affirmative action empirically (Desai, 2008). However the idea of the reservation policy widely appreciated to reducing

existing social and educational inequalities but it needs further to establish a dynamic society which is free from any inequalities.

### **Composition of social groups in India**

Broadly speaking, India's society can be segregated into four social groups- SCs, STs, OBCs, and General (Azam, 2009). The group General mainly includes higher castes of the India. According to a survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) the population of different social group are; the OBCs population in the country is 40.94%, the SCs population is 19.59%, and STs Population is 8.63% and the rest at 30.80% (ToI, 2017)

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The expansion of higher education in the country is essential to generate more skilled manpower and need it to look for the perspective of future growth. In India, there are 819 Universities, 39071 colleges and 11923 Stand Alone Institutions (UGC, 2017; MHRD, 2016). In which 86.33% students are enrolled in Graduate courses, 9.70% students are in Post-graduate courses, 0.63% students are in Research/ Doctoral and 3.31% students are in other courses of total enrolment (Choudaha, 2016). We have lesser universities around one-half as recommended by the National Knowledge Commission, which recommends the 1500 universities in India to fulfill the aspiration of higher education.

If we study the growth in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, it increases from 0.7% in 1950-51, to 1.4 % in 1960-61, and to 8% in early 2000, and is still very low (about 10%) compared to the world average of 23.2%, and an average of 54.6% for developed countries, 36.3% for countries in transition, and 11.3 % for developing countries. The existing Enrolment of Eligible Ratio (EER) of roughly 60% indicates that 40% of students who completes their education from higher secondary programs are not coming for in higher education (Deshpande, 2012).

**Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)\* In Higher Education 2014-15**

Level	All			SC			ST		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Secondary (IX-X)	78.1	78.9	78.5	81.6	83.9	82.7	71.8	72.6	72.2
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	54.6	53.8	54.2	53.5	55.3	54.3	39.8	37.8	38.8
Higher Education	25.3	23.2	24.3	20.0	18.2	19.1	15.2	12.3	13.7

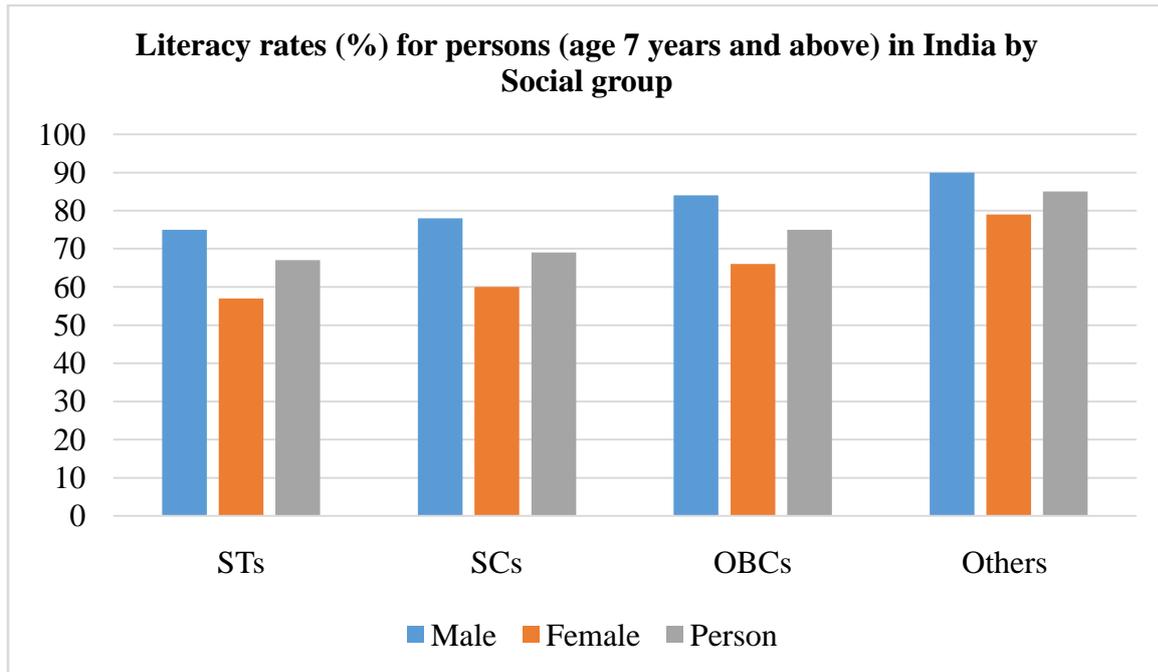
Source: GoI, 2016 Educational Statistics at a Glance, Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of School Education & Literacy.

\*GER is the ratio of the number of students who live in the country to those who qualify for the particular grade level.

The above table shows the GER in the higher education, the GER of SCs and STs are lower than that of all India level. The current GER is also an indicator of under-representation of these social groups in higher education in the country. The enrolment at secondary and senior secondary level of SCs is better than the All but at the higher level it down. In case of STs, It is lesser at all three levels than All.

**Literacy rates (%) for persons (age 7 years and above) in India by Social group**

The literacy rate is the most common indicator of educational attainment. The following chart represents the literacy rate by social groups in India.



Source: Author computed literacy data from NSS 71<sup>st</sup> round, 2014

The literacy rate of STs is 67%, for SCs it is 69%, for OBCs it is 75%, and for others, it is 85%. These charts show the significant difference in literacy rate by social groups in India, this difference can be seen further in higher education level.

**Distribution (%) of persons by completed level of education for each social group (All-India)**

Social group	Completed level of education		
	Secondary & higher secondary	Diploma/Certificate	Graduate & above
	Male		
ST	14.2	1.0	3.7
SC	17.3	1.0	4.3
OBC	21.6	1.8	6.8
Others	27.3	2.4	15.1
All	21.7	1.7	8.4
	Female		
ST	10.0	0.4	2.1
SC	11.8	0.6	2.4

OBC	15.6	0.8	4.2
Others	22.0	1.2	11.3
All	16.1	0.8	5.6
	Person		
ST	12.2	0.7	3.0
SC	14.6	0.8	3.4
OBC	18.7	1.3	5.5
Others	24.8	1.8	13.3
All	19.0	1.3	7.1

Note: Author calculates the data from NSS 71<sup>st</sup> round data, 2014 Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

The above table depicts that the completed level of education of Secondary & Higher Secondary, Diploma/certificate, and graduate and above level, the social groups STs, SCs, and OBCs are behind the 'others' and All India level. These figures show the current scenario of the higher education in the country which is evident of the persisting inequality in higher education. The level of education completed by social groups creates further effect in employment sector which is also evident in the inequalities of job market.

#### **Age Specific Attendance Ratio (%) for different age-groups for social groups**

Social group	Age- group (years)			
	6-13	14-17	18-23	24-29
	Male			
ST	87	70	26	3
SC	89	71	29	3
OBC	90	77	34	4
Others	93	85	42	6
All	90	77	35	4
	Female			
ST	86	65	20	2
SC	88	73	22	2
OBC	89	74	27	2
Others	92	82	38	3
All	89	75	28	2

	Person			
ST	87	67	23	3
SC	88	72	26	3
OBC	90	76	31	3
Others	93	83	40	5
All	90	76	32	3

Sources: NSS 71<sup>st</sup> round, 2014 Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

The age-specific attendance ratio reveals that Males and females belonging to social group ST had the lowest age attendance ratio for all the age-groups. In the age-group 14-17, the ratio of the OBCs is almost similar to those of all social groups that are combined but lower than the 'others'. In the age group 18-23 the age attendance ratio among all social group is lower than the others, it is 23, 26, and 31 for ST, SC, and OBC respectively and 40 for 'others'. In the age-group 24-29 years, the age attendance ratio among all the social groups is same i.e., 3, but lower than the 'others' for which the age attendance ratio is 5. It can be said the social groups SC, ST, and OBCs has lower representation in higher education on the basis of age attendance ratio.

If we take in the religion-wise enrolment in higher education; Muslims are the least representative in the higher education and witness of the facing inequality in education whether it is primary or higher level. The Sachar Committee (2006) in its report to the government of India quantified and highlighted the backwardness of Indian Muslims in education and aspects of life.

#### Age Specific Attendance Ratio (%) for different age-groups for religions

Religion	Age- group (years)		
	6-13	14-17	18-23
	Male		
Hinduism	91	79	36
Islam	85	64	24
Christianity	95	86	50
Sikhism	94	83	36
Other religions	95	89	46

All	90	77	35
	Female		
Hinduism	90	77	29
Islam	82	60	18
Christianity	93	89	46
Sikhism	96	83	41
Other religions	92	86	36
All	89	75	28
	Person		
Hinduism	91	78	33
Islam	84	62	21
Christianity	94	87	48
Sikhism	95	83	38
Others	93	88	41
All	90	76	32

Sources: NSS 71<sup>st</sup> round, 2014 Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation

The above table provides the age attendance ratio for different age-groups for major religions. In the age group of (18-23) years i.e., youth age, a stage which enter them into the employment sector, the enrolment of followers of Islam is 21% nearly half than the 'others' of 41% and two-thirds of the national level. It is clearly revealed that age attendance ratio for the people following 'Islam' is lower than the follower of all religions and of all-India age attendance ratio in all the age-groups.

### **The Social Group Composition of Higher Educational Institutions (types) 71<sup>st</sup> and 64<sup>th</sup> Rounds**

Social group	NSS 71 <sup>st</sup> Round- 2014			NSS 64 <sup>th</sup> Round- 2008		
	Govt.	Private Aided	Private unaided	Govt.	Private Aided	Private unaided
STs	8.0	4.5	3.2	3.9	2.2	2.3
SCs	17.9	12.1	12.3	14.8	14.4	7.3
Non-Muslim	32.5	35.3	44.5	29.7	37.1	38.3

OBC						
Muslim-OBC	5.2	5.3	4.2	3.2	3.3	4.9
Muslim-upper class	5.0	3.1	2.5	4.4	4.4	3.6
Non-Muslim Upper class	31.5	39.8	33.3	44.0	38.6	43.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Sources: (Boroah, 2016) <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/75683>

The above table represents the comparative picture of 64<sup>th</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup> round NSS data of the social group's composition in the higher educational institutions (types). During this period the Muslims has been registered the lowest growth among all socio-religious groups in educational institutions particularly in private unaided.

**Distribution of persons of (age 5-29)\* years by current attendance and current enrolment status for each social group all-India**

Social group	Attending		
	Secondary & higher secondary	Diploma/Certificate	Graduate & above
	Male		
ST	12.3	1.1	3.1
SC	12.4	1.6	4.1
OBC	13.5	2.0	5.3
Others	15.3	2.7	7.4
All	13.6	2.0	5.4
	Female		
ST	10.7	0.8	2.4
SC	12.3	0.9	3.7
OBC	12.1	1.0	4.6
Others	14.2	1.3	7.7

All	12.5	1.0	5.0
	Person		
ST	11.5	0.9	2.8
SC	12.3	1.2	3.9
OBC	12.8	1.5	5.0
Others	14.7	2.0	7.5
All	13.1	1.5	5.2

Note: Author calculates the data from NSS 71<sup>st</sup> round data, 2014 Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

\*For purposing to calculate the current attendance and enrolment in the higher education, the author excludes the data of enrolment in the primary and above level of education in the given age bracket.

The table shows the current attendance and current enrolment in higher education in India, at graduate level the current attendance and current enrolment of two social groups SCs and STs are nearly half than the 'others', it is 3.9% and 2.8% for SCs and STs respectively against the 7.5% for others. The group OBCs having (5.0%) nearly equal enrolment to the All India level (5.2%) but lower than the others (7.5).

The Indian education system is largely supported by the non-governmental institutions (Private) which fulfill the aspirations of the many people to attain higher education, the expenditure on these institutions is quite higher the government institutions. The following table illustrates the average expenditure per student oh their study.

**Average expenditure (₹) per student on course fee, pursuing technical /professional education at different levels by type of institution**

level of attendance	Type of institution		
	Govt.	Private Aided	Private unaided
Higher Secondary	1572	7775	11309
Graduate	25783	49914	64442
Post graduate and	24349	47800	75574

above			
Diploma (up to secondary)	6501	20860	22219
Diploma (higher secondary and above )	17659	38630	41585

Sources: NSS 71<sup>st</sup> round, 2014 Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

The above table displays the differences in expenditure on higher education according to institution type. The higher education through government institution is the best option among the economically lower status group. At the graduate and above level, the private unaided institutions are almost three times costlier than the government institutions which show that how much inequality persist in expenditure on education among institution type.

### Conclusion

This paper reviewing the inequality in higher education by social groups, the finding of the study shows the underrepresentation of certain social groups in higher education level. The data supports the prevailing inequalities in attainment and enrolment by social groups. However, on comparison from the previous NSS data, the social groups' presence increases in higher education, the trend of current enrolment in higher education indicate that the social group particularly OBCs of age cohort (18-23) and (24-29) years presence is almost equal to the national level but lower than the general population, it indicates that even after implementation of policy of affirmative action, the enrolment rate in higher education of eligible OBCs are still not increasing faster than the enrollment rates of the eligible general population (Basant & Sen, 2016). Here policy implication regarding the affirmative action (AA) played a positive role and the same argument can be applied to the other social group i.e., SCs and STs.

Though, as a note of restraint, it must be noted that the policy for reservation of OBC is quite new and it needs more time to assess its impact. In this context the study presents the current statistics of social group's enrolment in higher education and also compares it with the general population.

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