CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
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1.1 THE PROBLEM

All human societies, known till date from the simplest to the most complex, exhibit some or the other kind of social inequality. On the basis of these inequalities or differences individuals and groups are ranked hierarchically into strata and the amounts of power, prestige and wealth are distributed according to the positions they hold in the hierarchy. This system of hierarchical ranking or stratification also determines the extent of access a person or a group shall have to various goods and services including cultural goods. Thus a person’s membership of a certain stratum determines his/her “life chances” – from the chances of survival at birth to educational and occupational attainments and of earning a certain income. Even the state of health and longevity depend on one’s position in the hierarchy.

Stratification has characterized and is characterizing all civilized societies from the earliest that emerged some five thousand years ago in areas now identified as Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Israel and
India, to the most advanced industrial societies of the today's western world. However, man's dream of equality and an egalitarian society is also as old as his civilization. For thousands of years men have been assessing the properties of stratification and philosophers have been theorizing about the matter, while some like Plato and modern functionalist sociologists like Davis and Moore, insist on its desirability, others like Rousseau and Voltaire, and the communists led by Marx and Angels advocate abolition of this social aberration and its replacement by a classless society. With the greater demands for equality, grew the need to promote social mobility and as such equity.

Indian society has traditionally been stratified on the basis of spiritual purity-pollution dimension and as such the traditional Hindu society is divided into four major divisions or *varnas* of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras with the extent of prestige and social status ranking in that order. Each *varna* is composed of a large number of *Jatis*, or Caste groups based on the traditional occupations. The castes within each *varna* are also arranged hierarchically. As said earlier, that, a person's or group's position in the hierarchy of the strata determines his/her life chances including access to education, a certain type of occupation, and a certain income has been a function of caste in the traditional Indian social structure.
During the medieval times Muslims brought with them the concept of an egalitarian society, as they believe all human beings are children of God and as such equal. Although the two communities, Hindus and Muslims have been living together for several centuries and exchanging culture and traditions and also adding through this to the already rich cultural heritage of the Nation, there has been no significant dent in the system of caste stratification.

Similarly, the European settlers specially the British, who ruled India for over two hundred years, brought with them so-called modern science, philosophy of humanism, concept of a secular state and that of an egalitarian society based on the cardinal slogans of the French Revolution, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

Although all these historical events and processes brought about a change in the attitudes of Indian people and as a result the values of secularism, democracy, humanism and equality of opportunity have become popular. Despite this, the traditional caste structure of the Hindus has remained the dominant structure and the membership of caste has been a determining factor of a person's life chances even in the secular spheres of activity. Infact, what has happened is that Indian society is not stratified only in terms of the caste and Varna but also in terms of the economic classes. The Indian polity today is also divided
into various religious communities and linguistic groups with unequal access to the goods and services and the wealth available to the Nation.

With this background in mind Indian people constituted themselves into a democratic secular society with a socialistic pattern of society, after obtaining freedom from British rule. The founding fathers of the Constitution of independent India specified the goals of modern Indian society in the Preamble to the Constitution which read as:

"WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC, REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all;

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and integrity of the Nation.

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, this twenty-sixth day of November 1949 do HEREBY, ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION".
With a view to fulfilling the envisaged goals the Constitution makes various provisions in the form of Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy.

An important administrative issue dealt within the Constitution refers to the division of educational responsibility between the Government of India and the Government of States. Under Article 246, the Schedule 7 lists the functions of the States and the Union. The division of functions between the union and the state governments with regard to education is as follows.

**LIST – I**

**LIST OF UNION FUNCTIONS**

**Entry 63.** The institutions known at the commencement of this Constitution as the Benaras Hindu University, the Aligarh Muslim University and the Delhi University, and any other institution of national importance.

**Entry 64.** Institutions for Scientific of Technical Education financed by the Government of India wholly or in part and declared by Parliament by law to be institutions of national importance.

**Entry 65.** Union agencies and institutions for,

a) professional, vocational or technical training, including the training of police officers; or

b) The promotion of special studies or research; or
c) Scientific or technical assistance in the investigation or detection of crime.

Entry 66. Co-ordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions.

**LIST – II**

**LIST OF STATE FUNCTIONS**

Entry 11. Education including Universities, subject to the provisions of entries 63, 64, 65 and 66 of List 1 and entry 25 of List III.

**LIST – III**

**LIST OF CONCURRENT FUNCTIONS**

Entry 25. Vocational and technical training of labour.

According to J.P. Naik and Syed Nurullah, in order to achieve national goals envisaged in the Preamble to the Constitution, the Nation decided to adopt the three major programmes (Naik and Nurullah 1971):

1. democracy as a way of life;
2. socialistic pattern of society; and
3. industrialization based upon modern science and technology.

In order to ensure the success of the three programmes (mentioned above) to achieve the national objectives envisaged
in the Preamble to the Constitution, the founding fathers of the Constitution incorporated the following articles, with regard to education, as education was considered one of the essential inputs in the process of modernization of the Indian tradition and also an instrument of social engineering.

The provisions of the following Articles of the Constitution provide direction to these programmes.

**Article 14:** guarantees to all, equality before law and equal protection of laws within the territory of India.

**Article 15:** prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or any of them. Vide the 93rd Amendment 2005 this article was amended to provide reservation in admission for SC's, ST's and backward classes in private unaided educational institutions.

**Article 16:** provides for equality of opportunity in the matters of public employment.

**Article 17:** abolishes untouchability and declares its practice as a cognizable offense.

**Article 19:** guarantees freedom of speech, freedom assemble peacefully without arms, to form associations or unions, to move through the territory of India, to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India, to practice any profession and to carry on any occupation or trade or business.
**Article 21:** guarantees that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

**Article 23:** prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour.

**Article 24:** prohibits employing children below the age of 14 in any hazardous employment.

**Article 28:** guarantees freedom of religion, it directs that “no religious instructions shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds”.

**Article 29:** guarantees that “any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof, having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same” and it further declares that “no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institutions maintained by the state or receiving aid out of the state funds, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them”.

**Article 30:** declares that “all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice” and adds that “the state shall not discriminate in granting aid to educational institution on the ground that it is under the
management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.”

**Article 38:** The Constitution of India enjoins on the state “to strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice social economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life”.

**Article 41:** provides for right to work, right to education and right to public assistance in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement etc.

**Article 46:** “The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitations”.

Vide the 86th Constitutional (Amendment) Act 2002 Elementary Education made a fundamental Right under Article 21 A which reads:

**Article 21 A:** Right to Education: “The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6-14 years in such manner as the State may determine by law”.

The said Amendment also substituted the content of the Article 45 which now reads as:
**Article 45:** Provision for Early Childhood Care and Education to all children below the age of six years: “the state shall endeavor to provide Early Childhood Care and Education for children until they complete the age of six years”.

Under the same Amendment Act one more fundamental duty was added under **Article 51 A:**

[K]: “Who is a parent or a guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and 14 years”.

**Article 338:** National Commission for Scheduled Castes: “There shall be commission for the Scheduled Castes to be known as the National Commission for the Scheduled Castes with duties to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes under the Constitution including the matters related to individual cases. This commission also advises the Planning Commission, the Central and the State Governments on the protection, welfare, development and advancement of the Scheduled Castes”.

**Article 338A:** National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. There shall be a National Commission for the Scheduled Tribes known as the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes with duties to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safe guards provided for the Scheduled Tribes under the constitution
including the matters related to individual cases. This commission also advises the Planning Commission, the State and the Central Governments on the protection welfare, development and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes.

**Article 339**: provides for the appointment of a commission on the administration of scheduled castes, and the welfare of the scheduled tribes, before the end of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution”.

**Article 340**: further provides for the appointment of a commission to investigate into the conditions of the backward classes and report their findings to the President together with their recommendations if any”.

**Article 341** of Indian Constitution: declares that the President of India “may with respect to any State or Union Territory, where it is a state after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of, or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purpose of this constitution be deemed to be scheduled castes in relation to that state or Union Territory as the case may be.”

**Article 343**: declares that Hindi in Devnagri Script (with the international form of Indian numerals) would be the official language of the union. In order to make this transition gradual and acceptable to all shades of opinion, however, it was
provided that English shall continue to be used, until 1965, for all official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before the commencement of the constitution. Hindi is to be first used in addition to English and later on it will replace English gradually in accordance with such programme as the Parliament may decide.

**Article 350-A:** It endeavors “to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary state of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups”.

**Article 350-B:** provides for the appointment of a special officer for linguistic minorities who shall be responsible to the President and who shall investigate into all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the Constitution.

(Note: Articles 14 to 35 are all Fundamental rights and Articles 36 to 51 are Directive Principles of State Policy.)

To give effect to the provisions of the Constitution listed above education was conceived as a mechanism of social engineering. It is expected to provide training, besides providing training in the skills required for jobs in the modern industrial occupational structure, and to bring about an attitudinal change by fostering the development of critical faculties. Having realized the significance of education in the socio-economic-
cultural transformation of the Nation, the government of India, after independence constituted several committees and commissions to suggest measures to reform the educational system, so that it becomes an instrument of national development and therefore to make education accessible to all sections of the Indian society irrespective of differences in terms of religion, caste, language, gender, or class, so that every individual citizen has an equal opportunity for self-development in terms of physical, cultural & economic dimensions and also an equal opportunity to contribute his / her best to the overall development of the Nation as a whole. Notable among the commissions and committees for such educational reforms are:

1. University Education Commission, 1948-49
3. National Committee on Women's Education, 1958-59 (Durgabai Deshmukh Committee)
4. Committee for Differentiation of Curricula for Boys and Girls, 1961 Hansa Mehta Committee)
5. Committee to look into the Causes for lack of Public support particularly in Rural Areas for Girl's education and to Enlist Public Co operation, 1963 (Bhaktavatsalam Committee)
6. The Indian Education Commission, 1964 – 66 (Kothari Commission)
7. Committee on the Status of Women, 1971-74
9. NPE Review Committee: Towards an Enlightened and Humane Society, 1990 (Acharya Ramamurthy Committee)

The National Policy of Education 1986 emphasizes the inclusion of the hitherto excluded sections (SC', ST', OBC's) into the mainstream of national life and also empowers these sections especially the women.

All these committees and commissions have made recommendations to make education in India relevant to her social, cultural, economic, political and spiritual needs. They also made recommendations as to how equality of opportunity in education can be ensured. During the last six decades of independence a lot of positive change towards implementation of the principles of equality of opportunity in education and employment has taken place through the operation of the constitutional provisions and the implementation of the recommendations of the committees and commissions on Education referred to above. Through the implementation of the
recommendations of the committees and commissions vigorous developments have taken place since independence.

As far as the provision of schooling facilities are concerned the same have been provided within a walking distance of all children up to the standard V and for 60% of the children up to standard VIII. But even then the children in the eligible age groups do not attend them. The number of secondary and higher secondary schools and colleges has multiplied.

The following statistics give a glimpse of the progress made.

**TABLE 1. SEXWISE LITERACY RATE 1951 – 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>% LITERATE</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>8.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>28.31</td>
<td>40.46</td>
<td>15.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>45.95</td>
<td>21.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>(41.42)</td>
<td>(53.45)</td>
<td>(28.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>65.38</td>
<td>75.85</td>
<td>54.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes:
1. Literacy rate for 1951, 1961 and 1971 related to population aged five years and above. The rates for the years 1981 and 1991 relate to the population aged seven years and above. The literacy of rates for population aged five years and above in 1981 have been shown in brackets.
2. The 1981 rates exclude Assam where the 1981 census could not be conducted. The 1991 census rate exclude Jammu and Kashmir where the 1991 census was not conducted.
The literacy rates have gone up considerably from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% in 2001. For men it has increased from 27.16% to 75.85%. The table also shows that literacy among women has increased proportionately with men. However, though the progress has been phenomenal, increasing from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% in 2001, the light of education has not touched the people of all regions, communities, castes, social classes etc., equally. Proportion of population (of relevant age group) participating in higher education has also been increasing at a very fast pace, as shown in table 2.

**TABLE 2: ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION SINCE 1950-51-2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NO.OF STUDENTS (IN LAKH)</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE THERE IN TOTAL POPULATION IN AGE GROUP 17-23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Enrolment at the higher education stage increased more than 21 times during the period 1950-51 and 1999-2000. It rose from 3.6 lakhs to 77.3 lakhs. The enrolment percentage to total
percentage in the age group increased from 0.8 percent to almost 6 percent during this period.

At present there are 306 University-level institutions in India including 18 Central Universities, 186 State Universities, five Institutions established under States Legislature Act, 84 Deemed Universities and 13 Institutes of national importance. Of them, 38 Institutions provide education in agriculture (including forestry, dairy, fisheries and veterinary Science) 21 in Medicine (including Ayurveda), 44 in Engineering and Technology, and four in Information Technology, four in Legal Studies. The number of Open Universities is nine and that of Women Universities is five. The total enrolment of students in Universities and Colleges is 88 lakhs while the number of teachers is more than four lakhs.

Participation of girls at all levels of education improved considerably over the years. At present the proportion of women students to men students in higher education is 1:4. The enrollments have also increased manifolds.

In his essay, “Many Faces of Gender Inequality”, Amartya Sen, highlights seven types of inequality or aspects of inequality that exist between men and women around the world including both the developed and developing societies. These are: (1) Mortality inequality (2) Natality inequality (3) Basic facility inequality (4) Special Opportunity Inequality (5) Professional inequality (6)
Ownership inequality and (7) Household-inequality. One of the results of these inequalities is the inequality in access to education and especially to higher education. Inequality in higher education results in inequality in access to prestigious occupations. Although the facilities of higher education seem to have equalised, the inequality in access to higher education continues to be glaring which prevents women from getting empowered. From the above it is clear that despite the vigorous expansion of educational facilities a sizeable proportion of the Indian population remains illiterate. Similarly, higher education does not appear to be equally accessible to all the sections of the society, although the enrolment figures are impressive.

According to J.C.Aggarwal, it is mainly the upper and the middle classes that are the beneficiaries of this system. 60% of the population (aged 10 and over) which is still illiterate has obviously received none of its benefits. Of every 100 children of 6 years of age, 70 drop out at an early stage, so that only about 30 complete class VIII. 70% of the seats in secondary schools and 80% of the seats in higher education are taken by the top 20% of the income groups.

As the studies reviewed in the following chapter indicate, the facilities of higher education are availed of by the urban, middle class, upper caste, sections of the society. Even among these sections there is a domination of men over women in higher
education. Thus the rural, lower class, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward communities and women continue to remain bereft of the facilities of higher education and the prestigious jobs available to university graduates in this country.

It is, therefore, pertinent to study as to what factors of background determine an individual's chances of entering an institution of higher education. In other words it is highly relevant at this point of time to examine how far the constitutional provision of equality of access to higher education has been achieved after about six decades of independence and practice of socialistic principles of the Constitution.

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of the study is to examine the nature and extent of inequality in access to higher education.

The study is intended to find out as to who goes to college and to draw a socio-economic profile of the students on the rolls of the institutions of higher education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since the study is made through a sample survey, no hypotheses are proposed to be tested. However, it is addressed to seeking answers to the following questions:
1. Do males and females have equal access to higher education?

2. Do rural and urban residents have equal access to higher education?

3. Do children of parents from different religious communities have equal access to higher education?

4. Do children of parents from different categories have equal access to higher education?

5. Do children of parents with different educational attainments have equal access to higher education?

6. Do children of parents in different occupations have equal access to higher education?

7. Do children of different Income groups have equal access to higher education?

1.3. **DELIMITATION:**

Due to the paucity of time and resources at the disposal of the investigator, the study could not be made on a national or even a state scale and as such was limited to a sample of undergraduate students on the rolls of colleges and University departments in Barak Valley and is titled, “Inequality in Access to Higher Education: A Study of Barak Valley in South Assam”.

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1.4. **DEFINITION OF THE TERMS USED:**

**Education:** Education for the present study is used to refer to formal education and implies education provided by formal agencies like schools and colleges etc. However, functional literacy is treated as equivalent to primary education. The levels of education are arranged in the following hierarchial order.

**Illiterate:** Not having gone to school nor being able to read and write any language.

**Literate/ Primary School:** Having studied upto Class IV or V. This level also included those who may not have gone to a formal school but are able to read and write their first language.

**Middle School:** Formal Education up to class VII or VIII.

**High School:** Formal Education up to class IX or X.

**Higher Secondary School:** Formal Education up to class XI or XII. This level also includes Post High school diploma courses.

**Graduation(liberal arts):** First degree level education in liberal-arts above Higher Secondary for which a degree is provided by a University or Deemed University.

**Professional-Graduation:** First degree level education in Professional courses like Medicine, Engineering / Technology, Pharmacology, Architecture, Management, etc.
**Post-Graduation**: Masters’ degree level education in liberal-arts as well as Professional subjects.

**Higher-Education**: It is defined in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Hand book as more specialized study normally undertaken after successful completion of a good basic education lasting for at least eleven years. For the present study, higher education is taken as any study after Senior secondary school (+2) for which a degree is awarded by a University or a deemed University. It excludes courses offered by institutions like Polytechnics for which diplomas are not offered by Universities. It also excludes post Secondary school courses of less than three years duration like certificate and diploma courses even if offered by Universities and Deemed Universities.

**Occupation**: It is defined as relatively continuous and full time activity that provides workers a livelihood and defines their general social status. For the purpose of this study occupations are classified and arranged in following hierarchial order.

**Unskilled Labour**: All kinds of casual labour including farm labour.

**Small-Peasant(Marginal-farming)**: Agricultural workers owning very small amounts of land and earning livelihood partly by wage-labour.
**Semi-Skilled Labour:** Masons, carpenters, drivers, workshop mechanics, electricians, etc.

**Class-IV employment:** Peons, orderlies, laboratory bearers, lowest ranks in armed forces and police.

**Business:** Traders of all kinds.

**Clerical-Work:** Clerical workers and its equivalent including JCO’s in the armed forces.

**School-Teaching:** Primary and Secondary school teachers.

**Professional Work:** Physicians, Engineers, Architects, College and University teachers, Scientists, Painters, Journalists, etc.

**Administration:** Managers and gazetted officers including commissioned officers in the armed forces, MP’s, MLA’s, Ministers, bureaucrats, etc.

**Home-makers (House-Wives):** Women who are engaged in the work of looking after their own homes only and do not go out for earning wages / salary.

**Income:** Legitimised earnings of individuals are considered to be income. For example, wages and salary of the workers and the earnings of business groups and farmers.
ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT

Gen: Stands for General Category,

SC: for Scheduled Caste;

OBC: for Other Backward Communities;

ST: for Scheduled Tribes;

In the tables:

P stands for persons;

M for male; and

F for female.