THE STATUS OF SCHEDULED CASTES
IN ANDHRA PRADESH - A CASE STUDY
OF SELECTED DISTRICTS IN A.P.

By

Maddu Ankaiah
M.A., B.Ed., L.L.B.,

Research Director

Prof. N. Samuyelu
M.A., M.A., M.A., L.L.M., Ph.D.

Centre for Dr. Ambedkar Chair
ACHARYA NAGARJUNA UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

India is a caste based society. Caste is the predominant factor and feature of Indian society. The caste in Indian society is still the most powerful factor in determining a man’s dignity, calling and profession. In India every Hindu necessarily belongs to the caste of his parents and in that caste he inevitably remains. No accumulation of wealth and exercise of talents can alter his caste status and marriage outside his caste is prohibited or severely discouraged. It almost invariably happens that every man’s caste is known to his neighbours. In some cases, the application of the rule of caste seems almost to prescribe the means of livelihood of its members. Thus the caste system, which may have originated in the preservation of ceremonial purity in social relations and in rules designed to limit admixture of blood has in the course of the ages developed into an institution which assigns to each individual his duty and his position in orthodox Hinduism.

There is discrimination in India on the basis of caste. Scheduled Castes are the most deprived castes in India facing such discrimination. The Scheduled Castes constitute 16.2 per cent of the total population of the country as per 2001 Census. This population forming about one – fifth of the total population, have been socially, economically and educationally backward. Such a situation arose due to the social stratification system which is based on caste hierarchy in India. Their status all over the country is still precarious as they live in abject poverty and are mostly concentrated in low paid material occupations. For these people, the shifting in occupational base has largely been denied by social customs and conventions. Overwhelming majority of them are living at the pleasure of other higher status people of either social or political or economic authority. It became a common tendency that as one belongs to SC/ST category, everyone looks at in another way. They neglect his/her existence and they tend to keep away him/her. Atrocities on the scheduled caste people, especially on the scavenging castes and women of these untouchables, have been still found
to a large extent in the form of various kinds of discriminations, killings, beatings and putting them to all kinds of physical torturing.

There is caste discrimination among the sub-castes of the Scheduled Castes and also within a particular caste. The elite group among the Scheduled Castes are keeping themselves at a distance from other ordinary people of their own castes. Probably, the richer and educated sections are isolating themselves from the uneducated poor people as well. That’s why the scheduled castes are not developing. There are many sub-castes among the scheduled castes and they live separately in the villages. Majority of the population of the Scheduled Castes lives in rural India. Rural India resides in sub-divisions of a village, known as habitations or hamlets. Habitations are generally organized along caste lines, so that the rural economy is characterized by a considerable degree of caste-based segregation with scheduled caste households frequently residing in separate, smaller sub-habitations of the village. For the country as a whole, 2002 data reveal that India’s 586,986 villages are divided into more than double the number of habitations, with an average of 2.1 habitations per village. Of this total, 38 percent are scheduled caste and tribe habitations, in which most of the nation’s SC/ST population resides.

There is a relative segregation and isolation in the social habitations of the Scheduled Castes in the urban areas also. However, the urban setting has witnessed more changes in the social status of the Scheduled Castes due to expansion of educational facilities, employment avenues, political changes, and the urbanized way of life of the city dwellers. The rural people are still living under the old patterns of social setting with some marginal changes. Further, political leaders of the Scheduled Castes are severing their relations with their own caste and they mostly become unapproachable to the masses.
The Scheduled Castes

Several castes in Hindu society have been associated with unclean occupations and social restrictions, and suffered from socio-economic, educational and cultural disabilities. The people belonging to the castes, to which the elite of Hindu society have ascribed ‘untouchability’, are Untouchables.

As Untouchables were outside the Varna system, they were known as ‘Avarna’, ‘Panchamas’, or ‘Antyaja’. These people were out castes and as such were socially ostracized by caste Hindus is rather a strange expression. All the Hindus come under the Varna and Caste System and as such there was no one like non Varna or non-caste Hindu. As the lower strata in the society, the Untouchables were outside the four Varna fold and formed the fifth Varna and as such were ‘Panchamas’.

The practice of untouchability developed in the course of time, some scholars argued as the conflict between the Aryans and the indigenous people became sharp. Practice of untouchability was preceded by a long history of social and cultural prejudice of the Vedic Aryans towards some groups of the indigenous population who posed threat to their way of life, based on pastoral wealth and performance of religious rituals and sacrifices. Untouchables were hated because they spoke a different language and did not follow the religion of the Aryans.

Cultural segregation increased as time passed by the habitational segregation and cultural religious prejudice practiced by the Aryans vis-à-vis certain other groups identified as hostile and unassailable, resulted in the practice of untouchability. The Aryans could not bring them under their control and these groups continued to rebel against the hegemony of the Aryan in economic and cultural spheres.
The Scheduled Castes were said to be carried with them the stigma of their low and impure birth. The caste system was said to be founded on the concept of ‘purity and pollution’. As the very positions in the caste hierarchy are based on the ideas of ‘purity and pollution’, the caste at the top have greater ‘purity’ in that their food, dress and occupation are regarded as more pure than those of other castes. Castes at the bottom are regarded as ‘impure’ and their food, occupations, clothes, customs and myths are regarded as either inferior or impure. Economically completely dependent on the superior castes and much exploited by them, educationally backward, socially degraded and treated with contempt, deliberately deprived of the higher religious and cultural values of the Hindu society, all the Scheduled Castes were attributed with varying degrees of ritual impurity. Close contact with them was polluting; hence they were untouchables. Various names have been used to refer to these people. The names that one comes across for these people are ‘Untouchables’, ‘Chandala’, ‘Avarna’, ‘Antyaja’, ‘Mritipa’, ‘Svapaha’, ‘Panchama’, ‘Untouchable’, ‘Harijan’, ‘Out Castes’, ‘Depressed Class’, ‘Exterior caste’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Ex Untouchables’ and ‘Dalit’.

After independence, in 1950, the Constitution of India abolished untouchability (Article 17) and in 1955, the Parliament passed the Untouchability Offences Act. The national movement had created an atmosphere sympathetic towards the untouchables. It made it possible for the Government to provide protective discrimination in an attempt to pull out the untouchables from traditional segregation. In the Republican Constitution, the Scheduled Castes have been provided with not only special privileges in the matter of recruitment of services but also with special representation in the legislative bodies.

Article 341(1) of the Constitution reads “the President of India may with respect to any State (or Union Territories), and where it is a State after consultation with Government
thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within
castes, races or tribes which shall, for the purpose of this Constitution be deemed to be
Scheduled Castes in relation to that State (or Union Territory) or as the caste may be”.

Article 341(2) reads, “Parliament may by law include or exclude from the list of
Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause (1), any caste, race, or tribe
or part of or group within any caste, race or tribes”.

The Scheduled Castes were kept apart from the rest of the Society due to the prevalent
practice of untouchability. The Indian caste system based on the notion of purity and
pollution believed that the Scheduled Castes were impure and polluted. As a result they were
forced to live outside the village/town proper and suffered from discrimination in all walks of
life.

On account of the restrictions listed above the Scheduled Castes were placed low in
social hierarchy and suffered from disabilities and discrimination. These disabilities can be
categorized as (a). occupational disabilities; (b). educational disabilities; (c). social, cultural
and religious disabilities and (d). political disabilities.

**Occupational disabilities**

The nature of ones occupation has a direct reference to one’s status. The social status
of an individual is affected and even determined by the nature of occupation from which he
derived his livelihood. The Scheduled Castes were known for their long association with so-
called impure, unclean, degrading, socially looked down and least preferred occupations.
Many Untouchables followed the hereditary occupations such as scavenging, carcass
recovery and flaying and hide tanning, leatherwork, drum beating and grave digging. These
occupations that was associated with the Untouchables with permanent ritual pollution,
barred social intercourse between them and higher caste Hindus, in the framework of traditional Indian society. Besides these traditional occupations, they are also involved in ‘clean’ occupations with a majority of them being agricultural labourers.

Looking into occupations of the Scheduled Castes it can be said that the Scheduled Castes were economically poor and generally were dependent on agricultural labour and other low-income occupations besides their caste occupation. In fact, the greatest majority of Scheduled Caste occupational force is engaged in agricultural labour in rural areas. Besides this all the primary leather workers, scavengers, and who deal with carcass recovery and flaying were almost the Scheduled Castes. In urban areas, a large proportion of cart pullers, hamalis, and the like manual workers and other unorganized non-agricultural wages labourers and civic sanitation workers belong to the Scheduled Castes.

Even those Scheduled Castes who do follow the ‘clean’ occupations were also subjected to discrimination. It is not the polluting occupation alone, which is the reason for discrimination of the Scheduled Castes, but the very birth in the caste seems to be the reason for low status imposed on the Scheduled Castes, as the Scheduled Castes who follow the clean occupations were equally ill-treated.

One of the important factors that are associated with the occupation is economic condition. Because of their lowly placed occupations, Scheduled Castes had depressed economic conditions. The Scheduled Castes were virtually denied of the right to own land for cultivation, were paid low wages as manual workers and always were in debts far beyond their capacities to repay. Although outside the rigid Varna system, the Scheduled Castes constituted a vital segment of population and performed mostly unskilled and manual labour and unclean occupations without which the smooth running of traditional system would have been impossible. Their earnings were meager and were primarily indebted and were forced
to work as bonded labour to the upper caste on low wages. Scheduled Castes were also under obligation to perform forced labour.

**Educational disabilities**

The Scheduled Castes also suffered from educational disabilities for centuries. Historically they had been most uneducated and illiterate group. The mass illiteracy among the Scheduled Castes was in turn was due to the social and religious sanctions imposed on them. The sacred books, Brihaspathi and Manusmrithi have prohibited any attempt on the part of Sudras, leave alone Scheduled Castes, to recite Hindu religious slokas and if they ventured to do so, the smrithi ordained that the tongue of such person be cut off.

Besides the religious and social sanctions imposed on the Scheduled Castes against taking up formal education the poverty among the Scheduled Castes is the main obstacle for them to take up formal education. In addition to this ignorance of use of education feeling that education is not useful, adverse economic conditions, absent of educational facilities in rural areas, lack of knowledge of educational facilities and traditional apathy towards education, home environment were other reasons of educational backwardness among Scheduled Castes. Moreover for the Scheduled Castes it was felt that children were assets to their families. The older children in the family by helping the mother in domestic chores and looking after the younger siblings make it possible for her to remain in labour market. Apart from their indirect economic contribution a substantial portion of them were wage earners in their own rights. With all these reasons the Scheduled Castes have remained educationally backward.

**Socio Cultural and Religious Disabilities**

Untouchability was the major social disability of the Scheduled Castes. Hindu society
insisted on the segregation of untouchables and would not allow them to live inside their own areas. The caste Hindus public appearance and behaviour is contrary to their true intentions and feelings. The caste Hindus discriminates the Untouchables. Scheduled Castes’ social identity was highlighted by the fact that they were generally required to live at a distance from the main village settlement. Residential segregation was somewhat strictly enforced. Thus, most of them lived in the outskirts of the villages and slums in the towns, in Kutch houses that were made of mud and thatched roof. The life of these sections of people had been miserable and unhygienic. The environment of these people was in no way conducive to the achievement of better standards.

The services of barbers, water carriers, washer men, tailors who serve caste Hindus were denied to them. They were debarred from using all public conveniences, roads, vehicles, ferries, wells, schools, restaurants and teashops. They were not allowed to enter the houses of caste Hindus and for that matter was not allowed to enter the streets where higher castes live.

The religious disabilities took the form that they were debarred from Hindu temples and places of worship, from the celebrations of feasts, offerings and sacrifices. At all times, the Brahmin priesthood has endeavoured to keep them segregated, not only from Hindu society, but from the Hindu religion and the Hindu ceremonial; they were not allowed to hear, much less study the Vedas; they must not enter the temples; they must carry on all ceremonies without using the mantras and no Brahmin would carry out any domestic ceremony for them.

The disabilities of the Scheduled Castes affected the women among them with double intensity. The Scheduled Caste women suffered from twin disadvantage, one because of their castes and the other because of their gender. They were under-privileged among the under-
privileged and discriminated among the discriminated. The Scheduled Caste woman was perceived to be the essence and epitome of ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and pollution not long ago. It was found in the earlier studies that scheduled caste women were more instruments to quench the sexual hunger of the higher castes. The Scheduled Caste woman working for a landlord had to submit to the sexual desires of her master. The untouchable status of Scheduled Caste women never came in the way of the gratification of the sexual desires of the higher castes.

The caste and gender of the Scheduled Caste women made her to perform menial tasks that were considered to be impure and defiling such as disposal of human waste, looking after cleanliness at the times of birth, menstruation and death. Even today many of the indigenous ‘Dai’ and ‘Midwife’ in the rural areas are from the Scheduled Castes only. The disabilities, disadvantages and dishonour afflicted on the Scheduled Caste women hurt and undermine their status and position.

Political disabilities

Caste has been most important locus of power in traditional India. The power structure in such a society is characterized as tradition oriented and ascriptive. A largely feudal society emphasized, the rule of elders and tradition, and the dominance of higher castes. In such society power is generally linked with economic religious factors besides education. Brahmins held power in Indian society for a long time because of the importance given to the ritual status and knowledge in the past. Later the economically dominant castes wrested power from Brahmins. This was made possible because of the shift in the importance from the ritual status and knowledge to number land holdings and economic power.

The Scheduled Castes had absolutely no access to power in the past not only because
of the absence of any of the factors that contributed for political participation which the caste Hindus had, but also due to their low social status and economic dependence on the caste Hindus. For reasons such as illiteracy and ignorance, traditional values and customs, lack of hopes and aspirations, the Scheduled Castes have generally accepted the lowest rank tagged on to them with many social disabilities.

As a consequence of all these disabilities, Scheduled castes suffered oppression at the hands of the upper castes for centuries, their socio-economic condition was extremely depressed, they were educationally backward and they lacked political skills to hold their own against the upper caste leadership of the country.

After India attained independence the plight of the Scheduled Castes was the primary concern of the social reformers and planners and their efforts shaped into a formidable action. Independent India’s commitment to equality, socialism and welfare led to the launching of multi pronged welfare measures for the development of the Scheduled Castes who constitute a formidable section of the population in the country. The planners of Independent India visualized social change among the Scheduled Castes by bringing about social mobility among them.

Constitutional protection was provided to the Scheduled Castes to undo the social injustice and all forms of exploitation and to bring them into the main stream of development. The Indian Constitution has provided a Section for the abolition of untouchability and the Union as well as the State governments has taken legislative measures to enforce this section. Apart from this, every effort has been made to promote the educational and economic interests of these sections of society. They are offered big fee concessions and stipends to help them to carry on their academic pursuits. In the occupational field, special privileges by way of reservation of seats are granted to enable them to attain respectable status in society.
Thus, not only has judicial discrimination been constitutionally abolished, but special privileges have also been given under the Constitution to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Caste people to enable them to bridge the gulf which in the past separated them from the advanced sections of the society.

The post-independence period has not brought any socio-economic and political change in the life of the Scheduled Castes. Equality cannot be achieved if we treat the strong and the week, the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the intelligent on the same footing. Constitutional provisions, political process since independence and the impact of leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have created a wave of rising expectations in the life of Scheduled Castes in general and in the life of the neo-Buddhists in particular. Gradually, since then, the Scheduled Castes are slowly becoming aware of their rightful place in society and are asserting for the reordering of society for their betterment and advancement. This has created a number of pressures and pulls resulting in socio-political tensions in Indian society. Renaming Marathwada University agitation after Dr. Ambedkar was one such occasion.

**Need for the study**

The traditional Indian society has remained for ages, as hierarchically frozen and segmented into differentially ranked caste groups on the notions of purity and pollutions. Thus the Indian caste system based on the notion of purity and pollution believed that the Scheduled Castes were impure and polluted. As a result they were forced to live outside the village/town proper and suffered from discrimination in all walks of life. Scheduled castes are lagging behind occupationally, educationally and politically. They also suffered from socio-economic and cultural disabilities.

It is an accepted fact that after the Independence, a small number of persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes have benefited from the ‘protective discrimination’
regarding education, employment in government departments, and politics. These persons are placed in different and probably better socio-economic positions like the persons of other castes. There are also men in the lower castes who have either been upwardly mobile earlier, or are upwardly mobile now, or getting equipped for upward mobility in the foreseeable future. The constitutional measures help them to achieve higher status in the class structure, but they do not guarantee any improvement in their caste status. The members of the new middle class might have achieved certain social status in the class – structure due to changes in their social, economic, occupational and interaction positions. It is, however, still unclear whether it affects their status in the caste hierarchy. It is, thus, important to examine the changes in their socio-economic, education, occupation and political awareness status.

After more than 60 years of independence, it is pertinent to ask what has been the impact of the policies of the government on the socio-economic conditions of those belonging to the Scheduled Castes. There have been a considerable number of empirical studies on the Scheduled Castes in India since independence. Apart from such studies, many social scientists have elaborately analyzed the changing status of scheduled castes in India. However, most of these studies are either based on secondary data or localized when some primary data have been collected. Each of these covered some limited aspects of development in a certain region. No comprehensive study based on primary data and covering multiple aspects of improved status has been undertaken so far. The earlier studies reveal that the pace of change is rapid in urban areas whereas the change is slow or absent in rural areas. In view of the above, the overall aim of the present study is to examine the present status of the Scheduled Castes in the rural and urban areas of the Andhra Pradesh in terms of education, occupation and social status in Andhra Pradesh. This study is unique because this is a micro level study. No study has been yet conducted on these lines in Andhra Pradesh.
Importance of the Study

The entire humanity has entered the new millennium with sea changes in the various aspects of life. These changes mainly pertain to the techno-scientific and psycho-social areas of human culture in the era of globalization, economic liberalization and free market economy on one side of the coin. On the other side of the coin, Scheduled Castes in India are still living with lower level of socio-economic conditions, lower level of literacy, lower sex ratio and poor conditions of housing as compared to State and National averages. Both the Central and State governments have implemented policies directed at the socio-economic empowerment of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (STs). But the status of the Scheduled Castes has not changed hitherto. They are the weakest in terms of political, economic, social and cultural resources.

When a man remains throughout his life in the same occupational, economic and political status, his behaviour inevitably becomes very rigid and non-flexible. On this account, the behaviour of the people of the same status approaches uniformity, while that of people in different social positions becomes widely divergent. A quite different picture is given by the behaviour of the members of a mobile society. A great versatility and plasticity of human behaviour is a natural result of social mobility.

Human development, as a concept, will have value or significance until the human development levels of disadvantaged people, particularly of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are raised to the levels of those of the dominant classes. The present study in this direction has studied the status of the Scheduled Castes. The suggestions made by the study if implemented will surely ensure Scheduled Castes to enjoy equal rights and equal access to goods and services in the society and to attain overall development on par with dominant castes.
Objectives of the Study

In pursuit of the aim of the study, the following are the objectives of the study –

1. To analyze the efforts made by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the government to improve the status of the Scheduled Castes.

2. To examine the socio-economic characteristics of the sample respondents.

3. To examine the intergenerational disparities in educational attainment of the Scheduled Castes in the rural and urban areas of Andhra Pradesh.

4. To analyze the intergenerational changes in the occupation among the Scheduled Castes in the rural and urban areas of Andhra Pradesh.

5. To examine the change in social status of the scheduled castes in the rural and urban areas of Andhra Pradesh.

6. To suggest measures to improve the overall status of the Scheduled Castes.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The main sources of secondary data are books, journals, articles, various publications of Census of India, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, internet and so on. Besides these, various reports and documents of various scholars both published as well as unpublished have been utilized.

Selection of the Sample

Purposive stratified random technique is used while selecting the sample. There are 23 districts in Andhra Pradesh. On geographical basis, Andhra Pradesh is divided into three regions as Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana regions. The scheduled caste population is
spread all over Andhra Pradesh. From each region, one district, which is having higher percentage of Scheduled Caste population is selected and 120 samples were taken by representing the rural and urban areas from each district. From Coastal Andhra region, Guntur district, from Rayalaseema region, Chittoor district and from the Telangana region, Nalgonda district are selected for the present study. Therefore as a whole 360 samples were collected by using multi stage stratified random sampling technique.

Both primary and secondary data was used for the study. Various reports from the Planning Commission, Scheduled Caste Development Corporation, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Scheduled Caste Finance and Development Corporation, other government reports, books, journals, articles, newspapers and internet were used for the purpose of secondary data. For collecting the primary data, a questionnaire was framed. The collected primary data is processed through Computer using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Software. Simple arithmetic calculations like percentages were used for the processing of data. To assess statistical significance between the variables, Chi-square test was applied. Substantial part of the thesis is based on tabular analysis. In the analysis of data, education, occupation, political participation and social status have been identified as variables.

**Statistical analysis of the Data**

The important variables were formulated and the relevant data collected from the field were coded and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software. Cross tables were drawn for analyzing the data. Suitable and appropriate statistical tools such as percentages were used. Test of significance of the data was carried out using Chi-square test.
Organization of the Study

The Thesis is organized in eight Chapters. Chapter I gives introduction, need for the study, objectives, methodology, etc. The second chapter reviews the related literature available. The third Chapter focuses on the efforts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the government to improve the status of the Scheduled Castes. The fourth Chapter analyzes the profile of Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh. The fifth Chapter presents the profile of the study area. Chapter VI addresses the socio-economic characteristics of the sample respondents. Educational, occupational and social statuses of the Scheduled Castes are explained in Chapter VII. The last Chapter sums up the findings and conclusions of the study and presents the suggestions of the study.

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