



Socio Economic Paradigms of Tribal People in India and Their Status

KEYWORDS

Development paradigms-Socio Economics Status - Tribals Community- Present conditions

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ABSTRACT *The central and state governments and planners have formulated and implemented various policies aiming at raising the social and economic conditions of the communities such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) who had remained traditionally backward for historical reasons. Few comprehensive studies based on primary data collected with the specific purpose of assessing the social and economic conditions of the SCs and STs have, thus far, been undertaken. The present study attempts an analysis of the household level data collected by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in its Human Development Indicator survey from a sample of 33 230 rural households – 7943 belonging to the SCs and 4220 belonging to the STs, to assess their level of development. The results of the study show that the number of STs has grown at a faster rate than others, increasing their share in total population over the decades. Among the major states in India, Madhya Pradesh has the highest percentage (23.3 percent) of ST population. Other states where the proportion of ST population is higher are Orissa (22.2 percent), Gujarat (14.9 percent) and Rajasthan (12.4 percent). Every alternate person belonging to SCs and STs is poor while every third person not belonging to SCs and STs is poor. Higher incidence and intensity of poverty between SCs and STs is perhaps a consequence of lower access to productive assets. Keeping in view the proportion of STs in rural population, proportion of landless households among them is quite high. However, there has been a decrease in the incidence of landlessness between STs.*

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the availability of amenities STs are in much better position than SC population. As regards to the development of education STs clearly are not the better performers if the output parameters like literacy rate, ever enrolment rate, discontinuation rate and percentage of population (aged 15+ years) completing middle level are considered. Interstate variation in literacy between both STs and SCs as measured by coefficient of variation also shows a decreasing trend over time. This means that the backward castes are improving at a faster rate. On coming to some of the health and demography-related parameters, STs are better off than SCs as well as total population as far as major morbidity rates are concerned. Crude birth rate and total fertility rate are high and the contraceptive prevalence rate is also high among STs as compared to SCs.

India is a vast country, inhabited by a large number of communities. Quite a few of these communities remained backward in several aspects of life. Since the inception of planning era, making the society more egalitarian, both in economic and other social aspects has remained one of the major objectives of state policies. The central and state governments and the planners have formulated and implemented various policies aimed at raising the social and economic conditions of the communities such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) who had remained traditionally backward for historical reasons. Institutions and individual scholars have occasionally assessed the impact of these policies. Most of the studies, made so far, are either based on secondary data available from the census National Sample Survey (NSS) and other sources or localized when some primary data have been collected. These studies pertain to different time periods and different regions covering limited aspects of development. The results are therefore not comparable over time or space. Findings of these studies are, consequently, of limited use. Very few comprehensive studies based on primary data collected with the specific purpose of assessing the social and economic conditions of the SCs and STs have, thus far, been undertaken.

HDI and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)

Comprehensive data on various aspects of development disaggregated by population groups such as the SCs and STs are rare. **The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)** in its efforts to compile Human Development Profiles of India and its states conducted a nationwide sample survey (HDI Survey) of about 33 000 rural households to elicit data on various aspects of development. Sampling has been done independently in 16 major states with households as the ultimate sampling units. The households belonging to SCs and STs often formed separate strata in the sample design. Valid estimates of various development parameters pertaining to SCs and STs could be derived out of these data.

The present study attempts an analysis of the household level data collected by the NCAER in its HDI survey from a sample of 33 230 rural households – 7943 belonging to SCs, 4220 belonging to STs, to assess their level of development, both in absolute terms and relative to that of the total population. The analysis is supplemented by data from some secondary sources such as NSSO and Census and findings of other researchers. Of the 846 million Indian population enumerated in the 1991 census about 8 percent or 68 million are Scheduled Tribes and another 16 percent or 138 million belong to Scheduled Castes. Faster growth of population among these two communities is reflected in a rising trend in their proportion in total population. The ST population grew at the decadal rate of 27.7, 35.8 and 31.4 percent respectively during the past three decades.

Comparatively, SC population grew at a lower rate of 24.2, 30.9 and 32.0 percent during the same period. In 1961 the Scheduled Tribes constituted 6.9 percent of the population, while in 1991 it is up to 8.1 percent. During the same period the proportion of Scheduled Castes has gone up to 16.5 percent from 14.7 percent. The distribution of scheduled tribe population for the states in India for 1991.

Majority of (83 percent) the scheduled tribe population in the

country numbering about 68 million lives in the so called central tribal belt running through the hilly terrains of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Among the major states in India, Madhya Pradesh has the highest percentage (23.3 percent) of ST population. Other states where the proportion of ST population is higher are Orissa (22.2 percent), Gujarat (14.9 percent) and Rajasthan (12.4 percent). In the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, 90 percent of the population is tribal. However, in the remaining northeast states of Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, and Tripura, tribal population varies between 20 to 30 percent.

Tribal groups inhabit widely varying ecological and geo-climatic conditions (hilly, forest, desert etc) in different concentrations throughout the country with different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The economic life of the tribals is specific in nature. They are generally involved in food gathering and hunting, shifting cultivation, agriculture, artisanship, as pastoralists and cattle herders, folk artists and wage labourers. Historically, the economy of most tribes was subsistence agriculture or hunting and gathering. A large number of tribals in rural areas are still dependent on forests for their livelihood. In the forest based tribal economy provisions for basic necessities like food, fuel, housing material etc. is made from the forest produce. Around 16 percent of tribal households live within a distance of one km from a forest. The proportion is higher in the northeastern states. Meghalaya reported the largest proportion of its tribal households living within 1 km of a forest. In almost all the northeastern states over 95 percent of the tribal households reside within 5 km of a forest.

In most of the states more than 60 percent of the tribal population resides within that distance from the forest. Thus, out of 68 million tribal people, a large percentage of whom live close to forest areas constitute the most disadvantaged section of society based on Per Capita income, literacy rate, health status and lack of access to basic amenities. In the following sections we have discussed the socio-economic profile of ST's using the NCAER-HDI survey data. In the paper, a state wise analysis of only ST concentrated states namely Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Northeastern region is presented.

ECONOMIC CONDITION

The survey shows that there is a higher incidence of poverty among the ST population. Overall, the **Head Count Poverty and Capability Poverty ratios** are considerably higher for the STs compared with the all India average and the SCs. More than half of the ST population is reported to be below poverty line. Similarly, capability poverty ratio is also 68 percent for STs compared to 60 percent for SCs and 52 percent for the whole population. The survey also provides distribution of household income for various caste categories for rural areas. **The household income of STs is Rs.19 556 and the per capita income is Rs. 3504**, which is higher than that of SC population, but much lower than that of the national average. This brings to fore the lack of access to asset and other types of employment and wage stability for the STs and SCs as compared to general population.

The data suggest that the share of income from agriculture is relatively high among STs in comparison with SCs. ST households also report a higher percentage of landholdings. The work participation rate of STs, especially that of females is higher than that of SCs whereas in the case of males there is no variation. Interestingly, it is observed that about 15 percent of the total incomes of all the three groups are from salaried occupations. In all the states more than half of the ST population is living below poverty line.

Among the states, the highest per capita income of tribals is found in the northeastern region. Similarly, among the states household income is also high in the northeastern region of

the country. Data show that the main source of income for ST's is allied agriculture activities. In Madhya Pradesh around two-thirds of income of ST's is from allied agricultural activities. Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra also report agricultural wage as a source of income for ST's. A large number of ST's in the northeastern region are working as salaried employees. In all the states, more than half of the ST's have reported possession of landholdings.

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Size of Landholdings among STs and SCs by States

In rural India land is the most important productive asset and is also a symbol of power and privilege. Its possession enhances one's economic and social status. A look into the ownership pattern of land among STs, SCs and others may therefore be revealing in the context of their relative social and economic position.

Following the recommendations of several committees and commissions, many states with sizeable STs in their population have enacted laws prohibiting alienation of tribal land and also restoration of alienated land. Some of the states like Karnataka, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal enacted similar laws for the SCs as well.

Since Independence, comprehensive agrarian reform measures have been launched to reduce the glaring inequality in land distribution and to ensure land to the tiller. These measures constituted the largest body of agrarian legislation in the country. Several scholars have studied the impact of these measures on agrarian relations (Appu 1975, Bandopadhyay 1986). Researchers have also studied the trends in the distribution of landholdings in rural India (Sanyal 1977, 1988, Vyas 1979, Nair 1990, Sharma 1994). These studies, however, fail to throw much light on the changing access of SCs, STs and others to land and also the distribution of land among these communities separately. Again, not many studies are available which exclusively focus on the land distribution between SC and ST households. These two communities, particularly SCs, have been

the target group of the numerous land reform legislations in the country since the 1950s. For example, it has been routinely reiterated in plan and other policy documents that while distributing surplus land, priority shall be given to landless SC and ST households.

The pertinent questions to be answered in this context include:

What is the relative share of STs, SCs and other households in the total land, and how it has changed over time? What is the incidence of landlessness among STs, SCs and others and how it has changed over time? What is the extent of inequality in the distribution of land within these communities? We make an attempt to answer these on the basis of data collected by the NSSO. The data on land distribution among all households are available since 1953-54 (8th Round), but that on SCs and STs are available since 1982 in the Report on landholdings (37th Round, NSS Report No. 300) and Report on some aspects of household ownership holdings (1) (48th Round, NSS Report No. 399). The percentage share of SCs, STs and other households separately in the total population

and their share of land in the selected states or obtained from the NSSO data are presented. In rural India as a whole the share of land owned by other households declined from 82 percent to 78 percent. These changes, *pari passu*, imply an increase in the share of land owned by SC and ST households. And in fact the share of SC households increased from 7.89 percent to 10.34 percent and that of ST households. The ST households constitute nearly one-fourth of the rural population in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and one-fifth in Gujarat. During the decade 1982–92, the proportion of STs in rural population did not change substantially in any of the states. However, their share in land increased markedly in Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan. In 1992, the percentage of total land owned by ST households was higher in relation to their share in rural population in Orissa.

INCIDENCE OF LANDLESSNESS

The proportion of STs and SCs in rural population, as well as proportion of landless households among them, is quite high. However, overall there has been a decrease in the incidence of landlessness among all population groups except STs. The incidence of landlessness among ST, SC and other households, along with the changes, during 1982–92 for selected states. It can be seen that the incidence of landlessness declined between STs in most of the states except in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

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