

# Equity in Education: A Comparative Study

-Dr.Nandini Chakraborty, Asst. Professor, Department of Economics, Jangipur College, Jangipur, West Bengal.

**Abstract:** Caste and gender always remain as key concerns of social sciences in India that continues to be relevant even today. In ancient times, the Vedic culture which represented Brahmanic hegemony reinforced subjugation of the ancient subalterns like sudras and women. In colonial India, the education system was de-Sanskritized but the access to education remained as a distant dream to these two groups. The concept of inclusivity is introduced only in nineties with DPEP programme (1994) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2000) that calls for universalization of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance. This paper tried to analyze how far these programmes improve the position of marginalized people in Indian education system. Simple cross sectional tables and diagrams with reference period of 2010-11 is taken for discussion. the study is mostly descriptive in nature.

**Key words:** education, caste, gender, enrolment, dropout.

## I. Introduction:

Education is an instrument of socialization and is considered as a powerful catalytic agent for social change and empowerment. The Indian education system is among the largest in the world where nearly one fourth of its population is engaged in direct learning process. One of the primary flaw of this vast structure relates to the lack of inclusivity which means unequal accessibility of education among different segment of the community. One of the important barriers towards inclusivity is the caste affiliation of a person. Caste is one of the oldest concerns of India that continues to be relevant even today and determines educational attainment of a person in a negative fashion. However, since 1950, affirmative action programmes were taken by Indian social policy makers to eradicate this inequality. Keeping the importance of education, article 15 of the Indian constitution enables the state to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward class of citizen. In pursuance of these constitutional provisions, a series of measures have been taken both by the central government and the state government to spread education and literacy among the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other marginalized groups that include elaborate provisions of pre-metric and post-metric scholarships, abolition of user fees, reservation of seats in schools and colleges including technical and professional institutions, establishment of hostels and Ashram schools for the children of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Most of these programmes emphasized supply led investments whereas financial assistance is considered as a weapon to boost demand. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is perhaps the most important of such measures. Even though the primary objective of it is to provide useful and quality education for all children in the elementary levels i.e., in the 6 to 14 years' age group by 2010. But its secondary aim is to make up the social, regional and gender disparities, with the active participation of the local community in the management of the programme. This paper tried to analyze to what extent this policy prescription affects education attainment of marginalized communities.

## II. Objective of the study:

To examine extent of inequality in educational performance of schedule caste and schedule tribe population of India after the initiation of SSA.

## III. Literature review:

Porter (1965) points out education as a social capability in getting opportunities but there may exist some features that suppress the people through social categorization like caste, ethnicity and religions by dominant group. Pal (2016), in his study of anganwadi workers observed that the *dalit* children (lower caste children who were traditionally "untouchables,") are made to stand or sit separately with their plates from upper caste students. Hoff and Panday (2012) also found that publicly revealing caste identity that induced isolation impairs the ability to learn and may lead to drop out or low scoring educational performance. The caste stratification of education is more profound when women are considered. SC and ST girls are the worst off in terms of most educational outcome indicators (Pandey, 1990; Raju, 1991). According to MORD report (2007): 73% of SC women, 79% of ST women are illiterate. The dropout rate for the above mentioned social groups are 34.2% and 43.3% respectively. Discrimination could also exist within the schooling system e.g. in the form of hostile teacher's attitudes towards children belonging to

disadvantageous community (Jaychandran, 2002). However, the effect of caste bias on education, according to PROBE study, required further exploration. The PROBE study put forward that there is a doubt about the perceived presence of caste bias in education sector if household income, parental literacy status and related characteristics are controlled.

#### **IV. Data sources and Methodology:**

In this study, both primary and secondary data have been used. Secondary data were collected from various publications of Department of School Education & Literacy and Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt of India. The SCs are primarily concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, while the tribal are concentrated in the Central Tribal Belt comprising Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra (Source: Primary Census Abstract, Final Population Totals 2011, Directorate of Census Operations, Govt of India). The SC concentrated states are taken to describe the status for SCs and the ST concentrated states are considered for STs. The main technique of analysis was cross section tabular representation with the reference period 2010-11. Because 2010 was the then outer limit for achieving the goals of universalization of elementary education for all children across the country<sup>1</sup>.

#### **V. Basic Features of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:**

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is an attempt on the part of both the central and states to provide an opportunity for improving community-owned quality education to all children in the country. It serves as an umbrella scheme directly and indirectly beneficial to the girl child- the National Programme for the Education of Girls at an Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The financial sharing of expenses for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was on a ratio of 85:15 during the IXth Plan, was on a ratio of 75:25 during the X<sup>th</sup> Plan, and is on equal sharing arrangements (of 50:50) thereafter between the centre and state governments. The instruments of SSA embraces both demand and supply approach for boosting participation. On the one hand, it tries to meet the infrastructural gap existing in the system like improvement in school infrastructure and better accessibility to schools which are the necessary conditions for universalization of elementary education. It has been detected that school related factors are the most reported causes of leaving schools. Poor infrastructure, distance, irregularity of classes, attitude of teachers towards pupils causes dissatisfaction of both the pupils and their parents resulting dropouts (Sikdar and Mukherjee, 2012). On the other hand, they seek to reduce, both direct and indirect costs (opportunity costs) of education which is generally very high for the students of marginalized group. In this context, SSA instruments are expected to boost school participation for them.

#### **VI. Inequality in Education:**

Measuring inequality in education is not easy because of its vast domain. However, the study started with analyzing the crudest measure of educational attainment of a person or community i.e. its adult literacy rate. Simply speaking, literacy means the ability to read and write. It is itself a right and is the starting point of achieving other rights too. Literacy rate is defined as the total percentage of total population of the age of seven years who can read or write with understanding. Expectedly the literacy rate for the backward people was below their general counterpart (see Table 1).

Even after such earnest efforts, the literacy rate for the backward people was below their general counterpart. Apparently, it shows that the gap between other category (general) and SC reduced from around 21 percent to merely 6 percent for males after the initiation of SSA. The corresponding differential for female is 23.1 and 18.9 respectively. The social gap between ST and other category was 24.3 for males in 1999-2000 that reduced to 15.3 in 2007-08. Similar trend is found for females but the decline is less than that of males (7 percent lesser). For a more detailed picture, the following cross-state analysis is taken for consideration.

<sup>1</sup> The second goal of Millennium Development Goals as set by UNDP was to achieve universalization of primary education for all its 191 the then member countries.

**Table 1: Sex Distribution of Literacy Rate by Social Groups**

Social Groups	Male		Female	
	2001	2011	2001	2011
SC	66.6	75.2	41.9	56.5
ST	59.2	68.3	34.8	49.3
Non-SC/ST	78.7	83.5	58.2	68.2
ALL GROUPS	75.2	82.1	53.7	65.5

Source: Census of India, 2001 & 2011, Govt of India.

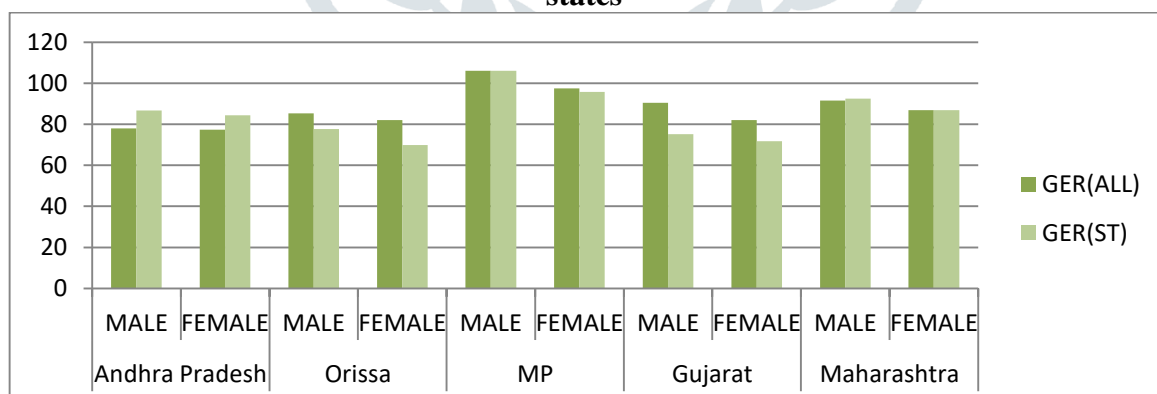
After literacy rate, the most commonly used measure is **Gross Enrolment Ratio** (henceforth, GER). GER is the ratio of the number of children enrolled at a given level (e.g. in primary school), whatever their age, to the number in the age range officially corresponding to that level (e.g. ages 6 to 12 years). A GER value approaching or exceeding 100 per cent indicates that the country is, in principle, able to accommodate its entire primary school-age population. However, it does not indicate the proportion of that population actually enrolled. GER is expressed as a percentage. It can exceed 100%, because of early or, more frequently, delayed enrolment, as well as grade repetition – which results in children other than those of the official age(s) being enrolled at a given level. The GER (primary) is more than hundred percent both for SC girls and boys in all the selected states which is a very positive aspect.

**Table 2: Enrolment Status for SC students in the selected states :2010-11**

Education Status	Uttar Pradesh		Madhya Pradesh		Bihar		West Bengal		India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
GER (Primary)	117.71	129.46	164.52	168.59	129.62	103.83	138.25	137.81	127.81	128.72
GER (Upper Primary)	73.05	72.15	120.20	112.18	55.34	40.59	93.48	95.60	90.51	86.59

Source: based on –

- India Human Development Report 2011- Towards Social Inclusion, Planning Commission, Government of India.
- Statistics of School Education, 2009-10, MHRD, Government of India.

**Diagram 1: Comparison of GER (Upper Primary) between all categories and STs in the selected states-**

Source: based on table 6A.7 and table 6A.8, India Human Development Report, 2011, Planning Commission, Govt of India.

Except Bihar, the gender differential for the states is less than ten percent revealing gender neutral character of GER among SCs. However, for upper primary level, only Madhya Pradesh registered GER more than hundred percent. The most surprising fact is that if we consider the GER for upper primary for all categories and GER for SC girls for the selected states (table 2), we will found that for all the states except Bihar the GER for SC girls is more than the GER of all category girls. Same trend with slightest differences are observed for SC boys. The progress in the educational status of STs- the other marginalized section is manifested in the associated table (see Diagram 1). The GER for primary is impressive one and the GER for upper primary is also at a comfortable level of more than 70%.

However, enrolment is just one side of development. It may be that the children who enrolled in formal schooling fail to continue the classes for various household responsibilities like sibling care, looking after

domestic animals, collecting water or wood for cooking, working as family labour in agriculture or in family business etc. Girls are more vulnerable to the situation because traditionally, girls are supposed to play the role of the housekeeper, after their mother. Thus, the enrolment rate collected from the educational institution could be higher than the attendance rate captured by NSSO through household surveys. So, to investigate the “true educational opportunity,” Net Attendance Ratio (NAR) is considered for analysis. NAR is the ratio of the number of persons in the official age-group attending a particular class-group to the total number persons in the age-group. The NAR for the selected states is distressingly lower for both the sexes for SC students except West Bengal. NAR for both primary and upper primary is the highest in West Bengal for both the sexes followed by Madhya Pradesh. It is surprising to note that among the five selected states, four are registered higher NAR for the girls students than the boys whereas at the primary level the situation is reverse (see table 3).

**Table 3: Net Attendance Ratio (%) for SC students in the selected states:2010-11**

Education Status	Uttar Pradesh		Madhya Pradesh		Bihar		West Bengal		India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
NAR (Primary)	41.4	39.6	61.1	26	42.5	37.0	74.5	81.8	66	60.3
NAR (Upper Primary)	45.1	47.3	46.5	56.9	41.8	24.8	72.8	75.0	60.7	55.4

Source:

- India Human Development Report 2011- Towards Social Inclusion, Planning Commission, Government of India.
- Statistics of School Education, 2009-10, MHRD, Government of India.

**Table 4: Net Attendance Ratio (%) for ST students in the selected states:2010-11**

Education Status	Andhra Pradesh		Orissa		Madhya Pradesh		Gujarat		Maharashtra	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
NAR Primary	89.0	90.6	81.2	77.4	84.4	82.5	85.1	83.3	70.2	65.6
NAR Upper primary	68.1	74.3	60.3	58.3	55.4	42.4	71.0	68.8	51.0	56.9

Source: Same as in table 3.

In West Bengal, the highest scoring state in this respect, NAR for female is nearly 7% higher than the boys at the primary level and 3% at the upper primary level. For SC students, the picture is somewhat illuminating where NAR is quite high relative to SC students. In primary level, nearly two third of the students regularly attend the school except the female ST students in Madhya Pradesh. In secondary, the condition of Maharashtra (only 51% and 57% for boys and girls respectively) and Madhya Pradesh (boys score only 55% and girls score only 42%) is dismal (table 4). This non-attendance or frequent absence leads to future drop-out which cannot be arrested even after the state geared Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan intervention.

**Table 5: Dropout rate (%) for SC students in the selected states: 2010-11**

Education Status	Uttar Pradesh		Madhya Pradesh		Bihar		West Bengal		India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Drop out (Primary)	45.05	26.25	25.06	22.91	50.92	49.70	23.50	19.18	32.37	25.31
Drop out (Upper Primary)	66.96	64.82	23.76	35.28	77.93	79.12	54.59	54.30	50.59	51.99

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table 6: Dropout rate (%) for ST students in the selected states: 2010-11**

Education Status	Andhra Pradesh		Orissa		Madhya Pradesh		Gujarat		Maharashtra	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Drop out (Primary)	34.51	39.64	31.74	32.04	22.66	17.76	50.89	44.52	24.34	23.07
Drop out (Upper Primary)	64.10	69.36	71.16	74.91	37.44	43.38	50.46	58.25	46.52	51.83

Source: *Ibid.*

The dropout rate for primary and upper primary is very high which is the general character of education scenario in India. However, for dropout in upper primary, the picture is different. In all the states and for

both the sexes, the dropout rate is higher for the SCs but the difference is noticeably high. For ST students, the differences in ST and all categories regarding GER is minimal but their differences regarding drop out is significant (table: 5 & 6).

The first thing that strikes us is the huge level of dropouts as a whole. In the primary stage i.e., in classes I-V, around 30 percent dropout that increased to around 42 percent in the next stage. The drop out data for both primary and upper primary level for SC is very high (as high as 67% and 65% respectively) in Uttar Pradesh. The data for ST follows more or less same figure for Odisha and Andra Pradesh. Expectedly, dropout is higher in upper primary level irrespective of regions and caste. Here, it is important to note that in the state of Uttar Pradesh for SC students, there is significant gender differential in dropout rate in the primary level; though the gap becomes almost void in the upper primary level. Again, in Madhya Pradesh the dropout rate (in the primary level) for SC and ST girl students is lesser than their male counterpart (table: 5 & 6). It implies that the factors influencing such discrimination affect boys and girls equally and perhaps we have to resort to economic or other determinants rather than the social one if we seek to explain the trend.

## VII. Caste and Learning Outcome:

The direction between caste and education can be interlinked in two ways. On one hand, caste acts as a factor preventing people for getting access to education and on the other hand, those with education considered to have lesser risk of caste vulnerability. However, there is a threshold level after which the returns to education (access to income generating activities, self-esteem etc.) outweigh the negative impact of caste stereotyping. Class X and XII board examinations are set here as the threshold limit. In this context, Jain and Arora's (1995) study found that performance of the students has narrowed down with the increase in socio-economic status of the students.

**Table 7: Performance of 'Dalit' students relative to their general counterpart: 2010**

Category	Pass Percentage in Class X Exam		Pass Percentage in Class XII Exam	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
ALL	73.2	77.4	73.2	81.5
SC	67.2	71.3	67.1	75.8
ST	62.4	61.5	65.2	69.7

Source: Department of School Education & Literacy, Govt of India.

Surprisingly, the pass percentage of girls is higher for all categories which means the enabling factors (government interventions, policy framing, various incentives etc) offset the native demographic or pre disposing factors and makes the total impact positive for girl students of all the categories. However, it is also observed that SC students are lagging behind their general counterpart; but the difference is almost six percentage points for male and female SC students and the difference is nearly ten percentage points for ST male and female students.

## VIII. Conclusion:

Even though the direct quantification of inequality (or equality otherwise) for a qualitative variable (viz. education) is difficult, the study tries to analyse it at a very crude level. The study found that, firstly, the caste differences both in literacy, enrolment is not too high to speculate that caste affiliation acts as an excluding factor at the beginning stage. However, boosting enrolment is not enough to overcome the learning gap of excluded groups because of the presence of high dropout rate both in primary and secondary levels. Secondly, the study also noticed that there is hardly any difference in dropout rates for boys and girls. In fact, in 2009-10, girl's rate is marginally higher for some selected indicators. Thirdly, the indicator for measuring learning outcome (pass percentage of class X and XII examinations) exhibits that Dalit students are lagging behind only six points implying that there is no significant quality deficit among Dalit students. This results underscore the importance of supply side interventions like *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* on reducing inequality of education in India.

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