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Falling Numbers of SC & ST Students in IITs

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Why in News

Recently, data collected from a series of **Right to Information (RTI)** applications pertaining to five older **Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)**, has indicated that the **acceptance rate is skewed against students from the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities.**

SC and ST applicants are half as likely to get selected for a Ph.D. programme at IITs as aspirants from the General Category (GC) are.

Key Points

- **Data from the RTI Applications:**

- **Acceptance Rate:**

- It refers to the **number of students selected for every 100 students who applied.**
 - It stood at **4%** for students from **General Category (GC)**.
 - It falls to **2.7% for OBC** students and further down to just **2.16% for SCs** and **2.2% for STs**.
- This finding **comes against the backdrop of the Education Ministry's data** submitted to Parliament in 2020 showing the failure of the IITs to fill Ph.D. seats as per reservation.

The government's **reservation policy mandates** allocation of **15% seats for students from the SCs**, **7.5% from STs** and **27% from OBCs**.

- **Significance:**

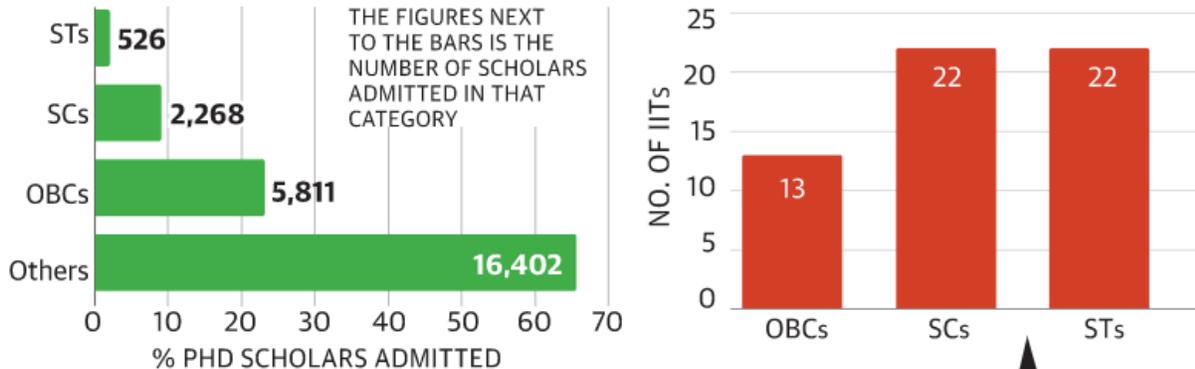
- The **IITs have often cited the lack of applicants from the marginalised communities** for the situation. However, **the RTI data reveals quite the opposite.**
- The **percentage of GC students** among those admitted was **always higher** than their percentage among those applied. However, the **converse was true for SC, ST and OBC candidates.**

- **Education Ministry's Data:**

- Of the total admissions made by all IITs from 2015 to 2019, only 9.1% went to SC and 2.1% to ST.
- Only 23.2% seats went to applicants from the OBCs. Remaining 65.6%, or roughly two-thirds of all the seats, went to General Category applicants.

Matter of inclusion

Of the 25,007 PhD scholars admitted in all 23 IITs in the last five years, only 9.1% were from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 2.1% were from Scheduled Tribes (STs). The reservation policy mandates 15% of the seats for SCs, 7.5% for STs and 27% for Other Backward Classes (OBCs)



ADMISSION PATTERN IN BIGGER IITS

Institute	Admitted	SCs (%)	STs (%)	OBCs (%)	Others (%)
IIT-Bombay	2,877	8.2	1.6	18.9	71.3
IIT-Kanpur	1,653	7.5	0.7	23	68.8
IIT-Delhi	3,081	6.7	1.2	15.6	76.5
IIT-Madras	3,874	6.4	1.3	27.9	64.4
IIT-Kharagpur	3,057	12.7	2.2	20.2	64.9

The chart shows the number of IITs that failed to meet the reservation mandate. For instance, 22 of the 23 IITs failed to fill the seats reserved for the SCs and the STs

- **Reasons for Falling Rate:**
 - **Given by IITs:**
 - **Eligibility Issue:**
Some institutions **could not even fill all the seats in the general category** since they **did not get enough eligible candidates**.
 - **Economic Causes:**
 - Students of the required calibre **tend to take up industry jobs rather than join for a PhD** which has extra uncertainties and lower income levels during PhD and in some areas even post PhD.
 - It is possible that the **family background and economic level** may have an impact on such candidates applying for a PhD.
 - **Argument of 'Merit':**
 - There has been long-standing **opposition among IIT administrators and faculty to reservations**, which they see as a form of **unjust government intervention** in their meritocratic institutions.
 - The **recent report** of an Education Ministry-constituted committee **recommended the abolition of reservation in faculty recruitment**.
The committee based its recommendations primarily on arguments **claiming the need for IITs to maintain their academic excellence and the lack of candidates from the reserved categories** who fulfil the qualification criteria.
 - **A More Systematic Problem:**
The problem is also of practice and **access to quality school education**, leading to **poor base**.
- **Advantages of following the Reservation Policy:**
 - **An Example to Other Institutions:**
 - The IITs are and should continue to be institutions of national importance. But they **also have social functions**.
 - They should set an example to other institutions by **creating opportunities for and encourage the underprivileged communities to excel** in research and innovation.
 - **Bridging Inequalities:**
Affirmative action and caste-based reservation can **help bridge inequalities in society**, enable the underprivileged to have access to quality education, promote diversity, and, more importantly, remove obstacles to equality and correct the past wrongs.

Way Forward

- Policy intervention has to begin sooner, in the early school years, to attempt to equalise opportunities in education.

- In addition, negative attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes about the ability of students belonging to the SC/ST groups are a major hurdle. Policy should recognise how such perceptions hold back individuals and groups, and seriously attempt to think of ways to alter these.
- Diversity issues can also be addressed through outreach campaigns.

Source:TH