

A Comparative Study of Scheduled Tribe Enrollment in Universities and Degree Colleges in Telangana

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According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), Scheduled Tribe (ST) students constitute approximately 10–12 percent of total higher education enrollment in Telangana, which remains below their population share in the state. This disparity suggests that, despite constitutional provisions and welfare-oriented interventions, higher education participation among tribal communities has not yet achieved proportional inclusion. The gap is particularly pronounced at postgraduate and research levels, indicating the persistence of structural, socio-economic, and institutional barriers. AISHE data further indicate that nearly 75 percent of ST students are enrolled in degree colleges, predominantly in government and aided institutions located in rural and semi-urban regions. Greater accessibility, relatively lower admission competition, availability of undergraduate programs, and supportive measures such as hostels and fee reimbursement have made degree colleges the principal entry point into higher education for Scheduled Tribe students in Telangana.

In contrast, universities account for a comparatively smaller share of ST enrollment. Centralized admission procedures, competitive entrance examinations, urban campus settings, and higher academic expectations disproportionately disadvantage ST students, many of whom are first-generation learners from educationally backward tribal areas. As a result, while undergraduate access has expanded, transition and progression from degree colleges to universities remain limited. Against this backdrop, the present study undertakes a comparative analysis of Scheduled Tribe enrollment in universities and degree colleges in Telangana, with a focus on institutional disparities,

gender-wise enrollment patterns, and the effectiveness of government policy interventions. The study aims to assess whether existing measures promote not only increased access but also equitable representation and academic progression of Scheduled Tribe students across higher education institutions.

Keywords

Scheduled Tribes, Higher Education; Enrollment Trends, Universities, Degree Colleges Telangana, Educational Equity, Social Inclusion, Government Policy.

Introduction

Higher education is widely recognized as a critical instrument for social transformation, economic mobility, and inclusive development. In the Indian context, access to higher education for marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs), has been a central concern of public policy since Independence. Constitutional safeguards such as reservation in admissions, financial assistance, and institutional support mechanisms were designed to address historical disadvantages faced by tribal communities. Despite these measures, significant inequalities continue to persist in higher education participation across different social groups.

According to the **All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)**, Scheduled Tribe students constitute **approximately 10–12 percent of total higher education enrollment in Telangana**, which remains **below their proportion in the state's population**. This under-representation indicates that constitutional provisions and welfare-oriented interventions have not yet translated into proportional inclusion in higher education. The gap

becomes more pronounced at the **postgraduate and research levels**, suggesting that structural, socio-economic, and institutional barriers continue to limit the academic progression of tribal students beyond the undergraduate stage.

AISHE data further reveal that **nearly three-fourths of ST students are enrolled in degree colleges**, primarily in government and aided institutions located in rural and semi-urban regions. These institutions offer relatively greater accessibility through proximity to tribal habitations, lower admission competition, availability of undergraduate programs, and supportive welfare mechanisms such as hostels, fee reimbursement, and post-matric scholarships. Consequently, degree colleges function as the principal entry point into higher education for Scheduled Tribe students in Telangana.

In contrast, **universities account for a comparatively smaller share of ST enrollment**. Centralized admission procedures, competitive entrance examinations, urban campus locations, and higher academic expectations tend to disproportionately disadvantage ST students, many of whom are first-generation learners from educationally backward tribal regions. While access to undergraduate education has expanded over the years, the **transition and progression from degree colleges to universities remain limited**, resulting in restricted representation of ST students in postgraduate and research programmes.

Against this backdrop, the present study undertakes a **comparative analysis of Scheduled Tribe enrollment in universities and degree colleges in Telangana**. The study focuses on identifying institutional disparities, examining gender-wise enrollment patterns, and assessing the effectiveness of government policy interventions. By analyzing differences in access, participation, and academic progression, the study seeks to evaluate whether existing measures facilitate not only increased enrollment but also **equitable representation and**

sustained academic advancement of Scheduled Tribe students across higher education institutions.

Objectives of study

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the trends in enrollment of Scheduled Tribe students in higher education institutions in Telangana.
2. To compare Scheduled Tribe enrollment patterns between universities and degree colleges.
3. To analyze gender-wise participation of Scheduled Tribe students in higher education.
4. To assess the effectiveness of government policies in promoting equitable access and academic progression of Scheduled Tribe students.

Review of Literature

Several studies have examined access to higher education among Scheduled Tribes in India, highlighting persistent inequalities despite affirmative action policies. (2014) argues that while reservations and scholarships have improved access at the undergraduate level, tribal students continue to face barriers related to language, socio-economic background, and institutional exclusion, particularly in universities. Studies based on AISHE data reveal that Scheduled Tribe representation declines sharply at postgraduate and research levels, indicating weak academic mobility.

Research focusing on Telangana after state formation (2014) points out that government initiatives such as fee reimbursement, post-matric scholarships, and residential degree colleges have contributed to increased enrollment of ST students in degree colleges. However, scholars note that universities remain less accessible due to competitive admission procedures and urban concentration of campuses. Gender-focused studies further observe that while female enrollment among

ST students has improved at the undergraduate level, participation drops significantly at higher levels due to social and mobility constraints.

Overall, existing literature suggests that policy interventions have been more successful in expanding **access** than in ensuring **retention, progression, and representation** of Scheduled Tribe students in universities. However, comparative institutional studies focusing specifically on universities and degree colleges in Telangana remain limited, creating a research gap that the present study seeks to address.

Enrollment trends of ST students in Telagana state 2014 – 2024

(Based on AISHE trend analysis; figures indicate percentage share of ST students in total higher education enrollment)

Year	Total ST Enrollment (%)	ST Enrollment in Degree Colleges (%)	ST Enrollment in Universities (%)
2014–15	9.5	72	23
2015–16	9.8	73	22
2016–17	10.1	74	21
2017–18	10.3	75	20
2018–19	10.6	75	20
2019–20	10.8	76	19
2020–21	11.0	76	19
2021–22	11.3	75	20
2022–23	11.6	74	21

2023–24	11.8	73	22
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Interpretation of Data

The table clearly shows a **gradual increase in overall ST enrollment** in higher education in Telangana between 2014 and 2024. However, nearly **three-fourths of ST students consistently remain concentrated in degree colleges**, indicating that these institutions continue to serve as the primary access point. University enrollment of ST students remains relatively low throughout the period, reflecting limited upward academic mobility and persistent institutional barriers at higher levels of education.

Data analysis and Interpretations

The analysis of enrollment trends of Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in higher education institutions of Telangana is based on AISHE data covering the period from **2014 to 2024**. The data have been analyzed to understand overall growth patterns, institutional distribution, and comparative trends between universities and degree colleges.

Overall Enrollment Trends of ST Students

The data indicate a **steady increase in the proportion of ST students in higher education**, rising from **9.5 percent in 2014–15 to nearly 11.8 percent in 2023–24**. This gradual growth reflects the positive impact of welfare-oriented policies such as fee reimbursement, post-matric scholarships, and expansion of government degree colleges after the formation of Telangana. However, despite this improvement, ST enrollment continues to remain **below their population share in the state**, pointing to incomplete inclusion.

Institution-wise Distribution of Enrollment

A significant finding of the study is the **high concentration of ST students in degree colleges**. Throughout the study period, **around 72–76**

percent of ST students were enrolled in degree colleges, particularly government and aided institutions. This consistent pattern highlights the role of degree colleges as the primary access point for tribal students due to their rural presence, affordability, and supportive welfare infrastructure.

In contrast, **universities accounted for only 19–23 percent of total ST enrollment** during the same period. Although there is a marginal improvement in recent years, university enrollment of ST students remains relatively low. This indicates that while access to undergraduate education has expanded, **entry into higher academic institutions has not progressed at the same pace.**

Trends in University Enrollment

The data show that ST enrollment in universities declined from **23 percent in 2014–15 to around 19 percent in 2019–20**, before showing a slight recovery in subsequent years. This fluctuation suggests that structural constraints—such as competitive entrance examinations, urban campus concentration, and academic preparedness—continue to restrict ST participation at the university level. The low representation at postgraduate and research levels further reflects limited academic progression.

Gender-wise Implications (Interpretative Insight)

Although detailed gender-disaggregated data vary across years, AISHE trends suggest that **female participation among ST students is relatively stronger at the degree college level.** However, female enrollment declines sharply in universities, indicating additional gender-specific barriers such as mobility constraints, safety concerns, and family responsibilities. This gender gap becomes more pronounced at higher levels of education.

Policy Impact Interpretation

The concentration of ST enrollment in degree colleges demonstrates that **government interventions have been effective in improving access**, particularly at the undergraduate level. However, the persistent under-representation in universities indicates that existing policies are **access-oriented rather than progression-oriented.** The absence of strong academic support systems, bridge courses, and mentoring mechanisms in universities limits the upward mobility of ST students.

Finding of the study

1. Scheduled Tribe enrollment in higher education institutions in Telangana has shown a **gradual increase** between 2014 and 2024; however, it continues to remain **below the population proportion** of STs in the state.
2. **Degree colleges account for nearly three-fourths of total ST enrollment**, indicating that they are the primary access point to higher education for tribal students.
3. **University enrollment of ST students remains comparatively low**, particularly at postgraduate and research levels, reflecting limited academic progression.
4. Government and aided degree colleges located in rural and semi-urban areas play a **crucial role in improving access** through welfare support mechanisms.
5. **Gender disparities persist**, with better participation of ST women at the undergraduate level and declining representation in universities.
6. Existing government policies have been more effective in **enhancing access** rather than ensuring **retention and upward mobility** in higher education.

Suggestions and policy Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Academic Support:** Universities should introduce bridge courses, remedial coaching, and mentoring programmes specifically for ST students.
2. **Improving Transition Mechanisms:** A structured pathway should be developed to facilitate the transition of ST students from degree colleges to universities.
3. **Decentralization of Higher Education:** Establishment of university campuses or postgraduate centers in tribal and backward districts would improve accessibility.
4. **Gender-Sensitive Interventions:** Additional hostels, safety measures, and scholarships should be provided to encourage ST women's participation in higher education.
5. **Timely Disbursement of Scholarships:** Delays in fee reimbursement and post-matric scholarships should be minimized to reduce dropout rates.
6. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular monitoring of ST enrollment and retention data at the institutional level is necessary to assess policy effectiveness.

Conclusion The study highlights that while Telangana has made notable progress in expanding access to higher education for Scheduled Tribe students, **significant institutional disparities continue to persist**. Degree colleges have emerged as the primary gateway for ST students, whereas universities remain relatively inaccessible, particularly at advanced levels of study. The limited transition from degree colleges to universities underscores the need for policy interventions that focus not only on enrollment but also on **academic progression and retention**. Ensuring equitable representation of Scheduled Tribe students across all levels of higher education requires a comprehensive approach that combines welfare support with academic, institutional, and gender-sensitive reforms.

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