

Unit 13

Education and the Policy of Positive Discrimination and Affirmative Action

Contents

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Social Inequalities in Indian Society
- 13.3 Evolution of the Policy of Positive Discrimination and Affirmative Action in India
- 13.4 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Higher Education
- 13.5 Issues of Access, Retention, and Poor Performance
- 13.6 Conclusion
- 13.7 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the social and historical context in which policies of positive discrimination acquire relevance;
- explain the concepts of positive discrimination and affirmative action in the context of education; and
- critically discuss the issues of access, retention, and performance of students who avail the policies of positive discrimination.

13.1 Introduction

Several societies have inherited inequalities of one kind or the other from their past, be it in terms of race, caste, ethnic group identity, gender, social class, etc. This has led some of the modern democratic states to redress these inequalities through a policy initiative which is aimed at ameliorating the deficiencies of the past. John Rawls (1999) refers to this as a 'principle of redress', which attempts to eliminate undeserved inequalities. The principle holds that in order to treat all persons equally, to provide them equal opportunities, society should give more attention to those who are marginalized and to those born into less favorable social positions. In this context the practice of positive discrimination is imperative to promote equality in favour of the disadvantaged.

The term 'positive discrimination' is defined as the practice of preferential selection of members of under-represented groups to widely esteemed positions. According to Thomas Weisskopf (2004), what makes discrimination 'positive' is that it is intended to elevate members of groups that are under-represented in esteemed positions and thus under-represented in the upper strata of society. However, as Weisskopf argues, it may also be kept in mind that 'negative' discrimination denotes a policy of exclusion of such members. The term 'affirmative action' is usually used in the American context to connote the preference given to the deprived group, other things being equal. These policies are also called the policies of 'reverse' or 'compensatory' discrimination. In India, it is used to connote the special privileges, concessions or treatment better known as the 'reservation' policy or the policy of 'positive discrimination' in the Indian context.

In a wider spectrum, the policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action describes those practices that attempt to correct past or present discrimination and prevent future occurrences of discrimination. Different

societies have different historical distortions, which have prevented certain groups from entering the mainstream of social development. Particularly, the disparities between the educational levels of different social groups have been the cause and consequence of the differentials between their levels of socio-economic development. The concern for inequalities in education arises from a commitment to the socially and economically deprived groups. From the point of view of nation-building also, there can be no proper development of human resources unless all segments of the population receive evenhanded attention and support. The social cohesion of a society is threatened if the resources and opportunities are unevenly distributed among individuals and groups. It is the belief in shared values and purposes that contributes to cohesion in a civil society. In this context, education systems across the world now encounter the problem of redefining their role in a new situation arising out of the increasing individual and group differences. Moreover, education is endowed with the responsibility of turning diversity into a positive and constructive contributory factor in enhancing the understanding of various social groups. Especially, higher education is viewed as a mechanism through which individuals or groups are to be equipped to obtain occupational and economic mobility in order to attain a social status.

In this Unit we will discuss the context in which the policies of affirmative action and positive discrimination emerged in various societies. The focus here is on social inequalities in the Indian society and the history of the evolution of policies of positive discrimination. We will also examine the impact of policy of affirmative action on higher education in particular and explain the issues of access, retention, and poor performance of students from disadvantaged sections.

13.2 Social Inequalities in Indian Society

Caste is the most pervasive dimension of social stratification in India. It is a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between the castes are governed, among others, by the concepts of 'purity-pollution', 'division of labour', 'segregation', etc. The hierarchic divide between the castes is governed by the degrees of 'purity and pollution'. Those at the top (i.e. Brahmins) are said to be the most clean and pure and those at the bottom of the hierarchy (i.e. Sudras) are most impure or unclean. This particular group of ex-untouchables are deprived of any relationship with other members of the social hierarchy and had to live a life of social seclusion and isolation imposed through the practice of untouchability.

The practice of untouchability is reported even today in certain parts of the country and it evokes a national level uproar and condemnation every now and then. Sometimes it results in conflict between the 'upper castes' and the 'untouchables'. It is unthinkable in the present age of egalitarianism, civil democracy and post-modernism that some people would consider themselves to be polluted merely by the touch of one section of people. Therefore, the section of people whose touch have been condemned to live, over generations, a life of complete seclusion, deprivation and humiliation. The social group which experienced in the past an era of deprivation, now, being termed as 'Scheduled Castes' (SCs) or 'ex-untouchables' or 'depressed castes'. Mahatma Gandhi named them 'Harijans' or the 'children of the god'. The position of SCs has a bearing on the social structure of the caste Hindu society. They constitute a large and important segment whose problems differ from region to region, from urban to village settings, and in different occupations.

Another social group which remained outside the fold of education is Scheduled Tribes (STs). However, the problems of STs are different from those of SCs. STs have been traditionally separated in terms of territorial communities. Though

some of the tribes are still pursuing shifting cultivation, most of them have taken to agriculture as settled communities. These STs are not part of the settled Hindu society in villages and towns. Mostly they live in isolated areas such as mountains and forests. Therefore, the STs are geographically, economically and culturally isolated from other sections of population. Besides SCs and STs, there are certain castes which are slightly above the SCs and below some of the intermediary peasant castes within the fold of sudras. There are the artisan castes such as blacksmiths, barbers, cow herders, washermen, etc. These artisan castes are also educationally and socially backward and are referred to as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India. Their deprivation may also be explained in terms of the 'purity-pollution' concept. OBCs in certain parts of contemporary India are better off than the upper castes in terms of their hold over land, economy, and polity. It is interesting to note that these castes undertake the same practices of oppression as their upper caste counterparts to enforce their dominance in the social hierarchy.

Box 13.1: Backward Classes

Backward Classes include all depressed and weaker sections such as SCs, STs and other backward artisan castes, minorities, etc. But, the Constitution of India specifies the categories such as SCs, STs, and mentions a few provisions for a category called other socially and educationally backward classes. This category was extensively referred to as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by the Mandal Commission Report(1978) to include social groups such as artisan castes. The term 'Class' is used because, in the Indian context, the measure of inequalities and stratification is caste or group but not the individual. Therefore, backward classes are nothing but the backward castes. Further, the term 'depressed classes' was replaced by 'Scheduled Castes' to denote the untouchables in 1936 and lists of these castes were notified in a Schedule. Simultaneously, the term 'primitive tribes' was replaced by the term 'backward tribes'. The term 'Scheduled Tribes' was used only after independence in 1947 (Chanana 1993:122).

13.3 Evolution of the Policy of Positive Discrimination and Affirmative Action in India

Concern for the welfare of disadvantaged sections in India is not a post-independence phenomenon. It has a long history of advocacy and implementation even before Independence in 1947. There were contestations to the rigid Hindu caste structure and hierarchy even in the ancient Indian society exemplified by the emergence and spread of religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and movements like the Bhakti Movement that devalued the caste system. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, their cause was taken up by some of the nationalist leaders and enlightened social reformers like Vidya Sagar, Ram Mohan Roy, Gandhiji, Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar, and others. who voiced concern for them much before the colonial rulers' legislative action for the amelioration of the living conditions of these sections of population, was planned.

As a result, British rule in India formally introduced the principle of equality of all citizens before law. The Caste Disabilities Act of 1850 is the earliest. As far back as in 1885, the provincial Madras Government made a provision for education of children from disadvantaged sections. Later, as a consequence of the non-Brahmin movement, the Madras Government reserved positions for the non-Brahmins in government services. Another significant development in the early part of this century was the appointment of a Committee (1918) by the Maharaja of Mysore for the upliftment of the non-Brahmin sections of society under the Chairmanship of Sir Leslie Miller. The Committee recommended that within a period of seven years, not less than half of the higher and two

thirds of the lower appointments in each grade of the service and so far as possible in each office, are to be held by members of the communities other than the Brahmins, preference being given to duly qualified candidates of the depressed classes, when such are available (Miller Committee Report 1918, cited in the Report of the Karnataka Third Backward Classes Commission, vol.1, 1990:12).

At the all India level, the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) envisaged representation of deprived sections in several local self-governments and public bodies. Further, the Government of India Act (1935) provides for reservation to the depressed castes in the legislative assemblies of different provinces. The reservations for SCs were made for the first time in 1943 when 8.33 per cent vacancies in government services were reserved for them through a Government Order. In June 1946, this was raised to 12.5 per cent to correspond with their proportion in the population (Chanana 1993: 122). Special support to the backward classes was offered in education along with a scheme of the award of post-metric scholarships which was introduced in the year 1945 initially for the SCs and later extended to STs in 1948-49 (Government of India 1984: 55).

The commitment of the Indian Constitution to social justice and equality emerges out of the conviction that education is a basic instrument of social mobility. Article 46 of the Constitution states, 'the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the SCs and STs and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation'. Various commissions and policies on education in the post-independent India explicitly stated the commitment envisioned by the Constitution. Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) on university education states, "Education is the great instrument of social emancipation by which a democracy establishes, maintains and protects the spirit of equality among its members" (Government of India 1950: 49).

The Education Commission (1964-66) in its Report provides the vision for Indian education as a contributory mechanism to achieve the civil society. The Commission notes, "One of the important social objectives of education is to equalize opportunity, enabling the backward or underprivileged classes and individuals to use education as a leveler for the improvement of their condition. Every society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of the common man and cultivate all available talent, must ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population. This is the only guarantee for building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the weak will be minimized."

Education is also viewed as an instrument of social change and social equality for all groups through social justice and integration (Government of India 1986). This concern was also shared by the two Commissions which were appointed by the Government of India in 1953 and 1978 on the backward classes. The first was headed by Kaka Kalelkar and the other by B.P. Mandal. Kalelkar Commission's recommendations were rejected by the then Government as because of differences of opinion among the members on the issue of identifying the backward classes. Mandal Commission Report was implemented only in the year 1990 after widespread public debate and resentment.

Box 13.2: Mandal Commission

Mandal Commission identified the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) on the basis of caste and evolved certain criterion for judging whether a particular caste is backward or not. It also noted, based on the 1931 census that they constitute 52 per cent of the total population and reserved 27 per cent of government jobs for these sections. It was shelved for a decade

till the Government under V. P. Singh decided to implement. It may be noted that this decision by the then government evoked violent demonstrations from students belonging to the so-called 'upper castes'. This percentage of reservations is in addition to the reservations provided to the Scheduled Castes (15 per cent) and Scheduled Tribes (7.5 per cent).

After Independence, in response to the special obligation placed on the Government of India by Article 15 (4) of the Constitution to make special provisions, the then Ministry of Education, for the first time addressed a letter on 23.11.1954 to the Chief Secretaries of all state governments suggested that 20 per cent of seats be reserved for the SCs and STs in educational institutions with a provision of 5 per cent relaxation in minimum qualifying marks for admission. This was slightly modified in April 1964, when a distinct percentage of 15 for SCs and 5 for STs was laid down and was also made interchangeable. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare also came forward and separately issued letters to the Vice-Chancellors of the universities having medical faculties to reserve 15 per cent seats for SCs and 5 per cent for STs with 5 per cent relaxation in minimum qualifying marks for admission to all medical and dental colleges. The University Grants Commission (UGC) also issued guidelines to the universities and colleges under their respective control to ensure that SC/ ST students were allowed due concession in all undergraduate and graduate courses in various streams. The percentage of reservation for STs was revised upwards from 5 per cent to 7.5 per cent in 1982. At present, 15 per cent and 7.5 per cent of seats are reserved for students from SC and ST categories respectively in all educational institutions.

Besides reservations, the Government of India took a number of steps to strengthen the educational base of the SCs and STs. Provision of educational institutions on a priority basis in the areas predominantly inhabited by these communities, provision of incentives like scholarships, provision of coaching classes for competitive examinations, remedial coaching and provision of hostels are some of the steps which have contributed a great deal in raising the educational levels of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The scheme of remedial coaching for SC/ST students aims at improving the academic skills and linguistic proficiency of the students in various subjects and raising their level of comprehension in such subjects where qualitative techniques and laboratory work are involved. Yet another important step taken by the UGC in recent years is to appoint a monitoring committee to oversee the implementation of reservation policy in central universities. For state universities, the UGC has set up regional committees for the effective working of the affirmative action policy in higher education. In a recent directive to the universities, UGC has given warning to those universities which are not implementing the policy on admissions as well as appointments in their institutions. If a university does not implement the quota of reservations, their funding may be stopped or reduced as per the new initiatives.

As of today, the policy of positive discrimination or reservations does not envisage reservations for OBCs in the higher educational institutions at an all-India level, though such reservation is envisaged in the near future. However, different states have varying percentages of reservation for OBCs in their respective states. For instance, Tamil Nadu reserves 50 per cent and Andhra Pradesh reserves 25 per cent of seats for OBCs in higher education. It may be noted that the total percentage of reservations in Tamil Nadu is 69 per cent which is the highest in the entire country - 18 per cent for SCs, 1 per cent for STs, 50 per cent for Backward Classes (BCs) and Most Backward Classes (MBCs). Tamil Nadu has the unique distinction that it differentiates the BCs from the MBCs. Karnataka also reserves seats for OBCs in the educational institutions besides reservations in jobs.

13.4 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Higher Education

There is no doubt that a considerable improvement has been made in terms of the enrollment of SC and ST students in higher education after the commencement of the policy of positive discrimination. However, this may not be adequate keeping in view the proportion of SC/ST population still outside the fold of higher education or even the minimum levels of literacy. This section reviews the progress made over many years of implementation of affirmative action policy in the country. It is found (UGC 1990) that the enrollment of SCs in higher education is very low (7.77 per cent in 1996-97). Though the actual enrollment increased from 180,058 in 1978-79 to 512,291 in 1996-97, the percentage share in total enrollment did not show much improvement. On the other hand, the enrollment of STs marked a growth of little over one per cent during the period 1978-79 to 1996-97. Their share in total enrollment was 1.6 per cent in 1978-79 and 2.73 per cent in 1996-97. That means, the coverage of ST students in higher education is only one-fourth. While the period 1978-79 to 1988-89 noted only a marginal increase in the percentage share of SCs and STs to the total enrollment, the period 1988-89 to 1995-96 showed a sudden increase in both the categories. The actual enrollment of SC and ST students in higher education is far below the stipulated quota of reservations, namely, 15 per cent for SCs and 7.5 per cent for STs. Inter-state differences are also quite significant. In 1979-80, Uttar Pradesh had the highest percentage (11.62) of SC students enrolled at the undergraduate level, followed by Tamil Nadu (8.97 per cent), West Bengal (8.36 per cent), and Punjab (8.29 per cent). Jammu & Kashmir recorded the lowest percentage of SC students in the undergraduate courses (UGC 1990). The reason for this could be low percentage of SCs in the state. As regards the STs in 1979-80, the state of Meghalaya in north-east India where STs are the predominant population, had the highest percentage (66.88 per cent), followed by Bihar (6.86 per cent) and Assam (6.72 per cent).

There has been a far lower participation of SC/ STs in prestigious faculties which are in demand for high salaried jobs. In 1978-79 and even in 1996-97, a majority of the SC and ST students enrolled at the undergraduate and graduate levels are in the arts faculty. It is followed by science and commerce. Both arts and commerce taken together account for more than 7 out of every 10 SC students and with the enrollment in science, the three cover nearly 89 per cent of all SC students at the under-graduate level in 1996-97. Their participation in professional courses such as medicine, engineering, and education is very low and far from satisfactory. Significantly, there was a considerable decrease in the percentage of SC students enrolled for the medicine course in 1996-97 from that of 1978-79.

The enrollment of SC students at the graduate level is similar to that at the undergraduate level. Around 95 per cent of SC students are enrolled in science and commerce faculties in 1978-79. The proportion of SC students in the professional stream at the graduate level is very low. For instance, only 0.8 per cent, 0.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent of SC students have enrolled in graduate courses in education, engineering and medicine respectively. This is indicative not only of their low share in enrollment but also of the higher rate of attrition as they move up the educational ladder. As regards the enrollment of STs at the undergraduate level, the situation is the same as that of the SCs. About 90 per cent of the ST students are enrolled in arts, commerce, and science faculties, i.e. for every 10 ST students, 9 are enrolled in these streams. In 1996-97, the proportion of ST students in undergraduate courses in medicine, engineering and technology, and education was very low.

Therefore, the share of SC and ST students in the total is higher in the case of arts, commerce and other general courses, wherein the reserved category students are admitted to meet the constitutional obligations. The enrollment in the professional courses for which the job market is attractive is extremely low. The proportion of SC/ST students in the emerging areas of information technology, biotechnology, etc., is either negligible or even none.

Thus, inequality has a particularly pronounced characteristic in higher education. Inequalities exist between SCs/STs and non- SCs/STs and men and women. If one considers the case of a woman belonging to Scheduled Caste or a Tribe from a village in a backward region, the chances of her finding a place in higher education are extremely remote (Chanana 1993). What holds true of women is equally true for other disadvantaged population. The lower the position of a person in the social hierarchy, the greater is the chance of her/his being deprived of higher education. Further, these structural imbalances not only distort the expansion of educational facilities but also reflect on the issue of excellence in education.

Reflection and Action 13.1

Find out from at least four SC/ST students the extent to which they have benefitted (if at all) from the policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action.

13.5 Issues of Access, Retention, and Poor Performance

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the marginal representation of students from SC/ST is, even today, a reality and it is an indicator of unequal educational opportunities. In other words, the reach of the higher education system is not commensurate with the national goal of equality. The analysis of the reasons for poor access and retention and the resultant educational backwardness among the SC/STs mainly relate to their school education (Chanana 1993: 144). For instance, the single most important factor at the school level is the absence of schools in areas which are accessible to SCs and STs. However, in recent years, there has been a thrust on more effective coverage of areas where there is a concentration of SCs and STs and those areas which create more problems for women (such as hilly and remote areas) in the primary and secondary education programs in order to provide equal opportunity and access.

It may also be noted that higher education in India is urban based. Those who spent most of their life in urban areas, namely, towns and cities, are the overwhelming majority in higher education. The major portion of SC/ST students in the general higher educational institutions are from the rural background and are first generation learners or beneficiaries of higher education. Their parental occupations and education is generally low and are often engaged in wage earning agricultural labor or artisanship. Therefore, poverty and lack of economic resources in the family and the utility of extra hands to eke out a living, to some extent, affect the educational chances of the SC/ST.

The quality of feeder streams of education is also an important factor so far as the access of SCs and STs to higher educational institutions is concerned. The quality of schooling that most SC and ST students get is vastly inferior to the schooling available to the class of children who find their way into the prestigious courses and institutions (Chitnis 1988: 161). In recent times, efforts have been made to upgrade the merit of SC and ST students by setting up residential schools. Those students who are selected under this scheme are provided extra coaching both remedial and special with a view to remove their social and educational deficiencies. Remedial coaching is provided in subjects

such as language, mathematics and science whereas the special coaching is provided as per the requirement of the competence to be attained by the student for passing the entrance examinations conducted by various higher educational institutions.

SC/ST students in the professional colleges and institutions are found to be from families with middle or higher occupational status. This gives rise to the argument that the professional educational institutions are socially exclusive and that they are accessible to the social groups occupying top positions in the social class hierarchy. The reasons for poor access and retention of SC/ST students in higher education are also the cause of their poor performance level. The differences in the performance levels of SC/ST and non-SC/ST students may be observed right from their entry into the institution either through an examination or through percentage of marks in the previous courses of study. The case of central universities and Indian Institutes of Technology is a very good illustration. About two-thirds of the marks obtained by the last candidate in general category is judged as a cut-off for SC/ST candidates to get selected to the IIT system. The performance differential between SC/ST and non-SC/ST candidates in the case of IITs is sometimes 40 percent at the time of entry. Such a large divergence in entry performance has brought into the institutions a significant number of academically deficient students who have considerable difficulty in coping with the system in spite of remedial measures (Indiresan and Nigam 1993, 357-58). The reason for poor performance, however, need not necessarily be entry level differential. It could also be due to certain institutional factors such as exclusion and discrimination within the institutions as well (Rao, 2006). Further, of those admitted, almost 25 per cent are asked to leave the institutes due to their poor academic performance. The Twenty Sixth Report of the Commissioner for SC/ST (1978:39) brings out this drawback in the system: "It is reported from various studies that the performance of these (SC/ST) students after admission was not very satisfactory. Even after the special coaching, several students left the courses and a number of them could not withstand the strain of a five year course".

One of the major considerations for the weaker sections is the preparation of a separate All India Merit List for the SC/STs, so as to ensure that adequate number of students from these sections get admission. A further concession being made is a preparatory course for academically weak students from these groups who do not even make the grade even with the reduced cut-off level. Once the students SC/ST take admission to these institutions, the differential is narrowed with various institutional strategies such as faculty advisor, remedial coaching, seniors as counselors, summer-term programs, etc. In some cases, however, the performance levels are not bridged to the extent that the reserved category student can acquire the required credits to get promoted to the next class. In spite of the facilities of extra semesters to the reserved category students, there are instances of students either leaving the institutions without completing a course or dropping out of the course.

Kirpal and Gupta(1999) in the course research on the issue of academic performance of SC/ST students and its linkages with socio-economic background, educational background, deficiencies in English, noted that SC and ST students feel segregated and delinked from the mainstream on account of their lacking upper class and upper caste characteristics and because they do not feel financially on par with the others. On the other hand, they also are not able to develop academically to the standards expected in the institutions. They feel helpless and demotivated and that contributes to the divide on the academic front. It is the social divide that seems to affect them deeply.

The discussion on quantitative expansion and access reveals that the higher education is still not accessible to a large proportion of socially disadvantaged sections such as SC/STs. The actual enrollment of SCs varies from faculty to

faculty and even department to department in the same institution. It may also be noted that the policy of reservation is implemented more effectively in some courses/subjects of study and in some other it is not. This dichotomy is clear in recruitment of faculty in the disciplines of arts/commerce as against engineering/medicine. It is often explained in terms of the lack of students applying for professional courses compared to general courses, enabling colleges/institutions to evade their social responsibility. This may not be acceptable since reservations are determined according to the population of SCs and STs in the region or state, and the task is to cover these sections as early as possible to help them to achieve upward mobility. It would also be imperative on a nation which is committed to the ideals of social justice and equality.

The problems of access, retention and performance have, therefore, to do with their socialization into the general pattern of an education system. Sometimes, the caste prejudices also affect their decision to enter and stay on in the institutions of higher education (Chitnis 1988: 163). Several Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes students are not adequately equipped to cope with the academic pressure and competitive climate of the institutions. Further, these students are the ones who would not, but for the policy of reservations, have found their way in.

Reflection and Action 13.2

In your opinion, should the government continue with the policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action in education? Debate with your co-learners at the study centre.

13.6 Conclusion

In this context, where do we place the educational advancement of the SCs and STs in India? As discussed earlier, the participation of SCs and STs in the sectors contributing to the emergence of a 'knowledge society', namely, electronics, information technology, software development, etc., is likely to be very low or even negligible because these courses are offered either in self-financing private institutions or in the elite institutions of technology and management which are out of reach for these students. The bulk of the courses and employment in these fields is not covered under the Constitutional scheme of reservations and lie mostly in the private sector. The job scenario is also shifting to the private sector as a result of the reduction in the number of jobs now available in the government. Therefore the large number of SC/ST students graduating in liberal arts, commerce and sciences without a basic understanding of information technology will prove redundant to the job market. Today the question is not the question of exploitation of some segments by others. The problem today is one of exclusion because these sections become invisible as they cannot participate in a 'knowledge society'. The priority of the affirmative action policy is, therefore, how to include the SCs and STs, who have fallen out of the system of 'knowledge society', where key assets are information and know-how.

Yet another dimension which is crucial in the context of an emerging society is what will happen to the social stigma that is attached to these castes despite their advancement in terms of social class, wealth and power. It has been the experience in this country that increasing levels of education have not really changed much the attitudes of hatred and discrimination in the minds of the so-called 'upper castes'. An SC officer is not simply referred to as an officer by his position or by his name, but by his ascriptive status, no matter how brilliant he is at his job! Even at the village level, their being educated is seen not as a positive sign of the development of the marginal groups, but seen as a negation of the traditional authority of the upper castes.

Some manifestations of the conflict do occur in contemporary India in the form of agitations, protests, struggles and sometimes violent incidents. Some of the massacres of disadvantaged groups by the upper castes and instances of retaliation by the disadvantaged groups against the upper castes reflect the growing caste consciousness, identity and hatred towards each other rather than understanding the diversity in a positive manner with a concern for the deprived groups. Vindictive attitude on the part of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, taking recourse to the law for every act of omission and commission, also sometimes vitiates the trust among each other. Will the emerging 'knowledge society' contribute to the emergence of a more 'just' and 'civil' society or will it further widen the 'gap' between both the groups, the oppressors and the oppressed, is a question to be debated and answered by the policy-makers in twenty-first century India.

One of the factors which the policy has not addressed so far and which needs to be addressed before we embark upon a new direction and future of affirmative action policy is the levels of social, economic and educational deprivations within the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The deprivations differ across region, sub-caste, tribe, and gender. It may not be feasible to have a uniform policy across the country because of the varied conditions, diversity and attitudes prevalent in different regions/states. There is, therefore, a need for evolving indicators so that the facilities reserved for these communities are not utilized by a particular stratum among these communities denying benefit to several others who are not so articulate and knowledgeable. There is an urgent need to identify these neglected groups among the SC/STs and educational supports may be extended comprehensively right from the lowest levels of the educational ladder, i.e., primary and secondary schools, and also particularly given to the first generation learners among the SC/ST and women. Even in the context of bringing them into the fold of 'knowledge society', the feeder streams to higher education need to be strengthened and given impetus.

Another important policy issue is that of developing mechanisms for socio-psychological integration of the SC/ST students in order to enhance their self-confidence and self-esteem to take on the challenges of adjusting to the climates of higher educational institutions so that the problems of dropping and non-performance could be tackled. Therefore, greater emphasis can be placed on the basic structural changes in the economy and society through the formulation of an affirmative action policy suiting the requirements of the future. If attempts are not made to arrest inequality that continues to increase in the country, maximum damage will occur only to the members of these castes/tribes because their condition is already bad. These attempts may pave the way for at least the 21st century India emerging as an egalitarian civil democracy in which each one has a role to play in the development process and social cohesion.

The material in this unit is heavily drawn from the author's article, 'Equality in Higher Education: Impact of affirmative Action Policies in India'. In Edgar F. Beckham (ed.). 2002, *Global Collaborations: The Role of Higher Education in Diverse Democracies*, Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC & U), Washington D.C.

13.7 Further Reading

Chanana, Karuna. 1993. "Accessing Higher Education - The Dilemma of Schooling: Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes in Contemporary India". In Chitnis, Suma and Philip Altbach (eds.). *Higher Education Reform in India : Experience and Perspectives*. New Delhi : Sage Publications

Chitnis, Suma. 1972. Education for Equality: Case of Scheduled Castes in Higher Education. *Economic and Political Weekly*, August, Special Number

Chitnis, Suma. 1988. "Educating the Weaker Sections of Society". In Singh, Amrik and Philip Altbach . (eds.). *Higher Education in India : The Social Context*. New Delhi : Konark Publishers