



EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: EDUCATION

DATE: 28.12.2024

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Financial Barriers in Accessing Education for Marginalised Communities

- Marginalised students, especially from Dalit and underprivileged backgrounds, face significant financial barriers due to rising tuition fees and caste-based discrimination, limiting their access to quality education.
- Despite competitive ranks, many deserving students from these communities are unable to afford education in prestigious institutions like IITs and IIMs.

Supreme Court's Role in Supporting Marginalised Students

- The Supreme Court intervened in the case of Atul Kumar, a Scheduled Caste student, who lost his seat at IIT Dhanbad due to an inability to pay the ₹17,500 seat booking fee.
- The Court's action under Article 142 ensured his admission, bringing attention to the financial hurdles faced by many marginalised students.

Impact of Rising Tuition Fees on Access to Education

- Fees in premier institutions like IITs and IIMs have surged significantly, with IIT undergraduate fees increasing by 200% in 2016.
- Such fee hikes make higher education unaffordable for many students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, despite government scholarship schemes like Vidyalakshmi.

Challenges Faced by Marginalised Students in Education

- The escalating cost of education disproportionately affects marginalised communities, preventing them from accessing quality education even with competitive exam results.
- Financial pressure has led to a tragic rise in student suicides, with 122 such cases reported between 2014 and 2021 in IITs and IIMs, along with high dropout rates.

Student Dropout Trends Due to Financial Constraints

- Many students drop out due to the inability to manage the financial burden of education.
- Between 2017 and 2018, 2,461 students left IITs, and over 13,500 SC, ST, and OBC students dropped out of central universities, IITs, and IIMs over five years.



Caste-Based Discrimination in Education and Employment

- Dalit students continue to face systemic caste-based discrimination, often relegated to lower-paying jobs and facing barriers in securing employment.
- The underrepresentation of SC, ST, and OBC faculty members in prestigious institutions and the dominance of upper-caste faculty further deepens these inequalities.

Social and Emotional Struggles of Dalit Students

- Despite constitutional protections, Dalit students face prejudice, isolation, and emotional distress, sometimes resulting in suicides.
- Institutions like IIT Bombay and medical colleges have been criticized for their casteist practices, contributing to the marginalisation of Dalit students.

Employment Barriers for Marginalised Graduates

- High unemployment rates, combined with caste-based challenges, create additional hurdles for marginalised students in securing employment after graduation.
- In 2024, 38% of IIT graduates, including those from marginalised communities, remained unplaced, underlining the challenges faced in the job market.

Conclusion: Need for Reform in Education and Employment Systems

- Addressing the financial, caste-based, and employment-related barriers is essential for fostering equitable access to education and job opportunities for marginalised students.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/marginalised-by-caste-marginalised-in-education/article69034291.ece>