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67 Years on – Have our Dalits Really Moved on? – A Grassroots Study of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

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ABSTRACT

Even after 67 years of India's independence, a very large section of the country's population, the Dalits, continue to face wide-ranging economic, social disadvantages, and day- to-day humiliation, denial of justice and are being subjected to various kinds of atrocities. By and large, the present condition of many Dalits is due to widespread poverty low education, limited employment opportunities and their marginalisation in all spheres of public life.The present paperwill attempt to look into the various facets of the socio-economic status of the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, based upon parameters such as the magnitude, literacy, labour force participation, land status, and cropping pattern, as compared to the non-SC groups.

KEYWORDS Dalits, SCs, and Socio-Economic Status

Introduction

The contradictions of socio-economic order in India remain almost the same even after 67 years of independence. Half a century is a considerable period of time for a society, state and nation to realise its mistakes and make a sincere effort to correct the imbalances. But even at the beginning of the 21st century, neither the society, nor the state in India has been able to resolve the numerous contradictions. Despite the Constitutional commitment of the post-colonial state towards the goal of equality, liberty and justice, the age-old structure of inequality has not been dismantled. Social and economic inequality still occupies the centre-stage of the Indian socio-economic and political scene. The ideals of social democracy and distributive justice, in their essence, largely remain elusive. On the contrary, the vast majority of the Indian population is deprived - socially, economically, politically and educationally. The social opportunities, offered to the citizens by the state, are tending to be confined only to the privileged sections of society. The deprived and disadvantaged groups are still exposed to the experiences of cumulative inequality. These marginalised groups have yet to fully enjoy the fruits of the so-called modern development. There is a tremendous gap in the socio-economic conditions of the upper castes and the Dalits, who constitutes more than 16 per cent of the country's population. The upwardly mobile other backward castes have, of course, challenged the hegemonic structure of the upper castes (Brahminical) order and have crystallised themselves as a major economic and political power in independent India. But as far as the social status of Dalits is concerned, no substantial changes have taken place during the six decades of developmentplanning.

It is widely acknowledged that traditional Indian society was based on varnaand jati. This system is very ancient in origin and with the passage of time, it has undergone a lot of changes, but caste still remains a very powerful institution in our socio-economic, religious and political organisation. The most disquietening and disturbing feature connected with the caste system has been the concept of untouchability. Those who were engaged in 'unclean occupations' were considered as polluted persons and had to go with this stigma in the prevailing reality and had to accept for themselves the status of untouchables. (K.S. Shukla and B.M. Verma, 1993).

Generally, the rural Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India are essentially a landless group, or own only a small area of their house site—only 30 per cent of them own more than one acre of land each. According to (V.M. Rao, 2001), "As constituents of a developing society, the Scheduled Castes suffer from the double handicap of low social status, coupled with low occupational status. The low social status has been an outcome of their exposure over a historical past to domination by the mainstream castes, particularly by the rural land owning elites in the economic and social spheres". He further opined that, not surprisingly, the SCs and STs have been pushed down to the lowest rung of the social ladder and have found little help and opportunity in the past to move upwards. (B.B. Mohanty, 2001) made a comparative analysis of the aspects of the economic development of the SCs in rural India across the major states. This study has brought out that the SCs continue to be the economically-disadvantaged, communities and there has been hardly any improvement in their socio-economic conditions. The perceptible changes in certain respects in some states are not so much due to the progressive measures of planning, but due to the SC movements and organisations. The author argues that the entrusted dominant castes never allow the benefits of economic development to percolate down, unless forced to. Recently, a few attempts have been made to assess the development of the SCs (Mohanty, 2001).

Methodology and Data sources

The data used in this paper has been collected from secondary sources. The secondary data will include: Rural Labour Enquiry Report on General Characteristics of Rural Labour Households, 1993-94, 1999-2000, and 2004-05, NSS Report No. 516: Employment and Unemployment Situation Among Social Groups in India, 2004-05 and All India Report on Agricultural Census, 2005-06.

However, the analysis in most of these studies is confined either to the all India level, or to specific states and regions. In fact, there are very few studies about the comparative analysis of the economic conditions of the SCs and STs in rural areas across the states.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution by Household Type in AP (2004-05).

Social group	Self-employed in			Rural labour			
	Agriculture	Non-agriculture	All	Agricultural labour	Other labour	All	Others
ST	27.7	5.9	33.5	38.9	4	42.8	23.2
SC	10.4	7.9	18.3	59.6	10.7	70.2	11.4
Non-SC/ST	29.2	19.2	49.8	27.3	9.1	36.4	13.8
All	25.1	16	41.1	35.8	9.1	44.9	14

Source: NSS Report No. 516: Employment and Unemployment Situation Among Social Groups in India, 2004-05.

The percentage distribution of households based on social groups in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is presented in Table 1. It is observed that 29.2percent of the non-SC/ST households are self-employed in agriculture, compared to 27.7 per cent among the STs and 10.4 per cent among the SCs. The percentage of non-SCs/STs in non-agriculture is also observed to be higher than the state figure, i.e., 16 per cent. The percentage of self-employed SCs is 18.3 per cent, whereas the percentage of self-employed STs is 33.5 per cent; however, the state figure is 41.1 per cent. The percentage of rural SCs involved in agricultural labour is 59.6 per cent and other labour, 10.7 per cent, while the state figure is only 35.8 per cent. It can be seen that the percentage of non-SCs/STs to be lesser than the state figure.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of persons (aged 15 years and above) in terms of level of general education in AP (2004-05)

Social group	Gender	Not literate	Literate upto primary level		Literate uptosecondary level	Literate uptohigher secondary level	Diploma/ certificate	Graduate and above	All
STs	Male	69.7	17.1	7.1	3.3	1.5	0.3	1.1	100.0
	Female	86.3	9.6	1.0	2.4	0.6	0.1	0.0	100.0
	Persons	78.0	13.4	4.0	2.9	1.0	0.2	0.6	100.0
SCs	Male	50.5	20.0	13.7	9.4	2.8	0.8	2.8	100.0
	Female	75.4	12.6	4.9	4.1	1.5	0.8	0.5	100.0
	Persons	62.8	16.4	9.3	6.8	2.1	0.8	1.6	100.0
OBCs	Male	47.5	22.4	12.5	9.3	4.3	1.0	3.0	100.0
	Female	71.6	14.2	6.3	5.7	1.3	0.3	0.5	100.0
	Persons	49.9	18.3	9.3	7.5	2.8	0.6	1.7	100.0
Others	Male	31.3	24.4	16.3	15.5	6.1	1.7	4.7	100.0
	Female	49.6	24.8	10.9	9.8	3.0	0.1	1.9	100.0
	Persons	40.7	24.6	13.5	12.6	4.6	0.9	3.2	100.0
All	Male	45.3	22.0	13.4	10.6	4.3	1.1	3.3	100.0
	Female	67.4	16.5	6.9	6.3	1.8	0.3	0.8	100.0
	Persons	56.6	19.2	10.1	8.4	3.0	0.7	2.1	100.0

Source: NSS Report No. 516: Employment and Unemployment Situation Among Social Groups in India, 2004-05

In Table 2, the percentage distribution of persons (15 years and above) in terms of the level of general education in Andhra Pradesh has been presented. Among the social groups, , it is observed that 86.3 per cent of females among the STs and 75.4 per cent of the females among the SCs are illiterate, while the average percentage of illiteracy is only 56.6 per cent and the percentage of illiterates among OBCs and other social groups is 49.9 and 40.7 per cent respectively. The state figure for females literates up to primary level is 19.2, whereas it is 9.6 among the STs, 14.2 per cent among the SCs, 24.8 among the OBCs, and 16.5 per cent among others. Among those literate up to higher secondary level, the figures are: 1.5 per cent for SC females are and 0.6 per cent for and ST females. It is surprising that there are no female graduates among the STs, while there are only 0.5 per cent female graduates among the SCs; this percentage is observed to be higher among the OBCs and others—the figure is 2.1, which is higher than the social group figures.

Table 3: Labour force participation rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR), and proportion unemployed (PU) according to usual status in AP (2005-06)

	Male			Female			Persons		
	LFPR	WPR	PU	LFPR	WPR	PU	LFPR	WPR	PU
ST	570	570	0	531	530	0	550	550	0
SC	622	612	10	503	501	2	563	557	6
OBC	608	602	6	511	509	2	559	555	4
Others	623	618	5	408	406	2	516	512	4
All	612	605	6	485	483	2	548	544	4

Source: NSS Report No. 516: Employment and Unemployment Situation Among Social Groups in India, 2004-05

It is observed that the male LFPR and WPR in respect of male SCs and 'Others' exceed the state figures, It is rather amazing that the proportionate unemployment among both the ST males and females is ZEROand that the PU in respect of SC males is as high as 10. In respect of females, it can be seen that the LFPR and WPR figures for STs, SCs and OBCs are more than the figures for the overall state.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of agricultural and rural labour households with and without cultivated land during 1993-94, 1999-2000, and 2004-05

Years			1993-94	1999-00	2004-05
All Classes HHs	All Rural HHs	With Land	50.54	47.65	39.27
		Without Land	49.46	52.35	60.73
	Rural Labour HHs	With Land	39.43	36.62	27.34
		Without Land	60.57	63.38	72.66
	Agrl. Labour HHs	With Land	41.91	39.37	30.27
		Without Land	58.09	60.63	69.79
Scheduled Caste HHs	All Rural HHs	With Land	39.64	35.74	25.28
		Without Land	60.36	64.26	74.72
	Rural Labour HHs	With Land	34.82	32.86	20.09
		Without Land	65.18	67.14	79.91
	Agrl. Labour HHs	With Land	35.81	34	21.31
		Without Land	64.19	66	78.69
Scheduled Tribes HHs	All Rural HHs	With Land	63.07	57.18	42.88
		Without Land	36.93	42.82	57.12
	Rural Labour HHs	With Land	49.18	35.65	32.85
		Without Land	50.82	64.35	67.15
	Agrl. Labour HHs	With Land	51.5	37.9	34.33
		Without Land	48.5	62.1	65.67

Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report on General Characteristics of Rural Labour Households, 1993-94, 1999-2000, and 2004-05

The households are classified into three classes, i.e., all classes of households, SC households, and ST households, and each class is sub-divided into three sub-classes, i.e., all rural households with land and without land, rural labour households with or without land, and agricultural labour households with or without land.

The important observations are as follows:

Over a period of time, a decreasing tendency in rural land cultivation is observed from 1993-94 to 2004-05. The percentage distribution has drastically decreased from 50.54% (1993-94) to 39.27% (2004-05). Also, the percentage of households without land rose from 49.46 (1993-94) to 60.73 (2004-05). The percentage of rural labour with land is observed to decrease from 39.43 (1993-94) to 27.34 (2004-05), while the percentage of households without land increased from 60.57 during 1993-94 to 63.38 during 1999-2000 and finally to 72.66 during 2004-05. Perhaps, this was due to the pressing financial constraints, uneconomic agricultural farming, allurements from real estate agents, and so on. The agricultural labour households were also classified into two categories, i.e., with land and without land. It is observed that the percentage of agricultural labour households with land has steadily decreased from 41.91 during 1993-94 to 30.27 during 2004-05, whereas the percentage of those without land has increased from 58.09 during 1993-94 to 60.63 during 1999-00 and finally to 69.79 in 2004-05. Among all rural households with land, it is observed that the percentage has dropped from 39.64 to 25.28, while among the rural households without land, the percentage has increased from 60.36 to 74.72 during the years under reference. On the other hand, the percentage of SC rural labour households with land was 34.82, 32.86, and 20.09 during the years 1993-94, 1999-2000, and 2004-05 respectively and the percentage of those without land was observed to be 65.18, 67.14, and 79.91 respectively.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of area under main land use of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes during 2000-01 and 2005-06 in Andhra Pradesh

Social category	Land not available for cultivation		Net cultivated area		Land unutilized		Total	
	2001-02	2005-06	2001-02	2005-06	2001-02	2005-06	2001-02	2005-06
SC	0.11	1.03	98.75	97.29	1.15	1.57	100	100
ST	0.09	1.55	98.26	96.94	1.65	1.51	100	100
All	0.13	0.6	98.26	97.88	1.62	1.52	100	100

Source: All India Report on Agricultural Census 2005-06

It can be seen from the above Table 5that land not available for cultivation has been increasing over a period of time (from 0.11 to 1.03 hectares among the SCs, and from 0.09 to 1.55 among the STs), while the state figure has decreased from 0.13 to 0.6. On the other hand, the net cultivated area among all the social groups has been decreasing i.e., from 98.75 to 97.29 among the SCs and from 98.26 to 96.94 among the STs, while the state figure was lower during 2001-02 and higher during 2005-2006. It is further observed that the extent of unutilized land has increased from 2001-02 to 2005-06, while the state figure is lower than the figures of the social groups.

Table 6: Proportion of net irrigated area to net sown area (in percentage) during 2000-01 and 2005-06 (area in '00 ha) in Andhra Pradesh

Social category	Net sownarea		Net irrigated area		Percentage of NIA to NSA		Intensity of cropping	
	2001-02	2005-06	2001-02	2005-06	2001-02	2005-06	2005-06	(Gross cropped area/ net area sown)
SC	9439	8666	3438	3347	37.61	38.62	1.1028 (1.0965)	
ST	10179	9684	2494	2583	24.5	26.67	1.0496 (1.0419)	
All	11870	11553	4845	4812	40.82	41.65	1.1303 (1.1272)	

Source: All India Report on Agricultural Census 2005-06.

It can be seen from the above Table 6 that a sudden and slight increase has been registered (NIA to NSA)—from 37.61 to 38.62 among the SCs, from 24.5 to 26.67 among the STs, and from 40.82 and 41.65 at the state level. Further, the intensity of cropping is also observed to have increased—1.10.28 (1.0965) among the SCs, 1.0496 (1.0419) among the STs, and 1.1303 (1.1272) at the state level; this is perhaps due to temporal variations.

Table 7: State-wise gross cropped area during 2005-06 (area in '00 ha)

Social category	Gross irrigated area	Gross unirrigated area	Gross cropped area
SC	3846	5711	9557
ST	2838	7327	10165
All	5649	7410	13059

Source: All India Report on Agricultural Census 2005-06

From the above Table, we can conclude that the gross irrigated area, as well as the gross cropped area, by the SCs and STs is comparatively lesser than the respective state figures. The gross cropped area by the SCs and the STs was 9557 and 10165 respectively, while the state figure is 13059. Thus, it may be understood that temporal variations have been registered among the social groups.

Conclusion

It is rather unfortunate that even after 67 years of our independence, the SCs and STs continue to be socially and economically the most disadvantaged groups. The study identified that among the SCs and STs, the landholding households have a much lower level of income compared to the national average. This shows that a large proportion of the SC and ST households own very little amount of land. Further, employment as well as income is low, and so is the consumption expenditure; as a result, poverty is high among these groups when compared to the other groups.

This study reveals that the level of poverty among the SCs and STs is higher than that of non-SCs/STs. It is further observed that, there is a very close association between household income and ownership of household amenities. There are more numbers of landless and landless wage earners among the SCs/STs compared to the others. The study also reveals that the levels of income and share of landholdings of SCs/STs are still much below the per capita income compared to the non-SCs/STs. Further, illiteracy, particularly female illiteracy, is higher among the SCs and STs. It is further observed that the net sown area is very low among the SCs and the net irrigated area is less among the STs; and they are cultivating more non-food crops than food crops. Finally, we can conclude that non-agricultural work opportunities are very low for the SCs/STs.

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