

Awareness and Impact of Economically Weaker Section Scheme in Social Development: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The Government of India has introduced several welfare policies and programmes to promote social justice and improve the situation of life of economically disadvantaged sections of society. Among these initiatives, the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) Scheme seeks to provide equitable opportunities in education, employment, and housing that do not belong to the existing reserved categories. The study is based on the concepts and explanations presented in Social Problems in India, which emphasizes poverty, inequality, social exclusion, and the significance of state intervention in achieving inclusive development. Using a descriptive and analytical approach, the paper explores how the EWS Scheme contributes to social inclusion, equal opportunities and the overall welfare of this group. It also discusses the challenges associated with the implementation of the scheme and its implications for reducing socio-economic disparities

1.1 Introduction

In India, a significant proportion of the population in rural India still faces challenges such as poverty, unemployment, lack of access to quality education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities. These disparities hinder social mobility and restrict the ability of weaker sections to participate effectively in the political, economic, and social processes of the country after independence, the Indian state has focused on welfare policies to uplift disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

The Government of India introduced the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) category through the 103rd Constitutional Amendment in 2019. This amendment provided for reservation in education and public employment for economically weaker individuals who are not covered under existing reservation categories. The objective of the EWS scheme is to promote equality of opportunity, reduce economic disparities, and ensure that individuals

from financially weaker backgrounds are not deprived of access to education and employment. In the context of the EWS Scheme, awareness encompasses knowledge regarding eligibility conditions, income limits, documentation requirements, reservation benefits, and application processes. Understanding the level of awareness among citizens is therefore essential for evaluating the effectiveness of the scheme.

The scheme aims to improve access to government employment opportunities. Public sector jobs in India are widely regarded as stable and prestigious, offering financial security and social status. However, competition for such positions is intense, and economically disadvantaged candidates often face challenges in securing employment due to limited access to educational resources and competitive preparation. By providing reservation in public employment, the EWS Scheme seeks to reduce barriers and enhance representation of economically weaker individuals in government services.

This Scheme extends beyond individual beneficiaries. By facilitating educational and occupational advancement, the scheme contributes to broader goals of social inclusion, economic development, and poverty reduction. The Economically Weaker Section (EWS) Scheme has emerged as an important welfare measure aimed at promoting equal opportunities for economically disadvantaged individuals belonging to the general category. In Punjab, the scheme is being implemented across educational institutions and government employment sectors, providing reservation benefits to eligible beneficiaries. Despite its growing significance and positive impact, effective implementation requires greater awareness, simplified procedures, and improved accessibility, particularly in rural areas.

1.2 Overview of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) Scheme:

The EWS reservation marks a historic shift in India's affirmative action framework by introducing economic criteria as a basis for reservation. Under this amendment, Articles 15(6) and 16(6) were inserted into the Constitution, enabling the State to provide up to 10 percent reservation in educational institutions and public employment for economically weaker sections among citizens who are not covered under existing reservation schemes. The introduction of EWS reservation reflects the government's commitment to addressing economic deprivation and expanding opportunities for economically disadvantaged individuals irrespective of their caste background.

1.2.1 Constitutional and Administrative Framework:

The EWS Scheme was introduced through the Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019, inserting Articles 15(6) and 16(6) to provide 10% reservation in education and public employment for economically weaker individuals from the unreserved category. Its implementation follows a multi-level administrative structure involving the Central Government, State Governments, District Administration, Revenue Departments, and educational and recruitment institutions. This coordinated framework ensures policy formulation, certificate issuance, implementation of reservations, and monitoring of benefits.

1.2.2 Eligibility Criteria and EWS Certificate:

Eligibility under the EWS Scheme is determined by both income and asset criteria. Families with an annual income below ₹8 lakh, who do not own assets beyond the prescribed limits, are eligible, provided they do not belong to the SC, ST, or OBC categories. Applicants must obtain an Income and Asset Certificate (EWS Certificate) from a competent revenue authority after verification of income, property, and supporting documents. The certificate is generally valid for one financial year and must be renewed whenever required.

1.2.3 Reservation Benefits in Education and Employment:

The scheme provides 10% reservation in admissions to higher educational institutions and direct recruitment in government services. Eligible candidates can avail reservation in institutions offering professional and higher education and compete for reserved vacancies in government employment. Along with reservation, many Central and State Government scholarship schemes, fee concessions, and educational assistance programs support EWS students, promoting greater access to education and employment opportunities.

1.2.4. Implementation in Punjab and Administrative Mechanism:

Punjab adopted the EWS reservation policy in accordance with the constitutional amendment and implemented it across government departments, educational institutions, and public sector organizations. The Revenue Department, Department of Social Justice, Deputy Commissioners, SDMs and Tehsildars supervise certificate issuance and verification through both offline and digital platforms such as Sewa Kendras. The state's digital governance initiatives have improved transparency, efficiency, and accessibility while ensuring that benefits reach genuinely eligible beneficiaries.

1.2.5 Challenges and Government Initiatives:

Despite its positive impact, the EWS Scheme faces challenges such as limited public awareness, documentation difficulties, administrative delays, verification issues, and accessibility problems in rural areas. To address these concerns, governments have

introduced awareness campaigns, online application systems, digital verification, grievance redressal mechanisms, and regular monitoring through administrative inspections and integrated databases. These initiatives aim to improve transparency, reduce delays, prevent misuse, and ensure effective delivery of reservation benefits to economically weaker sections of society.

1.3 Review of Literature:

Dreze and Sen (2013) examined the relationship between economic inequality and access to social opportunities in India. The authors argued that poverty significantly affects educational attainment, employment opportunities, and overall human development. Their study highlighted the importance of affirmative action and welfare measures in reducing socio-economic disparities. The findings provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the rationale behind economic-based reservation policies such as the EWS Scheme. Tilak (2018) explored the relationship between education and socio-economic development in India. The study emphasized that financial constraints often limit access to higher education among economically disadvantaged students. The findings indicate that economic support measures can significantly contribute to human resource development. This work is relevant for evaluating the educational impact of the EWS Scheme.

Bhattacharya (2019) examined the relationship between economic disadvantage and access to public welfare programmes in India. The study found that poverty often restricts access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. It emphasized the need for targeted policy interventions to support economically vulnerable groups. The author argued that economic criteria should complement existing welfare measures to promote social equality. Jha (2020) examined the socio-economic implications of introducing economic criteria into reservation policies. The study found that economically weaker individuals from the general category often face barriers similar to those experienced by other disadvantaged groups. It suggested that targeted support mechanisms can improve educational and employment outcomes. Saxena (2020) explored the concept of economic justice within the framework of Indian public policy. The study argued that economic inequality remains a major obstacle to social development and equal opportunity. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2020) reviewed the implementation of welfare policies aimed at promoting social justice and economic inclusion. The report highlighted the introduction of EWS reservation as a major policy initiative. It discussed the expected benefits of increased access to education and public employment for economically weaker citizens. Basu (2021)

discussed the constitutional principles of equality, justice, and affirmative action in India. The author explained the significance of the Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019, which introduced EWS reservation. The study highlighted the constitutional validity of economic-based reservation under Articles 15(6) and 16(6).

NITI Aayog (2021) analyzed issues related to inclusive growth and social development in India. It highlighted the role of targeted welfare programmes in reducing poverty and inequality. The study suggested strengthening awareness and accessibility of government schemes. The findings support the objectives of the EWS Scheme in promoting inclusive development and economic empowerment. Yadav and Singh (2021) investigated awareness levels regarding reservation policies among rural youth in northern India. The study revealed that many eligible individuals lacked adequate information about reservation benefits and application procedures. . The researchers recommended community-level awareness campaigns and educational outreach programmes. Their findings underline the importance of awareness in determining the effectiveness of welfare schemes such as EWS. Kaur (2022) studied the implementation of social welfare programmes in rural Punjab. The research highlighted administrative challenges, including documentation requirements and delays in service delivery. It found that beneficiaries often faced difficulties in accessing government schemes due to limited awareness and bureaucratic procedures. The study emphasized the need for transparent and citizen-friendly implementation mechanisms

1.4 Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the level of awareness about economically weaker section scheme
- To evaluate the impact of the EWS scheme on education, employment and socio-economic status of the beneficiaries.

1.5 Research Methodology:

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. Both primary and secondary sources of data are utilized for the study. Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews with the respondents. Secondary data are gathered from government reports, books, journals, research articles, official websites, and policy documents related to the EWS Scheme. The area of the study is Village Nangla. A sample of 100 respondents is selected from Village Nangla using a simple random sampling method.

1.6 General Discussion:

The study highlights the significance of the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) Scheme as an important welfare initiative aimed at promoting social justice, equal opportunity, and inclusive development in India. Introduced through the 103rd Constitutional Amendment, the scheme extends 10% reservation in education and public employment to economically weaker individuals from the unreserved category. It reflects the government's effort to address economic inequality by enabling deserving candidates to access higher education and secure government employment. The literature and policy framework indicate that while the scheme has the potential to improve educational attainment, employment opportunities, and socio-economic mobility, its success largely depends on public awareness, effective implementation, and transparent administrative mechanisms.

The findings of the study are expected to emphasize that awareness of the EWS Scheme remains a key factor influencing its effectiveness, particularly in rural areas such as Village Nangla. Many eligible beneficiaries may face challenges related to documentation, eligibility verification, and limited knowledge of the application process, which can reduce access to the benefits provided under the scheme. Strengthening awareness campaigns, simplifying administrative procedures, expanding digital and offline support systems, and ensuring efficient implementation can enhance the reach and impact of the EWS Scheme. Overall, the scheme contributes to reducing economic disparities, promoting inclusive growth, and improving the socio-economic conditions of economically weaker sections by creating greater opportunities in education and public employment.

1.7 Major Findings:

The findings reveal the extent of awareness among respondents, their knowledge of eligibility criteria and reservation benefits and their experiences in availing themselves of the scheme. The paper also highlights the positive contributions of the EWS Scheme towards educational advancement, employment opportunities, and socio-economic development.

- It is found that a large majority (82%) of respondents were aware of the Economically Weaker Section Scheme.
- It revealed that 76 percent of respondents were aware that EWS beneficiaries receive reservation benefits in educational institutions and government employment. However, a notable proportion remained unaware of these provisions. This finding highlights the need for better dissemination of information regarding scheme benefits.

- A majority of respondents (68%) were aware of the income limit prescribed for EWS eligibility. Nevertheless, about one-third of the respondents lacked knowledge of this crucial criterion. Such lack of awareness may prevent eligible individuals from availing themselves of the scheme's benefits
- Most respondents assessed their overall awareness level as moderate rather than high. Only a small percentage reported very high awareness, while others indicated low or very low awareness. This demonstrates that awareness exists but is not sufficiently comprehensive among all sections of society
- The study found that only 58 percent of respondents had applied for EWS Certificate. Although awareness levels were relatively high, actual utilization of the scheme remained moderate. This indicates the presence of procedural, informational, or administrative barriers affecting participation.
- Most respondents believed that the eligibility criteria of the EWS Scheme were fair and appropriate. A majority either agreed or strongly agreed with the existing provisions. This reflects general acceptance and trust in the framework of the scheme among rural residents.
- The study found that a majority of respondents perceived the EWS Scheme as beneficial for improving employment opportunities and economic conditions. Reservation in government jobs has increased prospects for eligible candidates. Respondents also reported improvements in financial stability and socio-economic well-being.
- Most respondents agreed that the EWS Scheme has improved educational opportunities for economically weaker students. Reservation benefits have enabled many beneficiaries to gain access to higher educational institutions. The findings demonstrate the scheme's contribution to educational inclusion and social mobility.

Above findings indicate the EWS Scheme has positively influenced the socio-economic status of beneficiaries in Village Nangla. Most respondents assessed the impact of the scheme as positive or very positive. The scheme has contributed to promoting economic justice, social inclusion, educational advancement, and employment opportunities for economically weaker sections of society.

1.8 Conclusion:

The study concludes that the EWS Scheme has emerged as an important welfare initiative for promoting social justice, equal opportunity, and inclusive development among

economically disadvantaged individuals from the unreserved category. The findings from Village Nangla indicate that although awareness of the scheme is relatively high, knowledge regarding eligibility criteria, reservation benefits, and application procedures remains incomplete among a significant section of the population. The scheme has positively contributed to improving access to higher education, government employment opportunities, and the overall socio-economic status of beneficiaries. The challenges such as administrative barriers continue to affect its effective utilization. In general, the EWS Scheme plays a significant role in reducing economic disparities, enhancing social inclusion, and empowering economically weaker sections by creating greater opportunities for education, employment, and sustainable socio-economic development.

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