

DEVELOPMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN INDIA – A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The polity of our country has realised 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.

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 categorised 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. Mythologically, 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. (Vidyarathi and Mishra 1977). The overall lower socio-economic position of the scheduled castes, made the framers of the Constitution, to realise

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

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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 Swarajgar 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).

No doubt, since Independence we have made remarkable progress in the fields of science and technology, industrial and infrastructure development. As per the issue of development of weaker sections especially the sched-

uled castes/ scheduled tribes, we have also progressed significantly but the desirable outcome is still far away from the reality. Various studies have been conducted to assess the extent of development of scheduled castes. Forrester (1974) studied the position of scheduled caste people on the social scale index comprising items like poverty, social status, health life expectancy, literacy and education and found them at the bottom of the scale. Similarly, Malik (1979), Singh & Malik (1989) found in their studies that the implementation of the scheme for scheduled castes is very poor. Nancharaiiah (1990) analysed the economic development of the scheduled castes since Independence with reference to access to land, occupational distribution, access to education and incidence of poverty. He is of the opinion that though there is cognisable improvement in the development of the scheduled castes, it is however not substantial as the community remained as agricultural labourer. Murthy and Mohan (2000) analysed the impact of developmental programmes on the disparities between SCs/STs and others with the help of statistical techniques such as 'disparity index'. They have concluded that there is a need to intensifying caste based targeting to reduce the deprivations of SCs and STs. The basic reasons behind their miserable socio-economic conditions are illiteracy, lack of required skill, inequalities in agrarian structure due to failure of land reforms, lack of income generating assets and ineffective implementation of the welfare schemes. Poverty and social discrimination are the main issues of concern for the scheduled castes presently which need to be given proper attention. Since the early 1990s, there has been greater focus of development, planning towards enhancement of human well-being and reduction in inequities along with growth of per capita income. The concept of well-being would encompass individual attainments in the areas of education, health and amenities like electricity, water supply and sanitation, housing, etc. The present paper attempts to review the extent of achievements made by the scheduled castes in the areas of education,

employment, health and other amenities over a period of time since Independence. The study also highlights the areas of deprivation which need urgent attention of the government.

Data and Methods: The paper is based upon the secondary source of data. The data of the census 2001 along with reports of the United Nation (2008), Planning Commission (2005-06), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2003-04), National Family Health Survey-III (2006), Mid-Year Review of Ministry of Finance (2008-2009), Employment Review (2005-06), Economic Survey (2006-07) and Selected Labour and Employment Statistics (2008) of Ministry of Labour and Employment, Gol are used to highlight the developmental status of scheduled castes in the fields of education, employment, health, housing, water supply, electricity and poverty etc. The main findings of the study are presented and discussed below.

Results and Discussion

Education: Education is an essential element of human resource development as it improves the knowledge and develops required skill base among the individuals. The spread of education in India has been low in comparison to the other developing countries of the world. The Crude Literacy Rate (defined as percentage of literates among the total population) of scheduled castes increased from 10.27 in 1961 to 45.20 in 2001 registering an increase of 34.9 percentage points in the last forty years. The crude literacy of scheduled tribes was 8.53 per cent in 1961, which increased to 38.41 per cent in 2001 registering an increase of 29.88 percentage points in the last forty years (Table I). In other words, around 55 per cent of SC and 62 per cent of ST population are still deprived from this basic and essential component of human development. The main factor responsible for educational backwardness is considered to be social and economic poverty of the SCs/STs.

Table 1 : Comparative crude literacy rates

| Year | Total population | | | Scheduled castes | | | Scheduled tribes | | |
|--------|------------------|--------|---------|------------------|--------|---------|------------------|--------|---------|
| | Male | Female | Persons | Male | Female | Persons | Male | Female | Persons |
| 1961 | 34.44 | 12.95 | 24.02 | 17.00 | 3.29 | 10.27 | 13.83 | 3.16 | 8.53 |
| 1971 | 39.45 | 18.70 | 29.45 | 22.40 | 6.44 | 14.67 | 17.63 | 4.85 | 11.30 |
| 1981# | 46.89 | 24.82 | 36.23 | 31.10 | 10.93 | 21.38 | 24.52 | 8.04 | 16.35 |
| 1991@ | 52.74 | 32.17 | 42.84 | 40.24 | 19.03 | 30.07 | 32.50 | 14.50 | 23.63 |
| 2001\$ | 63.24 | 45.15 | 54.51 | 55.10 | 34.62 | 45.20 | 48.23 | 28.36 | 38.41 |

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001.

Excludes Assam in 1981 @ Excludes Jammu & Kashmir in 1991.

\$ The figures exclude Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur.

The Effective Literacy Rate (defined as percentage of literates among the population in ages 7 years and above) for SCs in 2001 Census is 54.69 and in 1991 Census was 37.41 registering an increase of 17.28 percentage points between 1991 and 2001. The effective literacy rate for STs in 2001 Census is 47.1. The literacy percentage of SC/ST when compared with the literacy percentage of other communities other than SCs /STs during 1991 & 2001 (Table 2)

reflects that the literacy gap has decreased from 20.28 in 1991 to 14.12 in 2001 in respect of SCs and from 28.09 in 1991 to 21.71 in 2001 in respect of STs. Although the figure reflects the decreasing trends in the literacy gap among the SCs/STs in relation to others castes in 2001, still a huge and significant difference of more than 14 per cent in case of SCs and 22 per cent in case of STs exists which need to be reduced urgently to bring this segment of the population at least at

par in skill and knowledge with the general population.

The government is doing its level best and substantial progress has been made in the field of education. The number of primary and middle schools increased from 2.23 lakh in 1951 to 12.83 lakh in year 2005-06 (Economic survey 2006-07). Enrolment of SC and ST students also increased faster than the enrolment of all categories in primary, upper primary, secondary/senior secondary and higher education levels during the period 1995-96 to 2002-2003. However, the universalisation of primary education is still a far cry in our country. Dropout rates of children in class I to V, during 1996-97 to 2002-

03 fell down by 1.3 per cent for SCs and 5.2 per cent for STs. Moreover, dropout rates during the same period in class I to VIII, fell by 4.6 per cent for SCs and 6.50 per cent for STs. This dropout rate needs to be further reduced significantly by providing economic incentives, fair deal to the children particularly in the phase of early schooling, improving the socio-economic conditions of their families and generating awareness about the importance of education among the parents. So the indicators of educational development for SCs and STs show evidence of steady improvement over time and the gap between the overall literacy and literacy levels among SCs/STs has been continuously declining since last two and half decades.

Table 2 : Comparative effective literacy rates

| Year | Sex | Literacy rate | | | Literacy gap of SCs/STs to others (in percentage) | |
|------|--------|---------------|-------|--------------------|---|-------|
| | | SCs | STs | Other than SCs/STs | SCs | STs |
| 1991 | Male | 49.91 | 40.65 | 69.53 | 19.62 | 28.88 |
| | Female | 23.76 | 18.19 | 44.81 | 21.05 | 26.62 |
| | Total | 37.41 | 29.60 | 57.69 | 20.28 | 28.09 |
| 2001 | Male | 66.64 | 59.17 | 78.70 | 12.06 | 19.53 |
| | Female | 41.90 | 34.76 | 58.17 | 16.27 | 23.41 |
| | Total | 54.69 | 47.10 | 68.81 | 14.12 | 21.71 |

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001.

Excludes Assam in 1981 @ Excludes Jammu & Kashmir in 1991.

\$ The figure excludes Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur.

Health : Health status is multi-dimensional in nature and difficult to measure precisely. It is captured through a range of indicators such as mortality, morbidity, anthropometric measures, nutritional status or calorie intake, and life expectancy at birth. Among these, mortality and life expectancy at birth are widely used to measure the health status of a population, as they are easily observed, objective and less prone to measurement errors.

The access to and benefits from the public health system have been very uneven

between the better endowed and the more vulnerable sections of society. Keeping this uneven access of health services in view, the National Health Policy-2002 evolved a policy structure, which reduces these inequities and allows the disadvantaged section of society a fair access to public health services by various measures including separate schemes and increasing sectoral outlays in the primary health sector. The health situation of the SCs and STs on the basis of various health indicators has been reflected in the following Table.

Table 3 : Status of key health indicators

| Health indicators | Total (%) | Scheduled castes (%) | Scheduled tribes (%) |
|---|-----------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Infant Mortality | 57.0 | 66.4 | 62.1 |
| Neo-natal Mortality | 39.0 | 46.3 | 39.9 |
| Child Mortality | 18.4 | 23.2 | 35.8 |
| Peri-Natal Mortality | 48.5 | 55.0 | 40.6 |
| Post-Natal Mortality | 18.0 | 20.1 | 22.3 |
| Under five Mortality | 74.3 | 88.1 | 95.7 |
| Anti-Natal Care Checkup | 77.2 | 74.1 | 70.6 |
| Institutional Deliveries | 38.6 | 33.0 | 17.7 |
| Childhood vaccination (full immunisation) | 43.5 | 39.7 | 31.3 |

Source - National Family Health Survey - III (NFHS) India 2005-06, Vol.-1

Infant mortality means the probability of dying of infant before the first birthday. Infant mortality in India has declined from 77 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1991-95 to 57 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2001-05. The rate of infant mortality is much higher in case of SCs (66.4) and STs (62.1) than the national rate of 57 as indicated by Table 3. In the neo-natal period, (the first month of life of the baby) the mortality rate is much higher among the scheduled castes (46.3) than the total neo-natal mortality rate of 39. The child mortality (death of child between first and fifth birthday) rate is higher in STs (35.8) in comparison to SCs (23.2) and the total child mortality rate of 18.4 in India. The possibility of the child dying before fifth birthday is higher among the scheduled castes (88.1) and scheduled tribes (95.7) than the other castes. Although peri-natal mortality (the sum of number of stillbirths and early neo-natal deaths divided by the number of pregnancies of seven or more months' duration) is an extremely sensitive indicator of health status of the population, high quality data on peri-natal mortality are difficult to obtain because of under-reporting of stillbirths and infant deaths at age 0-6 days. Table 3 suggests that the rate of peri-natal deaths is more among the scheduled castes (55 per thousand) than the total rate of 48.5 per thousand. Only 39.7 per cent of scheduled caste children and 31.3 per cent of scheduled tribe children have reported to be fully immunised whereas the percentage of immunised children is higher among the general castes.

As regards the anti-natal care check up and institutionalised deliveries among the women are concerned, the figure in the Table reveals that only 74.1 per cent of scheduled caste women and 70.6 per cent of scheduled tribe women preferred anti-natal care check up during their pregnancies as against the total anti-natal care check up of 77.2 per cent. The total percentage of women who use public/private health services for delivering their babies is reported as 38.6 per cent. In case of institutional deliveries among the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women the data show that nearly 77 per cent of SC women and more than 82 per cent of ST women gave birth to their children at home. So the above analyses reflect that although there is improvement in the health status of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, there still exists a substantial gap in the various dimensions of key health indicators relating to morbidity and mortality of the children and women.

Workforce Participation Rate : Workforce Participation Rate is defined as the percentage of total workers to total population. Long-term growth of labour force was almost same as the population growth i.e. 1.97 per cent per annum during the period 1983-2005. However, during the period of 2000-05 the growth rate of population has been 1.71 per cent, which is quite low in comparison to 2.97 per cent growth rate of labour force during the same period. The work participation rate at all India level is highest

among the scheduled tribes being (49.1 per cent), followed by scheduled castes (40.4 per cent) and general population (30.3 per cent). Although the scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes appear to be doing well in the employment front, an in-depth examination of the data in terms of the availability of work

throughout the year and the type of activity provides clear picture of the deprivation. According to census definition a worker is categorized as 'Main Worker' if she/he has worked for 6 months or more, otherwise she/he is considered to be a 'Marginal Worker.' The percentage distribution of total workers between main and marginal workers is given below (Table 4).

Table 4 : Distribution of main and marginal workers

| Category | Percentage of main workers | Percentage of marginal workers |
|------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| General Castes | 80.20 | 19.80 |
| Scheduled Castes | 73.00 | 27.00 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 68.90 | 31.10 |
| Total | 77.80 | 22.20 |

Source: Planning Commission, GoI, 2005-06.

The data on distribution of main and marginal workers reveal (Table 4) that 80 per cent of the workers among the general population are main workers while the share of main workers among scheduled castes is 73 per cent and that among scheduled tribes is 69 per cent. The marginal workers are mainly from the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes and the share of general castes in this category is the least. So more than one-fourth working population of scheduled castes/scheduled tribes are still deprived of the regular work opportunities and they have to struggle even to get work at least for six months in a year. The people of these communities need to be educated and motivated to participate and get benefit from the existing income generation programmes meant specifically for them.

Occupation: The occupational status of the population reflects their relative dependence on the various economic activities. The figures on economic activities pursued by the different categories of population show that more than 25 per cent among the general castes and 20 per cent among the scheduled caste workers are involved in basic agricultural work. Around 21 per cent of general castes people and 45.60 per cent of scheduled castes are engaged in agricultural labour. The share of general castes and scheduled castes in non-farming activities

is 46.80 and 34.40, respectively. The data reflect the change in the occupational distribution pattern of scheduled caste and general caste workers since 1981. During the period of 1981 to 2001 there has been a constant decrease in the percentage of scheduled caste workers (28.17 to 20) as cultivators and as agricultural labourers (48.22 to 45.60). However, there has been an increase (23.61 to 34.40) in the percentage of workers of scheduled castes category engaged in non-farming activities. Thus, even after sixty years of our planned development efforts, the scheduled castes still remained mostly as agricultural labourers. In case of general caste workers overall the same trend has been reflected i.e. decline in the percentage of workers as cultivators and agricultural labourers and increase in the percentage of non-farming workers during the same period. Thus, the analysis reflects a shifting trend in occupation among the working population from farming related activities to the non-farming work. This shift in the occupational trend may be attributed to the population pressure in rural areas resulting in migration to urban areas. Various developmental policies/income generation schemes for the weaker sections of the society in rural areas are also responsible for this occupational change.

Table 5 : Occupational distribution by economic activities in India

| Economic Activity | Percentage in total workers of General Castes | | | Percentage in total workers of Scheduled Castes | | |
|------------------------|--|-------|-------|--|-------|-------|
| | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 |
| Cultivators | 41.58 | 38.75 | 32.50 | 28.17 | 25.44 | 20.00 |
| Agricultural Labourers | 24.94 | 26.15 | 20.70 | 48.22 | 49.06 | 45.60 |
| Other workers | 33.48 | 40.10 | 46.80 | 23.61 | 25.41 | 34.40 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source : Planning Commission, Gol, 2005-06.

Wage Employment under Income Generation Programmes :

Rural development has been given top priority during the successive five year plans by the government of India. Various rural development programmes have been initiated from time to time for the upliftment of the rural poor. These programmes benefited the rural people and bring qualitative change in their lives, but not as desired or expected by the planners. This may be because of poor implementation of the various schemes, corruption and inadequate people's participation specifically of the beneficiaries in the process of development. The socio-economic development of the scheduled castes is a continuous process and the government is constantly making efforts to improve the lot of poor people. Distribution of surplus land to the members of the scheduled caste categories is one of the important steps towards their economic empowerment. Since inception till March, 2002, the total quantum of land declared surplus in the entire country is 73.73 lakh acres, out of which 65.01 lakh has been taken possession of and 53.94 lakh acres had been distributed to 576.47 lakh beneficiaries of whom 36 per cent belong to SCs and 15 per cent to STs. The government has also initiated many programmes to improve the quality of life of the rural poor specially the scheduled castes by making special provisions for them. One of the important programmes is the 'Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana' which was launched to safeguard the interest of the weaker sections and women by providing them wage employment. Under this scheme around 22.5 per cent of the annual allocations (first stream) have been earmarked for individual beneficiary

schemes of SCs/STs. Similarly, a minimum of 50 per cent of the allocation has been earmarked to the village panchayat for creation of need based village infrastructure in SC/ST habitations under the second stream of SGRY. The Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, another rural development scheme also aims at bringing poor families above the poverty line by providing them income generating assets through a mix of credit and subsidy. The SGSY has also made an explicit provision that 50 per cent of the swarozgaris assisted should be from SCs/STs. Under the SGSY scheme, around 1.10 lakh SHGs have been formed and a total of 4.56 lakh swarozgaris have been assisted during the year 2008-09 (up to August). Among the total swarozgaris assisted, 2.11 lakh were from SC/ST category and 2.78 lakh women swarozgaris, which constitute 46.29 and 60.96 per cent, respectively of the total swarozgaris (Gol, 2008-09).

The government of India recently enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in February 2006. This act for the first time guaranteed 100 days of manual labour to each poor rural household. Henceforth, it is the only operational wage employment programme in the country and all other public wage programmes including Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana have been merged with it. It provides huge possibilities of making difference to the lives of 45 million rural households of the country over the period of two years of its existence. As per the report of the mid-year review of the Ministry of Finance, Gol (2008-09), around 3.39 crore poor

households were provided employment and 143.5 crore person days were generated in the year 2007-08 under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Even in the year 2008-2009 (up to September), 2.93 crore households had been provided employment and 109.30 crore person-days were generated. In 2007-2008, more than 68 per cent of funds utilised were in the form of wages paid to the labourers, whereas in 2008-2009, 71 per cent of the funds have been utilised in the form of wages. The participation of marginalised groups like scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and women in this scheme has been recorded 57 and 43 per cent, respectively in 2007-2008. The participation has showed an increased trend in year 2008-09, as 54 per cent of scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and 49 per cent of women beneficiaries have actually benefited from the scheme till September 2008. The scheme is a landmark in the generation of employment, as it enhanced the wage earnings of the SC/ST families significantly and led to strengthening of their livelihood resource base.

Representation in Government Jobs: Education and employment to the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes has been mainly possible due to the protective discrimination policy of the government of India. The reservation in the jobs has been provided, which facilitates entry into the salaried services as educational opportunities alone would be meaningless without jobs. Various reports and studies in regard to the reservation in jobs and the benefit derived by the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes indicate that their representation in top echelons of services is negligible. Although the educational and employment achievements among SCs/STs have not been up to the expectations, these have contributed to their socio-economic development to a significant extent. On perusal of the data in Table 6, it is clear that there is an improvement in representation of scheduled castes in all categories of Central government services except class 'D' in the year 2001 over 1991. There is still a significant gap of over 4 per cent between their prescribed quota of 15.5 per

cent and 11.42 actually filled positions in class 'A' category and a gap of 2.68 per cent in class B category. The representation of SCs in category 'C' and particularly class 'D' is in excess only because of lower grade jobs which generally are not accepted by other caste people due to social stigma. So as a result of the affirmative action policies of the Government, the overall representation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes at all levels of services of the Government of India has increased to 16.52 and 6.46 per cent, respectively in the year 2003. Moreover, in Public Sector Banks, SCs and STs constituted 17.75 and 5.48 per cent of total employment in 2005, while their share in public sector enterprise during the same year was 18.37 and 9.42 per cent, respectively (UNESCO 2008). Therefore, there is an urgent need to fill up the required gap in the different categories of services by strictly following the constitutional provisions and initiating a special drive in this regard.

Table 6 : SC representations in Central Government Services in 1991 and 2001

| Category | Percentage representation | | |
|----------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| | 1971 | 1991 | 2001 |
| Class A | 2.58 | 9.09 | 11.42 |
| Class B | 4.06 | 11.82 | 12.82 |
| Class C | 9.59 | 15.65 | 16.25 |
| Class D | 18.37 | 21.24 | 17.89 |

Source : DOP&T, Govt. of India.

Access to Electricity: From Table 7, it is clear that around 55.8 per cent of the households in the country have access to electricity. The percentage access in terms of general category, SC and ST households are 61.4, 44.3 and 36.5, respectively. Though during the decade 1991-2001, the access to availability of electricity has increased among the households of general caste (13.3 per cent), scheduled caste (16.2 per cent) and scheduled tribe (13.7 per cent), still both the SCs and STs households are still deprived in terms of access to electricity in comparison to

general caste households. It is unfortunate that in the era of science and technology more than 21 per cent SC villages, 47.8 per cent ST villages

and 19.5 per cent other caste villages have zero per cent access to the electricity facility (Planning Commission 2005).

Table 7 : Percentage of households having access to electricity

| Census year | Total | General Castes | Scheduled Castes | Scheduled Tribes |
|-------------|-------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1991 | 42.40 | 48.10 | 28.10 | 22.80 |
| 2001 | 55.80 | 61.40 | 44.30 | 36.50 |

Source: Planning Commission, Gol, 2005.

Drinking Water and Sanitation: Drinking water and sanitation facilities are very important and crucial for achieving the goal of "Health For All". Safe drinking water supply and basic sanitation are so intrinsically linked to human and ecosystem health that they, along with proper hygiene form the most essential components of a safe and healthy life.

The supply of safe drinking water is a state subject and as such, it is the responsibility of the state governments/local bodies to provide adequate water supply and sanitation facilities to the citizens. The water supply and sanitation schemes are planned, designed and executed by State /Boards/Local Bodies with State Plan funds. As per census data 2001, around 79.2 per cent households of the general population, 81.1 per cent SCs and 61.7 per cent STs have improved drinking water facility. About 45.2 per cent households among the general population, 27 per cent scheduled caste and 15.2 per cent scheduled tribe households have drinking

water source within the premises. Table 8 shows that around 65.4 per cent households in urban areas, 28.7 per cent rural households enjoy the facility of water within their premises. In case of scheduled caste households only 20.9 per cent in rural areas and 48.5 per cent in urban areas have drinking water facility within the premises. Around 58.2 per cent scheduled caste households in rural areas and 36.8 per cent in urban areas get the drinking water outside their premises. The data further reveal that about 21 per cent scheduled caste households in rural areas and 14.7 per cent in urban areas have to go away from their houses to collect drinking water. It is clear that the gap between scheduled castes and other castes of the population in relation to access to drinking water source is high. Moreover, 39 per cent of the general population has drinking water source within the premises whereas only 27 per cent of scheduled castes/scheduled tribes have drinking water facilities/sources within their premises.

Table 8 : Percentage distribution of households by location of drinking water source

| Rural/Urban | Total percentage of households having drinking water source by location | | | Total percentage of SC households having drinking water source by location | | |
|-------------|---|---------------|------|--|---------------|------|
| | Within premises | Near premises | Away | Within premises | Near premises | Away |
| Total | 39.0 | 44.3 | 16.7 | 27.0 | 53.5 | 19.5 |
| Rural | 28.7 | 51.8 | 19.5 | 20.9 | 58.2 | 20.9 |
| Urban | 65.4 | 25.2 | 9.4 | 48.5 | 36.8 | 14.7 |

Source: Census of India 2001.

Sanitation is a cornerstone of public health. Improved sanitation contributes enormously to human health and well-being. It is estimated that nearly 40 per cent of the world's population lacks access to toilets, and the dignity and safety that they provide (UNESCO, 2008). The absence of adequate sanitation has a serious impact on health and social development as investments in improving sanitation will accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and save lives.

As far as our country is concerned, only 23.7 per cent of scheduled caste households have latrine facility within the premises as compared to 42.3 per cent of general category households. The situation of scheduled tribes is more dismal as only 17 per cent households have latrine facilities. As regards households with connectivity for waste water outlet, only 50.6 per cent of general category households, 42.9 per cent of SC households and 21.8 per cent of ST households have access to this facility. The status of the sanitation facilities in our country is reflected from the fact that in more than half of our states, the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population have latrine facilities below the national average of 36.4 per cent.

Housing: Housing is one of the basic needs and right after the food and clothing for human survival. It provides significant economic security and dignity in society to a person. Proper housing exerts a profound influence on people's health and develops character among them. The Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) and the Valmiki Ambedkar Awaas Yojana are the two important housing schemes, respectively for the economically poor section of the society in both rural and urban areas. Indira Awaas Yojana provides assistance for construction/upgradation of dwelling units to below poverty line (BPL) rural households belonging to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and freed bonded labourers. The objective of Valmiki Ambedkar Awaas Yojana (VAMBAY) is to facilitate the construction and upgradation of the dwelling units for the slum dwellers and to provide health and enabling urban environment through community toilets.

Since the year 2001-02 Central Subsidy of Rs.622.53 crore has so far been released under VAMBAY since its inception, for construction of 282831 dwelling units and 35363 toilet seats. As per the census data 2001, only 42.8 per cent scheduled caste households and 24.4 per cent scheduled tribe households possessed permanent house as against 57.7 per cent of general households. Under the IAY during the period 2002- 03, around 15.48 lakh houses were constructed against the target of 13.14 lakh but in year 2003-04 the target was not achieved and the construction of houses fell short of 1.29 lakh of the targets. In the year 2004-05 also the construction of houses fell short because the targets are fixed as per the new unit cost. So during the last three years, on an average, about 14-15 lakh houses are being constructed under IAY every year, whereas the annual requirement is about 30 lakh houses per annum as per the 2001 Census. In addition to this, it is estimated that about 10 lakh shelterless are added every year. Thus, the total requirement is about 40 lakh houses per annum whereas with the available resources, about 15 lakh houses are constructed leaving a gap of about 25 lakh houses every year in the rural areas. Thus, the discussion reflects that majority of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households do not have a permanent roof over their heads to live in and are deprived of the basic human need of adequate shelter. For the current financial year 2008-09, under Indira Awaas Yojana, an amount of Rs. 5645.77 crore has been allocated to the States/UTs with a target of construction of 21.27 lakh houses (MoF,Gol, 2009).

Incidence of Poverty: The main concern of the development strategy in India has been to improve the standard of living of people by raising economic growth, particularly by investing larger share of resources in industry. However, it is quite clear that growth had not percolated down to the poor scheduled castes/ scheduled tribes to the desired extent, as millions of them were still living in deplorable conditions. The persistence of poverty in our country despite achieving increase in per capita income

levels over the successive five- year plans has remained a matter of concern for the policy makers. As a result of the planned development efforts of the government in successive plans, the incidence of poverty has declined to a large extent from 51.2 per cent during 1977-78 to around 20.0 per cent in March 2004-05. In case of scheduled castes the percentage of people below poverty line has reduced from 64.6 to 37.36 during the same period. Table 9 reveals the decreasing trends in poverty among all sections of the society including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes during 1993-94 to 1999-2000. The extent of decline has been faster in rural areas, where majority of the population lives. Gap in the poverty levels of the total population and scheduled castes has also narrowed. However, after 1999-2000, the incidence of

poverty among scheduled castes and scheduled tribes has marginally increased. The percentage of scheduled caste population below poverty line is more in urban areas than the rural areas. Against 28.30 per cent of all population living below the poverty line in the rural areas in 2004-05, around 36.80 per cent of SC population and 47.30 per cent of ST population live below the poverty line. Similar trend is observed in the urban areas where against the 25.70 per cent of all population living below the poverty line, 39.90 per cent scheduled castes and 33.30 per cent scheduled tribes are living in deplorable socio-economic conditions. It is clear from the analysis that the poverty has reduced among all sections of the society but the prevalence of poverty is still very high among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Table 9 : Incidence of overall poverty and poverty levels among SCs and STs

| Year | Total Population | | Scheduled Castes | | Scheduled Tribes | |
|-----------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| 1993-1994 | 37.27 | 32.36 | 48.11 | 49.48 | 51.94 | 41.14 |
| 1999-2000 | 27.11 | 23.65 | 36.25 | 38.47 | 45.86 | 34.75 |
| 2004-2005 | 28.30 | 25.70 | 36.80 | 39.9 | 47.30 | 33.30 |

Source: UN Economic and Social Council.

Conclusion

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 realised 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. Education, income and health are considered the pivotal anchors of development in every society. The present state of the conditions of scheduled castes on the above indicators reflects that still there is literacy gap of more than 14 per cent in case of scheduled castes and 22 per cent in case of scheduled tribes in relation to other castes. The dropout rate is also on the higher side among the children of SCs/STs. The health indicators reveal that infant mortality, neo-natal mortality, child mortality, peri-natal mortality, post-natal mortality and under five mortality is much higher among the scheduled caste population in comparison to general castes. Regarding institutional deliveries among the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women, nearly 77 per cent of SC women and more than 82 per cent of ST women are

forced to give birth to their children at home due to acute poverty. As far as the work participation rate among the scheduled castes is concerned, it is found that around 80 per cent of them still remained essentially the agricultural/casual labourers and one-fourth among the working population of SCs/STs still have to struggle to get work even for a period of six months in a year. Moreover, their representation in top echelons of services of class 'A' and 'B' is very less than their stipulated share of 15.5 per cent. It is unfortunate that in the era of science and technology more than 21 per cent SC villages, 47.8 per cent ST villages have no access to the electricity facility. More than 56 per cent of scheduled castes and 64 per cent of scheduled tribes do not have access to electricity in their houses. Access to safe drinking water is essential for the good health and survival of the individuals. Only 27 per cent of scheduled castes have drinking water source within the premises, whereas 20 per cent of scheduled caste population have to go away outside their houses to meet their drinking water requirement. The status of the sanitation facilities in our country is reflected from the fact that only 23.7 per cent of scheduled caste households have latrine facility within the premises as compared to 42.3 per cent of general category households. Moreover, majority of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population do not have a permanent house to live in. In terms of reduction in poverty the government seems to have done well particularly in the past decade due to liberalisation and privatisation processes but it is a matter of great concern that still more than one-third population of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are living below poverty line with minimum or no access to economic sources, food, clothing, shelter, education and housing, the main indicators of prosperity. So education, housing, economic empowerment, health and safe drinking water are the main areas of concern which need urgent attention of the government and policy makers.

Suggestions

The following measures are suggested for the improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled castes.

Education is considered as a significant tool for human development; therefore, the need for qualitative education beginning with elementary school up to higher level can serve as sound base for empowerment of these people. There have been many programmes being implemented by the government in this regard but the need for according priority to scheduled caste masses is the need of the hour. Programmes like *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* should be implemented on priority basis in those SC areas where the literacy gap is on higher side between national and the SC literacy rate. To create interest and increase literacy among the girls of scheduled castes more *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyayas* should be opened in areas having low girl education rate. More flow of funds towards the scheme of Post-Metric Scholarship to be made to help financially the students of scheduled castes category in persuasion of their education. The Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme is a very good scheme for promotion of higher education among the scheduled caste children, the number of fellowship and their amount should be increased to facilitate the persuasion of higher education among the poor students.

The scheduled caste population is generally engaged in traditional occupations and many of them are also involved in agricultural related activities. But, changing economic growth, landholding fragmentation pattern and mechanisation of farming have made these people lesser employed especially at the place of their habitation. Therefore, the government should reorient the employment strategy to absorb the growing labour force by creating more job opportunities and a growth strategy focusing on the primary sector, which can sustain and absorb the increasing employment needs. The growth strategy must also focus on creating employment opportunities in the

non-farm and household industry sectors which are highly labour intensive. In order to provide employment avenues in the non-agriculture sector, there is need to impart skills including vocational training in the traditional and new trades. The government should devise special skill development courses for the target groups, keeping in view the market viability and their traditional skill base. This will encourage them to undertake entrepreneurship, self-employment and other income generation activities so as to move away from agricultural wage earnings.

The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare should take up a concerted drive on reproductive health issues in those areas where the literacy level of SC girls is below 30 per cent. There is a greater need of awareness generation among the scheduled caste people specifically women regarding the anti-natal care, post-natal care and other areas of health and hygiene to protect them from morbidity and mortality. Such programmes should not only extend health security rather, must be able to motivate them for adopting small family norms. Role of NGOs in the field of health and family welfare can be decisive in the generation of awareness among the masses particularly in the rural areas.

Housing is one of the basic needs of human being. Proper housing exerts a profound influence on people's health and develops character among them. Infrastructure and provisions under the housing schemes meant for the economically poor sections in both rural and urban areas should be adequately strengthened. No doubt, the existing policies and programmes are said to be adequate but, there is an urgent need to make them more realistic and need based in terms of quality of housing. At least the provision of two rooms set with kitchen facilities and open area should be made in place of existing one room set to enable them to live in a dignified way with their large size families. The corporate sector can play an important role in providing housing to the poor by supplementing the efforts of the government.

Safe drinking water supply and basic sanitation are so intrinsically linked to human and ecosystem health that they, along with proper hygiene form the most essential components of a safe and healthy life. There is a need to educate the people, specifically the people belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes about the importance of hygiene, safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities. Panchayats and local NGOs can be involved in this process of awareness generation to make it a mass campaign.

The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (prohibition) Act, 1993 need to be strictly implemented. Further, in order to rehabilitate the liberated scavengers into alternative occupation, the Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) and other schemes for socio-economic upliftment of sanitation workers/scavengers and their dependents need to be popularised in the target population and strictly implemented to enhance employability, with stress on placement linkages.

It has been a fact that the creamy layer with much broader base is emerging within the scheduled caste population. Consequently, the benefit of developmental and welfare strategy undertaken in the social, economic and political area need to be reoriented in order to support the lesser privileged one. The classification of scheduled castes in two groups (A and B) based on the backwardness level is urgently required to percolate the benefits of these developmental strategies to the underprivileged among the scheduled castes. Earlier such experiment had been successfully implemented in the States of Haryana and Andhra Pradesh. There may be other ways which can be taken after investigating the problem in a more systematic manner. In other words, there is an urgent need to bring adequate changes in the policy framework to help those who need it badly. Besides, special recruitment drive to fill up the backlog of SC vacancies should be initiated by the government to provide adequate representation in the government jobs.

The major factor responsible for the deprivation /poverty among the scheduled caste people is their improvident habits, thriftlessness and mismanagement, besides, their circumstances. Their conditions can be improved through inculcating in them individualistic and

moralistic values of self-denial, temperance, forethought, thrift, sobriety and self-reliance. These values will help them in proper utilisation of the various developmental schemes, which, in turn lead to the stability/improvement in their lives.

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