

Status transition among Scheduled Caste Employed Women A Study in Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The Scheduled Castes were excluded from the main stream society, suffered stigma and discrimination, lived in poverty and remained marginalized group. The women among Scheduled castes suffered twin disadvantages, one because of their caste and the other because of their gender. The women among the Scheduled Castes suffered twin disadvantages, one because of their caste and the other because of their gender. They were 'under privileged' among the 'under-privileged' and 'discriminated' among the 'discriminated'. The Scheduled Caste Women was essence and epitome of ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and pollution. She was an object of sexual pleasure for the higher castes from the time immemorial. The socio cultural religious and economic structure of the society made the Scheduled Castes completely subservient on the higher castes. The economic weakness of the Scheduled Castes was ruthlessly exploited by the higher castes, which took firm shape of sexually abusing the Scheduled Caste Women. As Desai (1993) puts it, the Scheduled Caste women were mere instruments to quench the sexual hunger of the dominant higher castes and so called untouchability of the Scheduled Caste women never came in the way of gratification of sex., The study tries to find whether there is change in soial status of Scheduled Caste Women in Anantapur..

Key words: Social Exclusion, Deprivation, Equity.

INTRODUCTION

The Scheduled Castes were subjected to various disabilities and discrimination in the past. The conditions of the Scheduled Castes were appalling in earlier times. They were branded as untouchables and their touch was polluting. They were socially degraded and were treated with contempt, deliberately deprived of minimum facilities. They were debarred from Hindu temples, from using roads, vehicles, wells, schools and public conveniences. Brahmins and did not perform religious rites for them and servicing castes did not serve them. They were forced to live out

side the village/town in unhygienic surroundings. There was no commensal relation between them and higher caste Hindus who did not accept cooked food from them.

With all these disabilities life was miserable for the Scheduled Castes. Many an attempt was made from time to time to uplift these sections by social reformers and social activities. The Scheduled Castes constitute 15% of the total population and the efforts to bring them into the main stream of society took concrete shape only after independence. Untouchability was made an offence. The Untouchability (Offences) Act 1955, which was amended in 1976 and renamed as Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955, The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of atrocities) Act 1989, were promulgated to safeguard the interest of the Scheduled Castes and work against the atrocities on them. Working on education, occupation by providing reservations and

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Assistance and preventing untouchability the Government tried to eliminate the social disadvantage of the Scheduled Castes. It was believed by improving the status of Scheduled Castes educationally and economically the Social Status of the Scheduled Castes will improve. Making use of 'Protective discrimination', quite a few studies revealed, the status of Scheduled Castes has improved (Malik 1979, Khan 1980, Rao 1981, Jayarasm 1981, Naidu 1991).

In the context of the changes taking place among the Scheduled Castes living in Urban areas an attempt is made to analyse the social standing of the respondents in this chapter. All the respondents are educated and employed in white collar jobs and living in urban area. As such they are more prone to change. The Scheduled Castes in Urban areas are no more discriminated in the urban centres. The present chapter explains how the urban Scheduled Caste educated, employed woman fare in terms of discrimination and social acceptance, commensal relation, facilities availed by them. Etc. The respondents are also expressing their views opinions attitudes towards certain issues such as status improvement, reservation policies, implementation of reservation, change of faith, job satisfaction, etc. Given below is detailed analysis of the social status of the Scheduled Caste Women in Anantapur town. The Scheduled Castes suffered not only economic dispossession and geographical segregation, but were also denied access to education. The closed system of stratification received religious sanction and social inequality was accepted as a religious value. (M.N. Srinivas, 1962; Chouhan, 1967). In line with the factors of religion and values, education too in traditional India was towards perpetuation of the closed system of stratification in which Brahmins were trained to be as priests and scholars, Kshatriyas as rules and warriors, Vysyas as businessmen. Under the pretext of the services to the above castes the Sudras and the Scheduled Castes were denied access to education.

According to the 2001 Census of India, Scheduled Castes communities are among the least literate social groups in the country. The

literacy rate among the Scheduled Castes works out to 43.35 against 64.8 for the general population.

Quite a few studies agreed that poverty is the root cause for the educational backwardness of the Scheduled Castes. The studies made by Shah, Patel and Swell (1971), Omparakash and Patwardhan (1971), Parvathamma (1973), Sunila Malik (1979) and Sen (1985) have pointed out poverty and poor socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes as the main reason for their low educational levels. Besides this studies have also revealed, low ascribed status of the caste, lack of knowledge of educational facilities, lack of appreciation for the value of education, poor home and school environment etc. as the reasons for educational backwardness of the Scheduled Castes.

According to the 1991 census, India has a literacy rate of 52 per cent, but among the Scheduled Castes only 37 per cent are literate. Every second enrolled child from the Scheduled Castes drop out before completing primary education and is forced to sell his/her labour. The obvious reasons for non-attendance and high dropout rate are poverty inadequate schooling facility and the social discrimination.

The opinion of the respondents on distribution of inter-caste marriage, was as many as 61.2 per cent reacted positively towards inter caste marriage. A few of them adding that they are last in the caste hierarchy and if at all there are any objections to the inter caste marriage, the objections should come from higher castes side. Quite a few respondents have said that among their communities inter religious marriage are very common in the sense the families which converted into Christianity from Scheduled Caste have no hesitation in accepting bride or bride grooms from the other religion or vice versa. As the case is 25 percent of the respondents are against to the idea of inter caste marriage and said these feel so for different reasons such as non-acceptance by society, parents and neighbors. They said the cultural differences make the life difficult for both wife and husband and may ultimately

lead to unrest in the family and the numbers of respondent who are indifferent to this question. But in difference we mean here that these respondents are positive to inter caste marriage. And at the same time they feel it is impractical. They recalled many an example where in inter caste marriage failed and said it will be the same result for any other inter caste marriage. The cultural differences, they feel, certainly work against the inter caste marriages. As many as 61.2 per cent reacted positively towards inter caste marriage. The respondents numbering about 54.4 per cent strongly approved of inter-caste marriages preferably among higher castes for enhancing social esteem and status.

Hindu sub-castes rightly favour endogamous marriage, marrying a person from outside one's own caste is known as inter caste marriage. Due to the adherence of caste system there were only a few instances of inter caste marriages in villages in early period. With the spread of modern education, the caste barriers began to feel and there emerged a favorable attitude towards inter caste marriages. Inter caste marriages have been legalized by the Hindu marriages Act of 1955. The government also ensures such marriages by providing many benefits including financial help as it leads to disintegration of caste. Moreover, legal act also holds inter caste marriage to be valid. Educated people, quite naturally want to marry educated spouses only. In lower castes, the educated have not been able to find suitable spouse from their own castes, hence they tend to marry outside their caste group.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper makes an attempt to investigate the status of Scheduled Caste Women who made use of Protective Discrimination in the spheres of education and employment to soar high into the orbit of socio-economic progress and process in their social inclusion into the main stream society.

METHOD OF STUDY

The paper is based on primary data collected from 250 Scheduled Caste women in Anantapur town of Andhra Pradesh who are employed in diverse occupations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Keeping these facts in mind in the present investigation efforts had been made to examine whether marrying outside their caste it is possible for them to raise their social status. 54.4 per cent of the respondents strongly approved for this proposal i.e. inter-caste marriage.

In the present study the above table makes it clear that half of the respondents strongly approved of the inter caste marriage for raising their social status, where as 28 per cent of the respondents strictly opposed inter caste marriage. This suggests that Scheduled Caste women were more conservative and they wanted to continue with the system of endogamous marriage. They were conscious of their low caste position and feel that marriage alliance with a higher caste was not advisable. In the present study, 14 percent respondents had inter-caste marriage, even now there is no relation ship between both the families i.e. (low caste- high caste)

The occupations of the Panchama Varna, the so called untouchables was scavenging, the so called untouchables was scavenging, disposal of the wastes, carrying death message to relatives, and perform all menial duties for the upper caste people, and therefore they were considered all the more impure and defiling.

The Scheduled Castes have been associated with unclean occupations and social restrictions, and suffered from socio-economic, educational and cultural disabilities and were placed low in social hierarchy and suffered from disabilities and discrimination.

An important point to be noted here is that even those Scheduled Castes who do follow 'clean' (occupations were also subjected to discrimination. It can argued here that 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 illiterate. The emergent issue here is whether the low status of Harijans is due to degrading nature of their occupation or they were condemned to follow these occupations because of their low status).

The Scheduled Castes were discriminated against and suffered from many a disadvantage in the fields of education, occupation, political participation and social status. Studies have reported that the status of the Scheduled Caste women has improved over a period of time with different degree of intensity in different study areas. The respondents were asked whether they still feel discriminated against in their work place, neighborhood and in the society in general. The majority response was 'Yes', they were discriminated. By and large the respondents do not feel discriminated against because of their caste. However a few respondents had said they still felt discriminated by the higher castes. The majority i.e. 67.2 per cent of the respondents has said they personally feel discriminated, they feel their caste in general is being discriminated against by the higher castes.

The occupations of the Scheduled Castes, the so called untouchables was scavenging, disposal of the wastes, carrying death message to relatives, and perform all menial duties for the upper caste people, and therefore they were considered all the more impure and defiling. (Chitnis, Suma, 1992). This was the strong reason for the Scheduled Castes to be socially discriminated.

67 percent of the respondents who said they think other castes show discrimination against Scheduled Castes were again asked to give reasons for discrimination as presumed by them. Out of 67 percent of respondents 06 percent of the respondents said they were discriminated because they have low standard of living. Due to performing of menial work by some of the elder members in their family

05 percent feel they are discriminated. 04 percent of the respondents said they were discriminated as they had low economic condition. 08 percent said on the basis of caste grounds, or in other words the discrimination is due to the very blunt in that particular caste. Finally 06 percent of the respondents said they were discriminated on the grounds of lack of education.

As we all know that all the 250 respondents are educated and working women. The discrimination is shown only in rural areas but in urban areas the discrimination of caste is less compared to rural areas. 48.4 per cent of the respondents told that they experienced problem these days being the member of Scheduled Castes because the narrow minded and unhealthy people by mind discriminate the women belonging to Scheduled Caste. They say that it is not their fault but what can be done they are born in particular caste, and they feel sorry for that.

The position of Scheduled Castes is lowest in the caste hierarchy. They were branded as untouchables. Nobody touches them, if so the upper caste people feel that they are polluted. Bearing this point in mind the researcher asked the question to the respondent that how was the behaviour of the neighbours with them (as they were respondents belonging to Scheduled Caste). Now-a-days the trend is changing people are very practical they live their lives according to circumstances. First preference is given to caste, but in this hierarchy of division of labour there is no question of Brahmin and Sudra (or) Untouchables, they are interdependent on one another. So they did not discriminate them or their family because they belonged to Scheduled Caste. Maximum per cent of the respondents i.e. 60.8 revealed the behaviour of the neighbour was good with them. 18 per cent of the respondents responded that the other higher caste people took down upon them. Because it's natural from decades Scheduled Caste people are declared as untouchables, depressed, downtrodden and unclean. They to-day also follow the same thing. They are orthodox and they don't want to change their opinion regarding Scheduled Caste people.

Table No.6 tells us about how important is women reservation for Scheduled Women is. Our government is trying to implement 33 per cent reservation for women. In the same way reservation for Scheduled Caste Women is encouraged and she improves her status in the society through her efforts no doubt she will pull other family members and tremendous change will occur in future for the Scheduled Castes. Among the respondents, 97 per cent of the respondent accepted exclusive reservations for women.

As mentioned in Table No.7 that women reservation is important for Scheduled Caste Women. At the same time the respondents were asked "Do you think both women and caste reservations are required for Scheduled Caste Women?"

All the 250 respondents who are working women responded in two ways: and 26 per cent of the respondents told they do not require both women and caste reservations for Scheduled Caste women. It is understood here that both women reservation and caste reservation is important. Majority of the respondents, 73.6 required both reservation, whereas 26 per cent of the respondents felt that Scheduled Caste reservation is enough.

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 caste 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.

The above table presents that in ordinary social inter course an educated Scheduled Caste woman will be treated as an equal to high caste member of the same educational qualifications. The respondents were asked to give their opinion to the question do you think an educated Scheduled Caste women is treated equal to a peer from higher caste ? In giving this opinion the respondents were asked to take into the consideration the attitude of their superiors, colleagues, and customers, people in general. 32 percent of the respondents has said they were treated as per to that of a higher caste peer. As many as 12 percent of the respondents have said that they will be treated equal to that of higher caste peer depends on the situation context. Performance of the respondents only .if they perform equal to a better than a higher caste peer they will be considered equal. If their performance is below the expectation they are looked down and there is only because of their performance and caste has nothing to do with the caste. Majority of the respondents i.e. 40 per cent of the respondents declared that never in life an educated Scheduled Caste woman will never be treated equal to high caste member of the same educational qualifications.

Table1: Opinion of the respondents on of inter-caste marriage

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Approve	92	36.8
Approve	61	24.4
Indifferent	31	12.4
Disapprove	44	17.6
Strongly Disapprove	22	8.8
Total	250	100.0

Table 2: Respondent's opinion on Exogamy marriage in order to raise the social status

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Highly Agree	82	32.8
Agree	54	21.6
Indifferent	38	15.2
Disagree	56	22.4
Highly Disagree	20	8.0
Total	250	100.0

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents on social discrimination

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Felt discriminate	168	67.2
Did not feel discriminate	82	32.8
Total	250	100.0

Table 4: Reasons given by the respondents for social discrimination

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Low standard of living	17	6.8
Performing menial work	14	5.6
Poor Economic conditions	10	4.0
Lack of education	15	6.0
Birth in caste	20	8.0
Others	33	13.2
Total	250	100.00

Table 4: Distribution of the respondents on experiencing any problem these days being the member of Scheduled Caste 00.0

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Experienced problem	121	48.4
Did not experience problem	129	51.6
Total	250	100.0

Table 5: Distribution of the respondents by their opinion about neighbours treatment

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
No different from other castes	103	41.2
Never felt others looked down	49	19.6
Overtly looked down	45	18.0
Covertly looked down	53	21.2
Total	250	100.0

Table 6: Distribution of the respondents by their response to the question, "How important women reservation is for Scheduled Caste Women"

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Important	242	96.8
Not, important	8	3.2
Total	250	100.0

Table 7: Distribution of the respondents by their opinion that both women and caste reservations are required for Scheduled Caste Women

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Required	184	73.6
Not, required	19	26.4
Total	250	100.0

Table 8: Opinion of the respondents by their response Do they think an education Schedule Caste women will be treated as an equal to high caste member of the same educational qualifications

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Always	38	15.2
Most Often	30	12.0
Some time	81	32.4
Never	101	40.4
Total	250	100.0

CONCLUSION

Finally it can be concluded from the paper that Protective Discrimination has not only brought social change in the status of a doubly disadvantaged section like that of Scheduled Caste women but also in terms of education, employment, values, attitudes, abilities, aspirations and included them into the main stream society.

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