IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature (IMPACT: IJRHAL)
ISSN(E): 2321-8878; ISSN(P): 2347-4564
Vol. 2, Issue 4, Apr 2014, 35-42

DISPARITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CONTEXT OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN INDIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Caste is the basic system of societal organization in India, which is based on highly unequal entitlements to economic and social rights. Education also gets affected by the mechanism of this Caste system. In spite of increasing attention given since independence to the education of weaker sections of the community, the percentage of the scheduled caste enrolled in higher education continues to be lower than their percentage in the population, and this also varies from region to region. The paper looks into the disparity in higher level of education among Scheduled castes and general population. It is based on the unit level data of the two latest NSSO rounds (55^{th} and 66^{th}) with comparable data for the two social groups namely Scheduled Castes and General Population (or others as given by NSSO).

KEYWORDS: Disparity, Enrolment, Higher Education, Scheduled Castes

INTRODUCTION

The Scheduled Castes have been considered the weakest constituents of the Indian social structure. They are designated with a variety of nomenclature such as untouchables, harijans, depressed classes, servile classes, weaker section, *panchamas, atisudras, avarnas* and *antyajas*. The Scheduled castes throughout the country occupy the lowest rank in the caste hierarchy, and faced many problems, which are social, economic, political and educational in nature. The suffering of Scheduled Caste varies from region to region and caste to caste as also in the time frame. However, both temporally and spatially, the Scheduled Castes have been a vital link in India's population. Despite discriminations of various sorts against the person of these castes, functionally they have been from the beginning and everywhere an integral part of India's life (Gosal and Mukherjee, 1972).

The inequality of the caste system is a special type of inequality, of ideas and values based on the purity- pollution which is the basic to the hierarchy in caste structure (Dumont, 1970). Scheduled Castes are worst victim of social inequality in every sphere of life. Contemporarily, the rigours of pollution, social practices of untouchability and social relations of servility vary greatly in different parts of the country. The widespread upsurge of atrocity signifies continued caste based oppression. The problems of scheduled caste have been aggravated over the years and pushed them to the total subjugation and exploitation. With the advances in the society, in spite of all measures to bring them to the higher levels of education, the gap between their level of educational development and the average for society as a whole still continues to be very wide. The Scheduled caste population in higher education level is differ from region to region, as the region specificities are acting predominantly on the social attributes, Therefore, the understanding of distribution and relative concentration of scheduled caste population is very important to know the complex nature of society and to the comprehension of the population geography of India. So the basic objectives of this paper are: to examine the

concentration and distribution pattern of scheduled caste; to look into the spatial pattern of disparity in higher level of education among Scheduled castes and general population.

DATA BASE

- Unit level data of NSSO 55TH Round: schedule 10.1:

  Employment and Unemployment data (July 1999 - June 2000).

- Unit level data of NSSO 66TH Round: schedule 10:

  Employment and Unemployment data (July 2009- June 2010).

METHODOLOGY

- Social groups of Scheduled Caste and Non Scheduled (which are nether scheduled caste, scheduled tribes nor other backward castes, and considered as others by NSSO, known as General Population in this study) are taken for the study with the rationale that the former group is lagging behind the later one.

- Location Quotient has been calculated to show the concentration of scheduled caste population:

$$location\ quotient = \frac{\frac{total\ population\ of\ SC\ in\ region}{total\ population\ of\ region}}{\frac{total\ population\ of\ SC\ in\ India}{total\ population\ of\ India}}$$

When a region's Location Quotient for Scheduled Caste is larger than 1, it can be concluded that there the SC population concentration is greater than national average.

- Measurement of dispersion within the social groups by the Co-efficient of Variation (CV)

  CV = SD/Mean

It measures the dispersion of a distribution relation to central value. The expression of the consistency of data, CV is dimensionless value so different values of CV are comparable. Higher value shows high variation in data.

- To show the disparity among Scheduled caste and General Population (mentioned as 'Others' in NSSO), Sopher's Index of Disparity, modified by A. Kundu is used:

$$Ds = log\left(\frac{X2}{X1}\right) + log\ ((Q - X1)/(Q - X2))$$

Where, X2 > X1 and Q > 200

Here, Non Scheduled population or General population is taken as X2, as they are considered as the forward group, and X1 is Scheduled caste.

- Compound Annual Growth Rate has been calculated for annual average growth rate by using:-

  $r = [(Yf/Yb)^{1/n} - 1]*100$

  Where, Yf = Final Year, Yb = Base year, n= Number of years

- With the help GIS, NSSO regional level map for both the time period have been generated to make Choropleth Maps for the spatial pattern of various attributes. For the State Region Map of India, we need to club some regions as to have the proper number of samples in the region. Also need to adjust the boundaries of the regions to match with two level data [55th (1999-2000) and 66th (2009-10)]. For this number for regions reduced in several states to match the regions.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Education is considered as one of the most important aspect of human life as it is not related to the quantity of population but with the qualitative aspect of the population and thus creates the high quality of human capital in today's knowledge based society. Education is considered to be an important mechanism for development.

More specifically, it has been viewed as the instrument through which people can be equipped for a social structure in which status is determined, not by ascription but by individual achievement and worth. It is regarded as one of the prime instrument for improving the condition. Not only this, education is also considered as an instrument to serve the social object of equalizing the under privileged in the matters of opportunities for advancement and enabling them to use their educations as a lever for improvement of their condition.

Education is the social institution in human society, though education makes its impact in the larger society, it is constantly affected in various ways by the social institutions like stratification, polity, economy and religion.

Caste is the basic attribute of the Indian social system which operates as an institution in society from past. As a social institution, education does not exist in isolation from the other social institutions in society. It exists in constant interaction with them and performs its function in the context of its relationship with them. In the process, education affects, and is constantly affected by, the other social institutions.

The major social institutions that are in interaction with education are stratification, economy, religion and polity. As a function of social stratification towards the educational system, every society faces the phenomenon of inequality in access to, and achievement in, education. (Aikara, 2004)

Education also gets affected by the mechanism of this Caste system and educational inequality in access has been a major concern in Indian society. One important data which shows their condition is about their access to higher education institutions. The access to higher education is measured in terms of gross enrolment ratio (GER) which is a ratio of persons enrolled in higher education institutions to total population of the persons in age groups of 18-23 years.

In case of India, the enrolment of Scheduled Castes students in higher education has been making great strides since independence and has shown substantial progress in the past decades. But still there is persistence of disparity between the enrolment of SCs and non-Scheduled populations (NSPs) in the higher education. In 2000, the average GER was about 10%.

However, there were significant disparities across social groups. The GER in rural area was much lower for SCs as compared with others. It's being 5.0% for SCs and 16.74% for others. In urban area, the GER for SCs and others was 11.53% and 29.28% respectively. Thus, there was wide gap in the GER for SCs as compared to others. (Srivastava and Sinha, 2008)

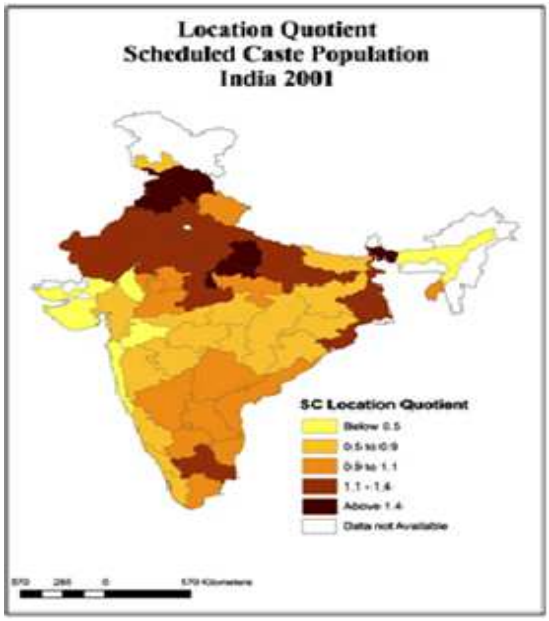


Figure 1: Location Quotient of Scheduled Caste, 2001,
(Source: Computed by Author with data from Census of India, 2001)

Figure 1 shows the location quotient of scheduled caste population. Location quotients compare the relative concentration of Scheduled caste in a region to the relative concentration of that same group in whole country. When a region's Location Quotient for Scheduled Caste is larger than 1, it can be concluded that there the Scheduled caste population concentration is greater than national average.

This map show same pattern as of scheduled caste concentration, as the regions of this map show same pattern as of Scheduled caste concentration, as the regions of north plain have the scheduled caste population more than the national average and the central belt have scheduled caste population share below national average. The regions like West Bengal Himalayan (2.2), Punjab Northern (1.9), Uttar Pradesh Southern (1.7), Punjab Southern (1.7) and Uttar Pradesh Central (1.6) have share of scheduled caste more than national average. Concentration of scheduled caste population shows that north plains have more concentration of scheduled caste population, as they derive their livelihood from agriculture so more concentrated in agrarian zone. Gujarat Saurashtra (0.3), Maharashtra Coastal (0.3) and Goa (0.1) have share of scheduled caste population less than the national average. The central belt extending from coastal Maharashtra to Jharkhand has low proportion of scheduled caste population.

Table 1: Educational Status of Scheduled Caste and General Population in 2009-10

2009-10 Education Status			Illiterate	Upto Primary	Upto Secondary	Upto Higher Secondary	Technical	Non – Technical Graduate
Scheduled Caste	Rural	Male	34.9	37.3	22.2	3.6	0.5	1.6
		Female	52.9	30.8	13.7	1.7	0.2	0.7
		Total	**43.6**	**34.1**	**18.0**	**2.7**	**0.3**	**1.2**
	Urban	Male	23.7	32.0	27.8	7.9	2.7	5.9
		Female	36.1	30.8	21.7	5.7	1.3	4.5
		Total	**29.6**	**31.4**	**24.9**	**6.8**	**2.0**	**5.2**
	Total	Male	32.6	36.2	23.3	4.4	1.0	2.5
		Female	49.6	30.8	15.2	2.5	0.4	1.5
		Total	**40.8**	**33.6**	**19.4**	**3.5**	**0.7**	**2.0**

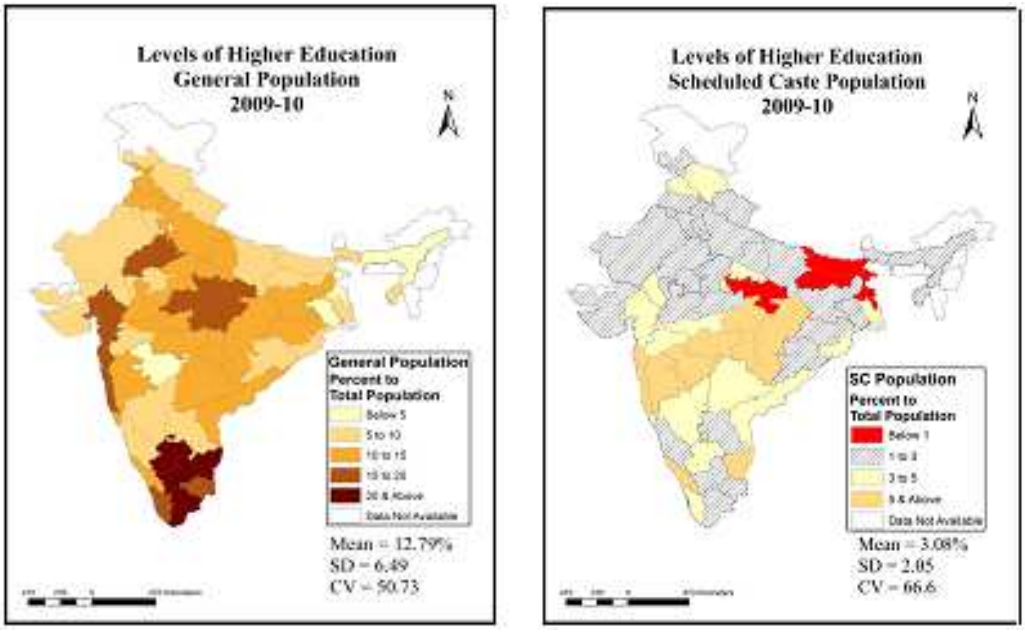
Table 1: Contd.,

General	Rural	Male	22.2	34.0	30.0	7.8	1.3	4.7
		Female	36.7	33.6	22.0	4.9	0.5	2.4
		Total	**29.2**	**33.8**	**26.1**	**6.4**	**0.9**	**3.6**
	Urban	Male	12.5	23.5	28.5	12.0	6.0	17.5
		Female	19.4	24.1	26.8	11.7	2.5	15.5
		Total	**15.8**	**23.8**	**27.7**	**11.9**	**4.3**	**16.5**
	Total	Male	18.3	29.8	29.4	9.5	3.1	9.8
		Female	29.9	29.8	23.9	7.6	1.3	7.5
		Total	**23.9**	**29.8**	**26.8**	**8.6**	**2.3**	**8.7**

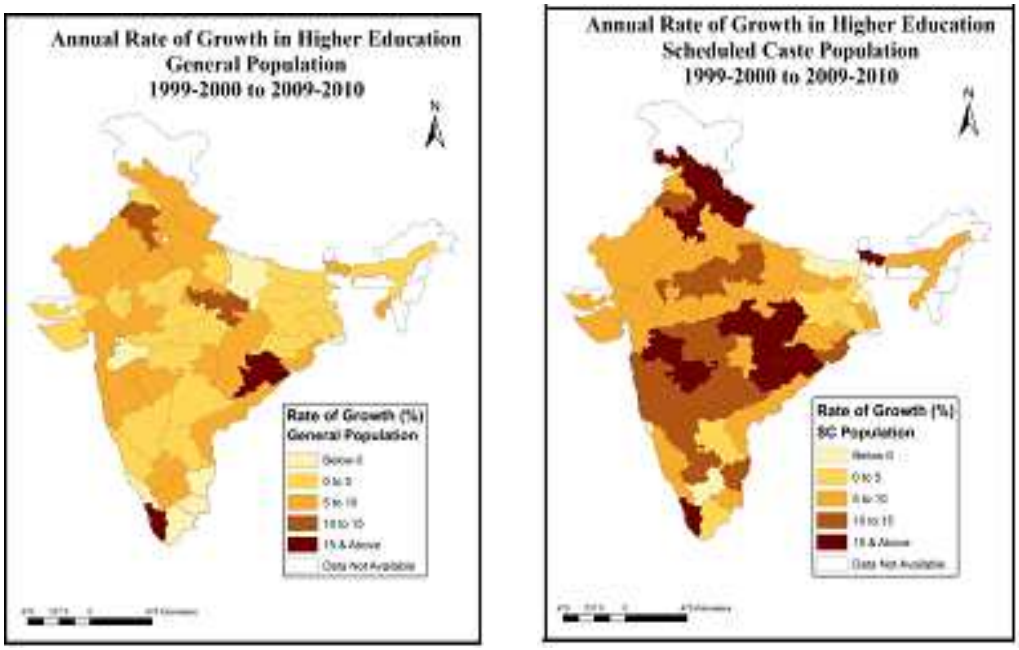
Source: Computed by author using NSS unit level data on employment and unemployment, 66th Round, Schedule 10, 2009-10

Table 1 shows the status of education for scheduled caste and general population in 2009-10. This clearly shows that scheduled caste comprises around 40.8% of illiterates and this proportion is very high for the scheduled caste females. In higher education, though, the overall representation is very poor but within this also the scheduled castes is marginalized, with just 2% as non – technical graduates and above, and just 0.7% with technical higher education. The condition for the rural scheduled caste is worse than the urban scheduled castes. The most deprived is rural scheduled caste females and out of scheduled caste the most privileged are urban scheduled caste males. But even then the difference between proportions of urban scheduled caste males and urban General males in higher education is very stark.

This shows the marginalization of scheduled caste population from higher education all across the sector and gender. This inequality is primarily analyzed in relation to inequality in society under the light of fact that not all social groups are equal in socio-economic background and hence, there is stratification in education too. Inequality in access to higher education between different social groups is very noticeable, continuous and also aggravated from past in spite of educational growth. Though it is clear that the traditionally disadvantageous group is far behind the advanced group not only in attaining higher education but traditional deprivation and lack of education make them dually marginalized.



(A) **(B)**



(C) **(D)**

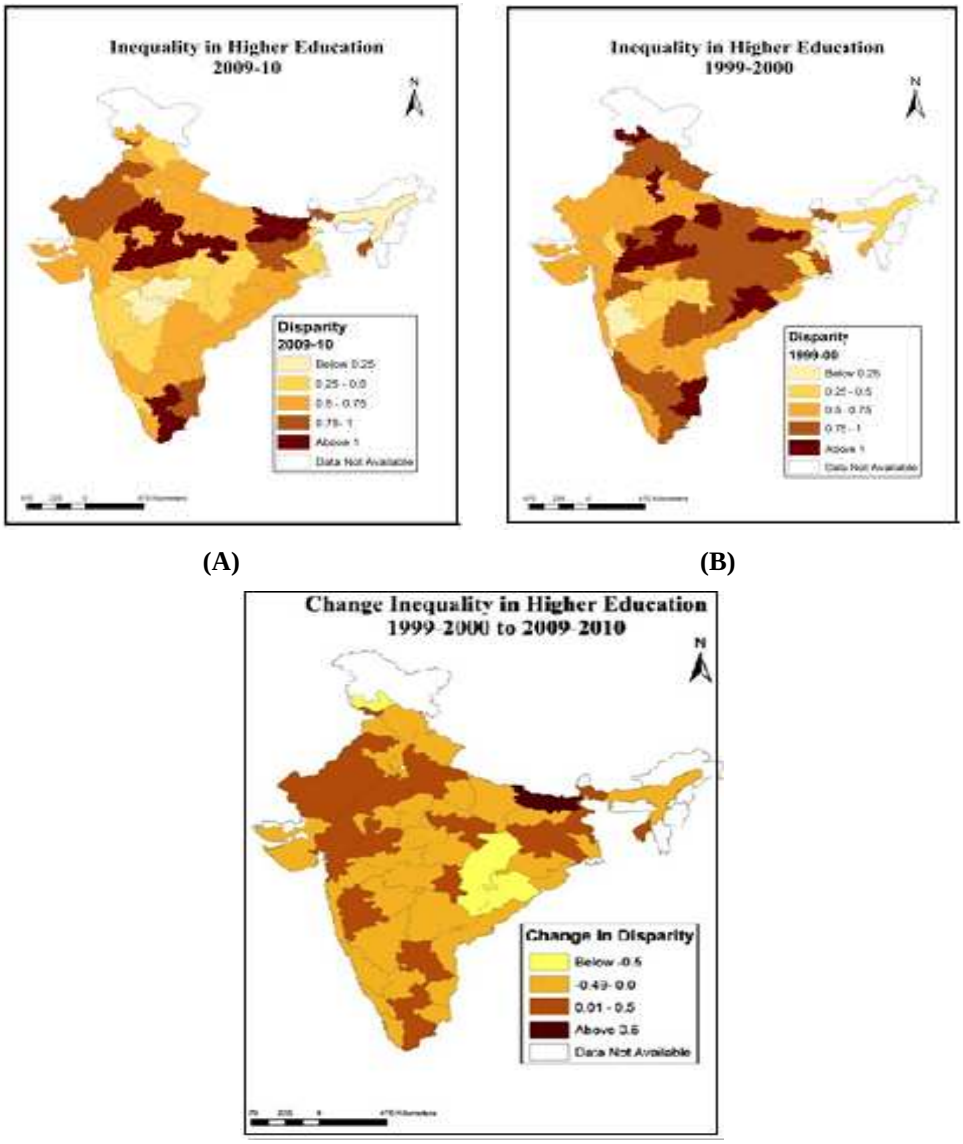
Figure 2: (A) Share of General Population in Higher Education, (B) Share of Scheduled Caste Population in Higher Education, (Source: Computed by Author Using NSS Unit Level Data on Employment and Unemployment, 66th Round, Schedule 10, 2009-10) (C) Growth Rate of General Population in Higher Education, (D) Growth Rate of Scheduled Caste Population in Higher Education (Source: Computed by Author Using NSS Unit Level Data on Employment and Unemployment, 66th Round, Schedule 10, 2009-10)

Figure 2(A) and (B) shows the proportions of general population and scheduled caste population in higher education, respectively. All across the regions the share of scheduled castes is low in comparison to general. The mean for the general population is 12.79% while that for the scheduled castes is 3.08%. The high value of CV (co-efficient of variation) for scheduled castes shows more variation among them.

The figure 2(B), showing proportions of higher education among scheduled caste and the figure 1, which shows the concentration of scheduled caste, is comparable as, in regions of north belt where the concentration of schedule castes is more, the proportion of scheduled caste in higher education is low, while that in the central belt the concentration of scheduled caste is low, there the comparative proportion in higher education for SCs is high.

Figure 2(C) and (D) show the annual growth rate in higher education among general population and scheduled caste population from 1999-00 to 2009-10, respectively. The figures show that the rate of growth is more among the scheduled caste population then general population. The rate of growth is more for scheduled caste in regions of Himachal, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Central India regions and in parts of South India.

The problem is more for the regions where the proportion of population in higher education is low and also the rate of growth in higher education is less, like in the northern Bihar, which stands with low proportions and low rate of growth in higher education.



(A) **(B)**

(C)

Figure 3: (A) Higher Education Disparity in 2009-10, (B) Higher Education Disparity in 1999-00, (C) Changes in Disparity from 1999-00 to 2009-10

Figure 3(A) shows the disparity among general population and scheduled caste population in higher education in 2009-10, the disparity is more northern plains and in Tamil Nadu regions, while that of low disparity is in central belt of India. The figure 3(B) shows the disparity among two groups in 1999-00, which shows more number of regions in range above 1 then in 2009-10. In 1999-00 the number of regions with high (0.75 to 1) and very high (above 1) disparity are more. While that in 2009-10 disparity declines but still persists. Figure 3(C) shows the change in disparity from 1999-00 to 2009-10, and this shows that the Jammu hills, Chhattisgarh and Orissa region shows faster decline in disparity. While the regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Western Uttar Pradesh show an increase in disparity in 2009-10 from 1999-00. Northern Bihar shows highest increase in disparity that is more than 0.5 points increase. These three maps shows that in 1999-00 the disparity is more in eastern parts of India, while due to decrease in inequality there and an increase in inequality in Northern India regions, there is consequent change in the map of 2009-10 which shows comparatively high disparity in north India.

CONCLUSIONS

Higher education is the threshold where future decisions – makers & policy makers generally receive training and are exposed to principles. It is thus critical to focus attention on mainstreaming social equality issues to allow for equal representation of all sections of society.

Equality of educational opportunity, as has been pointed out already, does not consist in a mere provision of opportunities. Rather it implies that such provisions be actually utilized by all particularly by those who have been denied such privileges before. If expansion of opportunities for secondary and higher education has not really enabled the underprivileged to use them either because of social or economic reasons and has only helped the dominant classes in the society to strengthen their position, no true egalitarian would plead for a further expansion of them.

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