



**Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity**

**Education and Social Equity
With a Special Focus on Scheduled Castes
and Scheduled Tribes in Elementary Education**

Mona Sedwal and Sangeeta Kamat

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Contents

Preface.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Summary.....	vii
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 A Brief Note on Nomenclature.....	1
1.2 Organisation of the Paper.....	2
2. Conceptual Issues and Debates.....	3
2.1. Histories of Exclusion.....	3
2.2. Education: The Way Forward?.....	4
2.3. The Many Faces of Exclusion.....	6
3. History, Economy and Society: Implications for Education of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.....	8
3.1. Intra-Community Segmentation and Hierarchies.....	10
3.2. Education, Identity and Culture.....	11
3.3. The Role of Education in Economic Life.....	13
4. Literacy Advancement among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.....	15
4.1. Literacy and Enrolment: Uneven Progress.....	15
4.2. Physical Access to Schools.....	19
4.3. Retention.....	20
4.4. Apartheid in Times of Equity.....	22
4.5. Gender Equity.....	23
5. Policies, Programmes and Initiatives.....	24
5.1. Incentive Schemes: Ensuring Access and Equity.....	26
5.2. Two Birds with One Scheme: Improving Access and Equity through Mid-Day Meals.....	27
5.3 State Level Programmes and Policies.....	29
5.3.1 Madhya Pradesh.....	29
5.3.2 Andhra Pradesh.....	30
5.3.3 Orissa.....	31
5.3.4 Karnataka.....	31
6. Areas for Research and Policy Intervention.....	33
6.1. Teacher Professionalism and School Culture.....	34
6.1.1 Beyond Access: Exclusion by Other Means.....	34
6.1.2 Curriculum and Pedagogical Issues.....	36
7. New Directions.....	37
References.....	39

List of Tables

Table 1. Total Population, Population of SCs and STs, and their Proportion (%) of Total Population, 2001	9
Table 2. Literacy Rates and Gross Enrolment Rates for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.....	16
Table 3. Primary School Coverage in Rural SC and ST Habitations	20
Table 4. Drop Out Rates (%) for SC Children at Primary and Elementary Stages	20
Table 5. Drop Out Rates (%) of SC and ST Students by State	21
Table 6. Special Component Plan Expenditure (Rs. in Crore/10 million).....	24
Table 7. Estimated Number of Schools with Incentive Schemes and Numbers of Beneficiaries in Primary Schools.....	26

List of Figures

Figure 1. Scheduled Caste Literacy Rates	17
Figure 2. Scheduled Tribe Literacy Rates.....	17
Figure 3. SC and ST Literacy Rates, 1991.....	18
Figure 4. SC and ST Literacy Rates, 2001.....	18

List of Boxes

Box 1. Regional Concentration of Scheduled Tribe Communities in India	7
Box 2. Some Recent Experiences in the Balmiki Community	11
Box 3. Adharshila, Madhya Pradesh: An Alternative School	12
Box 4. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Enrolment, Grades I-V	19
Box 5. Education Incentive Scheme for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Girls.....	30
Box 6. Tribal Education – A Special Drive in a Forest	32
Box 7. Students' Perception of School	35

List of Acronyms

CES	Centre for Equity Studies
DISE	District Information System for Education
EMIS	Educational Management Information System
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
ITDP	Integrated Tribal Development Project
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
MADA	Modified Area Development Approach
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OBC	Other Backward Classes
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCP	Special Component Plan
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TSP	Tribal Sub-Plan
UT	Union Territory

Preface

This review paper by Mona Sedwal and Sangeeta Kamat forms part of the larger exercise of developing a comprehensive Country Analytical Review for CREATE in India. Specifically, it reviews the available information base at the national level and the findings of research on the progress made in providing access to elementary education for socially marginalized groups. In particular, the paper focuses on issues related to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes – groups which are recognised for affirmative action within the Constitution of India. This review is of special importance because it assesses progress towards universal elementary education in India. It also highlights the persistence of social inequity that characterizes the Indian elementary education scene and discusses various strategies pursued for bridging the gaps.

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Summary

The Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are among the most socially and educationally disadvantaged groups in India. This paper examines issues concerning school access and equity for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities and also highlights their unique problems, which may require divergent policy responses.

The paper is divided into seven main parts. The first two sections introduce the reader to the nature of exclusion and discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and outlines the debate on the role of education in improving the socio-economic profile of both groups. The third section explains the socio-economic conditions within which Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes live and their marginalized status in contemporary India. The fourth section provides a discussion of literacy advancement among these groups, and of national policies and programmes which aim to improve school access and equity. The fifth section highlights special efforts made by certain state governments to improve educational participation of these two communities as well as the educational experiments on a more modest scale undertaken by community based Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The sixth section focuses on casteism as a deeply ideological issue that undercuts even the most genuine reform measures, and suggests research and policy options that may help to address underlying structural and ideological issues. The concluding section highlights a few critical areas for further research in the area.

Education and Social Equity: With a Special Focus on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Elementary Education

1. Introduction

The Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are among the most socially and educationally disadvantaged groups in India. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have different histories of social and economic deprivation, and the underlying causes of their educational marginalisation are also strikingly distinct. However, a comparison of educational outcomes among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes yields a common picture that the government has sought to address through a common set of policy prescriptions. In this paper, we examine both shared issues concerning school access and equity for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups and also highlight their unique problems, which may require divergent policy responses.

1.1 A Brief Note on Nomenclature

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the terms of reference listed in the Indian Constitution, and in government, legal and scholarly writing, particularly of the colonial period. Terms such as 'depressed classes' and 'backward classes' were also used historically, but these were eventually replaced. The terms SC and ST are now used to refer to the communities listed in the Government Schedule as 'outcastes' and 'tribals', respectively. The notion of 'outcastes' is premised upon the Hindu caste system, which divides society into the four broad categories of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (menial workers). The castes of Ati Shudras (performing the most menial tasks) were designated as outside the four-fold caste system, and it is these 'outcastes' that are today referred to as Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Castes have also been referred to as 'Untouchables' by Hindu caste society and as 'Harijans' (children of God), a term popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. These terms were deemed unconstitutional in Independent India, and rejected as derogatory and paternalistic by the Scheduled Castes themselves. The term 'Dalit' (meaning broken, oppressed, downtrodden) emerged from within the Scheduled Caste community to highlight their oppressed status and establish their unique identity and consciousness as the 'Other' within Hindu society.

Scheduled Tribes are similarly distinct from mainstream Hindu society, with lifestyles, languages and cultural practices different from the known religions of India. There are numerous tribal communities in India, with a population numbering more than 80 million, and who live mostly in forested, hilly and mountainous areas. In the colonial period, they were self-governed and therefore isolated from the rest of Indian society. However, the British administration (motivated primarily by their proximity to rich natural resources) sought to control these areas and communities and bring them into mainstream society. The term 'Adivasi' (meaning original inhabitants) has been self-consciously adopted by the tribal communities in an effort to reclaim their history and a unique place in Indian society.

1.2 Organisation of the Paper

The following paper is divided into seven main parts. The first two sections introduce the reader to the nature of exclusion and discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and outlines the debate on the role of education in improving the socio-economic profile of both groups. The third section explains the socio-economic conditions within which Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes live and their marginalized status in contemporary India. The fourth section provides a discussion of literacy advancement among these groups, and of national policies and programmes which aim to improve school access and equity. The fifth section highlights special efforts made by certain state governments to improve educational participation of these two communities as well as the educational experiments on a more modest scale undertaken by community based Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The sixth section focuses on casteism as a deeply ideological issue that undercuts even the most genuine reform measures, and suggests research and policy options that may help to address underlying structural and ideological issues. The concluding section raises several critical areas for further research in the area.

2. Conceptual Issues and Debates

2.1 Histories of Exclusion

The poor educational achievements of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes can be best understood in the context of deeply embedded caste and social hierarchies that are enacted and expressed in everyday social interactions of community, school and economic life. Functional from pre-colonial times, the system of socially sanctioned discrimination and prejudice against communities designated as outside the caste system has had far-reaching impacts on the self-worth, dignity and economic life of SC and ST groups. As we enter the twenty-first century, caste is no longer the definitive mode of organizing economic and social relations in India, but it continues to have a lasting impact on the economic, political and social life of communities. Recent studies show that caste-based discrimination continues to be an influential factor in the low educational mobility of both Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups, despite government programmes that selectively target aid to children from these communities (Secada, 1989).

Though there are several commonalities in the experience and outcomes of social exclusion for both groups, there are also some critical differences in the ways in which it takes place that have led to somewhat different struggles for equal rights. Although a highly detailed discussion of these differences is beyond the scope of this paper, we will touch upon a few issues that have direct implications for educational equity and inclusion.

One critical difference in the nature of discrimination is that in the Hindu caste system some sections of the Scheduled Castes are described as untouchables or 'less than human', and therefore face extreme discrimination and violence by other caste Hindus. Historically, SC communities were systematically segregated from the rest of the village and were denied access to education, housing and land. Public places such as temples, wells for drinking water, restaurants, toilets, and many other civic facilities were also out of bounds for them (Alexander, 2003). The infringement on their civil rights continues today, especially in rural areas, and instances of violent reprisals against groups who demand equal social status are not uncommon, despite legal prohibitions against caste-based discrimination.

Secondly, the caste-based ideology of hereditary occupations prescribes the most menial and lowly of occupations to SC groups and has determined the socio-economic life of these communities. The majority of SC individuals work as landless agricultural labourers or are engaged in what is considered 'coolie' work. While SCs have traditionally been denied education, even those with education have experienced very limited social mobility due to caste-based opposition to their occupational mobility (Jefferey et al, 2002).

The exclusion of Scheduled Tribes, on the other hand, is based on a different set of economic and cultural factors that have little to do with caste ideology. Scheduled Tribe groups have traditionally lived in more remote areas of the country and in closer proximity to forests and natural resources. The remote and difficult geographical terrain inhabited by Scheduled Tribes has isolated them from mainstream Indian society. This has afforded them a measure of cultural autonomy and economic

independence. Traditional Scheduled Tribe communities value their close relationship to nature and make optimal use of the natural resource-base for their daily sustenance. However, modernization and accumulative processes of production have resulted in massive encroachment into their natural habitats. This has in turn resulted in displacement, poverty and heightened levels of exploitation through a system of bonded labour. The term ‘double disadvantage’ has been used to characterise the socio-economic and spatial marginalisation of Scheduled Tribes in India (Sujatha, 2002).

2.2 Education: The Way Forward?

The histories of exploitation and marginalisation of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities have produced different engagements with education as a path to social mobility. For Scheduled Castes, access to education has been a focal point in their struggle for equity and social justice. Movements to abolish the caste system and end discrimination have always proposed education as the primary means to overcome caste oppression (Omvedt, 1993). Consequently, the educational status of Scheduled Castes is significantly better in the Southern and Southwestern states of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, where strong SC liberation movements and broad based anti-Brahmin movements emerged in the context of the anti-colonial struggle for independence. For a variety of complex reasons, such movements had a comparatively weak presence in North India (Velaskar, 2005). The history of Scheduled Tribe movements is quite different in that basic livelihood needs and the struggle to retain access to forests and natural resources took centre stage in their struggles for dignity and a better life, while access to education remained a secondary issue (Surajit, 2002).

Though education was not a critical demand among Scheduled Tribes, government policy focused on education as the main avenue by which to integrate them into ‘mainstream’ society. The concept of ‘ashram schools’ – residential schools for ST children – came into vogue in order to overcome structural barriers such as difficult terrain, inaccessible locations and spatially dispersed habitations, and thereby to improve educational access for Scheduled Tribe communities. A centrally-sponsored government scheme of ashram schools exclusively for ST children from elementary to higher secondary levels was initiated in the 1970s and continues to the present (Sujatha, 2002). Ashram schools include vocational training in their curricula in order to provide ST youth with skills and training for jobs in the industrial sector. The poor quality of education in ashram schools, however, has undermined confidence in education as a vehicle for social mobility¹. The curriculum bears no relation to the economic and social life of Scheduled Tribe communities and instead attempts to wean young people away from it, alienating them in the process. Considering the poor quality of teaching and infrastructure, and the distance of these schools from the community and habitats of the Scheduled Tribes, it is hardly surprising that many families prefer not to send their children to ashram schools and the drop out rate is high among those who do (Sujatha, 2002).

Over the last two decades, the government has increased elementary school provision (grades I-VIII) in and near tribal hamlets, and this has significantly increased rates of

¹ The record of vocational training in India as a vehicle to productive employment is very poor in general. See Sujatha (2002) for an analysis of the issues plaguing vocational training in India.

enrolment. However, issues of quality and relevance of schooling for ST children have barely received any attention from the national government. The poor quality of infrastructure and teaching, and a curriculum that does not relate to the socio-cultural lives of the Scheduled Tribes nor teach about their history, have all contributed to the communities' disenchantment with schooling. Furthermore, the content of school education devalues their cultures and histories and undermines their sense of self and community identity. Moreover, the poor quality of schooling available to ST children does not prepare them to succeed at higher levels of education nor to compete for jobs, thereby demoralizing young people.

Similar issues of self-worth, dignity and livelihoods that school education has failed to address or even acknowledge also arise for Scheduled Caste communities. While SC students have much greater access to elementary education than ST children, they frequently encounter overt and covert acts of discrimination, prejudice and rejection from teachers and fellow students. Commonly reported instances of cruel treatment include being told to sit separately from other students, being called 'untouchable' or stupid, being beaten and caned for presumed infractions and so on (Drèze and Gazdar, 1997). In other words, while elementary schools may appear to be places in which integration can take place, prejudices against Scheduled Castes persist in the classroom, playground and in the micro-practices of schooling.²

Poor treatment in schools and loss of self-worth and dignity result in drop outs or poor performance in examinations, thus undermining SC and ST students' opportunities to progress to higher levels of education. This, in turn, has a crippling effect on their ability to compete in the job market and increases their sense of alienation from their communities. Concern about this problem has led sections of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities to advocate for separate schools for their children in which they are taught by committed teachers and are able to develop a positive sense of self. Some such schools have been established with support from NGOs and educationists and, in rare cases, on the initiative of the government. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh the government has set up residential schools for SC students that are seen as successful in bypassing the problems encountered in regular government schools.

The understanding that education is a vehicle for integration and assimilation of SC and ST students into the social mainstream is also increasingly being questioned and is seen as having limited usefulness in overcoming prejudice, discrimination and marginalisation. To bring about equity in education for excluded populations such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, scholars and activists advocate a framework of social justice that goes beyond aggregative concerns of equity in the context of access, participation and outcomes, to one which emphasises qualitative aspects of the educational experience and their impact on identity, self-worth and future life chances (Secada, 1989). This, they argue, can only take place in schools that are set up exclusively for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students and that are invested in the success of these students (Illiah, 2000). While educators remain divided on how best to provide quality education that will bring about substantial improvements in the

² The formal integration of SC and non-SC students in schools has also unraveled in the past two decades. Research shows that there has been a gradual abandonment of government schools by non-SC parents, with preference shifting toward private schools. This has by default led to the sequestering of SC students in government schools (see PROBE, 1999).

lives of SC and ST communities, whether through mainstream or segregated schools, there is consensus that education is a critical resource in addressing the marginalisation of both groups.

2.3 The Many Faces of Exclusion

Exclusion from basic education for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is a complex socio-political process that has multiple roots and causalities. The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) has developed a framework of 'Zones of Exclusion' to examine access and to describe the various spaces where cohorts of children are included, excluded, or are at risk of exclusion (see Lewin, 2007)³. Of the six zones identified in the CREATE model, this paper is most concerned with:

- Zone 1** children who have never been to school, and are unlikely to attend school
- Zone 2** children who enter primary schooling, but who drop out before completing the primary cycle
- Zone 3** children who enter primary schooling and are enrolled but are 'at risk' of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement, and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning

Initial access has little meaning unless it results in: (i) regular attendance; (ii) progression; (iii) meaningful learning; and (iv) appropriate access to post-primary education (Lewin, 2007). The achievement of genuine access and equity require reforms that address problems in each of the Zones of Exclusion in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. As will become clear in subsequent sections, education reforms in India have so far focused on Zone 1, that is, ensuring Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students can enrol in school. Education reforms that also engage the other Zones of Exclusion are crucial to guaranteeing equity of opportunity for SC and ST children, but are currently absent from policy and research agendas.

³ See also www.create-rpc.org for more information on CREATE's work.

Box 1. Regional Concentration of Scheduled Tribe Communities in India

North-Eastern region: In the mountain valleys and other areas of North-Eastern India, covering the states and Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura live tribes such as the Abor, Garo, Khasi, Kuki, Mismi, and Naga, who are mostly of Mongolian descent.

Himalayan region: In the sub-Himalayan regions covering parts of North-Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh live tribes such as the Lepcha and Rabha, which are mostly of Mongolian ancestry.

Central India region: In the older hills and Chhotanagpur Plateau, along the dividing lines between peninsular India and the Indo-Gangetic basin, live many tribal communities like the Bhumij, Gond, Ho, Oraon, Munda, and Santal, covering the states of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal and mainly of Proto-Australoid descent.

Western India region: Covering states such as Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Dadra & Nagar Haveli live a number of tribal communities, the most important of them being the Bhil, a Proto-Australoid group.

Southern India region: Covering the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, in the Nilgiri Hills and converging lines of the Ghats live the Chenchu, Irula, Kadar, Kota, Kurumba, and Toda, which trace their ancestry to Negrito, Caucasoid, and Proto-Australoid groups.

Island region: Covering Andaman, Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands live a number of small tribes such as the Andamanese, Onge, and Sentinelese.

Source: Chaudhuri (1992) cited in D'Souza (2003: 10)

3. History, Economy and Society: Implications for Education of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

While differences between Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations make generalisations across these two groups difficult, it is equally problematic to treat SC and ST populations as composite homogenous communities. There are more than 400 major castes among Scheduled Castes and over 500 different tribes among Scheduled Tribes in the India. There is therefore a great deal of heterogeneity within each of these populations that calls for a more fine-grained understanding of the specific histories of SC and ST communities in particular places. In the following sections, we first describe the diversity and differences within the Scheduled Tribe community before turning to differences with the Scheduled Caste community. The wide geographical distribution of the Scheduled Tribe community (as shown in Box 1) brings along with it wide variation in culture, history and economic conditions. The extent of marginalisation of groups also differs, as do their aspirations, livelihood needs and educational requirements. State programmes are generically targeted at all Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities, however, and therefore have tended to benefit the socially and/or economically better off among those populations. Research on these communities has also neglected to explore intra-community inequalities, some of which are explained below. For primary education policies to succeed, research into the nature of discrimination and marginalization faced by specific Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities is needed. With this information, a more precise set of policy and programmatic prescriptions can be generated for different communities.

According to the 2001 Census, the ST population is 84,326,240 and constitutes 8.2% of the total population of India. This population grew by 24.5% during the period 1991-2001 (Census of India, 2002). The SC population, on the other hand, is 166,635,700 and constitutes 16.2% of the total population of India. In certain regions, and particularly the Northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, Scheduled Tribes make up the overwhelming majority of the total population. The overall socio-economic and political status of Scheduled Tribes in these states is significantly better than in other parts of the country, a difference that is also reflected in their educational status and accomplishments. For instance, literacy among the ST population in Mizoram, a state with a ST majority population, is 89.34%, while in Andhra Pradesh, a state with a ST minority population, it is only 37.04% (See Table 2). This unevenness is further complicated when one notes that states with a majority ST population represent only a small percentage of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the country. As Sujatha (2002) points out, the states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal together account for 82% of the total ST population in India, despite the fact that Scheduled Tribes are a minority group in these states (See Table 1).

Table 1. Total Population, Population of SCs and STs, and their Proportion (%) of Total Population, 2001

State/UT	Population			Proportion (%)	
	Total Population	SC Population	ST Population	SC Population	ST Population
India*	1,028,610,328	166,635,700	84,326,240	16.2	8.2
Jammu & Kashmir	10,143,700	770,155	1,105,979	7.6	10.9
Himachal Pradesh	6,077,900	1,502,170	244,587	24.7	4.0
Punjab	24,358,999	7,028,723	-	28.9	0.0
Chandigarh	900,635	157,597	-	17.5	0.0
Uttaranchal	8,489,349	1,517,186	256,129	17.9	3.0
Haryana	21,144,564	4,091,110	-	19.3	0.0
Delhi	13,850,507	2,343,255	-	16.9	0.0
Rajasthan	56,507,188	9,694,462	7,097,706	17.2	12.6
Uttar Pradesh	166,197,921	35,148,377	107,963	21.1	0.1
Bihar	82,998,509	13,048,608	758,351	15.7	0.9
Sikkim	540,851	27,165	111,405	5.0	20.6
Arunachal Pradesh	1,097,968	6,188	705,158	0.6	64.2
Nagaland	1,990,036	-	1,774,026	0.0	89.1
Manipur*	2,166,788	60,037	741,141	2.8	34.2
Mizoram	888,573	272	839,310	0.0	94.5
Tripura	3,199,203	555,724	993,426	17.4	31.1
Meghalaya	2,318,822	11,139	1,992,862	0.5	85.9
Assam	26,655,528	1,825,949	3,308,570	6.9	12.4
West Bengal	80,176,197	18,452,555	4,406,794	23.0	5.5
Jharkhand	26,945,829	3,189,320	7,087,068	11.8	26.3
Orissa	36,804,660	6,082,063	8,145,081	16.5	22.1
Chhattisgarh	20,833,803	2,418,722	6,616,596	11.6	31.8
Madhya Pradesh	60,348,023	9,155,177	12,233,474	15.2	20.3
Gujarat	50,671,017	3,592,715	7,481,160	7.1	14.8
Daman & Diu	158,204	4,838	13,997	3.1	8.8
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	220,490	4,104	137,225	1.9	62.2
Maharashtra	96,878,627	9,881,656	8,577,276	10.2	8.9
Andhra Pradesh	76,210,007	12,339,496	5,024,104	16.2	6.6
Karnataka	52,850,562	8,563,930	3,463,986	16.2	6.6
Goa	1,347,668	23,791	566	1.8	0.0
Lakshadweep	60,650	-	57,321	0.0	94.5
Kerala	31,841,374	3,123,941	364,189	9.8	1.1
Tamil Nadu	62,405,679	11,857,504	651,321	19.0	1.0
Pondicherry	974,345	157,771	-	16.2	0.0
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	356,152	-	29,469	0.0	8.3

Source: Government of India (2002)

Note: * - Excludes Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur

Table 1 illustrates that the Punjab has the highest proportion of Scheduled Castes (28.9%) as a proportion of the total state population, and Mizoram has the highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes (94.5%). Scheduled Castes are primarily concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. These states account for 53.36% of the SC population of the country. The states with no Scheduled

Caste groups are Nagaland, Mizoram, Lakshadweep and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The main concentration of Scheduled Tribes is in Central India and in the Northeastern states. More than half of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and Gujarat. The states with no Scheduled Tribe population are Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, Goa and Pondicherry. Out of the total population aged between 6-14 years in 2001, the number of SC and ST children was 17.4% and 8.97% respectively (Government of India, 2002).

3.1 Intra-Community Segmentation and Hierarchies

Within each region, there are several different ST communities with their own dialects, distinctive identities and ways of living. Within the same state, too, some Scheduled Tribe communities may be more Hindu-ized, live closer to the plains and engage in peasant cultivation, while others may be forest dwellers, engage in hunting, gathering and self-sustaining agriculture, and still others may be nomadic communities. Migrating to work in cities or in mines has become an economic necessity for many Scheduled Tribe communities due to the degradation of the natural environment, displacement due to changes in forest laws, urbanization and modernization projects. Thus, much of what counts as economic and social development has resulted in increased rates of poverty, poor maternal health and infant mortality for ST communities. This is particularly apparent in the Central and Western Indian plains. Their ability to gain access to education is also severely curtailed under these circumstances. These communities are exploited more savagely than communities that are able to depend on the natural environment to meet basic livelihood needs. Island communities, for instance, are better able to sustain themselves through fishing and marginal farming. Thus, some ST groups are more poor and deprived than others. These economic inequalities are also manifest culturally, in that certain Scheduled Tribe groups are accorded higher status and their dialect tends to be adopted by other ST groups in the region.

Within the Scheduled Caste community, sub-castes and hierarchies are even more pronounced and significant. For instance, the sub-caste known as 'Balmikis' is considered the lowest among Scheduled Castes, while 'Jatavs' are higher in status. The former are engaged in manual scavenging jobs, while the latter are engaged in leather crafts, indicating that status within the Scheduled Caste community is closely linked to Brahmanical notions of purity and pollution (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002). Some recent experiences related to the Balmiki are provided in Box 2 (below).

Box 2. Some Recent Experiences in the Balmiki Community

I've been on the *balmiki* trail since 1997. Even for the outsider, the writer merely recording their plight, it's a nauseating, depressing round. I thought I'd seen everything. Then I came to Sikar, Rajasthan. Manual scavenging anywhere tends to shock you, the sheer ugliness of it, the degradation of an entire people. But this was worse. In Sikar, little girls – eight, nine, ten years' old – were working with their mothers.

I met Pooja. She thought she was about 12. She had the saddest eyes of any little girl I have ever seen. And as she talked haltingly, slowly, shyly, I finally realised what it was all about. Not just the four endless years of cleaning human shit every morning from the age of eight. It was a combination of many things. Pooja had never ever had a childhood.

She was going to the school started by Manavadhikar Sampark Kendra to help *balmikis*. She was pleased to have stopped working the latrines. In and around Sikar, there were 70 little girls like Pooja working the latrines. The scenario was the same in U.P. and Bihar. There are still one million people working as manual scavengers all over India. Prime Minister Vajpayee, like others before him, declared from the ramparts of the Red Fort that manual scavenging would be abolished by 2002. The deadline is over. Nothing has changed for India's one million *balmikis*.

Merely admitting them in government schools achieves nothing. The children are victimised, picked on, beaten up, laughed and jeered at. In addition, they have to sit and eat separately. They are not allowed to take water from the pot because it would be polluting. The teaching is minimal.

Excerpted from: Thekaekara (2004)

3.2 Education, Identity and Culture

The animistic culture of Scheduled Tribes in India drew Christian missionaries to work among these communities, providing them with health care and education, and starting a process of conversion that began in the early 19th century. Today, in many areas of the country one finds the animistic beliefs of Scheduled Tribes co-existing in the same space as churches, baptism and the Bible. Christianity also made inroads into Scheduled Caste communities in the colonial period and after. Scheduled Caste families seeking some measure of self-respect chose to convert to Christianity as a way to escape the degradation of being treated as 'untouchable' and 'impure' castes. Though the main objective was to proselytize, the work of Christian missionaries did succeed in liberating Scheduled Castes from passive adherence to caste ideology and rituals and introducing them to ideas of equity and the right to dignity (Yagati, 2003). Among the Scheduled Tribes, their development is also often linked with the change in their religion to Christianity, which opened a way to educational progress. Certain studies (Kailash, 1993; Heredia, 1992) revealed that the churches played a pivotal role in socialising the Scheduled Tribes to the outside world, in addition to providing economic assistance. For example, this was the case for the Bhils tribe in Jhabua District of Madhya Pradesh. Due to the adoption of Christianity, a new class of educated and literate Bhils emerged and established a separate identity for themselves within the Bhil community (Kailash, 1993). Another study was undertaken in Talasari Taluka at the Northwestern end of Thane district on the Bombay-Ahmedabad highway by the Talasari Mission, which was expanding its network of schools in the area. The study reflects the similar trend that conversion to Christianity among the

Scheduled Tribes increased the demand for education (Kailash, 1993). To counter the influence of Christian missionaries particularly among ST communities, and in an effort to incorporate Scheduled Tribes within wider Hindu society, Hindu nationalist organizations also established welfare services and schools⁴.

In the 1930s, B.R. Ambedkar, a Scheduled Caste individual and prominent leader of the Indian independence movement, gave new direction to the struggle of Scheduled Castes by exhorting them to convert to Buddhism and reject Brahmanical Hinduism and the caste system altogether. The Ambedkarite movement was extremely influential in creating a new political movement that was led by Scheduled Castes themselves and centred on the annihilation of the caste system rather than its reform. According to Ghanshyam Shah (cited in Yagati, 2003) these developments led to two distinct kinds of political movements within the Scheduled Caste community: the reformative and the alternative. The former adopted a more Gandhian perspective, focused on the eradication of untouchability and sought to include Scheduled Castes within Hindu society, while the latter questioned the very legitimacy of the caste system and launched an autonomous Scheduled Castes movement.

The differences between the reformative and alternative movements are also expressed in their different perspectives on education and knowledge. For the reformative movement, education provides access to government jobs or to jobs in the industrial sector, as well as respectability and status through economic mobility. For the alternative movement, education is directed towards affirming a Scheduled Caste consciousness, and empowering people to challenge caste and other forms of inequity (See Box 3). The history of Scheduled Tribe movements, on the other hand, demonstrates a sceptical attitude towards reformative education, and limited experiments of alternative education are present in a few tribal areas.

Box 3. Adharshila, Madhya Pradesh: An Alternative School

Madhya Pradesh is home for Bhil and Bhilala tribals who are educationally backward. The organizations like Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangathan and the Scheduled Tribes Mukti Sangathan have set up alternative education system in a decentralized, equitable and environment sustainable development model with the aim of giving education an important place in the lives of the tribals.

Adharshila School was set up in 1998 in village Sakar near Sendhwa in Barwani district as training centre cum school. It was established as a residential school with a belief that effective teaching of tribal children of illiterate parents needs extra hours after school. For financial sustenance of the school, parents were to pay in cash or kind for their children attending school. There were no textbooks used and the medium of instruction was Bareli, a dialect of Bhili. The earlier method of conducting various kinds of surveys and writing down of the rich oral literature of the Bhili creation myths was used to acquaint children with the basics of language and arithmetic and in the process primers were created. The local environment was used for scientific learning through observation and analysis while local history was put together as told by the elders for history lessons. In addition, children have to spend two hours of labour everyday on the five-acre farm of the school to retain their peasant farmer roots.

Source: Rahul and Subhadra (2001)

⁴ For an illuminating history of Scheduled Caste education in colonial times, see Yagati (2003).

These opposite views on the role of education are present even today among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe leaders and intellectuals, however the government's approach to SC and ST education coincides with the reformative perspective. The historical record shows that ST and SC identities have evolved in complex ways in relation to different political moments in Indian history. For example, at times religion has served as a positive catalyst for social change, and at other times as an instrument of propaganda by dominant groups. At all times, however, education has served as a powerful tool in the struggle for equity and emancipation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, despite the many different meanings given to equity and emancipation.

3.3 The Role of Education in Economic Life

The cultural marginalisation and oppression faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that mainstream education does not tackle is one part of the problem. The second important failing of mainstream education is its inability to deliver the promise of jobs and upward economic mobility. The majority of SC and ST households are engaged in some form of manual labour – cultivation, grazing, mining, scavenging, construction work, or metal, leather or brick work. Mainstream education is singularly focused on building mental skills, however, and so manual skills are generally ignored and devalued. Understandably, SC and ST children internalize the hierarchy of mental skills versus manual labour and learn to consider the latter as inferior. Micro-studies show that although Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations have a poor rate of success in the job market, individuals do internalize the hidden curriculum of schools that teaches them to devalue and reject manual labour as 'dirty', 'lowly' and a mark of ignorance (Subrahmanian, 2005; Jefferey et al, 2002).

In the experience of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, therefore, failure to get a job in the modern economy means a double loss, because the 'educated' child is ill-equipped and/or unwilling to participate in the economic activity of the household. Studies also document that caste and political networks are crucial elements for competing successfully in the job market, and that even SC and ST youth who complete high school are often unable to secure jobs due to the lack of such social capital (Subrahmanian, 2005; Jefferey et al, 2002). In such cases, the economic costs to SC and ST households are very high, given that 'schooled' children have lost their ability and inclination to contribute to the household economy, thereby further impoverishing the family (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian, 2003, cited in Subramanian, 2005). Subramanian (2005: 70) cites a Korku (Scheduled Tribe) parent in this regard:

I make my son do both his school work as well as work in the field and look after the cattle. What if he does not do anything with his schoolwork? Then I will be stuck with a son who does not know how to work in the fields. So I teach him both.

The reluctance of SC and ST parents to keep their children in school can be traced to this disconnection between school education and their prospects in the economy. In their detailed case study on the *Chamar* (leather workers) caste in Bijnor district in Uttar Pradesh, Jeffrey et al (2002) describe how the community's expectation that educated *Chamar* youth will be able to secure government jobs and migrate out of the

village have been belied, and as a consequence they are re-evaluating their educational strategies. The research finds that these jobs are competitive and that the *Chamar* community does not have the necessary social networks nor are they able to pay the bribes required to secure such jobs. Further, school education is perceived to make people lazy and to reduce their ability to perform agricultural tasks which require physical stamina and a different set of skills and knowledge.

The educated are useless. Educated people are trapped. They are restricted in the work that they can do. Uneducated men are free; they can do whatever they like: labour, farming ... whatever. So I think that in today's world, given the nature of unemployment, it is right to be illiterate [...] In India there is hopelessness [*nir_ash_a*]. As a result of unemployment, people have lost the desire to live [*j_ine ki tamann_a*] (Jeffery et al, 2004: 972).

The discontent with schooling as a path towards social and economic mobility is only likely to increase among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with the growth in the casualisation of the labour force in urban and rural sectors, a phenomenon that started in the 1990s with economic liberalization reforms. A majority of the labour force is employed in the agricultural sector and the non-agricultural rural economy has also grown in this period. More than three-fourths of the Scheduled Caste population and more than 80% of the Scheduled Tribe population are employed in these sectors (Sundaram and Tendulkar, 2003). Making schooling relevant to the rural economy and the lives of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is not only sound pedagogy, but is important for the socio-economic development of these communities.

However, thus far, the focus has been on ensuring initial access to basic education for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, while issues of cultural identity and economic productivity have been relegated to the background. The following section will examine the achievements in terms of access to basic education, and the gaps and failures that remain, while paying close attention to regional variations.

4. Literacy Advancement among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Recent studies show that there is an increased demand for education among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Drèze and Sen, 2002). The increasing literacy rate among these groups, though at a slower pace, is witness to this trend. According to 2001 Census data, Scheduled Caste children comprise 17.4% of the total youth population and Scheduled Tribes children are 8.97% of the total youth population (Census of India, 2002) In the 6-11 year age cohort, Scheduled Caste children account for 23 million and Scheduled Tribes children for 12 million. In the 11-14 year age cohort, there are 13 million SC children and 6 million ST children. In this section, we trace the development in literacy rates, availability of schools and retention of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children in schools.

4.1 Literacy and Enrolment: Uneven Progress

Official data reveals that the educational progress of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations is quite remarkable, but only if one remains focused on the quantitative data, and particularly on enrolment. Sadly, the qualitative data reflects quite another picture and merits closer attention as it zeroes in on a particular situation and gives a richer picture. There are many dynamic factors related to this discrepancy, especially the fact that factors related to schooling processes – such as parental education and occupations which are the major determinants in sustaining a child in school – are often neglected in quantitative analysis. A study conducted in Tamil Nadu reveals that there is a significant difference in completing school education among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children due to the social disadvantages they face (Duraisamy, 2001). Variations between states are also quite deceptive if one compares the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) with the literacy rates among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (See Table 2). For instance, in Bihar, the GER for Scheduled Tribes is 79.2% whereas the literacy rate is only 28.2%. The same is the case for Scheduled Tribes in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh where the literacy rate is below 40%. In general, literacy rates for Scheduled Castes are better than those for Scheduled Tribe populations. However, three states – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand – have Scheduled Caste literacy rates that are far below the national average, and Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have also performed poorly. The data shows that SC and ST children are frequently not retained in the educational process for the complete elementary school cycle (i.e. up to class VIII; see Table 2).

Table 2. Literacy Rates and Gross Enrolment Rates for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

State/UT	Literacy Rate		GER Grades I-VIII (%)	
	SC	ST	SC Students	ST Students
India[@]	54.69	47.10	83.35	86.06
Jammu & Kashmir	59.03	37.46	81.25	62.05
Himachal Pradesh	70.31	65.50	100.26	111.70
Punjab	56.22	-	97.72	-
Chandigarh	67.66	-	63.59	-
Uttaranchal	63.40	63.23	105.11	91.53
Haryana	55.45	-	81.19	-
Delhi	70.85	-	61.28	-
Rajasthan	52.24	44.66	81.88	85.58
Uttar Pradesh	46.27	35.13	61.25	62.37
Bihar	28.47	28.17	59.67	79.19
Sikkim	63.04	67.14	75.48	114.23
Arunachal Pradesh	67.64	49.62	-	90.11
Nagaland	-	65.95	-	60.19
Manipur [@]	72.32	65.85	111.30	108.34
Mizoram	89.20	89.34	-	101.45
Tripura	74.68	56.48	104.75	101.19
Meghalaya	56.27	61.34	90.46	87.62
Assam	66.78	62.52	67.08	75.10
West Bengal	59.04	43.40	110.75	67.33
Jharkhand	37.56	40.67	54.90	85.03
Orissa	55.53	37.37	88.50	89.66
Chhattisgarh	63.96	52.09	96.24	105.95
Madhya Pradesh	58.57	41.16	97.28	79.55
Gujarat	70.50	47.74	72.96	89.01
Daman & Diu	85.13	63.42	98.34	103.02
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	78.25	41.24	102.39	93.32
Maharashtra	71.90	55.21	100.86	98.15
Andhra Pradesh	53.52	37.04	91.57	78.76
Karnataka	52.87	48.27	100.67	93.91
Goa	71.92	55.88	101.83	-
Lakshadweep	-	86.14	-	102.91
Kerala	82.66	64.35	91.43	108.99
Tamil Nadu	63.19	41.53	105.63	108.16
Pondicherry	69.12	-	116.45	-
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	-	66.79	-	88.36

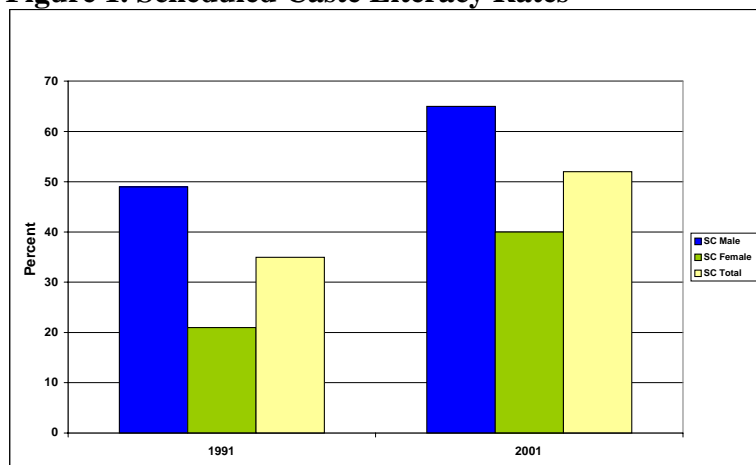
Source: Government of India (2006)

Note: [@] - Excludes Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur.

Between 1991 and 2001, literacy rates have increased for girls as well as for overall numbers of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups due to higher school participation (Government of India, 2006). The total literacy rate for Scheduled Caste groups during that time increased from 37.41% to 54.69% (Figure 1), and for Scheduled Tribes it increased from 29.6% to 47.1% (Figure 2). The literacy rate, therefore, increased by 17.28% among the Scheduled Caste population and by 17.5%

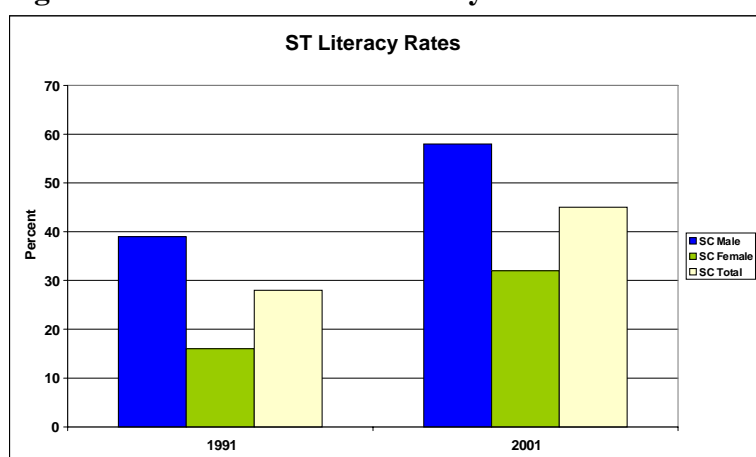
among the Scheduled Tribes, whereas the change to the overall national literacy rate is logged at 12.79% during 1991-2001. Similarly, in terms of an analysis of literacy by gender, Scheduled Caste females recorded a 18.14% increase and Scheduled Tribe females a 16.51% increase, as compared to an overall national change of 14.71%.

Figure 1. Scheduled Caste Literacy Rates



Source: Government of India (2006)

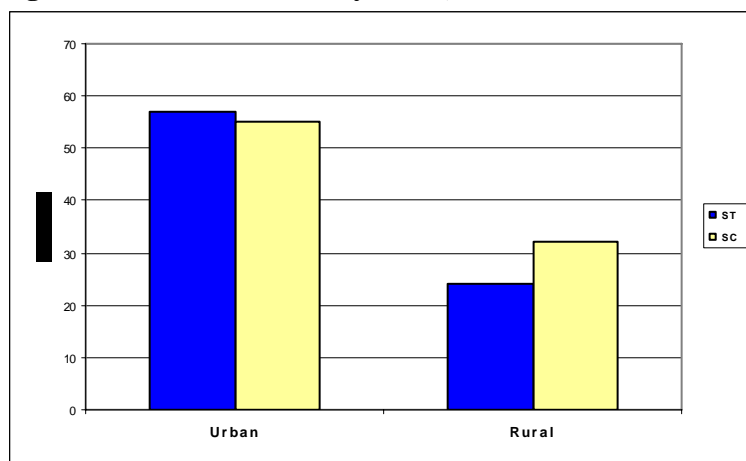
Figure 2. Scheduled Tribe Literacy Rates



Source: Government of India (2006)

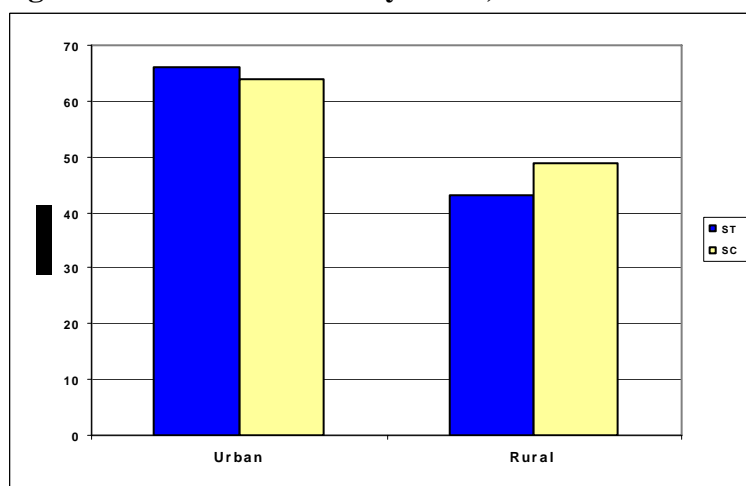
These figures indicate a reduction in the literacy gap between the general population and the SC and ST population groups. The literacy gap of Scheduled Castes compared to others, over the same time period, decreased from 20.28% to 14.12% and for Scheduled Tribes from 28.09% to 21.71% respectively. Despite these improvements, however, there continues to be a wide gap in terms of rural and urban literacy rates for the two groups (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. SC and ST Literacy Rates, 1991



Source: Government of India (2006)

Figure 4. SC and ST Literacy Rates, 2001

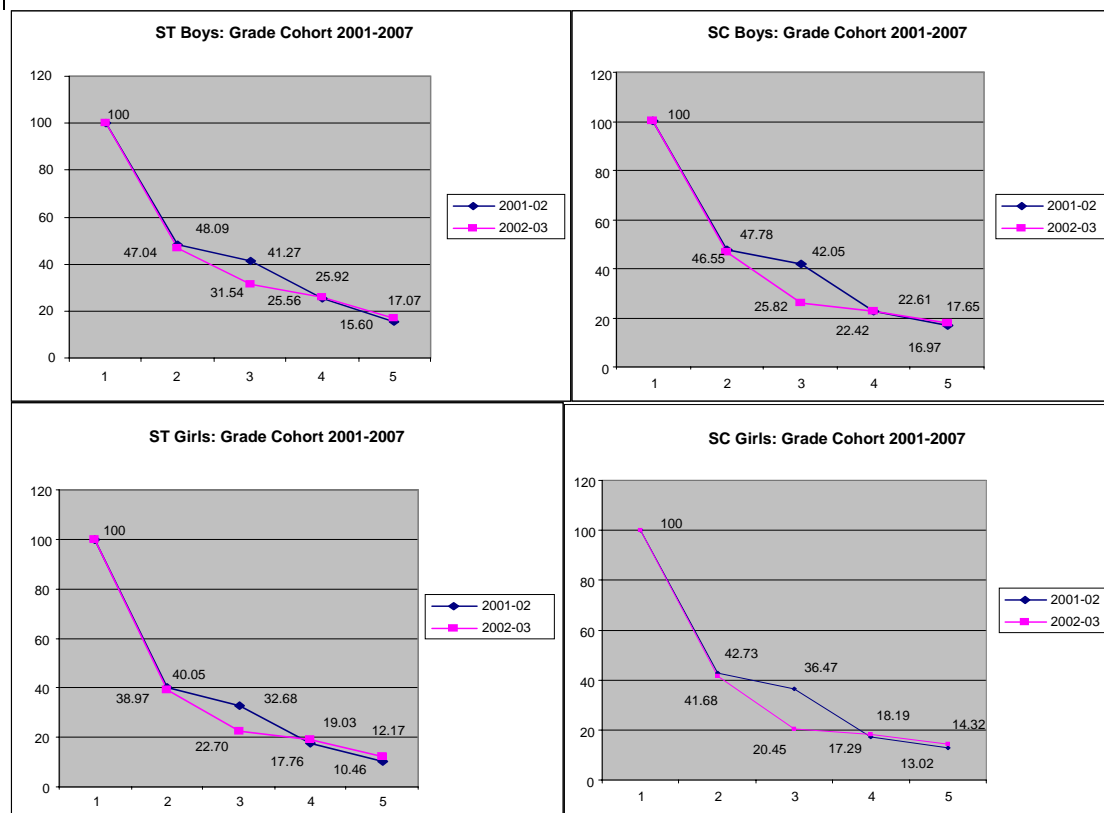


Source: Government of India (2006)

Despite significant increases in literacy and enrolment rates, the overall low average literacy level of the country, and especially amongst Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations, continues to aggravate inequalities in educational capabilities between different groups. The first important aspect of these inequalities is the vast difference between states (see Box 4). On the one hand, the state of Kerala had achieved nearly universal literacy by 1991, and on the other, states such as Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have not yet reached even 50% literacy levels (See Table 2). In addition to these regional disparities, there are also large educational inequalities between rural and urban areas, between different castes and between men and women. When these diverse inequalities are combined, we get an idea of the extent to which socially disadvantaged groups, such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, have very low levels of education. Among these groups, it is women who tend to suffer the most. For example, the literacy level of rural SC women in Uttar Pradesh is only 8%, in comparison with 73% for the same group in Kerala (Government of India, 2006).

Box 4. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Enrolment, Grades I-V*District Information System for Education (DISE) in India*

DISE data for the grade cohort 2001-2007 is used below to trace the enrolment trends of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children. The data presented covers 424,847 schools in 17 states: Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The data shows that enrolments decrease as students progress to higher grades.



If we take the enrolment of students as 100% from grade I and grade II, enrolment in the next grade can be seen to decrease every year. [Note: the following calculations are approximations, as data is not available regarding new entrants and repeaters.] The graphs above shows that SC and ST students' enrolment decreases significantly between grade II and grade V. SC students' enrolment is higher than that of ST students', but what is most troubling is the drastic fall in enrolment from primary to middle school level. For Scheduled Caste male students, enrolment is 42.05% in grade III, but drops to 17.65% in grade V, and for girls it drops from 36.47% to 14.32% respectively. Similarly, for ST boys the transition from grade III to grade V shows a decrease from 41.27% to 17.07% enrolment, while for girls it falls from 32.68% to 12.17%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on raw data from India's District Information System for Education (DISE, 2007).

4.2 Physical Access to Schools

Access to schooling is no longer a major impediment to ensuring universal education for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Sixth All India Educational Survey reveals that in 1993, 37% of Scheduled Caste habitations and 46% of Scheduled Tribe

habitations had schools within them (NCERT, 1998). In that same year, around 45% of Scheduled Caste habitations had a primary school located no more than one kilometre away, while approximately 30% of Scheduled Tribe population habitations had a primary school within one kilometre. Another 11% of Scheduled Tribe populations and 5.5% of Scheduled Caste populations did not have schools located within two kilometres of their habitation (see Table 3). The simple availability of a school, however, does not guarantee that children will enrol or attend.

Table 3. Primary School Coverage (%) in Rural SC and ST Habitations

Distance	Scheduled Caste Areas		Scheduled Tribe Areas	
	Habitations Covered (%)	Population Covered (%)	Habitations Covered (%)	Population Covered (%)
Within the habitation	37.03	64.27	45.96	71.43
Up to 1km away*	45.27	27.05	30.34	17.12
1km to 2km away	12.19	6.21	12.81	6.64
More than 2km away	5.51	2.46	10.89	4.81
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: NCERT (1998); * figures do not include schools found within the habitation

4.3 Retention

The expansion of schools has also been accompanied by an increased demand for education. While Table 3 (above) shows a good level of provision of primary schools within a reasonable distance (i.e. within 1km), Table 4 shows that many of these children drop out of primary school in the higher grades and do not make the transition to secondary schooling. Rapidly expanding enrolments have been accompanied by changing perceptions of the relevance of schooling, the effectiveness of schools, and the benefits of participation in relation to direct and indirect costs. Primary school graduation rates have not increased as rapidly as would be expected from overall enrolment growth. The problems of capturing and retaining the last 20% of non-enrolled or ‘at risk’ students, and of increasing promotion, completion and transition rates for girls and boys, are inextricably linked to decisions to participate by the poor and other excluded groups.

Table 4. Drop Out Rates (%) for SC Children at Primary and Elementary Stages

Year	Primary (grades I-V)						Elementary (grades I-VIII)					
	Boys		Girls		Total		Boys		Girls		Total	
	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST
2001-2002	43.7	51	47.1	54.1	45.2	52.3	58.6	67.3	63.6	72.7	60.7	69.5
2002-2003	41.1	50.8	41.9	52.1	41.5	51.4	58.2	66.9	62.2	71.2	59.9	68.7
2003-2004	36.8	49.1	36.2	48.7	36.6	48.9	57.3	69	62.2	71.4	59.4	70.1
2004-2005	32.7	42.6	36.1	42.0	34.2	42.3	55.2	65	60.0	67.1	57.3	65.9
2004-2005	33.6	40.3	34.0	39.3	33.8	39.8	53.7	62.8	57.3	63.2	55.2	62.9

Source: Government of India (2006) and Government of India (2008)

Economic pressures force a large number of Scheduled Caste children to leave school at an early age. However, this is not the only reason that children leave. Memories of humiliation can also play an important role in the decision to leave, albeit a less visible one (National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1998). The poor quality of education is another critical factor that leads to lower retention. Research has found that the majority of students from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled

Tribe communities study in government schools that are badly-equipped in terms of the number of teachers, infrastructure and school environment. Discrimination against under-privileged groups is endemic, and takes numerous forms (PROBE, 1999).

Table 5. Drop Out Rates (%) of SC and ST Students by State

Drop Out Rates of SC Students (grades I-VIII)		Drop Out Rates of ST Students (grades I-VIII)	
<40	<60	<40	<60
Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Maharashtra, Tripura, Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu	Punjab, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, India	Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep, Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland, Sikkim	Madhya Pradesh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu
<80	>80	<80	>80
Rajasthan, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh	Bihar	Mizoram, Meghalaya, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Tripura, West Bengal, India	Orissa

Source: Government of India (2008)

Notes: - Drop out rates for Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal are shown combined with the respective parent state.

- For SC students there is no drop out in the states of Kerala, Manipur, Daman & Diu and Puducherry.

Drop out rates have been decreasing over a number of years for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and has been particularly noticeable since 2001. Exceptions to this positive trend include the case of ST boys, as well as total drop out rates amongst Scheduled Tribes at the elementary level in 2003-04 (see Table 4). A state-wise analysis of drop out rates reveals that Bihar has the highest rate of Scheduled Caste drop out, while Orissa has the highest rate of drop out among Scheduled Tribes. The lowest drop out rates for Scheduled Caste students are in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Maharashtra, Tripura, Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. For Scheduled Tribes, rates are lowest in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep, Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland, Sikkim (see Table 5). In recent years, Himachal Pradesh has reversed a previous negative trend and achieved the lowest drop out rates both for both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This is due to active state intervention in the educational field, as primary education has remained a consistent priority of the state government, despite different political parties assuming power in the past years. This has provided the necessary conditions for Himachal Pradesh to achieve and sustain an impressive level of success in the primary education sector (see De et al, 2002).

The combinations of four main factors help to determine the retention of a child in the school, namely: the income of the household, parental education, home environment and school environment. Thus, a boy coming from an affluent upper caste family is almost certain to enter the schooling system and has a high prospect of completing

grade VIII. At the other end of the ladder, a girl from a poor Scheduled Caste family has a weaker prospect of entering the schooling system and much less chance of completing grade VIII (Filmer and Pritchett, 1998 cited in Alexander, 2003).

In the following section, we focus particularly on how the cost of schooling and the school environment impact on SC and ST students. Classroom processes, where the invisible and visible discrimination against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is evident, are discussed in a later section (6.2).

4.4 Apartheid in Times of Equity

Tilak's (2002) analysis of the NCAER survey data states that there is nothing like 'free' education in India. He reports that household expenditure on education is sizeable; households from poor socio-economic backgrounds (i.e. Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes) often spend considerable amounts of their income on education. This includes elementary education, which is supposed to be provided free by the government. Significant expenditure is made on books, uniforms and fees. Scheduled Tribes often spend much more on elementary education than others groups (i.e. non-Scheduled Caste/Tribe households), even in government schools. For instance, in Himachal Pradesh, Scheduled Tribe households reportedly spend Rs. 966 per child per year in government schools, while Scheduled Caste households spend Rs. 752 and 'others' spend Rs. 760 (see Tilak, 2002). This is similar in Punjab, Tamil Nadu and in the North-Eastern region. In the same way, Scheduled Castes in Kerala and Gujarat spend more than non-Scheduled Castes on elementary education (Tilak, 2002). On the other hand, it has been argued that the case of the states of Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have confirmed that the link between low enrolment in schools and household poverty is only a weak one, and therefore that universal basic education in India is an achievable goal, if implemented with genuine political will (Filmer and Pritchett, 1998, cited in Alexander, 2003).

The demand for schooling by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe families has not been matched by supply of quality education. On the contrary, the quality of education and environment in government schools has declined over the years and today not just the rich but also those with middle incomes prefer to send their children to private schools. The shift toward private schools is not restricted to the metropolitan cities but is also apparent in smaller towns in India (Kingdon, 1996). To meet the high demand, a variety of private schools, ranging from super-elite to 'budget', have emerged that cater to students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Today, affluent Scheduled Caste families also often prefer to incur additional expenditure and send their children to private rather than government schools. It is ironic, in this case, that government schools by law appoint only qualified teachers whereas private schools, and especially the 'budget' private schools that have mushroomed in the past decade, often hire unqualified teachers and pay them much less than their government school counterparts. As a result, these schools often provide low quality schooling, yet they are typically perceived to offer better quality education and to improve student's chances of progressing through the education system. Studies show that the demand for private schools is also greater for two additional reasons: (1) the extremely poor infrastructure available in most of the

government schools, including a lack of proper buildings, toilet facilities, desks and so forth; and (2) the regional language is the medium of instruction and English language is introduced only later in grade III or IV.

Better infrastructure, quality schooling and English language skills have thus become important criteria in shaping school choices for all social classes. Parents who can access private schools opt for them, and the poorest of the poor remain in government schools. It is relevant to note here that 99% of Scheduled Caste children are enrolled in government schools, thus creating a segregated and highly unequal schooling system.

4.5 Gender Equity

The education of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe girls is a serious issue as they are often doubly disadvantaged, due to both their social status and their gender. Gender equity is a major concern, as the drop out rate is higher among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe girls at the elementary level. In 2004-2005, the drop out rate for Scheduled Caste girls was 60% (compared to 55% for SC boys) and for Scheduled Tribe girls it was 67% (compared to 65% for ST boys) at the elementary level. Girls are particularly disadvantaged because family and social roles often do not prioritise their education (see Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian, 2008). The age of girls also affects when they drop out. In many states, early marriage and the economic utility of children leads to large scale drop out in the 5-10 year old and 16-20 year old age groups, interrupting the completion of girls' education (Naidu, 1999).

The government has provided special attendance scholarships for girl students in order to keep them in school. This is discussed separately in the section on incentives (5.1). A study conducted in Tamil Nadu illustrates that mother's education also plays a significant role in girls' enrolment and grade attainment. It emphasises that girls tend to access public schools within villages, as they are not allowed to travel long distances to attend schools because of social custom and safety concerns (Duraisamy, 2001).

5. Policies, Programmes and Initiatives

Until 1999, there was a single National Commission to address both Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. More recently, and in recognition of the different types of assistance required by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations, two separate Ministries have been established to address their concerns: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs was constituted in October 1999, with the objective of providing more focused attention on the integrated socio-economic development of the most under-privileged Scheduled Tribes in a coordinated and planned manner. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes was re-constituted in 2004 under the banner of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The Commission has wide powers to protect, safeguard and promote the interests of Scheduled Caste groups.

The government adopted the Special Component Plan (SCP) in 1979 for the socio-economic and educational development of Scheduled Castes, as well as the improvement to their working and living conditions. The focus of the strategy is on:

- (a) economic development through beneficiary-oriented programmes for raising their income and creating assets;
- (b) schemes for infrastructure development in the Scheduled areas;
- (c) educational development.

(Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2005)

For Scheduled Castes in the Northeastern regions, the Planning Commission issued guidelines in September 1998 which require all central government departments to earmark 10% of their gross budgetary support for specific programmes for the development of Scheduled Castes. This is significant, given that the Scheduled Caste population comprises only 2% of the total population in this region. Moreover, the region had been identified as an untouchability and atrocity-free area. The national Annual Plan approved Rs. 1492 crore (Rs. 14.92 billion) for the year 2004-05 including Rs. 65.80 crore (Rs. 658 million) (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2005).

At present, 27 states/UTs with sizeable Scheduled Caste populations are implementing the Special Component Plan. The details of total State Plan outlay to the SCP, as reported by the state governments and UT administrations for the first two years of Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Special Component Plan Expenditure (Rs. in Crore/10 million)

Period	Total State Plan Outlay	SCP Outlay	% of SCP Outlay to State Plan Outlay
2002-2003	96223.73	10595.79	11.01
2003-2004	85515.23	10840.18	12.68

Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2005)

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment provides 100% grants in addition to the Special Component Plan under the Central Sector Scheme of the Special Central Assistance to the states/UTs. It is worked out on the basis of the following criteria:

- i) SC Population of the states/UTs: 40%
- ii) Relative backwardness of the states/UTs: 10%
- iii) Percentage of Scheduled Castes families in the states/UTs covered by composite economic development programmes in the State Plan to enable them to cross the poverty line: 25%
- iv) Percentage of SCP to the Annual Plan: 25%.

(Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2005)

Similarly, the Constitution of India incorporates several special provisions for the promotion of the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Tribes as well as their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. These objectives are to be achieved through a strategy known as the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy, which was adopted at the beginning of the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1979). The strategy seeks to ensure adequate flow of funds for tribal development from the State Plan allocations, schemes/programmes of central ministries/departments, financial and developmental institutions. The corner-stone of this strategy has been to ensure that funds are earmarked for TSP by states/UTs in proportion to their Scheduled Tribe populations (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2005).

To look after the Scheduled Tribe population in a coordinated manner, Integrated Tribal Development Projects were also conceived as part of the Fifth Five Year Plan, and these have continued to be a feature of successive Five Year Plans. During the Sixth Plan (1980-1985), the Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) was adopted to cover smaller areas of tribal concentration and during the Seventh Plan (1985-1989), the TSP strategy was further extended to cover even smaller areas of Scheduled Tribe concentration. There are now 194 Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) in areas of the country where the Scheduled Tribes population is more than 50% of the total population. During the Sixth Plan, pockets outside ITDP areas with a total population of 10,000 and with a ST population of at least 5,000, were covered under the Tribal Sub-Plan and MADA. To date, 252 MADA pockets have been identified in the country as a whole (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2005). In the total Tenth Plan outlay, an additional Rs. 1754 crores (Rs. 17.54 billion) was granted for their development in addition to the programmes of Special Central Assistance to the Tribal Sub Plan and Grants under Article 275(1) of the Constitution of India (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2005a). The educational development of this group is also targeted through various other schemes, including the establishment of ashram schools.

There was an increase of 30.78% in the total Plan Budget of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs from Rs. 1146.00 crore (Rs. 11.46 billion) in 2004-2005 to Rs. 1498.82 crore (Rs. 14.98 billion) for the year 2005-2006. States which received grants were: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Orissa, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2005b).

5.1 Incentive Schemes: Ensuring Access and Equity

One way of getting Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students into school is through the provision of various incentives. Incentives can be categorised in a variety of ways – they can be tangible or intangible, financial or non-financial, direct or indirect. The four major categories are:

1. *Financial Interventions*: cash transfers directly to a family/child or in a bank (to access later); scholarships/stipends; provision of textbooks, stationery and uniforms; school vouchers and transport assistance (bus passes/cycles).
2. *Provision of Mid-Day Meals* and other health related interventions: provision of free meals, food distribution to families, provision of Iron and Vitamin A tablets, inoculation and vaccination, separate sanitation facilities and provision of water.
3. *Social Welfare Intervention*: provision of hostels and interventions for children with special needs.
4. *Additional Incentives* aimed at qualitative improvements: improving infrastructure, provision of quality teaching-learning, introduction of computers, sports facilities and remedial teaching, bridge courses, and appointment of parateachers.

(Educational Research Unit, 2006)

A variety of these types of incentive schemes have been launched by the central government in order to attract students from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities, including free education at primary level, scholarships, hostel facilities, mid-day meal schemes, free uniforms, free textbooks and attendance-based scholarship for girls (see Table 7). The Mid-day Meal Scheme is the largest and most ambitious programme ever attempted by the Indian Government (or any government in the world) as an attempt to achieve universal elementary education.

Table 7. Estimated Number of Schools with Incentive Schemes and Numbers of Beneficiaries in Primary Schools

Scheme	Number of schools with the scheme	Scheduled Caste beneficiaries		Scheduled Tribe beneficiaries	
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Mid-Day Meals	79,374	397,642	342,135	283,626	202,053
Free Uniform	166,899	393,433	483,316	259,246	306,769
Free Textbooks	311,263	1,066,569	898,619	569,579	408,175
Attendance Scholarship for Girls	79,940	-	301,812	-	196,612

Source: NCERT (1998)

The provision of incentive schemes has increased the demand-side of basic education as it not only helps in educational development of the child by reducing the cost of sending the child to school, it also builds awareness among parents about the importance of sending their children to school. Although the link between rising levels of literacy and affirmative action programmes may not be direct, these schemes are believed to have contributed to a overall promotion of the importance of basic education (Education Research Unit, 2006). At the same time, there are many parents

who are not aware of such schemes. Those groups and individuals and groups that are aware and make use of such provisions, however, have benefited significantly from them.

A study of DPEP by Reddy (2000) reveals that due to an insufficient and irregular supply of incentives, some parents spent their small incomes on children's books, stationery, and fees. So in spite of the government spending a huge amount on incentives, the intended target group often does not receive the benefits of it. Some educational incentives are also being misused and not reaching the beneficiaries. This is partly due to lack of awareness among Scheduled Tribe parents about the nature, quality, quantity and mechanisms involved in the distribution of incentives. As a result, poor enrolment, absenteeism, wastage and a lack of quality of education continue to be serious concerns in ST communities (Reddy, 2000).

5.2 Two Birds with One Scheme: Improving Access and Equity through Mid-Day Meals

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, commonly known as the Mid-day Meal Scheme, was launched in August 1995 (see Government of India, 2002: 28). In Tamil Nadu, it has been operational since 1956 through voluntary contributions from local people. Tamil Nadu's experience suggests that well-devised school meals have much to contribute to the advancement of elementary education, child nutrition and social equity. However, these achievements depend a great deal on the quality of mid-day meals. As other authors have noted, ramshackle mid-day meal programmes can do more harm than good (Drèze and Goyal, 2003).

Naidu (1999) conducted a study to explore the impacts of mid-day meal programmes in four states of South India: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. The mid-day meal scheme is the main attraction for Scheduled Tribe students in Tamil Nadu and is noted as the main incentive for large scale enrolment in primary schools. In Kerala, the absence of a mid-day meal scheme is one of the major factors that affects school enrolments when compared with Tamil Nadu. However, the number of schools is high in Kerala due to the presence of pre-metric schools (i.e. schools which provide classes up to grade IX) in tribal areas. In Andhra Pradesh, there are no mid-day meal schemes, but ashram schools extend education to a few Scheduled Tribe students. In comparison with other states, low enrolment levels and high drop out rates are two salient features in tribal schools in Andhra Pradesh. In Karnataka, the establishment of a larger number of schools enables increased enrolment and in comparison with the situation in other states, Karnataka's tribal schools record a high level of enrolment due to free meals schemes, scholarships and residential schools (Naidu, 1999).

The national Mid-Day Meal Scheme does not target Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students in particular, but its impact on them is evident. Thorat and Lee's (2005) study, conducted in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, argues that the participation of Scheduled Caste children in the Mid-Day Meal Scheme allows them to reach higher levels in the education system and lowers the incidence of exclusion, and thus caste discrimination. Another study conducted by Drèze and Goyal (2003) examined what mid-day meals have achieved and how they can be improved, using data from a survey by The Centre for Equity Studies (CES). The

survey, conducted between January and April 2003, covered three states: Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Karnataka. It revealed that the contribution of mid-day meals to food security and child nutrition seems to be particularly crucial in tribal areas, where hunger is endemic. It is hardly surprising then, that the CES survey revealed that parental appreciation of mid-day meals was highest among tribal communities. For example, Drèze and Goyal cite Phoolji Damore, a tribal parent in Banswara district (Rajasthan): 'We have to toil hard for our daily bread, and it is good that our children get at least one meal to eat because sometimes we don't have any food' (Drèze and Goyal, 2003: 9). The study also goes on to state that,

Aside from promoting school attendance and child nutrition, mid-day meals have an important socialisation value. As children learn to sit together and share a common meal, one can expect some erosion of caste prejudices and class inequity. As a Scheduled Castes father in Govind Pura village, Tonk District (Rajasthan), puts it: 'All children sit and eat together. This way they grow up as better individuals. This promotes the feeling of togetherness' (Drèze and Goyal, 2003: 9).

The CES survey suggested that there was no open caste discrimination in the areas under study, although such incidents did come to light from time to time. No cases were found of separate seating arrangements or of discriminatory practices such as separate eating or drinking arrangements, but subtle forms of caste prejudice and social discrimination were evident as some upper-caste parents sent their children to school with packed food, or asked them to come home for lunch. Whether this is a manifestation of caste prejudice (as opposed to class privilege) is not always clear, but the caste factor is likely to play a part in many cases. The study also noted several instances of active parental resistance to the appointment of Scheduled Caste cooks. In Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, for example, cases of Scheduled Caste cooks were largely confined to schools with no upper-caste children (Drèze and Goyal, 2003). Except for this opposition, mid-day meals were quite popular in each of the three sample states. Generally, teachers also had positive perceptions of the impact of mid-day meals. A large majority of teachers, for instance, felt that mid-day meals boosted pupil enrolment and enhanced children's interest in studies (Drèze and Goyal, 2003).

There are, however, many problems related to these schemes. For instance, a lack of awareness by beneficiaries leads to the misuse of incentives and a consequent failure to achieve the intended goals of the programme. The extent of satisfaction with incentive programmes differs, based on their supply, quantity, quality and nature. Due to some administrative lapses, implementing agencies are often not able to provide the material in time. It is reported that in some schools, because there is a lack of community participation and infrastructural facilities, teachers distribute raw rice to parents instead of serving mid-day meals. In a DPEP study in Andhra Pradesh, different problems like non-payment of the cook's salary, irregular supply of rice, vegetables and firewood and a lack of proper kitchen facilities and utensils were considered to make the scheme ineffective (Reddy, 2000). Additionally, a mid-day meal scheme can impinge on teaching time, in particular in single-teacher schools, as the teacher has to spend considerable time arranging the meal rather than teaching.

5.3 State Level Programmes and Policies

At the national level, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), a special school programme for girl children from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and other minorities in low female literacy districts, was launched in 2004-2005. It aimed to ensure access and quality education to girls through 750 residential schools and boarding facilities at elementary level. Efforts to implement the programme are not uniform at the state level, however, as some states are pro-active in focusing on SC/ST students and some are not. In the following sections, two southern states and two northern states are cited as exemplars to improve access and equity among the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities through state-level initiatives.

5.3.1 Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh has launched a number of innovative schemes to promote education especially among the poor and deprived. As many as 76 'Schools of Excellence' have been opened in 19 districts, and another 85 high schools were being opened in 2006 exclusively for Scheduled Tribes girls, covering almost all tribal areas of the state. The earlier approach of having Schools of Excellence in all district headquarters is now being complemented with a massive construction drive. The objective was to construct buildings for all primary schools by the end of the fiscal year of 2006 and to do the same in respect to all middle schools by the end of 2007. Hostel facilities have also been created for promising Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe students. The Gaon Ki Beti scheme gives any girl scoring the highest mark in the grade XII examination in her village incentives to meet the cost of her further studies. The Government of Madhya Pradesh has also made a decision to reimburse the full cost of schooling to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe students who make it to prestigious public schools in the state (India Today, 2006).

Madhya Pradesh has taken large steps forward in terms of access to primary education (see Box 5), as is evidenced by increasing enrolment rates for both boys and girls, as well as increasing literacy rates. These achievements have been the result both of greater funds allocated to the education sector and also due to programmes and schemes that focus on specific lacunae in the educational infrastructure and the educational system. These programmes and schemes seek to align supply side facilities with demand side incentives and generate a positive synergy between the two (Bajpai et al, 2005).

Box 5. Education Incentive Scheme for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Girls

With a view to encouraging the girls of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for education an incentive scheme is being implemented in Madhya Pradesh. The scheme aims at encouraging these girls to continue their education after primary level. There is a general tendency among girls of these sections to give up education on clearing fifth class. Another objective of the scheme is to bring down the dropout rate of these girls in schools.

The incentive scheme was amended in 2003-04 to make it more attractive. Under it, the girls who, after passing the 8th standard get admission in 9th class and those who take admission in 11th class after clearing high school examinations are provided a cash incentive of Rs. 1000 and Rs. 2000, respectively. The cash incentive is provided in two equal installments in July and January. However, the girls whose father/guardian are income tax payee are not eligible for the benefit under the scheme. The principals of concerning institutions send the information about the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe girls taking admission in 9th and 11th by October to the Assistant Commissioner/District Coordinator, Tribal Welfare Department.

The fathers or guardians of such girls are required to give a declaration of their annual income. The income tax certificate of the government servant or private servant should be duly signed by the head of office. The sanctioning authority provides the incentive amount through cheque to the principal who disburse it to the girls through bank. The cash incentive is in addition to the scholarship and stipend.

Excerpted from: Department of Public Relations Madhya Pradesh (2005)

5.3.2 Andhra Pradesh

The under-development of school education among the Scheduled Castes of Andhra Pradesh was systematically studied through a state level survey in 19 districts where DPEP is implemented (Chalam, 2000). It was observed that only 20 of the 59 sub-castes among the Scheduled Castes were represented in educational institutions. However, the state could provide places in residential schools and hostels to only 5% of the 15 lakh (1.5 million) SC children of school-going age. In the rural areas, 90% of Scheduled Caste parents were not aware of the provision of incentives for sending their children to school. The socio-economic background of the majority of Scheduled Caste respondents was poor and uneducated. Less than 30% of the SC children who enrolled in primary school reached grade VII (Chalam, 2000).

The Government of Andhra Pradesh, through the Department of Social Welfare, has been implementing strategies to improve this situation, such as providing social welfare hostels and residential schools. If we look at the magnitude of the problem, it is estimated that the state had 14 lakh (1.4 million) SC children between the ages of 6 and 11 years in 1996. The Government of Andhra Pradesh is providing facilities (both residential schools and social welfare hostels) to around 75,000 students. This constitutes about 5% of the total population of the state. The elite and the articulate Scheduled Castes groups are more likely to benefit from these facilities, however, as the more disadvantaged families live in rural areas and often do not have knowledge of such programmes (Chalam, 2000).

The state government has also started several measures to reach out to Scheduled Tribe communities, such as establishing: Girijana Vidya Vikas Kendras (alternative schools established by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency in association with the national Janshala programme) with grades I and II in ST areas; mandal (sub-district) level elementary schools; special residential schools called 'ashram schools' mainly in tribal areas; and alternative schools and monitoring systems such as the School Complex System (every 'school complex' is a pivot for many tribal feeder schools). Special programmes such as bridge courses and back to school initiatives for drop outs have also been provided. The state has also launched a special programme for adult literacy, known as 'Akshara Sankranthi', which is for 'adults' over the age of 15 years.

All of these attempts fall far short of the specific educational needs in tribal areas, however. This is because apart from access to education, the quality of available educational practices and processes are also important. Many of the existing schools do not have adequate numbers of teachers. The quality of teaching leaves much to be desired, as does the curriculum content, which does not take into account the realities within which tribal groups live (D'Souza, 2003).

5.3.3 Orissa

Orissa was a pioneer state in initiating special types of Residential Educational Institutions for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes students' educational development. There are 163 Residential High Schools for boys and 55 schools for girls. There are 112 ashram schools for boys in the state and 37 for girls. The state has 143 primary schools with residential facilities and 919 Sevashrams schools, which are non-residential. The state has also established 7 Special Scheduled Tribes Hostels. There are 400 schools which provide residential facilities at primary level for Scheduled Tribes girls in Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi (popularly known as KBK districts). Four model tribal schools have been established using the Nayodaya Vidyalaya Scheme. The number of students in educational institutions, managed by the Department, in the years 1999-2000, was 131,474 for Scheduled Tribe students and 44,874 for Scheduled Caste students (Government of Orissa, 2006).

5.3.4 Karnataka

In Karnataka, several schemes for children from Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities are funded and implemented by the Department of Social Welfare. These programmes are mostly in the form of free hostels, residential schools and scholarships. Free hostels are provided for boys and girls who live farther than 8-10 km from a school. Some NGOs play a vital role in spreading awareness of the importance of education among Scheduled Tribe communities (see Box 6) The state has established 88 ashram schools for SC children and 94 for ST children for grades I through IV. These provide educational opportunities for 8,800 SC students and 5,800 ST students. In addition, there are 51 Morarji Desai residential schools (established during 1995-96 under the incentive scheme) offering quality education for grades V through X. There is provision for an annual scholarship of Rs. 75 per child for classes I to IV, and Rs. 100 for those in classes VIII to X. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe girls in high school receive a scholarship of Rs. 500, which is dispersed through the school principal (Kanbargi, 2002).

Box 6. Tribal Education – A Special Drive in a Forest

The Tribal Alternate Education Programme was initiated as a pilot project by an NGO called DEED (Development through Education) in collaboration with A-e-A (*Aide-et-Action*), a Chennai based support group, in the Kakanakote forest area of Nagarahole national park in Mysore district in 6 tribal *hadis* (settlements) to assist 443 tribal (*Scheduled Tribes*) children out of whom 234 were girl children. Three government schools that were virtually dysfunctional in the area were adopted. 88 out-of-school children were also brought back to the educational system through these schools. This is a major component of a larger programme for the upliftment of the primitive tribal population of *Jenu Kurubas* that lives under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions. After the results of the pilot project were found encouraging, the programme was implemented under the Community Owned and Managed Education (COME) concept. The Education Department of the Government of Karnataka is now supporting this programme on a long-term basis.

A 4-year plan was implemented focusing on pre-primary education, primary education, life-oriented education and mainstreaming the drop outs below 14 years in 32 *hadis*. A total of about 3000 *Scheduled Tribes* children, including over 1600 girls, are being targeted. 386 drop out children have been brought back to the mainstream school system through 18 special *Chinnara Angala* coaching centres. These children joined regular government schools in June 2003.

Under the programme, certain innovative components have been included. For pre-primary children play-way methods, habit formation, games, plays and songs have been introduced. For primary education DPEP methods (*Nali-Kali, Kali-Nali*), cultural story telling, teaching songs, playing games, watching nature, promotion of eco-friendly practices, analyzing and understanding real-life situations, etc., have been adopted. The tribal dialect has been given importance. Special pedagogy education material (*Jenuudi Kaliyaku*) has been published and popularized in the schools. Science, mathematics and social studies have been taught through songs and games also.

To combat the children's malnutrition, noon-meal and nutritious supplementary food is provided in the schools. This has helped to reduce the drop outs and increase attendance in the schools. There is a strong community commitment to the programme. Education has been accepted by parents as well as children in the broader sense of an empowerment process in day-to-day affairs on a continuous basis.

Source: Government of Karnataka (2003)

State initiatives such as these play a vital role in attracting Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children to school. State policies that favour SC and ST communities lead to increased enrolment and pave the way towards sustainable access to schools. The four states discussed above, namely Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka, demonstrate that state policy is crucial in promoting education among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students. By providing free education along with other means of support through mid-day meals, hostel facilities, and other programmes, the states have accelerated the participation of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students in schools. They have done this in different ways. The area of focus in Madhya Pradesh, for example, was on girls' participation in Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities, in Andhra Pradesh it was on the establishment of schools for Scheduled Caste children, in Karnataka on establishing schools for both Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children, and in Orissa on establishing special types of residential educational institutions for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children.

6. Areas for Research and Policy Intervention

A review of literature on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe education shows that significant progress has been made in simply getting SC and ST children to register and attend school on a regular basis. The present enrolment rates at the primary level appear especially striking when one recognizes the protracted history of discrimination and oppression that has systematically excluded these communities from access to literacy and basic education. Provision of school facilities close to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe habitations and mass literacy drives have certainly helped in activating demand for schooling among these excluded communities.

However, it is also clear that policy reforms and programmes thus far have not tackled the deeper systemic issues – including both home and school factors – that underlie the continuing poor performance of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students. These might include home environment, illiterate parents (especially mothers' illiteracy), poverty and low nutritional levels, which result in weak development of the brain and mental faculties (see Pridmore, 2007). Regarding mental calibre and performance, it would be interesting and useful to find data with special reference to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes about: (a) children's nutritional standards since birth and during pregnancy, especially regarding the lack of vitamins and minerals that are required for brain development; (b) relative educational development of children with educated vs. illiterate parents, and especially mothers; (c) the comparative effects on school performance related to home environment vs. hostel/residential school environment; and (d) circumstances for SC and ST children in government vs. private schools.

Entrenched social prejudices and antipathy towards lower castes, especially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, has not been confronted as a serious issue within the education system. Teachers and school administrators often reproduce deeply held and socially sanctioned prejudices against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in both subtle and overt ways. There are no mechanisms to protect students against everyday institutionalized discrimination or to ensure the accountability of teachers.

A social justice approach to access and equity would entail policy interventions that attend to the supply side of the education market. In other words, policy reforms that concentrate on improving institutional accountability and transforming teacher attitudes, curricular content and pedagogical approaches. These changes, targeted specifically at government schools, are urgently needed to foster genuine equity and provide full citizenship rights to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities. Effective interventions, however, require a sound research base that is sorely missing. Below, we review the limited research on systemic issues related to education for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and identify a more comprehensive research agenda that will help chart new directions for education of these marginalized groups.

6.1 Teacher Professionalism and School Culture

Several micro-studies document how neglect and outright discrimination by teachers against SC and ST students is a major reason for the high levels of drop out at the primary level (Drèze and Gazdar, 1997; Batra, 2005). Such abuse of authority is reportedly widespread and raises questions about the culture and practice of teaching and the orientation of teachers as a professional class. Unfortunately, in media and policy discussions, recognition of this problem has only led to a 'blame game', in which teachers are scorned and criticized, while there is seldom any systematic analysis or suggestion of constructive actions to remedy the situation. Here, we discuss issues of teacher professionalism and school culture, with specific reference to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children.

6.1.1 Beyond Access: Exclusion by Other Means

In examining the extent of discrimination against Scheduled Caste children in schools, Thorat (2002) compares data on untouchability in several states in 1971 and 1996. He finds that while the practice of untouchability is much less severe and the practice of making Scheduled Caste children sit separately from other students had practically disappeared in his sample schools, discriminatory treatment persists in milder forms. The examples he found in the mid-1990s, for instance, were the lack of friendships between Scheduled Caste and non-Scheduled Caste students, and subtle differences in the treatment of SC and non-SC students by teachers. Detailed observations were not provided in the paper, however, so it is difficult to reach any definite conclusions about the extent to which attitudes have changed or not. Testimonies that are available point to the prevalence of a strong bias and discrimination by teachers against SC and ST children, but more extensive research on school culture is required. For a more in-depth understanding of the extent and nature of discrimination and prejudice against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in elementary schools, this research should utilize in-depth qualitative methods.

Kaul's (2001) paper highlights the need for a fresh approach to study the extent and forms of discrimination against SC and ST children. In her study, she found that many Scheduled Caste children were scared to talk about the unequal treatment meted out to them, such as verbal abuse, physical punishment or avoiding touching, by some of the upper caste teachers in their schools. In only a few cases did children speak out. Some SC students from a government school, for example, complained that although prejudices and discrimination were not practiced very openly in the classroom and the peer group appeared friendly in school, attitudes changed outside the school. Children of upper castes did not invite the Kuruba or Scheduled Caste children home to play and there was no social intermingling outside the school (Kaul, 2001). In her study of 12 schools in two districts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, Subramanian (2005) also found that primary school teachers freely expressed opinions about the 'ineducability' of SC and ST children. Such biased views, she reports, were expressed less by middle and secondary school teachers in the same districts. Box 7 shows the impact of teachers in building students' perceptions of schooling.

Box 7. Students' Perception of School

Near Lucknow I met another group of bright, laughing kids. They'd all been admitted to school by a well-meaning social worker who had used a blend of threats and cajoling to convince the headmaster that the kids had to be admitted. He reminded the principal about the existence of the Prevention of Atrocities Act by which practicing untouchability is punishable by law. The kids were excited, delighted as any kid would be, at the prospect of not cleaning latrines.

A few months later, all of them had dropped out. The teacher beat them. Called them stupid. And rarely taught them anything. None of them could read or write after six months in school. They were now out every morning collecting plastic from garbage dumps. Earning Rs. 20-30 a day, they went to the movies sometimes. School was a distant dream, with not very pleasant memories.

Excerpted from: Thekaekara (2004)

At a policy level, attempts to address the problems of caste bias and prejudice of teachers have been limited to appointing teachers from the same community rather than teachers who are 'outsiders' to the community. Studies that assess the effectiveness of such targeted hiring of teachers, and in particular its impact on SC and ST students' learning and retention rates, are not available. Regardless, such initiatives cannot entirely mitigate the extent of teacher bias and discrimination. In fact, they circumvent the more serious issue of rampant caste and social prejudice and stereotyping that is habitual among the educated classes and the teaching work-force in particular.

The DPEP evaluation of Scheduled Tribe schools in Andhra Pradesh (Reddy, 2000) reveals that 68.96% of non-ST teachers expressed the need for special training to teach ST children. Conversely, Scheduled Tribe teachers were of the view that simply being from the same community was not sufficient to be a good teacher and that training in pedagogy is essential for effective classroom teaching. The evaluation reported that the District Institutes of Education and Training that had been established in tribal areas were not effective in sensitizing teachers to meet the specific needs of children in tribal areas.

The use of democratic values, such as equity and fairness in the classroom, are crucial to creating an affirmative and positive learning environment for excluded communities such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. As the prime authority in the classroom, teachers must promote such values. Teacher education programmes that mandate democratic classroom practices, creating a professional work culture and strengthening the professional identity of teachers have direct implications for facilitating a healthy classroom environment in which all children are treated with respect. However, teachers do not work in a vacuum and it is as important that the basic infrastructure in government schools, attended mostly by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children, is radically altered.

Poor facilities and failure to provide basic amenities in government schools is part of the hidden curriculum of inequity and social discrimination, a hidden curriculum that students imbibe and teachers endorse. A more far-reaching reform measure would be to establish a common school system that would end the segregation of Scheduled

Caste, Scheduled Tribe and other marginalized students in government schools. In recent years, educationists and scholars in India have expressed greater support for a common school system as the only way to build a more inclusive and egalitarian school system (Sadgopal, 2005). However, because the idea of a common school system is seen as too challenging and complex a reform to implement, it has received little response from policy makers and state ministries.

6.1.2 Curriculum and Pedagogical Issues

A separate, although related area of reform, is that of curriculum content, and learning and teaching approaches. As described above, the marginalisation of Scheduled Castes is closely related to their low occupational status, which is predetermined by caste ideology. In the agricultural sector, Scheduled Castes are mostly landless and marginal farmers, while in the non-farm sector they work in jobs that are seen as demeaning and 'dirty', such as street cleaning, sewage and sanitation work, as cobblers, etc. School curricula are heavily biased in favour of middle class professional households. Textbooks represent middle class lifestyle and preferences, and often portray them as models to emulate. The explicit discrimination faced by Scheduled Caste students from teachers and students is therefore implicitly legitimated through the curricula used in schools.

The absence of any positive representation of the labour of the working poor, and especially of 'untouchable' Scheduled Castes communities, alienates SC children from their own communities and families and negatively affects their self-esteem. At the elementary school level, the curricula do not teach about their struggles for equity and dignity or the oppressive nature of the caste system, and it is barely dealt with at the secondary level either. Further, school curricula are restricted to bookish and abstract learning, and do not utilize local examples, materials and modes of learning to teach these concepts.

The situation is similar for Scheduled Tribe children, whose culture and living environments are also very different from middle class rural and urban households. A curriculum that includes the histories, living environments and livelihoods of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities in a positive manner is needed in order to promote a sense of self-worth and facilitate meaningful learning. However, current mainstream curricula do not give attention to the socio-cultural and economic realities and ideals of Scheduled Tribe communities.

Using the native language as the medium of instruction has also long been recognized as an important factor for successful learning. This is as especially important for ST children who often speak dialects that are different from the regional or state language. The 1986 National Policy on Education and the more recent revised National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) recommend the use of local languages in the early stages of education. Except in some rare instances (due to the efforts of local NGOs), however, there has been no real attempt to develop primers using words and phrases from the local language or dialect. Even in cases where there is clear justification for developing bilingual primers – such as in the case of the Gond tribal language, which is spoken by an estimated 3 million people in the central Indian belt – such efforts have been lacking.

7. New Directions

This review of the literature on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students in elementary education brings to the fore several insights on the nature of exclusion and discrimination that cannot be solved simply by providing more schools. The emphasis, as we have seen, has so far been on expanding access to schools by increasing the number of schools located near these communities. The results of this policy have been impressive and significant gains, which can be seen in the improvements to gross enrolment ratios for SC and ST children. This has especially been the case since the early 1990s, when states began to make concerted efforts as part of the Education for All campaign. The upswing in primary education in such a short period of time shows that when central and state governments commit to inclusive education through national and international efforts, significant advancements can be made. Non-availability of schools is, therefore, no longer the key impediment to educational access for marginalised communities, and the focus now needs to change.

Rather, the issues and concerns highlighted by CREATE's framework – including drop out, primary completion and transition to secondary school – deserve greater attention. Research-based interventions are required in a number of areas that have an impact on the classroom experiences of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students. Research is needed, for example, to explore the circumstances for students who have entered the education system in grade I, in order to understand how they can be motivated to stay in school and progress from one grade to the next. To some extent, parents may be highly motivated to encourage their children to stay in school, but may be constrained by their poverty and/or discouraged by the child's schooling experiences and by the lack of achievement in school. Furthermore, it is a sad fact that entrenched attitudes of caste antagonism and prejudice have not withered away with time, and at the primary level itself, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students continue to face rejection, discrimination and exclusion.

The responsibility for motivating students also lies with the school system, but many schools fail in this responsibility. These failings can be partly explained by the poor quality of education received by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students. At one level, quality refers to improving the quality of school infrastructure, textbooks, and superior teaching as well as learning processes that reflect in improved performance by students. For SC and ST students, quality also refers to curriculum content and social interaction that is free of bias, prejudice and casteism by teachers and school administrators. Quality, therefore, has to be tackled at both these levels in order to make a positive impact on the learning outcomes, retention and progression of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) have given attention to the issue of gender, but the problem of casteism and its prevalence in school education has not been acknowledged in a similar manner. Unless the attitudes and biases of the majority community become a subject of school reform in India, the exclusion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is likely to remain an insurmountable challenge. Teacher education programmes, in-service training, and teacher recruitment policies need to be at the centre of a research and policy agenda.

Similarly, textbooks and primers used in primary education need to provide positive representations of Scheduled Caste's and Scheduled Tribe's cultures and histories, and sensitize school children about both the prevalence of caste and tribal inequity and the need to abolish it.

The majority of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India are employed in agricultural and non-agricultural labour activities in the rural sector. The content of basic education needs to be attuned to this reality and incorporate examples and life situations that relate to it, whether in the teaching of mathematics, science, social sciences or languages. Aligning the curriculum to rural and agrarian realities should not be carried out in an instrumentalist manner, but as part of developing the cognitive, social and cultural capabilities of SC and ST students. The concept of capabilities, first proposed by Amartya Sen, provides a useful perspective in developing curriculum and classroom processes that will benefit Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities (Drèze and Sen, 2002). The capabilities approach defines the purpose of education as enabling individuals to carry out multiple functions in their interpersonal, social, political and economic life that are necessary for an empowered existence. By definition, the approach requires education to be made meaningful and relevant to the aspirations and livelihoods of these communities. This vision of education is sorely missing in the focus on access for minority groups and ultimately results in exclusion of these communities from meaningful participation in education.

The absence of a comprehensive research agenda precludes evidence-based policy making that could radically alter the educational futures of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In conclusion, we therefore identify a few critical areas for further research:

- *Comparative research between states:* Compare systems of administration for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe education; compare the impacts of segregated versus integrated schools for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students; explore innovative government policies to understand their effectiveness and to help develop a set of best practices.
- *Teacher professionalism:* Studies of teacher education programmes are needed to see the types of attitudes and messages which are taught to new and in-service teachers; student teachers and their backgrounds should be researched in order to identify their perspectives on marginalized groups, and especially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; research should be carried out with teacher unions in order to examine their perspectives on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe education; in addition, research should be carried out with the teaching workforce, looking at their social backgrounds and attitudes, and identifying factors that lead to progressive attitudes among teachers.
- *Qualitative and ethnographic research on school culture:* This should include leadership and management studies, classroom climate, community attitudes towards SC and ST children, etc.
- *Research that involves Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities and parents:* For example, to assess the problems related to meaningful learning and effective transition from one grade to the next, and to develop a better understanding of the impacts of the existing school curriculum on SC and ST children.

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Report Summary:

The Scheduled Castes (SCs, also known as Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes (STs, also known as Adivasis) are among the most socially and educationally disadvantaged groups in India. This paper examines issues concerning school access and equity for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities and also highlights their unique problems, which may require divergent policy responses.

The paper is divided into seven main parts. The first two sections introduce the reader to the nature of exclusion and discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and outline the debates on the role of education in improving the socio-economic profile of both groups. The third section explains the socio-economic conditions within which Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes live and their marginalized status in contemporary India. The fourth section provides a discussion of literacy advancement among these groups, and of national policies and programmes which aim to improve school access and equity. The fifth section highlights special efforts made by certain state governments to improve educational participation of these two communities as well as the educational experiments on a more modest scale undertaken by community-based nongovernmental organisations. The sixth section focuses on casteism as a deeply ideological issue that undercuts even the most genuine reform measures, and suggests research and policy options that may help to address underlying structural and ideological issues. The concluding section highlights a critical areas for further research in the area.

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