JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Regional Perspectives on educational inequality in India: Progress and challenges

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Abstract

Universal access to quality education is a prerequisite in building a more prosperous world, and it is vital for meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Education enables people to take care of their health, work and promote social inclusion. In this regard the objective of the study is to assess educational inequality in India, focusing on disparities across states and social groups, identifying causes and analysing their impact on education access and quality. The study draws upon secondary data from trusted sources such as the Census report, the National Statistical Office and the National Sample Survey etc. to explore regional disparities and key challenges in education. The findings culminate in a set of actionable recommendations aimed at policymakers and education stakeholders with the goal of addressing inequalities, boosting literacy rates and ensuring more equitable access to education across the nation.

Keywords: Regional inequality, Education, India, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction:

Education inequality continues to haunt the growth and development of any nation, India included. While there have been improvements on the access of education, disparity continues to reign across regions largely due to factors such as socio-economic status, gender, caste and the rural-urban interference. The difference in education is stark when comparing states with different economic growth, infrastructure and social development, making the issue an engrained one.

- **What is Educational Inequality?**

Educational Inequality is the concept that implies unequal distribution of education resources, educational opportunities and outcomes. Socio economic are key factors that contribute to varying degrees of educational achievement. In India, this stems from the disadvantages from an historical perspective and systemic disadvantages faced by specific groups. Rural population, marginalized castes and even young girls are faced with poor quality educational access.

- **Inequality in the Indian Education System with Respect to Regions:**

The education system in India ranks among the largest in the world, but it is also plagued by massive regional imbalances. The economically and infrastructurally strong states like Maharashtra, Delhi and Tamil Nadu have better schooling systems with more opportunities. In contrast, states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and some regions in Rajasthan continue to struggle with overcrowded classes, poor facilities, unskilled teachers and terrible educational results. These gaps are further developed by the rural and urban divide where rural students lack infrastructure and modern educational technology. That gives a huge disadvantage to learners in these areas.

In addition, the education system and quality also vary greatly from region to region in India due to socio-political factors like caste-based inequalities that still persist and negate many towards suffering in several parts. Discriminations, lack of social networks and poor schooling facilities make it harder for marginalized communities such as ST, SC and other backward classes (OBCs) compounding existing gaps from all regions. Consequently, there exists an educational status and employability gap between regions.

This paper evaluates advancement and barriers regarding educational inequality in India with emphasis on regional and socio-economic gaps. Under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims for universal access to education by 2030, the study outlines ongoing inequalities even with changing policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP stipulates investment in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in order to facilitate improvement in disparities and young learner's development. This study attempts to understand the extent of the educational inequality problem in different states and social groups, their reasons, and their effect on the access and quality of education. This paper demonstrates some challenges such as regional and gender inequality that hinder educational progress despite policy intentions. Using secondary data from trusted sources like the Census, the National Statistical Office, and the National Sample Survey, the paper identifies key challenges, such as regional and gender inequality, which continue to hinder educational progress despite policy intentions and global commitments to SDG 4.

2.Objective of the study:

a) To assess disparities in education across different states and social groups in India.

b) To identify the key reasons behind the existing educational inequalities.

3. Literature review:

Sonalde Desai and Veena Kulkarni (2008) in their paper on **"Changing Educational Inequalities in India in the Context of Affirmative Action",** examined educational inequalities in India and found that, between the 1980s and 1990s, disparities in primary education between Dalits, Adivasis, and upper-caste Hindus decreased. However, inequalities in college education widened for most groups, except for Adivasi males. Their findings also showed that rising income enabled Adivasis to achieve better college graduation rates compared to Dalits, and there was little evidence that the "creamy layer" disproportionately benefited from affirmative action policies.

M. Niat Asadullah and Gaston Yalonetzky (2010), their work titled **"Inequality of educational opportunity in India: Changes over time and across states"**. explored the inequality of educational opportunity in India between 1983 and 2004, utilizing National Sample Survey (NSS) data. The study built on recent advancements in the literature on inequality of opportunity, particularly Roemer's theory, to construct three indices of inequality based on adult sample data. The results consistently highlighted Kerala as the state with the least inequality in educational opportunities. However, even when Kerala was excluded, there was considerable variation in educational inequality across other Indian states.

Madhusudan Ghosh (2011) has conducted a study on **"Regional Disparities in Education, Health and Human Development in India"**. This study examined how disparities in human development were linked to per capita income and social sector expenditure. It found that, despite differences in per capita income, there had been a convergence in human development across states. This suggested that poorer states, while not catching up with wealthier states in terms of income, had made significant progress in improving human development indicators such as education and health.

Sivakumar, Marimuthu and Vijay M (2012) in their paper titled **"Regional Disparities in Poverty and Education in India"**, examined the period from 1973-2005, focusing on 15 major states and all of India, using data from the Planning Commission, Census of India, and the Economic Survey. It identified significant disparities in poverty reduction and education development, particularly in BIMURAO states, which, despite having rich natural resources, lagged behind. The study emphasized that education was crucial for economic growth, generating opportunities, and improving social outcomes like health, fertility, and labor market participation.

S. H. Indurwade (2016) worked on **"Rising Inequality in Income and Education in India".** This paper relied on secondary data from various sources, including the OECD 2012 report, NSSO 66th and 71st Round, the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) and a range of socio-economic reviews and articles etc. from state, national, and international publications. Research estimated that the return on education in Asia was generally higher than the global average. Private returns were primarily concerned with individual benefits, while public returns highlighted the wider societal advantages of education. In comparison to high-income countries, low- and middle-income nations recorded higher social returns on education.

Mausam Kumar Garg, Poulomi Chowdhury and Md Illias Kanchan SK (2022) in their paper on **"An Overview of Educational Inequality in India: The Role of Social and Demographic Factors"**, emphasized educational inequality in India using National Sample Survey data. They found improvements in educational attainment, but inequality remained high, with rural-urban divides as key contributors. Factors like digital exposure, household occupation, and wealth influenced educational outcomes. The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions in rural areas, focusing on infrastructure, e-learning, and parental involvement to reduce disparities.

Anjali Yadav and Vipin Kumar (2024) conducted a study on **"Inequality in Access to Higher Education in India Between the Poor and the Rich."** This study used NSSO data (2019–2022) and showed a growing income gap in college enrollment in India, highlighting disparities in access to higher education, especially between the rich and poor and rural and urban areas. Despite reduced gender inequality, income remained a significant factor in educational access, urging policy attention.

4.Methodology:

The study used a descriptive approach to analyse educational inequality status in India, drawing on secondary data from sources like National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO 75th round data), National Statistical Office 2022 (NSO) and Census data were utilized to calculate literacy rates. Reliable secondary sources ensuring a comprehensive and accurate comparison of educational inequality trends.

5.Limitations:

The study relies on secondary data, which may have limitations in terms of accuracy and updates. However, using national and state-level reports helps address these concerns and ensures a broad range of data points for analysis.

6. Ethical Consideration:

This study used of publicly available records from numerous institutions, such as government websites, research papers etc. No ethical approval was required because the investigation used publicly available databases.

7. Findings of the study:

Objective 1: To Assess disparities in education across different states and social groups in India.

Finding 1: Literacy Rate, Enrollment and Gender Parity in Education across Different States, Social and Religious Groups

Based on the NSO data provided, several key observations can be made about the literacy rates in rural and urban areas across different states in India, with comparisons between female and male literacy rates. Below are some important findings and discussions:

- **Table 1: Literacy rates in urban and rural areas for the year 2022.**

State/ Region	Rural Male	Rural Female	Rural Average	Urban Male	Urban Female	Urban Average
Jammu & Kashmir	84.9	66.0	75.8	88.5	75.7	82.6
Himachal Pradesh	92.3	79.2	85.6	97.8	93.0	95.5
Haryana	85.8	66.4	77.0	92.5	81.2	87.3
Punjab	85.5	74.0	80.0	93.8	86.7	90.5
Uttarakhand	93.1	79.0	86.1	97.4	85.9	92.0
Uttar Pradesh	80.5	60.4	70.8	86.8	74.9	81.2
Delhi	-	-	-	-	89.4	-
Rajasthan	77.6	52.6	65.5	91.1	74.6	83.5
Gujarat	85.7	68.0	77.0	95.2	86.3	91.1
Maharashtra	87.0	71.4	79.4	95.3	87.6	91.7
Chhattisgarh	84.0	65.6	75.0	91.8	82.3	87.2
Madhya Pradesh	77.9	61.0	69.8	91.4	79.5	85.8
Bihar	78.6	58.7	69.5	89.3	75.9	83.1
Jharkhand	80.6	61.4	71.4	92.6	78.6	86.1
Odisha	82.0	72.6	77.4	91.4	84.7	88.1
West Bengal	85.5	74.0	80.0	93.8	86.7	90.5
Assam	89.4	79.9	84.9	96.1	91.4	93.8
Andra Pradesh	67.5	53.4	60.4	86.3	73.1	79.6
Telangana	70.6	53.7	62.1	91.7	79.0	85.5
Karnataka	78.2	63.1	71.4	92.5	81.2	87.3
Kerala	96.7	94.1	95.4	98.2	96.4	97.3
Tamil Nadu	84.2	70.8	77.5	92.3	85.9	89.0
All-India	81.5	65.0	73.5	92.2	82.8	87.7

(Source: Data collected by the National Statistical Office survey)

Table-1 indicates the following outcomes-

1. Gender and Rural vs. Urban Disparities:

- **Rural-Urban Gap**: Urban areas generally have higher literacy rates than rural areas, a trend seen across most states. For example, in Andhra Pradesh, male literacy in rural areas is 67.5%, while in urban areas it is 86.3%. Female literacy follows a similar pattern, with rural literacy at 53.4% and urban literacy at 73.1%, emphasizing the role of urban infrastructure in improving literacy.
- **Gender Gap**: A significant gender gap in literacy is observed, particularly in rural areas, where male literacy often surpasses female literacy. For instance, in Bihar, rural male literacy is 78.6%, compared to 58.7% for females. However, urban areas show smaller gaps, with Kerala's urban literacy rates for males (98.2%) and females (96.4%) nearly equal.

2. State-wise Observations:

- **Kerala**: Kerala leads with high literacy rates across all demographics. Rural literacy for females (94.1%) and males (96.7%) is notably high, while urban literacy rates (96.4% for females, 98.2% for males) are among the highest in India.
- **Delhi**: Delhi's urban literacy rates are high, but the lack of rural data limits a full analysis of rural-urban disparities.

❖**States with Lower Literacy Rates**:

- **Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh**: These states have lower rural literacy rates, especially for females. In Rajasthan, rural male literacy is 77.6%, while female literacy is only 52.6%, indicating a need for targeted educational improvements.
- **Bihar**: There is a significant rural-urban gap in Bihar, with rural males at 78.6% literacy and urban males at 89.3% and a similar pattern for females.

❖**States with High Rural Literacy Rates**:

- **Himachal Pradesh**: Rural literacy rates are close to urban levels, with rural male literacy at 92.3% and female literacy at 79.2%, suggesting effective rural education programs.
- **Uttarakhand**: Shows strong rural literacy, with males at 93.1% and females at 79.0%.

3. All India Averages: The national average for rural literacy is 73.5%, and for urban literacy, it is 87.7%. This reinforces the consistent urban advantage in literacy rates. Additionally, the national average for male literacy is higher than for female literacy, both in rural and urban areas (81.5% for rural males vs. 65.0% for rural females; 92.2% for urban males vs. 82.8% for urban females).

▪ **Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Individuals Aged 3-35 Years by Enrollment Status Across Social Groups in India.**

Social group	Rural			Urban		
	Never enrolled	Ever enrolled		Never enrolled	Ever enrolled	
		Not attending	Attending		Not Attending	Attending
Male						
ST	15.7	41.8	42.5	7.1	46.0	47.0
SC	14.6	41.4	44.0	9.1	49.6	41.4

OBC	12.2	40.1	47.6	7.7	44.3	47.9
Others	9.5	43.7	46.8	5.5	47.0	47.3
All	12.6	41.3	46.0	7.1	46.2	46.6
Female						
ST	23.9	39.6	36.6	11.7	46.6	41.8
SC	21.9	37.3	40.9	12.7	45.9	41.4
OBC	20.1	39.0	41	11.0	47.0	41.9
Others	11.5	46.0	42.5	6.4	46.6	44.1
all	19.3	40.0	40.6	9.6	47.8	42.7

(Source: NSSO 75th round data)

Table- 2 indicates the following outcomes-

1. **Enrollment Trends by Social Group:**

- **Male Groups:**

  - **ST:** Rural areas have 15.7% never enrolled, while 42.5% have enrolled and continuing the education. Urban areas show a smaller gap, with 46.0% ever enrolled continuing attending.
  - **SC:** Urban areas show lower never enrollment (9.1%) compared to rural areas (14.6%).
  - **OBC:** OBC males have the highest continuing enrollment (47.6%) in rural areas, with a similar rate in urban areas (47.9%).
  - **Others:** This group shows the lowest never-enrolled rate 9.5% in rural areas and 5.5% in urban areas.

- **Female Groups:**

  - **ST:** Female STs have higher never-enrolled rates in rural areas (23.9%), but enrollment increases in both areas.
  - **SC:** Female SCs show lower enrollment in rural areas (21.9%) and higher in urban areas.
  - **OBC:** Female OBCs have relatively lower never enrollment rate in both rural and urban areas.
  - **Others:** Female 'Others' have the highest enrollment rates, especially in urban areas.

2. **Comparison Between Male and Female Enrollment:** Females generally have lower enrollment rates than males, particularly in rural areas, with the gap narrowing in urban areas.

3. **Rural vs. Urban Enrollment:** Urban areas have higher enrollment rates than rural areas, especially for ST and SC groups. The 'Others' group shows minimal disparity between rural and urban enrollment.

4. **Overall Trends:**
   - **Males**: Higher enrollment overall, with the 'Others' group having the highest figures.
   - **Females**: While rural enrollment is lower, urban enrollment is significantly higher, indicating better educational opportunities in urban areas.

▪ **Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Individuals (aged 3-35 Years) by Enrolment Status Across Religious Groups in India**

Religious group	Rural			Urban		
	Never enrolled	Ever enrolled		Never enrolled	Ever enrolled	
		Not attending	Attending		Not Attending	Attending
Male						
Hinduism	11.6	42.0	46.5	6.0	46.8	47.2
Islam	19.8	37.1	43.2	11.9	44.4	43.6
Christianity	12.7	39.9	47.4	5.5	44.8	49.6
Sikhism	5.7	45.6	48.8	3.6	49.7	46.7
All	12.6	41.3	46.0	7.1	46.2	46.6
Female						
Hinduism	18.7	40.1	41.1	8.2	48.8	43.0
Islam	24.8	38.0	37.2	16.6	43.9	39.6
Christianity	14.6	42.3	43.1	4.4	41.2	54.3
Sikhism	8.0	50.0	42.0	4.3	52.6	43.1
All	19.3	40.0	40.6	9.6	47.8	42.7

(Source: NSSO 75th round data)

Table -3 indicates following outcomes-

1. Enrollment Trends by Religious Group:

❖Male Groups:

- **Hinduism:** Males in rural areas have 11.6% never enrolled, with 46.5% ever enrolled currently attending. Urban areas show slightly lower enrollment (6.0%).
- **Islam:** Rural male Muslims have a higher never-enrolled rate (19.8%) and an ever-enrolled currently attending rate of 43.2%. In urban areas shows highest never enrollment rate (11.9%).
- **Christianity:** Male Christians show consistent enrollment both in rural and urban areas.
- **Sikhism:** Sikh males have the lowest never enrollment rate (5.7%).
- **All Groups:** Enrollment rates are generally higher in urban areas.

❖Female Groups:

- **Hinduism:** Female Hindus have a higher never-enrolled rate in rural areas (18.7%) and 8.2% rate in urban areas.
- **Islam:** Female Muslims have the highest never-enrolled rate in rural areas (24.8%) and 16.6% in urban areas.
- **Christianity:** Female Christians show slightly lower urban enrollment (41.2%) compared to rural (43.1%).
- **Sikhism:** Female Sikhs have the highest enrollment in urban areas and rural areas.
- **All Groups:** Female enrollment is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas.

❖**Overall trends:**

- **Male vs. Female Enrollment:** Males generally show higher enrollment, especially in rural areas, with Sikhism showing the highest enrollment for both genders.
- **Rural vs. Urban Enrollment:** Urban areas consistently show higher enrollment rates across all groups, particularly for females. Rural areas, especially for Muslims and Hindus, show lower enrollment rates.

- **Table 4. Gender Parity Index (GPI) by Education Level in India.**

Education Level	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Primary (I-V)	SC: 1.00, ST: 0.96, All: 1.00	SC: 1.01, ST: 0.97, All: 1.00	SC: 1.01, ST: 0.98, All: 1.01	SC: 1.02, ST: 0.99, All: 1.02
Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	SC: 1.03, ST: 0.98, All: 1.03	SC: 1.03, ST: 0.98, All: 1.02	SC: 1.02, ST: 0.98, All: 1.02	SC: 1.02, ST: 0.99, All: 1.02
Elementary (I-VIII)	SC: 1.01, ST: 0.97, All: 1.01	SC: 1.01, ST: 0.97, All: 1.01	SC: 1.02, ST: 0.98, All: 1.01	SC: 1.02, ST: 0.99, All: 1.02
Secondary (IX-X)	SC: 1.01, ST: 1.00, All: 0.99	SC: 1.01, ST: 1.00, All: 0.99	SC: 1.02, ST: 1.01, All: 1.00	SC: 1.02, ST: 1.01, All: 1.00
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	SC: 1.04, ST: 0.97, All: 1.00	SC: 1.05, ST: 1.00, All: 1.01	SC: 1.07, ST: 1.02, All: 1.03	SC: 1.08, ST: 1.05, All: 1.04
Higher Education	SC: 0.93, ST: 0.85, All: 0.94	SC: 0.96, ST: 0.87, All: 0.97	SC: 1.02, ST: 0.92, All: 1.00	SC: 1.05, ST: 0.97, All: 1.01

(Source: UDISE+, Department of Higher Education)

The GPI is calculated as the ratio of the Female Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to the Male GER. It indicates gender equality in educational participation. A GPI value of 1.00 reflects gender parity, while values above or below indicate a bias towards one gender. Here the data on the Gender Parity Index (GPI) across various education levels from 2016-17 to 2019-20 reveals significant insights regarding gender equality in education for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and the general population (All).

- **Table 4 indicates the following outcomes-**

1. **Gender Parity Trends:**

   - **Primary Education (I-V):** GPI for SC students improve from 1.00 to 1.02, while ST students show slower progress from 0.96 to 0.99, still below parity. The All category maintains a GPI of 1.00.
   - **Upper Primary (VI-VIII):** SC students' GPI stays strong around 1.02-1.03, but ST students remain slightly behind with GPI of 0.98-0.99. The All category shows good gender balance at 1.02-1.03.
   - **Secondary Education (IX-X):** GPI for SC students increase slightly, while ST remains stable at near-parity levels. The All category reaches 1.00 by 2019-20.
   - **Senior Secondary (XI-XII):** SC students show notable improvement in GPI (1.04 to 1.08), and ST students improve to 1.05. The All category reaches 1.04.
   - **Higher Education:** SC students' GPI rises from 0.93 to 1.05, surpassing parity, while ST students improve from 0.85 to 0.97, still below parity. The All category reaches 1.01.

2. Overall trends:

- **SC Students:** Consistent improvement in GPI across all education levels, particularly in higher education, reflects successful gender-targeted interventions.
- **ST Students:** While improvements are visible, ST students still lag behind in several levels, especially in primary, secondary, and higher education, with a more significant gap for ST girls.
- **National Trends (All Category):** The GPI shows good gender parity in most education levels, with improvements in senior secondary and higher education.

▪ **Table 5: Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) by Education Level (Rural + Urban) (NSS 75th round)**

State/Region	Primary	Upper Primary	Primary + Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Post Higher Secondary
Jammu & Kashmir	101.9	96.9	100.2	115.7	77.0	33.1
Himachal Pradesh	99.3	92.1	96.1	100.9	110.0	34.1
Haryana	106.3	93.8	101.3	96.7	70.3	25.2
Punjab	101.5	94.9	99.1	95.4	79.4	22.8
Uttarakhand	99.8	111.6	104.0	80.7	98.7	32.8
Uttar Pradesh	98.9	88.8	95.4	64.0	60.4	20.8
Delhi	100.2	90.6	96.8	93.6	86.2	29.6
Rajasthan	110.5	87.0	101.6	82.4	70.1	28.9
North Region	102.3	94.5	99.3	91.2	81.5	28.4
Gujarat	106.0	89.1	99.1	88.3	59.2	15.3
Maharashtra	101.1	96.5	99.5	104.0	74.3	29.3
West Region	103.6	92.8	99.3	96.2	66.8	22.3
Chhattisgarh	102.4	100.4	101.6	90.3	66.9	16.2
Madhya Pradesh	95.3	97.5	96.1	83.9	59.9	17.3
Central Region	98.9	99.0	98.9	87.1	63.4	16.8
Bihar	97.2	98.4	97.6	82.0	65.7	16.2
Jharkhand	112.4	91.4	105.3	90.0	51.3	16.8
Odisha	103.4	91.3	98.8	87.2	53.4	14.5
West Bengal	101.6	105.2	103.0	92.4	59.3	18.7
East Region	103.7	96.6	101.2	87.9	57.4	16.6
Assam	103.6	104.7	104.0	86.6	56.0	16.5
Northeast Region	103.6	104.7	104.0	86.6	56.0	16.5
Andhra Pradesh	99.3	81.9	92.2	114.1	73.0	26.1
Telangana	92.8	106.1	97.7	109.0	96.8	28.9
Karnataka	104.4	90.1	99.3	92.3	73.4	21.7
Kerala	103.6	97.2	100.9	97.3	99.9	37.6
Tamil Nadu	103.2	96.4	100.4	89.8	91.9	35.4
South Region	100.7	94.3	98.1	100.5	87.0	29.9
All India	101.2	94.4	98.7	86.4	68.3	22.8

(Source: NSSO 75th round)

Table-5 indicates that the gross attendance ratio (GAR) at the primary level was lower in the Central and Southern regions compared to the national average. For the upper primary/middle level, the West region recorded the lowest GAR. When combining primary and upper primary/middle levels, the South region had the lowest GAR. At the secondary level, the Northeast region had the least GAR, while the East region showed the lowest GAR for the higher secondary level. The lowest GAR at the post higher secondary level was found in both the East and Central regions.

At specific levels:

- **Primary level:** Telangana (South region) had the lowest GAR.
- **Upper Primary/Middle level:** Rajasthan (North region) recorded the lowest GAR.
- **Primary + Upper Primary/Middle level:** Andhra Pradesh (South region) had the lowest GAR.
- **Secondary level:** Uttar Pradesh (North region) had the lowest GAR.
- **Higher Secondary level:** Jharkhand (East region) recorded the lowest GAR.
- **Post Higher Secondary level:** Odisha (East region) had the lowest GAR.

These disparities in GAR across different states and regions are likely due to variations in socio-economic development, cultural factors, access to education, and other influencing factors.

- **Table 6: Net Attendance Ratios (NAR) by State and Region:**

State/Region	Primary Level	Upper Primary/ Middle Level	Primary & Upper Primary /Middle Level	Secondary Level	Higher Secondary Level	Post Higher Secondary Level
Jammu & Kashmir	88.1%	78.4%	91.3%	69.6%	46.1%	29.5%
Himachal Pradesh	90.1%	80.6%	90.7%	68.2%	67.5%	28.1%
Haryana	89.9%	77.2%	90.6%	63.2%	47.5%	20.9%
Punjab	88.8%	78.1%	90.9%	65.3%	49.7%	19.8%
Uttarakhand	87.1%	80.8%	94.0%	54.3%	56.5%	29.2%
Uttar Pradesh	79.2%	59.7%	84.0%	38.7%	33.1%	17.2%
Delhi	89.8%	73.1%	87.3%	62.4%	54.0%	23.4%
Rajasthan	89.5%	69.1%	88.2%	48.2%	37.8%	24.2%
North Region	87.8%	74.6%	89.6%	58.7%	49.0%	24.0%
Gujarat	93.7%	77.6%	91.0%	62.9%	40.6%	13.7%
Maharashtra	90.8%	79.9%	91.6%	71.9%	54.1%	25.9%
West Region	92.3%	78.8%	91.3%	67.4%	47.4%	19.8%
Chhattisgarh	91.6%	82.1%	93.5%	64.9%	46.6%	13.1%
Madhya Pradesh	81.6%	72.9%	86.6%	54.1%	36.3%	13.5%
Central Region	86.6%	77.5%	90.05%	59.5%	41.45%	13.3%
Bihar	81.9%	70.3%	87.8%	54.2%	35.7%	13.2%
Jharkhand	87.7%	61.3%	91.2%	50.0%	29.0%	13.8%
Odisha	91.2%	77.0%	91.5%	67.6%	37.4%	12.0%

West Bengal	88.4%	77.8%	91.9%	60.2%	36.3%	15.8%
East Region	87.3%	71.6%	90.6%	58.0%	34.6%	13.7%
Assam	88.8%	77.0%	93.0%	57.3%	36.8%	15.2%
Northeast Region	88.8%	77.0%	93.0%	57.3%	36.8%	15.2%
Andhra Pradesh	86.5%	64.6%	84.5%	70.7%	51.8%	22.4%
Telangana	82.2%	75.8%	91.0%	76.8%	75.2%	25.2%
Karnataka	95.3%	80.7%	94.5%	75.8%	56.5%	20.2%
Kerala	94.4%	86.3%	93.6%	76.9%	78.5%	33.2%
Tamil Nadu	89.5%	81.3%	92.3%	66.7%	61.8%	30.4%
South Region	89.6%	77.7%	91.2%	73.4%	64.8%	26.3%
All India	86.1%	72.2%	89.0%	57.6%	43.4%	19.4%

(Source: NSS 75th round)

Table-6 indicates that there are minimal differences in NAR at the primary level across regions. However, Uttar Pradesh (North), Madhya Pradesh (Central), Bihar (East), and Telangana (South) recorded the lowest NARs at this level. At the upper primary/middle level, the East region had the lowest NAR. When combining both primary and upper primary/middle levels, the North region had the lowest NAR. For the secondary level, the North-East region had the lowest NAR, while the East region had the lowest at the higher secondary level. The Central region recorded the lowest NAR at the post-higher secondary level. Among states, Uttar Pradesh had the lowest NAR, except at the post-higher secondary level.

- **Table 7: Percentage of Persons Who Dropped Out Among Ever Enrolled Persons (Ages 3 to 35) of Different States in India.**

State/ Region	Rural Male	Rural Female	Rural Total	Urban Male	Urban Female	Urban Total	Rural + Urban Male	Rural + Urban Female	Rural + Urban Total
Jammu & Kashmir	10.4%	13.9%	11.9%	7.9%	10.2%	8.9%	9.8%	13.1%	11.3%
Himachal Pradesh	5.4%	4.8%	5.1%	3.8%	3.9%	3.8%	5.2%	4.7%	5.0%
Haryana	11.0%	10.8%	10.9%	5.2%	4.5%	4.9%	9.1%	8.7%	8.9%
Punjab	5.3%	3.0%	4.2%	4.6%	2.5%	3.7%	5.0%	2.8%	4.0%
Uttarakhand	3.4%	3.2%	3.3%	4.7%	2.4%	3.7%	3.7%	3.0%	3.4%
Uttar Pradesh	6.8%	6.7%	6.8%	6.1%	4.6%	5.4%	6.7%	6.3%	6.5%
Delhi	-	-	-	6.5%	6.1%	6.4%	6.5%	6.0%	6.3%
Rajasthan	12.3%	16.0%	13.9%	10.0%	11.4%	10.6%	11.7%	14.9%	13.1%
North Region	7.8%	8.3%	8.0%	6.1%	5.7%	5.9%	7.2%	7.4%	7.3%
Gujarat	21.3%	19.5%	20.5%	13.7%	13.9%	13.8%	18.2%	17.3%	17.8%
Maharashtra	16.8%	19.9%	18.2%	12.2%	11.6%	11.9%	14.7%	16.1%	15.3%
West Region	19.1%	19.7%	19.4%	13.0%	12.8%	12.9%	16.5%	16.7%	16.6%

Chhattisgarh	11.3%	13.2%	12.2%	7.7%	9.4%	8.5%	10.7%	12.4%	11.5%
Madhya Pradesh	14.6%	14.3%	14.5%	8.9%	10.3%	9.5%	13.1%	13.3%	13.2%
Central Region	13.0%	13.8%	13.4%	8.3%	9.9%	9.0%	11.9%	12.9%	12.4%
Bihar	9.1%	13.1%	10.7%	4.6%	7.3%	5.8%	8.6%	12.4%	10.2%
Jharkhand	13.5%	16.3%	14.7%	8.7%	8.4%	8.6%	12.5%	14.7%	13.5%
Odisha	22.5%	23.5%	23.0%	10.4%	14.1%	12.2%	20.6%	21.9%	21.2%
West Bengal	24.9%	24.7%	24.8%	19.9%	20.4%	20.1%	23.5%	23.5%	23.5%
East Region	17.5%	19.4%	18.3%	10.9%	12.6%	11.7%	16.3%	18.1%	17.1%
Assam	18.6%	23.8%	21.0%	13.0%	15.9%	14.3%	18.0%	23.0%	20.3%
Northeast Region	18.6%	23.8%	21.0%	13.0%	15.9%	14.3%	18.0%	23.0%	20.3%
Andhra Pradesh	14.4%	14.6%	14.5%	10.4%	11.3%	10.8%	13.1%	13.5%	13.3%
Telangana	11.2%	13.9%	12.4%	6.5%	6.3%	6.4%	8.9%	10.3%	9.5%
Karnataka	15.0%	18.4%	16.5%	7.9%	9.2%	8.5%	12.3%	14.7%	13.3%
Kerala	14.6%	14.5%	14.5%	13.1%	11.9%	12.5%	13.9%	13.3%	13.6%
Tamil Nadu	10.8%	9.4%	10.1%	6.9%	6.6%	6.7%	8.1%	9.0%	8.5%
South Region	13.2%	14.2%	13.6%	9.0%	9.1%	9.0%	11.3%	12.2%	11.6%
All India	13.2%	14.7%	13.8%	9.5%	9.7%	9.6%	12.1%	13.2%	12.6%

(Source: NSSO 75th round)

Table-7 shows that the highest dropout rates among individuals aged 3 to 35 years were found in the East and West regions. Rural areas consistently had higher dropout rates than urban areas, with females experiencing higher dropout rates than males. These trends reflect challenges such as poverty, social norms, and limited access to education, particularly in rural areas and for females. In the northern region, Rajasthan had the highest dropout rate, while Gujarat (West), Madhya Pradesh (Central), West Bengal (East), Assam (Northeast) and Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh (South) also reported elevated dropout rates. The data highlights significant disparities in dropout rates across regions, states, rural versus urban areas and between genders.

Objective 2: To Identify the key reasons behind the existing educational inequalities.

Finding 2: Key Factors Contributing to Educational Inequality in India.

After reviewing the literature and documents, the researchers identified a few factors that influenced educational inequality in India. As follows-

- **Economic Constraints:**

Economic factors are a primary reason for children not attending or dropping out of school. Poor families often struggle to afford the cost associated with education, even when it is offered for free. In many cases, children are kept out of school to contribute to household income. Boys are typically withdrawn to engage in wage work or other economic activities, while girls are often pulled out to assist with domestic responsibilities.

- **Division of Caste:**

India has notable economic disparity, as the wealthiest 10% of the population controls approximately 74% of the nation's wealth. This is a significant contributor towards inequality in education across the rural versus urban divide, as well as for disadvantaged sections SC, ST, OBC. This divide continues to persist despite numerous government programs.

- **Language Barriers:**

Inaccessibility and lack of socio-economic mobility is affected most by language barrier. There are many post-colonial countries such as India, where the formal education systems and the political system are heavily dominated by European languages which makes it difficult for people who only speak the local dialect to avail opportunities such as education or employment.

- **Gender disparity:**

Inequalities in education and employment on basis of gender still exist owing to deeply rooted patriarchy. Although progress has been achieved, education still needs to work towards achieving true gender parity, so that men and women are afforded the same prospects.

- **Rural-Urban division based on geographical location:**

Geographical location is another big factor when considering the inequality in education. Much of the development is focused urban areas, leading to well established schools equipped with decent infrastructure and neglecting the rural areas where basic facilities like schools, sanitation and clean drinking water are lacking.

8. Key Discussion and Areas for Improvement:

- **Educational Policies and Interventions:**

The strategies to improve literacy rates in backward rural areas should be centred at improving the standards of female education. Such programs which focus on Education of rural women can have an enormous impact on reducing the gender gap. Some states, for example, Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh required more attention and investment in female educational infrastructure.

- **Urban- Rural Divide:**

The rural-urban divergence of literacy rates is a significant problem in India. Infrastructure development in rural areas, digital education and teacher training can aid in improving literacy levels in rural areas. Particularly in Bihar and Rajasthan, more emphasis is required on bringing the gap that exist in these regions.

- **Gender focused initiatives:**

Because of the exposure and disadvantage gap, specially in rural regions, these programs that target women such as adult literacy and educational affirmative schemes for women should be encouraged. Those like Kerala can be an example to aspire to, where literacy for women is nearly at per with men because of focus on gender equity in education systems.

- **Female enrollment in rural areas:**

The enrollment of women and young girls belonging to ST, SC, OBC groups is lower in rural sectors. Improved efforts targeting attendance, such as permitting more flexible hours and better school facilities are needed.

- **Target Programs for social groups:**

The enrollment for the general groups trends to be high. However, for the SC, ST and OBC groups, there is a need for specific interventions that address financial constraints, availability of schools and socio-cultural factors that helps in enrollment.

- **Inclusive classroom**:

Creating a curriculum that reflects India's linguistic and cultural diversity is essential. It should include local languages, highlight contributions of various communities and promote inclusivity in education sectors.

- **Digital Access:**

Expanding digital access especially post COVID period is vital. This involves providing affordable devices, reliable internet and digital literacy training to both students and teachers in remote areas. Initiatives like 'Digital India' aim to increase digital accessibility for all.

- **Equitable resource allocation:**

Fairly Distributing educational resources such as infrastructure, teaching materials and qualified teachers across all regions and schools is crucial to reducing education inequality across India.

9. Conclusion:

The issue of educational inequality in India continues to pose a problem especially when one looks at geographic concentration, socio economic aspects and placement in history. Many of these areas still face huge challenges which include but are not limited to very poor infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, language hindrances and sociocultural problems that hinder any form of participation from the underprivileged groups. Despite the evident efforts the last couple of years have shown, there are not sufficient government initiatives and policies target this particular population.

But relative to experience from the regions, we can commend the efforts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh for their active participation in mitigation of the educational gaps through policies and considerable public investment in education. At the same time however, other states within the Northern and Central borders such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are disadvantaged in their enrollment rates, learning outcomes, and overall educational equity.

In addressing the issue of educational inequality in India, a multifaceted problem-solving strategy seems most effective by taking into consideration the economic, social and cultural factors specific to each region. For this purpose, fomenting policies with specific plans of actions, increasing teacher training, developing infrastructure, and other forms of poverty and social exclusion need to be addressed. Permanent solutions will require time and sustained political commitment, adequate public funding and active participation of the community in the creation of a more inclusive and fair system across all regions.

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare no financial or non-financial conflict of interest.

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