



Impact of Social Stratification on the Educational System in India

Tarak Nath Bhunia & Dr. Jayanta Mete

1. Research Scholar, Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha, India, Email: bhuniataraknath@gmail.com
2. Professor, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, Nadia, West Bengal, India, Email: jayantamete447@gmail.com

Abstract: *Social stratification, deeply rooted in caste, class, gender, and regional inequalities, continues to influence educational access, participation, and outcomes in India. Marginalized and vulnerable groups continue to face limited access to quality education, which has emerged as a major concern for policymakers. This paper examines the impact of stratification using recent statistical data from national databases such as Unified District Information System for Education Plus and All India Survey on Higher Education. The study highlights disparities in literacy, enrolment, dropout, and higher education access. Findings indicate that while India has achieved near-universal primary education, inequalities intensify at higher levels due to structural barriers.*

Keywords: *Social Stratification, Educational Inequality, Educational Stratification, Caste, Class, Gender Disparity, NEP 2020.*

1. Introduction: Education is a comprehensive concept encompassing knowledge, skills, values, experiences, and learning processes. It enables individuals to develop intellectually and socially throughout their lives by enhancing their capabilities and potential. The primary objective of education is to promote cognitive development while fostering critical thinking, decision-making, and effective communication skills. It also shapes individuals' thoughts, attitudes, and perspectives, contributing to their overall development. **Educational stratification** refers to the hierarchical arrangement of educational opportunities and outcomes within society. Differences in the quality of education provided by public and private institutions have led to the formation of a stratified human resource structure. **Educational inequality** denotes the unequal distribution of educational resources and opportunities, resulting in disparities in access, quality, and outcomes among different social groups. Recognizing its importance, education has been given high priority in India's development policies. The provision of free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14 years is a Fundamental Right under the Constitution of India. The National Policy on Education (1986) marked a significant step in restructuring the education system, followed by various schemes and reforms aimed at improving access and quality. The Millennium Development Goals (2000) further accelerated educational expansion, while the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) strengthened elementary education. More recently, the National Education Policy (2020) has emphasized creativity, innovation, and holistic personality development. Tilak (2015) examined inequalities in higher education in India across economic classes, highlighting variations in access by gender, social groups (caste and religion), and place of residence (rural–urban). The study emphasized that economic status significantly influences participation in higher education, with disparities evident across all these

dimensions. Sharma (2023) analysed educational inequality through the lens of structural functionalism, arguing that the Indian education system simultaneously performs functional and dysfunctional roles within society. Her study showed that structural factors contribute to persistent disparities in access, quality, and outcomes among different social groups. It further highlighted the complex interaction between social structures and educational outcomes, explaining how inequalities are sustained within the system. Education is a key instrument for social mobility, yet in India, it is significantly shaped by social stratification. Historical caste hierarchy, economic inequality, gender bias, and rural-urban divides continue to create unequal educational opportunities. Despite policy interventions such as reservation and universal education programs, disparities persist across social groups.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To analyse educational inequality across social groups
- To examine statistical trends in literacy, enrolment, and dropout
- To assess the impact of social stratification on higher education access

3. Methodology: The study is based on secondary data analysis using national reports such as UDISE+, AISHE, and NSSO. A descriptive and analytical approach is used.

4. Data-Based Statistical Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Literacy Rate by Social Groups in India

Social Group	Literacy Rate (%)
General	80–85
OBC	70–75
SC	~66
ST	~59

Source: National Sample Survey Office. (2021).

Interpretation:

General (80–85%): This group has the highest literacy rate, indicating relatively better access to education, resources, and socio-economic advantages. OBC (70–75%): The literacy level is moderately high, but still lower than the General category, reflecting some structural and economic barriers. Lower literacy among SC and ST groups reflects systemic social exclusion and economic deprivation. The data highlights **educational inequality among social groups**, emphasizing the need for **inclusive policies, targeted interventions, and affirmative measures** to improve literacy, especially among **SC and ST communities**.

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by Educational Level

Level of Education	GER (%)
Primary	96–104
Upper Primary	~92–94
Secondary	~79–80
Higher Secondary	~57

Source: Unified District Information System for Education plus

Interpretation:

While **primary education is nearly universal**, there is a **serious retention problem in higher levels of education**. This highlights the need for **policies focusing on reducing dropout rates**, especially at the **secondary and higher secondary stages**.

Table 3: Higher Education GER by Social Groups

Social Group	GER (%)
General	27–30
SC	~23
ST	~18

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education

Interpretation:

Participation in higher education decreases significantly for marginalized groups, showing stratification impact intensifies over time. The data reflects **unequal access to higher education among social groups**, with **SC and especially ST communities lagging behind**. This underlines the need for **targeted policies, reservations, financial support, and inclusive educational strategies** to improve participation among disadvantaged groups.

Table 4: Dropout Rates by Level (India)

Level	Dropout Rate (%)
Primary	~1.5
Upper Primary	~3.2
Secondary	~12–14
Higher Secondary	~14–15

Source: Unified District Information System for Education Plus

Interpretation:

Dropout increases sharply at secondary level, especially among disadvantaged groups due to poverty, child labour, and discrimination. While **early education retention is strong**, dropout becomes a **serious issue at secondary and higher secondary levels**. This highlights the need for **targeted interventions** such as financial support, career guidance, and improved school access to **retain students in higher stages of education**.

Table 5: Enrolment Distribution by Social Category (2024–25)

Category	Percentage (%)
General	27.1
SC	17.8
ST	9.9
OBC	45.2
Muslim	16.0

Source: Unified District Information System for Education Plus

Interpretation:

OBCs have the highest participation, but SC/ST representation remains relatively low compared to population share. The data highlights **variation in representation across categories**, with **OBC and General Groups having higher shares**, while **SC, ST, and Muslim groups have comparatively lower participation**. This suggests the need for **inclusive and equitable policies** to ensure balanced development and opportunities across all groups.

Table 6: Gender Disparity in Education

Indicator	Value (%)
Male Literacy	~84
Female Literacy	~70
Female Dropout (Rural)	~20

Source: National Statistical Estimates

Interpretation:

Gender inequality persists, especially in rural areas, compounded by socio-cultural norms. The data reflects persistent gender disparities in education, particularly affecting rural girls. While male literacy is relatively strong, improving female literacy and reducing dropout rates requires focused efforts such as awareness programs, financial support, better school access, and social change initiatives.

Table 7: Digital Divide in Education

Area	Internet Access (%)
Urban	60–70
Rural	25–30

Interpretation:

Digital inequality widened learning gaps during COVID-19, disproportionately affecting marginalized students. The data clearly shows a **significant digital divide**, where rural areas lag far behind urban areas in internet access. Bridging this gap requires **improved infrastructure, affordable internet, device availability, and digital literacy programs**, especially in rural regions.

5. Discussion: The statistical evidence reveals that social stratification significantly shapes educational outcomes in India:

- **Caste-based inequality:** Lower literacy and GER among SC/ST groups
- **Class-based inequality:** Poverty influences dropout and access
- **Gender inequality:** Female education still lags behind males
- **Regional inequality:** Rural areas face infrastructure and digital gaps

Even though policies have improved access, structural barriers persist, especially at secondary and higher education levels.

6. Findings

- Educational inequality increases with higher levels of education
- Marginalized groups face higher dropout rates
- Gender and caste intersect to deepen disadvantage
- Digital divide has emerged as a new dimension of inequality

7. Conclusion: The present study highlights the existence of inequality and stratification in education. It shows that children experience disparities based on their socio-economic background as well as schooling conditions. Students from different social categories and strata are subjected to a differentiated and unequal system. As a result, these inequalities affect their access to quality higher education, future occupational opportunities, and overall life choices. The study concludes that social stratification continues to have a profound impact on India's educational system. While access to primary education has improved, inequality remains entrenched in terms of quality, retention, and higher education access. Addressing these disparities requires multi-dimensional policy interventions, including economic support, inclusive pedagogy, digital access, and social awareness.

8. References

- Agrawal, T. (2014). Educational inequality in rural and urban India. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 34, 11–19.
- Azim Premji University. (2021). *Loss of learning during COVID-19*.
- Bairagya, R., & Bairagya, S. (2011). Higher Education For Woman Is A Way To Stabilize Population, *Journal of Education & Culture*: 2229-4287.
- Banerji, R., & Mukherjee, A. N. (2008). Achieving universal elementary education in India: Future strategies for ensuring access, quality, and finance. *National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration*, 2, 213–228.
- Dreze, J., & Kingdon, G. G. (1999). *School participation in rural India* (Development Economics Discussion Paper No. 18). London.
- Government of India. (2023). *UDISE+ Report 2022–23*.
- Government of India. (2022). *All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report*.
- Maity, A. . (2023). National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education: A New Horizon in Teacher Education As Envisioned In NEP 2020. *Journal of Education, Ethics And Value*, 2(9), 45–50. Retrieved from <https://jeev.innovascience.uz/index.php/jeev/article/view/223>. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15738450>
- Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*.
- National Statistical Office. (2021). *Education statistics in India*.
- National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA). (n.d.). *Education for all: Towards quality with equity*. Retrieved August 18, 2024, from http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/EFA-Review-Report-final.pdf

- Sharma, J. (2023). Structural functionalism and educational inequalities in India: A comprehensive analysis. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 19(02), 747–750.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2000, July). *Household expenditure on education in India: A preliminary explanation of the 52nd round of the National Sample Survey*. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2002a). Determinants of household expenditure on education in rural India (Working Paper No. 88). National Council of Applied Economic Research.
- Varghese, N. V. (2013). Private higher education – The global surge and India concerns. In *India Infrastructure Report 2012* (pp. 145–156). Routledge.

Citation: Bhunia. T. N. & Mete. Dr. J., (2026) “Impact of Social Stratification on the Educational System in India”, *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-04, April-2026.