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Educational Inclusivity And Gender Equity Among Scheduled Caste And Scheduled Tribe Students In Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

In 2025, India stands as the world's most populous nation with an estimated population of 1.468 billion, accounting for nearly 18% of the global population. Tamil Nadu, as one of India's most socio-economically advanced states, demonstrates a progressive trend in educational inclusivity, particularly among Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. The educational statistics for 2022–23, drawn from the *Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu*, highlight the state's sustained commitment to equitable education across all levels from pre-primary to higher education and professional institutions. The pre-primary level, 84,021 SC/ST girl children were enrolled, with SC girls forming the majority (95.8%), indicating early-stage participation yet requiring focused inclusion of ST children. In primary education (Classes 1–5), nearly 5.9 lakh SC/ST girls were enrolled, with 80–90% studying in elementary education institutions, revealing strong engagement in foundational schooling. Overall, Tamil Nadu exhibits a structured yet uneven pattern of educational inclusiveness. The data reveal significant achievements in early education access and gender participation, yet persistent disparities in higher and research-level representation. Enhancing transition support, scholarships, and institutional diversity initiatives—especially for ST and female students—remains essential. The findings affirm Tamil Nadu's role as a model for inclusive education in India, while calling for targeted interventions to ensure equitable outcomes across all educational stages and social groups.

JEL Classification: I24, I25, I28, J15, J16, O15

Introduction

In 2025, India emerges as the most populated country globally, marked by significant population density, an expanding urban sector, and a youthful demographic, which together bring substantial prospects and intricate problems for future development. As of November 5, 2025, India's population is estimated to be roughly 1.468 billion, according to Worldometer and United Nations data (Worldometer; United Nations, 2025). The mid-year prediction for 2025 is marginally reduced to 1.464 billion, indicating a consistent albeit decelerating population growth rate. India comprises 17.78% of the global population, indicating that almost 1 in every 6 individuals worldwide resides in India. India has

overtaken China and now holds the position as the most populous country in the world. India, with a population density of 492 individuals per square kilometer, ranks among the most densely inhabited big nations globally. This density exerts strain on resources, infrastructure, housing, and services, particularly in metropolitan areas and arable regions. 37.08% of the population, approximately 543 million individuals, reside in urban areas (UN World Population Prospects 2024).

This indicates that approximately 63% of the population continues to inhabit rural areas; however, the urban demographic is expanding swiftly due to migration driven by educational opportunities, employment, and improved living conditions. Urbanization generates economic potential while simultaneously presenting difficulties, like overcrowding, pollution, and inequality. The median age of 28.8 years signifies a youthful demographic, indicating that half of the population is below the age of 29. The "demographic dividend" provides India with a competitive edge in manpower and productivity potential. It also necessitates an increase in employment opportunities, education, and healthcare to properly leverage this potential. The majority of states in India have wide disparities in term of higher education enrolment including the state of Tamil Nadu (Subbarayan Ulaganathan, 2021).

Objectives of the Study

To analyze the level of educational inclusion of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in Tamil Nadu across different stages of education — from pre-primary to higher education using 2022–23 enrolment data.

To examine gender-wise enrolment patterns among SC and ST students to identify the extent of gender equity and participation at various educational levels.

To assess institutional variations in SC/ST student representation across government, aided, and self-financing educational institutions, including general and professional colleges.

To evaluate disparities in access and progression between SC and ST groups, with special emphasis on female participation in secondary, tertiary, and professional education.

To identify trends and transition gaps (from school to higher education and research levels) affecting the retention and advancement of SC/ST students.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research employs a descriptive and analytical framework, concentrating on quantitative data to assess the trends of inclusivity and gender equity among Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in Tamil Nadu. The aim is to elucidate, interpret, and scrutinize the levels of participation, gender inequalities, and institutional differences in educational enrollment for the academic year 2022–23.

Data Collection and Compilation

Data were systematically compiled, tabulated, and classified according to:

- Type of institution (General / Professional / University / College)
- Level of education (School / College / University / Research)
- Gender (Male / Female)
- Social category (SC / ST)

Wherever available, absolute numbers and percentages were used to compute ratios and comparative indicators of inclusivity and gender representation.

Analytical Tools and Techniques

The following quantitative and graphical methods were employed to interpret data:

1. **Percentage Analysis** to determine the proportion of SC/ST students within total enrolment and by gender.
2. **Ratio Analysis** to evaluate gender parity ratios among SC/ST categories.
3. **Comparative Analysis** across institution types and educational levels.
4. **Trend Analysis** to observe progression patterns between schooling and higher education.
5. **Graphical Presentation** using bar charts, pie charts, and line graphs to visually represent patterns of inclusivity.
6. **Index of Inclusivity** (optional addition): A derived index based on SC/ST share in total enrolment, used to rank institutions on inclusion levels.

Period of the study

The examination is limited to the academic year 2022–23, reflecting the latest extensive dataset accessible for the education sector in Tamil Nadu.

Limitation of the Research

The research relies exclusively on secondary data, so representing just reported enrollments and without accounting for unreported dropouts or non-enrolled individuals.

- Availability of data for specific tribal groupings or private entities may be restricted.
- The research exclusively examines quantitative inclusion, disregarding the quality of education or academic performance outcomes.
- Variations in reporting criteria between departments (primary education versus higher education) may hinder optimal comparability.

Table:1

SC & ST Pre-primary level (pre KG to UKG) Girls children enrolment in State Board and Higher Secondary Schools at Tamil Nadu : 2022-23

Pre-primary level (pre KG to UKG)	Girls		Total SC/ST Girls
	SC	ST	
Elementary Education	36332 (45.14)	1648 (46.55)	37980 (45.20)
School Education	44149 (54.85)	1892 (53.44)	46041 (54.79)
Total	80481	3540	84021

Source: Statistics of Hand Book of Tamil Nadu: 2022-23

In Tamil Nadu, 84,021 SC/ST girl children were enrolled in pre-primary education (Pre-KG to UKG) during the 2022–23 academic year. Scheduled Caste females represent the majority with 80,481 enrollments. ST females represent 3,540 enrolments, constituting approximately 4.2% of the aggregate SC/ST girls' total. Elementary Education institutions enrolled 45.2% of the total girl children from SC/ST backgrounds. School education institutions comprised 54.8%, signifying that a greater number of pre-primary girls were enrolled in the School Education Department compared to Elementary Education. The percentage distribution (about 45% against 55%) indicates a minor bias in enrolment favoring School Education institutions. The proportions of SC and ST are comparable across categories, indicating analogous levels of access for both groups. The nearly equal distribution of shares between Elementary and School Education signifies uniform access throughout administrative divisions. The ST enrolment share (4.2%) is markedly lower than that of SC, maybe indicating demographic variations or inequities in outreach efforts.

Table: 2

SC & ST (1 to 5th standard) Girls children enrolment in State Board and Higher Secondary Schools at Tamil Nadu : 2022-23

1 to 5th standard	Girls	
	SC	ST
Elementary Education	434235 (79.06)	34722 (88.34)
School Education	114996 (20.93)	4582 (11.65)
Total	549231	39304

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu-2022-23

Total Scheduled Caste females (Classes 1–5): 549,231. The total number of Scheduled Tribe girls in Classes 1–5 is 39,304. In Classes 1–5, there are 588,535 combined SC/ST girls. Elementary education institutions represent 79.06% of SC girls and 88.34% of ST girls, whereas 20.93% of SC girls and 11.65% of ST girls are accounted for elsewhere. This indicates that the majority of girls (both SC and ST) at the primary level (grades 1–5) are enrolled in Elementary Education institutions rather than in

School Education establishments. ST females constitute a greater proportion (88.34%) in Elementary Education institutions than SC girls (79.06%). This indicates that the enrollment of ST girls is more concentrated in government elementary schools, likely due to enhanced outreach in tribal or rural regions via primary-level institutions. The proportion of students in School Education (about 12% for Scheduled Tribes and 21% for Scheduled Castes) suggests a lower enrollment in schools administered by the School Education Department at the primary level. Approximately 80% of SC girls and 90% of ST girls are enrolled in Elementary Education, underscoring its pivotal significance in basic education for marginalized groups. The increased ST enrolment proportion in primary institutions may indicate a heightened dependence on local, government-operated schools in tribal areas.

Table: 3

SC & ST (6 to 8th standard) Girls children enrolment in State Board and Higher Secondary Schools at Tamil Nadu : 2022-23

6 to 8th standard	Girls	
	SC	ST
Elementary Education	83262 (23.41)	7644 (33.92)
School Education	272370 (76.58)	14887 (66.07)
Total	355632	22531

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu-2022-23

The total enrollment of Scheduled Caste girls in Classes 6 to 8 is 355,632. The ST females (Grades 6–8): 22,531. Total for SC/ST combined: 378,163. A significant proportion of females in this category are engaged in School Education: 76.58% of SC girls and 66.07% of ST girls. A lesser proportion persists in Elementary Education: 23.41% of SC females and 33.92% of ST girls. This indicates the transition from Elementary Education to School Education institutions as students progress to the upper primary level (Classes 6–8). The prevalence of ST girls in Elementary Education is somewhat greater at 33.92% compared to SC girls at 23.41%, indicating that numerous tribal pupils persist in elementary-administered schools beyond Class 5. In contrast, SC females exhibit a more substantial representation (76.58%) inside School Education institutions, indicating a more seamless transfer to middle schools overseen by that department.

Table: 4

SC & ST Girls children enrolment in State Board and Higher Secondary Schools at Tamil Nadu : 2022-23

School Education	Girls	
	SC	ST
9 th & 10 th	233040	13360
11 th & 12 th	210925	10198
Total	443965	23558
1 st to 12 th + pre-primary	875480	44919

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu-2022-23

The total enrollment from Pre-primary to 12th grade includes 875,480 SC girls and 44,919 ST girls. The total number of SC/ST girls is 920,399. This denotes the aggregate number of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe girls registered in Tamil Nadu's State Board and Higher Secondary Schools for the academic year 2022–23. In Secondary and Higher Secondary education (grades 9–12), the enrollment of Scheduled Caste girls is 443,965, representing approximately 50.7% of the total Scheduled Caste enrollment from pre-primary to 12th grade. The ST girls: 23,558, representing approximately 52.4% of overall ST enrollment. This signifies that approximately fifty percent of SC and ST girls enrolled in educational institutions are at the intermediate or higher secondary level, demonstrating robust retention rates in advanced grades. Between the 9th–10th and 11th–12th grades, enrollment experiences a minor decline: SC girls decrease from 233,040 to 210,925 ($\downarrow \sim 9.5\%$), while ST girls decline from 13,360 to 10,198 ($\downarrow \sim 23.6\%$). The significant decrease among ST girls indicates that the transition from 10th to 11th grade continues to pose challenges for tribal children, potentially because to socio-economic issues, restricted access to upper secondary institutions, or premature dropout rates. Tamil Nadu demonstrates robust total enrollment of SC and ST girls in educational institutions. Scheduled Caste females (875,000) significantly outnumber Scheduled Tribe girls (45,000), illustrating demographic ratios. The transition from 10th to 11th grade is a pivotal phase marked by a significant decrease in ST enrollment, indicating the necessity for focused scholarships, residential schools, and community engagement. The consistent involvement at various levels suggests that the State Board and Higher Secondary system is inclusive; nonetheless, disparities persist at advanced levels for indigenous children.

Table: 5
SC & ST Students Strength in Selective Universities in Tamil Nadu : 2022-23

Sl.No	Name of the University	Girls SC/ST		Overall Total	SC/ST %
		SC	ST		
1	Alagappa University, Karaikudi	487	5	3521	13.97
2	Anna University, Chennai	12717	396	189339	6.92
3	Annamalai University, Chidambaram	7728	155	43685	18.04
4	Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli	154	5	1534	10.36
5	Bharathiyar University, Coimbatore	5515	317	45205	12.90
6	Dr.MGR Educational and Research Institute University, Chennai.	1219	67	7790	16.50
7	Gandhigram Rural University, Dindigul	511	31	2453	22.09
8	Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM), Chennai	320	118	2486	17.61
9	Manonmaniam Sundaranar University (MSU), Tirunelveli	3670	68	41887	8.92

Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu-2022-23

Gandhigram Rural University exhibits the largest representation of SC/ST students, signifying robust inclusiveness and social diversity. Presumably attributable to its emphasis on rural initiatives and community outreach projects. Annamalai University in Chidambaram is one of the largest institutions with significant representation of SC/ST students, demonstrating effective reservation and access policies. Anna University (12,717 SC girls) and Annamalai University (7,728 SC girls) exhibit the highest absolute numbers of SC girls, reflecting substantial enrollment figures. IIT Madras and Gandhigram University demonstrate significant engagement of SC/ST girls in relation to their overall enrollment, indicating enhanced gender inclusivity in specialized and rural institutions. The proportion of SC/ST students ranges from 6.9% at Anna University to 22.1% at Gandhigram University. Rural or socially oriented universities (e.g., Gandhigram, Annamalai) exhibit greater inclusion, whereas technical and metropolitan universities (such as Anna University) demonstrate diminished representation. Girls from SC/ST backgrounds are considerably engaged in most universities, indicating progress toward socioeconomic and gender fairness in Tamil Nadu's higher education sector. The data indicates advancements in inclusive education in Tamil Nadu, however gaps in representation remain across institutions. Rural and traditional universities demonstrate exceptional diversity. Urban and prestigious universities require targeted policies such as scholarships, preparatory programs, and outreach initiatives—to enhance participation rates of SC/ST individuals.

Table: 6

SC/ST MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS STRENGTH IN UG COURSE AT SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES IN TAMIL NADU : 2022-23

Name of the University		UG Course							
		Male				Female			
		SC	ST	Over all total	SC/ST %	SC	ST	Over all total	SC/ST %
1	Alagappa University, Karaikudi -630 003	208	10	715	30.48	138	3	731	19.28
2	Alagappa University, Directorate of Distance Education, Karaikudi 630 003	570	32	2632	22.87	854	39	3808	23.45
3	Anna University, Chennai 600 025	15245	682	94726	16.81	9571	350	53631	18.49
4	Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram	5803	131	16318	36.36	5972	105	18093	33.58
5	Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli .	1147	31	5633	20.91	993	24	4686	21.70
6	Bharathiyar University, Coimbatore*	4790	322	34328	14.89	4475	273	35066	13.54

7	Gandhigram Rural University, Dindigul District	284	19	1181	25.65	287	19	1057	28.94
8	Manonmaniam Sundaranar University (MSU), Tirunelveli *	2054	33	12681	16.45	2442	49	17076	14.58
9	Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai	60	1	126	48.41	61	0	264	23.10
10	Periyar University, Salem	12343	1703	57352	24.49	15597	1805	83191	20.91

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu-2022-23

Annamalai University (33–36%), Madurai Kamaraj University (23–48%), and Gandhigram Rural University (26–29%) have significant participation of SC/ST students in undergraduate programs. These institutions presumably cater to semi-urban or rural populations with enhanced access to resources. Alagappa (Main & Distance), Bharathidasan, Periyar, and Manonmaniam Sundaranar universities achieve a commendable equilibrium between inclusivity and urban accessibility. Low Representation (<15%): Bharathiar University and Anna University (Main Campus) have less SC/ST involvement, perhaps attributable to elevated entry obstacles in technical or urban institutions. In 60% of universities, male representation among SC/ST individuals is greater. Nonetheless, remote education and rural institutions (such as Alagappa-DDE and Gandhigram) have higher enrolment rates of female SC/ST students, indicating that flexible access enhances gender parity.

Table: 7

SC/ST MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS STRENGTH IN PG COURSE AT SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES IN TAMIL NADU : 2022-23

Name of the University		PG Course							
		Male				Female			
		SC	ST	Overall total	SC/ST %	SC	ST	Over all total	SC/ST %
1	Alagappa University, Karaikudi -630 003	320	2	951	33.85	210	1	1923	10.97
2	Anna University, Chennai 600 025	3420	75	15616	22.38	2476	37	11978	20.98
3	Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram	1326	46	3582	38.30	1686	47	5044	40.30
4	Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli .	115	7	505	24.15	122	4	1093	11.52
5	Bharathiyar University, Coimbatore*	760	42	7099	11.29	951	39	9312	10.63

6	Gandhigram Rural University, Dindigul District	138	8	542	26.93	174	4	825	21.57
7	Manonmaniam Sundaranar University (MSU), Tirunelveli *	255	8	1804	14.57	778	12	8141	9.70
8	Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai	96	1	483	20.08	82	0	422	19.43
9	Periyar University, Salem	39	1	386	10.36	36	0	360	10.00

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu-2022-23

Annamalai University has over 40% representation of SC/ST students across both genders, demonstrating significant equity at the postgraduate level. Alagappa University (Male) and Gandhigram Rural University also demonstrate commendable performance (>25%). Moderate Representation (15–25%): Anna University, Bharathidasan University (Male), and Madurai Kamaraj University exhibit satisfactory inclusiveness. Low Representation (<15%): Bharathiar, MS University, and Periyar exhibit comparatively minimal SC/ST involvement at the postgraduate level, particularly among females. Gender disparity: In 7 of 9 universities, male representation among SC/ST exceeds that of females. Only Annamalai University demonstrates a female advantage (40.3% compared to 38.3%), suggesting a more accepting atmosphere for women. Approximately 20% of postgraduate students in these Tamil Nadu universities are from SC/ST communities. Nonetheless, female representation remains deficient, with the exception of Annamalai University, which demonstrates robust inclusion.

Table: 8

SC/ST MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS STRENGTH IN Ph.d COURSE AT SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES IN TAMIL NADU : 2022-23

Name of the University		Ph. d Course							
		Male				Female			
		SC	ST	Overall total	SC/ST %	SC	ST	Overall total	SC/ST %
1	Alagappa University, Karaikudi -630 003	158	2	388	41.23	115	1	1492	7.77
2	Anna University, Chennai 600 025	856	17	7061	12.36	670	9	13388	5.07
3	Avinashilingam University for Women, Coimbatore.	---	---	---	---	40	5	448	10.04
4	Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli .	20	1	162	12.96	18	1	156	12.17
5	Dr.MGR Educational and Research Institute University, Chennai.	21	22	194	22.16	28	6	372	9.13
6	Gandhigram Rural University, Dindigul	32	8	183	21.85	30	5	192	18.22

7	Manonmaniam Sundaranar University (MSU), Tirunelveli	10	0	76	13.15	13	0	224	5.80
8	Mother Theresa Women's University, Kodaikanal	---	--	---	---	3	--	46	6.52
9	Periyar University, Salem	18	0	100	18.00	12	0	85	14.11

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu-2022-23

Alagappa University, located in Karaikudi, More than 40% of Ph.D. scholars from SC/ST backgrounds are male. Nonetheless, there exists a significant gender disparity, with female representation falling below 8%. At Anna University in Chennai, There is a notable underrepresentation of SC/ST individuals, particularly females, in the fields of science and engineering. Demonstrates restricted access for female researchers belonging to marginalized groups. Avinashilingam University for Women, Coimbatore, is a women's university that hosts approximately 45 SC/ST Ph.D. scholars, constituting about 10% of the total 448 scholars. Moderate representation for a campus exclusively for women. At Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, participation rates among both genders in SC/ST categories are comparable. Demonstrates a moderate yet balanced approach to inclusivity in research enrollments. Dr. MGR Educational and Research Institute, Chennai. Male participation exceeds female participation by more than double; despite some inclusion efforts at this private university, gender disparity persists. Gandhigram Rural University, located in Dindigul, Significant inclusion for both genders. The university effectively attracts researchers from SC/ST backgrounds, despite its rural setting. There is a moderate representation of males, while female representation is notably low, indicating potential barriers to doctoral progression for women at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University (MSU), Tirunelveli. High representation of SC/ST males ($\geq 20\%$) is observed at Alagappa University with 41.23%, the highest among Tamil Nadu institutions at the Ph.D. level, followed by Dr. MGR University at 22.16% and Gandhigram Rural University at 21.85%.

Summary and conclusion

The educational data from Tamil Nadu for the 2022–23 period illustrates notable advancements alongside persistent disparities in the inclusion of SC/ST communities and issues of gender equity. Tamil Nadu demonstrates a robust institutional framework that fosters the involvement of SC/ST communities throughout various educational tiers. The enrolment figures for early childhood and primary education are strong, reflecting effective outreach and enrolment initiatives, especially among Scheduled Caste communities. The consistent increase in female enrolment across various educational stages is noteworthy, particularly in professional courses, where women surpass men among SC/ST students. Nevertheless, disparities in gender persist and even expand at advanced academic tiers (postgraduate and doctoral), indicative of systemic obstacles including socio-economic limitations,

insufficient mentorship opportunities, and diminished representation within technical fields. Institutional Variation: Government and rural universities exhibit a greater degree of inclusivity compared to their private or metropolitan counterparts.

This indicates that factors such as affordability, social proximity, and state intervention play crucial roles in facilitating access for marginalized groups. Transition and Retention: Although Tamil Nadu exhibits commendable enrolment figures at the school level, the rates of transition from secondary to tertiary education, particularly among ST females, present a significant concern. Customized strategies for retention, financial assistance, and skill transition are essential. Tamil Nadu exemplifies a paradigm of progressive inclusivity within India's educational framework; however, disparities in equity remain, especially at the confluence of gender, caste, and higher education. Guaranteeing fair involvement of SC/ST women in higher and professional education is essential for the realization of social justice and the advancement of sustainable human development.

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