



Educational Opportunities and Development: A Narrative of Scheduled Caste Community

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Abstract

Education is a vital factor for the advancement of any society. Development encompasses various aspects, and education serves as a means of social mobility. The scheduled caste communities have been using education as a tool to escape social exploitation and marginalization. The primary objective of education is to help individuals develop their innate qualities to their full potential. In the historical context of Indian culture, a rigid system of caste inequality, guided by principles of hierarchy and purity pollution, has been prevalent. However, with the current socio-economic and political changes, new job structures are emerging, replacing the old caste-based system in the global era. Through widespread education, the scheduled caste community has been able to achieve socio-economic development. This study aims to explore the available educational opportunities, the extent of government support received by the scheduled caste community at the higher education level, and the reasons behind the existing disparities.

Key Words: Education, Development, Scheduled Caste, Government, Exploitation, Opportunities.

Introduction - Development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, involving economic growth, education, health services, modernization, the status of women, nutrition, and housing quality, equitable distribution of goods and services, and access to communication. The development of a country depends upon its knowledge, economy, and educated and skilled manpower. Skilled manpower helps to strengthen economic growth by extending knowledge to the productive process. 'Social capital' and 'human resources' are both the most important indicators of a developmental country. 'Social capital' is usually empowered by education and innovative ideas. Thus, to make a society productive and effective, education has become an important aspect of fostering growth and development for the nation. 'Education appears to be linked to

other dimensions of well-being, including health outcomes, investments in the next generation, social networks, and civic participation.’ He also said that ‘Education from the very beginning has been vital both for development of the individual as well as the effective functioning of society’ (Paul S. K., 2017). India is a diverse country with various diversity in the context of caste, creed, religion, languages, and so on. Indian social structure is based on a hierarchical structure that has given the Scheduled Caste community almost the lower strata in the society. They are victims of the oppression of the caste system and its practices in society. The conditions of Scheduled Castes are worse and more tormenting compared to the general castes. About 34% of the Scheduled Castes community remains below the poverty line (BPL) compared to the general caste (9%) people. The Scheduled Caste population of India assets a very low share of National wealth 17%, which is 2.5 times less than their total population. Whereas the national wealth share is very high for the general caste (45%). Land possession of Scheduled Caste is much less (7.3%) compared to 42.2% of general category people. Many people in the Scheduled Caste community are landless compared to 11% of the general Castes (Madheswaran, 2018). As per the Human Development Index, the Scheduled Castes community has been at a low level. The HDI value of the Scheduled Caste was 0.30 points compared to the general caste (10.39 points). By this index, Scheduled Caste communities' HDI rank is very low. Multiple Multidimensional Poverty Index report shows that in India Scheduled Caste was 33.3 % compared to the general caste at 22%, comparatively SC poorer than the general castes. Overall, 5 persons out of 6 are poor in the Scheduled Caste Community in India ((UNDP, 2021).

Education is one of the essential aspects of human life. Education is closely linked to generating newer knowledge and enhancement skills for individual and community development thereby for occupational and social mobility. Education leads to the development of the community. But it has been observed that still today the marginalized community, especially the SCs are far behind in comparison to other advanced communities. The literacy rate in India is 74%, whereas the literacy rate of the SCs is 66%. The literacy rate for SC males is 75% compared to 82% of total male literacy and SC female literacy is around 57% compared to 65% of total female literacy (Census, 2011).

Research questions – How many schemes are available for the educational development of the Scheduled Caste community? What is the present socio-economic status of the Scheduled Caste Communities?

Objectives – To study the educational development of the Scheduled Caste community in West Bengal. The study has also tried to find out the barrier to accessing educational benefits among Scheduled Caste Communities.

Methodology – The doctrinal research methodology has been adopted in the present study. In this connection, books, journals, reports, related newspapers, and other secondary resources have been consulted, analyzed, and explained as instruments to meet the objectives of this present study.

Discussion -

Education is a key impetus for the overall development of a country as well as any community. Specially Scheduled Caste community can uplift their socio-economic development through higher education. In this context, it would be noteworthy to mention the name of the philosopher Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Ambedkar argued, 'I regard education to be a very necessary qualification for possessing that degree of competence which is very necessary for the performance of one's duty', he also said, 'It requires education and therefore education even from the standpoint of the backward classes, scheduled classes or tribal areas is very necessary ingredient' (Ambedkar, 1956(1979)). He also organized *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* with the marginalized people for the grievances of untouchability, the motto or slogan framed as 'Educate, Agitate and Organise' (Ambedkar, 1956(1979)) to empower the socially and educationally excluded people. The United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which announced that the 'right to education should provide to every child'. However, in the present day, many young and child are unable to attend school due to their poor socio-economic backwardness, and the absence of affirmative support for them (UNDHRE, 1994).

India is a vast and diverse country with various inequalities reality to caste, class, gender, and religion. 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act' or Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009 commenced in 2010. It aimed to achieve social inclusion and reduce the drop-out rate but failed to reflect on the education of all students equally. This politics of inequality and deprivation in the educational system results in the marginalization and othering of the people belonging to the lower strata of society. Since the Vedic age in India, marginal communities were denied access to education due to their poor socio-economic condition. The marginal communities are officially or constitutionally now divided into three categories, - Other Backward Class, Scheduled Caste, and Scheduled Tribes. Now, Scheduled Castes are denied of accessing socio-economic resources. Moreover, they sometimes become the victims of educational inaccessibility. Since they are deprived of proper education in many parts of the country, students from the community continue to lag in terms of socio-economic and educational development (Chatterjee, 2000). The situation of the scheduled caste is terrifying regarding income, employment, and educational attainment. Despite several provisions and constitutional remedies for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes in India, they are facing ill-treatment in society in a broader sense. Continuously Scheduled Caste communities are kept behind in accessing education in comparison to general students. The government has taken some schemes for education access to all marginal communities including Scheduled Caste Community.

As per the census report 2011, the number of Scheduled Caste in India is 201.4 million, which is 16.6% of the total population of India. Among them 103.5 million (51.39%) are male and 97.9 million (48.61%) are female. The rate of literacy in India is 74% whereas for the SCs it is 66.1%. The literacy rate for SC males is 75.2% compared to 82.1% of total male literacy and SC female literacy is 56.5% compared to 65.4% of total female literacy (Census, 2011)

Government Schemes and Educational Development of Scheduled Caste Community - The Government has provided various schemes and taken various initiatives for the educational upliftment of all categories including the Scheduled caste community. The Government had also taken several initiatives, as per the constitutional affirmative provision, for the best quality livelihood of the Scheduled Castes community. We know that education is a precondition for jobs, poverty eradication, and occupational mobility. The Scheduled Castes community received various scholarships from class V to master's degrees to participate in modern education. The scholarships are namely Pre-Matric Scholarships for SC students, Post-Matric Scholarships, Upgradation of Merit of SC Students, Central Sector Scholarship of Top-Class Education for SC Students, National Fellowship for Scheduled Caste Students, and Free Coaching Scheme for SC, and OBC Students. Furthermore, the government provides free coaching to the SC community in preparation for the achievement of government and private jobs. For this purpose, the central government specifically NITI Ayog launched a programme in January 2018 named 'The Aspirational District Programme' (ADP). It aims to quickly and effectively transform the 112 most underdeveloped districts across the country. Only three districts Birbhum, Dakshin Dinajpur, and Nadia identify as Aspiration Districts in West Bengal. The Government also provides educational loans through the bank with very low interest to the Scheduled Caste community. The Scheduled Caste students getting The Top-Class Education for Scheduled Caste Scheme and National Overseas Scholarships SCs are both Central Sector schemes and scholarships are directly released to the student for stipend/allowances and to the institutions for fees (India, 2021). There is no State-wise allocation/quota under the scheme. Therefore, state-wise details are not available. The number of students who availed of this kind of scholarship last three years details are given in Table No. – 1.

Table No-1 All India Basis Top-Class & National Overseas Scholarship Beneficiaries

Year	Number of Students Under Top-Class Scholarship	Number of Students Under National Overseas Scholarships for SCs
2019-20	1375	100
2020-21	3118	100
2021-22	2050	60

Source- Press Information Bureau, Govt. of India

Another scheme availed by SC students in school education Pre-Matric and Post-Matric scholarships before entrance to higher education level. Last two years beneficiaries availed of those schemes that help them able to access education. Table No. 2 shows how many SC students in West Bengal availed of the Pre-Matric & Post-Matric Scholarship.

Table No- 2 Year-wise Pre-Matric & Post-Matric Scholarship beneficiaries in WB

Year	Pre-Matric	Post-Matric
2019-20	283504	518953
2020-21	209552	677932

Source- Press Information Bureau, Govt. of India

In 2001, the Government of India took the measure for 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' -Elementary Education for All – at the primary level, and 'Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan' in 2009 at the secondary level, to increase the number of schools, provide school resources, and support teacher development, among other interventions (Chakraborty, 2016). Furthermore, in 2009, the Right to Education (RTE) Act made formal schooling compulsory for all children ages 6-14 years. These policies and programs have now been in place for more than two decades and have been credited for the increased participation of all in-school education, particularly those of lower castes who had been among the out-of-school education at primary and secondary levels.

Table 3 Changing Pattern of SC Literacy in West Bengal 2001-2011

Sl. No	Name of the District	SC Literacy Rate 2001	SC Literacy Rate 2011
1	Bankura	59.04	69.43
2	Bardhaman	51.99	62.74
3	Birbhum	45.74	59.42
4	Dakshin Dinajpur	51.99	66.26
5	Darjeeling	62.43	72.94
6	Howrah	61.13	71.33
7	Hooghly	56.01	68.36
8	Jalpaiguri	61.78	73.04
9	Coach Behar	64.35	73.57
10	Kolkata	70.54	79.31
11	Malda	51.17	61.04
12	Murshidabad	48.91	62.23
13	Nadia	63.09	73.34
14	North 24 Parganas	70.74	79.7
15	Paschim & Purba Medinipur	54.32	75.52
16	Purulia	45.15	56.07
17	South 24 Parganas	67.36	76.31
18	Uttar Dinajpur	50.06	62.41

Source: Census of West Bengal, 2001, 2011

(**Note:** Purba and Paschim Medinipur are calculated together because, during the 2001 census, Medinipur was undivided & Purba and Paschim Bardhaman are calculated together because, during the 2001, and 2011 census, Burdwan was undivided.)

Table 3 shows that the literacy rate among the Scheduled Caste community in West Bengal is increasing gradually. It also reflects that the literacy rate in urban areas is higher compared to rural areas. North 24 Parganas and Kolkata are urban areas and the literacy rates are 70.74% and 70.54% but in the rural areas Birbhum and Purulia where the literacy rate is low 45.74% and 45.15%. But overall, in all districts in the state of West Bengal, the decadal literacy rate instantly grew.

Any developed country must have a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of over 85% for higher education, but it is very low in our country. This is a challenge. The Union Government now aims to improve the GER in higher education to 50% by 2035, said T.G. Sitharam, the Chairman of the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). He also commented on the crisis of overall enrolment in higher education. He said, 'Of the nearly 25 crore students who enrolment for school education every year in the country, only 28.3% enrolment for higher education and this is a cause for serious concern (The Hindu, 29th June 2024). This report focuses on the overall crisis of educational development. The marginal groups are in a more vulnerable situation because of unforeseen COVID-19 and its impacts on the rural economic structure. In developing countries like India, economic inequality is still prevalent within society. This inequality impacts everywhere in society, especially among the marginal communities.

As per the All-India School Education Survey (AIES), the total number of Scheduled Caste students in Upper Primary, Secondary, and Higher Secondary levels in 2002 shows that rural areas are higher than urban areas. This data is mentioned in Table 4.

Table No.4 - SC Students Enrolment in Upper, Secondary & Higher Secondary Schools, West Bengal

School Category		Boys	Girls	Total
Upper Primary	Rural	62,901	71,327	134,228
	Urban	6,114	8,411	14,525
	Total	69,015	79,738	148,753
Secondary	Rural	357,077	310,745	667,822
	Urban	54,058	65,829	119,887
	Total	411,135	376,574	787,709
Higher Secondary	Rural	320,976	160,850	481,826
	Urban	136,903	80,800	217,703
	Total	457,879	241,650	699,529

Source- NCERT (<http://ncert.nic.in>)

The Scheduled Caste community faces different obstacles to accessing higher education. Enrolment data of the higher education of SC students is negligible compared to that of non-SC students in higher education. This can be seen as the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education in India is 28.4% and 28.3% for males and 28.5% for females in general, which is calculated between the age group 18-23 years. This GER for SC is just 25% of which 25.8% are male and 26.0% are female (AISHE, 2022). As far as the enrolment of students is concerned, the top 6 states are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya

Pradesh, West Bengal, and Rajasthan according to the AISHE (2021-22) report (AISHE, 2022). They constitute 53.3% of the total student enrolment. West Bengal holds the 6th position in higher education enrolment ratio (GER).

Table-5 GER in Higher Education (18-23Years) Based on Census 2011

	All Category			SC		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
West Bengal	25.9	26.8	26.3	23.4	22.4	22.9
All India	28.3	28.5	28.4	25.8	26.0	25.9

Source - AISHE Report (2021-22)

Literacy is an important indicator of progress both for society as a whole and for individual communities with it. In this context, Table 5 indicates that there has been some improvement in the overall literacy rate in the post-independence period but not at expected levels.

It has been observed that some SC college students are not accessing any Scheduled Caste Pre-Matric and Post-Matric scholarships. They mentioned that their caste certificate was issued when they studying class 12th standard. As late as getting the caste certificate they cannot get such scholarships for school-level education. They are also first-generation learners and they are also unaware of how and where to get a caste certificate and what are the benefits of it.

Higher education is closely linked to generating newer knowledge and enhancement skills for individual and community development thereby for occupational and social mobility. The process of globalization demands knowledge, skills, and performance which depend on higher education and access to it (Agarwal, 2009). Participatory Teaching Learning approach' is the key method to ensure quality education (Paul S. K., 2017). With this quality education, all marginalized communities can meet the objectives of sustainable development and succeed in the demands of globalization. So, for higher education, all must follow this approach to achieve sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4). The above data shows that the government has taken various initiatives for the Scheduled Caste community to access education, but till now their gross enrolment in higher education is less rather than in general castes in West Bengal as well as all India level.

Conclusion - The central and state governments have taken initiatives for the educational development of the Scheduled Caste community. To access education, the Government provides Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships, but these scholarships availing percentage is very poor respective to SC students' enrolment ratio in the upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels. In this regard, we find out that, the government allocation for the scholarship funds is very low. For that, the number of Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships accessed by beneficiary number is less than the enrolment number. On the other hand, most of these students are first-generation learners, and hence they suffer from many more handicaps like being unaware of the government benefits. Based on the above government reports, the

literacy rates and gross enrolment trends of the Scheduled Caste community in secondary and higher education at the state level as well as National level has gradually increased, but not satisfactory. This community enrolment ratio is low compared to the general caste. Poverty is the main cause of the low enrolment in education in this community. Preliminary observation is that many SC students are unaware of the facilities and government initiatives. They did not get any proper guidance or support from the government implementing authorities along with from the previous beneficiaries within their community members. Most of this community is behind the lag. Some extents of this community have already gotten the government benefits and they are alienated from their community and created a 'micro small group' within the community, this small group has no contribution in terms of increasing awareness about government welfare schemes and benefits within the concerned community as well as economic helps. In a nutshell, the government authorities must be more active in the implementation of educational schemes for educational development. Because the degree of high literacy is an instrument for economic growth. Educational improvement in the marginal community helps to increase skills and efficient human beings who are part of the developed society as well as the developed country can achieve sustainable development goals 4. SDG-4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable equality in education and to promote lifelong opportunities for all.

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