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Gendered Professional Mobilities: Exploring Challenges Faced by Seedgs Women Engineering Students at an Elite Institution in Bihar

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Abstract

In post-independence India, higher education has significantly expanded and contributed to national development and to empowering individuals. However, gender disparities are still prevalent in technical education, particularly when it comes to elite engineering institutions. The objective of this article is to examine the multifaceted challenges faced by women students that belong to socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backwards Classes, and Economically Weaker Sections at a premier engineering institution in the state of Bihar.

Drawing from mixed-methods research, this article investigates barriers that women students face both at the admission and post-admission stages when it comes to gaining admission and studying at elite engineering institutions. Post-admission, SEDGs of women students face academic stress, struggle with language barriers, and lack of cultural capital. Introduced in 2018, supernumerary quotas for women in IITs aimed to address this gender imbalance, by increasing female enrolment to 20% by the year 2022. While this is a welcome move it has only modestly improved access to elite institutions.

In this article, the author argues that contrary to popular perceptions, elite education is not reserved only for the privileged. It contributes to the discourse on educational equity and the social reproduction of inequality within elite institutions. This article offers recommendations in the form of law and policy interventions in order to achieve a more equitable, gender-just higher education ecosystem in India.

Keywords: Elite; Higher Education; Engineering Institutions; Women Students; Gender Inequality