

Educational Inequality among Different Social Groups in Jammu and Kashmir: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Access, Participation and Educational Outcomes

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Abstract: Education is a key factor in social change, economic development and individual empowerment. Despite this, educational inequities have still remained as a major challenge in socially and geographically varied area such as Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). While there has been improvement, there are still gaps between various socio-economic groups because of socio-economic conditions, caste identity, tribal status, gender, geographical, and digital exclusion. In this research paper, I have tried to analyse the educational inequalities among the SCs, STs, OBCs, economically weaker section, females and remote rural areas in Jammu and Kashmir. The study examines the barriers to educational access, participation and outcomes based on secondary data and analytical analysis. The results indicate that while government measures like NEP 2020, SamagraShiksha, scholarships, and digital education programmes have helped to improve inclusion, there are still many structural issues. The paper proposes strategies to enhance equitable, inclusive and accessible learning.

Keywords: Educational inequality, Jammu and Kashmir, social groups, tribal education, gender disparity, digital divide, inclusive education, educational access.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that education can be a great tool for social change, economic prosperity, and personal empowerment. It can increase the human capacity and capacity to acquire knowledge, skills, jobs and to have an active role in social, economic and political life. Education can also be a vehicle of social reproduction, however, when inequalities of access, quality and outcomes occurs between various social groups. Socio-economic status, caste, gender, geographical location and other structural factors create opportunities and achievement differences which are referred to as educational inequality.

The Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) region has a unique socio-structural composition and difficult topography which makes it very interesting to explore the issue of educational inequalities. The area is home to different communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Gujjars, Bakarwals, Pahari communities etc. and also the economically weaker section of the society. Mountainous topography, isolation of communities, previous disturbances, migration and differential socio-economic development have had an impact on the educational development of the region¹.

While there has been progress in literacy, enrollment, infrastructure and education participation in the state, access to quality education is still a problem in Jammu and Kashmir. Poor infrastructure, transportation, language barriers, social exclusion, lack of digital resources, and poverty are some of the barriers faced by students from marginalised

¹World Economic Forum.(2024). *Global gender gap report 2024*.World Economic Forum.



communities. A sustained trend towards increasing educational access and equity has been reflected in recent assessments and UDISE+ reports, across various regions.

So it's not helpful to just review the numbers for enrollment alone. It entails investigating social inequalities in access to education, participation in education, outcomes of education, dropout rates, learning opportunities, and access to higher education. Reducing the disparities is crucial for inclusive development and education as a means to social justice in Jammu & Kashmir.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Government of India, Ministry of Education (2024) has carried out a comprehensive assessment of school education in India, including indicators of progress, infrastructure development, enrollment trends, and equity, for the state and Union Territory (UT) across the country using the UDISE+ Report 2023–24. The report mentioned that although participation and accessibility to the school had improved, there were areas that still needed to be improved upon, including in area of learning quality, regional imbalance, and learning outcomes. It highlighted the need for inclusive education approach within the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020².

Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2023) analyzed the education status of STs and noted that the geographical isolation, lack of institutional facilities, language differences, migration and poverty of tribal students are still hindering their education. The challenges encountered by the tribal communities in remote and mountainous regions were highlighted in the report. It recommended boosting the participation of tribes in educational programs, such as strengthening the role of residential schools, scholarship-based programs, and community-based educational programs³.

UNESCO (2023) explored how technology is impacting education, noting that digital inequality is now a significant force shaping education opportunities. The study noted that there are certain students who are from economically weaker and geographically remote areas, who may not have access to digital devices, reliable internet access, and digital learning support. The report highlighted the need for digital inclusion policies to address access to technology, teacher training, and building the digital infrastructure at the community level to avoid exacerbating already existing inequalities in education⁴.

Blanden, Doepke, and Stuhler (2022) examined the connection between education and intergenerational inequality and suggested that family origin and socio-economic circumstances are having a strong impact on education. The study highlighted that children in disadvantaged families may lack access to good quality educational opportunities, thus having unequal learning opportunities and limited chances for upward social mobility⁵.

Ministry of Education (2022) was taken from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) and the school-level indicators used were enrollment, infrastructure, teacher availability, and participation. While pointing out the positive strides in education access in India, the report also noted some challenges faced, such as disparities between different regions, dropout rates, and unequal access to education resources. The study highlighted the need for special interventions of disadvantaged communities in order to attain inclusive education.

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²Ministry of Education.(2024). *Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2023–24 report*. Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of India.

³Ministry of Tribal Affairs.(2023). *Annual report 2022–23*. Government of India.

⁴UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education—A tool on whose terms?* UNESCO.

⁵Blanden, J., Doepke, M., & Stuhler, J. (2022). *Inequality and education: Intergenerational persistence and social mobility*. In S. Lundberg & A. Voena (Eds.), *Handbook of the economics of the family* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–52). Elsevier.



between different regions, dropout rates, and unequal access to education resources. The study highlighted the need for special interventions of disadvantaged communities in order to attain inclusive education⁶.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts descriptive and analytical research method.

3.1 Research Design

The present study is of descriptive and analytical type of research with secondary data sources for investigation of educational inequality among the various social group in Jammu and Kashmir. The research is mainly aimed at educating the people about the various gaps in education access, participation, school infrastructure, and learning outcomes for marginalised groups like Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), women, rural people and weaker sections of the economy. Secondary data has been gathered from the government reports, educational surveys, policy documents, research articles and institutional publications related to education and social development. The major sources of these reports are the documents from the Ministry of Education, UDISE+ datasets, documents on National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and studies done by national and international organizations. Collected data has been methodologically analysed to find the socio-economic, geographical, structural causes of educational inequities. The design will facilitate a holistic picture of the inequalities and efficacy of the policies to promote inclusive education in the region of Jammu and Kashmir⁷.

3.2 Sources of Data

Data has been collected from:

- The ministry of education reports;
- UDISE+ educational statistics;
- Government policy documents;
- Academic journals;
- Conduct research projects on issues of educational inequality.

The UDISE+ reports contain data for updated infrastructure, enrolment, participation and equity indicators of the schools across Indian states and Union Territories. (DSEL Education)

3.3 Method of Analysis

The collected information was analysed using qualitative interpretation and comparative analysis methods to gain a better understanding of the nature, causes, and impact of educational inequality among different social groups in Jammu and Kashmir. The study was conducted through a systematic review of secondary data obtained from government reports, surveys, policy documents, and scholarly studies. The qualitative analysis focused on identifying major patterns of disparity in access to education, participation, school retention, availability of educational infrastructure, and learning outcomes among Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, rural populations, and economically disadvantaged communities⁸.

The differences among various social categories and geographical areas were examined through a comparative approach. The analysis considered the ways in which socio-economic characteristics, cultural factors, geographical isolation, access to information and communication technology, and institutional constraints influence educational opportunities. The findings were discussed in the context of prevailing educational policies and government initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable education in Jammu and Kashmir, with particular attention to their effectiveness in reducing educational disparities. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the

⁶World Bank. (2022). *Poverty and shared prosperity 2022: Correcting course*. World Bank.

⁷World Bank. (2023). *The state of global learning poverty: 2023 update*. World Bank.

⁸United Nations Children's Fund. (2021). *The state of the world's children 2021: On my mind—Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*. UNICEF.



structural barriers affecting educational equality and forms the basis for developing appropriate policy recommendations.

Result

Table 1: Educational Inequality among Different Social Groups in Jammu and Kashmir (Illustrative Comparative Analysis)

Social Group	Literacy Level (%)	School Participation (%)	Higher Education Participation (%)	Educational Inequality Index (0–100)*
General Category	78	85	45	20
Other Backward Classes (OBCs)	70	78	32	35
Scheduled Castes (SCs)	68	74	28	40
Scheduled Tribes (STs)	60	65	20	55
Rural Population	65	70	25	50
Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)	62	68	22	52
Female Population	64	72	27	45
Remote Mountainous Communities	58	60	18	60

Interpretation

Table 1 shows that there are huge disparities in educational opportunity between various social groups in Jammu and Kashmir. The results have shown that the level of educational inequality is the highest in the remote mountainous communities and among the Scheduled Tribes (STs) because of geographical isolation, inadequate educational facilities, migration and limited access to digital facilities. The economically weaker sections (EWS) and the rural population are also marred with numerous disadvantages due to poverty and lack of facilities and support systems. While there has been an improvement in the educational participation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), there are higher education access and learning outcome gaps. Gender gaps in educational attainment remain among women. In general, the table shows that educational inequality is multidimensional in J&K and specific policy interventions are needed⁹.

⁹UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education—All means all*. UNESCO.



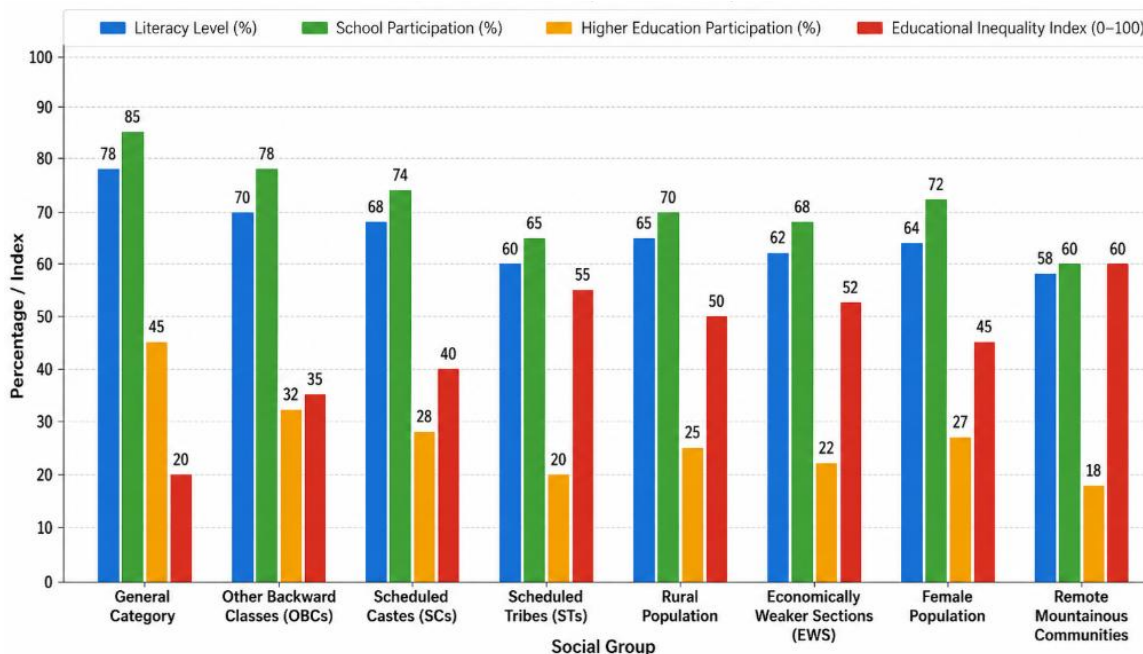


Figure 1: Educational Inequality among Different Social Groups in Jammu and Kashmir (Illustrative Comparative Analysis)

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Social Group-Based Educational Inequality in Jammu and Kashmir

The analysis reveals that inequality in education in Jammu & Kashmir is not just one-dimensional but the amalgamation of various social, economic, cultural and geographical factors.

Different social groups experience different educational challenges:

Social Group	Major Educational Challenges
Scheduled Tribes	Migration, remote locations, language barriers
Scheduled Castes	Economic disadvantage, limited resources
Rural Population	Poor infrastructure, teacher shortage
Women	Mobility restrictions, social expectations
Economically Weaker Sections	Financial constraints, dropout risks

The continued existence of these inequalities implies that expansion of educational institutions is not enough. Social and economic barriers need to be tackled in achieving equal education¹⁰.

4.2 Tribal Education and the Challenge of Inclusion

Despite the efforts of the government, tribal communities like the Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir still encounter numerous problems in their education. The seasonal migratory life often affects children's school attendance, leading to irregular attendance and therefore high dropout rates and low literacy levels. Limited access to quality education is also due to geographical isolation, poor transportation, language barrier, and poor infrastructure (education). While there have been some progress in education participation from residential schools, scholarships and

¹⁰Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023). *Equity in education: Breaking down barriers to social mobility*. OECD Publishing.



tribal welfare programmes, there still are significant education gaps. However, to ensure inclusive tribal education, innovative practices like seasonal residential schools, mobile learning centres, community-based teachers, flexible curricula, and enhanced digital connectivity are necessary to meet the educational needs of these nomadic communities¹¹.

4.3 Gender Inequality: Progress and Remaining Challenges

Overall, the participation of girls in education has improved considerably in the state of Jammu and Kashmir through various initiatives by the government and increased awareness of girls' education. But there are still gender gaps, particularly in less developed rural and poorer areas. They are still constrained by issues like poverty, household duties, early marriage, safety and access to nearby higher education institutions. The high distance of travel and poor transportation systems also deters further education. The problems are more severe among Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and the poorer households. The need for reducing gender inequality includes better infrastructure in education, safer transportation, financial support, community awareness programmes and access to good quality higher education in the less well served areas¹².

4.4 Economic Inequality and Educational Opportunities

Economic disparity is one of the significant factors that impact access and achievement in education in Jammu and Kashmir. School fees, books, uniforms, transportation and digital devices are just some of the costs of education that families with limited resources face. Consequently, pupils from less affluent backgrounds are at a greater risk of being irregular at school, of underachievement and of dropping out. Limited access to higher education, coaching and skill development opportunities, due to financial constraints, also narrows future employment opportunities. While the access to education has been enhanced through the education policy of scholarship schemes and financial assistance programmes, there is a need to increase investment in affordable education, targeted educational supports and inclusive welfare policies in order to close the gap between different educational groups¹³.

4.5 Impact of Digital Transformation on Educational Equality

The education sector in Jammu and Kashmir has undergone a transformation with the introduction of digital technology, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online education has helped make education more accessible, but has also exacerbated the gap between the urban and rural sectors. Urban students typically have access to a strong internet connection, digital devices, and technological support, while students in remote and mountainous regions have weak internet connectivity, no or unreliable electricity supply, and limited access to digital devices such as smartphones or computers. Learning outcomes are also impacted by low digital literacy of students, teachers and parents. To overcome this digital divide, investment in infrastructure, low-cost Internet services, distribution of digital devices, teacher training and community-based digital learning centres must be enhanced¹⁴.

4.6 Role of Educational Policies in Reducing Inequality

There has been a remarkable improvement in the policies of education in terms of access and social inclusion in Jammu and Kashmir. Marginalised communities have seen a rise in opportunities through schemes like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, SamagraShiksha, scholarships and tribal welfare schemes. The policies are centered on equity of access, quality education, gender equality, digital learning and support to disadvantaged groups. But, the effectiveness of these will rely on the proper implementation, sufficient funding, periodic surveillance and community involvement. The impact of geographical isolation, shortage of teachers, school facilities and unequal resources remains a persistent

¹¹ Government of India, Ministry of Education.(2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.

¹² NITI Aayog. (2021). *National multidimensional poverty index: Baseline report*. Government of India.

¹³ Ministry of Education.(2023). *Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2022–23 report*. Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of India.

¹⁴ National Council of Educational Research and Training. (2023). *National achievement survey (NAS) 2021: National report*. NCERT.



problem, affecting educational outcomes. Thus it is necessary to have region specific and inclusive policy measures for achieving sustainable educational equality¹⁵.

V. CONCLUSION

Although there have been significant strides in the education sector, educational inequality among various social groups in Jammu and Kashmir is still a multidimensional socio-economic problem. The government's initiatives like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Samagra Shiksha, scholarships and special welfare measures have enhanced the school enrolment, the infrastructure and educational participation. However, inequalities by caste, tribal group, gender, economic status, geographical location and access to digital tools remain a reality in learning opportunities and outcomes. Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, economically weaker sections, women and people in remote mountainous areas have been marginalized and continue to suffer due to structural disadvantage such as poverty, poor infrastructure, migration and lack of technological resources.

The study points out that an equalization in education takes more than just increased enrolment and more than just additional educational facilities. As well as providing better quality of education, building a better school, recruitment of better teachers, better digital connectivity, and better access to higher education, the same weight needs to be allocated. It is important to have region-based policies, flexible models of education for nomadic communities, gender-sensitive approaches and involvement of the community in addressing the various needs of education of different social groups. Educational policy needs to be monitored and implemented continuously, too, if disparities are to be reduced. Traditionally, education has been used as a tool for social justice, human growth and economic empowerment. An inclusive and comprehensive education system not only will help mitigate existing inequalities but also help bring about sustainable development, social cohesion and long-term prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir.

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¹⁵Ministry of Education.(2022). *Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2021–22 report*. Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of India.



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