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## Education status and its impact on development of scheduled castes: an overview

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### Abstract

The present study aims at studying the educational status of scheduled castes and contribution of different factors responsible for their status improvement based on review and synthesize the findings of the earlier studies based on secondary source of data. Majority of Scheduled Castes are having low literacy status which in turn causes for backwardness with low income, landlessness, poverty, etc, in spite of affirmative action with various education as well as development programmes. Hence, all educational and development programmes should be planned for social inclusion which constitute significant proportion of India population.

**Keywords:** Scheduled Castes, Illiteracy, low income, landlessness, and Socio-Economic Conditions

### 1. Introduction

Review of earlier research studies on the educational status of scheduled castes and contribution of different factors responsible for their status improvement is essential to formulate an appropriate perspective for any further study. It is of vital significance in any study in order to collect up-to-date information about what has been thought and done in that particular area. Several studies, on education status as well as the implementation of reservations and its impact on scheduled castes and the other policies adopted by the Government to develop the scheduled castes has been confined to one or two aspects and only to some regions of a State or a Country. As no study is likely to be absolutely completed, the available literature will not help to broaden the scope and nature of successive research. Therefore, the present study is taken up to bridge this gap. In this paper, an attempt has been made to review and synthesize the findings of the earlier studies on education status and evaluation of socio-economic conditions, impact of reservations and various government programmes for improving the status of scheduled castes based on secondary source of data. Lynch (1969) in his study on "the Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change" analysed the process of social mobility and change among a Scheduled Caste Community, namely, Jatavas in Agra city of India. The study revealed that Arya Samaj movement stimulated the Jatavas to acquire education and Sanskrit symbols, rites and beliefs to improve their social status. A few rich Jatavs started opening cotton mills, shoe industry. Then they started identifying themselves with upper castes to improve their ritual status in the society. A study by Suma Chitnis (1972) on "Education for Equality: Case of Scheduled Castes in Higher Education" stated that programmes for the betterment of the status of the Scheduled Castes have concentrated heavily on their education. Laws against untouchability and against discrimination by caste and the reservation of admission in educational institutions and in employment are, between them, expected to clear the ground for the equality of the Scheduled Castes. More specifically, education has been viewed as the instrument through which members of the Scheduled Castes can be equipped for a social structure in which status is determined, not by ascription but by individual achievement and worth. While the purpose behind the generous provision of educational facilities for the Scheduled Castes is clear and well-reasoned, the approach is naive in its assumptions, viz, (a) that the facilities provided would be optimally and equitably used; (b) that given the opportunity for school and college education, members of the Scheduled Castes would measure up on par with those who are backed by a tradition of formal education; and, (c) that the policy of reservations would best serve the attainment of equality for the Scheduled

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castes. He found that these assumptions are unrealistic and educational programmes based on them have led to the perpetuation of old inequalities and the creation of some new ones.

Uma Ramaswamy (1974) in his study on "Scheduled Castes in Andhra: Some Aspects of Social Change" examined how far the Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh have benefited from the various measures for their advancement. He found that the Scheduled Castes continue overwhelmingly in their traditional occupations in rural areas. Even in the urban areas only a fraction of the posts in the administration which are reserved for them is actually filled. Similarly, they are still steeped in illiteracy and only a small proportion of the population of school-going age actually attends school. Completion of formal education even upto the secondary level is negligible. Kusum K. Premi (1974) made a study on "Educational Opportunities for the Scheduled Castes: Role of Protective Discrimination in Equalisation". The study found that marked progress has been made by the Scheduled Castes in education, as is manifest from the rise in their literacy rates, enrolment co-efficients and the proportion of their numbers in Class I and II categories of jobs in Central and State services. A study on "Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes-Problems and Policies" by Kulkarni (1974) analyzed the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1971-72 and 1972-73, New Delhi, Government of India. It is found that there is considerable variation in the extent of literacy among the different communities of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes themselves.

Sharma (1974) in his study on "Educational Inequalities among Rajasthan's Scheduled Castes" analyzed the factors such as enrolment, hostels and scholarships related to the education of the Scheduled Castes. He found that Scheduled Castes' alarmingly backward condition is connected to the deprivation they suffer in relation to the higher status groups and to the differential treatment they receive from the power elites among themselves. Broadly, the distributive disparities affecting the Scheduled Castes are at three levels, namely, between the Scheduled Castes and the general population, between the various Scheduled Castes, and among Scheduled Castes in a particular district or area. A study by Sulabha Brahme (1975) on "Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes" analyzed the impact of various schemes meant for the socio-educational and economic improvement of the scheduled castes, because who are at the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder, since the beginning of the planning era in India in 1950 to 1975. The Scheduled Castes continue to work largely as agricultural labourers, with inadequate work and low wages or cultivate some inferior piece of land, without complementary inputs. Only a few received some education. Only a few have gained from the schemes and have reached some position of social, political or economic importance, but such number is infinitesimal. He opined that the present approach of concessions and special schemes can hardly deliver more than what it contains. It is time that in 1975 one tries to take a fresh look at the problem and see the downtrodden classes get a rightful place in the socio-political-economic structure. Dubey (1975) in his study on "Social mobility among professions" found that highest

percentage of the students going for higher education are of parents having higher literacy status as well as doing white collar jobs. His study also found that majority of the urban scheduled caste students are going for higher education when compared to the rural scheduled caste students.

Suma Chitnis (1975) in her study on "Education of Scheduled Castes" found that Scheduled Castes enrolled at schools and colleges come from privileged families, namely, literate homes. She also reveals that Scheduled Caste females who have access to higher education come from privileged families compared to their Scheduled Caste male counterparts. She further found that special programmes for the educational development of the Scheduled Castes are giving rise to new inequalities within their castes. She suggested that it would be useful to examine whether the Scheduled Castes students are economically well off as well. A study on "Higher Education for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes" by Viney Kirpal (1978) stated that the Scheduled Castes and they are treated as outcasts and untouchables for centuries at a stretch. These castes have had little contact with the world of education. Even when the British endeavoured to disseminate education among the Indian people, the Scheduled Castes were virtually denied this benefit because of the traditional prejudices of higher castes against them. He further expressed that though educational facilities and incentives offered to the Scheduled Castes are substantial, yet the community remains educationally backward. Suneila Malik (1979) study on "Social Integration of Scheduled Castes" investigated the relative impacts of changing educational and occupational levels on the life-pattern of the scheduled castes by highlighting the effectiveness of developmental measures taken so far. He found that the developmental measures have aided social mobility among the scheduled castes to some extent. Still a large majority of the Scheduled Castes are not able to benefit to the fullest extent from these developmental measures due to loopholes in the implementation mechanism. In a study by Jain (1981) on "Emancipation of Scheduled Castes and Tribes: Some Suggestions" found that the Scheduled Castes have little access to education which is the poor's most potent weapon for self-advancement. High rate of illiteracy is existed among the Scheduled Castes women, which is one of the biggest obstacles in the race against poverty. Again, only a small proportion of those who are literate have had access to higher education and the drop-out rate for economic reasons was high. He further found that though there is an improvement in the ratio of the enrolment of the children of the scheduled castes in the schools, they are still significantly below the enrolment ratio of the general population.

Krishna Kumar (1983) study on "Educational Experience of Scheduled Castes and Tribes" argument that education introduces bourgeois values among the oppressed, and thereby curbs their potential for radical expression, is based on the impact of education on an extremely small minority perceived from the point of view of non-SC/ST educators; and both the tone and the substance of the claim show a wrong choice. In a society where bourgeois values have high prestige, the acceptance of such values by a few members of oppressed groups can hardly be seen as a sign of regression,

unless we insist on ignoring the point of view from which the oppressed would look at their own successful brethren. What we should be worried about is not the fate of this tiny minority, but that of the vast numbers of SC and ST children who stop going to school long before the carrot of a middle class job can appear before them, and whose brief and demeaning educational experience merely proves to them that they are what they were alleged to be. The experience of education, under prevailing curricular norms, serves to assist SC and ST children to internalise the symbols of 'backward' behaviour. Santha Kumari (1983) in her study on "Scheduled Castes and Welfare Measures" found that education has enabled the respondents to learn the habits of high castes like cleanliness, method of preparation of food so that this would make their food acceptable to high caste guests. In a study on "New Horizons and SCs" by Parvathamma and Satyanarayana (1984) found that more than half of the fathers of the Scheduled Caste college students were illiterates and nearly three fourths of the mothers of the students are illiterates. They found further revealed that majority of the fathers of those students work in the villages as agricultural labourers and their mothers had no occupation. Furthermore, it is found from their study that more than half of the respondents were hailed from villages. Vakil (1985) in his study on "Reservation Policy and Scheduled Castes in India" stated that economic, educational and political facilities have not yet reached certain Scheduled Castes and hence they are facing a precarious condition. Unorganized nature of the Scheduled Castes, lack of leadership among them is mainly responsible for their backwardness. A study on "Harijan Students of Uttar Pradesh" by Chaturvedi (1986) found that financial condition of Scheduled Caste students enrolled in colleges was difficult. The majority of the scheduled castes college students were first generation college goers. Kusum K. Premi (1988) in his study on "Industrial Training for SCs and STs" stated that industrial training has been considered very important from the viewpoint of raising the productivity of Scheduled Castes. In his study, he found that the pattern of enrolment of Scheduled Castes in non-engineering trades differs somewhat from that of total trainees. Scheduled Castes trainees are found in much higher proportion in the cutting and tailoring trades at the cost of printing press trades and, in some cases, in stenography also. He suggested that it may be necessary to raise the amount of the stipend substantially to match it to the cost of living. Not only the amount of the stipend needs to be raised but even delay in its release will lead to be cut if the real poor from these groups are to be helped. Money should be placed at the disposal of the institution in the beginning of the academic year. Reddy and Kaliappan (1989) in their study on "Caste and Leadership in Rural Communities" found that inspite of changes that have been taking place in the form of sanskritization, westernization, industrialization and modernization in Indian rural communities, the impact of these changes on the low and lower middle caste castes, namely, backward and scheduled castes, is not significant. They further noted that higher castes have been benefited by all these processes as they have got ample resources at their disposal to have an ascendancy over the others even in the

changing circumstances. They found that in view of low income, landlessness, illiteracy, no or less exposure to media and lack of political contact along with low caste status, low status castes find it difficult to get access to local power politics. In terms of social reality also the low status castes would be less interested in taking part in local political activities as they lack facilitating components.

Puran Singh (1989) in his study on "Problem of Education among Scheduled Castes" stated that most of the problems pertaining to the education of the Scheduled Castes are of socio-economic nature. A few of these relate to their enrolment and academic performance. He further stated that the Scheduled Caste students largely feel that the facilities provided by the governments to them are needed and satisfactory also, but they are not administered properly. Kamble (1989) in his study "Socio-economic and political profiles of Scheduled Castes", stated that even after 33 years of independence, Scheduled Castes have very low level of education and consequently they are engaged in menial jobs which are looked down upon and have low income. Joseph Benjamin (1991) in his study on "Social Mobility among the Scheduled Castes in Bihar: A Case Study of Barh Block", expressed that main problem of the Scheduled Castes is their very low status based on untouchability which suited the requirements of older politics and ideology of Hindu society operated in the name of religion. He found that most Scheduled Caste students gave up their studies due to lack of financial support from their poor parents. But some arts students pursue their higher studies in spite of financial problems by working part time to support themselves. But science students do not seem to pursue their studies in this manner. This would indicate that finance is not only the constraint. There seem to be many more constraints, particularly when it comes to studying science which would provide them access to better paid and higher status jobs. But the social system as well as cultural constraints seems to stand in their way.

Karuna Chanana (1993) in her study on "Accessing Higher Education: The Dilemma of Schooling Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Contemporary India", focuses on the growth of higher education within the framework of treatment and supportive measures for the benefit of different social groups, namely, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, minorities and women. She found that educational policy fails to achieve equity among the social groups. Further, in the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Indian society, the parameters of gender, caste, class and region are crucial in determining access to higher education. Further, she observed that educational policies and programmes are unable to encompass the complex social reality within a single framework and are therefore unable to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Sharma (1996) in his study examined the "social mobility among the Scheduled Castes in Rajasthan". He found that there existed more or less variations in the development among sub-castes of Scheduled Castes. Educational achievements among the SCs are marginal. The efforts that have made since independence have resulted in changes in the traditional occupations of the Scheduled Castes. But this change process is not uniform for different groups of the Scheduled Castes.

As for political power, the scheduled castes have certainly shared with the local as well as State and national leadership in proportion to their numerical strength in the village society. They are facing problems of untouchability, unemployment, housing, general backwardness, indebtedness, etc. Nagi and Ravendra Singh (1996) in their study analyzed the reproductive health status of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Women. They found that the literacy level of Scheduled Caste/Tribe population is quite low as compared to other groups. This may be so as these groups are living in the remote/hilly areas or in the outskirts of the villages/cities where the educational and other facilities are not properly available. The socio-economic condition of these groups is also found to be poor. All these conditions attribute to the poor health status of these groups of people. Over and above the health status of women of these groups is also very poor.

A study on "Rural Development and Scheduled Castes" by Abdul Aziz, *et al.*, (2000) made an attempt to address how much of social and educational mobility among the Scheduled Castes is due to state intervention and how much on account of their own effort. They found that Scheduled Caste households which lived on a hand to mouth basis on the eve of independence and throughout a major part of three decades after independence have begun to see better days from the eighties. State intervention has been there to improve their social and economic conditions. Though this was somewhat significant in respect of housing and lighting, in other respects such as work opportunities, skill formation, capital assistance, awareness creation about availability of income-earning opportunities, the role of State was not significant enough. In this regard, it is the own effort of the respondents and to some extent, the peer group help that has gone a long way to contribute to the property of the SC households under study. In the process of development of the village economy, enabling environments are created; even the scheduled castes can benefit and come up on their own effort with little direct support from the state. Sudha Pai (2000) in his study on "Changing Socio-economic and Political Profile of Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh" found that Scheduled Castes constitute disadvantaged, economically poor and socially backward groups. Owning little land, with low levels of literacy, they suffer from low levels of urbanisation, employment and wages due to lack of rapid industrial development. Wankhede (2001) made a study on "Educational Inequalities among Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra", stated that particular Scheduled Caste(s) in each State and region are dominating the educational opportunities. Mahars of Maharashtra, jatavas of Uttar Pradesh, addharmis of Punjab, malas and madigas of Andhra Pradesh, pulayas of Kerala, etc. are some examples to this phenomenon. He found that despite a century old struggle for social and political reform and independence, literacy levels remain discouragingly low among substantial sections of the scheduled castes in Maharashtra. However, the rise in literacy rates has been marked by variations within the scheduled castes as borne out by census reports from 1961 onwards. The variations are based on levels of development, the migrancy factor and willingness to take on newer occupations, as well as traditions of hierarchy that continue

to persist in the social system. Srinivasa Rao (2002) in his study "Dalits in Education and Workforce" observed that despite constitutional provisions and safeguards, dalit representation in higher education institutes and in the workforce remains largely minimal. He suggested that State initiated programmes and policies apart, it is also essential to instill respect for diversity and greater understanding of the disadvantaged. He analyzed how to bring diversity in education as discussed in the Bhopal conference. There is a need to reform educational provisions for Dalits as it is the foundation upon which the edifice of social status and dignity is built. The Bhopal Conference called for implementation of diversity in admission in the educational institutions across the country irrespective of the type of management or stream of education. Particularly, it raises the issue of providing market oriented vocational and technical education to the scheduled castes and also that the issue of reservations should be applied to all institutions, public as well as private from primary to professional level. Another demand put forward is that the English medium schools must also implement the policy of diversity in admissions.

Naidu (2004) in his study on "Empowerment of Scheduled Castes" found that majority of the sample Scheduled Castes are illiterates and among the literates, majority have minimal educational attainment. It is further found that throughout all the three generations of the Scheduled Castes, illiteracy is high. However, the illiteracy over generations has come down, more so in case of fourth generation, the children of the respondents. Regarding educational mobility, it is found that the immobility is more pronounced than mobility. Of the immobile, majority is illiterates throughout. In case of the mobility, a substantial majority have shown upward mobility in all the cases. Except in the case of mobility between father and respondent generations, the downward mobility is very insignificant. He concluded that the status of the Scheduled Castes of his sample area is changing positively due to mutually complementary supportive forces like urbanization, economic development and progressive legislation. Biradar and Jayasheela (2007) in their study on "Effects of Educational Inequality among Social Groups in Rural India" opined that educational status in respect of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is significantly lower as compared to others. Although the rate of literacy increased significantly, a greater illiteracy continued to exist in respect of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes as compared to that of non-SCs/STs. The educational status among social groups is found to be highly unequal in India, even after more than five decades of developmental struggle. The educational status in respect of SCs/STs vis-à-vis non-SCs/STs is far from satisfactory. In spite of several programmes implemented towards provision of compulsory education, especially for SCs/STs, the illiteracy rates continue to be quite significant among them. This unequal distribution of education among social groups has an adverse impact on the society such as unequal access to better job options, meagre earnings as well as incidence of poverty, health hazards and thereby resulting in powerlessness.

Wankhede (2008) in his study on "Accessing Higher Education: Affirmative Action and Structured Inequality – The Indian Experience", opined that education is considered

as an important means development of weaker sections like the Scheduled Castes in the contemporary period of globalization. However, due to their traditional socio-economic handicaps, their access to, performance and sustenance in education is hampered. The government committed itself to compensate their deprivations through various measures. The findings show that there are several weaknesses in implementing the scheme and yet it is found to be very useful for the beneficiaries. They suggested that the scheme needs to be revamped in a big way. Bhola Nath Ghose (2009) in his study on "Problems of Education of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes: A Case Study in Calcutta and Surroundings and Medinipur and Surrounding Areas attempted to examine the socio-economic characteristics viz, place of residence, patterns of house ownership, type of house, Occupation of the Guardians of Graduates and Post Graduates students and its effect on education.

## 2. Conclusion

Based on review of the studies, it can be concluded that majority of Scheduled Castes are having low literacy status which inturn causes for backwardness with illiteracy, low income, landlessness, poverty, etc. In spite of affirmative action with various education as well as development programmes, the status of these castes has not improved to the desired level. Hence, all the educational and development programmes should be planned for social inclusion scheduled castes, which constitute significant proportion of India population.

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