

## **CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF BACKWARD CLASSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Through a variety of efforts, Free India has sought to examine the education of the backward classes through the lens of egalitarian values, developing constitutionally, legally, and judicially sound safeguards. The Constitution of India mandates the country to build a socialist democratic society and a new egalitarian social order free of exploitation and competing class interests, in which the nation's interests take precedence above personal interests. The national aspiration to achieve this vision could not be realized due to substantial social stratification and cultural-economic disparities. Despite many policies developed and implemented by the federal and state governments, socioeconomic disparities remain in some form or another, creating a long-standing challenge in Indian society. On the question of inequality and socioeconomic imbalance, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi stated in 1954 that "the important problem of India is to help all those who are backward and is or elevating the level of all depressed humanity in India." Because disparity is at the root of all problems, their empowerment is crucial to the strength of our country. The struggle between caste and development has resulted in the economic and social depravity of the backward classes, as historical evidence demonstrates that during British rule, people from the higher caste were picked as officers in government offices solely on the basis of their education. Education has such a high importance in people's lives that it may assist them overcome societal instability, injustice, and inequity.

**Key Words:** Higher Education, Backward Classes, Inequality, Humanity, National Education Policy, etc.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a tool for both personal enlightenment and national and global growth. Because caste has grown entangled with electoral politics in modern times, the system is likely to persist. It is important to remember that most elections were contested on a caste basis until the 1990s, with the upper social order contesting the polls, resulting in the exploitation of lower caste individuals. People with educational backgrounds appeared to achieve key positions in government jobs that belonged to the top hierarchy during British control, showing that education and development are interwoven. For ages, the caste system has been an important component of society. The Indian government has taken a variety of efforts to aid the social and economic development of people from lower castes. This study will look at government initiatives from Independence to the end of the twentieth century, or from 1947 to 1997, a 50-year period, to assess if they were successful in developing an equal and just society that provides equal chances to those from the lower castes in all sectors of life.

**Importance of Education:** In order to achieve justice in society, educational development of the underprivileged has earned national relevance and importance in development programmes in all states. Despite the fact that education is a sine qua non for every community's overall development, the majority of money are dedicated to SC and ST. The benefit of education as a human resource investment is becoming increasingly widely recognised in all countries. Throughout history, social and religious reformers have recognised the value of education and worked to enhance people's access to it.

### **Inequality and Opportunism Based on Caste**

Scheduled In modern India, castes continue to dominate the sweeper ranks (safai karmacharis). SCs account for nearly 60% of sweepers in the federal government. Furthermore, because a considerable proportion of applicants do not include caste information, this statistic is very definitely an underestimation. As a result, it's not surprising that various studies have found a significant relationship between caste and economic position, which they attribute to exclusion from productive resources such as land and education, as well as labour market discrimination. Caste differences must be addressed on two levels: inequality of opportunity and inequality of outcome.

Only castes and classes with a strong educational background took advantage of the opportunity. As a result, only members of specific castes and groups were eligible for government jobs, elevating their prestige. However, because of a lack of an educational tradition, the lower classes lagged behind, expanding the cultural, social, and economic gulf between them and the higher classes.

As a result, the lower castes understood they had been subjected to a tremendous lot of injustice. They were intrigued by modern education and yearned for a portion of the new opportunities. As a result, they desired to get, among other things, an English-language certificate. As a result, the backward class movement arose in the early twentieth century. Not only did the movement acquire pace in locations where Brahmins controlled higher education, but also in areas where there was a major social and cultural separation between them and others. However, qualified students were unable to enroll in professional and post-graduate programmes because admission was based on high school and college grades.

The boys were unable to get outstanding scores because they were schooled at home. It could be because of a number of things. This was due to the fact that the lecturers and examiners were from the upper classes. They were terrified of discrimination because of their caste. Similar circumstances arose when they fought for posts in government services.

Brahmins were generally in charge of appointing authorities at lower levels of governance. As a result, youths from lower castes are at a disadvantage in such conditions. As a result, many lower caste leaders and unhappy young people formed anti-Brahmin attitudes.

Kaka Kalelkar, Chairman, formed the Backward Class Commission in 1953. In addition to regions and tribes, the group was tasked with developing criteria for offering privileges to "socially and educationally backward parts." The commission was also entrusted with developing a list of such classes and researching the conditions, as well as the issues, of all such socially and educationally disadvantaged groups.

The panel quickly learned that, despite the fact that many groups came forward to define themselves as castes, the 1951 Census gave no statistical information in this area. This is one of the country's most fundamental social contradictions. According to the terms of reference, the panel intended to "create a list of such classes."

Because caste is a social phenomenon, it stands to reason that such lists are created in terms of castes. However, with the exception of some castes, the Constitution does not recognise caste. Caste-specific data collection was abandoned because it was considered that doing so would perpetuate caste distinctions; nonetheless, caste-specific data is essential to provide support to scheduled castes.

Many social ills are generated by economic adversity rather than the other way around. The commission established general guidelines for assessing backwardness criteria.

- (i) A poor social standing in the traditional caste system;
- (ii) A large proportion of the caste or community lacks access to education.
- (iii) Inadequate trade, commerce, and industry representation
- (iv) Under-representation or non-representation in government offices.

Using lists of other Backward groups as a basis, the Commission developed a list of 2400 castes based on their social order, literacy rate, and presence in government and industry, among other considerations. According to the Commission, the vast majority of the underprivileged are illiterate, uneducated, and destitute. Traders and moneylenders are among those who can easily exploit them.

It has also been stated that the caste system still exists, and that untouchability still occurs in rural areas. It is unavoidable in order for them to be protected.

In methods that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, give the caste system new vitality. He has a strong loyalty to his caste group, both because of ingrained traditions and because of the education he has acquired. Even when he is intellectually convinced that his loyalty is damaging, he is frequently unable to dismiss it. Caste inequities have been so ingrained in the Hindu mind that he accepts them as natural. The Hindu caste system is comprised of two basic components: endogamy and hierarchy. The urge to protect their purity motivates the stringent practise of endogamy. The caste system developed from a sense of inferiority." The Government of India, on the other hand, rejected the recommendations of the Kaka Kalelkar Commission, claiming that economic and educational backwardness should not be based solely on caste. Rather, the federal government instructed state governments to undertake surveys in order to identify members of the impoverished classes.

According to state governments, all reasonable facilities should be offered to those members. Several states have decided to categorise people depending on their employment and income.

**Educational backwardness:**

Educational backwardness can be described as the percentage of persons in a community or group who are literate, and when analyzing a group's or community's literacy level, Indian as well as local literacy variables must be considered. Evidence reveals that literacy rates are low in castes, communities, and groups that are socially backward or have a lower social status. A variety of causes might be blamed for low literacy rates among the backward classes. The main causes can be summed up as follows: (i) Traditional vocations that do not necessitate any specific education, (ii) traditional indifference for education as a result of social environment, (iii) generational development of occupational skill, (iv) poverty and the need for children to contribute to the family's earning capacity, (v) Nature of occupation, and (vi) Parental illiteracy.

**Aftermath of Covid-19:**

The Covid-19 pandemic has just been going on from 2020. The immediate consequences are serious, both in and outside of public health. It is unknown how long this crisis will persist. It is too early to assess the entire extent of its impact on the fabric and functioning of society, both locally and worldwide. The impact is also profound in higher education. Universities have to deal with the problem more than governmental authorities or other stakeholders in higher education. They have the impression that they have been ambushed, with no apparent end in sight. Short-term scenario planning has become a semi-permanent state, another word for the necessity to deal with, and plan around, oppressive uncertainty and extraordinary limits and hazards. For the time being, higher education institutions must focus on surviving today and tomorrow - ensuring that they educate successfully and have students (and staff) this last term of the academic year, next term, or the entire next academic year. They are concerned and feel alone.

Once again, higher education has been proclaimed in crisis, and it is impossible to ignore the truth of the situation. The conversation on the higher education crisis is complicated, ambiguous, and potentially deceptive. The "crisis in higher education" is frequently predicted and then fails to occur. On the other hand, according to some research, there is so much discourse about a crisis, even when there isn't one, that the rhetoric itself causes one, as in Aesop's fable of the shepherd boy and the wolf. The crisis in, or of, higher education is usually over-analyzed, in part because this discourse is extremely self-reflective, if not narcissistic.

Crises emerge and disappear; they last for a brief period of time or a little longer. There are fewer crises that appear to be more "persistent." The most visible of these is the funding crisis: since the beginning of massification, the tension between increased enrolment and a lack of corresponding increase in funding, or simply insufficient funding to support the expansion, has been portrayed as a kind of built-in characteristic of the modern university and a form of crisis.

**Conclusion:**

Despite educational advancement, research shows that educational disparities between distinct social strata continue and, in some circumstances, worsen. Various statistics and data suggest that the impact of student's socioeconomic status on their educational possibilities has remained consistent, if not increased. Socioeconomic differences are becoming increasingly prominent at higher levels of education. Furthermore, it has been reported that the Upper Castes account for the majority of OBCs in government jobs, particularly in higher cadre positions such as cabinet secretary, due to a scarcity of backward candidates who are selected to the cadre at a young age due to reservation but are unable to advance due to a lack of years of service. Thus, it appears that a lack of educational facilities causes people from lower socioeconomic classes to take longer to achieve educational excellence due to a lack of family support or guidance, as history shows that Brahmins and other upper caste people were highly positioned and well placed in the British Administration, and this trend continued after Independence. As a result, this research is crucial in comprehending the Indian government's post-independence programme for bridging the class and community divides.

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