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Educational Status of Scheduled Caste Children in Jammu and Kashmir: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: ***Indian culture is highly stratified due to its linguistic diversity, religious affiliations, caste system, and regional loyalties. Among the most economically deprived and marginalized groups in India are the Scheduled Castes (SCs), who continue to face significant social and educational disadvantages. Representing 16.6% of the country's total population (Census of India, 2011); the Scheduled Castes remain one of the most disadvantaged segments of Indian society. A substantial portion of this population is illiterate and unaware of the importance of education, which exacerbates their marginalization. Scheduled Caste children encounter numerous challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, a poor social environment, and a lack of public awareness. Although the Indian government has introduced various initiatives to improve their educational status, such as scholarships, educational facilities, financial aid, skill development programs, and special courts to address violence and atrocities, many SC individuals remain unaware of these opportunities.***

This present paper examines the educational status of Scheduled Caste children in India, with a particular focus on Jammu and Kashmir. It aims to shed light on the barriers preventing SC students from pursuing both school and higher education. Additionally, it will explore the constitutional provisions designed to uplift the status of Scheduled Caste students and analyze their enrollment rates at various educational levels in Jammu and Kashmir. Through this examination, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by SC students and the efforts being made to improve their educational outcomes.

Keywords: Scheduled caste, Marginalized groups, language diversity, religious affiliations

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial aspects and effective instruments of developing human resources is education, which is also essential for the long-term social and economic advancement for a country. Education helps people grow holistically by enhancing their quality of life, advancing their health, increasing their access to quality jobs and making it easier for them to participate in social and political life. In an Indian setting, people can be classified into many different groups and castes. On the socioeconomic ladder, the Scheduled Castes (SC) is at the bottom. They comprise the bulk of the downtrodden social classes. Groups of people who were previously outside of the caste system or Varna hierarchy are referred to as Scheduled Caste. The Simon Commission (1927) is credited with coining the term "scheduled caste." Throughout colonial times, the scheduled castes were referred to as "untouchables," "depressed class," and "exterior caste." Gandhiji referred to them as "harijans." The more well-known scheduled castes are the madiga, adi, Karnataka, and Bhangi (UP, Bihar, and Punjab).Madiga (Andhra) and Mala (Karnataka) harijan (Deka, 2016). The scheduled castes were isolated from the general population as a result of the pervasive untouchability practice (Chouhan, 2013; Kumar et al., 2022). Significantly underprivileged, socially marginalized in some places and with restricted access to jobs, education, and other sources of income, a large percentage of the Scheduled Castes are economically disadvantaged. The government has established a number of welfare programmes for the Scheduled Caste population's socioeconomic development.

The two most crucial components of the nation's economic growth are employment and education. There has been a consistent rise in the population of Scheduled Caste. Its population grew from approximately 48 million (Census, 1941) to 1,028,610,328 (Census, 2011).This makes up about 16.6% of India's total population. They typically depend on labour in agriculture, the leather industry and other low-paying jobs and have very few assets. Approximately 71% of farmers who belong to the Scheduled Caste group work on land they do not own. According to Article 46 of the Constitution, The State shall protect the weaker sections of the society—the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in particular—from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation, which also mandates that they be given special attention for their education and economic interests (Basu, 2012). However, access to education is limited for Scheduled Castes. The government fails to provide adequate funding to guarantee equitable access to resources and frequently ignores the infrastructure and resources in Dalit villages.

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The Scheduled Castes have only 66.1% literacy rate (Census, 2011). Scheduled Castes in India have experienced social exclusion and suffering. They experienced numerous economic issues; including poverty, low property ownership, a narrow choice of vocations and landlessness, in addition to educational regression (Ambedkar & Anuradha,2022).

In Jammu and Kashmir, since ancient times, Hindu society was split into castes (on the basis of birth and nature of employment). The Shudras (scheduled caste), the fourth caste, are referred to as the "untouchables" since they are viewed as the lower class. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, castes such as Megh, Doom, Chamar, Chura, Watal, Batwal, and Koli were among those considered untouchables. Ranbir Singh was the first Dogra ruler who brought attention to the problem of untouchability of the schedule class, Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir State attempted to ameliorate the status of lower castes in society. In 1940, Maharaja Hari Singh, the then ruler of royal state of Jammu and Kashmir, declared untouchability a crime because untouchability was impeding the development and well-being of the Harijan community. Similarly, the State Government enacted the Removal of Untouchability of Harijan Act in 1940. On behalf of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the Pandits of Kashi were convinced that the downtrodden and marginalized groups ought to have opportunities to improve their status in society (Kumar, 2021)

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To understand the present educational status of SC children in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir with respect to other states of India.
2) To explore the barriers faced by SC children in the field of education in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
3) To suggest few measures for uplifting the educational status of SC children.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative in nature. Data has been collected from the secondary sources like related research papers, official websites, articles, reports, National Family Health Surveys and Census of India (2011) etc.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. *Status of Scheduled Caste in Jammu and Kashmir*

The UT of Jammu & Kashmir, known as the crown of India is located in the extreme north of the country. In Jammu and Kashmir, the population is distributed quite unevenly. District to district and micro to meso-regional variations exist in population distribution and density. India's government recently established two union territories. As per (Census 2011), there are 9.24 lakh scheduled caste people in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Of these, 30% live in the Chenab valley, while the remaining people are distributed throughout the Kandi belt of Kathua, Samba, R.S. Pura, and Jammu in the Jammu division. Up to 82.6% of scheduled caste members live in rural regions, making them predominantly rural. According to (census, 2011), the largest concentration of scheduled castes is found in the Jammu district (24%), followed by Kathua (23%), and Udhampur (19.01%). The Kashmir division's districts all have extremely low population numbers. There are thirteen scheduled castes in Jammu and Kashmir, with the Megh caste (40%) having the most population, followed by the Chamar (24.9%) and Doom (20.8%) castes. The population as a whole is made up of 84.2% scheduled castes. 12.9% of the population is made up of the four scheduled castes, Batwal, Barwal, Basith, and Saryara. Just 2.9% of people are members of the remaining six castes. With a population of fewer than 200, Watal is the smallest community overall. Compared to the national average, Jammu and Kashmir's scheduled caste population has a much lower overall sex ratio of 910 girls per 1000 males. Because of their severe poverty, generational exploitation by upper castes, regional geographic differences, local rituals and customs, and local exploitation, scheduled castes in these locations have lower educational status than other community. Due to their low literacy rate, traditional economy, unemployment, and difficult living conditions in underdeveloped locations, these castes faced vulnerable socio-cultural challenges. They had been viewed historically as jajmani transactions and service castes (Chandar & Rafique, 2020).

Table 1. Population of SCs in all the states and UTs of India in comparison to J&K

State	Total population	S.C. population	S.C. %
Andhra Pradesh	84,580,777	13,878,078	16.41
Arunachal Pradesh	1,383,727	0	0.00
Assam	31,205,576	2,231,321	7.15

State	Total population	S.C. population	S.C. %
Bihar	104,099,452	16,567,325	15.91
Chhattisgarh	25,545,198	3,274,269	12.82
Goa	1,458,545	25,449	1.74
Gujarat	60,439,692	4,074,447	6.74
Haryana	25,351,462	5,113,615	20.17
Himachal Pradesh	6,864,602	1,729,252	25.19
Jammu and Kashmir	12,541,302	924,991	7.38
Jharkhand	32,988,134	3,985,644	12.08
Karnataka	61,095,297	10,474,992	17.15
Kerala	33,406,061	3,039,573	9.10
Madhya Pradesh	72,626,809	11,342,320	15.62
Maharashtra	112,374,333	13,275,898	11.81
Manipur	2,570,390	97,042	3.78
Meghalaya	2,966,889	17,355	0.58
Mizoram	1,097,206	1,218	0.11
Nagaland	1,978,502	0	0.00
Odisha	41,974,218	7,190,184	17.13
Punjab	27,743,338	8,860,179	31.94
Rajasthan	68,548,437	12,221,593	17.83
Sikkim	610,577	28,275	4.63
Tamil Nadu	72,147,030	14,438,445	20.01
Tripura	3,673,917	654,918	17.83
Uttar Pradesh	199,812,341	41,357,608	20.70

State	Total population	S.C. population	S.C. %
Uttarakhand	10,086,292	1,892,516	18.76
West Bengal	91,276,115	21,463,270	23.51
India	1,210,854,977	201,378,086	16.63

Source: Census (2011)

The Table 1 highlights the population of SCs in all the states and UTs of India. From the above table it can be estimated that out of all the states and union territories of the country, Punjab has the highest proportion of Scheduled Castes (31.90%) and Mizoram has the lowest proportion of Scheduled Castes (0.10%). Jammu and Kashmir has only 7.38% of sc population in the union territory.

Table 2. Population of Scheduled Caste in the UT of J&K

Description	Population	Population %	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
Total SC population in J&K	9,24,991	7.376%	4,86,232	438,759	902(females per 1000 males)
J&K SC population in Urban Areas	1,73,965	5.067%	93,251	80,714	866(females per 1000 males)
J&K SC population in Rural Areas	7,51,026	8.246%	3,92,981	358,045	911(females per 1000 males)

Source: Census (2011)

Table 2 highlights the population of SC in the rural and urban area of UT of Jammu and Kashmir. It shows that there are total 9,24,991 SCs in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which makes up 7.36% of total population in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, out of which 486,232 are males and 438,759 are females. Their sex ratio is 902 females per 1000 males. Out of 924,991 sc population, only 173,965 population resides in urban areas (93,251 males and 80,714 females) and 751,026 (392,981males and 358,045 females) resides in rural areas in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

Table 3: Community-wise population of Scheduled Castes in Jammu and Kashmir

Name of Scheduled Caste	Total/Rural/Urban	Total Population		
		Population	Male	Female
Barwala	Total	33,225	17,197	16,028
Barwala	Rural	25,817	13,333	12,484
Barwala	Urban	7,408	3,864	3,544
Basith	Total	24,407	12,654	11,753
Basith	Rural	23,808	12,301	11,507
Basith	Urban	599	353	246
Batwal	Total	43,945	23,191	20,754
Batwal	Rural	37,976	20,017	17,959
Batwal	Urban	5,969	3,174	2,795

Chamar or Ramdasia, Chamar-Ravidas, Chamar-Rohidas	Total	212,032	112,623	99,409
Chamar or Ramdasia, Chamar-Ravidas, Chamar-Rohidas	Rural	166,254	87,491	78,763
Chamar or Ramdasia, Chamar-Ravidas, Chamar-Rohidas	Urban	45,778	25,132	20,646
Chura, Bhangi, Balmiki, Mehtar	Total	6,918	3,680	3,238
Chura, Bhangi, Balmiki, Mehtar	Rural	3,555	1,885	1,670
Chura, Bhangi, Balmiki, Mehtar	Urban	3,363	1,795	1,568
Dhyar	Total	8,343	4,350	3,993
Dhyar	Rural	8,121	4,230	3,891
Dhyar	Urban	222	120	102
Doom or Mahasha, Dumna	Total	193,803	101,410	92,393
Doom or Mahasha, Dumna	Rural	148,275	77,740	70,535
Doom or Mahasha, Dumna	Urban	45,528	23,670	21,858
Gardi	Total	4,596	2,445	2,151
Gardi	Rural	3,805	2,020	1,785
Gardi	Urban	791	425	366
Jolaha	Total	306	188	118
Jolaha	Rural	118	70	48
Jolaha	Urban	188	118	70
Megh or Kabirpanthi	Total	359,105	186,813	172,292
Megh or Kabirpanthi	Rural	305,794	158,689	147,105
Megh or Kabirpanthi	Urban	53,311	28,124	25,187
Ratal	Total	2,784	1,489	1,295
Ratal	Rural	2,575	1,378	1,197
Ratal	Urban	209	111	98
Saryara	Total	15,825	8,242	7,583
Saryara	Rural	10,316	5,365	4,951
Saryara	Urban	5,509	2,877	2,632
Watal	Total	146	79	67
Watal	Rural	101	49	52

Source: Census (2011)

Table 3 shows the community-wise population distribution of Scheduled Castes in Jammu and Kashmir reveals significant demographic trends. For instance, the Barwala community has a total population of 33,225, with the majority residing in rural areas (25,817). Similarly, the Basith community, predominantly rural, has 23,808 out of its 24,407 members living in rural settings. The largest community, Megh or Kabirpanthi, has a total population of 359,105, with 305,794 living in rural areas. Urban populations tend to be smaller across communities, such as the Batwal, where only 5,969 of the 43,945 total members reside in urban areas. This data highlights the rural concentration of Scheduled Castes in the region.

Table 4. Enrolment of SC children In Primary level (Classes I-V) in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir

Year	Boys	Girls
2009-2010	49616	42874

Source: Census (2011)

Table 4 elucidates the enrolment of sc students at primary level (I-V) in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. From the table 4, it can be understood that in 2009-2010, 49616(boys) and 42874(girls) were enrolled at primary level.

Table 5. Enrolment of Overall and Scheduled Caste Students in J&K at Secondary Level

Years	Overall	Male	Female	Scheduled Caste	Male	Female
2013–2014	56,7941;	308,673	259,268	48,085	24,294	259,268
2014–2015	593,783	320,718	273,065	46,443	24,738	21,705
2015–2016	584,967	314,246	270,721	48,763	25,542	23,221
2016–2017	534,864	289,098	245,766	48,767	25,906	22,861
2017–2018	565,225	301,102	264,123	50,648	26,702	23,946

Source: U-DISE and MHRD, Government of India

Table 5 highlights that the enrolment of the scheduled caste students in J&K at the secondary level. In 2013–2014, the total enrolment was 56,7941; among them, 308,673 were male and 259,268 were female, while for scheduled caste the total enrolment was 48,085; among them 24,294 were male and 23,791 were female. In 2014–2015, the total enrolment is 593,783; among them 320,718 are male and 273,065 are female, while in scheduled castes the total enrolment was 46,443: 24,738 male and 21,705 female. In 2015–2016, the total enrolment was 584,967: 314,246 male and 270,721 female; while for scheduled caste the total enrolment was 48,763; among them 25,542 male and 23,221 female. In 2016–2017, the total enrolment is 534,864: 289,098 male and 245,766 female; while for scheduled caste it was 48,767: 25,906 male and 22,861 female. In 2017–2018, the total enrolment was 565,225: 301,102 male and 264,123 female, while for scheduled caste, the total enrolment was 50,648: 26,702 male and 23,946 female. Moreover, from the above table, it can be estimated that the enrolment of scheduled caste is increasing every year.

Table 6. Enrolment Rate of SC Students at Higher Educational Level in J&K

Year	Male	Female	Total
2011–2012	11.3	10.21	10.8
2012–2013	12.63	11.32	12.05
2013–2014	14.5	17.4	15.9
2014–2015	15	18.4	16.6
2015–2016	13.6	17.9	15.7

Source: MHRD report 2019–2020

Table 6 elucidates the GER of the scheduled caste at higher educational level in Jammu and Kashmir. In 2011–2012, the total percentage of sc students is 10.08(11.3% are male and 10.21% are female). In 2012–2013, the total is 12.05%, among them males are 12.63% and females are 11.32%, In 2013–2014, the total is 15.90%, among them 14.5% are males and 17.4% are females, In 2014–2015, the total population of sc students is 16.60%, among them 15.00%(males) and 18.40%(females) and similarly in 2015–2016 the total percentage is 15.70%, among them males are 13.60% and females are17.90%. The above data indicates that the highest enrolment of scheduled caste was observed in 2014–2015.

B. Barriers in the way of scheduled caste children in receiving education in J&K

In the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, the scheduled caste children face a lot of problems in receiving proper education. Some of major problems are enlisted under:

C. Poverty

There is a direct correlation between income levels and resource accessibility. Higher income families are frequently able to afford better educations. Compared to the Scheduled Castes, the Hindu Dominant Castes (HDCs) are four times wealthier. Approximately 41% of the nation's wealth is held by HDCs, nearly twice as much as their 22.28% population. In contrast, the combined ownership of SCs and STs is only 11.3% of their population, which is over 27% (Agarwal, 2019).

D. Stereotyping

Stereotyping is another major issue that comes in the way of sc children in receiving education. Stereotyping someone with a social identity affects their mental ability and makes them mentally ill and affects their performance to a larger extent .Teachers and peers frequently make assumptions about SC/ST children's inferiority, which negatively affects their academic achievement.

E. Physical Abuse

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (2021) attacks against SC/STs increased from 44,000 in 2018 to 49,000 in 2019. An International Dalit Solidarity Network [IDSN] research study (2017) states that children from underprivileged groups are disproportionately the victims of sexual assault in school violence incidents. 11 Dalit children were beaten by a principal in a Rajasthani case for using the communal water pot to drink water, which the principal said contaminated everyone's water supply. Such incidents increase their dropout rates at both school and higher level (Mruthunjaya 2019).

F. Early marriage

One of the main obstacles to education of the scheduled caste children is early marriage. Their parents compel them to marry early because according to them education is of no use and this is more prevalent in the case of women, where teenage girls out of their family pressure are made to marry early which affects their education (kumar,2021).

G. Lack of support from parents and family

In some cases, although both boys and girls are interested in studying but there is a lack of support from family members to continue education. Lack of support is sometimes related to the fear of engaging in the some social activities. However, there were also cases of physical abuse from the girl’s father, which prevented them from attending school and created pressures to drop out of school.

H. Lack of facilities for boys and girls

Another issue that comes in the way of sc children is the lack of facilities for male and females students’ especially female students at both school and colleges. There is no hostel, transport facility, separate classroom for both male and female. Lack of infrastructural facility decreases their enrolment and increases their dropout rate in schools and at college level (Kumar, 2021).

I. Constitutional provision to improve the situation and status of SCs

The Constitution provides a three-pronged strategy to improve the situation and status of SCs:

1) Affirmative action*:* In order to hasten the integration of SCs and STs into mainstream society, give them favorable treatment when it comes to job allocation and access to higher education. Reservation is a common term for affirmative action.

According to Article 16 of the Constitution, "nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provisions for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens, which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State." The Mandal Commission report, which suggested that affirmative action should extend to include the other backward castes in addition to the Untouchables, was upheld by the Supreme Court as lawful. But the public sector was the only one with qualms about affirmative action, not the private sector (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012).

2) Protective arrangements: Measures that are necessary to uphold equality, offer sanctions for violations, and eradicate long-standing customs that support injustices. The provisions of the Constitution were put into effect by a number of statutes. A few instances of these laws are the Scheduled Caste (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, the Untouchability Practices Act of 1955, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act of 1993, and so on. Social prejudice and crimes against the lower castes persisted in spite of laws (Sengupta, 2013)
3) Development*:* In order to close the socioeconomic divide between the SCs, STs, and other communities, offer resources and benefits. Acts to enhance the socioeconomic status of SCs and STs are needed because, in contrast to other groups, only 11% of SC and 37% of ST households were below the poverty line. In Indian society, the backward castes also experienced greater rates of sickness and mortality and were economically inferior to other groups (Sengupta, 2013)

J. The way forward

Education is widely recognized as a powerful tool for fostering upward social mobility, playing a crucial role in reducing socio-economic disparities and promoting the creation of an inclusive society. Efforts to empower weaker segments of society, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), have been extensive. These efforts include the implementation of constitutional protections, the introduction of scholarships, and the provision of "free-ships," which cover educational costs by offering free books, stationery, and midday meals. Additionally, the reservation of seats in government positions and educational institutions, along with specialized coaching classes for competitive exams, has been a key strategy to uplift these marginalized groups.

Despite over 60 years of affirmative action, the participation rate of SC students in education remains disproportionately low compared to their share of the overall population. This is a significant concern, particularly in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, where the dropout rates among SC students continue to be alarmingly high. To effectively address this issue and reduce social inequalities, the focus should be on not only increasing enrollment but also ensuring the retention of SC students in the education system.

A comprehensive approach is necessary to improve the educational outcomes for SC students in Jammu and Kashmir. This approach should include:

1) Enhanced Financial Support: Strengthening financial aid programs, such as scholarships and stipends, is essential to alleviate the economic burden on SC families. Expanding initiatives like free midday meals and providing educational materials at no cost can make education more accessible and reduce the financial strain on families.
2) Awareness and Outreach: Conducting targeted awareness campaigns within SC communities can help bridge the information gap regarding the importance of education and the availability of government schemes. These campaigns should involve local leaders, educators, and media to effectively reach families and encourage them to support their children's education.
3) Combating Discrimination: Implementing training programs for teachers to eliminate biases and stereotypes is crucial. Schools must adopt and enforce strict policies against discrimination and abuse, ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment for SC students. Regular monitoring and evaluation of these policies will help maintain accountability.
4) Strengthening Legal Protections: The enforcement of laws designed to protect SC students from discrimination and violence must be robust. Schools should provide accessible channels for students to report incidents, and there should be a swift legal response to any violations to create a deterrent effect.
5) Addressing Social Barriers: Community-based interventions are needed to combat social barriers like early marriage, particularly for SC girls. Education and counseling programs for parents, combined with legal enforcement of the minimum age of marriage, can help keep girls in school longer.
6) Parental and Community Engagement: Engaging parents and communities in the educational process is vital. Schools should facilitate regular meetings and workshops to discuss the benefits of education and address any cultural or social concerns that may hinder support for children's schooling.

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7) Infrastructure Development: Investing in educational infrastructure, especially in rural areas, is critical. This includes building hostels, ensuring safe transportation, and providing separate facilities for male and female students. Improved infrastructure can increase enrollment and reduce dropout rates by creating a more conducive learning environment.

8) Targeted Educational Programs: Developing specialized programs to support SC students in their academic pursuits is important. These programs could include mentorship, tutoring, and exam preparation classes tailored to the unique challenges faced by SC students.

9) Retention Strategies: Implementing retention strategies, such as early intervention programs for at-risk students, is essential. Schools should actively monitor student progress and provide additional support where needed to prevent dropouts.

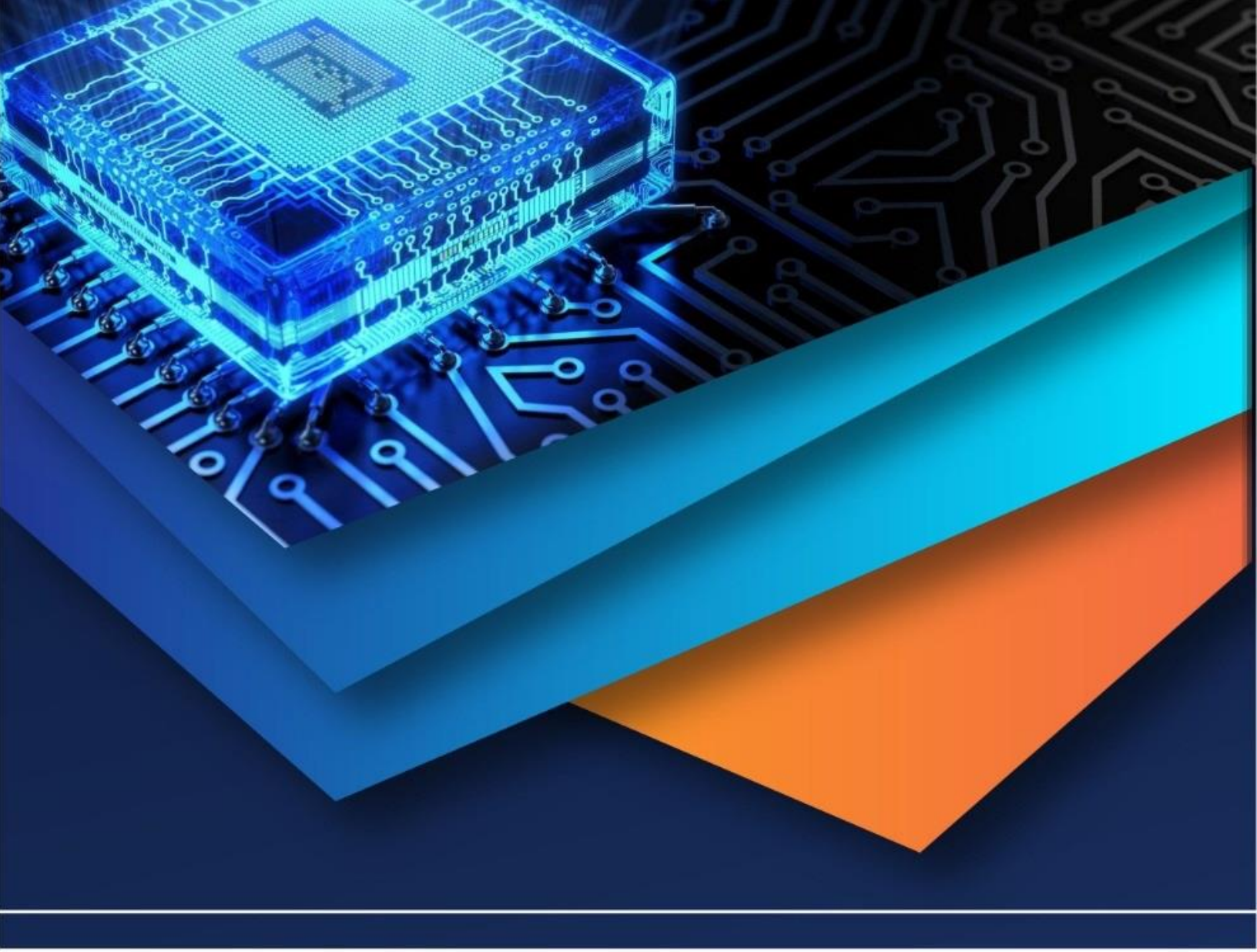
10) Policy Implementation and Monitoring: Continuous monitoring of the implementation of constitutional provisions and affirmative action policies is necessary to ensure they are effective. Regular assessments should be conducted to identify gaps and make adjustments as needed to maximize their impact.

By adopting these solutions, Jammu and Kashmir can create a more equitable and inclusive education system that not only increases SC student enrollment but also ensures their sustained participation and success in education. This holistic approach will contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalization, enabling SC students to achieve their full potential and contribute positively to society.

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