

SC/ST engg. admissions drop by 50%

Activists cite the 'tightening' of certain norms for **Post Matric Scholarship Scheme**

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The admission of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students to engineering courses has dropped by nearly 50% in Tamil Nadu over the years.

The period in question is the academic years from 2016-17 to 2020-21. For the purpose of this study, the admission to colleges under the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Technical Education has been taken into account.

The main reason cited by activists is the State government "tightening certain norms" in the implementation of the **Post Matric Scholarship Scheme, one of the flagship schemes of the Central government, for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students since August 2017.** At that time, the State equalised the course fees for the government and management quota seats at self-financing colleges. This meant the tuition fees of students enrolling under the management quota were only partially reimbursed.

Though there are seven components of the scheme such as maintenance allowance, study tour allowance and book allowance, it is the tuition fees that matter the most. The scheme covers students pursuing any course after Class 10, but it attracts more students of professional courses such as engineering and medicine than those of other courses.

During 2012-17, the State allowed the full reimbursement of tuition fees, as de-

On the wane

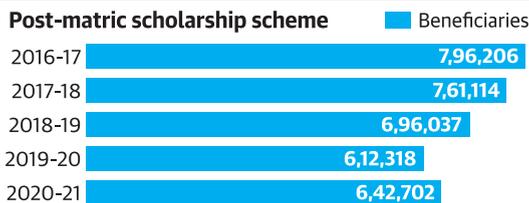
Admissions of SC/ST students to engineering colleges* have been dwindling over the years

Year	SC	SCA	ST	TOTAL
2016-17	31,048	2,966	1,000	35,014
2017-18	30,416	3,402	1,205	35,023
2018-19	20,172	2,720	828	23,720
2019-20	15,073	2,573	619	18,265
2020-21	14,601	2,249	668	17,518

SC - Scheduled Castes; SCA - Scheduled Castes (Arunthathiyar); ST - Scheduled Tribes

*Coming under the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Technical Education for the purpose of admissions

Note: Admissions cover those done under the government quota and the management quota



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G. CHANDRAMOHAN
Activist

termined by the fee fixation committee for self-financing colleges. During this period, there was a huge rise in the coverage of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students under the scheme. To cite an instance, the number of beneficiary students was 45,315 in 2011-12. But it went up by about 270% five years later with 1,23,199 students.

The previous AIADMK government had contended

that under the given guidelines, its committed liability, which was ₹353.55 crore in 2012-13, rose to ₹1,526.46 crore in 2017-18. The State had also complained that the Centre had not fully paid its share of the scholarship amount. Furthermore, the government was of the view that as the tuition fees for government quota seats were less than that of management quota seats, there existed an "incentive" for the self-financing colleges to promote more admissions under the management quota than under the government quota.

M. Bharathan, convener of the Amebdkar Kalvi Nustrandu Iyakkam, points out that the students choose private colleges owing to a

variety of reasons – the quality of teaching and infrastructure available – and no ulterior motive needs to be attached.

Referring to the revision of the guidelines by the Central government in March this year under which the Central and State governments will share the cost of the scholarship scheme on a 60:40 basis, G. Chandramohan, another activist, feels that as the burden of the State governments will be less now than in the past, the Tamil Nadu government can do away with the "stringent norms" fixed by the previous regime. In a petition addressed to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, he and Mr. Bharathan have sought that ₹2,000 crore be spent under for the scholarship scheme, of which 60% will be provided by the Centre.

K. Samuel Raj, general secretary, Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front, wants the authorities to ensure that the scholarship is disbursed at the right time. Delay in payment is a recurring feature. He feels that the private colleges, too, should pursue with the State government whenever there is a delay in the payment of the scholarship, instead of making the students to run from pillar to post.

A. Nagaraasan, general secretary of the Aathi Thaimizhar Peravai, calls upon the government to increase the quantum of internal reservation for the Arunthathiyars to 6% from 3% so that more students of the community can be covered under the scheme.