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A STUDY OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF SCHEDULED CASTE STUDENTS IN INDIA

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Abstract:

The lower educational status of SC is the issue of concern of government. Despite several policy implementation quantitative & qualitative achievement in SC education is not satisfactory. This paper discusses the factors influencing enrolment, dropout and achievement of SC students. Adverse socio-economic condition of the family, bad quality of schooling, discrimination in education, inadequate provisions and implementations of reservation policy, language problems, gender disparity and weak representation of SCs in curriculum are the factors which have influenced the present educational status of SCs.

KEY WORDS:

Scheduled castes, educational status, dropout, enrolment, academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a strong instrument to achieve socio-economic, political and democratic development of the country. It is one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future. The investment in Education is required for reducing poverty and inequality. Because only education can be helpful in raising income through knowledge and skills, improving health as living standard increasing, promoting equality as poverty is reducing.

In India, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities are excluded from entering the field of education due to various reasons. Central government and State governments have adopted various policies and programs for inclusion of these sections in the field of education. Still educational status of these sections has not improved at satisfactory level.

Present paper is related with the education of Scheduled caste in India. The objectives of the paper are 1. To study trends in literacy, dropouts and enrolment in higher education of Scheduled Caste. 2. To study the reasons of high dropouts, low enrolment at all levels of education and poor academic performance among Scheduled Castes. This paper has also discussed background of Scheduled Castes, social exclusion of SCs, its effects and need of inclusive education.

Scheduled caste and need of inclusive education:

As per the Census 2001, the total population of the Scheduled Castes (SC) in India is 166,635,700, which is 16.2 per cent of the total population. The population of SCs is unevenly distributed among the states in India. Punjab has the highest proportion at 28% and Gujarat has lowest 7.41%.

The Hindu social order depressed SCs by imposing various social customs by taking the support of religion. Thus, SCs became powerless as access to resources, land, employment, education production or services were denied by social order. The practice of caste system has divided SCs and other castes. This

segregation by social exclusion or discrimination is the reason of lower educational status of SCs which further resulted in the less participation of SCs in high return occupations, overcrowding in low return income and pollution works like scavengers etc., high proportion of SC workers in unorganized sector, less participation in institutional agencies like Co-operative institutions, less participation in administration in government and private sectors, and political weakness. [Manjula Laxman]

To improve this position the policy of inclusive education is the only mechanism. 'Inclusive education means all learners, young people, with or without disabilities being able to learn together in ordinary pre-school provisions, schools and community educational setting with appropriate network of support services' (MHRD, 2003). In brief, inclusive education means that all students regardless of their strengths and weaknesses become a natural part of the mainstream education. Thus, the policy of inclusive education and schemes of educational empowerment of SCs became important for the inclusion of this section in the mainstream education.

Trends in educational development of SCs in India:

Following tables can show educational development of Scheduled Castes in India in various periods.

Table no 1.

Literacy rate (%) among General Category and Scheduled Castes in India.

Year	General Category			Scheduled Castes		
	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

Source: Census of India, 1961-2001.

Literacy rate is an indicator of knowledge of understanding language and numbers. But, literacy rate is not enough for achievement of socio-economic status in the society. Table 1 shows literacy rate among SC population in the period 1961 to 2001. It shows increase in the literacy among general category and Scheduled castes. Literacy gap in these categories has declined over period of time. In 1961 literacy gap between SC and general category was 18.35% which has declined to 9.11% in 2001. But the gap among SC females and general category females is higher compared to literacy gap among males of both categories. Gender differences are also sharp in both the categories.

Table No. 2

Dropout Rates (%) of Scheduled Caste students

Year	Primary(I-V)			Elementary(I-VIII)			Secondary(I-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1980-81	---	---	60.2	---	---	76.8	---	---	86.9
1990-91	46.3	54.0	49.4	64.3	73.2	67.8	74.3	83.4	77.7
2001-02	43.7	47.1	45.2	58.6	63.6	60.7	71.1	74.9	72.7
2009-10*	32.67	25.81	29.33	50.59	51.99	51.25	58.47	59.71	59.03

Source: George-Naseem, 2010. * MHRD Report, 2010-11

High dropout rate at different level of schooling is an indicator of the lower educational status of SCs. This table shows that in thirty years from 1980-81 to 2009-10, dropout at primary level (I-V) decreased by 30%, at elementary level (I-VIII) by 25% and by 25% at secondary level(I-X). This data indicates that 58.47% boys and 59.71% girls, total 59.03% of SC students do not go beyond secondary schooling in India due to various reasons. Thus, dropout rates clearly shows that only a small section of the SC students enroll for higher and technical education in India. Following table shows enrolment in higher education for all courses excluding XI-XII for general category and Scheduled castes.

Table No. 3

Gross Enrolment Ratio (%) in Higher Education

Year	General Category			Scheduled Caste		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2001-02	9.28	6.71	8.07	7.67	3.64	5.76
2004-05	11.58	8.17	9.97	8.10	5.20	6.72
2007-08	15.87	11.05	13.58	13.79	9.08	11.62
2009-10	17.1	12.7	15.0	13.0	9.0	11.1

Sources: compiled from Statistics of Higher & Technical Education, MHRD, Govt. of India

Higher education indicates human capital investment and development process. By higher education social groups can get more accession to economic resources, land, higher position jobs, income, economic luxury and most important, social status and human rights also. But enrolment of SCs in higher education in India is drastically lower in India.

In 2001 gross enrolment of SCs in higher education was only 5.76% which increased to 11.1% in 2009-10. A decadal increase is of only 5.24%. Whereas for general category it was 8.07% in 2001, it increased to 15.0% in 2010. In the year 2009-10 the enrolment among SC has declined compare to 2007-08. Gender gap in the enrolment among SC is constant i.e. average around 4%. The gap in the enrolment of SC and general category is not much sharp.

The lower enrolment in school and in the higher education is a major associated cause of educational deprivation of SCs and marginal increase in enrolment is the result of efforts of government of India. But it is fact that despite policy interventions qualitative and quantitative attainment among SCs not taking place due to following factors, which are influencing on the education status of SCs in India.

Factors influencing on educational status of Scs

Economic Condition: High dropout and lower enrolment rates are natural outcomes of poverty and unemployment of SCs in India (Wankhede, 2010). Among poor SC and ST chances of persons being educated beyond higher secondary level are comparatively lesser than that of non-poor (George-Naseem, 2010). Because the opportunity cost of sending children to school is very high as children make valuable contribution to the household economy as wage earners or household helpers. Generally SC, ST children afford government school, because it has been said that no fee is charged for these students. J.B.G. Tilak in his paper discussed how free primary education is not 'free.' 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. becomes practically out of reach of the poor. For the family with several children of school going age, the direct cost of sending all of them to school is unaffordable. Direct cost more than the income forgone or opportunity cost is a significant factor in schooling decisions. Opportunity cost of time plays a more important role in the decision of schooling of girls, because female children spend a greater amount of time on household duties compare to male child. (Bhatty 1998, Tilak, George, 2011.)

George explains about higher education costs, according to him to a large extent, the different types of financial assistance by the government meet the cost of education. But assistance becomes inadequate for meeting the total expenses in the professional courses.

Chouhan, in his survey found that due to better socio-economic condition urban respondents have completed their education on regular basis. But due to poor economic conditions, the rural respondents were forced to join any kind job to meet the financial need of their families. 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.

Family background: Family as a first educational institution motivates and induces children to perform activities, acquire informal education before approaching to formal education. Thus, 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 influence enrolment, dropout and academic performance of the student.

A Study by Acharya and Behera, revealed that how family background influences on educational achievement and educational status of SC students. Firstly, occupation and income of the parents determines future economic and social life in the matter of acceptance or rejection of educational

opportunities. This has been discussed in detail in the first point. Further he explained that the children from high status occupation and income family perform good in academics, compare to the children from low status occupational and income background. Because, in a better financial position, parents of high income category have time and money to invest in their children.

The educational background of the parents also play important role in the education of the children. The parents who had attended school or are literate more likely to send their children to school and the children of these parents perform well in the academics. Thus, home environment and positive attitude of the parents determine academic future of the children.

Family structure also influences the enrolment and performance of the children. The overall performance of the children from broken families (family where one parent is absent because of death, divorce, desertion etc.) is lower compare nuclear and extended family.(Bhatty, Aikara)

Thus, if occupational status, income level, educational background, attitude of the parents towards education etc. are negative, then low enrolment, achievement and high dropouts are the results.

Quality of the Schooling: The quality of schooling depends on 1.Physical infrastructure i.e. school building, classrooms, teaching aids, water and toilet facilities etc. 2. Size, competence and motivation of teaching staff, 3.The organizational and managerial factors that determine the effectiveness with which resources are utilized.

In India there is lack of quality of primary schooling as availability of physical infrastructure is inadequate. In rural areas school does not have pucca building, did not have separate classrooms according to grades, drinking water and toilet facilities also inadequate and unhygienic, basic teaching aids like blackboards, furniture etc. as well as facilities of laboratory, library are not available in the schools. Due to inadequate availability of toilets parents did not sent girls to schools. In some schools students sat on worn out mats or strips of sack or cloth brought from home.

In many schools of the country sufficient teaching staff is not available. One teacher is teaching to more than one class. Chronic teacher absenteeism, function of schools less than stipulated hours, teachers regularly coming late and left early after lunch break, deteriorated teaching standard, lack of commitment, devotion and accountability by teachers in their jobs etc. affect on teaching environment adversely. Moreover, teachers engaged in other government duties like election duties or census duties and if headmaster is not available handle whole schooling activities. In this environment teacher is not available at all for students to teach. Thus, the students mainly in government schools cannot compete with the students who has strong curriculum, command on English language, and have lot of information and knowledge.

Management of the schools without headmaster is a fact in some schools of country. In the remote areas where headmasters are available not possessed even minimum prescribed qualification or training. Managerial and organizational skills and abilities are not playing role in the selection and promotion of teachers and headmasters. Lack of effective management and administration had underutilized the factor important for quality schooling. (Bhatty, 1998)

Thus, the quality of schools does not sufficient level in comparison of private schools. The education quality is poor for poor SCs. In this situation dropout become high during completing the primary education. This further influence negatively on academic performance of the students who enroll for the higher education.

Discrimination in Education: The Practice of untouchability, caste and casteism prevails in the school and inequality of opportunity is responsible for the low educational status of SCs. The menial and polluting tasks are assigned by teachers to the dalit students in the schools and also face discrimination in the mid-day meal program in the state like Karnataka. Thus, they are subjected to unequal and discriminatory treatment in relation to their peers. This caste based discrimination leads to denial of full access to cultural and symbolic resources and social relations and also dignity and social respect at basic schooling level.

The caste based discrimination (in higher education) compare to general education, is intense in technical and professional education. Discrimination in academic activities takes place at all levels of education. But it is difficult to see, observe and record this discrimination. Major and possible situations for such discrimination are caste records, internal examinations, experiments, viva-voce, classrooms and hostels etc. Here it is difficult to prove this discrimination. Thus, academic success or failure and social adjustment of maladjustment of students from Dalit 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 is the behavior of upper castes against the lower castes in order to maintain the status in their favor. Because, the empowered section enjoys social and cultural capital and economic power against the individuals born in lower caste to control them. The caste based bias and prejudice expressed in any way leads to humiliation and the helplessness of the victims. This

affects their educational achievement, mental health, creates inferiority complex and force to suicide also.(Wankhede)

Language: The education system which stress on 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 (NCERT, 2010). In the schools other than state language, English is important. Much of the supplementary reading material has been supplied in English and could not be used by the teachers also, as many of whom had only 10 years of schooling, then how it will be possible for the children to learn unknown language (Bhatty,1998).

In the case of higher education, the access to higher education through entrance exam is possible for upper castes, who are reaping the benefits of education since a long time. SC students from poor language backgrounds did not feel comfortable to answer in English and denied access to higher education. Thus, SC and ST 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.(Bhatty, wankhede 2010,) This affects on the will to enroll in higher education and also influence academic performance of the student, pursuing higher education.

Government Facilities or provisions: The provision of scholarships, special hostels, mid-day meals, book loans etc. have enabled many SC and ST 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 on 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 monitoring arrangement for the actual operation of these programs, quantifying achievement targets and determining financial outlays. Thus, the actual benefits are limited and benefits largely to the relatively more powerful better off SC and ST groups. Quantitative expansion usually occurs as a result of political pressures and enhanced awareness.

Over utilization and overcrowding in govt. 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. Despite several weaknesses that have pointed, there can is no doubt that the positive discrimination provisions in education for SC and ST plays important role in enabling access to all levels of education including higher education.(NCERT)

Reservation policy: The increasing share of SC and ST enrolments in higher educational institutions is the result of India's reservation policy in the admissions. But, it is very difficult to estimate just how much difference this policy has made (Thomas). 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. (Wankhede). In the year 1981-85 anti-reservation conflicts show mindsets of the Hindu society in Gujrat about lower castes. In the private financing institutions reservation policy has not follow up properly. Even government department, schools, universities and colleges has not considered caste quota in some states after 2000. (Manjula). 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 ,most of 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. Secondly, privatization has increased cost of education. Professional education become more expensive for SC, thus they cannot enroll for these courses due to high fee structure. Thus, in A-class business management institutions the SC 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 with earning income for the family. The dropout is generally high in

secondary school and very few girls being able to enroll for higher education.(wankhede 2010). 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 SC women.(Chouhan,)

Syllabus in schools/curriculum: Scheduled caste who have sought education as a mechanism to transform as well as enter mainstream society the central question is the representation of their knowledge and culture and the critiquing of dominant knowledge and value system of their lived reality and of social relationships based on dominance/subordination and exclusion.

The school curriculum which spreads common nationhood and equality has made invisible historical contribution of SC and ST groups and communities, their culture, religion and language. The ideas of dominant group their culture, religion language reflected in the curriculum. As well as Indian texts uphold symbols of the traditional, male dominated feudal society and its outdated cultural values and norms. The value contexts of the education are not matching with the reality of the changing dynamic India. The knowledge which is considered as useful is that which is linked to the values and lifestyle of dominant groups.

According to 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 highly developed, but did not find place in the school 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. This should have been done through literature and social science curricula.

The purpose of education is mental awakening and the creation of a social and moral conscience. It aimed at establishing a social order underpinned by a new morality, based on values of liberty, equality, fraternity and rationality. But, school curriculum in India failed to reflect these expressions, of new moral order. The national or state school curricula or teacher training curricula were never guided by these radical visions. 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.

CONCLUSION:

This paper has discussed educational position if scheduled caste with the help of trends in literacy, dropout and enrolment in higher education. It also discussed the factors influencing enrolment, dropout and performance of SC students in India. Thus, it can be concluded that adverse socio-economic condition of the family, bad quality of schooling, discrimination in education, inadequate provisions and implementations of reservation policy, language problems, gender disparity and weak representation of SCs in curriculum are the factors which have influenced the present educational status of SCs.

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