INTRODUCTION

Today, the world is fast progressing and for the progress of any nation, education plays a pivotal role. It is the basis on which a country is built. This discipline has its impact on every sphere of life of an individual. Individual's development is the nation's development. Hence for all round development of an individual, education plays the role of the kingpin. In order to educate every individual of a country, education must be made free and compulsory upto a certain level and at higher level, every individual must get equal opportunities to acquire it according to his aptitude and capacity.

Thus providing equal opportunities either in the sphere of education or occupation or any other is the fundamental requirement to be achieved by any democratic country.

To provide equal opportunities does not mean that equality must be given to everybody irrespective of his abilities or capabilities. No individual is equal in ability, aptitude and proficiency but it does meant that each individual should get equal opportunities in the sphere of his choice without any discrimination, based on race, religion, caste, sex, social or economic status etc.
The constitution of India itself assures equality to all the citizens in every field of life. Facilities are being provided, on equal grounds, in all the fields including education to maintain equality.

Thus, the present research project aimed at finding out the extent of facilities and opportunities were available to the two educationally backward national minorities — Muslims and the Scheduled castes and to investigate as to how far these communities fare as compared to other educationally advanced social groups in the sphere of education.

Keeping in view the above aspects the design of the study was prepared to find out the extent to which equality of opportunities are provided to these communities in the field of education. In our educational system Std. X is most crucial year, as the students of this class take their first public examination and it is a turning point in their lives. Their achievement in the examination depends much on the facilities and opportunities available to them.

The answers to the questions:

(1) Are same facilities being provided to all the students of Std. X and if they are to what extent? and
(2) Why are the educational achievement of the three groups; i.e. Muslims, the Scheduled castes and 'Others'
not the same? were being sought through the present study.

Therefore, to undertake an empirical study the researcher started with the following hypotheses:

i. There is no significant different in the educational opportunities provided to the students of different groups based on religion, language, caste, creed or sex.

ii. No significant discrimination is made in appointment on the basis of caste, creed, religion, sex, etc.

iii. No significant inequalities are found in financial assistance provided to the institutions run by these minorities; and to the students who are studying in these schools.

iv. The school environment and activities in the schools do not show any significant discrimination to any cultural or religious group.

The objectives formulated to test the above hypothesis were:
OBJECTIVES:

i) To investigate the educational opportunities provided to the students of different groups based on religion, language, caste, creed or sex.

ii) To investigate if discrimination is made in appointment on the basis of caste, creed, religion or sex.

iii) To investigate the financial assistance provided by the government and voluntary agencies to the institutions run by minorities.

iv) To investigate the financial assistance and other facilities provided to the students of minority communities in schools.

v) To investigate school environment and activities if they are discriminatory to any cultural or religious groups.

To test the hypotheses and objectives stated above, Aurangabad was selected as the locale for the study and the method adopted was the survey method.
The survey method was selected as the present study required factual information regarding quality of education, provision of various facilities in the educational institutions and the opinion of the people regarding socio-economic status of the Muslims and the Scheduled castes communities.

In order to elicit information regarding home background, socio-economic status, environment in school, working of the educational institutions, quality of teaching and aspirations, the following questionnaires were administered:

1. Questionnaire for students  
2. Questionnaire for teachers  
3. Questionnaire for Heads of Institutions  
4. Questionnaire for parents  
5. Questionnaire for the leaders of the communities (Muslims and the Scheduled castes).

SCHOOL:

It was decided to include all the secondary schools managed by Muslim and the Scheduled castes communities and to compare the educational opportunities available to the pupils of secondary schools in these institutions. We thought it advisable to select two schools by other castes (i.e. non-Muslim and non-Scheduled castes) one of the most outstanding schools run by other castes community was
selected for comparison because it has shown consistently good achievement at the S.S.C. examination, it is financially sound and is situated in urban area. The other school managed by Other castes is situated in rural area and is headed by a political heavy weight.

Only aided schools were selected for the study because through this study one could understand the problems prevailing in these schools. Thus eight Muslim managed, four Scheduled castes managed and two Other castes managed schools from urban and rural areas were selected for the study.

STUDENTS:

Due to a very large and uncontrollable sample of the students in the selected secondary schools only standard X students were selected. These formed the students' sample.

PARENTS:

To cross check the students' responses only the parents of the students studying in Std. X of the selected schools formed the parents sample.

TEACHERS:

All the teachers of secondary/high schools of the selected school's formed teachers' sample.
Head of the Institution:

Due to indifferent and non-cooperative attitude of the heads of the institutions only the heads of selected schools could form the sample.

LEADERS:

Leaders from different walks of life like social, political, religious, educational and economic fields of the three communities were included under the sample. 150 leaders were administered the questionnaire of which 100 questionnaire were returned.

Chapter I

This chapter deals with the concept of equality of educational opportunity. In this chapter an attempt has been made to study; the importance of education; the constitutional provision of free and compulsory education on equal basis, equality, its origin, definition, meaning, interpretation of equality of educational opportunities; problems in achieving equality position in India and efforts to reorganise the educational system for providing equality of educational opportunities to all communities.

An effort to present the socio-political scene on the basis of the findings of various researches done in different countries and in India from the point of view equality of opportunities in education is also discussed.
Chapter II

The two educationally backward communities at the National level (N E P 1986) are the Muslims and the Scheduled castes. In this chapter an attempt is made to find out the causes of their backwardness, an effort has also been made to trace the historical background. The first part deals with the Muslim minority and the second part with the Scheduled castes community from its origin to the present stage. Lastly, a comparative study of the educational status of the two communities was done.

Chapter III

The research design and procedure has been dealt in detail in this chapter. The operational definition of equal educational opportunities, hypothesis, objectives of the study, sample, locale, questionnaires and procedure of administrating of questionnaire are discussed.

Chapter IV

The fourth chapter deals with analysis of the questionnaires and interpretations of the findings.

Chapter V

In the last chapter major findings, conclusion and suggestions are included.
This research study is a pioneering effort to find out educational opportunities provided to Muslims and the Scheduled caste. The study included schools which are fully financially supported by the state. However there is also need to undertake a study of schools run by these communities which are not on grant-in-aid list and Zilla Parishad managed schools. A better picture of equality or inequality of educational opportunities would emerge if we do so.