

Education and Dalit Youth: A Place and Age-Specific Study in Rural Handia

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of education on Dalit youth aged 15–25 in rural Handia, Prayagraj district, Uttar Pradesh. Through qualitative fieldwork—interviews, focus group discussions, and observations—the research highlights how education fosters identity, aspiration, and awareness, especially influenced by Ambedkarite thought. However, systemic challenges such as caste-based discrimination, poverty, and infrastructural deficits hinder the transformative potential of education. The findings call for localized, age-sensitive, and caste-aware interventions to make education more inclusive and effective for marginalized youth.

Date of Submission: 08-06-2025

Date of Acceptance: 20-06-2025

I. Introduction

Dalits in India have long faced exclusion from educational and socio-economic advancement. While constitutional reforms and policies such as reservations and scholarships aim to bridge the gap, Dalit youth in rural areas continue to face intersecting disadvantages. This study explores how education impacts the lives of Dalit youth (aged 15–25) in Handia block of Prayagraj district, focusing on how age and place shape their educational experiences and aspirations.

II. Literature Review

1. Ambedkar (1936) emphasized education as a tool for social liberation and dignity.
2. Bourdieu (1986) introduced "cultural capital" to explain institutional bias and alienation faced by marginalized students.
3. Crenshaw (1989) coined intersectionality, helpful in understanding caste, class, gender, and rurality.
4. Deshpande (2011) and Nambissan (2010) observed that Dalit students often face exclusion even in "inclusive" spaces.
5. Guru (2000) and Jodhka (2012) highlighted that education for Dalits doesn't always translate into mobility due to caste-based market discrimination.

III. Objectives

1. To explore the socio-economic and educational background of Dalit youth in rural Handia.
2. To examine the age-wise differences in educational experiences.
3. To analyze place-specific infrastructural and social challenges to education.
4. To assess the impact of education on identity, empowerment, and aspirations.
5. To propose policy-oriented recommendations for inclusive education.

IV. Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design including in-depth interviews (30), FGDs (3), and key informant interviews. Theoretical frameworks included Ambedkarite thought, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, and intersectionality. Purposive sampling focused on Dalit youth aged 15–25 across four villages in Handia. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

V. Analysis of Data Collection / Findings

Dalit youth associate education with government employment, dignity, and awareness. Adolescents face dropout risks due to economic pressure and gender roles. Young adults experience disillusionment due to unemployment. Rural barriers include poor infrastructure, distance from institutions, and teacher discrimination. Despite hardships, education fosters Ambedkarite identity, rights-awareness, and symbolic empowerment.

VI. Conclusion

Education provides Dalit youth with awareness, aspiration, and political voice, yet structural barriers prevent its full benefits. Age and location significantly mediate their experience. The contradiction between symbolic empowerment and material exclusion needs urgent redress through caste-sensitive, localized, and intersectional education policies.

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