

# Inequality in Education

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After forty years of independence, the debate on the issue of educational equality in the Indian society centers around the question, how inequitable is the educational development among the scheduled castes and other caste groups. Based on a micro-study in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, the author concludes that there is a positive association between social status of the caste groups and their educational development. There is considerable degree of inequality in the educational development of scheduled castes. However, the degree of inequality within the caste groups is more severe than inequality between the caste groups.

## 1. Introduction

For a long time, promotion of equality in the development of education has been considered as a crucial measure in bringing about economic and social transformation in India. For instance, the Education Commission (1964-66) categorically states : "Every society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of the common man and cultivate all available talents, must ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population. This is the only guarantee of building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the weak will be minimized."1/

The same conviction is maintained in the New Education Policy Document-1986, which observes : "India has reached a stage in its economic and technical development when a dynamic effort is called for to derive the maximum benefit from the assets already created and to ensure that the fruits of change reach all sections. Education is the highway to that goal."2/

Quite frequently the debate on the issue of educational equality in the Indian society revolves around the question of equality between scheduled and non-scheduled castes. As an epitome to such debate, the New Education Policy-1986 observes : "The central focus in the scheduled castes' educational development is their equalization with the non-scheduled part of the population at all stages and levels of education in all areas and in all the four dimensions - rural male, rural female, urban male and urban female."3/

Scheduled castes have been occupying a low status in the Indian society for ages. They have been subjected to several social, economic and religious disabilities. As such they form one of the most disadvantaged sections of the Indian society. Since Independence, the govern-