# Education for Marginalised Communities

> **Mains (GS II) – *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education.***

## Why in news?

Oxfam's latest reports reveal that India's economic growth has been accompanied by widening inequality.

## What is the educational status of marginalized communities?

- Students from marginalised communities across India faces systemic barriers in their pursuit of education.
- **Skewed early childhood education** – As per ASER 2023, only 42.5% of SC/ST children aged 3–5 attend any form of preschool.
- Learning gap - As per ASER 2023 data, in rural areas only 43% of std V students can read an std II level text and only 25.6% of children in std V can solve a subtraction problem.
- **Low GER in higher education** - SC and ST student GERs remain lower at ***27.2% and 25.8%, compared to national average.***
- **Underrepresented in premier institutions** – Marginalized communities doesn't make adequate representation in premier institutions like IIT particularly at higher levels like PhD programs and faculty positions.
    - SC students make up only 10% of PhD enrolments
    - ST students 2%
    - Some institutes having no SC/ST faculty

> *Recent RTI Data shows that over 90% of professors in these institutions come from upper-caste backgrounds.*

- **Lack of inclusiveness** – Disabled children rarely complete primary school, and nearly half of the disabled people are still illiterate.

## What are the challenges faced by students from marginalised community?

- **Inadequate rural infrastructure** – Government schools in rural areas and urban slums lack basic infrastructure, qualified teachers, and proper learning materials.
- **Economic barriers** – Costly coaching programs to competitive exams like JEE, NEET,

and UPSC are unaffordable for most rural and low-income families, effectively locking them out of top institutions.
- Those who manage to qualify, face financial burden of travel, accommodation, and fees when moving from villages to urban centres.
- **Cultural and social exclusion** – Marginalized students face mockery of their accents, clothes, and food habits in urban institutions.
- It creates a psychological burden that makes them feel like outsiders in their own country, leading to drop out.
- **Myth of merit –** The concept of "merit" in exams and admissions ignores unequal starting points, privileges, opportunities and both are judged by the same yardstick.
- **Language disadvantage** – Students educated in regional languages face barrier in higher education and employments.
- **Stigma of reservations** – Reserved category students who clear exams are often labelled as quota students, and they're treated as lesser than their peers, undermining their confidence.
- **Discrimination** – Marginalized students face social exclusion, microaggressions, and casteism, such as segregated hostel rooms or dining tables, taking a mental toll that leads many to abandon their studies.
- **Unequal employment opportunities** – Even after graduation, caste networks determine access to opportunities, leaving marginalized students at a disadvantage despite their qualifications.

## What are the reforms required for equitable education for marginalized students?

- **Redefining merit system** – The merit system needs to be redefined to account for the unequal playing field.
- **Strengthening and expanding reservation** – The reservation could be followed strictly for SC, ST, and OBC representation in faculty and administrative roles in IITs.
- **Building robust support systems** – Top institutions needs to establish mandatory mentorship programs for marginalized students to bridge gaps in preparation and free mental health services to address the discrimination.
- **Improving public school infrastructure** – Increasing funding for government schools in rural areas and urban slums to make adequate facilities for marginalised students.
- **Challenge cultural exclusion** –zero-tolerance policies needs to be ensured for caste-based discrimination.
- Awareness campaigns and diversity training could also reduce mockery and foster inclusion.
- **Make competitive exams accessible** – It can be achieved by subsidizing coaching for exams like JEE and NEET for low-income students.
- By creating free, high-quality online preparatory resources in regional languages to level the playing field.

## Reference

[The Hindu| Indian Education System Failed Marginal Communities]



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
*Information is Empowering*