



WIDER Working Paper 2016/85

**Affirmative action and long-run changes in
group inequality in India**

Hemanshu Kumar¹ and Rohini Somanathan²

June 2016

Abstract: Research on caste-based inequalities in India has generally focused on differences between large categories such as the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, and the remainder of the population. We contribute to the literature on horizontal inequalities in India by looking within these groupings, and studying differences between the individual *jatis* that comprise these categories. Using census data, we find evidence of persistent inequalities in educational outcomes between the *jatis*, suggesting that socio-economic hierarchies have proved to be stable throughout the post-Independence period. Indeed, the evidence points to divergence: communities with more education in 1961 also had higher educational attainment in 2001. Also, while numerically larger Scheduled Caste communities witnessed greater improvements in educational levels compared to smaller ones, this was not true for the Scheduled Tribes. This may be the result of their greater political mobilization.

Keywords: caste, tribe, India, disadvantaged groups, horizontal inequalities, affirmative action, education

JEL classification: I24, J15, Z13

Acknowledgements: We are grateful to Kritika Goel and Mahima Vasishth for valuable research assistance. All remaining errors are ours.

¹ Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, India, corresponding author: hemanshu@econedse.org; ² Delhi School of Economics, New Delhi, India, rohini@econedse.org.

This study has been prepared within the UNU-WIDER project on ‘Discrimination and Affirmative Action: What have we learnt so far?’, which is part of a larger research project on ‘Disadvantaged Groups and Social Mobility’.

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Information and requests: publications@wider.unu.edu

ISSN 1798-7237 ISBN 978-92-9256-128-4

Typescript prepared by the Authors.

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The Institute is funded through income from an endowment fund with additional contributions to its work programme from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute or the United Nations University, nor the programme/project donors.

1 Introduction

There is now an extensive literature within economics on group mobility and inequality in India. Most of this work focuses on a comparison of four collections of social groups: the *Scheduled Castes* (SC), *Scheduled Tribes* (ST), *Other Backward Classes* (OBC), and a residual category often referred to as *General*, comprising all those not included in the above three categories. These large categories were formed primarily for purposes of affirmative action. Understanding the processes of social mobility and the evolution of horizontal inequalities requires looking *within* these categories as well as *between* them, whereas existing research concerns itself mainly with the latter.

In this paper, we focus on inequalities between individual *jatis* that comprise the SC and ST, using data from various rounds of the Census of India.¹ The Census of India began under British rule in 1872, and until 1931 it reported the number of castes and their educational and occupational characteristics in detail. At the time, most castes that were later scheduled had literacy rates of below 2%, while among upper castes such as the Brahmans and the Kayasths, between a fifth and a third of the population was literate (Somanathan, 2011). After the country gained independence and adopted a new constitution in 1950, comprehensive caste enumeration was abandoned,² and as a result, we know very little about what happened to differences between individual *jati* groups. Caste continued to be listed for all those who claimed SC or ST status,³ the two categories of communities for which the Constitution of India mandates affirmative action. We are therefore restricted to an examination of inequalities within these two categories, and

¹In this paper, we use the term caste to mean *jati*. This is in line with how the word is understood by most Indians.

²A Socio Economic and Caste Census was conducted in India starting in 2011, but its data have not yet been made publicly accessible.

³For instance, in the Census of 2011, question 8 of the Household Schedule dealt with its SC or ST status. Question 8(a) asks “Is this person SC/ST?” and question 8(b) follows up with “If SC or ST, write name of the SC or ST from the list supplied.” (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2013)

between them and the rest of the population. In the remainder of this paper we document these inequalities over the 1961-2001 period.

We begin in section 2 by providing a brief background on the origins of the schedules that defined the castes and tribes. In section 3 we discuss the ways in which data on these groups can be made consistent across multiple states and census years. There are differences in how groups are listed across space and time and also, state boundaries changed over this period. We match castes and tribes across states and years (the details of how we created caste and tribe groups that were comparable across states are elucidated in the appendix) and collapse state boundaries to the ones that existed in 1961. This done, in section 4 we proceed to describe the major changes in educational attainment by castes and tribes over the period of interest. Section 5 concludes.

2 Designation of the Scheduled groups

The term *Scheduled Castes* first appeared in the Government of India Act of 1935, which decentralised British power and provided some political representation to religious minorities, women and members of disadvantaged groups. This term did not specifically refer to Hindu castes and was defined in the Act as

such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes, being castes, races, tribes, parts or groups which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as “the depressed classes”. (Government of India, 1943, First Schedule, clause 26)

Lists of *depressed classes* had appeared in Census of India reports in previous years and, for the most part, these were groups that census officials considered ostracised within local communities because their touch was considered “polluting” by upper caste Hindus. The Act also refers to *backward tribes* but these are not defined within the Act. The Indian Constitution in

1950 created the two separate categories of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, based largely on these inherited schedules.

3 Data on Scheduled groups

The Census of India publications contain state-wise volumes on the *Special Tables on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*. We utilise the data on individual SCs and STs contained in these tables for our analysis.⁴

We create a state-level decadal panel of educational outcomes for caste and tribe groups spanning 1961-2001. The following sections discuss three aspects of the construction of this panel: (a) how the Indian states and union territories were combined into regions with boundaries that were consistent between 1961 and 2001, to serve as the geographical unit of analysis of our data; (b) how the individual castes and tribes were matched across years, and combined into groups that can be compared across states; and (c) the selection of specific educational attainment levels as our chosen indicators to track socio-economic mobility.

3.1 Boundary changes

As detailed in section 2 of Kumar and Somanathan (2015), there were several state-level boundary changes in the forty year period of our analysis. The most significant changes were in the form of the reorganisation of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh in 1966, the creation of the new states of Meghalaya and Mizoram from Assam in the early 1970s, the separation of Goa from Daman and Diu in 1987, and the partitioning of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in the year 2000. To create geographical units with consistent boundaries between 1961 and 2001, we thus collapse the newly created states into their parent states, and create a single region consisting of modern-day

⁴Occasionally these data are instead found in volumes on *Social and Cultural Tables* (for instance for Uttar Pradesh in 1971, see (Sinha, 1974)).

Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh.⁵ With some loss of precision, we shall refer to the resulting 27 consistent geographical areas as the 1961 states.

3.2 Tracking communities across states and years

The Census of India follows the latest government orders that enumerate the castes and tribes scheduled in each state and union territory of the country. Studying these communities across states and over different census rounds thus requires matching communities across these to create caste and tribe groups.

Since they first became available, census data have been used to try and organise the list of castes and tribes into meaningful groups for individual provinces, or less often, the country as a whole. Kitts (1885) for instance uses the reports of the Census of 1881 to categorise these communities into 1,929 groups. The more recent People of India project of the Anthropological Society of India has also largely depended on Government of India notifications, at least to identify historically disadvantaged groups (see for instance, Singh (1995) and Singh (1994)).⁶

⁵There were also a few area transfers between states, as noted in section 2.2 of Kumar and Somanathan (2015). Since these affected less than 0.02% of the population of each state involved, we ignore these changes.

⁶The process of creating caste and tribe groups is in general fraught, for at least three sorts of reasons. First, castes may have plural identities, and some of them may even be transitory. (Singh, 1995, p. 2) Second, it may be unclear which caste names are synonyms, which are sub-divisions of the same main caste, and which are merely spelling variants, especially given the linguistic diversity across regions of the country. Third, these communities have been undergoing processes of fission and fusion since at least colonial times, which makes it harder to determine how they should be classified: see for instance, Hardgrave (1968). Indeed, these processes may have been at least partly in response to the colonial ethnographic project and the politics of communal representation in colonial India (see Dirks (2001), Jaffrelot (2003, Ch. 5 & 6) and Chatterjee (2008, Ch. 3 & 4)). Cassan (2015) provides another interesting example of caste identity manipulation in colonial Punjab in response to a new law that restricted transactions in land to a group of “agricultural tribes.”

We construct caste and tribe groups using the state-wise lists of SCs and STs included in the publications of each census round. We start by matching SC and ST lists in Census 1961 through 1991 to the Census 2001 lists for each state. These lists were very stable between 1961 and 1971, and then again between 1981 to 2001.

The only complication consists of the changes in the lists wrought by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976. However, these changes were essentially of two kinds: (a) the removal of intra-state “area restrictions” on where individual communities were considered scheduled; and (b) the rationalisation of old lists within each state, to merge different entries that were considered part of the same caste group. Apart from these, the Act maintained the status quo and made no significant exclusions or inclusions (Galanter, 1984, p. 139). Thus, the task of matching the state-wise SC and ST lists from 1961 and 1971 to 2001 is straightforward.⁷

We thus arrive quite easily at a consistent list of SCs and STs in each state in all years of our panel, based on the lists in Census 2001. The principal challenge is that of matching communities *across* states. We accomplish this using an automated procedure that partitions all the caste and tribe names encountered in the SC and ST list entries into non-overlapping caste and tribe groups. We explain and illustrate our algorithm in the Appendix.

What does this process buy us? Treating each entry in the SC and ST lists of each 1961 state as a separate caste or tribe would have led to a total of 991 castes and 668 tribes, each found in exactly one state (by definition). With our procedure, we obtain 431 caste groups, each present in an average of 2.06 states (out of a possible 23 states that had SCs delimited in both 1961 and 2001) with a range between 1 and 21 states. Similarly, we obtain 384 tribe groups, each present in an average of 1.61 states (out of a possible 24 states with STs delimited in both 1961 and 2001), with a range between 1 and 8 states.

⁷The partitioning of states, as discussed in 3.1 also poses no difficulties since the newly created states inherited their parent state’s lists of SCs and STs.

3.3 Outcomes

We focus on educational attainment as a measure of inequality and mobility, and this needs some justification. There are two main sources of secondary data on household characteristics in India, the Census and the National Sample Survey (NSS). Neither of these, nor any other large dataset that covers this time period, collects data on household income. While the NSS has data on household consumption, it does not report individual castes. We are therefore limited to the decennial censuses.

In the census rounds between 1961 and 2001, there are two sorts of socio-economic outcomes that were tracked throughout for individual SCs and STs – occupation categories and educational attainment. However, the exact categories varied across the years. From 1961 through 1991, Census publications track the occupations of workers in individual SC and ST groups using 9-10 industrial categories.⁸ However in Census 2001, workers are clubbed into just four broad groups: cultivators, agricultural labourers, household industry and other workers. The coarseness of these categories and the heterogeneity within them in terms of incomes, stability in employment, the precise nature of the job and associated status makes it difficult to measure mobility in terms of occupational change.

We therefore focus on education outcomes as an indicator of the socio-economic status of each scheduled group. For the full period from 1961 through 2001, the census tables allow us to construct a state-level panel on the educational attainment of individual groups at three levels: literacy, primary school completion, and secondary school completion. Although some of the more recent censuses have data on graduate degrees and diplomas, the early censuses do not and we cannot therefore look beyond high school over the long period. Analytically this however, is no loss. As we show below, graduation and even high school completion rates are low even today amongst

⁸In Census 1961 for instance, these were (i) cultivators; (ii) agricultural labourers; (iii) mining, quarrying, livestock, forestry etc.; (iv) household industry; (v) manufacturing other than household industry; (vi) construction; (vii) trade and commerce; (viii) transport, storage and communication; (ix) other services. Later censuses record mining and quarrying separately from livestock, forestry, etc.

the two scheduled groups, and consequently there is negligible variation in the data over time or space that one can take advantage of.

In the discussion that follows, we thus rely on a 1961 state-level panel of literacy rates, and primary school and secondary school completion rates for individual caste and tribe groups, for each census round from 1961 through 2001.⁹

3.4 The largest caste and tribe groups

In our study of inequality and mobility, we will restrict attention to the caste and tribe groups that constitute at least 1% of the total population of SCs and STs, respectively. There are 24 such groups of castes and 17 groups of tribes. The former are listed in Table 1 and the latter in Table 2, along with their populations, as computed from the Census of 2001.

As the two tables show, the size distribution of the largest groups is very unequal. The Chamar group itself comprises over a quarter of the total SC population of the country, and is spread across all but two of the 23 states in our panel where castes are scheduled.¹⁰ Other groups that are very widespread include the Balmikis (17 states), Dhobis (12 states), the Pasi, Pan and Mang (in 11 states each) and the Mahars (10 states). At the other extreme, the Rajbanshi and Pod groups are found only in West Bengal. Most other large caste groups are concentrated in the southern states (e.g. the Madiga, Adi Dravida, Pallan, Adi Karnataka, and the Paraiyan), and a few in the northern states (e.g. the Mazhabi and Kori) or the eastern states (e.g. Bauri and Musahar). Some part of these differences in numbers arises from differences in language. Language varies by state and the 14 state

⁹In the absence of information on the age structure of individual groups, we scale the gross rates using information on the age structure of the overall population of India in each census year. In particular, for literacy rates we exclude the population between 0-6 years; for primary school completion we exclude the population between 0-9 years; and for secondary school completion we exclude the population between 0-14 years of age.

¹⁰No castes are scheduled in Nagaland, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep.

Table 1: Largest SC Groups

Caste group	Population	Percentage
Chamar	44,376,312	26.9
Madiga	7,393,924	4.5
Mahar	6,808,249	4.1
Pasi	6,567,249	4.0
Adi Dravida	6,329,969	3.8
Balmiki	5,608,130	3.4
Mala	5,560,292	3.4
Dusadh	4,680,921	2.8
Dhobi	4,454,032	2.7
Namasudra	4,105,520	2.5
Kori	3,754,895	2.3
Rajbanshi	3,386,617	2.1
Megh	3,032,947	1.8
Bagdi	3,032,166	1.8
Mang	2,703,566	1.6
Pan	2,582,245	1.6
Mazhabi	2,469,641	1.5
Musahar	2,384,456	1.4
Pallan	2,329,708	1.4
Adi Karnataka	2,237,340	1.4
Pod	2,216,513	1.3
Paraiyan	2,122,194	1.3
Bauri	1,995,900	1.2
Balahi	1,854,390	1.1
All SC	165,124,592	

Source: Special Tables for SC/ST, Census of India 2001.

1. Percentage refers to the percentage of total SC population falling in that group.
2. This table enumerates all groups that comprise at least 1% of the overall SC population.

Table 2: Largest ST Groups

Tribe group	Population	Percentage
Bhil	12,801,771	15.3
Gond	11,650,848	13.9
Santal	5,838,016	7.0
Oraon	3,959,028	4.7
Mina	3,800,002	4.5
Naikda	3,411,896	4.1
Munda	2,730,988	3.3
Sugalis	2,077,947	2.5
Naga	1,774,853	2.1
Khond	1,408,514	1.7
Boro	1,355,703	1.6
Koli Mahadev	1,227,562	1.5
Kol	1,179,712	1.4
Khasi	1,156,823	1.4
Varli	974,916	1.2
Shabar	934,516	1.1
Kokna	926,763	1.1
All ST	83,803,552	

Source: Special Tables for SC/ST, Census of India 2001.

1. Percentage refers to the percentage of total ST population falling in that group.
2. This table enumerates all groups that comprise at least 1% of the overall ST population.

languages in India fall into two main linguistic groups, the Indo-European and the Dravidian. Chamar literally translates as *leather-worker* in Hindi which is in the former group and is the official language in many of the north Indian states. In Andhra Pradesh it is the Madigas whose traditional occupation was leather work.

The STs tend to be geographically far less widespread. They are largely concentrated in the central, eastern and north-eastern Indian states; over a fifth of the entire country's ST population is found in undivided Madhya Pradesh. As Table 2 shows, the two numerically largest tribal groups in India are the Bhils and Gonds; they are found in 7 and 9 states respectively. Next are the Santhal, who are localised to just four eastern states (predominantly Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa) and the Oraon, found in 8 states. Almost the entire population of the Mina tribe, numerically the fifth largest ST group in the country, is from a single state: Rajasthan. In a similar way, the Naga tribal group is predominantly found in Nagaland, with a much smaller population in Assam and sporadic settlements in other north-eastern states.

Was size itself related to mobility? On the one hand larger groups may be politically more vocal. On the other hand, a concentration of the disadvantaged may imply limited contact with other more influential communities and be associated with lower public transfers. We return to this question towards the end of Section 4.

4 Inequality and mobility, 1961-2001

We start by looking at educational outcomes for the SC and ST categories from the Census of 2001. Significant progress has been made over the years in improving literacy levels among the SCs and STs, and much of this has been achieved after Indian independence. In 1931, census figures show that literacy rates were almost always below 2% for the castes that would later form the SCs, while they were often over 20% for Hindu upper-caste groups such as the Brahmins and Kayasths (Somanathan, 2011). By the 1961 census, the literacy rate for SCs had risen only to 10.3% and that for STs, to 8.53%

(Government of India, 2007, p. XLI). As Table 3 reports, by 2001 there had been significant convergence in literacy rates between the overall population and these historically disadvantaged groups.

Table 3: Education levels: Census 2001

Category	Completion Rate (%)				
	Literacy	Primary	Secondary	High School	Graduation
Total	64.84	50.10	23.88	13.13	6.67
SC	54.69	38.29	13.45	6.45	2.66
ST	47.10	29.31	9.76	4.52	1.76

Source: Tables C-08, C-08 SC and C-08 ST; Census of India 2001.

On the other hand, gaps in literacy rates persist and even widen over this period between the SCs and STs as a whole, with 54.7% of the SC population being literate in 2001 as compared to only 47.1% of the STs.

Moreover, the convergence between the overall population and these groups tends to fade away at higher levels of education. High school and graduation completion rates among SCs and STs for instance, are less than half those for the overall population. Educational inequalities between the SC and ST categories also persist at each level of educational attainment.

But while there may be significant inequalities between the SCs, STs and the remaining population, are these categories fairly homogenous within themselves?

Tables 4 – 9 present the changes in literacy, and primary and secondary school completion rates for the numerically largest SC and ST groups identified in section 3.2 above. In Table 4, we find that in 1961 itself, there were very wide differences in the literacy rates of the largest caste groups. On the one hand, over a fifth of the population of groups such as the Pod, Namasudra, Adi Dravida and the Pallan and Paraiyan were literate. On the other, fewer than 3% of the Musahars were literate, with groups such as the Madiga, Pasi, Mazhabi, and Adi Karnataka also reporting literacy levels of less than 10%. Disparities were equally wide among the largest ST tribal groups. As we

Table 4: SC Castes: Literacy

Caste Group	Literacy Rates (%)				
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Chamar	10.50	14.90	22.72	31.56	50.64
Madiga	6.25	7.81	14.01	24.35	47.77
Mahar	19.32	32.29	44.16	57.66	74.98
Pasi	7.54	10.12	14.30	20.75	37.47
Adi Dravida	20.92	30.85	39.80	50.50	67.90
Balmiki	12.56	16.90	24.87	35.58	52.28
Mala	13.17	16.37	26.51	37.79	61.87
Dusadh	9.15	10.38	15.56	22.16	32.90
Dhobi	13.48	18.33	26.75	36.35	53.45
Namasudra	25.82	33.06	43.34	54.07	71.70
Kori	10.54	16.67	24.47	33.83	52.41
Rajbanshi	18.84	22.26	30.31	40.21	60.05
Megh	10.39	14.23	21.12	28.66	51.46
Bagdi	10.65	12.99	16.75	28.25	47.58
Mang	11.36	18.94	24.66	36.65	56.95
Pan	11.58	14.66	21.52	30.36	46.19
Mazhabi	8.48	10.37	15.62	25.12	41.70
Musahar	2.74	2.11	2.74	4.65	8.74
Pallan	20.70	30.83	37.98	50.67	67.71
Adi Karnataka	9.96	16.27	24.51	37.31	58.55
Pod	27.70	34.62	44.86	56.04	74.05
Paraiyan	20.24	30.14	43.98	56.91	70.10
Bauri	9.23	13.59	14.47	22.53	39.89
Balahi	8.73	13.83	20.96	31.46	58.57
All Scheduled Castes	13.13	18.07	26.12	36.64	53.76

Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001.

Table 5: ST Tribes: Literacy

Tribe Group	Literacy Rates (%)				
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Bhil	6.63	6.51	12.69	19.12	35.72
Gond	8.05	11.15	17.88	26.14	48.96
Santal	7.57	9.97	15.68	23.46	36.35
Oraon	14.20	19.34	26.44	34.59	51.48
Mina	6.59	10.51	17.13	24.39	49.39
Naikda	13.10	16.67	22.24	33.10	46.25
Munda	14.10	18.18	23.52	30.78	48.08
Sugalis	6.03	8.21	7.41	14.43	33.28
Naga	18.44	30.13	54.15	60.62	66.64
Khond	9.12	10.13	15.25	20.38	31.22
Boro ^{a,b}	25.33			45.14	61.26
Koli Mahadev	13.62	21.97	36.22	45.62	65.22
Kol	3.61	6.81	10.44	15.64	35.03
Khasi ^{a,c}	31.40		41.95	46.89	61.24
Varli	5.74	9.90	12.61	18.18	36.16
Shabar	11.55	14.58	20.29	26.03	40.16
Kokna	11.73	18.15	24.42	36.14	54.78
All Scheduled Tribes	10.86	12.15	19.90	28.79	45.68

Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001.

^a The missing value in 1971 arises since no data was available for Assam for that year.

^b The missing value in 1981 arises since no census was conducted in Assam that year.

^c The 1981 value is derived from data for Meghalaya and Mizoram.

can see from Table 5, while over a quarter of the population of north-eastern tribes such as the Boro and Khasi were literate in 1961, over half of the other fifteen large tribes had literacy rates below 10%, with the Kols reporting the lowest rate, of 3.6%.

Similar patterns are evident in Tables 6 and 7, which track primary school completion rates among these groups. Secondary school completion rates, reported in Tables 8 and 9 were so close to zero for the SC and ST groups in 1961 that they offer no meaningful variation.

How did these educational inequalities evolve over time? If anything, educational outcomes appear to have diverged between our caste groups over the forty year period. Caste groups that had started with relatively high levels of literacy in 1961 have done very well over this period, with literacy rates in excess of 67% for groups like Mahars, Pods, Paraiyans, and the Pallan in 2001. At the other extreme, the Musahars do not appear to have shared in the gains by the SC groups: in 2001, less than one in ten Musahars aged 7 and above were literate.

None of our large tribes do as poorly, and the literacy rates of individual groups vary only between 31.2% for the Khonds at the lower end, to nearly 67% for the Naga tribes in the north-east.

Similar patterns are observed for primary and secondary school completion rates, with wide inequalities observed among the individual SC caste groups, and lower average levels as well as narrower inequalities between the large tribal groups.

In Figures 1 and 2, we plot the initial educational outcomes for the largest SC and ST groups in 1961 against the same outcomes in 2001.¹¹ These graphs serve to visualise the patterns we have observed from the detailed tables. First, if we were to imagine a regression line of ‘best fit’ on our

¹¹The bubbles representing individual points in these graphs scale with the total population of the group in a given state in 1961.

Table 6: SC Castes: Primary Education

Caste Group	Completion Rates (%)				
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Chamar	3.35	8.67	14.45	23.41	34.93
Madiga	2.00	4.61	9.83	16.40	31.80
Mahar	8.52	20.51	29.87	46.19	56.81
Pasi	2.27	5.85	9.31	15.38	23.83
Adi Dravida	6.08	20.37	28.32	39.22	55.47
Balmiki	4.12	9.78	13.62	24.66	35.21
Mala	5.07	11.09	19.77	28.33	46.09
Dusadh	2.02	6.15	9.82	18.62	22.68
Dhobi	3.52	12.35	17.05	28.37	38.35
Namasudra	8.56	24.56	30.99	43.72	47.73
Kori	2.72	9.41	15.47	25.21	37.16
Rajbanshi	6.61	18.59	20.23	31.14	33.27
Megh	4.32	7.88	12.89	20.21	32.02
Bagdi	2.63	9.10	8.58	16.87	20.70
Mang	4.02	10.69	14.54	25.49	36.97
Pan	1.57	11.59	9.39	19.81	28.16
Mazhabi	3.14	5.31	9.06	16.21	27.82
Musahar	0.29	1.01	1.22	3.34	3.91
Pallan	4.69	18.33	24.36	37.00	51.94
Adi Karnataka	1.76	12.03	17.79	28.82	45.93
Pod	8.18	23.57	33.43	46.07	48.35
Paraiyan	4.70	18.26	27.78	43.50	54.24
Bauri	1.26	9.55	6.35	14.16	19.82
Balahi	1.00	7.37	11.45	20.78	34.31
All Scheduled Castes	3.98	11.36	16.86	27.42	37.26

Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001.

Table 7: ST Tribes: Primary Education

Tribe Group	Completion Rates (%)				
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Bhil	2.86	2.98	5.83	11.15	18.11
Gond	1.77	5.75	8.70	15.51	26.61
Santal	2.01	6.90	9.74	16.95	21.98
Oraon	5.79	12.68	17.04	26.36	35.90
Mina	0.73	4.87	9.93	18.06	29.40
Naikda	6.43	9.51	14.31	23.21	30.18
Munda	4.33	11.13	14.89	22.37	31.18
Sugalis	1.97	5.90	3.86	8.27	18.53
Naga	1.87	21.53	29.79	47.96	55.78
Khond	0.78	9.12	4.75	10.29	15.91
Boro ^{a,b}	5.69			37.93	46.29
Koli Mahadev	4.52	12.31	23.51	34.29	44.48
Kol	0.67	3.84	5.51	9.34	17.53
Khasi ^{a,c}	7.72		28.18	27.84	33.53
Varli	1.94	3.97	4.57	9.85	17.33
Shabar	2.40	10.47	11.02	17.60	24.47
Kokna	5.49	10.15	13.93	24.12	35.96
All Scheduled Tribes	3.19	7.53	11.02	19.52	27.97

Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001.

^a The missing value in 1971 arises since no data was available for Assam for that year.

^b The missing value in 1981 arises since no census was conducted in Assam that year.

^c The 1981 value is derived from data for Meghalaya and Mizoram.

Table 8: SC Castes: Secondary Education

Caste Group	Completion Rates (%)				
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Chamar	0.47	1.57	4.15	7.93	12.12
Madiga	0.18	0.63	1.93	5.48	11.93
Mahar	0.72	2.72	7.86	14.83	26.23
Pasi	0.32	1.02	2.68	5.32	7.05
Adi Dravida	0.75	2.41	7.12	11.63	21.00
Balmiki	0.30	1.12	2.38	5.90	8.73
Mala	0.58	1.61	4.68	10.43	19.80
Dusadh	0.25	1.11	3.42	8.02	8.65
Dhobi	0.52	1.75	4.54	9.57	13.71
Namasudra	1.01	2.07	6.62	11.70	14.22
Kori	0.42	1.56	3.73	7.32	11.64
Rajbanshi	0.39	1.10	2.70	6.50	7.51
Megh	0.37	1.22	2.94	5.57	9.79
Bagdi	0.18	0.78	0.86	2.36	3.19
Mang	0.15	0.70	2.61	5.82	11.54
Pan	0.12	0.47	1.19	4.97	7.36
Mazhabi	0.47	0.69	1.56	4.29	8.06
Musahar	0.03	0.14	0.27	0.87	0.73
Pallan	0.62	1.87	5.61	10.00	17.82
Adi Karnataka	0.61	2.10	4.46	8.89	19.27
Pod	1.24	2.12	6.44	12.32	14.32
Paraiyan	0.49	1.84	5.87	11.55	19.00
Bauri	0.16	0.75	0.74	2.40	3.78
Balahi	0.12	1.03	2.42	5.43	9.65
All Scheduled Castes	0.46	1.47	3.97	8.22	12.88

Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001.

Table 9: ST Tribes: Secondary Education

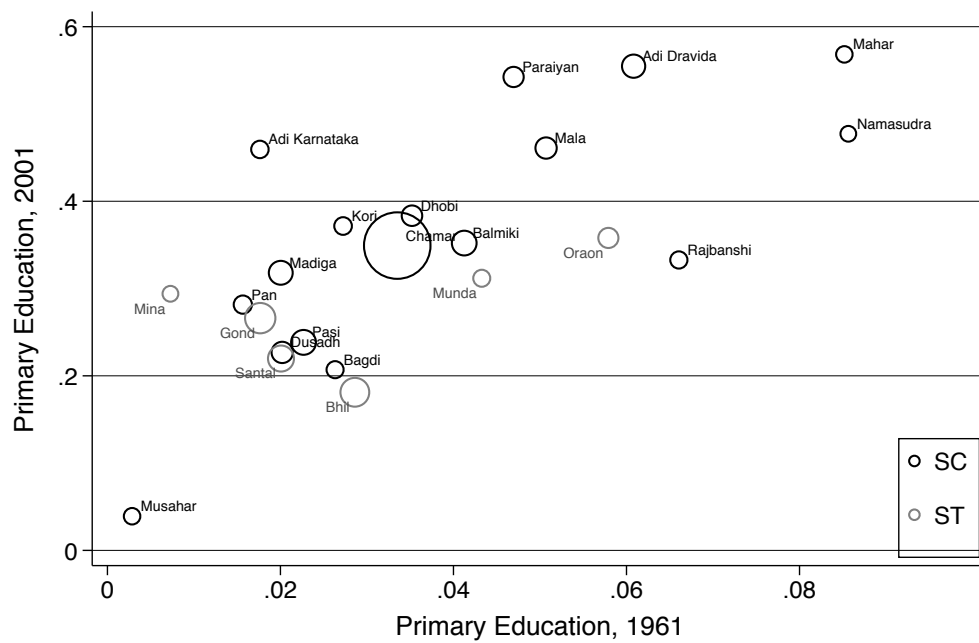
Tribe Group	Completion Rates (%)				
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Bhil	0.03	0.21	1.22	2.80	5.65
Gond	0.05	0.38	1.25	3.10	6.67
Santal	0.13	0.54	1.92	4.03	5.79
Oraon	0.45	1.81	5.13	9.33	14.02
Mina	0.12	0.79	2.12	5.17	9.48
Naikda	0.14	0.66	2.90	6.27	11.22
Munda	0.34	1.11	3.54	6.59	9.29
Sugalis	0.12	0.46	0.57	2.55	7.10
Naga	0.20	1.11	13.00	12.28	24.38
Khond	0.05	0.10	0.37	1.81	3.21
Boro ^{a,b}	0.32			9.13	19.35
Koli Mahadev	0.08	0.38	4.56	8.18	16.05
Kol	0.02	0.40	0.84	1.92	3.32
Khasi ^{a,c}	1.47		6.93	8.19	14.28
Varli	0.02	0.07	0.52	1.29	3.21
Shabar	0.17	0.69	2.31	4.88	7.79
Kokna	0.04	0.29	2.05	6.28	14.39
All Scheduled Tribes	0.16	0.58	2.29	5.01	9.14

Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001.

^a The missing value in 1971 arises since no data was available for Assam for that year.

^b The missing value in 1981 arises since no census was conducted in Assam that year.

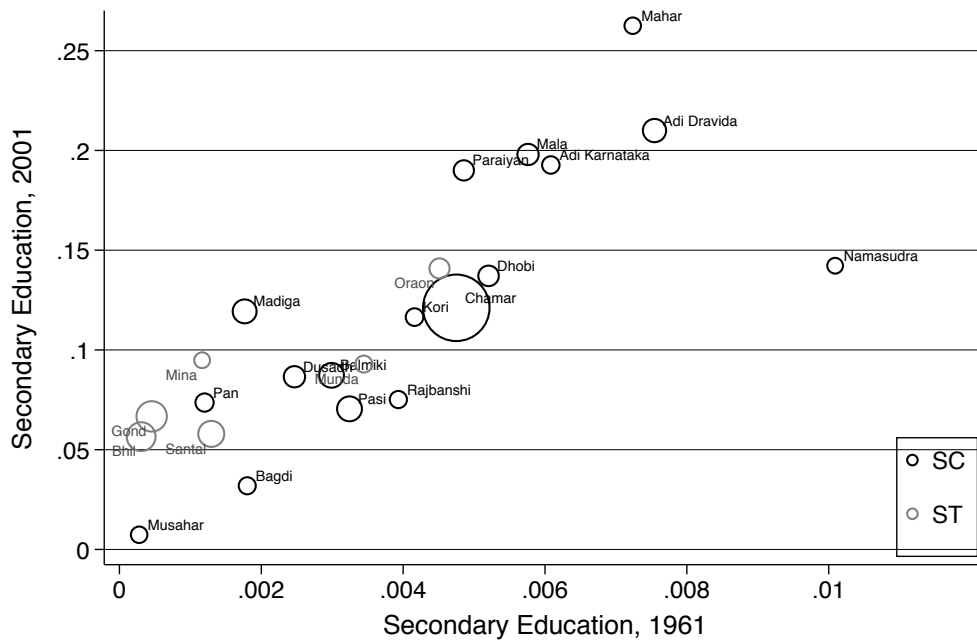
^c The 1981 value is derived from data for Meghalaya and Mizoram.



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961 & 2001

Figure 1: Change in primary school completion across states: Largest SC/STs

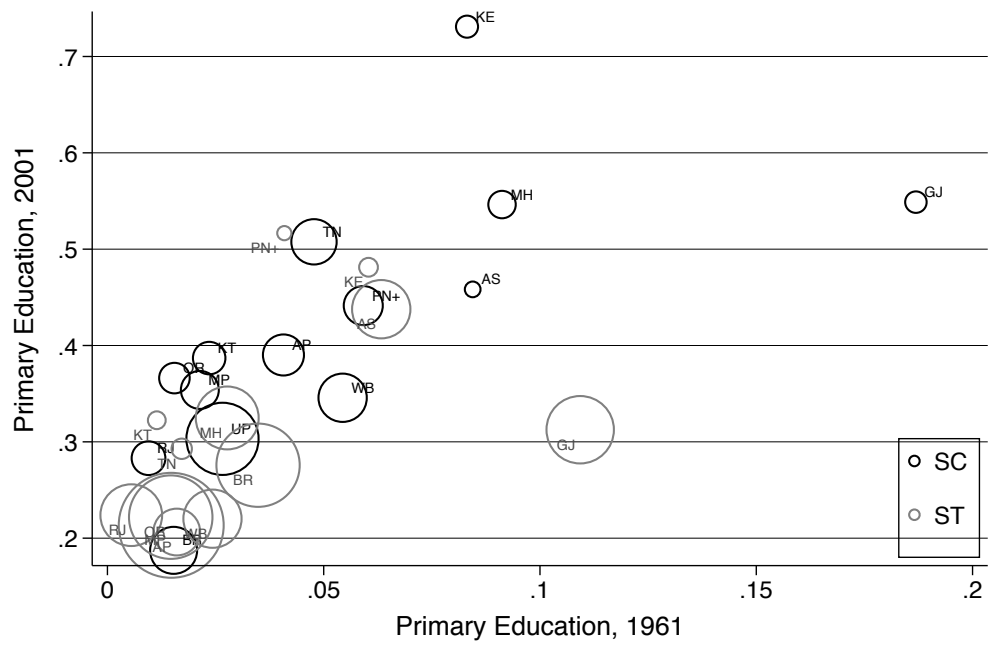
scatter plot, the line would have a significantly positive slope: this reflects the observation that groups that started at superior levels of education in 1961, ended at much higher levels as well, and vice-versa. In addition, the slope would be much steeper for the caste groups than the tribes, reflecting the greater divergence in the former group as compared to the latter.



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961 & 2001

Figure 2: Change in secondary school completion across states: Largest SC/STs

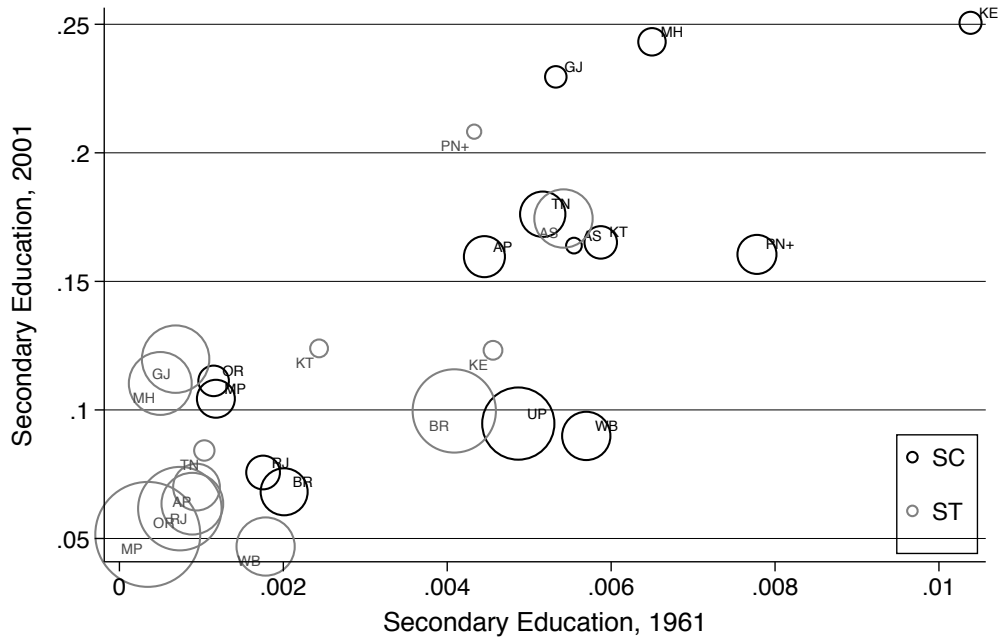
To what extent is the dispersion in educational outcomes between individual caste and tribe groups at a national level merely an artefact of their geographical location? In other words, do the observed differences largely accounted for by differences in the performance of the states in which they were located? Or do different castes and tribes perform very differently within each state?



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961 & 2001

Figure 3: Change in primary school completion across states: All SC/ST

In Figures 3 and 4, we consider the performance of the overall SC and ST categories across states in 1961 vs. 2001. These figures yield several insights: first, we once again find a significantly positive relationship between the initial levels of education for SCs and STs in 1961, and their final levels in 2001. States such as Kerala, Maharashtra, and Punjab, that started at relatively high levels of education in 1961, performed well overall in this period, and show high outcomes for SCs and STs in 2001. In contrast, the poor overall performance of the so-called ‘BIMARU’ states¹² of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh reflects clearly in the educational outcomes for SCs and STs as well.

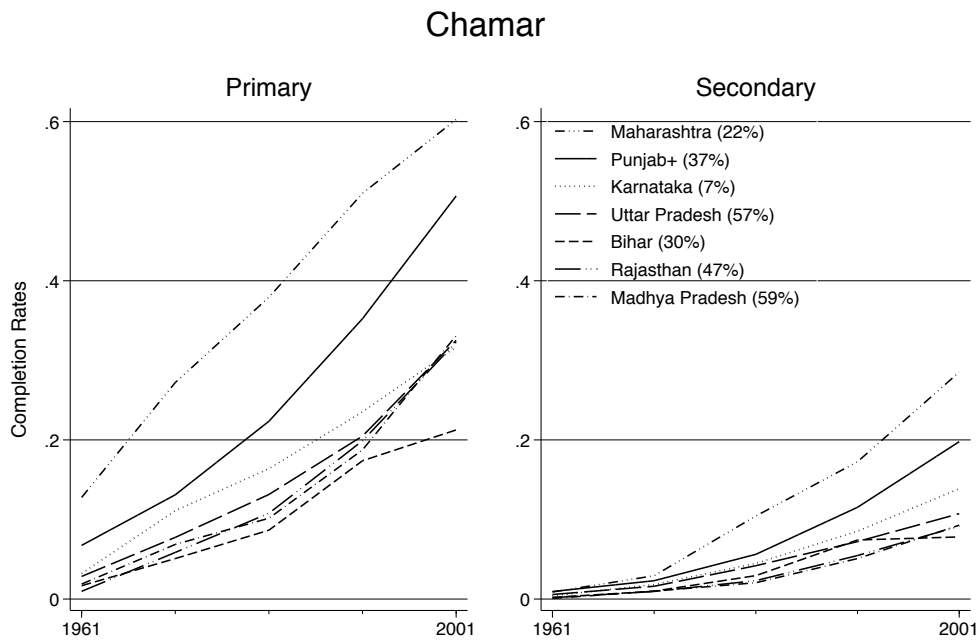


Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961 & 2001

Figure 4: Change in secondary school completion across states: All SC/ST

¹²The acronym BIMARU was coined by Indian demographer Ashish Bose in the 1980s. The word *bimar* in Hindi means ‘sick’.

Figures 3 and 4 also clearly bring out a startling pattern in the data: with the exception of Assam and Bihar, in each 1961 state in our data, the SCs as a whole did significantly better than the STs over the forty year period.¹³ In Kerala, known for its high education levels, there is a stark difference between the education levels for SCs and STs. Indeed, the STs of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh give company to those of Kerala in terms of secondary school completion rates, though SCs in Kerala have the best educational outcome of any state in the country.



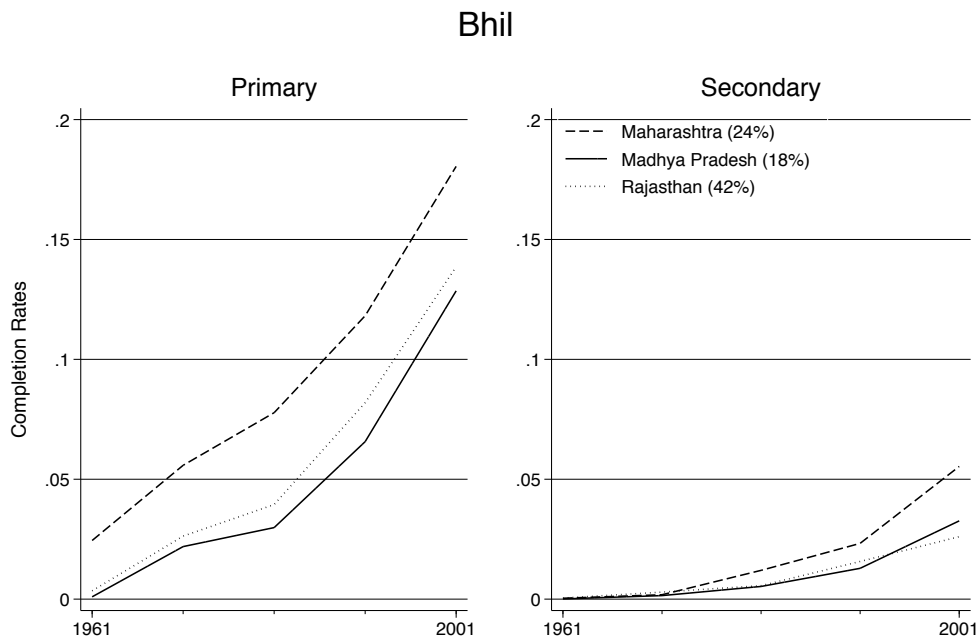
Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001

Figure 5: Educational attainment across states: Chamars

The state-level differences in performance can also be seen at the level of individual caste and tribe groups. To illustrate, Figures 5 to 7 examine the

¹³The relative performance of SCs and STs in the “PN+” region comprising Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh are not strictly comparable since SCs were delimited over the entire region while STs were delimited only in Himachal Pradesh.

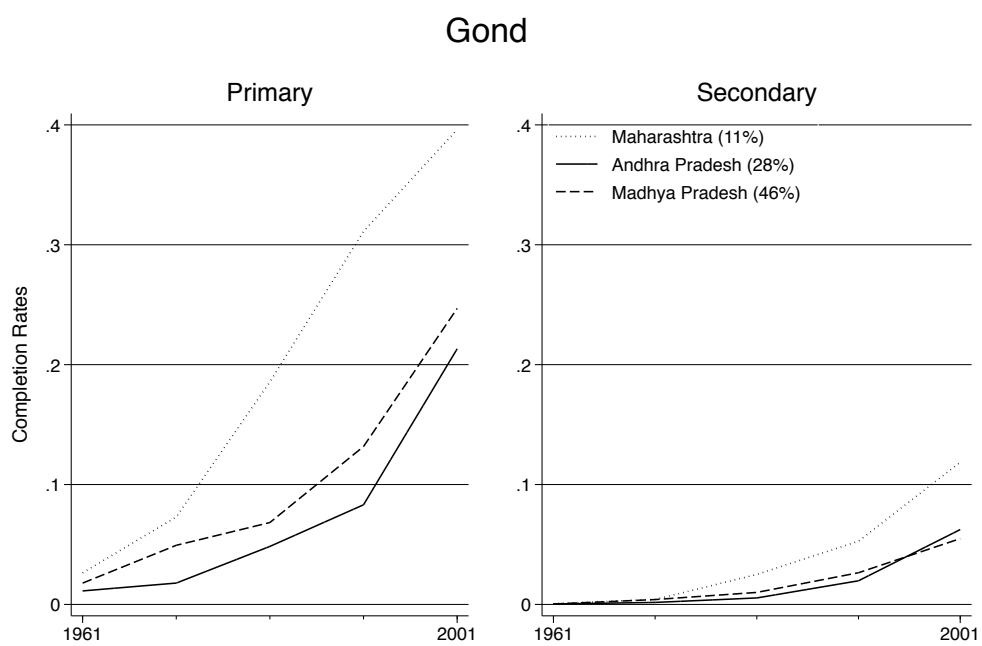
change in educational levels for the largest SC group, the Chamars, and the two numerically largest ST groups, the Bhils and Gonds. In these figures, numbers in parentheses in the legend represent the percentage of the population of all SCs (or STs) that the group accounted for in each state in 1961. In each case, we find a similar pattern: the same caste or tribe group, when located in a high-performing state such as Maharashtra or Punjab did far better than its counterparts located in states such as Rajasthan, Bihar, or Madhya Pradesh. Inequalities between states were maintained or even widened during the forty year period from 1961-2001.



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001

Figure 6: Educational attainment across states: Bhils

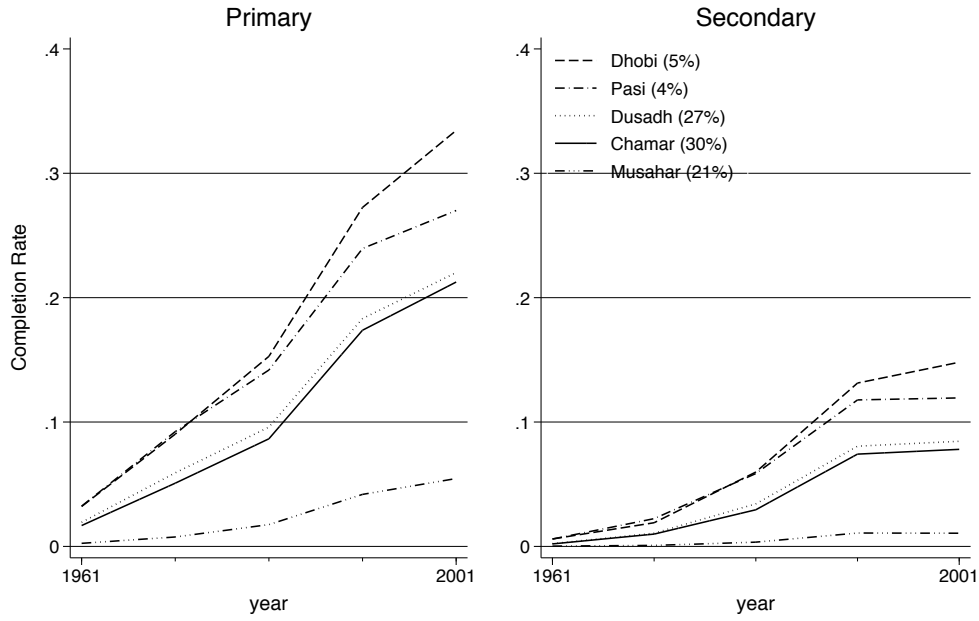
Clearly, where a caste or tribe group was located in the country had a very significant impact on its fortunes over the long term. But was this the whole



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001

Figure 7: Educational attainment across states: Gonds

story? Or were there important differences even between individual groups *within* each state?



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001

Figure 8: Educational attainment across SCs: Bihar

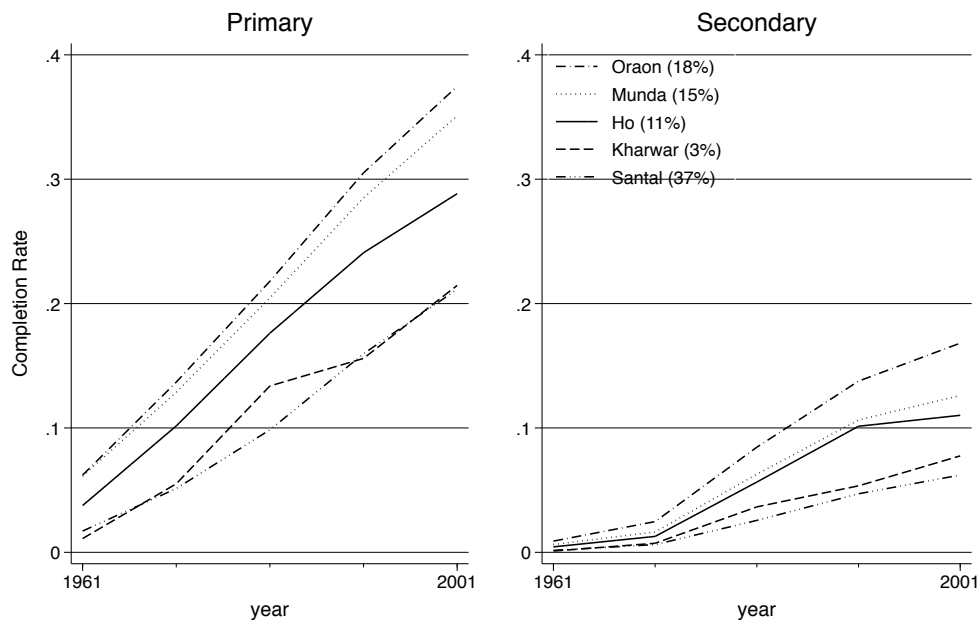
To answer the question, we first consider two states in which some of the largest SC groups of the country as well as some of the largest ST groups are well-represented: Bihar¹⁴ and Maharashtra.

Figures 8 to 11 plot the educational outcomes of the five largest caste groups¹⁵ and the five largest tribe groups in each state, from 1961 till 2001. There is a

¹⁴Since we are considering states as per their 1961 boundaries, this includes the present-day state of Jharkhand.

¹⁵For Bihar, we combine the Musahar and Bhuiya communities into a single Musahar group. This is based on our field work in Bihar where it became clear that the two names are used interchangeably. The educational outcomes of the two also closely track each other.

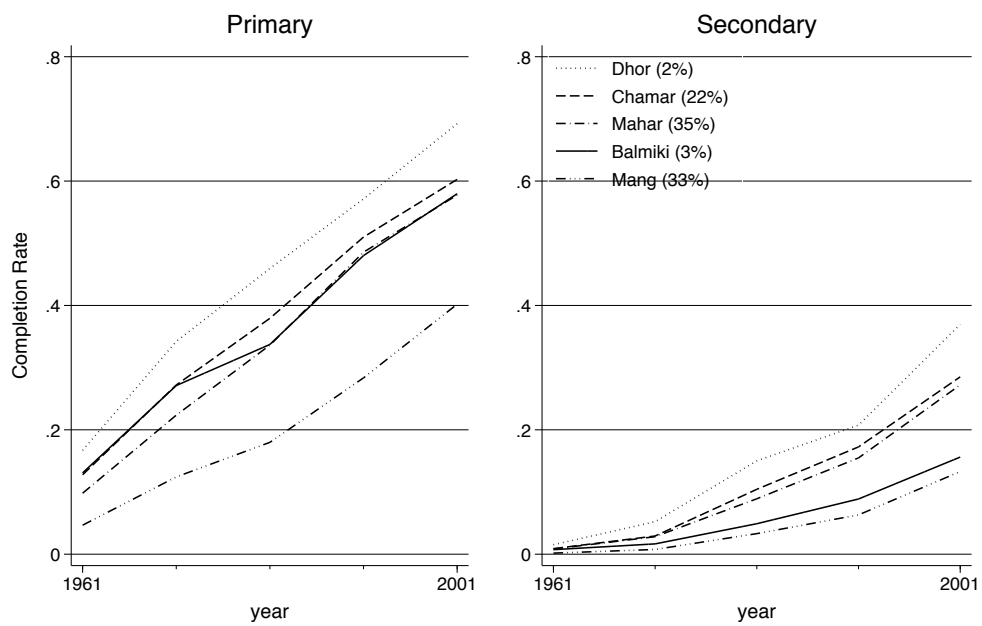
sharp pattern that emerges from these graphs: within each state, inequalities in educational levels between castes were maintained or grew worse during the forty year period under consideration. Indeed, the rank order of the castes and tribes in terms of educational outcomes was almost always maintained in this period.



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001

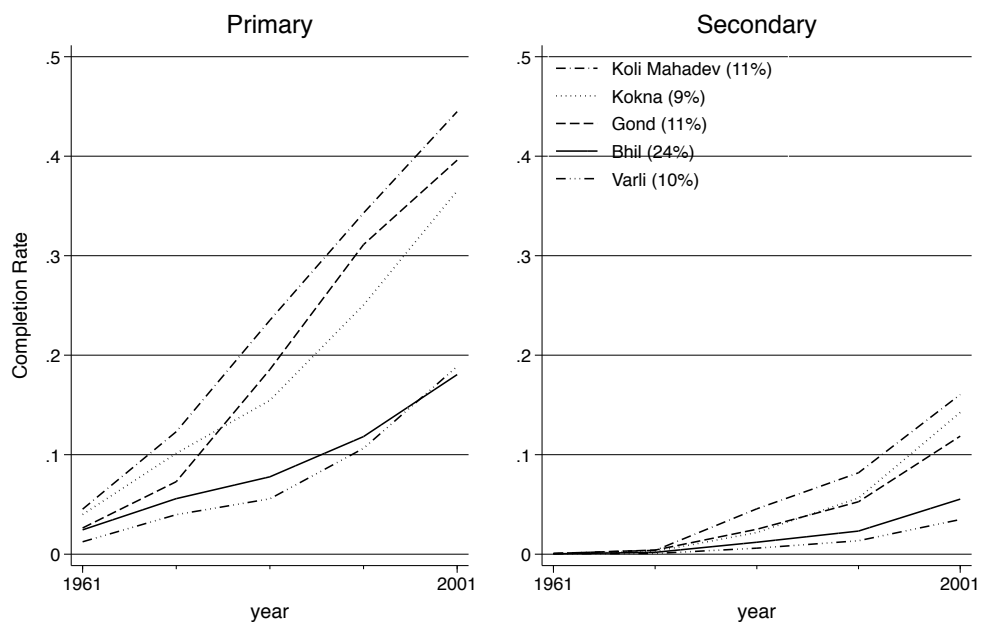
Figure 9: Educational attainment across STs: Bihar

If educational outcomes are a reasonable proxy for socio-economic status, then these figures suggest that while these historically disadvantaged groups were able to improve their lot to a greater or lesser extent, the hierarchy between these groups was extremely stable over time.



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001

Figure 10: Educational attainment across SCs: Maharashtra



Source: Special Tables on SC/STs, Census of India 1961-2001

Figure 11: Educational attainment across STs: Maharashtra

Finally, we examine inequalities across individual caste and tribe groups using regression analysis. We use a dataset wherein a single observation consists of a tribe or caste group in a state, and restrict focus to groups that had a state-wide population of at least 100 persons in 1961. Our dependent variables of interest are a group's levels of educational attainment as per the Census wave of 2001; in particular, we examine three levels – literacy, as well as primary and secondary completion rates, each measured as percentages. To examine convergence over time, we control for literacy levels in 1961. In addition, we control for the population size of the group at the state level as per the Census of 1961. Finally, in light of the foregoing discuss of inter-state differences, we also include state fixed effects.

We report our regression results for SC groups in Table 10 and for ST groups in Table 11. For both sets of communities, the first results confirm the story from our graphical exposition above – communities with higher levels of literacy in 1961 also report higher levels of educational attainment on average in 2001, *ceteris paribus*.¹⁶

In addition, Table 10 suggests that for SC communities, the numerical strength of the group had an important role to play in determining their socio-economic fortunes. Other things being equal, a group whose population was larger by 1 million persons in 1961 had a literacy level on average higher by 1.68 percentage points in 2001. Higher levels of educational attainment are also similarly affected. On the other hand, we do not detect any such size effects in the case of ST groups in Table 11.

This asymmetric result for the SC and ST communities is consistent with the widely noted fact that the level of political mobilisation among these two groups is very different. Over the last several decades, several large

¹⁶For instance, a 1 percentage point higher level of literacy in 1961 is on average associated with a 0.54 percentage point higher level of secondary school completion among SC groups, and a 0.39 percentage point higher level of secondary school completion among ST groups in 2001, controlling for group population sizes in 1961 and controlling for state fixed effects.

Table 10: Explaining SC educational attainment

	Literacy	Primary	Secondary
Literacy, 1961 (per cent)	0.744*** (0.000)	0.806*** (0.000)	0.537*** (0.000)
1961 Population (millions)	1.676*** (0.007)	1.471** (0.018)	0.506** (0.039)
Constant	43.38*** (0.000)	27.15*** (0.000)	8.106*** (0.000)
State FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	704	704	704

OLS regression of Census 2001 education levels, with robust standard errors.

p -values in parentheses. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

and assertive SC communities have been able to secure political representation, while political parties with tribal power bases have had limited success. Banerjee and Somanathan (2007, p. 311) note that while the SCs have been doing reasonably well in recent years, areas with STs had lower access to public goods such as schools. In the same vein, Pande (2003, p. 1142) finds that SCs have benefited from affirmative action policies but not STs, and attributes this asymmetry to their different levels of political activism. Both these studies analyse the SCs and STs as collective blocs; our findings complement and extend these results because we find this asymmetry applies at the level of individual SC and ST communities as well.

Table 11: Explaining ST educational attainment

	Literacy	Primary	Secondary
Literacy, 1961 (per cent)	0.769*** (0.000)	0.736*** (0.000)	0.380*** (0.000)
1961 Population (millions)	0.560 (0.691)	-0.0276 (0.983)	-0.365 (0.612)
Constant	29.91 (0.170)	25.19 (0.171)	4.787 (0.176)
State FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	381	381	381

OLS regression of Census 2001 education levels, with robust standard errors.

p -values in parentheses. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

5 Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper has been to describe broad patterns of inequality and mobility within the scheduled groups which have been little studied by economists.

There are many possible mechanisms that drive the changes in educational attainment of the different groups considered above. The divergence that we observe could simply be the outcome of affirmative action policies which treat the worst off within the SCs and STs at par with the best and are therefore more advantageous to the latter. It may also be that size results in political power as is the case with the Chamars in Uttar Pradesh. Large castes do well in the relative ranking within some states like Uttar Pradesh and not others. Some of the smaller castes and tribes may be less isolated and as a result have better access to public goods (Sethi and Somanathan, 2014). With the tribes, linguistic isolation may play an important role.¹⁷ We plan to explore these mechanisms more fully in future work.

¹⁷See e.g. Jain et al. (2015).

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Appendix: Creating caste and tribe groups

In this appendix, we describe and illustrate the procedure used to construct of groups of castes and tribes across states. This is a largely automated procedure, using the lists of SCs and STs as they existed at the time of the Census of India 2001.¹⁸

To start with, we consider all names listed under a single entry in the SC or ST list of a particular state in 2001 as part of the same caste or tribe group. With some loss of precision, we shall henceforth refer to the names within such a group as *synonyms*.

The procedure is best explained with an example: the creation of the Chamar group from the SC data, the largest and most widespread group by far. Table A1 describes the composition of the Chamar group in terms of the individual entries in different state SC lists.

For the SCs, the procedure begins with the population data on individual SCs, taken from the state-wise Special Tables on Scheduled Castes for Census 2001. The data is sorted in descending order of population, so that the numerically largest castes are at the top. This puts the “Chamar, Dhusia, Jhusia, Jatava” entry for Uttar Pradesh at the top of the list.

The process of creating caste groups is initialised by borrowing the first name in this list (Chamar), and using it as the identifier for the group. The algorithm now records that Chamar has four ‘synonyms’, and begins cycling through the remaining data, searching for other entries that have any of these four synonyms in common. When such entries are encountered, such as the “Bhambi, Bhambhi, Asadaru, Asodi, Chamadia, Chamar, ...” group in Karnataka, they are also assigned to the caste group ‘Chamar’, and other caste names found in those entries are added to the reference pool of names considered as synonyms of Chamar. Notice for instance, that this means that the procedure now considers a name like “Muchi” as another

¹⁸Manual adjustments are made for a few spelling variants across states, e.g. putting Balmiki, Valmiki and Valamiki into a single group; similarly for Mazhabi and Majhabi, or for Santal and Santhal.

synonym for Chamar, by virtue of its occurrence in the aforementioned entry in Karnataka. This in turn implies that the caste “Muchi, Rishi”, enumerated in states such as Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, will now also be classified in the Chamar group, though not containing the Chamar name per se.

The process iterates until there is no new addition to the list of synonyms for Chamar.

In this way, all caste entries for the entire country are amalgamated into mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets of ‘synonyms’, which form the caste and tribe groups used in the remainder of this paper.

Table A2 shows the composition of the three numerically largest groups of STs created by our procedure: the Bhil, Gond and Santal. As mentioned in section 3.2, tribe groups tend to be spread over fewer states, and have fewer ‘synonyms’ compared to SCs.

Table A1: State-wise classification of the Chamar group

State	Census 2001 Scheduled Castes list entry
UP	Chamar, Dhusia, Jhusia, Jatava
MP	Chamar, Chamari, Bairwa, Bhambi, Jatav, Mochi, Regar, Nona, Rohidas, Ramnami, Satnami, Surjyabanshi, Surjyaramnami, Ahirwar, Chamar Mangan, Raidas
BR	Chamar, Mochi
PN+	Chamar, Jatia Chamar, Rehgar, Raigar, Ravidasi, Ramdasias, Mochi
RJ	Chamar, Bhambhi, Bambhi, Bhambi, Jatia, Jatav, Jatava, Mochi, Raidas, Rohidas, Regar, Raigar, Ramdasias, Asadaru, Asodi, Chamadia, Chambhar, Chamgar, Haralayya, Harali, Khalpa, Machigar, Mochigar, Madar, Samgar
MH	Bhambi, Bhambhi, Asadaru, Asodi, Chamadia, Chamar, Chamari, Chambhar, Chamgar, Haralayya, Harali, Khalpa, Machigar, Mochigar, Madar, Madig, Mochi, Telegu Mochi, Kamati Mochi, Ranigar, Rohidas, Nona, Ramnami, Rohit, Samgar, Samagara, Satnami, Surjyabanshi, Surjyaramnami
GJ	Bhambi, Bhambhi, Asadaru, Asodi, Chamadia, Chamar, Chambhar, Chamgar, Haralayya, Harali, Khalpa, Machigar, Mochigar, Madar, Madig, Mochi, Nalia, Telegu Mochi, Kamati Mochi, Ranigar, Rohidas, Rohit, Samgar
WB	Chamar, Charmakar, Mochi, Muchi, Rabidas, Ruidas, Rishi
RJ	Bairwa, Berwa
DL	Chamar, Chanwar Chamar, Mochi, Ramdasias, Ravidasi, Raidasi, Rehgarh, Raigar
KT	Bhambi, Bhambhi, Asadaru, Asodi, Chamadia, Chamar, Chambhar, Chamgar, Haralayya, Harali, Khalpa, Machigar, Mochigar, Madar, Madig, Mochi, Muchi, Telegu Mochi, Kamati Mochi, Ranigar, Rohidas, Rohit, Samgar
JK	Chamar, Ramdasias
OR	Chamar, Mochi, Muchi, Satnami
AP, KE, KT, TN	Samagara
AR, AS	Muchi, Rishi
AP	Chamar, Mochi, Muchi
KE, TN, TR	Chamar, Muchi
AP, GA	Chambhar
DN	Chamar
MN	Muchi, Ravidas

Note:

1. The states are as per their 1961 boundaries.

2. State acronyms: AS: Assam, AP: Arunachal Pradesh, AR: Arunachal Pradesh, BR: Bihar, DN: Dadra and Nagar Haveli, DL: Delhi, JK: Jammu and Kashmir, GA: Goa, Daman and Diu, GJ: Gujarat, KE: Kerala, KT: Karnataka, MH: Maharashtra, MN: Manipur, MP: Madhya Pradesh, OR: Orissa, PN+: Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, RJ: Rajasthan, TN: Tamil Nadu, TR: Tripura, UP: Uttar Pradesh, WB: West Bengal

Table A2: State-wise classification of the largest tribe groups

Tribe	State	Census 2001 Scheduled Tribes list entry
Bhil	GJ, KT, MH, RJ	Bhil, Bhil Garasia, Dholi Bhil, Dungri Bhil, Dungri Garasia, Me-wasi Bhil, Rawal Bhil, Tadvi Bhil, Bhagalia, Bhilala, Pawra, Vasava, Vasave
	MP	Bhil, Bhilala, Barela, Patelia
	GJ, KT, MH, RJ	Patelia
	AP, DL, TR	Bhil
Gond	MP	Gond; Arakh, Arrakh, Agaria, Asur, Badi Maria, Bada Maria, Bhatola, Bhimma, Bhuta, Koilabhuta, Koliabhuti, Bhar, Bisonhorn Maria, Chota Maria, Dandami Maria, Dhuru, Dhurwa, Dhoba, Dhulia, Dorla, Gaiki, Gatta, Gatti, Gaita, Gond Gowari, Hill Maria, Kandra, Kalanga, Khatola, Koitar, Koya, Khirwar, Khirwara, Kucha Maria, Kuchaki Maria, Madia, Maria, Mana, Mannewar, Moghya, Mogia, Monghya, Mudia, Muria, Nagarchi, Nagwanshi, Ojha, Raj, Sonjhari Jhareka, Thatia, Thotya, Wade Maria, Vade Maria, Daroi
	MH	Gond Rajgond, Arakh, Arrakh, Agaria, Asur, Badi Maria, Bada Maria, Bhatola, Bhimma, Bhuta, Koilabhuta, Koilabhuti, Bhar, Bisonhorn Maria, Chota Maria, Dandami Maria, Dhuru, Dhurwa, Dhoba, Dhulia, Dorla, Gaiki, Gatta, Gatti, Gaita, Gond, Gowari, Hill Maria, Kandra, Kalanga, Khatola, Koitar, Koya, Khirwar, Khirwara, Kucha Maria, Kuchaki Maria, Madia, Maria, Mana, Mannewar, Moghya, Mogia, Monghya, Mudia, Muria, Nagarchi, Naikpod, Nagwanshi, Ojha, Raj, Sonjhari Jhareka, Thatia, Thotya, Wade Maria, Vade Maria
	OR	Gond, Gondo
	AP	Koya, Goud, Rajah, Rasha Koya, Lingadhari Koya , ordinary, Kottu Koya, Bhine Koya, Rajkoya
	BR, UP, WB	Gond
	AP, KT	Gond, Naikpod, Rajgond
	OR	Koya
	AP	Kotia, Benthoriya, Bartika, Dhulia, Dulia, Holva, Paiko, Putiya, Sanrona, Sidhopaiko
	OR	Kotia
	BR, WB	Asur
	OR	Holva
	OR	Madia
	GJ	Gond, Rajgond
	KT, MH	Koya, Bhine Koya, Rajkoya
	Santal	BR, OR, TR, WB

Note:

1. The states are as per their 1961 boundaries.
2. State acronyms: AS: Assam, AP: Arunachal Pradesh, AR: Arunachal Pradesh, BR: Bihar, DN: Dadra and Nagar Haveli, DL: Delhi, JK: Jammu and Kashmir, GA: Goa, Daman and Diu, GJ: Gujarat, KE: Kerala, KT: Karnataka, MH: Maharashtra, MN: Manipur, MP: Madhya Pradesh, OR: Orissa, PN+: Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, RJ: Rajasthan, TN: Tamil Nadu, TR: Tripura, UP: Uttar Pradesh, WB: West Bengal