



Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity

**Education and Social Equity  
With a Special Focus on Scheduled Castes  
and Scheduled Tribes in Elementary Education**

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**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS  
Research Monograph No 19**

May 2008



National University of Educational  
Planning and Administration  
NUEPA

## Summary

The Scheduled Castes (SCs, also known as Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes (STs, also known as Adivasis) are among the most socially and educationally disadvantaged groups in India. This paper examines issues concerning school access and equity for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities and also highlights their unique problems, which may require divergent policy responses.

The paper is divided into seven main parts. The first two sections introduce the reader to the nature of exclusion and discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and outline the debates on the role of education in improving the socio-economic profile of both groups. The third section explains the socio-economic conditions within which Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes live and their marginalized status in contemporary India. The fourth section provides a discussion of literacy advancement among these groups, and of national policies and programmes which aim to improve school access and equity. The fifth section highlights special efforts made by certain state governments to improve educational participation of these two communities as well as the educational experiments on a more modest scale undertaken by community-based nongovernmental organisations. The sixth section focuses on casteism as a deeply ideological issue that undercuts even the most genuine reform measures, and suggests research and policy options that may help to address underlying structural and ideological issues. The concluding section highlights a critical areas for further research in the area.

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ISBN: 0-901881-20-1

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