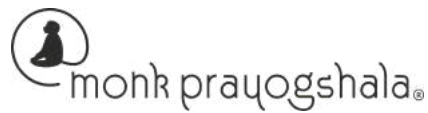




India Network  
Rethinking  
Economics



# DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION IN ECONOMICS IN INDIA

RETHINKING ECONOMICS INDIA NETWORK-  
MONK PRAYOGSHALA- BAHUJAN ECONOMISTS  
POLICY BRIEF

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# INTRODUCTION

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The profession of economics has historically faced a lack of diversity: not just in the ideas that represent economic science, but also the individuals that work in the discipline. **Typically, economists in training are taught concepts of efficiency and equity, but it is rare to see those discussed in the domain of the profession itself.**

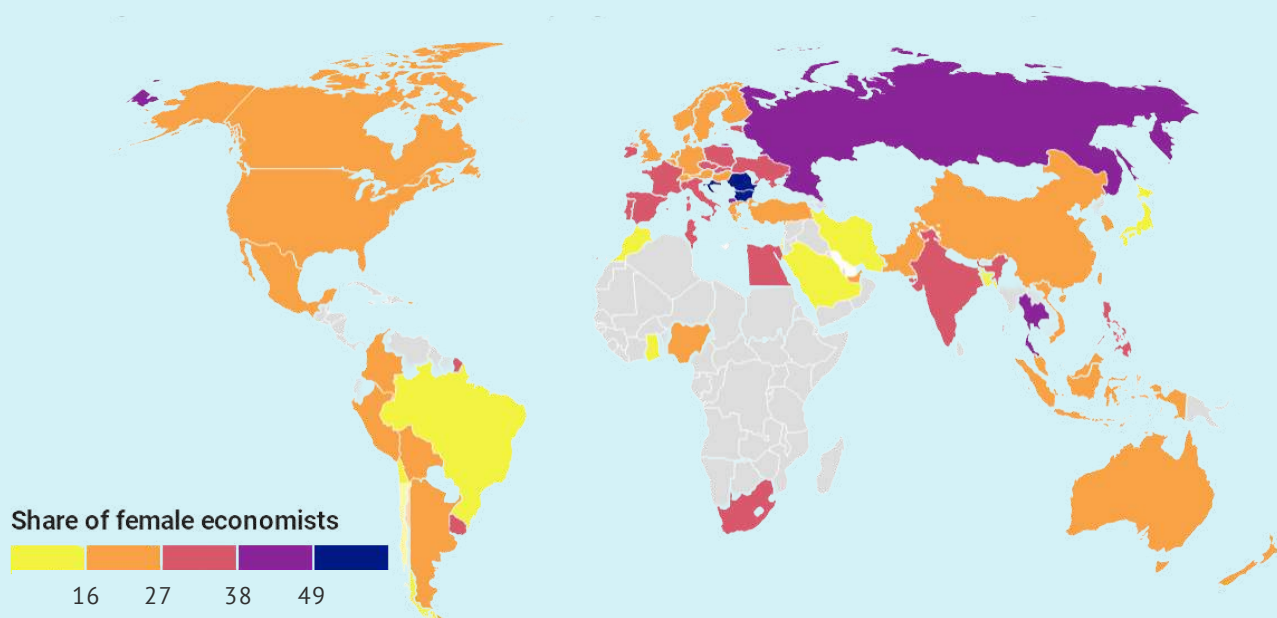
Bayer and Rouse (2016) discuss the importance of diversity in economics in terms of being more inclusive of women and economists belonging to racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. **There are two parts to the argument: efficiency (misallocated resources to those who might have made significant contributions to the field) and equity (unfair opportunities and perpetuating inequalities).**

Globally, data compiled by the IDEAS database (from Research Papers in Economics) on female economists' representation displays differences across countries (figure 1). Within the US itself, there is stark heterogeneity in how marginalized groups are represented. For example, surveys by the American Economic Association (AEA) finds that as of 2014, little more than 30% of all doctoral degrees in economics went to women. This is far lower than in fields comprising Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM, where representation of women has been a persistent problem as well), implying that the profession of economics is not alone in this fight for diversity.

# INTRODUCTION

## FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ECONOMICS

Percentage share of total authors identifying as female registered with RePEc



Map: Anirudh Tagat | Source: IDEAS | Created with Datawrapper

**Figure 1: Female representation in economics globally; Source: [IDEAS RePEc](#)**

In the United States, the country with arguably the highest share in economic research output, women's participation is lowest in economics compared to other social sciences (National Science Foundation, 2017). This is despite the increasing shares of women being awarded master's and doctoral degrees in economics, and the decreasing share in bachelor's degrees. **Representation becomes important not just for the sake of itself, but due to far-reaching societal implications. Economics, through policy, provides one of the most important mechanisms for socio-economic upliftment.** However, the lack of representation in the discipline translates into a lack of representation in policy making, giving way to top-down economic decisions made by economists far disconnected from the people whose lives they impact. This lack of representation is further visible in economic research, both in terms of the methods and the objectives. **On the one hand, oppressed communities have long been treated as passive subjects of economic research to be worked upon, devoid of any agency. On the other, there is an absolute dearth of empirical data or research on questions and issues of concern to these communities.**

# INTRODUCTION

Thus, having a diverse set of voices and representations in the field of economics might enhance the utility and visibility of the discipline, as well as ensure richness in economic thought. Addressing diversity in economics is important in a country like India as it enables the voices of marginalized and oppressed groups to be incorporated in economic research. Since economists typically provide both normative (policy-based) and positive (research and knowledge-based) inputs, having a plurality of voices is likely to improve diversity in advisory bodies, think-tanks, research institutions, and universities. For example, May, McGarvey, and Whaples (2014) found that male and female economists had varying views on economic results and policies, even after adjusting for PhD vintage and types of jobs. Diversity affects the dynamics of the group and the decision-making process, and the actions of the individual members changes with the group mix. In this context, this policy brief examines data on diversity in the economics discipline in India, with special reference to female and caste representation. Specifically, we ask “how well represented are women and SC/ST/OBC individuals in the Indian academy of economics?” On the basis of work in other social sciences in India as well as in other countries, we provide recommendations on diversifying the academy further. Finally, the policy brief discusses the current barriers to inclusivity in economics, and how they can be overcome using a multiple-stakeholder approach.



(1) A body of laboratory research on this point has been carried out with a wide variety of players and tasks. Research has shown that heterogeneous groups result in better generation of ideas, skillfulness and better research. Phillips, Northcraft, and Neale (2006) in their studies on ethnic and cultural diversity shows that in an experimental setting with 216 undergraduate business students racially diverse groups substantially outperform other groups in solving complex problems, as homogeneous groups consider their knowledge to be less special and spend less time on the challenge.



**BACKGROUND**

## ECONOMICS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN INDIA: INSTITUTIONS AND AREAS

India is among the top 50 regions in the world that IDEAS lists under **economics research output**, and other rankings (e.g. Ray et al., 2016) indicate that **economics is among the most prolific among social sciences in India**. There is an extensive discussion of issues in Indian social science in Thorat and Verma (2017) that readers can refer to for a broader look at economics research in India within the social science domain. The key takeaways important for our study are that **there exists no unified science policy specific to the social sciences (and therefore economics), and that continued lack of funding, appropriate data, and adequate research infrastructure pose challenges to Indian social scientists' contributions to research**. This is not that far removed from the challenges faced in (tertiary) education within the social sciences as well as in other disciplines.

## GENDER IN ECONOMICS IN INDIA

Over the years, India has produced stellar female economists such as Devaki Jain, Padma Desai, Isher Judge Ahluwalia, and Ritu Dewan to name a few. However, **women in economics (as elsewhere) face familiar barriers when it comes to pursuing economics as a profession in India. These include patriarchal gendered norms around women and work, absence of strong mentoring institutions (2), or social networks to encourage more women, and caregiving responsibilities.** There is no single data source that highlights aspects of gender and caste composition in economics in India. A recent advance in data on representation in economics in India comes in work by Dongre et al. (2020), who document how many women faculty and students exist at top economics institutions in India (defined by their position in the National Institute Ranking Framework, or NIRF and RePEc rankings). They collate data across 120 academic institutions and examine female representation in economics faculty positions, research output, and participation in the Indian Statistical Institute's annual conference. Of more than 1300 papers examined, they find a low representation of females in research presented at the conference in the past two decades but find high share of female master's students in economics programmes in India (relative to other countries). We go into more detail on this dataset in the following section.

(2) Another article by Branisa et al. (2013) shows by characterizing and applying the recently developed Social Institution and Gender Index (SIGI) and its subcomponents, how social institutions related to gender inequality are associated with female education, child mortality, fertility, and governance (corruption) in developing countries, even when controlling for other socioeconomic and cultural factors.

# BACKGROUND

## CASTE IN ACADEMIA IN INDIA

The caste system is a form of social stratification structure that divides Hindus into four categories preserved through endogamy and heredity transmission. It dictates the occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy, and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution. Despite its constitutional abolition in 1950 and introduction of the reservation system, **the practice of social exclusion and untouchability remain prevalent in modern day India that potentially manifests in a lack of representation of oppressed caste students and faculty in academia.** A part of this has meant to be ameliorated using affirmative action policies such as quotas for hiring in public universities and institutions. **All government institutions (including universities) are mandated to provide 15% reservation of positions for members who identify as belonging to the scheduled caste (SC) and 7.5% for scheduled tribes (ST).** However, recent [data on hiring](#), tells a different story: of the 6,043 faculty members at the 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs, the premier engineering schools in India), 149 are from the Scheduled Castes and 21 from Scheduled Tribes which translates to only 2.8% of the faculty members belonging to these categories. Similarly, out of the total 1,148 sectioned faculty strength at 20 Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs, the premier management schools in India) only 11 faculty members belong to these categories. A [host of concerns](#) impede participation of minority communities in India in academia.

**In comparison to other social sciences, the number of students from marginalised communities pursuing Economics in India is abysmally low.** Of those who do take up the discipline, drop-out rates and failures are very high. Understanding the systemic nature of this problem is crucial to addressing it. Economics, though an empowering tool for marginalised communities, remains highly inaccessible to much of them. Very often this is due to the perception that the subject is elite and requires rigour and capabilities that women and marginalised groups lack. **However, what is concerning is the dearth of support systems and role models that can alleviate such concerns. The shortage of faculty belonging to these communities, who can empathise with their concerns and act as a support mechanism further aggravates the issue at hand.**

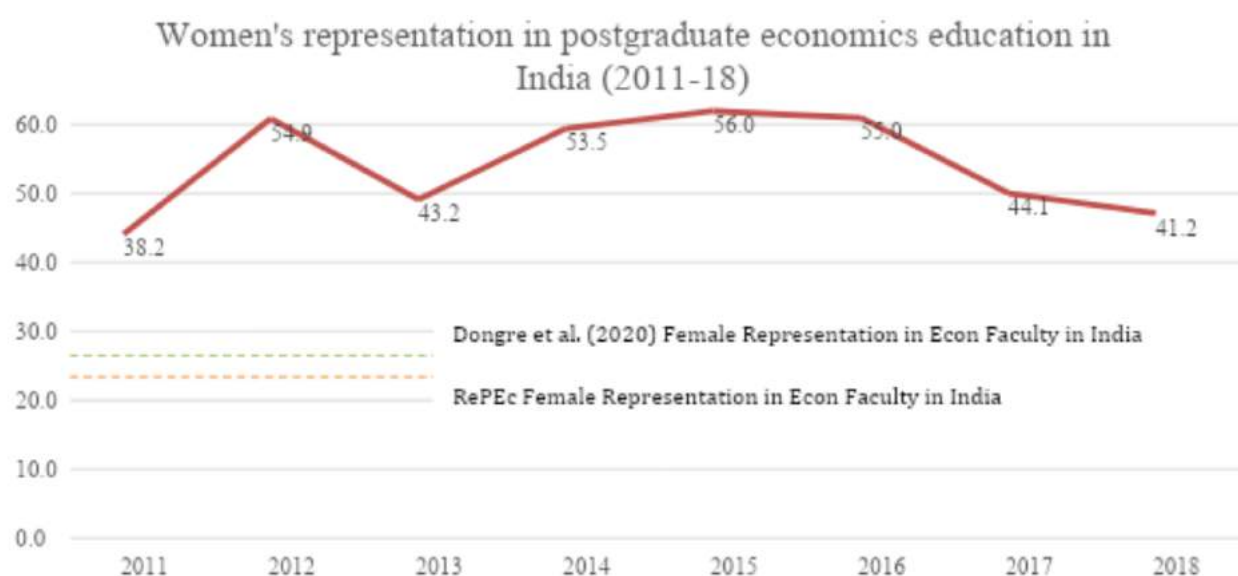
In the following section, we detail data (where available) from various sources on women's and oppressed caste representation in academia and economics.





## DATA ON WOMEN'S AND CASTE REPRESENTATION IN ECONOMICS

There is evidence to suggest that systematic exclusion and deprivation of opportunities starts at schools (public and private) sometimes even those that are set up to serve **minority communities**. Often such institutions implicitly condone discrimination by teachers and fellow students alike, which leads to dropouts or lower enrolment in higher education and ultimately employment. In this section, we illustrate broad trends in representation in economics in India, at the level of students (undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral) and faculty using a variety of data sources. **First, the All-India Survey of Higher Education in India reports that the 'Social Sciences' stream has a total number of 16,698 doctoral students in 13 sub-streams. Within this, Economics has the highest number of students currently enrolled in a Ph.D. (2733), with roughly equal male (1378) and female (1355) representation (AISHE, 2019).** Figure 2 summarizes female representation in economics at the postgraduate levels (Master's, MPhil and PhD).

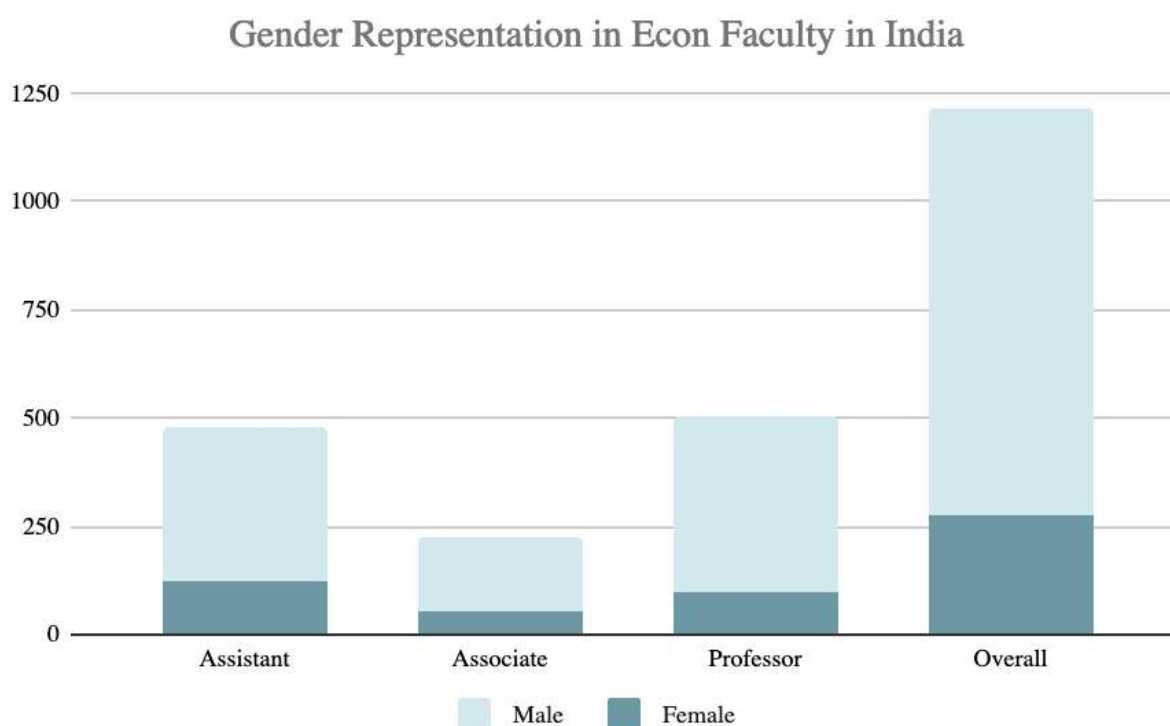


**Figure 2: Women's representation in postgrad economics education in India (2011-18)**

Source: Authors computation using data from Dongre et al. (2020)

## DATA ON WOMEN'S AND CASTE REPRESENTATION IN ECONOMICS

Analysing data from elite institutions that employ at least one faculty member with a PhD in Economics, **Dongre et al. (2020)** find that **28.5 percent faculty members are women, with the share being 22.7 percent at Professor level, 32.5 percent at Associate level, and 32.2 percent at Assistant Professor level.** This is illustrated in Figure 3, using data on overall representation of top economics institutions in India. Data from the ISI conference reveals that women constitute only 29 percent of the authors of papers presented at the conference for the period 2004 to 2017, and shows no improvement over the years.

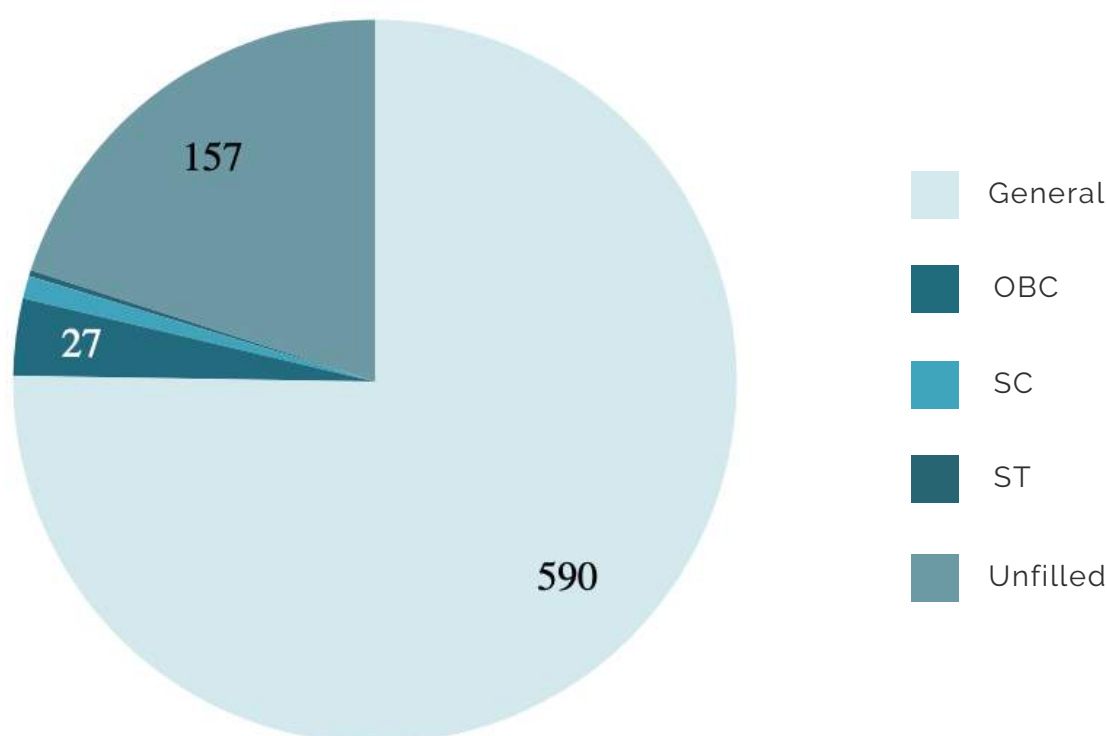


**Figure 3: Gender Representation in Economics Faculty in India.**

Source: Dongre et al. (2020).

## DATA ON WOMEN'S AND CASTE REPRESENTATION IN ECONOMICS

Unlike data on female representation in economics education, **there is not much publicly available data on representation in India for both students as well as teaching staff.** Across all areas, **as of 2018-19, SC students constitute 19.9 percent (20.8 and 19.0 percent male and female respectively, up from 10.4 and 6.4 in 2005-06, respectively) of those enrolled in higher education institutions, and has nearly doubled since 2005-06.** 14.2 percent of students are ST students (15.6 and 12.9 for male and female respectively), up 8% from the 2005-06 figure, driven by a near-triple-fold increase of women ST students. The report also notes that 36.34 percent are from Other Backward Classes, 5.23 percent are Muslims and 2.33 percent are from other minority communities. **A recent study conducted by Joshi and Malghan (2017) (refer to Figure 4) used Right to Information (RTI) queries to compile data on the social composition of faculty at the IIMs, where substantial research work in finance, economics, marketing, and management are carried out.** Out of 512 faculty members, only two were SCs, 13 were OBCs, and there was no one from the ST category.



**Figure 4: Data on number of SC/ST faculty members at IIMs.**

Source: [Kritika Sharma, Arindam Mukherjee, The Print \(2019\)](#).


## DATA ON WOMEN'S AND CASTE REPRESENTATION IN ECONOMICS

AISHE (2019) also has some data on teaching staff across faculties (not specific to economics). The total number of teachers are 14,16,299, out of which about **42.2% are female teachers**. In the SC category there were **57 female teachers per 100 male teachers** and in the case of both ST and OBC, this ratio stands at **68 females per 100 male teachers** (AISHE, 2019). In terms of overall faculty, only **9 OBC professors are teaching in central universities across India against 313 quota posts as of January 2020**. MHRD also conducted a pilot survey report on higher education. It has a caste and gender wise distribution of teaching staff for their sample. Their sample design includes universities of each type (central, deemed, private, open, affiliated colleges and standalone). **Out of the 19 sample institutions, 6 did not report even a single faculty member from the ST community**. Finally, according to data compiled by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on teaching posts generated across several universities since the UGC order of March 2018, of the 706 vacancies advertised by 11 central universities, only 2.5% posts were for SCs, and none for STs.





# IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY



One of the key provisions in place meant to address caste-based discrimination at educational institutions in India comes in the form of the UGC-mandated SC/ST-cell. **The Thorat Committee (set up in 2007 following widespread discrimination against students from oppressed castes) recommended that a post-based roster system of reservation be applied in the selection of Senior Residents and Faculty.** There have also been extensive initiatives in recent times to set up a gender cell, but this typically deals more with issues related to workplace sexual harassment, among others. While sexual harassment is well established as a significant barrier to women's employment and progress in academia, there is no institutional push for improving women's representation in academia (3). The extent of intellectual and even material deprivation in academic institutions in nations in the global South, as opposed to those in the West, has long-lasting impacts in marginalized communities of developing nations. **While there is research that suggests even if countries have a more or less similar basket of resources the difference in government policies can go a long way to inculcate equality within the society,** there are others who state that nations face varying types and levels of bottlenecks in countering stigmas of inequality and backwardness. Thus, when it comes to attacking a historic issue at hand, careful government intervention is required.

(3) Responsibilities towards the family, especially that of raising children, make it difficult for women to pursue rigorous research either on their own or through collaborations, which then have negative implications on conference participation. These factors have been highlighted before in Indian as well as in other contexts. There could be other factors, such as differential preferences for academic and non-academic jobs after master's or PhD, socialisation and enculturation during doctoral education, quality of doctoral research, recruitment practices, and workplace environment, to name a few.

## ACKNOWLEDGING THE PROBLEM

**Acknowledging the existence of the caste system despite provisions is the first step to reforming the current landscape.** In the case of the AEA, forming committees and giving them power, improves the dialogue around matters of race and gender representation in economics. In India, this should be led by the elite higher education institutions, who must first acknowledge the absence of a formally stated policy on diversity and inclusion. In response to the lack of faculty diversity, university administration often cites reasons like not finding suitable candidates. **To make matters worse, implicit discrimination and stereotypes hurt progress of oppressed castes in academia. For example, a success story of a Dalit in academia is commonly attributed to their entry into the programme via reservations.** Such casual attributions lead to undervaluation of capabilities and merit of a Dalit voice. The upper class privilege and innate bias against marginalized groups applicants can only be resolved when there is a conscious effort to include the marginalized sections by conducting special recruitment drives.

## TARGETED RECRUITMENT

**There is a lack of scientific documentation of discrimination in academia along caste and gendered lines.** Anecdotal information and journalistic reports suggest that deeply entrenched gender and caste norms promote individual and institutional biases against hiring and retaining women and backward castes faculty in economics (as with other disciplines). The solutions to the lack of diversity in the faculty are to be approached in two ways. **The immediate solutions have to come in the form of targeted recruitment for filling vacant positions reserved for women and lower castes as mandated by the Government of India. These should be accompanied by time bound assessments of the status of recruitments and promotions across universities with public disclosures to that effect.**

## MENTORING AND CURRICULAR SUPPORT

Among the major barriers to adequate representation of women and marginalized groups has to do with **the lack of a robust mentoring network that can provide context-specific advice and help tackle systemic biases**. We know from **data** that **women's representation drops dramatically between getting a PhD and entering faculty positions** (at least in the elite economics research institutions and universities). The perception of economics requiring quantitative rigor hinders the enrolment of women and lower castes due to the assumption of lack of intrinsic capabilities relevant to the field among women and marginalized groups. Appropriate mentoring from current economists (either from these very groups or others) should be an institutional initiative, since there are already several efforts outside of academia that are working toward establishing such groups.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUPS & COLLECTIVES

**Mobilisation of students** belonging to marginalised communities and their **consolidation into support groups and collectives** can go a long way into ensuring agency and assertion. These collectives can provide a platform for students coming from oppressed communities to find solidarity, provide mentoring, articulate and develop their ideas and aspirations with each other. Such collectives fulfil the aim of building **sustainable and independent** networks of support and solidarity **from within** these communities.





## WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES GOING FORWARD?

As Dongre et al. (2020) suggest, there is much to tackle in terms of systemic barriers to entry for female economists in India. Although we have not discussed much about intersections (females belonging to oppressed castes), institutions in India must take notice of the disproportionate representation of these groups in academia. Some of the immediate initiatives that could help in the short-run go beyond hiring practices, such as those related to **establishing specific funding for research earmarked for female or marginalized groups researchers**. If the end-goal is to have a plurality of voices in Indian economics, then **we must first acknowledge that there are vast sections of society that do not find a voice in our work**. The next is to build concrete networks and incorporate policy changes to enhance representation within academic institutions. **The final step is to put in place sustainable policies that can ensure that both groups and their intersections have incentives to remain and be contributing members to Indian economics.**



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