

Inclusive Development of the Backward Classes Through Higher Education

(A Study on Backward Class Students Enrolled in Engineering and Medical Courses in Anantapur, A.P.)

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Abstract

Post Independent India tried to uplift the disadvantaged sections through the inclusive policy of reservation, in education and occupation, so as to enable them to catch up with the main stream society. It is almost five decades since the provision of reservations and welfare inputs to the backward classes in all the states. What is the impact of these welfare inputs? Whether or not these backward classes made use of these reservations and inputs to scale higher education more so in engineering and medical streams of professional education? Whether or not the inclusive policy of reservation resulted in ushering of equality of opportunity in education and subsequently their social empowerment on a scale of social parity is being examined in this paper.

Key Words:

Backward classes: The artisan and castes who ranked just above the so called untouchables in the caste hierarchy and rendered services to other castes.

Professional Education: The higher education, specializing in the streams of engineering and medicine, which are ranked as premier in the country.

Introduction

Inequality of power and advantage has been an extremely common feature of human societies, even if the degree of inequality has varied greatly. It is not, however, something which is randomly distributed between individuals in society. Members of a given group will have features in common and if they are in a superior position they will usually see that their unequal position is passed on to their children.

Social stratification of Indian society was on the dimension of caste inequality signifying social exclusion and marginalization of many a social group in the lines of purity and

pollution. The twice born castes enjoyed social honor, power and economic viability, all other groups were to made be subservient in this form of ascribed social positioning and concomitant social status and Jajmanic social obligations. The so called 'Harijans' occupied the lowest rung outside the caste hierarchy, the artisan castes subsequently came to be called as the backward classes or communities practicing the traditional service occupations such as Dhobies, Barbers, Shepherds, Potters, Goldsmiths and Iron smiths, Carpenters etc. These occupations were not ranked a defiling and polluting, as in the case of Dalits, yet these Backward Classes were deprived of social position, honor and power and were made to occupy the caste ladder just above the untouchables.

Society is divided into a patterned structure of unequal groups, and this structure tends to persist across generations. The actual nature of these groups and the relationships between them vary enormously.

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In a caste based stratification system as in the case of traditional India an individual's position totally depends on those status attributes ascribed by birth rather than on any which are achieved during the course of one's life. The social position into which an individual is born here is the one in which, theoretically, he is bound to remain for the rest of his life. In reality, individuals, families and even groups can change position, although it is far from usual. Thus, in a class society members typically believe that mobility is easily available and secured on merit. Though this is demonstrated to be largely illusory in practice, this belief still contrasts with that underlying caste inequality.

In traditional India different castes formed a hierarchy of social precedence. Each position in the caste structure was defined in terms of in purity or pollution relative to others, whilst those who are least pure – i.e. the Panchamas, sometimes called the 'out castes' or 'Untouchables' – are inferior to all other castes. In The traditional system is generally conceptualized in terms of the four-fold Varnas, which in addition to the Brahmins at the top included the Kshatriyas, or warriors, the Vaishyas, or traders, and the Shudras, or servants and labourers, in that order. Thus, in a class society members typically believe that mobility is easily available and secured on merit. Though this is demonstrated to be largely illusory in practice, this belief still contrasts with that underlying caste inequality.

The Panchamas were outside the caste plane and, as such, they were considered to be inferior to even Shudras. As a matter of fact, however, only the top and bottom of the hierarchy, namely, the Brahmins and the Panchamas, are relatively fixed. And, there are innumerable occupation-based caste groups, called Jatis, in the middle range whose mutual position allows room for considerable debate.

Social stratification is, as we have seen, structured inequality in society, such that some strata have more power and reward than

others. In many societies this has been an avowed and recognized feature of social organization – acknowledged and (usually) justified both by those who benefit and those who are disadvantaged. Normally in such societies – for example, in the form of castes or feudal estates- social positions are defined and fixed by birth. Unequal power or benefit is inherited – ascribed – and in theory this position cannot be changed by the efforts of the occupant of such a stratum. However good, however servile, the untouchables in India could never make themselves anything other than untouchable (and equally important, by and large, they accepted this fact). Thus, social hierarchy is fixed, rigid, and transmitted across generations in these societies with mobility blocked for ever.

The caste system in India has undergone considerable changes over the years, especially during the course of the last century and a half. The most important driving force for these changes was the British rule and the socio-economic and administrative institutions and practices introduced by the British. The British when they introduced secular education, tried to attract the Dalits and the Backward Classes to education with the latent intention of weakening the freedom movement. But this paved way for the emergence and social elevation of backward classes who tried to take advantage of the education and develop their social status.

The British, when they introduced secular education, tried to attract the Dalits and the Backward Classes to education with the latent intention of weakening the freedom movement. But this paved way for the to the emergence and social elevation of backward classes, who tried to take advantage of the education and develop their social status. The Independent India, began with the agenda of ensuring an egalitarian society, initiated protective discrimination and constitutional safeguards to the marginalized sections of society. The states were directed to accord inputs for the developments of the backward classes, for the backward classes were not uniform throughout the country and in their

numerical strength. Accordingly, the states provided education and employment opportunities to the backward communities categorizing them into as, A, B, C, D and subsequently E in an inclusive strategy for development. The central government has in the last decade, began to provide reservations to backward classes in education and in Employment to the non- creamy layer.

The new economic and secular occupational opportunities have weakened the traditional association between caste and occupation. The emerging capitalist economy, especially since independence, has superimposed a Class stratification on the caste system. This has resulted in a coalescence of caste and class in some sectors of the population and a dissociation or divergence between them amongst the others. The exigencies of urban life have eroded caste- based social customs and behaviour patterns. The various social reform movements, the spread of liberal ideology, and the legislative enactments of the government as also its policy and programme of protective discrimination for the upliftment of the erstwhile downtrodden caste groups have also made severe dents in the caste system.

Thus, if on the one hand caste as a system is in general weakening, castes as interest groups have gained strength. In a society in the throes of change all this means that stratification is in a state of flux. While the changes in the caste system are most visible in the urban areas, the caste system still continues to color many facets of social and economic life in the rural areas.

Education

Formal education is regarded as a major agency of socialization in modern societies. But, education differs from other forms of socialization in that it involves instruction which is deliberate, conducted within formal organizations set aside for that purpose, and relatively standardized. Apart from socialization, education is also considered to be a necessary way of preparing children for

adult life. Above all in the modern era education is a key input for development and empowerment.

Educational reformers and sociologists alike have seen the promotion of equality of opportunity in education as the key to new, more egalitarian society – a meritocracy, in which people could move freely up and down the occupational hierarchy according to personal merit. In a meritocracy, the education system would act ruthlessly and impartially to allocate individuals to a station befitting their ability; being born into a wealthy or powerful family no cushion against failure. In short, equality of opportunity in education would be the instrument severing the old links between family background and adult success.

We should note two points about the linked concepts of ‘meritocracy’ and ‘equality of opportunity’. First, in most versions of the meritocratic argument, social inequality is assumed to be a more or less inevitable outcome of individual differences in intelligence or talent, given the ‘need’ in industrial societies to offer incentives to those of higher ability.

Two historical developments, namely, accelerated Globalisation and the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Revolution, have caused all – pervasive and unprecedented global – level impact. No sphere of human life is left untouched by them. Unhindered growth of capitalism has culminated in a new world economic order, one of the distinguishing features of which is the predominance and importance of knowledge as a factor of production. It is commendable that India has developed a very a large network of institutions of higher education. However, mere quantitative growth of institutions alone would not serve the objective of becoming a globally recognized power. There are three main deficiencies, namely, inadequacy in access, uneven and inequitable opportunities of higher education across different categories and sections of the population, and low quality of education imparted in institutions of higher education.

Therefore, the question of equity has also become equally important. There are glaring disparities in General Enrolment Ratio among the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Muslims, women, and the rural people, which need to be corrected for achieving the objective of inclusive growth, to make the society more egalitarian, inclusive and to harness the potentials of these groups for nation building. The issue of equality in education is intimately related to the prevailing socio-economic inequalities in the society.

Higher Education in India

Among things that post- independence India has succeeded in achieving is the phenomenal growth of higher education in terms of institutions, academic programmes, and enrolment. A large network of universities, colleges, and research institutes, that has been established, is globally recognized as the third largest. Hundreds of institutions of higher education are imparting education and providing training in the conventional and in the emerging disciplines to the students. The products of some of them have worldwide acceptability.

The foundation of the modern formal system of higher education was laid by the British regime when the first three universities at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were established in 1857. The growth of the system in the subsequent decades was slow. It took several years for the fourth university to come into existence. A few colleges of liberal education were also then established. However, professional education remained largely neglected since the beginning. Historical records reveal that in 1916-17 there were only four engineering colleges in British India with a total annual intake of 74 students. Till 1921 - 22 only one more college was added. The period between 1931-32 and 1939-40 was totally blank. In 1911-12, there were only four medical colleges in the country. Their number went up to 12 in 1939-40. Since these universities and colleges were located in bigger cities, those having a tradition of education

and mainly living in those cities could take advantage of these facilities.

It may be because of the tiny class of intellectuals, which came out of the portals of these institutions that posed a formidable challenge to the legitimacy of British rule in India that the British kept the access to higher education limited. The people of non-literate castes and communities that constituted a bulk of the Indian population lacked in self-consciousness and were not enough awakened to the importance of education for their individual development. So, their inclination to education was dormant or weak. The general awakening that got stirred during the independence movement, efforts of social reformers and visible benefits of education ignited the quest for education among common people.

After independence a great deal of boost was given to education, particularly higher education. The founding fathers of Independent India realized the crucial significance of education for the country's overall development. There was an increasing demand for educated and trained human resources to operate the multitude of units that were created to provide technical and allied services required to implement various development programmes including the industrial projects.

The pace of expansion of higher education continued and strengthened further. Before Independence, there were only 20 Universities and 591 Colleges in the country. In the post-independence period, there has been a dramatic growth in the number of institutions of higher education. In 2006, there were in all 356 Universities and University-level institutions, which included 20 Central Universities, 211 State Universities, 107 'Deemed to be Universities', and 18 Institutions of National Importance. The total number of universities in the country has now reportedly grown to 421. The growth of universities is multi - faceted. Among 365 universities, 219 are conventional universities and 146 are universities of specialized education. The latter include universities of engineering and

technology, agriculture, health sciences, Indian languages, law, women, yoga, fine arts, museum, population sciences, Jainology, and like.

In the present context of Globalization, Education has become a global in character. The whole world had become a manufacturing society the new concept is that of knowledge society and knowledge network are the ruling terms. Today the demand for professionals for a worldwide market has turned the world of higher education assuming a global character producing professionals for global market on lucrative pay rolls. With opportunities beckoning, there had been an unprecedented demand for engineering and business graduates. In this context it has to be examined as to the progress made by the disadvantaged sections in higher education particularly in professional education like engineering and medicine, which are the most preferred professional courses.

Six decades have rolled by. There were very few studies made on the progress made by various communities in terms of attainment of higher education. The studies in education were mainly focused on the primary and secondary level where we are yet to achieve total literacy. The population being heterogeneous in character the social exclusion of predominant sections for centuries had created a lag between the advantaged and the disadvantaged sections of the society. In an effort to bridge the gulf between these sections various programmes were initiated ensure equality of opportunity to ensure egalitarian character. Its time that studies are to be made to assess the progress made by the backward classes sequel to the provision of special privileges and development inputs for their social development through educational and economic inputs. Currently 'social Inclusion' and 'social Exclusion' have become the buzz words. The success of public policies and programmes is now being assessed in terms of how far they are socially inclusive. The concept of social inclusion is loaded with a sense of social justice and notion of morality.

An inclusive growth is considered a desirable aspect of development. There is now growing awareness of this among the policy makers, too. Quite a few of the groups and sections in Indian society have so far not got their legitimate share in the developmental gains of the country. This situation is now viewed as potentially harmful to the general wellbeing of society, to national integration, and ultimately to the stability of the democratic polity. The developmental policies and programmes are now being redesigned to give them a socially inclusive character. The disadvantaged groups have also become more aware of their rights and claims which they express in different ways. The government's commitment to equitable distribution of gains and opportunities is ingrained in its policy formulations. This is evident from the fact that the XI Plan documents bear the words, 'With Inclusive Growth'.

The era of globalization has brought into currency the terms 'social Inclusion' and 'social Exclusion' have become the buzz words. The success of public policies and programmes are now being assessed in terms of how far they are socially inclusive. Today the concept of social inclusion, is loaded with a sense of social justice and notion of morality as well. An inclusive growth is considered a desirable aspect of development. There is now growing awareness of this among the policy makers, too. Quite a few of the groups and sections in Indian society have so far not got their legitimate share in the developmental gains of the country. This situation is now viewed as potentially harmful to the general wellbeing of society, to national integration, and ultimately to the stability of democratic polity, So, the developmental policies and programmes are now being redesigned to give them a socially inclusive character. The disadvantaged groups have also become more aware of their rights and claims which they express in different ways. The government's commitment to equitable distribution of gains and opportunities is ingrained in its policy formulations from the tie of independence . This is evident from the fact that the XI Plan

documents also reiterate the same goal bearing the words, 'With Inclusive Growth'.

To what an extent did these inclusive development strategies succeeded in triggering the social mobility of the downtrodden castes through higher education more so through professional education has not been object of study for long. There has not been statistics on their numerical strength. To fill the void in the gap the present study was attempted to shed light on the progress and social inclusion of backward classes through higher education and the empowerment of these erstwhile disadvantaged sections.

Objectives

1. To estimate the progress of backward classes in higher education particularly in Engineering and Medical courses.
2. To assess the quality and the extent of social Inclusion and equality of opportunity achieved by backward classes in higher education for their inclusion into mainstream society.

Method of Study

This paper is based on a study on 340 Engineering and 70 Medical students belonging to backward Classes' students enrolled in premier Government professional colleges viz the JNTU College of Engineering and the Anantapur Medical College, in Anantapur City of Andhra Pradesh.

Findings and discussion

It can be said that boys and girls from backward classes are into engineering and medical streams making use of the inclusive policy of reservations. Besides the social inclusion of boys from the backward sections, there is also inclusion of once deprived, weaker sections, of society namely the women from these backward classes.

It has been found that students from all five Sub castes of Backward Castes are entering professional education mainly through the reservation channel but many of them could also bag seats under open quota. It was heartening to note that 37.94 per cent of the Engineering seats and 25.71 per cent of the Medical seats in the open were bagged by boys and girls from the backward sections. Analyzing it by sub caste wise it can be seen that among the Engineering seats bagged by backward class students, the percentage of BC C, students bagging OC seats was more (45.45

Table I: Distribution of Respondents by Gender and Course

SI. No.	Gender	No. of Respondents		Total
		Engineering	Medical	
1.	Male	215 (63.24)	43 (61.43)	258 (62.93)
2.	Female	125 (36.76)	27 (38.57)	152 (37.07)
	Total	340 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	410 (100.00)

Table II: Distribution of Respondents by the Caste

SI. No.	Caste	No. of Respondents		Total
		Engineering	Medical	
1.	BC-A	90 (26.47)	15 (21.43)	105 (25.61)
2.	BC-B	99 (29.12)	18 (25.71)	117 (28.54)
3.	BC-C	11 (2.24)	6 (8.57)	17 (4.15)
4.	BC-D	96 (28.24)	16 (22.86)	112 (27.32)
5.	BC-E	44 (12.94)	15 (21.43)	59 (14.39)
	Total	340 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	410 (100.00)

%, followed by BCB (42.42), and BC D students (38.64 % and BC A (37.78). Among the Medical seats the BC B & BC C students have bagged 33.33 of OC seats followed by BC D, 25%. and BCA & BC E 20 %). This only shows the equality of opportunity and the empowerment of the backward classes through higher education.

Table III: Distribution of Respondents by their Sub- Caste and Branch of Study

SI. No.	Caste	Engineering					Total	Medical		Grand Total
		Civil	E.E.E	Mech	E.C.E	C.S.E		M.B.B.S	Total	
1.	BC-A	20 (29.41)	16 (24.62)	19 (27.14)	15 (22.06)	20 (28.99)	90 (26.47)	15 (21.43)	15 (21.43)	105 (25.61)
2.	BC-B	20 (29.41)	20 (30.77)	20 (28.57)	20 (29.41)	19 (27.54)	99 (29.12)	18 (25.71)	18 (25.71)	117 (28.54)
3.	BC-C	1 (1.47)	1 (1.54)	2 (2.86)	4 (5.88)	3 (4.35)	11 (3.24)	6 (8.57)	6 (8.57)	17 (4.15)
4.	BC-D	19 (27.94)	20 (30.77)	18 (25.71)	19 (27.94)	20 (28.99)	96 (28.24)	16 (22.86)	16 (22.86)	112 (27.32)
5.	BC-E	8 (11.76)	8 (12.31)	11 (15.71)	10 (14.71)	7 (10.14)	44 (12.94)	15 (21.43)	15 (21.43)	59 (14.39)
	Total	68 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	68 (100.00)	69 (100.00)	340 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	410 (100.00)

Course and Gender wise enrolment of backward class students shows that girls from backward Classes are entering all branches of Engineering. They are found be joining even the male preferred branches of Civil and Mechanical engineering. The usually preferred branches by girls are E.E.E. E.C.E. C.S.E. Due to the decline for the software the demand for conventional branches of Engineering Civil and Mechanical are being preferred not only by boys but also by girls as well. This indicates their confidence and positive orientation to professional education.

It is observed that 72.20 per cent of backward class students from both engineering and medical courses are from Rural (43.90%)

Table IV: Distribution of Respondents by their Places of birth

SI. No.	Place of Birth	No. of Respondents		Total
		Engineering	Medical	
1.	Rural	161 (47.35)	19 (27.14)	180 (43.90)
2.	Semi - Urban	85 (25.00)	31 (44.29)	116 (28.30)
3.	Urban	94 (27.65)	20 (28.57)	114 (27.80)
	Total	340 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	410 (100.00)

Table V: Distributions of Respondents by the Category of admission

SI. No.	B.C. Students	No. of Respondents		Total
		Engineering	Medical	
1.	Reservation Category	211 (62.06)	52 (74.29)	263 (64.15)
2.	Open Category	129 (37.94)	18 (25.71)	147 (35.85)
	Total	340 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	410 (100.00)

and semi urban areas (28.30%). These students hailing from backward rural and semi urban background have shown remarkable sense of achievement in overcoming the backwardness through their excellent academic achievement.

Analyzing the income level of their families, it can be seen that 48.29 of the families have a monthly income of less than Rs. 10,000 p.m. and 26.34 per cent have income level of Rs. Rs.10,000 and above. The inference here is that the economic condition of the families of the students belonging to backward classes indicate, that their condition is one of just above the position of disadvantage.

The parental level of education shows that in the case of 29.76 % of respondents the level of education of the parents is equal and in the case of 65.85 % of cases, fathers are more educated than their mothers and only in the

Table VI: Distributions of Respondents by the Sub Caste & Reservation Category

B.C. Students	Engineering						Medical					
	BC-A	BC-B	BC-C	BC-D	BC-E	Total	BC-A	BC-B	BC-C	BC-D	BC-E	Total
Reservation Category	56 (62.22)	57 (57.58)	6 (54.55)	65 (67.71)	27 (61.36)	211 (62.06)	12 (80.00)	12 (66.67)	4 (66.67)	12 (75.00)	12 (80.00)	52 (74.29)
Open Category	34 (37.78)	42 (42.42)	5 (45.45)	31 (32.29)	17 (38.64)	129 (37.94)	3 (20.00)	6 (33.33)	2 (33.33)	4 (25.00)	3 (20.00)	18 (25.71)
Total	90 (100.00)	99 (100.00)	11 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	44 (100.00)	340 (100.00)	15 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	6 (100.00)	16 (100.00)	15 (100.00)	70 (100.00)

Table VII: Distribution of Respondents by the fathers' income

Sl. No.	Level of Monthly Income	No. of Respondents		Total
		Engineering	Medical	
1.	Rs1000 - 2000	73 (21.47)	15 (21.43)	88 (21.46)
2.	2000 - 3000	45 (13.24)	6 (8.57)	51 (12.44)
3.	3000 - 5000	49 (14.41)	10 (14.29)	59 (14.39)
4.	5000 - 10000	80 (23.53)	11 (15.71)	91 (22.20)
5.	10000 - 20000	58 (17.06)	24 (34.29)	82 (20.00)
6.	20000 - 30000	11 (3.24)	2 (2.86)	13 (3.17)
7.	30000 - 40000	3 (0.88)	1 (1.43)	4 (0.98)
8.	40000 - 50000	6 (1.76)	0 (0.00)	6 (1.46)
9.	50000 >	3 (0.88)	0 (0.00)	3 (0.73)
10.	Father not alive	12 (3.53)	1 (1.43)	13 (3.17)
	Total	340 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	410 (100.00)

case of 4.39 cases the mother have higher level of learning than their fathers. On the whole the parental level of education predominantly in secondary and Intermediate level which seemed to have enabled the parents to realize the importance of education and also had enabled them to take appropriate decisions for their wards' education.

Conclusion

The paper on the basis of the above key findings draws the conclusion that the students belonging to Backward classes are entering the portals of higher education easily more so because of the inclusive initiative of

reservations. It is heartening to see that within a short span of less than 60 years the backward classes have shown remarkable level of educational mobility, even excelling to bag 37.94 % of Engineering seats and 25.71 % of medical seats in the open category. These seats are in the premier Institutions of higher learning offering professional education. Hailing predominantly from disadvantaged families from rural and semi urban areas, these students could scale higher levels of professional education with higher academic consistency and exhibiting positive value orientation. The inclusive initiative of reservations in education and occupations in the states did result in empowering and uplifting the backward classes to pave way for their occupational and social mobility there by vindicating the inclusive policy of reservations, which has brought about equality of opportunity for these backward class students.

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Table VIII: Matrix Showing levels of Education of Respondents' Fathers and Mothers
Fathers Education

	No Schooling	Primary Education	Upper Primary Education	Secondary Education	Intermediate	Degree	Post Degree	Professional
No Schooling	59	20	12	35	14	11	1	8
Primary Education	2	5	6	18	4	1		1
Upper Primary	1	1	3	12	6	4	1	3
Secondary Education	2	1	5	21	23	26	4	10
Intermediate	1			4	3	13	4	9
Degree				1		14	8	11
Post Degree						1	2	1
Professional						2	1	15

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