

Policy Watch

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Reservation in Educational Institutions Who Gains from Abolishing the Common Entrance Test (CET) in Tamil Nadu

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**Reservation in Educational Institutions:
Who Gains from Abolishing the Common Entrance Test (CET)
in Tamil Nadu**

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ABSTRACT

At a time when the need for and the effectiveness of a Common Entrance Test (CET) to professional colleges is debated across the country, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy's third Policy Watch looks at the working of the professional college admissions system.

It studies the efficiency of the implementation of affirmative action policies in Tamil Nadu's professional education institutions to meet the underlying social justice objectives by looking at the mechanism used to determine admissions to these courses.

This analysis points out that the abolition of the CET in Tamil Nadu has benefitted students from the Other Communities and the Backward Classes more than those from other socially deprived classes, such as the Most Backward Classes, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The solution to work out an efficient affirmative action policy, according to the author, lies in reorienting both the school education system and the CET mechanism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tamil Nadu has a history of communal reservation in higher education dating back to 1920s. In addition to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), reservations are provided for Most Backward Classes (MBC) and Backward Classes (BC). At present 69 per cent of seats in higher education is reserved for these communities in Tamil Nadu. The remaining 31 per cent of seats is called ‘Open Category’, for which students from the reserved communities can also compete.

Apart from providing reservation of seats for students from the educationally and socially backward/oppressed communities, the Tamil Nadu government has created community-specific departments to implement schemes for promoting education in such communities. Such schemes include exclusive schools for SCs, STs and Kallars (a subgroup of MBCs), and religious minorities like Muslims. These departments also extend liberal scholarships and run hostels for the school and college students.

In addition to these activities, in 2007 the Tamil Nadu government removed the CET for admission in professional courses, the important reason being that students from the backward communities could not spend on coaching classes that were essential to prepare for the CET. Removal of the CET was largely seen as a step toward achieving social justice without compromising on quality of students admitted in professional courses.

Changes in the admission procedures were seen as a discrimination against students of Higher Secondary (H.Sc.) Boards other than the Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board Schools affiliated to other H.Sc. boards like Central Board of Secondary Examination (CBSE), Council for Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE) have students mainly from the non-backward classes and linguistic minorities in the Tamil Nadu.

This Policy Watch report scrutinises the impact of the removal of the CET for admission in professional courses on the enrolment and learning outcomes measured in terms of marks of students in Science streams in Higher Secondary Schools affiliated to the Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board. It examines how social backwardness represented by the four categories of communities (BC, MBC, and SC and ST) interacted with the types of schools and resulted in differing probabilities of the success of each of these groups in getting admission in professional courses.

II. CHANGES IN PROCEDURES FOR ADMISSION IN PROFESSIONAL COURSES

Until 1983-84, admission to professional courses was based on the H.Sc. marks and an interview. The discretion of the interview board was eliminated with the introduction of a CET since 1984-85. Those who applied for engineering courses had to take the CET in Mathematics and Physical Sciences (Physics and Chemistry) and those who applied for medical and other professional courses had to take the CET in Biology and Physical Sciences. The qualifying marks for the admission were calculated as follows:

- For Engineering courses, the aggregate of Board exam marks in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry was reduced to a proportion of 200, and the CET marks was reduced to a proportion of 100. The sum of these two marks as a proportion of 300 marks was the final mark which was considered for admission.
- For Medical and other Science-related professional courses, the aggregate of Board exam marks of Biology, Physics and Chemistry was reduced to a proportion of 200 and the CET marks was reduced to a proportion of 100 and the final marks was obtained as a summation of these two marks as a proportion of 300 marks. For instance, if a student scored 175, 185, 190 marks in Biology, Physics and Chemistry respectively in the H.Sc. examination and 75 marks out of 100 in the CET. The aggregate of 550 out of 600 in the H.Sc. examination was reduced to 183.33 out of 200. 75 out of 100 in the CET was added with 183.33 out of 200 in the H.Sc. to get 258.33 out of 300 as the qualifying marks for admission purpose.

Thus, two-third of the qualifying marks was based on the H.Sc. marks and one-third on CET mark. Generally, students take the H.Sc. examination in the month of March and the CET in April. This doubled the academic pressure on the students. Moreover, the CET was based on multiple-choice questions and the H.Sc. examination was based on descriptive type questions. This gave rise to proliferation of coaching centres in urban areas in Tamil Nadu. Many college teachers and H.Sc. School teachers in Mathematics, Physical Sciences and Biology were running such coaching centres. Schools concentrated on preparing the students for the H.Sc. examination and coaching centres prepared them for the CET.

The difference in the examination patterns of these two exams was also debated from 1980s to early 2000s and the Government of Tamil Nadu tried to introduce multiple-choice questions in the H.Sc. examination in 2004, but withdrew due to stiff opposition from political parties, which described the move as pro-rich and pro-urban. The CET was also criticised as pro-rich and pro-urban by many political parties, thus against the principle of social justice and rural students.

III. ABOLITION OF THE COMMON ENTRANCE TEST (CET)

In 2005, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) government issued a government order abolishing the CET for admission to professional courses in government and private colleges and state universities in Tamil Nadu. This was struck down by the Madras High Court as it was against the regulations of the Medical Council of India and All India Council for Technical Education, which prescribed a CET for admission to the professional courses.

In 2006 the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government constituted a committee under the chairmanship of M. Anandkrishnan, former Vice Chancellor of Anna University, to recommend measures for the abolition of the CET from the academic year 2007-08.¹ The committee held public hearings in which 390 persons participated and received representations from 3,000 persons. Of these 1,250 advocated abolition of the CET and 600 wanted it to be retained. The committee also carried out in-house analysis of data on performance of students in Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board examination and the CET marks. The committee summarised the public opinion on these issues as follows:

Arguments to Abolish CET		Arguments to Retain CET	
1	There are very few coaching centre facilities in rural areas compared with urban areas	1	Since a large number of students get the same marks in H.Sc. it will be difficult to rank them without the CET.
2	As the question paper for the H.Sc. students is entirely different in structure and syllabus from the one for the CET, the students were not able to perform well in the CET.	2	The CET contributes to improving the quality of education
3	Students scoring high marks in Board exams tend to score less in the CET. There are instances where, the students from rural areas getting more than 95 marks in H.Sc. have scored low marks in the CET.	3	There is no need for extra coaching as the syllabus for H.Sc. and the CET are the same.
4	The CET creates additional financial burden to parents.	4	The CET helps to identify the really meritorious students.
5	The CET causes considerable delay in admission to the first year courses	5	The present system of H.Sc. is not reliable because of unacceptable practices, malpractices in some places and liberal valuation.
6	The rural students find the time allotted to the CET inadequate.	6	Implications of various judgments- firstly, the CET becomes a necessity mainly as a means of determining comparative merit, while at the same time, not discriminating against students coming from different boards of examinations. Secondly, the regulations prescribed by the central statutory bodies such as All India Council for Technical Education, Medical Council India, and others, take precedence over any corresponding regulations of State governments regarding admission procedure.

The Anandkrishnan Committee while accepting the arguments of those who supported the abolition of the CET, also tried to address one of the issues raised by those who wanted it to be retained. It accepted the argument that marks of students from different H.Sc. Boards were not comparable and, hence, could not be ranked as such. To overcome this problem, the Anandkrishnan Committee recommended a proposal to provide for 'normalisation' to bring the marks of students from various boards on a comparable metric system, it passively rejected all other arguments favouring the retention of CET.

Prima facie, the Anandkrishnan Committee did not offer evidence to prove the claim that the CET bears an urban-rich bias. However, in a document that the Committee's chairman, Anandkrishnan, submitted to the 'oversight committee on the implementation of reservation policy in higher educational institutions' in 2006,² he argued that the CET in Tamil Nadu was biased against the poor, rural and educationally depressed communities like BC, MBC and SC&ST.

Tables 1A and 1B are the abridged versions compiled from the various tables in the Anandkrishnan report to the oversight committee.

Table 1A: Marks in Board and CET of Applicants to Engineering Courses in 2002

Categories	Number of applicants for admission to Engineering	Applicants who scored more than 60 per cent in Maths and Physical Sciences	Applicants who scored more than 50 per cent in CET	Pass per cent in H.Sc. Board (TN) Exam
Other Communities (OtC)	12,066	12,028 (100)	8,647 (72)	92
Backward Communities (BC)	34,013	33,678 (99)	23,721 (70)	89
Most Backward Communities (MBC)	10,580	10,259 (97)	6,215 (59)	83
Scheduled Castes (SC)	7,621	6,178 (81)	2,728 (36)	76
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	234	178 (76)	63 (27)	77

Note: Figures in brackets are percentage to number of students applied.

Source: Anandkrishnan's report to the Oversight Committee.

Table 1B: Marks in Board and CET of Applicants to Engineering Courses in 2005

Categories	Number of applicants for admission to Engineering	Applicants who scored more than 60 per cent in Maths and Physical Sciences	Applicants who scored more than 50 per cent in CET	Pass per cent in H.Sc. Board (TN) Exam
Other Communities (OtC)	8,461	8,392 (99)	4,437 (55)	89
Backward Communities (BC)	33,972	32,941 (97)	12,671 (37)	81
Most Backward Communities (MBC)	11,486	10,782 (94)	3,168 (28)	74
Scheduled Castes (SC)	7,377	6,071 (82)	1,124 (15)	64
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	230	176 (77)	30 (13)	62

Note: Figures in brackets are percentage to number of students applied.

Source: Anandakrishnan's report to Oversight Committee.

Tables 1A and 1B give the details of students who applied for admission to Engineering courses in Tamil Nadu in 2002 and 2005. The proportion of students who scored more than 60 per cent in Mathematics and Physical Sciences was lower among SC and ST, because the minimum eligibility for applying to professional courses was 60 per cent for OtCs, BC and MBC and 55 per cent for SC and ST⁵.

Obviously, the proportion of students who scored more than 50 per cent in the CET declined from 55 per cent for OtC to 37 per cent, 28 per cent, 15 per cent and 13 per cent for BC, MBC, SC and ST respectively. There is nothing surprising here because the same report also quoted that the pass percentage of students in the H.Sc. examination declined in the same way for various communities as shown in the last column in Tables 1A and 1B. Thus, the pass percentage and proportion of students in various classes (e.g., greater than 60 per cent or 75 per cent) declined in the same fashion whether it was the H.Sc. examination or the CET.

According to Anandakrishnan, access to coaching class for the rich and urban students was the reason for higher marks of such students in the CET. He said:

“It may be seen that the entrance examination scores of the students in reservation category [are] lower than the students of Open Category. These students don't have the facility of the coaching centres that are available to the urban students and to those who come from the rich families. Hence entrance examination creates special disadvantage of these students even though their higher secondary performance is relatively comparable to the Open Category”. [Report to the Oversight Committee. Please refer note 2.]

This opinion would have probably formed the basis for his recommendation to remove the CET as a criterion for admission to professional courses in Tamil Nadu.

Anandakrishnan made two assertions in this section – one, the coaching classes were accessible to the urban and rich students and two, the students from the reserved categories did not have access to such coaching classes. He implied thereby, that the majority of the students of BC, MBC, SC and ST communities ought to be either poor and/or from rural areas. This point would have been proven had there been statistical evidence presented to show that the rural students' performance in the H.Sc. examination was on a par with those of the urban students and only the CET marks made all the difference in the entrance for professional courses. It was, however, only backed by an unsubstantiated claim that coaching classes were accessible only to the students of urban-rich class.

The Anandakrishnan Committee observed:

“[The] CET is being adopted as the **only** [emphasis original]_method for bringing the students of State Board and other boards, following syllabus and different examinations into a comparable score. The CET however is not necessarily a fool-proof method of ensuring a complete parity of standards. If the CET is closer to following a particular board syllabus, the other board students are likely to be at a disadvantage. Moreover, the CET as such causes substantial disadvantage to the rural, Tamil medium and under-privileged students, while the urban, English medium and socially forward sections of students stand to benefit.”

The fact was, for admission in professional courses, only one-third of the qualifying marks was derived from the CET and the H.Sc. marks decided the remaining two-thirds of the qualifying marks.

Therefore, the H.Sc. marks, in spite of differences in syllabi and methods of evaluation between H.Sc. Boards, have directly influenced two-thirds of the qualifying marks. In such a situation the CET was essential to offset such biases, as it was designed to treat everyone equally.

Further, access to coaching classes is similar to access to quality school education. Time and again, marks in the H.Sc. examinations in different States, including Tamil Nadu, show significant differences in terms of social groups and type of school even within a H.Sc. Board.

For example, students from economically and socially advanced families who study in urban-private schools have generally secured more marks compared with other students from the same H.Sc. Board. Therefore, access to quality education has been a problem for the socially and educationally depressed communities that adversely affected their performances in both the H.Sc. examination and the CET. Therefore, removing the CET in no way will correct the social, educational and economic bias in favour of the rich and urban students, as they would continue to get the access to quality education for success in the H.Sc. examinations.

Another reason against the use of the CET was the difference in the syllabi and examination patterns between the H.Sc. examination and the CET. The Anandakrishnan Committee should have probed this issue further. The syllabi and the types of questions that measure different scholastic abilities of students should be subjected to thorough scrutiny by educationists. Merely removing the CET and

unqualified acceptance of the H.Sc. marks are totally unscientific recommendations. However, the Anandakrishnan Committee recommended a normalisation process for comparing marks of students from different Boards.

IV. NORMALISATION OF MARKS FROM DIFFERENT H.Sc. BOARDS

The Anandakrishnan Committee considered the normalisation process used in Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) and rejected it. The normalisation process used by GATE required average marks, qualifying marks, average of top 0.1 per cent of students and standard deviation of marks in every subject. As the database of marks in all the subjects in every H.Sc. Board might not be available on time, the committee rejected this normalisation process, and recommended another method which was accepted by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Under the new method, the highest marks obtained in every subject in every H.Sc. Board is equated to the highest marks in Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board, and the ratio of these two marks will be multiplied by the individual student's marks to obtain the normalised marks. The illustration in the report is given below:

If the highest marks secured by the topper of the Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board in Physics is 100 and the highest marks secured by the topper of the CBSE Board in the same subject is 90, both the highest marks will be considered to be equal to 100. If a student of the CBSE Board secures 60 marks in Physics, the 60 marks will be considered to be equal to 66.66 marks, that is, $(100/90) \times 60 = 66.66$.

This normalisation process assumes that the differences in syllabi, examination pattern, and evaluation standards are all reflected only in the highest marks in the H.Sc. Board examination. However, it is too simplistic to assume that the difference between the highest marks in a subject in two Boards will capture all the differences in the syllabi, standards of examination and evaluation. It is the norm that the topper in any class is an exception (a statistical outlier). Rather, the better way to capture the differences in the academic standards between Boards is through using average and the pattern of distribution of marks as is done in GATE, which is an established entrance test for admission in post-graduate courses in engineering across the country. This could have been a better method than an *ad hoc* and unscientific metric system to offset the non-availability of required data.

Moreover, one is not certain about the non-availability of such statistics from all the Boards.

Nowadays, every Board issues computerised mark-sheets to the thousands of students who appear for the H.Sc. examinations. Moreover, the selection committee for selecting students for admission in professional courses in Tamil Nadu obtains the highest mark in each subject from every other Board to normalise the school marks in each subject from the competent authorities. Obtaining comparative statistics is only a click away. Therefore, the GATE formula for normalisation should have been considered as a realistic option compared with the current one.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The removal of the CET as one of the qualifying exams for admission to professional courses in Tamil Nadu through the promulgation of Tamil Nadu Admission in Professional Educational Institution Act, 2006, has left the H.Sc. examination marks as the only criterion for such admission.

If the poor and rural students do not have access to coaching classes for the preparation of the CET, they (who are mainly from MBC, SC and ST communities) would also be similarly disadvantaged in respect of access to good schooling. But the fallout of the recommendation to do away with the CET, and its institutionalisation, has led to undesirable consequences in the course of time over the last eight to nine years. The major among such outcomes is the introduction of examination reforms that was biased against proper teaching and learning and its substitution with rote memorisation and coaching to answer questions in well-defined patterns. This means that students and teachers spend little time on the teaching and learning processes and concentrate exclusively on memorising the textbooks.

The introduction of a blueprint and a key for evaluation of answer scripts in H.Sc. by the Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board are measures towards evaluating the memory of students rather than testing the understanding and interpretative abilities of students. The blueprint gives the distribution of questions across chapters, which helps students prepare different types of questions through a process of permutation and combination and make reasonable guesses of likely questions from each chapter for the examination.

Moreover, every year the Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board prepares the key for each question paper, that is, the exact answers expected from students for each question. A collection of question papers and keys over a period of time will aid a well-informed guess of the question paper. This has gradually reduced the H.Sc. Board examination in Tamil Nadu to a system of measuring the ability of students to memorise text books.

Consequently, students, schools and teachers have been concentrating on improving the scores in the H.Sc. examinations. As described earlier, the use of blue-print and keys has helped this effort. A comparison of marks of students who appeared for the Tamil Nadu H.Sc.. Board examinations in 2007 and 2014 clearly illustrates this trend.

Marks of students who appeared in Science and Mathematics streams that make them eligible for admission to professional courses have been taken for this analysis. The analysis considered only the marks from 3 or 4 subjects in Mathematics and sciences that are considered for admission in professional courses, excluding the marks obtained in English and Languages.

Table 2 gives the distribution of students in science and Mathematics streams in 2007 and 2014. The total number of students increased nearly 50 per cent from 3.04 lakh in 2007 to 4.57 lakh in 2014. The distribution of students by type of management of schools shows that the increase in students in

government schools was the highest at 62 per cent and followed by 47 per cent and 38 per cent in private and aided schools, respectively. In the last 10 years, the government has been upgrading most of the schools to higher levels, subject to higher enrolment in the lower classes. It is also a fact that the drop-out ratios have declined, facilitating higher enrolment in high school and higher secondary school.

The absolute number of students in BC, MBC, and SC and ST communities increased and on the contrary the number of students from OtC declined, resulting in the proportion of OtC students declining from 5.9 per cent in 2007 to 3.5 per cent in 2014. Though the number of students from the BC category increased by nearly 56,000, their proportion declined from 50.5 per cent to 45.9 per cent. The proportion of students from MBC, and SC and ST increased from 24.9 per cent to 29.1 per cent and 18.7 per cent to 21.5 per cent respectively.

The decline in the proportions of students from OtC and BC categories show that the students from these categories are increasingly moving to other boards such as CBSC, ICSE and international boards. Within each community, the proportion of students in private schools has increased except for SC and ST. The increase in the proportion of private school students was the highest for OtC, followed BC, MBC, and SC and ST. More than 2/3rd of OtC students and 1/3rd of the BC students are in private schools compared with only 1/5th of MBC and 1/12th of SC and ST students in private schools. This increases the probability of OtC and BC students getting admission in the 'Open Category' compared with other categories because generally the students from private schools score more than the students from government-aided and government schools.

On the whole, the likelihood of BC students getting a disproportionately larger share of the seats in professional courses is high. This trend calls into question the working of the reservation system and the functioning of the schools system.

Under an ideal system of reservation, students from BC, MBC, SC and ST ought to get their shares in the respective quotas, with or without the CET. However, the removal of the CET has increased the chances of students from BCs to get a larger share in the Open Category, though the same is not the case for students from MBCs, and SCs, and STs.

Table 2: Distribution of Students Who Appeared for H.Sc. in Science Streams in 2007 and 2014

2007	Community					
		OtC	BC	MBC	SC/ST	Total
Management	Government	2704 (15.2)	51941 (33.8)	41476 (54.8)	32672 (57.6)	128793 (42.4)
	Aided	4570 (25.6)	51807 (33.8)	19114 (25.3)	15810 (27.9)	91301 (30.1)
	Private	10557 (59.2)	49736 (32.4)	15098 (19.9)	8194 (14.5)	83585 (27.5)
	Total	17831 [5.9]	153484 [50.5]	75688 [24.9]	56676 [18.7]	303679
2014	Community					
		OtC	BC	MBC	SC/ST	Total
Management	Government	2309 (14.4)	69609 (33.2)	75957 (57.2)	60239 (61.2)	208114 (45.5)
	Aided	3341 (20.8)	66580 (31.7)	30141 (22.7)	25912 (26.3)	125974 (27.6)
	Private	10435 (64.9)	73667 (35.1)	26752 (20.1)	12311 (12.5)	123165 (26.9)
	Total	16085 [3.5]	209856 [45.9]	132850 [29.1]	98462 [21.5]	457253

Note: Figures in () are percentages to column total. Figures in [] are percentage to row total

Source: Dept. of Govt. Examinations, Govt. of Tamil Nadu

This analysis also takes up the question, how many students from different schools and communities would be eligible to get admission in government, government-aided and university colleges in professional courses, where all the seats are distributed as per the reservation formula described in the introductory passages. Further, seats surrendered by private colleges to the state government should also be filled using the communal reservation system⁴. The number of engineering and medical seats in the three government sector colleges (government colleges, government-aided colleges and constituent colleges of state Universities) in Tamil Nadu increased from roughly 7,000 in 2006-07 to 15,500 in 2014-15. In addition to these, there are lesser sought-after professional courses like paramedical, agricultural sciences and veterinary sciences. Therefore, it is assumed that students who scored more than 95 per cent in the H.Sc. exam should be eligible to get admission in at least one of the professional courses in the government sector, because the number of students scored more than 95 per cent increased roughly from 4,000 to 14,000 during this period. Of these students, the top 31 per cent would get admission under the 'Open Category' and others under quotas for different communities.

Table 3: Distribution of Students in H.Sc. in Science Streams in 2007 and 2014

Particulars		2007				2014			
		Total Appeared	Total Passed	">95 per cent"	"Top 31 per cent"	Total Appeared	Total Passed	">95 per cent"	"Top 31 per cent"
OtC	Total	17,831	16,095	820	259	16,085	15,630	1,631	597
	Increase over 2007					-1746	-465	811	338
	Proportion to total increase					-1.1	-0.3	8.2	11.1
BC	Total	1,53,484	1,32,011	2,496	779	2,09,856	2,01,127	9,225	2,928
	Increase over 2007					56,372	69,116	6,729	2,149
	Proportion to total increase					36.7	38.3	68.2	70.3
MBC	Total	75,688	59,279	496	146	1,32,850	1,23,464	2,337	614
	Increase over 2007					57,162	64,185	1,841	468
	Proportion to total increase					37.2	35.6	18.7	15.3
SC and ST	Total	56,676	39,158	137	40	98,462	86,812	624	144
	Increase over 2007					41,786	47,674	487	104
	Proportion to total increase					27.2	26.4	4.9	3.4
Govt. Schools	Total	1,28,793	89,672	145	38	2,08,114	1,85,493	893	128
	Increase over 2007					79,321	95,821	748	90
	Proportion to total increase					51.7	53.0	7.6	2.9
Aided Schools	Total	91,301	80,187	687	172	1,25,974	1,21,080	2,659	614
	Increase over 2007					34,673	40,893	1,972	442
	Proportion to total increase					22.6	22.7	20.0	14.5
Private Schools	Total	83,585	76,684	3,117	1,014	1,23,165	1,20,460	10,265	3,541
	Increase over 2007					39,580	43,776	7,148	2,527
	Proportion to total increase					25.8	24.3	72.4	82.6
Grand Total	Total	3,03,679	2,46,543	3,949	1,224	4,57,253	4,27,033	13,817	4,283
	Increase over 2007					1,53,574	1,80,490	9868	3059
	Proportion to total increase					100	100	100	100

Table 3 gives the distribution of total students who appeared in the Science and Mathematics streams, passed, scored more than 95 per cent, and among them who formed the top 31 per cent. The increase in the number of students in each of the categories in 2014 compared with 2007, and the proportion in each class of students by communities and type of schools to the respective total increase is also calculated and presented in the Table 3.

The number of students who appeared and passed in the OtC category declined in 2014 compared with 2007 by 1,746 and 465 respectively. Despite this decline, the proportion of increase in '> 95 per cent' and 'top 31 per cent' are 8.2 and 11.4 respectively. Since the OtC students could compete only in the 'open category', they could get 11.0 per cent of the seats in the 'open category'. Given that the number of OtC students declined in the Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board schools, their share in the 'open category' is not too low.

For the BC category, compared with 2007, the number students in 2014 increased by 56,372 that is 36.7 per cent of the total increase of 1,53,574. A similar 38.3 per cent increase was found for the BC students in the 'pass' category. In the '>95 per cent' category, the share of BC students in the total increase was 68.2 per cent and in the 'top 31 per cent' their share was 70.3 per cent. This means that nearly 70.3 per cent of the seats in the 'open category' would go to BC students. This is in addition to 30 per cent quota for the BC students. Thus, the removal of the CET has clearly benefited the BC students. The combined share of OtC and BC students in the 'top 31 per cent' was 81.4 per cent leaving only 18.6 per cent for the MBC, SC and ST students in the open category. Between MBC, and SC and ST, the increase in 'top 31 per cent' was divided into 15.3 per cent and 3.4 per cent respectively. This further reiterates the relative educational backwardness of SC and ST compared with all others. This clearly exhibits the educational backwardness of the students from MBC, SC and ST communities and their inability to compete in the open competition. However, one cannot make such a categorical statement about the BC students.

Earlier, it was shown that higher proportions of students in the OtC and BC communities were enrolled in private schools compared to the students in other educationally and socially depressed communities. If a comparison of schools by type of management, then the private schools have larger proportion of students in both '> 95 per cent' and 'top 31 per cent' categories. Though the private schools accounted for 25.8 per cent of the increase in total students who appeared in 2014 compared with 2007, their shares in the two categories were 72.6 per cent and 82.6 per cent, respectively. Thus, the community and type of school combine determined the relatively larger presence of the students from the OtC and BC in both '> 95 per cent' and 'top 31 per cent' categories. The removal of the CET has not enhanced the chances of the students from MBC, SC and ST communities to get a larger share in the 'open category'. They would nevertheless get their share in their respective communities' quotas with or without the CET. Thus the removal CET has not served the perceived social justice objective of enlarging choice of the students from the most socially and educationally depressed communities.

The level of educational attainment of students from all the communities has improved over time, but such an improvement seems to have been pretty faster for students from BC communities compared to all others. This can be illustrated with a new set of data. Table 4A gives the cut-off marks in various branches of Engineering for various social groups in Anna University Departments in 2007. Table 4B gives similar information for 2014. In Table 4B two new communal groups are found, BC-Muslim (BCM) and SC-Arundhadhiyar (SCA), because they are given reservation within the existing BC and SC quotas respectively. As such, BC gets 26.5 per cent and BCM gets 3.5 per cent aggregating to 30 per cent for BC and SC gets 15 per cent and SCA get 3 per cent, aggregating to 18 per cent for SC. BCM cannot compete in the 26.5 per cent reserved for other backward communities, similarly SCA cannot compete in the 15 per cent reserved for other SC.

Table4A: Cut-off Marks for Courses in Anna University Departments-2007

Branch	Open cat	BC	MBC	SC	ST
Agriculture & Irrigation Engineering	184.25	182.25	177.5	166.25	0
Bio Medical Engineering					
Civil Engineering	196	195.25	192.75	184	173.75
Computer Science & Engineering (CSE)	199.5	199	198	194.5	189
Computer Science & Engineering (CSE, self-supporting)	199	198.75	197.5	189.5	0
Electrical & Electronics Engineering	198.25	197.75	195.75	190	188.75
Electronics & Communication Engineering	199.75	199.5	198.5	195.25	0
Electronics & Communication Engineering (self-supporting)	199.25	199.25	197.75	192.25	191
Geoinformatics	195	194	190	179	0
Industrial Engineering	195	194	189	181.75	170.5
Information Technology	198.5	198	196	189	184
Manufacturing Engineering	195.5	194.25	190	180.5	174.5
Materials Science & Engineering	193.5	192.5	186	172	0
Mechanical Engineering	197.5	196.75	194.5	187.75	176.25
Mining Engineering	189.75	187.5	187.25	175	0
Printing Technology	192.25	190.25	187	174.5	0

Source: [Colleges in Tamil Nadu](#) Last accessed: April 26, 2016

Table 4B: Cut-off Marks for Courses in Anna University Departments – 2014

Branch	Open cat	BC	BCM	MBC	SC	ST	SCA
Agriculture & Irrigation Engineering	196.5	195.75	194	194	187	176.75	175.25
Bio Medical Engineering	198.25	197.75	197.5	195.75	190.75	184.25	186.5
Civil Engineering	199.5	199.25	199	198.5	196.75	188.25	195.75
Computer Science & Engineering (CSE)	200	199.75	199.5	199.25	196	186.25	194.33
Computer Science & Engineering (CSE, self-supporting)	199.5	199.25	199	197.75	192.5	185.25	191
Electrical & Electronics Engineering	199.75	199.5	199.25	199	196.75	197.75	194.25
Electronics & Communication Engineering	200	199.75	199.25	199.25	197.75	193.75	197
Electronics & Communication Engineering (self-supporting)	199.5	199.25	199	198.5	195.25	186.25	191.5
Geoinformatics	197.75	197.25	195.5	195.5	190.5	0	178.75
Industrial Engineering	197.5	197.25	196.25	195.25	187.5	0	174.25
Information Technology	199	198.75	198	196.75	189.5	181.5	180.25
Manufacturing Engineering	198.25	197.5	198.25	196	189.5	0	181.5
Materials Science & Engineering	197	196.75	195.25	194.75	183.5	0	169.75
Mechanical Engineering	199.75	199.75	199.5	199.25	198	187.25	197.5
Mining Engineering	198	197.5	195.25	195.5	189	0	189.75
Printing Technology	195.5	194.75	193.75	193	184.75	156	179

Source: [Colleges in Tamil Nadu](#) Last accessed: April 26, 2016

It is evident from Tables 4A and 4B that not only have the cut-off marks for various courses increased over the seven-year period, but also the difference in cut-off marks between communities have declined sharply. The CSE can be considered as an illustration. The cut-off for open category increased from 199.5 to 200, that is, 31 per cent of the seats in this branch of engineering was filled with students who scored centum in all the Science and Mathematics papers in 2014. The difference in cut-off marks between open category and BC was 0.5 in 2007 and 0.25 in 2014. Similarly, such differences between BC and MBC in the two years were 1.0 and 0.5 respectively. However, the differences were higher between MBC and SC – 3.5 in 2007 and 3.25 in 2014.

VI. TIME FOR REVIEW

The substantial differences in cut-off marks between the BC, MBC, and SC and ST show the economic and educational differences between these communities, and that the differences are declining, implying the narrowing educational gap. The small gap of 0.25 in the cut-off marks between OtC and BC may be wiped out in the near future. Such narrowing gaps in the cut-off marks for various streams of professional courses and institutions between BC and OtC underline the need for a relook at the reservation for BC as a whole.

If BC is not a heterogeneous group, then it is quite likely that a few of the sub-castes in BC is getting the benefits of reservation. If one were to assume that the BCs constitute a homogenous group then, given the narrowing gap with OtC, it may not need reservation in future. Either way, we need to revisit the reservation for BC so also for other communal groups with greater attention to intra-group differences in terms of social and educational backwardness.

The following major points that emerge from this analysis:

- A.** The rationale to remove the CET is flawed and the system of normalisation of marks between different Boards of H.Sc. exams is unscientific. The CET does not have a social justice objective. It is a system to create a level-playing field for students from different boards to compete for admission in professional courses. The onus of creating social justice should rest on the school system by reorienting it to remove the relative educational backwardness of certain communities.
- B.** When nearly 14,000 students are within the top 5 per cent of marks in the Tamil Nadu Board of H.Sc. examination, it could be concluded that either the educational standards have increased uniformly across such schools and that thousands of students could earn the same marks, or that the educational system has failed to differentiate the high achievers from the rest.
- C.** In the absence of the CET and using only the H.Sc. exam marks, the increasing cut-off marks for all the courses show that it is easier for most of the students in successive years to skilfully increase the score through the use of blue-print and keys as already explained in this analysis.
- D.** The narrowing difference in cut-off marks shows that the educational distance between the various groups is declining, which could be perhaps interpreted as the need to revisit the reservation system and possibly to remove some sub-castes from each group.
- E.** Alternatively, the narrowing difference in cut-off marks exposes the inadequacy of the existing examination pattern to bring out the real differences in the educational attainment of students from different communities.
- F.** The reservation system in any form will discriminate against the students of 'Other Communities' and hence their numbers in the State government's educational system will decline over time. In addition to reservation system that is in practice, the removal of the CET, combined with the 'blue print aided and key based' evaluation system of the Tamil Nadu H.Sc. Board Exam, have hastened this process further, which needs some deep thinking.

Notes:

¹Dr. M. Anandakrishnan's report was not made public. What follows is based on the gist of the report provided in the judgement of Madras High Court in *S. Aswin Kumar vs. State of Tamil Nadu* (2007) challenging the law that removed CET for admission in professional courses.

²Dr. M. Anandakrishnan submitted a report to this committee, and that was reproduced as Appendix X in its Interim report in 2006. In May 2006, the Government of India instituted Oversight Committee to monitor implementation of reservation of seats for students from Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in higher educational institutions. It submitted an interim report in July 2006.

³There is a fixed quantum of seats for students from each of the BC, MBC, SC and ST Communities. Students from communities other than those listed are called as 'Other Communities' (OtC) and such students can compete only for the open category seats. But students of BC, MBC, SC and ST can also compete for the 'open category' seats, because such seats are not reserved for any particular communities, hence the name Open Category.

⁴Normally, every private engineering/medical college should surrender 50 per cent of seats for single window admission system of the state government. Students admitted through this system pay the government determined tuition fees. Students for the remaining 50 per cent of the seats, called management quota, shall be admitted by the management and that gives scope for collecting higher tuition and other fees. However, some of the private engineering colleges surrender more than 50 per cent of the seats, because they could not get students for all the seats in the management quota.



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