



Social empowerment Via Education

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Introduction : 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. 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-

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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 empower them socially

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