



CULTURAL INEQUALITY AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Abdul Rasak C* Sreekala Edannur**

*Research Scholar (UGC-JRF) School of education, Pondicherry University, India.

**Assistant Professor, School of Education, Pondicherry University, India.

Abstract

This study draws a picture of how cultural inequality the backward class students faced affects their higher educational trajectories. Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) are the three social groups coming under Backward Classes. An attempt is made to study if there is any difference in the cultural inequality faced by backward class students who have accessed professional, paramedical and arts & science courses. Data was collected from 523 backward class students who are pursuing any of the higher educational programmes in Government, Aided and Private institutions of Palakkad District of Kerala. The result shows that cultural inequality has significant role deciding the higher educational course backward class students accessed. The study also reveals that there is significant difference in the mean scores of cultural inequality faced by professional, paramedical and arts & science students.

Key Words: Higher Education, Backward Class students, Cultural inequality, Inequality in accessing Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education has undeniable influence on the thoughts and perspectives of individuals and society. A society made up of educated members is an asset not only to the country but to the entire world itself. The existence of social discriminations in the name of class, caste, cultural, religious credentials has become a leading cause for the unequal distribution of educational access and level of participation in higher education. The domination of elite classes on the educational opportunities of the country continues to be persistent in the field of Higher Education due to different reasons other than academic excellence of students. Education plays a remarkable role in the reproduction and maintenance of the cultural capital of the country. The role of education as a means to produce and maintain cultural capital of the country seems less effective due to experiences of discrimination and inequality among social classes of the country. The absence of interaction among different castes and classes of the country and the lack of awareness about the ways of access and weaker level of participation in the field of higher education pave the way for educational backwardness of the lower classes and castes in the country. Though the higher education system is heading towards international standards in India, the problems of equity and access in higher education remain unsolved effectively. It is clear that caste based discrimination and deprivation not only in social and economic fields but also in educational field is apparent despite of existing policies of reservation and priorities. This deprived status results in a relatively low access of students belonging to these sections of the society in the higher education system especially in high profiled higher education institutions in India. Educational facilities are unequally distributed among different groups of population based on socioeconomic status, sex, region, caste and occupation. Access and level of participation in higher education is very much limited and is structured on class and gender lines. An attempt is made in this paper to examine the level of cultural inequality of the backward class students who have accessed different types of higher educational courses.

HIGHER EDUCATION OF BACKWARD CLASS STUDENTS

Indian higher education system is the third largest higher education system in the world followed by United States and China. National Policy on Education (1986, 1992) emphasises on facilitating inter regional mobility in education giving equal access to higher education to every Indian citizen based on merit regardless of class, race, ethnicity, gender and origins. In this regard, several initiatives and approaches have been formed by Indian government to make higher education accessible to all sections of the society and to accelerate quality of higher education wherever higher education is provided. SAMVAY (Skill Assessment Matrix for Vocational Advancement of Youth), Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching, Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) and SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) are some of initiatives central government has taken for the quality acceleration, enhancing educational mobility and ensuring equal access to all citizens in higher education. According to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE-2011) the total enrolment of students in higher education during the year 2010 – 2011 is 29184331. Among this, Scheduled cast students are 12.2%, Scheduled Tribe Students are only 4.5% and Other Backward Students are 30.1%. The educational status of Backward Class people has increased considerably after independence to the present. 'There is an increase in the average years of education among Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Class People'



(Deshpande & Ramachandran, 2014). Educated parents of all these three groups try to give their sons and daughters equal or higher education than them. The educated old generations are trying to give more education to their new generation (Deshpande & Ramachandran, 2014). The educated earlier generations have taken initiative to dominate over educational advantages and possess it for their community (Nambissan, 1996).

EVIDENCES FROM KERALA

Kerala is reaching closer to its aim to achieve universal access to secondary education by 2017 as part of *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (RMSA). As part of ensuring universal access to secondary education steps are being taken to provide special attention to economically weaker sections of the society, the educationally backward, the girls and the disabled children residing in rural areas and other marginalized categories like SC,ST,OBC and Educationally Backward Minorities. At present, a wide gap is existing in the proportion of eligible students for higher education and higher educational opportunities. When RMSA reaches to its objectives like universal access to secondary education by 2017 and universal retention by 2020, this gap in the proportion of students who are eligible for higher education and opportunities in the higher education would be wider.

While educational sector is expanding at secondary and higher secondary level inequality in access and opportunity at higher education level is rising fast. In Indian society where people are stratified based on their race, ethnicity, social class, religion and culture. Some sections of the students are highly privileged when they come to higher education, which is relevant in terms of job opportunities, and access to it depends upon economic, social, cultural and educational aspects of the students. According to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE-2011) the total enrolment of students in higher education during the year 2010 – 2011 in Kerala is 689535. Among this, Scheduled cast students are 48477, Scheduled Tribe Students are only 6947 and Other Backward Students are 218852.

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF INEQUALITY

Cultural Inequality has a number of aspects. Brofen Brenner simply takes cultural disparity, whatever its form, to be the main source of educational inequality. Cultural inequality can be viewed through two dimensions. Theories of Basil Bernstein, Bourdieu and Passeron emphasise on the reproduction of inequality through the cultural transmission from generation to generation. The advantage of middle class people in terms of language used in schools and cultural and behavioural attitudes of teachers is being stressed in the theory of cultural inequality of Bourdieu and Bernstein. The cultural advantage of middle class people over lower class people are highlighted as cultural capital. Social organisation of Durkheim, Marx, Engels and Weber is framed around particular concepts such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, values, social attitudes and behaviour, tolerance and trust. Class difference perspectives, cultural deficiency, information barriers, fear of isolation, negative impressions...etc. are considered as the aspects of cultural inequality.

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

The population of the study is the students of Backward classes (SC, ST and OBC) who have accessed Higher Educational courses in Palakkad district of Kerala. Data was collected from a sample of 523 students who have accessed Higher Education in Professional, Paramedical and Arts & Science Colleges of Palakkad district. For the purpose of analysis, Higher Education is categorised to three categories. 1, Professional 2, Paramedical 3, Arts & Science. Professional Courses consists of Medical and Engineering Course. Paramedical Courses consist of Nursing, Pharmacy and Health inspector courses. Arts and Science Courses consist of BA (Batchelor of Arts), B.Com (Batchelor of Commerce) and other graduate courses.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives

1. To study the level of cultural inequality faced by backward class students who have accessed different types of higher educational courses.
2. The find out whether there is significant difference in cultural inequality faced by the backward class students who have accessed different types of higher educational courses.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Objective 1

Level of cultural inequality faced by professional, paramedical and arts & science students



Level of Cultural Inequality * Present Course of Study Crosstabulation						
			Present Course of Study			Total
			Professional	Paramedical	Arts & Science	
Level of Cultural Inequality	High	Count	18	13	46	77
		% within Level of Cultural Inequality	23.4%	16.9%	59.7%	100.0%
	Average	Count	91	105	167	363
		% within Level of Cultural Inequality	25.1%	28.9%	46.0%	100.0%
	Low	Count	29	31	23	83
		% within Level of Cultural Inequality	34.9%	37.3%	27.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	138	149	236	523
		% within Level of Cultural Inequality	26.4%	28.5%	45.1%	100.0%

The cross tabulation table shows that, among 77 students who have faced high cultural inequality 59.7% (46) students have accessed their higher education in Arts & Science colleges, 23.4% (18) students have accessed professional courses and 16.9% (13) students have accessed Paramedical courses. Among those who have faced average cultural inequality 25.1% (91) have accessed professional courses, 28.9% (105) students have accessed Paramedical courses and 46% (167) students have accessed their higher education in Arts & Science colleges. Among the students who have accessed low level of cultural inequality, 34.9% (29) students have accessed professional courses, 37.3% (31) students have accessed paramedical courses and 27.7% (23) have accessed their higher education in Arts & Science colleges.

The result shows that the higher the level of cultural inequality the greater is the chance to get the students enrolled in Arts & Science Colleges and the lower the level of cultural inequality the greater is the chance to get enrolled in Professional colleges.

Objective 2

Difference in the mean scores of cultural inequality among backward class students who have accessed professional, paramedical and arts & science courses.

ANOVA					
Cultural Inequality					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1955.794	2	977.897	8.351	.000
Within Groups	60889.870	520	117.096		
Total	62845.663	522			

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Cultural Inequality						
LSD						
(I) Present Course of Study	(J) Present Course of Study	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Professional	Paramedical	-.773	1.278	.546	-3.28	1.74
	Arts & Science	-4.244*	1.160	.000	-6.52	-1.97
Paramedical	Professional	.773	1.278	.546	-1.74	3.28
	Arts & Science	-3.472*	1.132	.002	-5.70	-1.25



Arts & Science	Professional	4.244*	1.160	.000	1.97	6.52
	Paramedical	3.472*	1.132	.002	1.25	5.70
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

One way ANOVA shows that there is significant difference in the mean scores of cultural inequality faced by backward class students in accessing different types of Higher education. Post hoc analysis shows that the difference in the mean scores of cultural inequality between professional and paramedical students is not significant (.54). However, there is a significant difference in mean scores of professional and arts & science students (.00) and paramedical and arts and science college students (.002)

DISCUSSION

It is revealed that students who are facing low cultural inequality have a greater chance to get admitted to more prestigious Professional courses and the students who are facing high level of cultural inequality are getting enrolled in less prestigious arts & science colleges. In order to uplift the disadvantaged sections of the society to the main stream of higher education, authorities should take measures to curb the cultural inequality and to give equal social situations to all sections of the society. This could be achieved only through ensuring quality and equality in higher educational opportunity and access to all sections of the society. There is significant difference in the mean scores of cultural inequality among Professional and Arts & Science college students. It means that cultural experience of those who are accessing professional courses is different from those who accessed art & science courses and students who are enrolled in Arts & Science courses are facing higher level of cultural inequality than those of professional and paramedical students. This situation would be changed only through social change where education takes the prime role.

CONCLUSION

Cultural inequality is the result of different cultural experiences the backward class students get from their society. Equalising the social situations of all sections of the society is the only way to curb this inequality among the students. There should be subjective interventions in the lives of backward people to empower them. The opportunities in accessing higher education will never be equal to all sections of the society unless the authorities give special attention to provide quality education to Backward Class students and make the Higher Education accessible and affordable to the students from all sections of the society, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, family back ground, religion and caste.

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