



EMPOWERMENT OF THE SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED through education GROUPS

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Introduction

The Socially Disadvantaged Groups include the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs), the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and the Minorities. According to the 1991 Census, SCs Account for 138.23 million (16.5 percent); STs 67.76 million (8.1 percent); and Minorities 145.31 Million (17.2 percent). As regards OBCs, it is difficult to quantify the size of their population in the absence of the Census data. However, according to the estimates by the Mandal Commission in 1993, the OBCs constitute 52 per cent of the country's total population. Some of them may belong to the categories of SCs and Minorities.

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Commitments of Ninth Plan

2. The Ninth Five Year Plan commits to empower the Socially Disadvantaged Groups as agents of socio-economic change and development, as set out in Box No.1 below:.
3. Towards fulfilling the commitments, the Ninth Plan adopted a three pronged strategy of - i) Social Empowerment; ii) Economic Empowerment; and iii) Social Justice to ensure removal of disparities, elimination of exploitation and suppression and to provide protection to these disadvantaged groups.
4. Education being the most effective instrument for socio-economic empowerment, high priority continues to be accorded to improve the educational status of SCs and STs, specially that of the women and the girl child. No doubt, there has been a visible increase in the literacy rates of SCs and STs during the last three developmental decades, but the gap between literacy rate of SCs/ STs and that of the general population continues to persist, as shown by the data given below:

Literacy Rates of SCs and STs:



SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Education being the most effective instrument for socio-economic empowerment of the socially disadvantaged groups, high priority continues to be accorded to improve the educational status of these groups especially that of women and girl child through :

- Relaxation of norms for opening of primary schools within one kilometer of walking distance.
- Extending reservation in educational institutions and granting concessions like free education, free supply of books, uniforms/ scholarships etc.
- Vocationalising education both at the middle and high school level towards improving opportunities for both wage and self-employment.
- Promoting higher and technical/professional education amongst these groups, through effective implementation of Post Matric Scholarships (PMS) with an added thrust and wider coverage.
- Promoting higher education amongst children whose parents are engaged in unclean occupations and thus gradually wean them away from the practice of scavenging.
- Providing more opportunity to these groups to appear in the competitive examination coaching centers.
- Achieving complete eradication of untouchability by 2002 and thus providing a rightful place and status to these socially disadvantaged groups.
- Developing special health packages and extending vital health services through improved delivery system to combat endemic diseases prevalent in Tribal areas.
- Launching exclusive schemes for Primitive Tribal Groups for their survival, protection and allround development.

5. As could be seen from the Table, the most discouraging sign was the increasing gap between the female literacy rate of SCs and STs and of the general categories during 1971 to 1991, defeating the very efforts at reducing the existing gaps/disparities. The female literacy rates of these communities as a whole still continues to be very low requiring focussed attention.

6. Supplementing efforts by the Department of Education, the nodal Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, since its establishment in 1999, has also



implemented a few exclusive programmes for the educational betterment of the Socially Disadvantaged Groups through extending scholarships, hostels, coaching etc.

7. The nation-wide scheme of Post-Matric Scholarships (PMS) for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students was revised in 1997-98 to extend its scope besides increasing the amount of scholarship and the ceiling of income limits of parents. . During first three years of the Plan (1997-2000), an amount of Rs.315.07 crore has been released to States/Union Territories (UTs) for extending PMS to 56.26 lakh students. Similarly, under the scheme of Pre-Matric Scholarships for the children of those engaged in un-clean occupations an amount of Rs.14.28 crore was spent during the first three years of the Ninth Plan (1997-2000) to benefit about 10.18 lakh students. It is time that the impact of these two schemes was assessed, especially from the point of cost-benefit analysis.

8. There are several other educational programmes for these groups. The programmes are -
Construction of Hostels for SC/ST Boys and Girls, Ashram-schools for STs, Coaching and Allied Scheme, Book-Banks; Upgradation of Merit of SC/ST students; Special Educational Development Programmes to SC/ST Girls belonging to Low Literacy Areas;
Programmes to extend financial assistance to Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for setting up of Educational Complexes to promote education among SCs/STs and especially amongst girls belonging to Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs);



National Scholarships
to meritorious SC/ST
students to pursue
higher studies abroad
etc. All these
schemes, as stated
earlier, supplement the
major efforts being
put into action
exclusively to improve
the educational status
of SC and ST
population and thus
345
empower them socially.

9. As the State Governments are unable to meet the huge committed liability, educational development schemes especially like Post-Matric Scholarships and Pre-Matric Scholarships get adversely affected, leaving SC/ST students to face hardships due to non-payment of scholarships under these schemes. A recent evaluation carried out by the Ministry on the scheme has found that the performance of certain States in providing matching grant, maintenance of services and management of hostels is not encouraging and the pace of construction of hostels has been very slow and the basic amenities provided in them are substandard. A review of Ashram Schools scheme would show that some of the schools are very badly maintained and deprived of even basic facilities. Also, no separate sections exist in the hostels for primary school children which is a pre-requisite.

10. Tribal hostels and residential schools in remote interiors are poorly managed, plagued by badly maintained buildings with leakages and by delays in payments to students and purchases. The greatest failing has been in education in tribal schools. The stated tribal policy of 'integration' and 'enabling tribal communities to develop according to their own genius' would appear to have been entirely



forgotten and mainstream school curricula are imposed wholesale on tribal schools. The problem is not merely the medium of instruction -- again contrary to stated national policy of enabling children at the primary level to study in their mother- tongue -- there are almost no tribal schools in which teaching is in tribal languages.

11. Although educational facilities are made available to the weaker sections, the quality of those facilities remains dismal and the content of education is neither found relevant nor meaningful to their socio-economic set-up and needs. Therefore, the need is to evolve an effective system of education process in terms of using their local language (especially for STs) as the medium of instruction and of vocationalisation of education at the Middle/High School levels to equip these groups for wage/selfemployment.

Educational development amongst the disadvantaged sections, especially SCs and STs, shows up certain numerical improvement but the achievements are not commensurate either qualitatively

or quantitatively to reach the level of competence on par with the general population.

Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

12. Development of the OBCs, which made a beginning during the 'Nineties, received better attention in the Ninth Plan with many new initiatives coming up in the field of education and economic development. For educational development amongst OBCs, schemes were introduced to provide scholarships for post-matric/ pre-matric courses as well as other higher education supported by hostel facilities. Besides, children belonging to the OBCs were also allowed to enjoy the existing hostel facilities meant for SC and ST boys and girls. For OBC students to participate effectively in the competitive examinations, Pre Examination Coaching Centres were set up in the Ninth Plan.