



DEPRIVATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Dr. Akhilesh Kumar Singh

Assistant professor (B.Ed.) Raath mahavidyalaya paithani

Abstract

Ger in higher educational institutions in India have been increasing rapidly over the past half –century , but the proportionate representation of SC/ST student is very slow. Their participation is characterized by clustering in the non-professional and non- market courses in higher education . Exclusionary trends in higher education for SC/STs are the result of financial barriers such as low economic status increasing private costs of education , proliferation of private and self-financing institutions , increasing costs of private education , and non-financial barriers such as less privileged socio-economic background, academic background socio-cultural background, generation gap, social support and socio- political factors .



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Introduction

Inclusion of scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) in the educational development is important as they constitute a sizable segment of the population of the country . The SCs and STs who have been historically out of the main stream development initiatives, partly due to the still continuing socio programmes in reaching this disadvantage group, still find themselves in difficult to compete terrains vis-à-vis the other sections in the society. SC/ST gained access to higher education but their participatin is characterized by clustering in the non-professional and non-market courses in higher education . Their development in higher education is painted with dull colors.

Deprivations over time negatively affected the living standards of weaker secions and since such deprivations are based on socio-demographic consderations, in order to formulate effective policies for overall development, the underlying aspects of such deprivations must also

be addressed. Objective of present paper is to examine the access and achievement of SC/ST in higher education in the post independence period and to analyze reasonable barriers with a view of future development.

Enrolment in Higher Education

Total student enrolment in higher educational institutions in India has been increasing rapidly over the past half-century, but the proportionate representation of SC and ST students in total higher educational enrolment has been slowly rising. From the late 1970s to the late 1990s the SC proportion rose 7% to 7.8% and the ST proportion rose from 1.6% to 2.7% only (Rao,2002). The SC proportion of all graduates of Indian higher educational institutions raised from 0.9 per cent in 1961 to 3.3 per cent in 1981, and the corresponding ST proportion raised from 0.1 % in 1961 to 0.8 per cent in 1981. No doubt the SC and ST proportions have increased further since then. But SC and ST graduates fall below their shares of the total Indian population (Thomas, 2004). It should be noted that data on SC and ST enrolment in Indian higher educational institutions are probably somewhat overstated, because some non-SC and ST applicants manage to claim SC and ST status and thereby gain admission via reserved seats to institutions for which they do not qualify as general (Velasker, 1986).

Enrolment in Higher Professional Education

Though the increase in Gross enrolment rates of SC/ST Communities in higher education is quite impressive but the increase in GER took place more in the traditional art and science courses rather than in the job oriented technical and professional courses (George,2011). The percentages of SC and ST students enrolled in the most prestigious programmes such as engineering, law and medicine – are much lower than for students from the rest of the population (Chanana, 1933 and Govt. of India, 1997). Only about a third of the SC and ST students enrolled in higher educational institutions in the late 1990s were pursuing higher education in relatively more desirable programme because of the existence of reservation policies in admission (Thoms, 2004). NO data is readily available on the total strength of student in higher and technical education colleges. During 2009 numbers of SC and ST students are disproportionately low in engineering and medical colleges than government owned and aided colleges where the fees are highly subsidized (George, 2011).

The situation of SC and ST students at elite of Technology (IITs), whose programmes attract many of the best student in India. Admissions data for 1994-95 indicate that only about half of

the seats reserved for SC Students were filled , while the corresponding figure for ST Students was less than one-sixth (Rao, 2002).

Public Higher Education Institutions : Equity and Quality

After independence, higher education was entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the constitutional provisions for positive discrimination with the responsibility of promoting social change until 1991 . Due to the twin concern with equality and excellence higher education in India was fully supported by the federal and provincial governments . However , since 1991 the policies of the government have dramatically changed. The government began to remove public support to higher education and make it self-financing while privatizing it. The gradual reduction in proportion of plan expenditure as well as capital expenditure in education sector in ratio of growing population prevented the government from expanding capacity of government and technical education sectors when the demand for enrolment and funds was growing . This vacuum was filled initially by the self-financing institutions .

Financial Barriers

Apart from the low financial status , financial barriers coming in the way of higher education being imparted to SC/ST students are under:

(1) Increasing private costs of education: Monthly Per Consumption Expenditure of STs is the lowest followed by SCs, OBCs and other ; they lagged behind 'other ' marginally in the case of food expenditure and substantially in the case of non-food expenditure . In rural areas , percentage of poor in the population was the highest among STs followed by SCs and the OBCs . The forward castes and communities have the least share of poor among them. Same trend is among the urban poor expect that the SCs have bigger concentration of poor than the STs (NSSO,2004-05). Though no fee is charged on the SC and ST students as supported by state funding in government institutions it is not totally free for them as they have to incur costs of several types. Study by kumar (2008) in government medical colleges report that about 90 per cent the cost of assistance given by way of lump sum grants , stipend and scholarships to SC/ST students is inadequate to cover fully these private costs especially in medical and engineering colleges.

(2) Proliferation of private and self-financing institutions; Since 1991, a large number of private colleges on self financing basis set up and their number has increased rapidly . Most of the increase in higher educational opportunities is taking place in the private sector rather than

in the public sector. For example , in 2002, of 977 undergraduate engineering colleges 764 (78.2%); of 1349 medical colleges,1028 (76.2%); of 505 management institutions,324 (64.2%), of 1521 teacher education colleges, 1038 (67.4),were private (Bhattacharya 2004). One of the recent trends in education system is the starting of a number of self-financing course in the government owned and government aided colleges . These course are mostly job oriented and were started avowedly to meet the emerging demnads of the job market. Access to education market abroad is also limited due to the high costs for availing education and their lack fo social network. Zachariah (2010) observed that the share of SCs and STs in the self-financing stream is considerably lower than in the regular aided streams. What is more, their share has been coming down both at the UG and PG level.

The private techinal education system in India is the largest in the world and the growth of higher education in last 15 years has been mainly in the private sector (Anandkrishnan, 2004). Traditionally , medical colleges in India were largely funded by the government and the contribution of private sector was negligible (Rao et al 2008).

(3) Increasing costs of private education: The private institutions levy hefty tution fees with/without the approval of the state governments. The state governments and the judiciary have to intervene in the matter of fication of fees. Increasingly, these colleges have sought the status of deemed universities in order to be autonomous in matters of curriculum and examination/evaluation Along with the financial exploitation of the students , the quality of their education is also suspect and so are their motivations (Anandkrishnan 2004). Another limitation is that since private institutions get land at subsidized rates, they are expected to reserve seas for the SC/STs but there is little monitoring of these measures and no statistics are finding it difficult deters these communitis to get education beginning from lower leverl and increasing folds in higher professional education.

Non-financial Barriers

Meta-analysis by George (2011) points that it is not poverty or other financial barriers alone that stand in the way of the SC/ST students getting enrolled in professional educational institutions. Even among the non poor households , the possibility of the SC/ST students facing larger non financial barriers inherent in their caste/community status and their social and educational background. These barriers ara low socio-economic background acadmic background , socio-cultural background, generation gap, social support and socio-political backgrounds.

Research implications

Many factors could be identified for the lag in higher education sectors in India which may be elusive to policy interventions. While such studies have greatly increased the understanding of the area, the inferences derived from these are limited owing to the reach of the indicators used in the studies. These studies tend to discount the dynamic classic, rural areas etc) when researching on issues like effectiveness of educational policies. The paucity of hard evidence related to social exclusion points to the great need for more systematic empirical research on this topic. Research for inclusive policy of SC/ST in higher education should incorporate the 'Process-Status-Process' approach i.e. identify and examine the process that led to social exclusion, evaluate the present status/magnitude and chart out processes to achieve the desired level of social inclusion.

Conclusion

Enrolment and achievement of SC/STs is increasing very slowly. Further strengthening of government support is needed to overcome the problem of barriers as they are not reaching to beneficiary to optimum level. Regular monitoring and systematic empirical research is required. Private professional institutions must realize the fact that apart from the projection of welfare view for weaker section of society by providing facility to SC/ST student, prospect of bright future placement value in present globalized India would certainly improve their reputations and income not only locally also globally.

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