

Social Inequality and Exclusion in Educational Attainment: Evidence from Micro Level Study in Karnataka

Dr. V. Ramakrishnappa*

¹Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Inclusion (CSSI), Mangalore University, Mangalagangothri-574 199, Karnataka

*Corresponding author: Dr. V. Ramakrishnappa

| Received: 25.08.2025 | Accepted: 14.10.2025 | Published: 16.10.2025 |

Abstract: The level of educational achievement is a critical determinant of both individual and societal progress; however, it remains profoundly influenced by social inequality and exclusion. Exclusion in educational attainment refers to the unequal distribution of educational opportunities and outcomes across social groups. This study explores how factors such as caste and geographic location create disparities in access to educational opportunities and academic outcomes. Based on the primary data collected from the forward and backward regions of Karnataka, the study emphasizes how caste interacts to influence educational opportunities. The findings reveal persistent disparities in educational attainment among marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). By analyzing empirical evidence, the paper highlights the need for inclusive policies and interventions that address structural inequalities and promote equity in education.

Keywords: Educational Attainment, Social Inequality, Exclusion in Education, Disparity, Social Groups, Karnataka.

INTRODUCTION

The progress of a nation is measured not just by its economic developments but also through human development indicators. One such metric is education and knowledge (UNDP, 2023). Therefore, *education plays a crucial role in empowering individuals and building a society that is driven by knowledge*. According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to education." At least primary and general education should be free. Primary education should be compulsory and technical and vocational training should be accessible to all. Everyone should have equal opportunities for higher education based on their talent (UN, 1948). The UNESCO report (2021) titled '*Reimagining our Future Together: a New Social Contract for Education*' emphasized the necessity to rethink the content and vision of education to meet the evolving needs of the world while concurrently reducing inequality and promoting justice (UNESCO, 2021). As a result, there is a global focus on education, a vital measure of human development, as evidenced in significant policy documents.

The phenomenon of social exclusion and unequal educational opportunities is increasingly prevalent in both developed and developing nations.

Social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional process influenced by various factors, including socio-cultural, economic, demographic, racial, and historical elements (Ben Haman *et al.*, 2021). It manifests in different ways, ranging from overt discrimination to subtle marginalization, and can stem from issues such as poverty, discrimination, governance challenges, and geographical isolation (Beall & Piron, 2005; Silver, 1994). According to Sen, social exclusion is a multi-dimensional process where individuals or groups are denied access to resources and opportunities (Sen, 2000). Social inequality and exclusion in educational opportunity refer to the systemic barriers that prevent certain social groups from accessing, participating in, and benefiting equally from education. In South Asia, educational exclusion remains a pressing issue, particularly affecting the marginalized rural poor (United Nations, 2015). Even when schools are accessible and economic assistance is available, unequal access to education can still result in educational exclusion. The roots of social exclusion can often be traced back to schools and the education system (Hick *et al.*, 2007).

In the context of India, education is regarded as a top priority within the nation's development policy. The Constitution of India guarantees the provision of free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14 years as a fundamental right. The National Policy on Education

Quick Response Code



Journal homepage:
<https://www.easpublisher.com/>

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution **4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)** which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

Citation: V. Ramakrishnappa (2025). Social Inequality and Exclusion in Educational Attainment: Evidence from Micro Level Study in Karnataka. *Cross Current Int J Econ Manag Media Stud*, 7(5), 100-104.

(1986) marked a significant milestone in fulfilling this Constitutional obligation. India has made substantial strides in enhancing access to education, achieving over 90% enrollment at the primary school level (ASER, 2024). However, glaring inequalities persist across socially and economically deprived groups and gender. Educational disparities have been a longstanding concern for policymakers in India. Social inequality in access to education refers to the unequal distribution of academic resources and opportunities among different social groups. These disparities reflect on a person's future earning potential and life prospects. The previous National Policy on Education, 1986, was over three decades old and inadequate to address current educational and job market needs. Therefore, the Government of India initiated the New Education Policy (NEP) in 2020 to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all. However, based on the complex inequalities of the caste system in India, the society is divided into different social categories for the distribution of educational and social opportunities. These are Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Among the various forms of inequality, disparities in the education system across social groups and geographical regions are regarded as too serious to overlook any longer. In this context the present paper aims to: (i) to understand the socio-economic status of the sample households across social groups, (ii) to assess the disparities in educational attainment between social groups and geographical regions, and (iii) to provide policy implications to address the problem of inequalities in access to educational opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was gathered through a structured interview schedule administered among a

sample of 300 households (150 from each district) across two districts in Karnataka, specifically Dakshina Kannada and Raichur. A multi-stage stratified random sampling method was utilized for the selection of districts, taluks, villages, and sample households. For the collection of primary data, two districts with different levels of development (geographically, one district from the northern region and one from the southern region) in Karnataka were selected. These districts have been selected on the basis of the Comprehensive Composite Development Index (CCDI) developed by the High Power Committee for Redressal of Regional Disparity headed by the late Dr. D. M. Nanjundappa. Accordingly, Raichur district represents the backward region, and Dakshina Kannada represents the developed region.

Socio-Economic Status of Sample Households

Table-1 shows the distribution of households by social groups across a forward region (Dakshina Kannada) and a backward region (Raichur). The sample is equally drawn (150 households each), allowing for direct comparison. SC households form about 18% of the total. Their share is slightly higher in Raichur (18.67%) compared to Dakshina Kannada (17.33%), reflecting their relatively greater presence in the backward region. STs account for around 13% overall. Their distribution is nearly identical across both regions: 12.67% in Dakshina Kannada and 13.33% in Raichur. This indicates no significant regional variation. OBC households constitute around 29% in Dakshina Kannada and 28% in Raichur, totaling 28.67%. Again, the distribution is very balanced, showing little difference between forward and backward regions. The largest group across both regions is "Others," making up about 40% of the total. This share is very close in both regions (around 40%), suggesting a relatively equal representation of forward caste groups. Not much difference is found between the forward and backward regions; by and large, an equal share has prevailed.

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Households by Social Groups and Regions

Social Groups	Forward Region (Dakshina Kannada)	Backward Region (Raichur)	All
SCs	26	28	54
	(17.33)	(18.67)	(18.0)
STs	19	20	39
	(12.67)	(13.33)	(13.0)
OBCs	44	42	86
	(29.33)	(28.0)	(28.67)
Others	61	60	121
	(40.67)	(40.0)	(40.33)
Total	150	150	300
	(100)	(100)	(100)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages of the total.

Source: Primary Survey.

Composition of Population and Household Size

The provided data in Table 2 reveals distinct patterns in household size and gender composition across social groups (SC, ST, OBC, Others) and regions

(forward, backward, and overall). In forward regions, the female share is notably higher among SC and ST, and household size varies significantly, with 'Others' having the largest average household size (8.11). In backward

regions, the male share is higher among OBC, and household sizes become more uniform across groups, ranging from 5.30 to 5.75. When all regions are combined, household size averages between 5.36 and 5.98 across groups, reflecting moderate regional disparities. As far as the social groups are concerned, the data indicate that the share of the male population, by and large, was lower among SCs/STs as compared to OBCs

and Others; this is more explicit in the case of the forward region as compared to that of the backward region. The average size of the sample household was estimated to be 5.59; this is not similar across different areas and social groups. It was marginally higher in the backward region as compared to that of forward region and marginally lower in the case of STs and OBCs as compared to SCs and Others.

Table 2: Distribution of Composition of Population and Household Size

Social Groups	% Share of		Size of the Household (actual data)
	Males	Females	
Forward Region			
SC	46.91	53.09	6.23
ST	43.33	56.67	4.74
OBC	52.42	47.58	5.16
Others	50.14	49.86	8.11
Total	49.40	50.60	5.57
Backward Region			
SC	49.07	50.93	5.75
ST	48.11	51.89	5.30
OBC	55.13	44.87	5.57
Others	49.56	50.44	5.68
Total	50.83	49.17	5.61
All			
SC	47.99	52.01	5.98
ST	45.92	54.08	5.53
OBC	53.80	46.20	5.36
Others	49.86	50.14	5.77
Total	50.12	49.88	5.59

Source: Field Survey.

Disparities in Educational Attainments

The scale of social exclusion in access to education is examined through the illiteracy rates of the working population and dropout rate at primary and secondary levels of education in backward and forward regions of the state. The social exclusion index is also estimated. The data provided in Table 3 indicate that the extent of social exclusion in terms of illiteracy of the working population was higher in the case of SCs with 33.8 per cent followed by STs with 25.42 per cent as compared to that of OBCs which accounts for 18.18 per cent and Others accounting for 16.25 per cent.

It has been observed across the regions that the rate of illiteracy was relatively higher in the backward

region with 27.03 per cent as compared to that of forward region with as low as 15.41 per cent. The working population with no education is more likely to be involved in lowly paid casual wage employment and thereby lower earnings. This would further lead to social exclusion in some other dimensions like health, education of their children and economic status. The social exclusion index in the case of education was estimated to be higher among SCs/STs as compared to non-SCs/STs both in the forward and backward regions. But across the regions, the social exclusion index value was estimated to be relatively higher in the forward region as against the backward region.

Table 3: Disparities in Education among Working Population of Sample Households by Social Groups and Regions

Social Groups	% of Literates	% of Illiterates	Social Exclusion Index
Forward Region			
SC	68.92	31.08	2.02
ST	82.35	17.65	1.15
OBC	87.38	12.62	0.82
Others	90.24	9.76	0.63
Total	84.59	15.41	1

Social Groups	% of Literates	% of Illiterates	Social Exclusion Index
Backward Region			
SC	63.24	36.76	1.36
ST	67.39	32.61	1.21
OBC	76.28	23.72	0.88
Others	76.62	23.38	0.86
Total	72.97	27.03	1
All			
SC	66.20	33.80	1.60
ST	74.58	25.42	1.21
OBC	81.82	18.18	0.86
Others	83.75	16.25	0.77
Total	78.91	21.09	1

Source: Field Survey.

This indicates that the members of SCs/STs vis-à-vis the non-SCs/STs in the forward region were not able to access the benefits proportionately, the members of OBCs and Others were more beneficial in the forward region than in the backward region. That is why, although the illiteracy was estimated to be lower in the forward regions, the problem of social exclusion was reported to be more severe than that of in the backward region. In the name of faster growth, the inclusive growth has been at risk in the forward region in the absence of affirmative action plan.

Further, the data from Table 4 reveals clear disparities in educational attainment across social groups (SC, ST, OBC and Others) and regions (Forward, Backward, and All combined). Across all regions, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) have the highest proportions of workers in the sample households with only primary and middle school education, indicating lower overall educational attainment. The majority of workers across all social groups have education only up to primary & middle school. Overall, it is highest among SC (62.23%) and ST

(58.33%), indicating relatively lower educational attainment in these groups. Around 22-32% of workers across groups have completed high school. 'Others' and OBC have the highest percentages here (31.61% and 29.63%), suggesting better access to or attainment of secondary education in these groups. SC has the lowest proportion of workers with PUC (6.91%) and graduation (5.32%). OBC shows the highest percentage with PUC (14.25%) and graduation and above (11.11%), indicating better educational outcomes relative to SC and ST. 'Others' category also show comparatively better education beyond high school (11.28% PUC, 8.91% graduation and above). Across social groups, the data show that the share of workers in the sample households with lower levels of education was estimated to be higher among SCs/STs as compared to others. On the other hand, the share of workers with relatively higher levels of education was much larger among non-SCs/STs as against SCs/STs in the study areas. If we look at the region-wise data, they indicate that the educational access of the workers from the forward region was found to be much better as compared to the backward region.

Table 4: Distribution of Workers of Sample Households by Level of Education by Social Groups and Regions

Social Groups	Primary & Middle School	High School	PUC	Graduation and above	Total
Forward					
SC	60.75	24.45	5.94	7.86	100.00 (102)
ST	61.00	21.86	8.57	8.57	100.00 (70)
OBC	49.73	28.34	11.23	10.70	100.00 (187)
Others	40.82	34.75	10.49	13.93	100.00 (305)
Total	53.31	30.57	9.34	6.78	100.00 (664)
Backward					
SC	61.63	23.26	11.63	3.49	100.00 (86)
ST	56.45	22.58	14.52	6.45	100.00 (62)
OBC	39.63	31.10	17.68	11.59	100.00 (164)
Others	50.69	27.54	12.29	9.47	100.00 (236)
Total	50.18	27.37	14.05	8.39	100.00 (548)
All					
SC	62.23	25.53	6.91	5.32	100.00 (188)
ST	58.33	22.73	11.36	7.58	100.00 (132)
OBC	45.01	29.63	14.25	11.11	100.00 (351)
Others	49.20	31.61	11.28	8.91	100.00 (541)
Total	51.90	29.13	11.47	7.51	100.00 (1212)

Note: The figures in parenthesis indicate actual data. Source: Field Survey.

The share of workers of sample households with levels of education among SCs/STs was reported to be much better in the forward region as compared to that of the backward region. Similarly, in the case of OBCs and others, the share of workers with higher levels of education was reported to be much better in the forward region as compared to that of the backward region. This implies that access to educational facilities is quite limited in the case of SCs/STs as compared to that of OBCs and Others; it is quite explicit in the case of the forward region as against the backward region. This indicates that the scale of social exclusion in the domain of education is reported to be higher in the case of SCs/STs as compared to non-SCs/STs.

CONCLUSION

The research reveals that the social exclusion index was assessed to be greater in the forward region compared to the backward region. Among various social groups, the index was notably higher for SCs/STs in contrast to OBC and Others. This pattern is also evident at the secondary education level. Consequently, this indicates that, under the guise of accelerated growth and development, access to educational resources is not equitably distributed among different segments of society in the forward regions when juxtaposed with the backward region. The findings highlight considerable educational disparities among social groups, with SC and ST communities experiencing lower levels of educational achievement, which could hinder their employment prospects and socioeconomic advancement.

It has been noted that the social exclusion index, which is defined in relation to illiteracy, was found to be higher for SCs and STs compared to their non-SC/ST counterparts, particularly in the forward region; furthermore, the index was notably greater for SCs/STs in the forward region than for those in the backward region. This rapid growth may be contributing to the issue of social exclusion. The research highlights a stratified educational landscape where both social group and geographical region play a significant role in determining the level of educational attainment among workers. Educational outcomes are more favorable in forward regions and among general social groups, whereas backward regions and marginalized groups (SC/ST) predominantly fall into lower educational categories, underscoring the need for policy interventions to address these disparities. Initiatives and policies should focus on reducing the impact of social group dynamics on educational success (Gaur *et al.*,

2024). There is a need for specific interventions aimed at enhancing educational access and quality for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) groups. Policies must tackle both economic obstacles and social issues that impede educational advancement. By implementing these measures, the government can contribute to diminishing inequality, fostering social inclusion, and improving economic mobility for marginalized communities.

REFERENCES

- ASER (2024). *Annual Status of Educational report (Rural) 2024*. ASER Centre, New Delhi.
- Beall, J and L.H. Piron (2005). *DFID Social Exclusion Review*. London School of Economics (LSE) and Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Department for International Development (DFID).
- Ben Haman, O. (2021). The reality of youth unemployment and unsuitable development models in the global south: Evidence from Morocco. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 16(1):149–164.
- Gaur, D., Pandey, S. K., Sharma, D. (2024). Inequalities in educational achievement: Effect of individuals' capabilities & social identity. *Journal of Policy Modeling*, 46 (3), 494–513.
- Hick, P., Visser, J. and MacNab, N. (2007). Education and Social Exclusion, in Abrams, D., Christian, J. and Gordon, D. (eds.) *Multi-professional Handbook of Social Exclusion*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 95–114.
- Sen, A., (2000). Social Exclusion: Concept, Application and Scrutiny. Social Development Papers No.1, Office of Environment and Social Development, Asian Development Bank.
- Silver, H. (1994). Social exclusion and social solidarity: Three paradigms. *International Labour Review*, 133(5–7), 531–578.
- UNDP (2023). *Human Development Index (HDI)*. <https://hdr.undp.org>: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-developmentindex#/indicies/HDI>.
- UNESCO (2021). *UNESDOC Digital Library*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/>.
- United Nations (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org>: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universaldeclaration-of-human-rights>.
- United Nations (2015). *The Millennium Development Goals Report-2015*. United Nations, New York.