

Scheduled Caste in India: An Analysis on Social, Educational and Economic Development

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Abstract – *The polity of our country has realized the significance of the development of weaker sections specially the scheduled castes since Independence. Consequently, planned efforts have been made for their upliftment by the government. This paper has examined the progress made with regard to their social (health, housing, workforce participation, availability of basic amenities and wage employment under income generation schemes), educational and occupational status. Based on secondary data, it has been found that no doubt, a positive change on various socio-economic parameters has been recorded but, that change has touched merely less than half of their population. Further, the gap between the mainstream and scheduled caste population still persists significantly in our traditional society. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reorient and focus the strategy in order to support the lesser privileged by providing qualitative education and infusing among them the individualistic and moralistic values of self-denial, temperance, forethought, thrift, sobriety and self-reliance essential to bring these downtrodden into the national mainstream.*

With the noble intention of self-employment, resulting in reducing the unemployment and poverty among the backward classes, government of Maharashtra established Backward Class Development Corporation Ltd., in the year 1978, recently the above institution completed 30 years of its services. The social strata which is known as the backward class represents the down trodden classes of the society. BC has its origin in the ancient Indian social system. The ancient Indian social systems divides the society into four broad classes namely the Brahmin, the warrior class, the serving class in addition to this fifth class known as who were untouchable existed in ancient India. With a view of socialistic pattern of society as mentioned in the constitution of India along with the basic principles of equity, fraternity, freedom and justice for all Government at Central and State levels established corporations which meant to work as agents of economic development of the backward classes by providing finance to them. Corporations are playing very dominant role for the development of backward classes by providing finance and creating self-employment opportunities for the backward classes.

INTRODUCTION

The social strata which is known as the backward class represents the down trodden classes of the society. BC has its origin in the ancient Indian social system. The ancient Indian social systems divides the society into four broad classes namely the Brahmin, the warrior class, the serving class in addition to this fifth class known as who were untouchable existed in ancient India. The classification is according the inherent aptitudes and activities adopted (Karma) but in practice the classification of the caste based upon birth thus in Indian society where the unwritten law still prevails the occupation of person is decided not by his skill and ability but by his birth the fourth class known as the servant class carried on occupations like black smith, gold smith, leather workers, merchant, physician, barber etc. The western impact and the capitalist mode of production

introduced in the country opened new areas of accommodation, adjustment and opportunities. Under the National scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependants (NSLRS) co-operatives of scavengers called sanitary marts have started functioning in various states in India. Sanitary marts enable the scavengers to take up alternate jobs and thus help in integrating them into the main stream of the society.

Equal opportunity to all, particularly to those who are from disadvantage groups, is an essential component of any development intervention. The mandate of the Ministry of Rural Development is to alleviate poverty in the rural areas. The Ministry is implementing various schemes/programmes with the objective to provide avenues of employment to most disadvantaged sections of the society, including SCs/STs. The Ministry has made specific provisions in the

guidelines of the programmes to ensure adequate flow of resources to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The details of assistance provided to the poor households from SC/ST communities under the major programmes is as under:

Scheduled castes are those castes/races, which have been or may in future be specified in a list in accordance with Article 341 of our Constitution. The people of these castes are considered outcastes and categorized as untouchables. They remain at the bottom of social hierarchy and have been socially deprived, discriminated and exploited by the upper caste Hindus since time immemorial. This is the result of our rigid caste system which divides the Indian society into upper castes and lower castes on the basis of birth. Mythological, the people of these castes are born impure, culturally they suffer from social disabilities and occupationally they are linked with impure occupation and above all they are exclusively dependent for their survival on the high castes of the respective villages who have tradition bound attitudes, reflected in the nomenclature, castes etc.

(Vidyarthi and Mishra 1977). The overall lower socio-economic position of the scheduled castes, made the framers of the Constitution, to realize that special attention is urgently required for their development. As a result, some specific provisions have been incorporated in the Constitution to provide social justice to the members of these castes through the policy of protective discrimination. The basic purpose of incorporating these developmental provisions was to change the traditional social structure of our society, which is based upon socio-economic and political inequalities. These special provisions have played an important role in improving the socio-economic conditions and achieving a respectful position to the members of the scheduled caste communities in the society.

Economic growth with social justice has been the major objective of planning process and rural development programmes in India. The government would not only take into account economic goals, but also consider social aspects like providing access to deprived section to participate in the development process. Article 46 of the Indian Constitution imposes the obligation on the government to promote the socio-economic interests of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Both Central and the state governments have implemented various schemes/programmes like Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana, Indira Awaas Yojana and many others for the upliftment of the poor families including scheduled castes that are living below poverty line. Recently, the government has enacted National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2006 to ensure 100 days guaranteed employment to the poor people. In addition to the general programmes for their development, special component plan was introduced

during the Sixth Five-Year Plan to facilitate the monitoring of the development programmes meant for scheduled caste population. The government of

India established a National Scheduled Caste Finance and Development Corporation in the year 1989 to provide financial help to the below poverty line members of scheduled castes at the cheaper interest rate to start various income generation activities for their economic development.

The government also made efforts to promote education and employment opportunities for the SCs/STs through protective discrimination policies as per the constitutional provisions and through scholarship facilities. Presently, the scheduled castes in India constitute around 16.2 per cent of the total population. They constitute 45.60 per cent of landless agricultural labourers and 20 per cent of the cultivators mostly in the category of small and marginal farmers. Almost one-third of them live below poverty line and do not have access even to the basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter and constitute major part of our labour force and are generally engaged in petty occupations like agriculture labour, construction work, hawking and other low grade jobs (census 2001).

In an age of information revolution, education, the way of imparting and acquiring of knowledge to teaching and learning is the conscious process by which a person learns and applies the learning for his life experiences. Over the time : from a to z and from primitive to modern education has become one of the most important functions of the State. It is an instrument in awakening in a person, the cultural values, preparing or a better, practical training and helping him to learn and adjust to the surrounding social and natural environment. For the underprivileged section of the Society, like the member of SC in India, who was subjected to deprivation of various forms over centuries, education seems to be the most important tool of has been treated as a fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Human Rights Covenant. The rights for the basic education particularly for the underprivileged sections of the society of these S.C. communities which is not only the obligation of the State but the biggest moral challenges of our times.

Economic development in India even after five decades of planned development has by passed Indian poor. For the poorest of the poor and for the members of Scheduled Castes who are doubly disadvantaged, the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening despite rapid technology changes and galloping globalization. The overall goal of economic development for the poor and for the members of Scheduled Castes have so far been seen in generalized improvement in agricultural production, sanitation, health care, schooling and other income generation schemes. But the lack of resources and

capability deprivation have gone against the poorest section majority of whom are members of SCs as discrimination, socio-economic and political, appears to operate at least partially through strong mechanism where the Scheduled Castes are either not represented at all and if represented in gainful employment, they are poorly paid in dead end jobs. Due to the historical disadvantage majority of members of Scheduled Castes having no access to basic resources of survival and growth, remain still deprived vis a vis. other socially dominant groups. The traditional approach for the development of the poor, based on relief and individual/ benevolence approach has now changed to "teaching the man to fish". While the approach of self-development is laudable as changed from relief approach of giving a fish handout as minimum food, what is needed is a total attack on poverty for the sake of development. In order to teach a man to fish, there should be appropriate resources in the form of equipment's, access to unpolluted water containing fish as well as effective marketing network for the catch for realization of the value. Therefore, knowledge of fishing is no longer enough for the sake of development and empowerment of these poorer sections of the society including the Scheduled Castes who have witnessed centuries of neglect. For this purpose Article 15 of the Constitution envisages the State to ensure economic development of persons belonging to Scheduled Castes. Members of Scheduled Castes in India existed under conditions of a hidden apartheid for centuries in a relatively stable system of caste, but the misery of situation is multiplied in the case of SC women who appear to be further discriminated due to their gender. The problems are more severe in rural areas. Fortunately, India's Constitution is, perhaps, amongst the most progressive Constitution in the world. The inability of poor people to achieve their rights under the law, rights of which they are often unaware, has added a different dimension to the challenge of the State for ensuring compliance for the sake of the poorest. Even

by the poverty estimate which only indicates one dimension of this multifaceted problem, there is statistically meaningful quantification to show that systematic differences exist between members of SCs & STs and upper caste households.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

The disparity in the implementation of reservation policy for SCs has resulted into serious economic consequences, which are closely connected to their life. When one person from SCs family gets a job, the whole family remains dependent on him. The dependency ratio in SCs family is higher. Therefore, the disparity has resulted into huge economic losses to the SCs, as a whole. Although the government is trying to reduce the disparity, in the phase of globalization, large number of posts have been wiped by the government itself. Therefore, The disparity has affected adversely, the social, economic and cultural life of the

Scheduled Castes.

According to the report of the Working Group on the Empowering of Scheduled Castes, over 1,13,450 job opportunities were lost by the scheduled castes in the Central Government during the period 1992-97.10 Eradication of reservation posts on large scale could be seen in all state Government. The reasons for such step are given as 'Excess Recruitment', 'Globalization', 'Efficiency' etc. During the last few years, several lakhs of reservation posts have been wiped out. Majority of these posts were high-class posts, which can play important role in the determination of the economic position of the society. This is social injustice; above all, this is an violation of Indian constitution. In the light of economics, the Scheduled Castes lost huge number of sources of livelihood. This policy may create once again, the economic slavery, in the economic system.

EDUCATIONAL CAPABILITIES AND DEVELOPMENT

As against the orthodox way of looking at poverty in terms of income and consumption, a broader approach advocated by Amartya Sen, requires evaluating people's lives in terms of capability to achieve different functions. Under this concept, poverty is not seen merely in terms of an impoverished life of low income and scarce resources but also as 'capability deprivation' where the poor have no freedom to choose other types of living. Therefore, poverty as 'capability deprivation' requires education as the most crucial input for expansion of basic capabilities due to a number of reasons: First, education has many instrumental values for a persons such as getting a job, social respect, a more active and informed political participation and so on. Second. education has many important social roles like elimination of widespread illiteracy and as a catalyst for a better organization of economic and political life in the society. Education can also enhance the power of the disadvantaged groups like the SCs to Combat challenges oppression and in order to organize them politically. Third, besides these instrumental values and social roles, education has its own intrinsic importance because of the intellectual enhancement and personal growth it brings to the individual.

Post Matric Scholarship: In the Tenth Five Year Plan the scheme has been merged with the schemes of Post Matric Scholarship and Book Bank and the allocation for the combined Scheme has been fixed at Rs. 383.19 crore. For the year 2002-03 the allocation for the Up- gradation of Merit segment of the combined scheme is Rs. 0.99 crore out of which Rs. 0.56 crore have been released to state governments/UT administration. During the year 2002-03, 167 students have been benefited from the Scheme.

Pre-Matric Scholarship to the Children of those Engaged in

Unclean Occupations : The coverage under the Scheme is over 5 lakh students in last two years & the current year. Performance of the Scheme during the last three years is as under:-

Year	Budget Allocation Rs. In Crore	Central Assistant Release Rs. In Crore	Nos of Beneficiaries In Lakh
2002-03	14.50	5.13	5.82
2003-04	14.50	14.60	5.03
2004-05	16.00	9.89	5.99

Table-1 : Year wise Budget allotment

National Overseas Scholarship Scheme for SC Students : Under the Scheme financial assistance is provided to meritorious selected students for pursuing higher studies abroad in the specified fields of Engineering, Technology and Science at Masters level courses, Ph. D and Post Doctoral Research Programs. The assistance includes the cost of maintenance allowance, travel expenses, tuition fee and other educational expenses. Twenty (20) awards are allocated annually out of which 17 awards are for Scheduled Castes, 2 awards for De-Notified Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribes and 1 award for landless agricultural laborers and traditional artisans.

Hostel for SC boys and girls : Education is considered as a stepping- stone to economic and social progress of the persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes. Accessibility in terms of ward's transport to centers of learning has been poor. In order to provide hostel facilities to SC students studying in middle Schools, Higher Secondary School, College and Universities, for enabling them to pursue their studies in educational center, the Government formulated the Schemes of hostel for Scheduled Caste Girls and Boys. The Scheme provides for release of Central Assistance to State Government on 50:50 matching share basis (100%) to UTs and 90% grant to Central Universities for construction of Hostel buildings.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, all the branches of Government Sectors have been neglecting the reservation policy. Even after fifty-nine years of Independence, the reservation status of SCs in all Government branches has been unsatisfactory. The reservation policy has been underutilized.

The rate of disparity in the implementation has been high. In the phase of globalization, the government policy is discouraging the reservation policy. This situation has created various social and economic problems in the contemporary period. In a way, the social justice for the SCs has been denied even in the contemporary period. An In spite of Constitutional provision, the reservation policy has been neglected. This must be taken as violation of Constitution. There must be significant representation of SCs in the decision-making posts, which could help further,

for the development of SCs, as a whole.

The development of weaker sections of the society particularly of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes has been on the agenda of the government since the starting of planned development process in our country. Even it was realized by the framers of the Constitution of India that these socially, economically and educationally backward castes cannot compete with others without the initial push given by the State.

Accordingly, some special provisions, besides fundamental rights have been incorporated in the Constitution to provide justice and equal opportunities to them. As a result of these protective discrimination policies, improvement in the social and economic conditions has been recorded among these categories of the society.

The other earning hands of the beneficiaries. Accordingly 51% belong to the backward class beneficiaries do not have any other earning hands. Average monthly saving is Rs. 236/-. Only 4 among the samples are income tax payers meaning there by 96% samples are non-income tax payers. Out of the total sample of 100. 49% beneficiaries have selected trading activities. Most of the total sample of the beneficiaries 45% beneficiaries are in favor of Infrastructure is not provided by the corporation. 21% beneficiaries are in favor of service is provided by the corporation for the beneficiaries.

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