

Expansion of SC/ST Scholarships

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SC/ST Scholarships Latest News

- The Centre is considering raising parental income limits for SC/ST scholarships from FY 2026-27 to widen access amid declining beneficiary numbers.

Introduction

- The Union government is considering significant changes to the eligibility criteria for pre-matric and post-matric scholarships for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and **Denotified Tribes** (DNTs).
- One key proposal under discussion is the upward revision of the parental income limit, aimed at expanding access to these schemes from the financial cycle 2026-27 to 2030-31.
- The move comes amid declining beneficiary numbers and calls from Parliamentary committees to make the income criteria more inclusive.

About SC/ST Scholarships

- These scholarships are **centrally sponsored schemes** jointly funded by the Union and State governments in a 60:40 ratio (90:10 for the Northeastern states).
- They provide financial assistance to students from marginalised communities to support their education:
 - **Pre-Matric Scholarships:** Typically cover Classes IX and X. For SCs, they are available from Classes I to X for children of parents engaged in “unclean or hazardous” occupations.
 - **Post-Matric Scholarships:** Cover education beyond Class X.
 - **Current Eligibility:** The annual parental income must not exceed Rs. 2.5 lakh.

Proposed Revisions to Income Limits

- **For STs:** The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is considering increasing the limit to Rs. 4.5 lakh for both pre-matric and post-matric scholarships.
- **For SCs, OBCs, and DNTs:** The Social Justice Ministry is discussing similar revisions.
- Parliamentary panels have suggested doubling the income ceiling for OBC scholarships and introducing pre-matric scholarships from Class V onwards for OBCs.

Budgetary Allocation and Importance

- For FY 2025-26:
 - Centrally sponsored scholarships for SCs, OBCs, EBCs, and DNTs account for **66.7%** of the Social Justice Ministry’s Rs. 13,611 crore budget.
 - For STs, such scholarships make up **18.6%** of the Tribal Affairs Ministry’s Rs. 14,925.81 crore allocation.
- These figures underline the schemes’ central role in enabling education for disadvantaged communities.

Declining Beneficiary Trends

- Government data reveals a worrying decline in scholarship beneficiaries:
 - **SCs:** Pre-matric beneficiaries fell by **30.63%** (2020-21 to 2024-25); post-matric by **4.22%**.
 - **OBCs, EBCs, DNTs:** Pre-matric beneficiaries dropped from **58.62 lakh** (2021-22) to **20.25 lakh** (2023-24); post-matric fell from **43.34 lakh** to **38.42 lakh**.
 - **STs:** Pre-matric numbers fell by **4.63 lakh**; post-matric by **3.52 lakh** in the same period.

Recommendations from Parliamentary Committees

- Two key Parliamentary panels have flagged the need for reforms:
 - **OBC Welfare Committee:**
 - Urged doubling the income limit for OBC pre- and post-matric scholarships.
 - Recommended expanding pre-matric coverage to start from Class V.
 - **Panel on Tribal Affairs and Social Justice:**
 - Suggested revising parental income limits for ST scholarships.
 - Emphasised that current limits exclude many families in need.

- Both committees stressed that scholarships are vital tools for social mobility, and overly restrictive criteria undermine their purpose.

Socio-Economic Impact of Raising Income Limits

- Raising the parental income ceiling could:
 - **Expand Coverage:** Include more lower-middle-income families who still face financial barriers.
 - **Reduce Dropouts:** Enable continued education beyond primary levels.
 - **Bridge Inequality:** Help disadvantaged communities access higher education and competitive careers.
- However, it will also require higher budgetary allocations and robust monitoring to ensure genuine beneficiaries receive aid.

Future Outlook

- If approved, the revised limits will take effect in FY 2026-27, coinciding with the start of a new five-year financial planning cycle.
- The government's challenge will be to balance inclusivity with fiscal sustainability, while ensuring the scholarships reach intended recipients without leakages.

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