



## SOCIO – ECONOMIC AMELIORATION OF THE RURAL DEPRIVED CASTES THROUGH POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES



**Dr. Prashant Agarwal<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Dept. of  
Economics, S.R.K. (P.G)  
College, Firozabad,  
Uttarpradesh, India

### ABSTRACT

*The mechanization in agricultural practices has reduced the demand for unskilled labour in agricultural and other related activities which has made their livelihood tough and exploitable in absence of alternatives. Most of these labours belong to Schedule castes and other backward castes of the society. This study provides a glimpse of caste chauvinism and its socio – economic implications for the rural deprived sections. It also analyzes the role of the poverty alleviation programs in enhancement of the socio-economic status of the deprived castes in rural areas.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Economic Growth, Economic Inclusion, Poverty, Employment, Medical Care.*

### INTRODUCTION

Poverty is not only an economic statement; it also has its social implications. On the parameters of UNDP Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which identifies multiple deprivations in the same households in education, health and living standards, India's 55.3 percent of population were multi-dimensionally poor while an additional 18.2 percent were near multi-dimensional poverty in year 2005. For the same year, Multidimensional Poverty Headcount Ratio for SC was 65.80 percent. It is true; that percentage of population below poverty line is declining in every NSSO round but the relatively higher gaps between percentages of rural and urban social groups is still a big challenge. In rural areas, 39.8 percent of agricultural labour and 32.7 percent of other laborers were estimated below poverty line. In urban areas the highest below poverty population 32.9 percent was found under casual labour category which is only 3.2 percent of the urban population.

This is consistent, that rapid economic growth is good for the poor, and continuously declining of poverty rates in urban as well as in rural areas has proved the fact. But, some lacunas in policy

implications and socio economic stigmas attached with the rural society have slowed the domino effect of poverty alleviation programs.

### PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

The mechanization in agricultural practices has reduced the demand for unskilled labour in agricultural and other related activities which has made their livelihood tough and exploitable in absence of alternatives. Most of these labours belong to Schedule castes and other backward castes of the society. This study provides a glimpse of caste chauvinism and its socio – economic implications for the rural deprived sections. It also analyzes the role of the poverty alleviation programs in enhancement of the socio-economic status of the deprived castes in rural areas.

### OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

1. To study the Socio – economic profile of deprived sections in different caste matrices.
2. To find out the role of different policy initiatives for amelioration of deprived castes.



3. To suggest policy initiatives for furtherance of socio - economic inclusion of the rural poor and deprived castes.

To deal with following objectives, a survey was conducted in the rural areas of district Firozabad, which is an industrial as well as agricultural affluent district of Uttar Pradesh. The rural areas of the district are fertile enough for cash crops especially potato. The upper castes and Backward Agricultural Castes (BACs) hold major share of agricultural landholdings and have socio - economic dominance in their respective villages. This study is based on the survey of 360 households of twelve purposively selected villages where all major castes resides and the government welfare programmes are persisting. Though the assessment adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods, a questionnaire based field work has been extensively followed to understand and adapt with the local dynamics.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Demographic Characteristics of the Households:-

In the sample of 360 surveyed households 1178 males and 1396 females were counted. In survey, it was found that Maternal Mortality Rate and Infant Mortality Rate are still higher among the poor, 6 households reported death of females due to cause of birth related complications and 13 couples lost their at least 1 baby aged 0-1 year in duration of last two years. Moreover, 87.4 percent of the couples aged 25 - 40 years have more than 3 children and average number of children per couple of age 25 - 40 is 3.7. Son preference is one of the major causes of larger family size. The reasons behind these poor demographic indicators are mainly, lack of medical care and nutritious diets at the time of pregnancy and after birth, lack of immunization, early age of marriage and lack of practicing the methods for spacing and contraception to regulate fertility. These households sustain on government provided facilities for their health, education other basic needs which are rarely upto the mark. The age distribution figures in table - 1 shows that 58.85 percent of male population and 61.43 percent of female population is in working age group (15 - 39). Due to poverty child labour is common in the families and getting education is still a dream. Most of the men are only literate and their skills are considered as low paid.

### Caste and Socio – economic Status of the Households

The survey revealed that village economy still revolves around caste hierarchy that reflects in any person's occupation. After the land reform legislations, upper castes (primarily Rajputs and Brahmins) shared additional portions of land with Backward Agricultural Classes (known as BACs, who are in this area are mainly Yadavs and in some regions Kushwah) and extended BACs economic holdings. Therefore, transformation of land and technological improvement in agriculture has uplifted the socio-economic status BACs and made them dominant in their respective areas of preponderance, while the lowest-ranked (scheduled) castes that were engaged in menial tasks left behind on the path of economic development. Only in few villages, the land distribution is found in favour of schedule castes. Even in the villages where schedule caste population is more than others; land distribution is merely in favour of schedule castes and merely 30 percent of SC farmers have sufficient land for agriculture in villages of their dominance. Moreover, in other castes dominated villages, only 8 - 10 percent of SC's population has marginal land holdings which are insufficient for any profitable agrarian activity. Thus, for the deprived castes socio - economic conditions are not favorable by two reasons firstly, they have not enough land to agriculture and secondly, they are not as skilled as others to get employment in other sectors in rural as well as in urban areas.

Table - 2 shows that, 60 percent of the total SC workforce is in agricultural and non agricultural labour category and only 36 is self employed either in agrarian or in non - agrarian activities. Most of the SC farmers are marginal farmers and are obliged with contractual farming to survive. But, for those, who belong to non - agricultural community, life is really intricate in rural areas. Traditionally, Dalits are classified as scavengers, leather workers, carpenters or those who are engaged in other menial occupations. Before industrialization they were always in demand for their goods and services in villages, but in changed rural lifestyle, the demand for their goods and services has come down. These changes have turned these traditional self employees into unorganized semi - skilled labours, who are engaged in various employment schemes of government or construction sector for subsistence earnings.

In rural areas, it is too difficult to categorize females' contribution in 'economic or noneconomic' category because they are full time workers. They have to perform not only their routine household responsibilities but also incorporate with economic liabilities of other members of the household. Especially those females, who belong to very poor economic background; have to put up with more earning responsibilities towards their families, they get job in manufacturing, construction and in agriculture for few days in a year on comparatively less wages. Though, these females are victims of caste-gender discrimination at every level of socio - economic dimension but, irrespective of this, they play an important role in maintaining economic stability in their families.

### **Role of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Development of Deprived Sections of the Society**

The government has introduced multidimensional approach to alleviate poverty for rural areas. As, to meet the nutritional needs of the poor and to provide food security, Public Distribution System (PDS) has been formed, with several food assistance schemes as; *Food for Work, Annapurna, Integrated Child Development Scheme and Mid Day Meal Scheme etc.* Moreover, different social-sector and employment generation programs as, Backward Regions Grant Fund, Right to Education (RTE)-Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), Self Help Groups (SHGs) are performing appreciably in their respective areas. In the villages where a larger share of population belongs to the deprived castes, government pays special attention under status of Ambedkar Grameen Samagra Vikas Yojana and Ram Manohar Lohia Samagra Gram Vikas Yojana.

Furthermore, to develop skills and education, social welfare department of the state government provides many scholarships and assistance to the students of weaker sections. The reservation for weaker sections in admissions in educational institutions and hostels also facilitate the poor students to join qualitative education in urban areas. The Inclusive development approach includes social inclusion along with financial inclusion and Ministry of social justice and

empowerment and national-level financial institutions as National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSCFDC), National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) and National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC) endow with this effort.

In this study, it was found that policies related to education are considerably helpful in increasing the number of enrolments in poor households and provide nutritional assistance in form of 'Mid day meal'. But, only get enrolled in schools without proper outcome doesn't make any sense if it doesn't enhance the knowledge and skill for development. More than 79 percent of 6 - 14 years aged children of BPL families are enrolled in primary school but only 12 percent of them attend their classes more than 3 days in a week. The condition of higher levels of formal education is bitter in these households, only 8 percent of youth aged 15-19 has completed their secondary education. The main causes of aloofness of children from government schools are the traditional methods of formal education, poor infrastructure, and lack of vocational approach with scanty role in providing employment. Government has initiated several policy implications, as reservation in admissions for SC, ST and OBC candidates in educational institutions and different scholarships to assure quality education to the children of the deprived families but the percentage of beneficiaries is still very low in case of higher studies. Despite the fact that Reservation System was designed to support deprived castes in getting jobs and education and to bring them in economic mainstream; its benefits are still out of reach for a large segment of rural deprived section. In fact, reservation system has benefited a small number of those persons of the deprived castes who already belongs to better economic conditions and are aware of the opportunities for them. Besides that, very few of the rural poor of these castes got benefitted through reservation because of their astonishing performance in studies or their competency. The same replicates with the poor SCs in their entrepreneurial efforts and sanctioning of loans for economic initiatives.

### **The Efficacy of Government Policies in Economic Amelioration**

In this study, it is found that government schemes provide employment to those who are

unemployed due to seasonal variations in demand for labour. Mostly, BPL households are the main beneficiaries of such subsistence employment schemes. Therefore, findings show that MNREGA and PMGSY have provided some assistance to poor households in their hard times but, rest of the time, majority of the poor households are compelled to do meager labour activities at subsistence wages. It is also found, that most of the BPL household haven't proper information of Governmental Financial Provisions and Assistance Programmes for the poor and the benefits from such programmes are availed by those who are comparatively in better conditions through malpractices and leakages of policy implications. The entrepreneurial policies like SHG are still not in reach of BPL households.

Table - 3 shows, that 64 percent of BPL families of deprived castes support the importance of the government's programmes to improve earnings, but also complained for leakages at level of implications. At the same, for APL households these policies are more significant because of their better knowledge and awareness towards the policy benefits. In survey, it was found that the implementation of policies through Panchayats has its own drawbacks. Most of the rural poor belong to deprived castes and their economic dependence has weakened their political significance. The well-off help the weaker in their hard times but expect for support in fulfilling their political wishes in exchange. This so called 'cooperation' makes poor more desolate at the time of malpractices in implementation of welfare programmes. The corruption in implementation of rural development schemes such as MANREGA, MDM, micro finance schemes and even in NRHM etc. has increased the manipulations for dominance in Panchayats. Unfortunately, these leakages of policy implementations have not only devastated the monetary aids but also have desolated a large section of the society on the way of development.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHERANCE**

To achieve the objectives of 'development with equality' the governments have allured several policy initiatives for the deprived section of the society but leakages in implantations and social stigma have hardened the path of policy implementations. So, it is a high time to implement the multidimensional approach of socio-economic development to ensure the transformable impact on rural society, as:

The dependency on agrarian labour activities must be shifted to non - farm activities methodically for better economic returns, and to sustain this shift, proper investment and skill development facilities must be provided by leakage free process.

Normally, in government institutions the level of education and facilities are not competent in rural areas and this unequal beginning towards learning shrinks their occupational opportunities. So, quality education without any discrimination should be provided to the poor to assure better avenues.

Only satisfying of basic needs by substandard means cannot achieve the goal of inclusive growth for deprived section, it also requires an awakening of society against caste chauvinism. It is necessary to reassess reservation policy in favour of the poorest of the poor, because without economic self-determination of the deprived section their socio - political rights are ineffectual.

And lastly, 'the deprived', which is a socially, economically and politically discriminated legion of growing economy, can be upraised by inclusive effort for their education, health, financial assistance, and social security with the assurance of their efficient contribution in economic and social mainstream.

### **SUMMING UP**

The growth in gross monetary indicators is not a great deal without strengthening the weaker sections of the society. Sooner or later, poverty and deprivation of qualitative aspects of human resource of this weaker section will make nation's economic growth sluggish. So, it is a collective responsibility of the government as well as of the society to make efforts for the development of the victims of 'customary poverty and discrimination', and to assure 'Right to Equality' with economic amelioration to the deprived rural population.

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### Appendix

**Table – 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Surveyed Schedule Castes Households**

Age group	(% of total population)		Primary educated population (%)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
0-6	9.56	9.86	NA	NA
7-14	10.11	10.02	64	53
15-19	10.56	11.12	56	48
20-24	12.43	13.05	46	34
25-29	11.56	13.02	39	21
30-34	11.67	12.11	31	14
35-39	12.63	12.13	24	5
40-59	10.41	10.05	6	1
60-79	8.27	6.54	-	-
80+	2.8	2.1	-	-
<b>Total</b>	100	100		

**Table – 2: Occupational Activities of different social groups in Surveyed Households**

Economic by Groups (%)	SC	OBC	UC	OTH	Total Share of workforce in Economic Activity
Self-employed, Agriculture	24	43	32	22	30.25
Self Employed, Non Agriculture	12	10	47	11	20
Agricultural Labour	26	19	2	43	22.5
Non-agricultural Labour	34	22	10	16	20.5
Miscellaneous	4	6	9	8	6.75
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100

SC – Schedule Caste, OBC – Other Backward Caste, UC – Upper Caste, OTH – Other Castes

**Table - 3: Household's Responses for Government Efforts for Economic Amelioration**

Response Points in Percentage	BPL Household				APL Households			
	Good	Average	Not Sufficient	Can't Tell	Good	Average	Not Sufficient	Can't Tell
Increasing Employment Opportunities	32.4	43.6	21.6	2.4	45.1	32.3	21.4	1.2
Enhancing Wage Earning and Impact on Minimum Wage	64.5	23.1	11.2	1.2	23.4	43.3	19.6	13.7
Increasing Outreach to the poor	13.6	34.2	52.2	0	38.3	43.6	16.4	1.7
Financial Inclusion of the poor	12.3	25.6	61.3	0.8	21.5	32.5	43.5	3.2
<b>BPL - Below Poverty Line, APL - Above Poverty Line</b>								