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Q5(b)

Discuss the issues of access and exclusion in higher education in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the issues of access and exclusion in higher education in India
- Keep the discussion within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Higher education in India expanded seats without equal access.

Bourdieu's cultural capital and English coaching filter entry.

Caste, gender, care, and fees exclude before and after admission.

Privatisation markets access.

AISHE and **Census** show a steep pyramid.

Introduction

Higher education is a ladder of credentials and a field of honour. Access is who enters. Exclusion is who is kept out by fees, language, caste, gender, and geography. Expansion of colleges has not ended that dual.

Body

Access

- Public universities, reservations, and scholarships opened doors after independence. **Pierre Bourdieu** would still call the exam a cultural filter.
- English-medium schooling and coaching towns concentrate access in a few urban belts.
- **AISHE** and **Census** literacy-to-graduate steps show a pyramid, not a pipeline.

Exclusion

- Fees, hostel shortage, and unpaid care keep many women and rural poor out, as NFHS and time-use hints show.
- Caste discrimination in classrooms and hostels is exclusion after entry. Dalit student movements named that.
- Disability, minority language, and informal-labour households lack the "college-going" habitus.

Issues that bind both

- Privatisation sells access to those who can pay and excludes the rest as a market outcome.
- Quality gaps mean a degree that does not convert to Weberian life-chances.

- **Reservation** is a tool of access; stigma and poor school foundations limit its yield.

Flow diagram

Higher education -> Access expansion
Higher education -> Exclusion filters
Exclusion filters -> Fees language caste gender
Access expansion -> Credentials

Conclusion

Access expanded on paper. Exclusion continues through money, language, caste, gender, and care. **Bourdieu**'s cultural capital and **Weber**'s credentials explain why a new college on the map is not equal entry. Count graduates and also who never sits the exam.

Facts & figures

Bourdieu

Education reproduces class by treating cultivated habitus as natural talent.

AISHE

All India Survey on Higher Education: enrolment, gender, and institutional mix.

Reservation

Constitutional access tool whose classroom yield still meets discrimination.

NFHS / Census

Education gradients by wealth, caste group, and sex that shape the college pool.