

Factors Influencing the Educational Achievements of the Scheduled Caste and General Caste Students of Cuttack Municipality Corporation, Orissa

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ABSTRACT Undisputedly, education holds the master key to socio-economic development and as a matter of fact, it has been regarded as the engine of development. In the context of Indian society in general and the socio-economic milieu of Orissa in particular which is characterised by caste discrimination, skewed income distribution and the attendant social conflict, educational factor is perceived as a prime factor in the direction of social mobility and potent leveller of social inequality. Preparation to placing a monitor to effective measure the ingress of education in a given society, one must reckon with the degree of educational achievements of disadvantaged section and the factor influencing it. The article makes an honest attempt to set forth some of the prime factors influencing the educational achievement of Schedule Caste vis-à-vis General Caste in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the process for the end purpose of policy formulation.

THE BACKGROUND

The life-long process of education first starts at the family where the child spends major part of its life. Mother plays the role of the teacher and imparts informal education to the child in the way of instruction and advice. The child also learns various informal things from the elders in the family and playmates outside the family. These informal learning gradually prepares the child for the formal education.

To Durkheim (1956: 71) "education is to arouse and develop physical, intellectual and moral states". Lowis considered it as an indispensable aspect of every society, and without education all accumulated knowledge and all standards of conduct would be lost (1979: 194). More narrowly, education is the inculcation in each generation of certain knowledge, skills and attitudes by means of institutions, such as schools, deliberately created for this end (Kaether, 1966: 11).

It is now widely acknowledged that human resources are essential component for the human development. With this end in view, education is given an overriding priority to achieve the goal. Education is an important component of fundamental human right to life. The Directive Principles of State Policy have also made provision under Article 45 that "the state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution for

free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years". But the early strategies could not make much headway in achieving the goal. Even if the country has already celebrated its Golden Jubilee, nearly half of its population are still illiterate.

In the traditional caste-based structure of the Indian society, segmented in four folds, placing the Brahmins at the top and the Sudras at the bottom, there exists another caste known as "Scheduled Caste". Ghurye (1969: 306) describes them as "depressed class" and they are regarded as the "fifth order" of the Hindu caste system.

In spite of various measures, a considerable number of children in 6-14 years continue to remain outside school (the orbit of basic education). So special attention to the disadvantaged lots like Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) is very much essential. The Government of India has developed a multi-pronged strategy for improving the lot of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India.

One of the weaker sections to whom we identify as Scheduled Castes are drawn from the lowest socio-economic strata. They are an important component of city life, as they fulfil the requirement of skilled and unskilled labours in various sectors. The level of awareness of these people about various programmes is relatively high compared to their counterpart in the rural sector. The information on educational programmes is continuously put out by the mass

media. This has raised their expectation as regard to access to education. The Scheduled Castes in urban areas feel that education is a tool of their liberation from caste system and a means for economic upliftment in the society. The accent on universal education has gone a long way to rip open the seemingly closed social structure by way of throwing open the prospect of social mobility. However different caste groups take dissimilar advantages of the external stimuli.

However, the benefit of education does not percolate so easily because of various problems that the Scheduled Caste people encounter. Lack of adult literacy, deprivation of the opportunity for schooling, poverty and social taboos, parental attitude towards education, literacy level of the family and several non-educational factors are to be examined here against the backdrop of educational performance of the Scheduled Caste children.

For several decades, low achievement among Scheduled Caste children in urban areas has been one of the serious educational problems faced by India. These children are primarily from families in which parents have little education and who live in poverty. Historically, low-income, disadvantaged Scheduled Caste children have entered schools behind their peers. The gap in achievement between these children and those from higher caste backgrounds increases significantly during the elementary and secondary grades.

A student's personal, home, community and school characteristics should not be studied in isolation—all these variables contribute to student performance, and they are strongly interactive. Recognizing these interactive dynamics is very important to explain as to why some students fail and others succeed.

Social scientists in many cases refer to the social determinants of educational attainment of a group as occupation, education and the aspiration level of that group. The above stated criteria create educational gap among the students in terms of achieving the educational goal. Educational gap can be primarily attributed to (a) the inadequate educational facility, (b) lack of motivation and (c) socio-economic status of the parents.

Overview of Literature

Ahhunawallia (1985: 39) has outlined the main

determining factors for the educational achievement of the children. These are parents' education, economic status and size of the family. Panda (1982) studied the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities of Cuttack, Puri and Dhenkanal districts of Orissa coming from the impoverished home environment. One major finding of the study is that home conditions and illiteracy of the parents adversely affect the achievement of the students. Similarly Devi (1985) also opines that home environment blocks the achievement of Scheduled Caste children in the school. Rao (1997) in his study finds that socio-economic status of students plays a greater role in forming and vitalizing the study habits. Chinnapan (1987: 29) is of opinion that the parental occupational level and educational attainment of children are closely associated. Besides, family environment holds an important position for the educational attainment of the child, as it is a place of secured living and learning for every child. Dave (1988: 43-44) points out some other problems for the children's performance at school. He states that students who do not get sufficient time to read due to domestic activities and social environment bring very bad results in the school. He further adds that the problem sometime multiplies for the students due to drunkenness, illiteracy and poor economic conditions of the parents.

Objectives

Against the backdrop, the study has the following objectives:

- (a) To find out the reasons of varying educational achievements between Scheduled Caste students and students from General Category; and
- (b) to identify various socio-economic barriers to educational development among Scheduled Caste students and students from General Category.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in some slum pockets of Cuttack Municipality Corporation. After a preliminary survey of the sample area, a few schools having high enrolment of Scheduled Caste students were selected purposively. To have a comparative picture, some General Caste students of those sample schools were also taken into consideration.

Of the 29 schools are situated in the study area, only 5 M.E. and 5 High schools were selected on the basis of high enrolment of Scheduled Caste students. All those Scheduled Caste students (above 10 years of age) who were reading in Class-VI and above were consulted for data collection. As many as 259 Scheduled Caste students fulfilling all our requirements were identified in our sample schools. However, data could be collected only from 250 Scheduled Caste students as six were not available throughout the fieldwork and three other did not co-operate with us despite our best possible effort. Accordingly 250 General Caste students from the same educational grades with the same gender break-up were selected on a random basis for a comparative analysis.

Data were collected through interview, observation and case study methods. Three sets of interview schedules were prepared, pre-tested and subsequently suitable modifications were made therein. Secondary data were also collected from various government records in order to supplement our analysis.

FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Even in a given caste group the absorption of the advantage of education is different in the cases of the base constituent known as "family". Family is the most fundamental and universal of all institutions and it is our endeavour have to bring out the factors that operate at the level of "family" which have direct bearing on education. In any society "family" has an over-riding role in shaping personality and determining the well-being of the children. It motivates and induces the children to perform activities necessary for meeting social needs. In fact, family stands out as the first educational institution for the child. The latter acquires informal education by way of talking to the elders and interacting with others before embarking upon formal education. Consequently, the structure of the family has considerable influence on the children acquiring the fruits of education. Krishnaswamy (1998: 68) rightly remarks: "people have to get out of the mindset that children of plumbers can be nothing but plumbers". The educative role of the family can never be neglected (Majumdar and Madam, 1962: 5)

Sachchidananda and Sinha (1989: 155) observed that economic condition of the family

is an indispensable element in educational attainment of a child. Similarly Khan and Chopra (1964) examined and emphasized the relation between the social status and educational achievement.

Educational Background of Parents and Children's Performance

The formal educational institutions like schools prepare children for their future economic life. The schools impart education at school and impose certain academic work on children for home workout. In this regard parents' educational qualifications and congenial home atmosphere come in to fore in solving children difficulties and in motivating them to fulfil the requirements of the prescriptive standard of education. The main thing is the genuine guidance and proper care in the matters of children's studies. Other things remaining constant, where the basic requirement is present, the cause of education progresses and in its absence the end of education regresses. This fact has the support of many studies. In UNICEF Magazine (1985-86: 13) it has been brought out that "there is evidence that the parents who had attended school are more likely to send their own children to school and help them in their formal education". The findings of Sachchidananda and Sinha (1989: 155-213) echo the same view when they state that it would appear that among the Scheduled Caste students reading in schools and colleges, majority are the children of such parents who have had some education. The same fact has been studied by Duggal (1992) and he states that there is a close relationship between enrolment and educational achievement of the parents.

Occupation and Education

A caste-based society conforms to its norms or a set of social traditions of its own for which it keeps its own identity from others. Different studies have highlighted the fact that in the traditional hierarchical society occupation proceeded on the line of heredity. For example, in a fishing village in coastal Orissa, the Siuli sub-caste of Keuta (Fisher men) allow their boys to catch fish at the age of 14 after a ceremonial offering of cake to the villagers and the older generations guide, instruct and advise on the future economic life (Panda, 1963: 64). Therefore, family occupation wields a great leverage on the

future economic life in the matter of acceptance or rejection of educational opportunities.

In the present context children's enrolment, achievement (performance score) and aspiration level (occupational aspiration) are compared with parents' education, occupation and family structure. As it is a comparative study variables such as parents' education, occupation and family structure are taken for both Scheduled Caste and General Caste students.

The parents are classified into three categories in terms of their literacy status. Data on these sub-groups need to be compared further by grouping the parents under various comparable heads and here parents are broadly classified into three classes, viz. (1) Service (public and private sectors) (2) Businessmen (3) Others.

By "nuclear family" we mean the basic grouping of mates and their children. Similarly by "extended family" we mean the collection of more than one primary family on the basis of close blood ties and common residence. A home in which one parent is absent because of death, divorce, desertion, etc. has been taken as a "broken family". Data on family structure based on field observation. The parents are classified into three categories in terms of their income status under the headings low, moderate and high. These sub groups are incorporated in the various occupational categories of the parents and thereby co-related to the achievement score and aspiration level of the students separately.

By "performance" we mean the academic performance or the result of the sample respondents based on school records. The academic performance is classified into six categories "a", "b", "c", "d", "e" and "f".

The enrolment of children is likely to be more from the families where either both the parents are literate or one of the parents is literate than the families where both the parents are illiterate. The same test can be applied to the General Caste as well as Scheduled Caste students.

The data in respect of attendance shows that the parents from both the category are conscious of sending their children to school. However, a critical analysis reveals the underlying facts. The illiterate working Scheduled Caste mothers also want to leave their children in the school during day time which would facilitate them to go out for wage earning. This is one of the important reasons for higher rate of attendance among Scheduled Caste students. However, it was

observed that mothers of sample respondents are least concern with the academic progress of their children.

General Caste enrolment has *inter alia* a definite and distinctive bias towards educational level of the parents. But given the educational level, the case of enrolment stands comparatively better in case of General Caste than that of the Scheduled Caste.

Factors Influencing Performance

The positive interrelationship between some social factors and enrolment, per se, will pass into irrelevance if it is not accomplished with result, which is referred to as "performance". Now, it will be our endeavour to trace the interrelationship between performance and the recognized social factors.

At the outset it may be made clear that the factors which held an overwhelming influence over "enrolment" may not have its significance as absolute over "performance". If "enrolment" is linked to embedding a seed, "performance" can be described as blooming and blossoming of a seedling. Here, quite divergent factors are said to be responsible for the flourishing of a human-mind, if social factors can be grouped under the head of environment which has an impact on "performance". Therefore, it must be recognized that social factors only influence "performance", but these cannot determine it. With this limited perspective in view we single out some social factors to evaluate their influence on "performance". In evaluation of performance there is a need of a scale and the one which is commonly used in schools is utilised for the purpose. Previously students' academic achievements are classified into six categories as "a", "b", "c", "d", "e" and "f" and these divisions are converted into mark ranges generally used in the school.

A study of table 1 and 2 shows that both in case of General Caste and Scheduled Castes, the families where both the parents are literate produce comparatively more "a" grade and "b" grade performances than other categories of families. Also, it reveals on comparison that "a" grade and "b" grade students of first category (i.e. where both parents are literate) of General Castes stand much ahead of the students of first category of Scheduled Castes. The study of the table also indicates that "d" and "e" grade

students are clustered relatively more around families where both the parents are illiterate, both in the General Castes and the Scheduled Castes. But when we compared “d” and “e” grade performers of General Caste with those of Scheduled Castes, concentration is comparatively less in case of former than that of the latter. “f” category of students are also more among the Scheduled Caste families compared to the families of General Caste category.

The fact remains that first category of families of General Caste (i.e. both the parents are literate) produces a total of 43.1 per cent grade “a” and grade “b” students which distinctly leaves far behind other categories of families (Table 2). For such category of families (first category) in case of Scheduled Caste where the combined percentage of grade “a” and “b” students is 7.6 per cent (Table 1). In an inter caste comparison of performance of families where both the parents are literate, the grade “a” and grade “b” performers registers a total 108 out of 180 (46%) for General Caste (Table 2) and the respective figure is only 19 out of 68 (27%) in case of Scheduled Caste (Table 1).

Students coming out of the families where both the parents are literate occupy more room at the top and the students coming out of the families where both the parents are illiterate are clustered at the bottom. In respect of grade “d”

and “e” relating to General Caste, the contribution of families where both the parents are literate are only 4.0 per cent whereas comparative figure in respect of the category where both the parents are illiterate is as high as 14 per cent for parents those who are literate, against “a” and “b” category of students. Similarly 28.20 per cent of “d” and “e” category of students are from those families, where both the parents are illiterate. From those facts, it is also clear that the Scheduled Caste families where both the parents are illiterate supply much high number (28.20%) of grade “d” and “e” students than that of the comparable category of General Caste (14%). 4.22 per cent “f” category students are from the families where both the parents are illiterate, while the figure stands at 2 per cent for the corresponding group in General Caste category.

Thus, the room at the top of the scale is occupied relatively more by the students coming from the families where both the parents are illiterate. Such trend is broadly true both for General Castes and Scheduled Castes students. The comparison of these two categories shows that students of General Caste perform better and stay less at the bottom than that of the students of Scheduled Caste in any comparable category of family.

It is contemplated that there exists some sort of a nexus between children performance and

Table 1: Children’s performance co-related to the educational level of the parents (Scheduled Caste students) $N_1 = 250$

Mark range	Both the parents literate	One of the parents literate	Both the parents illiterate	Total
a	18(11.61%)	2(2.98%)	0(0.00%)	20(8.00%)
b	69(44.51%)	11(16.42%)	1(3.57%)	81(32.40%)
c	28(18.06%)	19(28.36%)	4(14.28%)	51(20.40%)
d	17(10.96%)	16(23.88%)	6(21.43%)	39(15.60%)
e	13(8.38%)	8(11.94%)	8(28.57%)	29(11.60%)
f	10(6.45%)	11(16.41%)	9(32.14%)	30(12.00%)
Total	155(38%)	67(34.80%)	28(27.20%)	250(100%)

Table 2: Children’s performance co-related to the educational level of the parents (General Caste students) $N_2 = 250$

Mark range	Both the parents literate	One of the parents literate	Both the parents illiterate	Total
a	53(21.10%)	8(3.20%)	1(0.40%)	62(24.80%)
b	55(22.00%)	9(3.60%)	1(0.4%)	65(26.00%)
c	60(24.00%)	15(6.00%)	1(0.40%)	76(30.40%)
d	5(2.00%)	7(2.80%)	6(2.40%)	18(7.20%)
e	5(2.00%)	7(2.80%)	5(2.00%)	17(6.80%)
f	2(0.80%)	6(2.40%)	4(1.60%)	12(4.80%)
Total	210(72%)	35(20.80%)	5(7.20%)	250(100%)

the occupation of their parents. Now we try to give this interrelation a close look. It is found that parents in service sector of General Caste supply half (i.e. 48 out of 94) of top grade students comprising grade “a” and “b” and their contribution to bottom most “e” negligibly stands at 1.6 per cent combined. It is also seen that parents belonging to the residual category “others” of General Caste provide the bulk of lower grade students “d” and “e” (i.e. 44 out of 90). Particularly “f” grade students (failure students) are 5.2 per cent among the General Caste category parents included under the category of occupations of the parents as “others”.

The comparative position in case of Scheduled Caste is that students with parents in service sector total a number 19 in respect of two top grades (a+b) out of 81 which is 23 per cent. Likewise Scheduled Caste families listed under the heading of “others” are also the major suppliers of lower grade (grade “d” and “e”) students (i.e. 48 out of 94, which is 51%). Generally speaking, the students coming out of the category of parents in service sector are comparatively better students. This is true both for General Caste and Scheduled Caste. However, a comparison between the two categories shows that the General Caste has a distinct lead of about 11 per cent in the top most category over the other (combined both “a” and “b”). “f” category of students are found to be 8.4 per cent among the Scheduled Caste parents whereas the percentage stands at 6.4 per cent for the General Caste parents under the category “others”.

All other families coming under the category of “others” are the major suppliers of lower grade (“d” and “e”) students both in the cases of General Caste and Scheduled Caste.

We have already examined the influence of family structure on the enrolment of children.

Now we would like to know whether the family structure has any bearing upon the “performance”.

The striking fact that stands out of the table is that in top two slots (grade ‘a’ and ‘b’) students from the broken families have no presence at all in respect of those positions, but here the representation of students coming out of extended and nuclear families is more conspicuous. This fact holds true for both General Caste and Scheduled Caste students.

It can also be seen that in respect of the top two grades, students from the nuclear families are slightly better performers than students from extended families but these slight advantages do not have the substance to jump upon any definite conclusion. Yet, it can be said that the type of family structure holds some key for performance at least in the extreme cases of broken families.

Table 3 co-relates Scheduled Caste children’s academic performance with the income category of their parents. The academic performance of the Scheduled Caste children belonging to the parents of low-income category highly concentrated around the mark range of “c”, “d” and “e”. It is noticed that excellence in the academic performance of children belonging to the parents of low-income category is almost negligible. This is evident from the fact that out of the total 125 students belonging to low-income category only 4 students could occupy position in the mark range of “a” and “b”. In contrast the students of the parents belonging to high-income category appear to have done fairly well in terms of excellence in academic achievements. This is evident from the fact that 23 out of the total of 56 students belonging to high-income category students belonging to the parents of high-income category have positioned themselves in the mark range of “a” and “b”. Looking from another angel

Table 3: Children’s performance co-related to the primary occupation of the parents (General Caste students) N₂= 250

Marks range	Service sector	Business	Others	Total
a	22(8.80)	18(7.20%)	8(3.20%)	48(19.20%)
b	26(-10.40)	15(6%)	10(4%)	51(20.40%)
c	32(13%)	18(7%)	15(6%)	65(26%)
d	9(3.60%)	10(4%)	30(12%)	49(9.60%)
e	3(1.20%)	4(1.60%)	14(9.60%)	21(8.40%)
f	1(0.40%)	2(0.80%)	13(5.20%)	16(6.40%)
Total	94(00%)	66(38%)	90(26%)	250(36%)

it is seen that only 9 out of 56 students belonging to Scheduled Caste parents of high-income category have scored badly and have placed themselves in the mark range of “e” and “f”.

Analysis of data presented in the table 3 show that the students belonging to parents of moderate-income group have placed themselves, by and large, in the middle mark range of “c” and “d”. This is evident from the fact that of 69 students of moderate-income group, 36 students (more than 50 per cent) have placed themselves in the mark ranges of “c” and “d”.

From the above interpretation of the data, academic achievement of the students seems to have a positive co-relation with the income range. In other words, the higher the income category of the parents, the better is the achievement of the students in terms of academic excellence. This conclusion is buttressed, if we interpret the data in the table 3 from another angle. Of the 19 students in the mark range of “a”, 11 students belong to high-income category, 7 belong to moderate-income category and only 1 student is from low-income category. Similarly out of a total of 24 students in the mark range of “b”, 12 students belong to high-income category, 9 belong to moderate-income category and only 3 belong to low-income category. This trend is exhibited even if we look from the bottom. Of the total 21 students in the mark range of “f”, only 3 students belong to high-income category, 6 belong to moderate-income category and 12 are from lower income bracket. Similarly in the mark range of “d” and “e”, highest numbers of students are found from the low-income category.

Table 4 co-relates the academic performance of General Caste students with the income category of their parents. Even a cursory glance at the data presented in the table 24 indicates a trend of positive co-relation between the income category of the parents and the academic

performance of students. Thus the observed trend in case of Scheduled Caste students also holds good for the General Caste students.

In the mark range of “a”, the contribution of the students from income category “a” is 50 per cent (24 out of 48). Only 5 students from low-income bracket have placed themselves in the mark range “a”. The trend continued to be the same in the mark range of “b”. Of the total of 51 students in this mark range, 25 students belong to high-income category and only 9 students are from low-income category. As regards to the mark ranges of “e” and “f”, majority of the students is from low-income category.

However, a comparison between these two tables representing academic performances of the students of General Caste and Scheduled Caste students shows one difference in terms of absolute numbers.

Of the 250 Scheduled Caste students, only 43 have placed themselves in the high mark ranges of “a” and “b”. As many as 81 students have placed themselves in the low rank of mark ranges of “e” and “f”. This stands in contrast with the academic performance of General Caste students.

Of the 250 General Caste sample respondents, 99 fall in the mark ranges of “a” and “b” and only 37 students find their place in the low ranges of “e” and “f”. The General Caste students have all along scored higher marks than that of their Scheduled Caste counterparts. Yet in both the cases, income category of the parents seems to have substantially influenced the academic achievement of their children. An important reason is that school education involves cost for the parents. Parents belonging to low-income category have definitely in a socially inferior position to superintend the academic welfare of their children. Grinds of hard work with regular monotony have led them with little enthusiasm

Table 4: Children’s performance co-related to the primary occupation of the parents (Scheduled Caste students) $N_1 = 250$

Marks range	Service sector	Business	Others	Total
a	7(2.80%)	6(2.40%)	6(2.40%)	19(7.60%)
b	12(5%)	7(2.60%)	5(2%)	23(9.60%)
c	26(10.40%)	17(6.80%)	15(6%)	58(23.20%)
d	17(6.80%)	18(7.20%)	33(13.20%)	68(27.20%)
e	14(5.60%)	21(8.40%)	25(10.10%)	60(24%)
f	5(2%)	6(2.40%)	10(4%)	21(8.40%)
Total	81(100%)	75(32%)	94(30%)	250(38%)

to monitor over the future of their children. Factors like motivation, teaching care and shaping the ambition of the students have decisive influence on the academic achievement of the students. Possibly parents belonging to high-income category, having enjoyed a distinctive social position are in a better situation to infuse a sense of purpose, dedication and ambition in their children. They always try to motivate the children by closely following their academic progress. Being in a better financial position the parents of high-income category have time and money to invest on their children.

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