

# Social and Policy Dimensions of Scheduled Castes in Bahraich District, Uttar Pradesh: Spatial Demography and Welfare Policies

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## Abstract

This paper examines the demographic profile, socio-economic conditions, and policy framework concerning Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Uttar Pradesh, with special focus on Bahraich district, using secondary data from Census of India (2001, 2011) and government records. The analysis shows that SCs constitute 20.70% of Uttar Pradesh's population, yet continue to face major educational, occupational, and economic disadvantages, while Bahraich district presents a particularly weak profile with low literacy and high rural concentration. The paper also identifies a persistent gap between constitutional safeguards and ground-level outcomes, and argues for stronger regional targeting, educational support, employment generation, and implementation monitoring ..

Affirmative action policies in India are among the most extensive in the world. However, their effectiveness depends on complementary measures such as quality education, awareness, and institutional support. Without these, reservation benefits tend to be captured by relatively better-off sections within Scheduled Castes, leaving the most disadvantaged behind. The policy framework for Scheduled Castes in India is rooted in the broader philosophy of social justice and affirmative action. Theories of distributive justice, particularly those advanced by John Rawls, support the idea that inequalities are justified only if they benefit the least advantaged. In the Indian context, reservation policies aim to operationalize this principle by ensuring representation and access. Affirmative action policies in India are among the most extensive in the world. However, their effectiveness depends on complementary measures such as quality education, awareness, and institutional support. Without these, reservation benefits tend to be captured by relatively better-off sections within Scheduled Castes, leaving the most disadvantaged behind.

**Keywords:** Scheduled Castes, demographic profile, reservation policy, welfare schemes, Uttar Pradesh, Bahraich district, educational attainment, occupational distribution

## Introduction

The caste system has also been examined through multiple sociological perspectives such as structural-functionalism, conflict theory, and subaltern studies. Structural-functionalists like G.S. Ghurye viewed caste as a system maintaining social order, while conflict theorists highlight its role in perpetuating inequality and domination. Contemporary scholars argue that caste operates as a dynamic system interacting with class, gender, and region, thereby shaping access to opportunities and life chances.

The caste system represents one of India's most enduring forms of social stratification, marked by hierarchy, hereditary occupation, and ritual ideas of purity and pollution. Within this structure, Scheduled Castes historically occupied the most disadvantaged social position and were subjected to exclusion, humiliation, and denial of dignity.

The historical evolution of untouchability can be traced from the Vedic period through the medieval era to colonial rule, with its rigid hereditary features becoming more institutionalised over time. British rule, Western education, social reform movements, and the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played an important role in challenging caste oppression and creating a language of rights and social justice. The adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950 marked a major turning point by abolishing untouchability and providing safeguards through reservation in education, employment, and political representation. Even so, the socio-economic condition of Scheduled Castes continues to lag behind the general population on many development indicators, making a district-level and state-level analysis especially important. At the state level, Uttar Pradesh represents a critical case due to its large population and socio-economic diversity. Theoretical frameworks of regional development suggest that disparities arise due to uneven distribution of infrastructure, education, and economic opportunities, which disproportionately affect marginalized communities like Scheduled Castes.

## Literature Review

Overall, the literature suggests that while policy interventions such as reservation and welfare schemes have improved representation, structural inequalities and social discrimination continue to limit the effectiveness of these measures. This study builds on existing literature by providing a district-level analysis of Bahraich, highlighting the interaction between caste and regional underdevelopment. Regional studies further reveal that caste disadvantage is unevenly distributed across states and districts. Research indicates that backward regions such as eastern Uttar Pradesh exhibit compounded forms of deprivation due to poor infrastructure, low educational attainment, and weak institutional support. Studies by Thorat and Sabharwal (2015) demonstrate the persistence of caste-based discrimination in labor markets and private sector enterprises, indicating that economic liberalization has not eliminated social inequalities. Similarly, Nambissan (2009) highlights the exclusion of Dalit children in educational institutions, pointing to systemic barriers beyond mere access. Contemporary scholars such as Andre Beteille (1996) and Satish Deshpande (2011) have highlighted the changing nature of caste in modern India, arguing that caste continues to influence access to education, employment, and social capital despite economic development and modernization.

G.S. Ghurye (1950) viewed caste as a system characterized by segmental division, hierarchy, and occupational restrictions, while Louis Dumont (1970) emphasized the ideological basis of caste rooted in purity and pollution. These classical perspectives provide a structural understanding of caste-based exclusion. The study of caste and Scheduled Castes in India has been extensively examined by sociologists, economists, and social theorists. B.R. Ambedkar (1936) critically analyzed the caste system as a mechanism of graded inequality that restricts social mobility and human dignity. His work laid the foundation for understanding caste as both a social and economic institution. In addition, the concept of social exclusion is central to understanding caste-based marginalization. Social exclusion refers to the processes through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live. Scheduled Castes have historically faced exclusion from education, public spaces, and economic opportunities, which has had long-term intergenerational effects.

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ritual ideas of purity and pollution . Within this structure, Scheduled Castes historically occupied the most disadvantaged social position and were subjected to exclusion, humiliation, and denial of dignity . The historical evolution of untouchability can be traced from the Vedic period through the medieval era to colonial rule, with its rigid hereditary features becoming more institutionalised over time . British rule, Western education, social reform movements, and the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played an important role in challenging caste oppression and creating a language of rights and social justice

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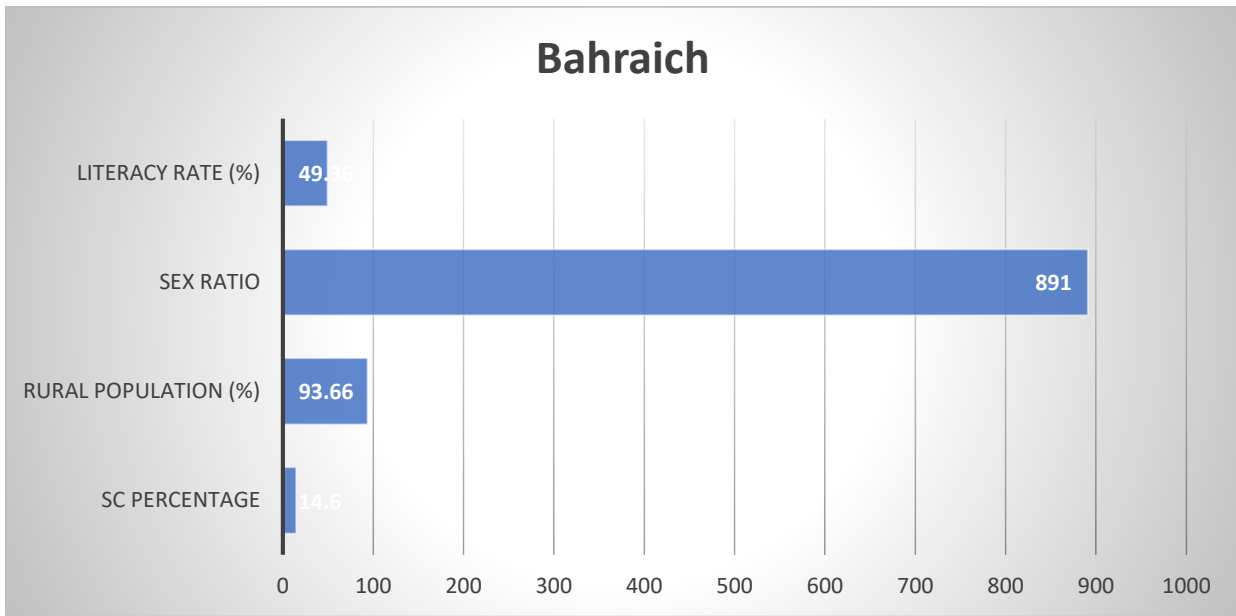
### **Scheduled Castes in India: National Overview**

The persistence of inequality can also be interpreted through human capital theory, which emphasizes the role of education and skills in improving productivity and income. The lower literacy and educational attainment among Scheduled Castes directly translate into limited access to better-paying jobs and upward mobility.

From a demographic perspective, the distribution of Scheduled Castes reflects historical patterns of settlement, agrarian relations, and colonial administrative classifications. Scholars argue that the persistence of rural concentration is linked to limited mobility, lack of urban skills, and structural barriers in migration and employment markets. According to Census 2011, India's Scheduled Caste population was 201.13 million, constituting 16.60% of the total population . Uttar Pradesh had the highest absolute SC population, while Punjab had the highest proportionate share among major states . The rural concentration of SCs remained very high, and literacy gaps persisted across both gender and social group categories .

**Table 1. National SC profile, India 2011**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
SC share in total population	16.60
Rural SC population	81.30
SC literacy rate	66.07
General literacy rate	72.99



#### Panel B: Gender literacy among SCs

Category	Percentage
SC male literacy	75.17
SC female literacy	56.00

Table 1 shows the national profile of Scheduled Castes in India, highlighting their population share, strong rural concentration, and continuing literacy disadvantage. Occupationally, SCs remained disproportionately concentrated in agricultural labour, with 49.06% of SC workers in this category compared to 28.67% among the general population. By contrast, the proportion of SC cultivators was much lower than that of the general population, pointing to structural landlessness and occupational vulnerability. These disparities can also be explained through the lens of structural inequality, where social institutions systematically disadvantage certain groups. The overlap between caste and class further intensifies inequality, making it difficult for marginalized groups to escape poverty.

**Table 2. Comparative socio-economic indicators: SC vs general population, India 2011** These disparities can also be explained through the lens of structural inequality, where social institutions systematically disadvantage certain groups. The overlap between caste and class further intensifies inequality, making it difficult for marginalized groups to escape poverty.

Indicator	SC population (%)	General population (%)	Gap
Literacy rate	66.07	72.99	-6.92
Male literacy	75.17	80.89	-5.72
Female literacy	56.00	64.64	-8.64

Rural population	81.30	68.84	+12.46
Agricultural labourers	49.06	28.67	+20.39
Cultivators	25.44	41.23	-15.79

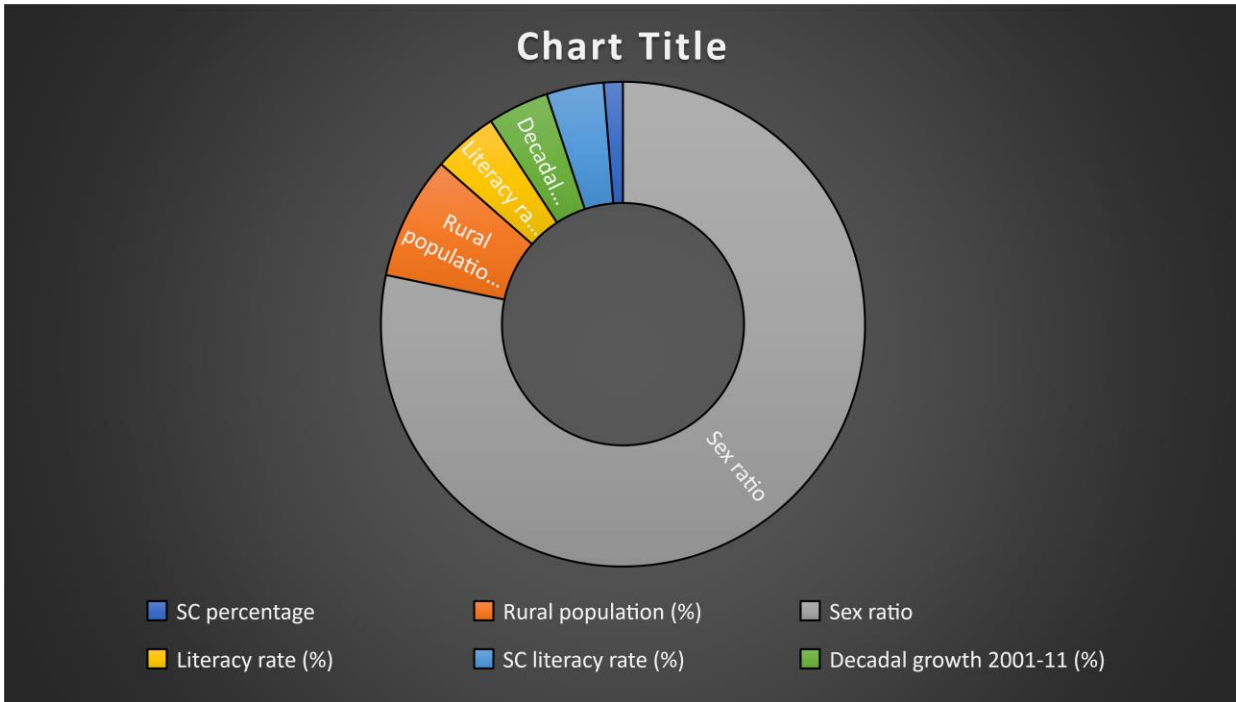


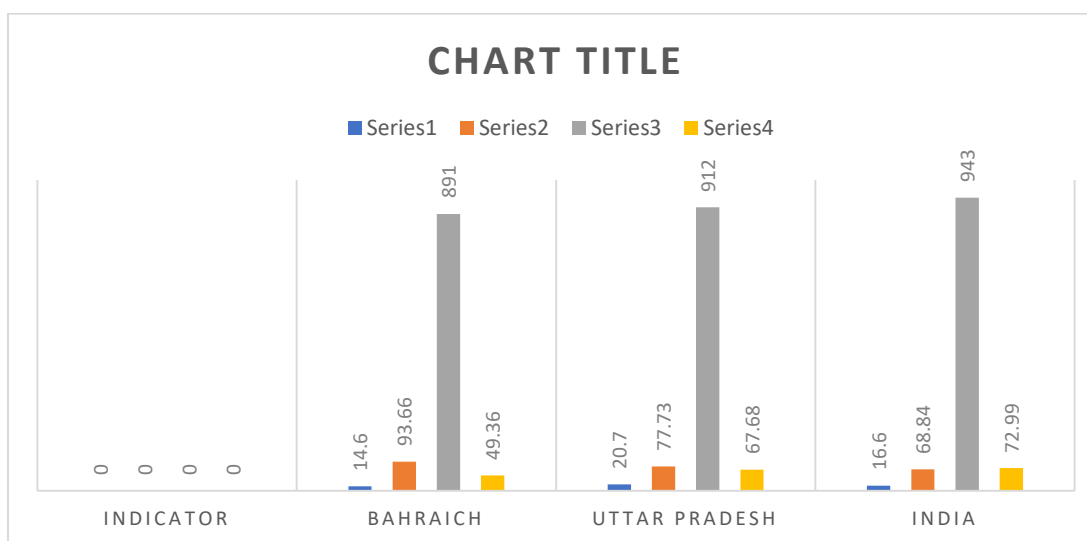
Table 2 makes the pattern especially clear: SCs show lower literacy outcomes, greater rural concentration, and greater dependence on low-paid agricultural labour than the general population. This visual presentation strengthens the argument that caste disadvantage remains closely linked to educational and occupational inequality.

**Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh: State-level analysis** The concept of development lag is particularly relevant in understanding Uttar Pradesh, where historical neglect, governance challenges, and uneven policy implementation have resulted in persistent socio-economic gaps. Scheduled Castes, being at the lower end of the social hierarchy, are disproportionately affected by these structural constraints.

At the state level, Uttar Pradesh represents a critical case due to its large population and socio-economic diversity. Theoretical frameworks of regional development suggest that disparities arise due to uneven distribution of infrastructure, education, and economic opportunities, which disproportionately affect marginalized communities like Scheduled Castes. Uttar Pradesh had a total population of 199.78 million in 2011, of which 41.36 million persons, or 20.70%, belonged to Scheduled Castes. This share was significantly above the national average of 16.60%, and the long-term trend shows sustained growth in both absolute numbers and relative demographic importance.

**Table 3. Growth of Scheduled Caste population in Uttar Pradesh, 1951-2011**

Census year	Total population (lakhs)	SC population (lakhs)	SC percentage
1951	632.83	86.35	14.27
1971	883.41	139.64	15.81
1991	1391.19	212.77	15.29
2011	1997.81	413.58	20.70



The SC population in Uttar Pradesh is predominantly rural, with 87.70% residing in rural areas compared with 77.73% for the state overall . The literacy rate among SCs in the state was 60.89%, lower than the overall state average of 67.68%, and the gender gap within SC literacy remained very large . Educational attainment reveals especially sharp inequality . Among SCs in Uttar Pradesh, 39.11% were illiterate compared with 32.32% among the general population, while only 1.41% of SCs had graduate or higher education compared with 4.43% among the general population .

**Table 4. Educational attainment by level: SC vs general population, Uttar Pradesh 2011**

Educational level	UP SC (%)	UP general (%)
Illiterate	39.11	32.32
Below primary	8.34	7.45
Primary	17.23	16.89

Middle	15.67	16.23
Matric/Secondary	9.45	12.56
Higher secondary	3.12	5.34
Graduate and above	1.41	4.43

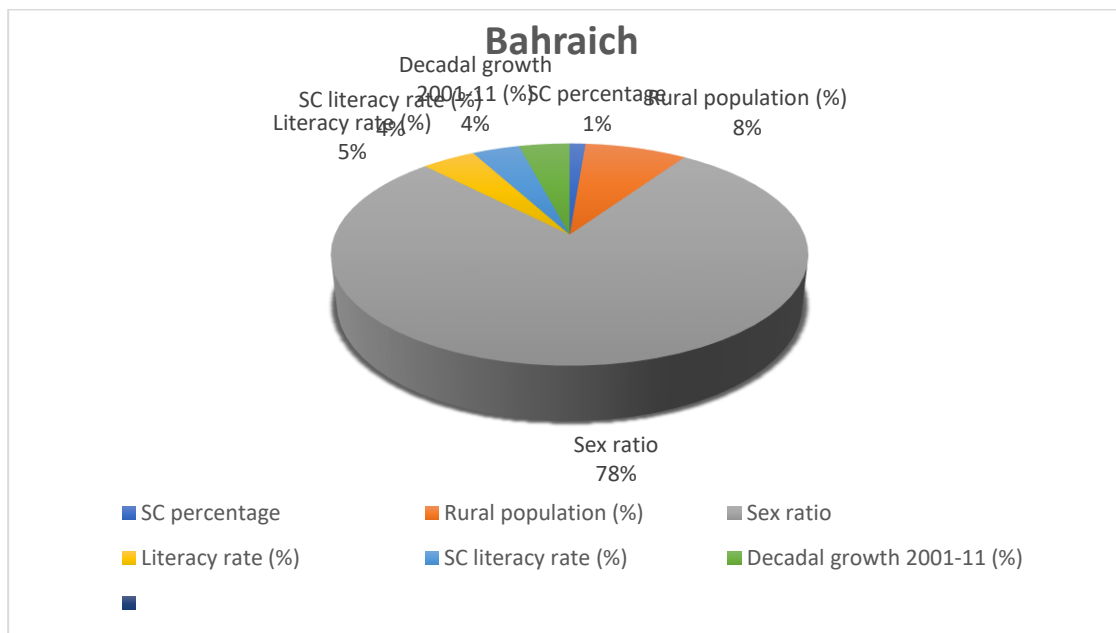


Figure 4 shows that the educational gap narrows little in lower schooling categories and widens sharply at the higher secondary and graduate levels. This pattern suggests that formal access alone is insufficient unless retention, quality, mentoring, and economic support improve substantially. The SC population in Uttar Pradesh also includes 66 caste communities, of which Chamar, Pasi, Dhobi, Kori, and Balmiki together account for about 87.5% of the total SC population. District-level concentration varies significantly across the state, indicating the importance of regional analysis.

### Bahraich district: regional context and SC profile

Dependency theory can also be applied at a micro level, where backward regions remain dependent on external resources and fail to develop internal capacities. In such contexts, marginalized communities like Scheduled Castes face compounded disadvantages due to both caste and regional underdevelopment. Regional backwardness in districts like Bahraich can be explained through the concept of cumulative disadvantage, where multiple deprivations such as poor education, weak infrastructure, and limited employment opportunities reinforce each other over time. This creates a cycle of poverty and exclusion that is difficult to break without targeted intervention. Bahraich district, located in northeastern Uttar Pradesh near the Nepal border, had a total population of 34.88 lakh in 2011 and was overwhelmingly rural, with

93.66% of its population living in rural areas .The overall literacy rate of the district was 49.36%, much lower than the state average of 67.68% .

The Scheduled Caste population of Bahraich was 5,09,501 persons, constituting 14.60% of the district population .. Of the total SC population, 93.20% lived in rural areas, and the SC literacy rate was only 43.52%, far below both the Uttar Pradesh SC average of 60.89% and the India SC average of 66.07% .

**Table 5. SC literacy gap: Bahraich vs Uttar Pradesh vs India, 2011**

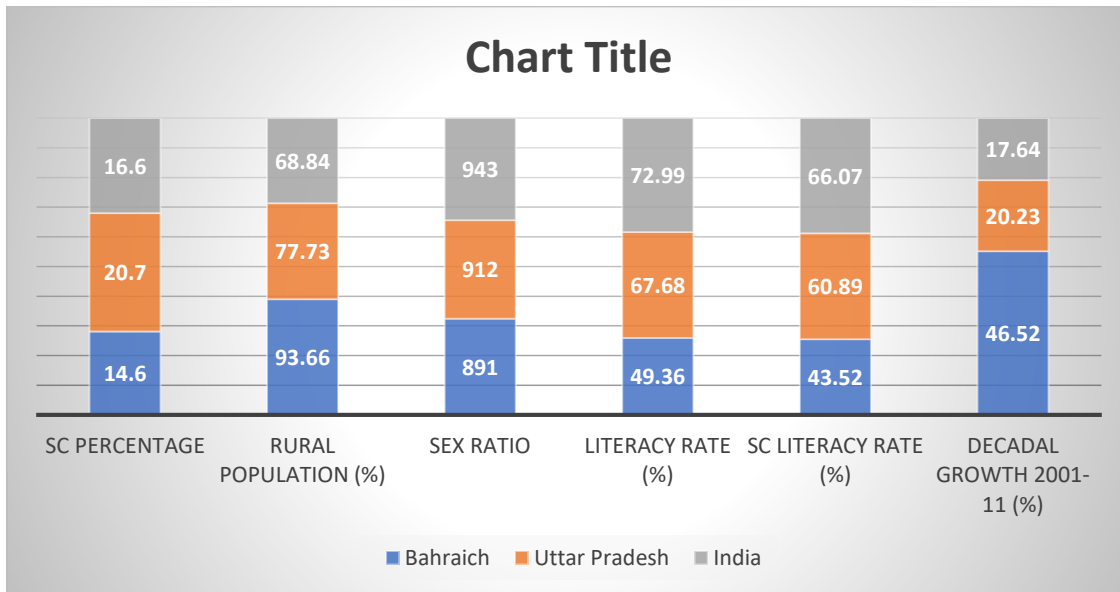
Region	SC literacy rate (%)
Bahraich	43.52
Uttar Pradesh	60.89
India	66.07

The data compares Scheduled Caste literacy rates in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, and India, clearly highlighting the severe educational lag of Bahraich district. The SC literacy rate in Bahraich (43.52%) is substantially lower than both the state average of Uttar Pradesh (60.89%) and the national average (66.07%), indicating a deep-rooted educational disadvantage. This gap reflects not only limited access to educational infrastructure but also broader structural issues such as poverty, low awareness, social exclusion, and inadequate institutional support. The disparity is particularly significant because literacy serves as a foundational indicator of human development and socio-economic mobility. Lower literacy levels among SCs in Bahraich restrict their participation in higher education, skilled employment, and formal sector opportunities, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and marginalization. Additionally, the rural dominance of the district, coupled with weak schooling facilities, teacher shortages, and high dropout rates, further exacerbates this condition. From a policy perspective, this pronounced gap suggests that existing educational schemes and affirmative action measures have not been equally effective across regions. It underlines the need for targeted, region-specific interventions focusing on improving school infrastructure, enhancing teaching quality, increasing retention rates, and providing financial and academic support to SC students. Without such focused efforts, regional disparities like those observed in Bahraich are likely to persist, limiting the overall impact of inclusive development policies. A wider comparison of district, state, and national indicators listed below

**Table 6. Key socio-economic indicators: Bahraich vs Uttar Pradesh vs India, 2011**

Indicator	Bahraich	Uttar Pradesh	India
SC percentage	14.60	20.70	16.60
Rural population (%)	93.66	77.73	68.84
Sex ratio	891	912	943

Literacy rate (%)	49.36	67.68	72.99
SC literacy rate (%)	43.52	60.89	66.07
Decadal growth 2001-11 (%)	46.52	20.23	17.64



*The Data* compares selected socio-economic indicators across Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, and India, highlighting the cumulative regional disadvantage of Bahraich district. Educational attainment data reinforces this backwardness. In Bahraich, 56.48% of SCs were illiterate, compared with 39.11% among UP SCs overall, while only 0.53% had graduate or higher education compared with 1.41% for UP SCs. These figures indicate that caste disadvantage in Bahraich is intensified by regional underdevelopment.

### Constitutional and policy framework for SC development

Affirmative action policies in India are among the most extensive in the world. However, their effectiveness depends on complementary measures such as quality education, awareness, and institutional support. Without these, reservation benefits tend to be captured by relatively better-off sections within Scheduled Castes, leaving the most disadvantaged behind. The policy framework for Scheduled Castes in India is rooted in the broader philosophy of social justice and affirmative action. Theories of distributive justice, particularly those advanced by John Rawls, support the idea that inequalities are justified only if they benefit the least advantaged. In the Indian context, reservation policies aim to operationalize this principle by ensuring representation and access. Affirmative action policies in India are among the most extensive in the world. However, their effectiveness depends on complementary measures such as quality education, awareness, and institutional support. Without these, reservation benefits tend to be captured by relatively better-off sections within Scheduled Castes, leaving the most disadvantaged behind. The Constitution of India contains several provisions to prohibit caste discrimination and advance Scheduled Caste welfare, including Articles 15, 16, 17, 46, 330, 332, and 338. Legislative measures such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act further strengthen this framework.

Reservation in education, employment, and political representation has created important openings for SC advancement, and a range of welfare schemes has also been introduced, including scholarships, housing support, marriage assistance, coaching schemes, development corporation loans, and skill development programmes . At the same time, the paper notes recurring implementation problems, including inadequate budget allocation, delayed fund release, administrative obstacles, and weak monitoring .

### **Critical analysis: policy-practice gap**

Another important theoretical perspective is that of intersectionality, which highlights how multiple forms of disadvantage—such as caste, class, gender, and region—interact to produce complex patterns of inequality. For example, SC women in rural Bahraich face multiple layers of marginalization compared to SC men or urban populations. The persistence of the policy-practice gap can be analyzed using implementation theory, which emphasizes the role of administrative capacity, political will, and local governance structures. Scholars argue that top-down policies often fail at the grassroots due to lack of accountability, corruption, and limited community participation. The central finding of the paper is that extensive constitutional safeguards coexist with persistent socio-economic inequality . Seven decades after the formal abolition of untouchability, SCs continue to lag behind on literacy, higher education, occupational diversification, and access to secure livelihoods .

### **Policy-practice gap in SC development**

Constitutional safeguards and legal protection, Welfare schemes and reservation policies Implementation bottlenecks (awareness gaps, delayed funds, bureaucracy, discrimination, weak monitoring) Persistent disparities in education, employment, and regional development . *As per data* the policy-practice gap in Scheduled Caste development, showing how strong legal safeguards are weakened by implementation failures and produce uneven social outcomes . Educational disparities remain pronounced . In Uttar Pradesh, SC literacy trails the state average, and in Bahraich the SC literacy rate is 17 percentage points below the state SC average, while higher education participation remains extremely low . Occupational concentration is another major indicator of exclusion . Nearly half of SC workers were agricultural labourers, and the proportion of cultivators among SCs was much lower than among the general population, indicating landlessness and economic insecurity .

Regional disparity deepens the problem .. Bahraich performs worse than both Uttar Pradesh and India on literacy and SC literacy, while also showing very high rural concentration. This demonstrates that caste-based disadvantage is not evenly distributed and becomes more severe in backward districts . The paper also rightly notes the reservation policy paradox: while reservation has enabled the emergence of an SC middle class in some sectors, large sections remain unable to benefit because poor schooling and low educational attainment prevent access to reserved seats and jobs in Bahraich.

### **Conclusion and policy recommendations**

Thus, a multidimensional approach to development is required, integrating education, health, employment, and social justice. Policymaking must move from a one-size-fits-all model to a context-specific strategy that addresses local realities and the unique challenges faced by Scheduled Castes in different regions.

From a theoretical standpoint, achieving substantive equality requires moving beyond formal equality to capability enhancement, as proposed by Amartya Sen. This involves expanding real freedoms and opportunities for marginalized groups, enabling them to lead lives they value.

The evidence presented in this paper points to limited progress alongside persistent structural inequality. Although the constitutional framework and welfare policies have created opportunities for some, the benefits remain unevenly distributed and are weakest in rural backward districts such as Bahraich . The key findings of the study are clear: Scheduled Castes account for 20.70% of Uttar Pradesh's population, yet continue to lag in literacy, higher education access, and occupational diversification; regional disparities are substantial; and implementation gaps weaken the impact of policy .

### Policy recommendations

1. **Regional targeting:** Backward districts should receive proportionately greater resource allocation with district-specific action plans .
2. **Educational infrastructure:** Quality schools, trained teachers, scholarships, and residential support should be strengthened in SC-dominated areas .
3. **Higher education access:** Remedial coaching, mentoring, hostel support, and financial assistance are needed to improve retention and progression .
4. **Skill development and employment:** Training should be linked to market demand and employment pathways, with stronger support for SC entrepreneurship .
5. **Land rights:** Land reform and access to productive resources should be strengthened for landless SC households .
6. **Implementation strengthening:** Awareness drives, facilitation centres, simplified procedures, and stronger monitoring systems are essential .
7. **Addressing discrimination:** Enforcement of civil rights and atrocity laws must improve alongside sensitisation of local institutions .
8. **Data systems:** District- and block-level tracking of SC development indicators should be institutionalised .
9. **Political empowerment:** SC participation in planning and local governance should be enhanced .
10. **Long-term structural change:** Welfare measures should be paired with deeper transformation in education, labour markets, landholding, and social attitudes .

Achieving substantive equality requires more than legal guarantees. It demands sustained implementation, targeted regional investment, and the conversion of formal rights into real capabilities and dignified lives for the broader SC population .

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