

## **Evaluating the impact of conditional cash transfers on marginalized high school students in Delhi, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Bihar**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*For a country like India with a large demographic dividend, it is important that its children receive ample opportunity to grow, learn and earn, thus, adding to the GDP growth of the economy. This can only be achieved when the marginalized children namely under the SC/ST/OBC/EWS are given the same level and opportunity of learning that the rest of the children and the country receive. This paper analyses, studies and compares the financial incentive and scheme that are being imparted to marginalized children from Delhi, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. What is the level of achievement that has been attained by these states with respect to these children? Which states have achieved near universal education and why? What are the problems that are being faced by the laggard states? Learning from the states that have achieved universal education and addressing these issues through the New Education Policy (2020).*

**Keywords:** Marginalized Children, Conditional Cash Transfers, Education Policy (NEP 2020), Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Right to Education Act (RTE), Reservation Policy, Literacy Rates, Government Schemes

### **1. Introduction**

Marginalized children are those who are neglected and segregated from others in society. They are not taken care of by others and treated inhumanly. They are deprived of their economic status. They may be excluded due to race, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, language, physical disabilities among many.

The World Health Organization defined "Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and emotional ill-treatment,

sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power" [1]

These children often face varying degrees of disadvantages with respect to the opportunities in education and job applications. Some children have no access to education. The few who do get access are often treated poorly by others and picked on by children of a much more dominant race, caste or language.

However, the state of marginalized children in India is improving due to the immense contributions of the Government of India and CSR activities under taken by corporations. Multiple rules and regulations were implemented by the government of India to help marginalized children obtain education and make it easier for members of marginalized groups to apply and be selected for jobs.

It was made mandatory for marginalized children of the age group 6-14 to attend school and have access to food, shelter and healthcare under the Right to Education Act (RTE) [2]. The Government of India has also implemented a law that prohibits the use of child labour.

The changes implemented by the Government of India are slowly reforming the people of India and reducing the discrimination faced by marginalized sections of society. However, India still has a long way to go. There still exist many funding constraints and coordination issues between NGOs and the Government. There also exist lack of awareness and many marginalized people are oblivious to the schemes offered by the Government to help them move up from their present status.

## **2. History, Theoretical Background, and Laws implemented for Marginalized Society in India**

### **2.1 History of Marginalized Society in India**

Marginalization has been prevalent in India for more than 400 years. Various types of discrimination had been practiced in India throughout this period – the most common amongst them being “untouchability” against Dalits (earlier known as Shudras). It is a concept that has been long practiced in India, even before the British Raj under the caste system. The caste system divided the society into four major categories namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. This was a system whereby the occupation of the people was divided according to the caste they belonged. For example, the Brahmins were pandits who worked in temples and were the most learned category. Their mastery over Sanskrit and various Vedas gave them the benefit of superiority amongst all others. The Kshatriyas came next – also known as the warrior

clan. They were equally important as territorial wars were immense during that time amongst the various Maharajas. Most of these Rajas were occupied in protecting their territory or else usurping other territories, the Vaishyas were given the task of agriculture and farming such that they could provide adequate food and nourishment for the citizens of the province, the Shudras, on the other hand, were that sections of the society which were given the lowliest tasks to be performed – including collection of garbage, cleaning of toilets among others. It was very difficult for them to move upwards on this existing hierarchy, though there were certain possibilities through “Sanskritization.” This meant that learning of Sanskrit would give the individual the power to change his caste. The British Raj only intensified this stratification in an effort to rule India through their divide and rule strategy.

Many visionaries such as Mahatma Gandhi favourably advocated “untouchables” and viewed them as “Harijans” – or children of God. Mahatma Gandhi would walk alongside them and even indulge in tasks which were forced upon to them. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar – also a Dalit – had emerged as a powerful advocate. Ambedkar’s political activism allowed the voices of the Dalit community be heard. Dr. BR Ambedkar was the first Dalit to graduate out of a high school in Bombay. After graduation, Ambedkar spent 3 years (from 1913-1916) in Columbia University, USA where he earned an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Economics. Immediately after which, he attended London School of Economics where he earned a M.Sc. and a D.Sc. in Economics.

Ambedkar believed that the Caste System, prevalent in India at the time, was the root cause of social injustice in India. Ambedkar framed the constitution in such a manner that everyone was treated fairly. He abolished untouchability through Article 17 in the Indian Constitution. Article 14 and 15 were also added to the constitution which state the idea of equality before law and prohibition of discrimination. He also suggested reservation policies to enable socially backward people to have a fair chance at education and job selections.

After independence in 1947, the Constitution of India was adopted in 1950 – whose main architect was Dr. Ambedkar. Its main features were:

1. Abolished untouchability (Article 17)
2. Guaranteed fundamental rights and equality before the law
3. Introduced a system of affirmative action, commonly known as "reservations." This was also further fructified by the Mandal Commission. The Mandal Commission was established on January 1, 1979, whose efforts were led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai. Its aim was to identify socially and educationally backward classes and recommend measures for their growth. [3]

These policies were designed to ensure representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in educational institutions, government employment, and legislative bodies, aiming to rectify historical disadvantages and promote social inclusion. Later, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) as also Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) were also included in the reservation framework. The Supreme Court had advocated that the total reservations for the economy should at no point of time increase beyond 50%.

Despite these progressive constitutional provisions and decades of implementation, the path to true equality remains challenging. Dalits and Adivasis continue to confront discrimination, violence, and significant socio-economic disparities, particularly in rural areas where traditional hierarchies often persist. The benefits of reservations, while impactful for many, have not uniformly reached all sections within these vast communities, leading to debates about their effectiveness and implementation. The ongoing efforts involve not just legal frameworks but also sustained social movements, public awareness campaigns, and policy reforms aimed at fostering a genuinely inclusive and harmonious society.

## **2.2 How has India defined its marginalized society**

India has divided its marginal society into various smaller units. They are Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Classes, Economically Weaker Section among others.

Scheduled caste includes people who are subject to extreme social and economic discrimination due to their caste. This category also involves people subject to “Untouchability” and “Dalits.”

Scheduled Tribes are indigenous and tribal communities who are geographically isolated and are economically backward. Due to deforestation were left homeless. They survived on the produce of the forest. When their livelihood was taken away from them, it was taken upon by the government to provide for their livelihood as well as inclusion in mainstream society. It was essential that the government made efforts to uplift all the “tribes” by ensuring equal opportunities to educate themselves and help them obtain jobs for their livelihood.

Other Backward Classes include people that are economically and socially backward but do not qualify under Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.

Economically Weaker Sections include economically challenged people of the General Category. EWS are the people who come under general category but whose income is less than Rs. 8 lakhs per annum.

Many other categories also exist such as religious minorities, disabled people among many others.

### **2.3 Laws implemented to address marginalized discrimination**

Several articles in the constitution have been implemented by the government of India, along with various laws and initiative, to address marginalized discrimination. They are as follows:

Article 14 and 15: These articles guarantee equality before the law and prohibit discrimination based on various grounds like race, sex, caste etc.

Article 17: This article abolishes untouchability. This ensures that Dalits are able to access education, public facilities and temples.

Article 46: This article mandates the state to promote the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, particularly SCs and STs, and protect them from social injustice.

Article 39A: This article of the constitution emphasizes free legal aid and access to justice for the economically and otherwise disadvantaged people. [3]

### **2.4 Laws specifically for school going children**

Several articles in the constitution have been implemented by the government of India, along with various laws and initiative, to help school going children whose parents and, thus them, fall under SC/ST/OBC/EWS categories. They are as follows: -

Article 15(4) empowers the state to make provisions for the advancement of socially and economically backward classes. They have the right to reserve seats for children in this category in all educational institutions. The maximum percentage of reservations is 15% for SCs, 7.5% for STs, and 27% for OBCs. For Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), there is a separate 10% reservation, which doesn't violate the 50% ceiling placed on reservations for SC, ST and OBC in government schools, colleges, and jobs. These reservations were introduced in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Constitution (amendment) Act, 2019 by amending articles 15 and 16. It was enacted to promote the welfare of the poor who were not covered by the 50% reservation policy for SC, ST and OBC.

Article 15(5) is especially concerned with the marginalized groups mentioned above gaining access to educational opportunities. The educational institutions include all government, private un-aided and aided institutions but excludes minority educational institutions.

The Right to Education Act, 2009, mandates all educational institutions to provide right to free and have a 25% reservation for EWS children. [3]

### **3. Research Gap**

This paper specifically looks at the

1. Effectiveness of various financial and other schemes that have been adopted over time by the government in enabling the upliftment of marginalized sections particularly the SC and ST sections of society and more so of children in the form of educating them, across different states in India.
2. Have these schemes helped the children obtain some type of equal opportunities with the others.
3. Which are the specific schemes across states that have achieved near universality of equal opportunity.

### **4. Methodology**

The methodology adopted would be of the mixed method type that would include both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative methods would depend on secondary data from authentic resources to analyse the impact of policy measures adopted by various states in India and their achievements. This data would be presented in tabular and graphical format to bring out the differences in the achievements by various states and in various categories.

### **5. Data Analysis**

The Right to Education Act, 2009 makes it mandatory for private aided and non-aided institutions to provide free and compulsory education to marginalized children. It also states that the government shall reimburse the private schools for the expenditure incurred in providing free and compulsory elementary education to them. Marginalized children here only include EWS and not SC/ST/OBC. Moreover, this act makes it mandatory for children from 6-14 years of age. The reservation, however, for SC/ST/OBC is present in state and centrally funded colleges and universities. A reservation cap has been placed at 50% of the total seats – 15% seats are reserved for SC, 7.5% for ST, 27% for OBC –to enable each and every candidate get selected. On top of this, EWS gets another 10% reservation which does not violate the 50% cap implemented by the government.

#### **5.1 Status of EWS category of children in Delhi**

From 2018-19 onwards till 2022-23, the number of recognized schools in Delhi which included government and government-aided schools along with their enrolment numbers are indicated in the table below.

**Table 1: EWS children in government, government-aided and un-aided schools in Delhi**

Year	Number of Schools	Number of government and government-aided schools	Number of un-aided private schools	Number of children from EWS in un-aided schools
2018-19	5726	1229	4497	32455
2019-20	5691	1230	4461	35962
2020-21	5666	1231	4435	35275
2021-22	5619	1250	4369	32406
2022-23	5488	1240	4248	31111

Source: Economic Survey of Delhi from 2019 onwards [4]

### 5.2 Status of EWS category of children in Kerala

From 2018-19 onwards till 2022-23, the number of recognized schools in Kerala which included government and government-aided schools along with their enrolment numbers are indicated in the table below.

**Table 2: Total number of government, government-aided and private un-aided schools**

Year	Number of government schools	Number of government-aided schools	Number of un-aided private schools	Total reserved seats for EWS	Percentage of Seats filled under EWS category
2018-19	4695	7216	1050	-	-
2019-20	4693	7216	1042	-	-
2020-21	4697	7214	1075	-	-
2021-22	4697	7212	1063	-	-
2022-23	4698	7210	1051	401407	95%

Source: Economic Survey of Kerala from 2019 onwards [5]

**5.3 Status of EWS category of children in Himachal Pradesh**

From 2018-19 onwards till 2022-23, the number of recognized schools in Himachal Pradesh which included government and government-aided schools along with their enrolment numbers are indicated in the table below.

**Table 3: Number of government run elementary schools and reservation quota for EWS**

Year	Number of government primary schools	Number of government middle schools	Number of children admitted under RTE
2018-19	10716	2049	100
2019-20	10723	2029	97
2020-21	10734	2022	143
2021-22	10758	1965	155
2022-23	9943	1786	157

**Source:** Economic Survey of Himachal Pradesh from 2019 onwards [6], UDISE+ [7], Sansad [8]

Himachal Pradesh has managed to achieve a high rate of literacy levels of all its citizens including SC/ST/EWS with the implementation of policies advanced by the center as well as those of their own. It is a remarkable achievement for the state which was a lagged one as compared to Kerala.

**5.4 Status of EWS category of children in Uttar Pradesh**

From 2018-19 onwards till 2022-23, the number of recognized schools in Uttar Pradesh which included government and government-aided schools along with their enrolment numbers are indicated in the table below.

**Table 4: Number of government schools and number of children enrolled under RTE 2009 in private schools**

Year	Number of government schools	Number of children enrolled under RTE
2018-19	161565	72428
2019-20	136058	118719

2020-21	-	198072
2021-22	135426	250292
2022-23	-	296283

Source: UDISE+ [7], Sansad [8]

### 5.5 Status of EWS category of children in Bihar

From 2018-19 onwards till 2022-23, the number of recognized schools in Bihar which included government and government-aided schools along with their enrolment numbers are indicated in the table below.

**Table 5: Number of government schools and number of children admitted under RTE**

Year	Number of children admitted under RTE	Number of Government Schools
2018-19	225597	72472
2019-20	276792	72445
2020-21	295807	75387
2021-22	345667	-
2022-23	367453	-

Source: Sansad [8], UDISE+ [7]

Bihar might have shown some improvement in implementing policies that have been initiated by the centre as well as their own stage policies but the impact has not been at the same level as that of Himachal Pradesh.

## 6. Lessons learnt from the above analysis

### 6.1 Kerala

States like Kerala are already way ahead in terms of education irrespective of gender and caste. Their base for education was already very high at the time of independence as compared to the rest of the country. Universal education was achieved through

- Decentralized decision-making
- Universal education irrespective of caste and religion

- Community involvement
- Heavy state expenditure on education in spite of central projects
- Emphasis on primary education and the girl child.

These measures have ensured that education reached all sections of society, contributing to Kerala's long-standing success in this field.

Comparison of Kerala's achievement in literacy levels overtime

Year	Kerala	All India
1947	47.18%	12%
1990	70.42%	52.21%
1991	89.81%	52.21%
2001	90.9%	65.38%
2011	94%	74.04%

**Source:** Census of India [9]

The table above reiterates the fact that Kerala was unique in the manner in which they achieved universal education as at the time of independence they were way ahead of the national average. This gap continued to exist over the years eventually reaching 95% literacy rate for its citizens in the last Census of 2011.

## **6.2 Himachal Pradesh**

This state is unique in the manner in which it achieved universality in education in spite of being one of the laggards at the time of independence.

Comparison of Himachal Pradesh's achievement in literacy levels overtime

Year	Himachal Pradesh	All India
1947	7%	12%
1990	63.86%	52.21%
1991	63.86%	52.21%
2001	76.48%	65.38%
2011	82.80%	74.04%

**Source:** Census of India [9]

The table above indicates the progress that Himachal has made in terms of universality of education. They started at the level of 7%, way below the national average, reaching 82.80%, way above the national average in 2011 according to the Census of India. Not only have they achieved near universal education but they also have achieved higher GDP growth over the years resulting in limited migration from the state to other states. Recently, in the year 2025, they have been declared as the 4<sup>th</sup> state to be completely literate. The reasons for this achievement are

- Decentralized decision-making to district levels as they understood the problems of their people.
- The school year was decided on the agricultural cycle so that all children could attend and working on fields could not be used as an excuse.
- Home schooling was available for children who were not able to attend schools for whatever reasons.
- Special emphasis was given on SC/ST/EWS and the girl child.
- There was active involvement of parents along with officials and panchayats to ensure universal education.
- The state also ensured safe buildings, adequate number of teachers, proper toilets, and other basic infrastructure.
- The government ensured employment generation after passing out from school.

Himachal Pradesh introduced skill-oriented education along with regular learning to ensure employment of its citizens.

### **6.3 Comparison of the above states with UP and Bihar (Laggard States)**

Comparison of Uttar Pradesh's achievement in literacy levels overtime

Year	Uttar Pradesh	All India
1947	12.02%	12%
1990	40.71%	52.21%
1991	40.71%	52.21%
2001	56.27%	65.38%
2011	67.68%	74.04%

**Source:** Census of India [9]

The above table indicates that in spite of 64 years of independence (till 2011) Uttar Pradesh has lagged behind the national average. The reasons for this are stated below

- Low allocation of the state budget to education.
- Lack of infrastructure such as insufficient teachers and lack of toilet facilities.
- Lack of decentralization in decision making
- Lack of implementation of policies advocated by the centre
- Inadequate allocation of the state budget towards education.

The state continues to harbour the disparities that exist with respect to region, caste, religion, and gender and neither has it been able to address the inadequate facilities for the girl child. This has resulted in a large section of students not attending school or that those enrolling in large numbers drop out of the education system once they pass the primary stage. All this has resulted in state's GDP being lower than the national average. The policy measures followed by the state are unlike what Kerala and Himachal have been following.

### **6.4 Bihar**

Comparison of Bihar's achievement in literacy levels overtime

Year	Bihar	All India
1947	13.49%	12%
1990	37.49%	52.21%
1991	37.49%	52.21%
2001	47%	65.38%
2011	61.80%	74.04%

**Source:** Census of India [9]

The problem in Bihar is very similar to that of Uttar Pradesh. The main reasons for this are

- Lack of infrastructure
- Lack of toilets
- Lack of teachers.
- All decisions are centralized

- Lack of adequate funds in the state budget for education
- Inadequate implementation of schemes by the centre

The state has not been able to address the socio-economic issues with respect to caste, religion, and gender. They have in fact perpetuated the poverty levels within the SC/ST/EWS. Neglect of the girl child has resulted in reduction in the states GDP. The huge socio-economic caste divide has not been addressed overtime. The enrolment rate may have increased but the dropout rate is high and the retention rate is low.

### **7. Policy Measures advocated by the State and Centre with Specific Reference to SC/ST/OBC/EWS Children**

At the national level, the Government of India has established the foundation for safeguarding and promoting the rights of marginalized children through various schemes and legislation.

- The Right to Education Act (2009) ensures free and compulsory education for children in the age group of 6–14, with 25% reservation of seats in private schools for economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups.
- The *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* consolidates school education from pre-primary to Class XII and lays special focus on inclusive education, with home-based learning and support for children with special needs.
- Nutritional support is guaranteed through *PM POSHAN* (previously *Mid-Day Meal*)
- Protection and alternative care for vulnerable children is ensured through *Mission Vatsalya* and *The Juvenile Justice Act*.
- *The National Education Policy* (2020) recognizes socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) as a priority and instructs states to formulate targeted inclusion strategies.
- The central *PENCIL* portal coordinates the implementation of the *Child Labour Amendment Act*, facilitating rescue and rehabilitation efforts.

#### **7.1 Delhi**

The government in the capital has established a strong system for EWS, Disadvantaged Groups (DG), and Children with Special Needs (CWSN) admissions in private schools, where applications are processed online and seats are assigned through transparent lotteries. The state

has also initiated *Mission Buniyaad and Chunauti*, which aim to bridge learning gaps in literacy and numeracy among marginalized children, including those who have fallen behind or are out of school. Supplementary classes, summer camps, and targeted training centres ensure that disadvantaged students are brought back into the mainstream.

## **7.2 Kerala**

The state has experimented with localized and inclusive interventions. *Project Roshni* offers language support and integration assistance to children of migrant workers, ensuring that linguistic differences do not result in exclusion or dropout. For children who have lost one or both parents, the *Snehapoorvam scheme* provides financial support to facilitate continued schooling. These interventions fall under the larger umbrella of the *Kerala Social Security Mission*, which oversees multiple child-centred welfare schemes with a focus on orphans, semi-orphans, and other vulnerable categories.

## **7.3 Himachal Pradesh**

This state has concentrated specifically on gender equity and inclusion. The *Beti Hai Anmol scheme* offers cash incentives to girls from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families to promote enrolment and retention in schools. In addition to this, the state has the inclusive education aspect of *Samagra Shiksha*, ensuring children with special needs receive access to medical camps, assistive devices, and individualized support from pre-primary to higher secondary education.

## **7.4 Uttar Pradesh**

The state has integrated large-scale learning missions with focused social welfare schemes. Through *Mission Prerna* and the state's adoption of *NIPUN Bharat*, foundational literacy and numeracy are being emphasized, with remedial learning materials and teacher mentoring to assist children from disadvantaged groups. Concurrently with this, the *School Chalo Abhiyan* runs enrolment drives to bring back out-of-school children. The *Kanya Sumangala scheme* offers conditional cash transfers to assist girls' education at various stages, while the *Mukhyamantri Bal Seva Yojana* ensures educational and financial assistance for children orphaned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **7.5 Bihar**

It has made significant investments in schemes that directly lower barriers to access. The *Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana* and its extension to boys offer bicycles to allow rural children to travel to far-off secondary schools safely and economically. Uniform grants under the

*Mukhyamantri Poshak Yojana* and cash incentives through *Balika Protsahan* incentivize girls to remain in school and pursue higher levels of education. The state also operates residential hostels and facilities for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) children, with the aim of providing a supportive environment for first-generation learners and children from remote areas.

## **8. Limitations**

The main issues that were faced in bringing out the aid provided to the marginalized children was the lack of data for each scheme across schools. The progress was monitored in the format of complete literacy of the state, but there were other issues like compatibility and adjustment of these children in regular school for which data is not available. There are also issues with respect to the government paying on time and the whole amount to private un-aided schools in implementing the EWS mandate with respect to tuition, fees, books, and uniforms. This tends to undermine the spirit under which these programs are being implemented.

## **9. Conclusion**

An in-depth analysis of the extent of schemes that have been adopted by the centre and state clearly indicate the objective of bringing marginalized children primarily from SC/ST/OBC/EWS and physically challenged into mainstream education, such that they have the same opportunities as the rest of the children. Their status should not be an hinderance to their ability to earn and grow in life. Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are prime examples of the role of education in the development of the state. Kerala started with an advantage of already having the highest literacy compared to the rest of the country at the time of independence. They continued on this path and have till date achieved close to 100% literacy rate. This was achieved by specific implementation of both state and central schemes.

The surprise development was in the case of Himachal Pradesh which started at a below par literacy level at the time of independence but has achieved 100% literacy rates as of date (2025). This feat has been achieved by understanding specific problems that the marginalized face and addressing them through state funds. They have also used centrally aided projects effectively.

Delhi in-spite of being the capital has made great strides in bringing the marginalized children into mainstream education but has not been able to achieve the same levels as Kerala and Himachal Pradesh. In recent years, Delhi tried to improve the status of government schools by addressing issues like infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, lack of teachers, improving teacher professionalism, and involvement of parents in addressing issues which may be faced by the children (through Parent-Teacher Meetings). This has definitely improved the status of all children, specially the marginalized.

The problem states still remain Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where there is inadequate implementation of the central schemes and not much thought has been given in addressing the issues that are peculiar to the state. Greater emphasis has to be provided in the form of higher allocation of the state budget towards education, better implementation of the central schemes, and specific schemes for laggard districts. These states can study and learn from the Kerala, Himachal and Delhi model to improve the plight of the marginalized such that they are on an equal footing to compete for opportunities as the rest of the citizens of the state.

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