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Study of social change among various segments of scheduled castes

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Abstract

The problem of socio-economic transformation of scheduled castes has been a great challenge in India. The complexity of the problem is due to the fact that this vast multitude has been subjected to indignity and stigma of untouchability, as well as, other problems resulting out of its low socio-economic status. The perpetual existence of the most wretched conditions of scheduled castes, more so in a country widely acclaimed as governed by the principles of parliamentary democracy, secularism and socialist pattern of development, raises crucial questions pertaining to the nature of efforts made to ameliorate the conditions of scheduled castes.

Keywords: Socio-Economic, Scheduled Castes

Introduction

"The scheduled castes reside mainly in villages, where the state of housing, education, health and sanitation is very poor. They do not only suffer from the lack of resources and ignorance but also from the lack of motivation due to generations of exploitation, negligence and various kinds of social discrimination by the majority of the population"

"It should be realised that independence in India released the forces of progress, resistance and dynamism among the scheduled caste people. The provisions in the Constitution were made with the lofty objective to bridge the socio-economic group between them and the rest of the Indian people. They have began to feel more deeply than ever before, that they are going to be uplifted from their socioeconomic backwardness but the status-quo is maintained. They are regarded as backward and unequal with rest of the Indians. It is important to examine as to what extent has the rhetoric of planned socio-economic development and social justice, has initiated the process of change in the status of the scheduled castes. Such an attempt is inevitable, as the cumulative exploitation of the SCs is an existential reality. Though the need for transformation of their status has been acclaimed but the visible reality in the lack of commitment and motivation for the realisation of the goal. During the post independence period numerous programmes and schemes in accordance to the constitutional provisions have been undertaken by the central and state governments. It is seen that the most formidable factor is the basis of considering them as socially outcast and economically dependent and oppressed. Thus developmental schemes are primarily concerned with their economic upliftment. The policy towards economic upliftment has undergone a significant change during the various five year plans in accordance with their emerging needs. The other area the policy frame is education for the important in their status. The main objective of this chapter is to examine the impact of the operation of various schemes on the status of the scheduled caste in Bihar.

After independence, the state government has given priority to improve the conditions of the scheduled castes. The efforts have been directed to promote the educational and economic interests of these marginalised sections of society. They are offered fee concessions and stipends to enable them to carry on their educational pursuits. In the economic field, special privileges by way of subsidies, loans with differential rate of interest and developmental schemes exclusively meant for them are granted so as to enable them to improve their living conditions at par with other sections of the society. During the post independence period, government has embarked on the course of development with a view to remove mass poverty.

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The bulk of the scheduled castes lives in the countryside or in the city slums. They are marginal peasants, landless labourers and unemployed workers in general. The greater awareness of their problems has given rise to special efforts at various levels to improve their conditions. Such efforts are related with various anti poverty programmes to eliminate poverty among them at mass level. One of them is the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) intended to alleviate rural poverty in general and of SCs in particular. Similarly, there are programmes like the Jawahar Rojgar Yojna, Indira Awas Yojna and Anganwadi Yojna. They aim upliftment through income and employment generation, provision for housing, nutritional awareness, land to landless, distribution of Lal Card to those below the poverty line and educational facilities. There is also a state scheduled castes Development Corporation intended to alleviate poverty among the scheduled castes through employment generation. Some studies regarding their impact of development programmes is as follow:-

The Integrated Rural Development Programme is the antipoverty programme underway in all the Community Development Blocks in the country. It aims at providing income generating assets and employment opportunities - to the rural poor for enabling them subsequently to rise above the poverty line.

Ajay Kumar Singh conducted a study on administrative personnel in the implementation of IRDP in two blocks of Nalanda district in Bihar. The results showed that 23 percent of the beneficiaries annual income was more than Rs 3,500; 57 percent of the beneficiaries selected the schemes by themselves without knowing the details of the programmes; selection of the beneficiaries for any scheme was based on their relationship with the official (may be maintained by giving bribe); VLW did not meet 82 percent of the beneficiaries, BDO did not contact 87 per cent of them. He suggested a motivated team of functionaries with high morale can help for the success of RD Programmes.

Concurrent evaluation of IRDP carried out in respect of 10,787 beneficiary family schedules canvassed in 544 sample blocks in 274 districts in India by the Ministry of Rural Development. The 48.68 percent of the beneficiaries have crossed the poverty line of Rs. 6400 at all India level. In Bihar, it was 53.94 percent who crossed the poverty line. On the basis of the Revised Poverty line only 11.09 percent of old beneficiaries have crossed the poverty line of Rs 11,000. The 6.22 percent of the beneficiaries have crossed the revised poverty line in Bihar. It was observed that at all India level, 27.42 percent were scheduled castes, 18.66 percent belong to other categories. At the Bihar level, 27.30 percent were scheduled castes, 10.50 percents were scheduled tribe and the rest 62.20 percents belong to other categories. The proper linkage of IRDP beneficiaries with TRYSEM is an important aspect of the programme. However, only 3.89 percents of beneficiaries reportedly received training under TRYSEM. In many states, the percentage of beneficiaries who received training under TRYSEM was zero like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura and rest of the Uts.

Concurrent Evaluation of JRY5 covering the entire period January, 1992-December 1992 based on survey carried out in 448 districts, 4406 Panchayats and interviewing 21791 JRY workers. It has been observed that a major part of the available funds, i.e. nearly 73 percent were spent by village

panchayats for undertaking community development projects under this scheme at all India level.

Some of the states like J&K, Sikkim, Tripura, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi and Pondicherry utilized more than 100 percent of the available funds at their disposal. The other finding is that extent of unspent balance was quite high in states like Bihar, M.P. and west Bengal. It also revealed that of the total employment generated, the share of SCs STs and landless labourers was of the order of 54 percent, and 38 percent, respectively. According to the guidelines laid down under the programme, 30 percent employment opportunities are earmarked for women. However, women in the employment generation was 20 percent only at all India level. Similarly in Bihar, the employment generated among SCs/STs, women and landless labourer under this scheme are 58.78 percent, 8.29 percent and 49.62 percent respectively. The survey revealed that in the selected 4406 panchayats, during 1991-92, 13178 assets were created. Major assets created for schools, Panchayat ghars, Anganwadi etc. (15.21%) community irrigation wells for SCs/STs and freed houses (1.56%) and other assets received low priority.

R. Verma conducted a survey of the scheduled caste beneficiaries of IRDP in the Rajauli Block of the Nawada district of Bihar. It revealed that the programme had helped 48 percent among them to cross the poverty line. The provision of assets to the beneficiaries have not only changed their economic status but has also led to a change in their occupation in the case of 32 percent of the beneficiaries. The bulk of the beneficiaries who were earlier agricultural labourer had changed over to rickshaw pulling, shoemaking etc. It was also discovered that there is a lot of leakage in the funds meant for the purchase of assets.

Annirudh Prasad conducted a survey of special component plan in the districts of Muzaffarpur, Munger, Giridih and Gaya, different blocks have recorded different rates of progress with reference to the coverage of beneficiaries, kind of assistance made available, suitable marketing facilities, rate of recovery of loan and the arrangement of the second dose of subsidy to the beneficiaries under the programme. Beneficiaries were advanced loans for acquiring assets such as knitting machines, cycle rickshaws, purchase of milch animals, pigs and for starting ritual industry. It was found that many beneficiaries could not avail the loan for purchasing assets for which they showed a preference. In many of these blocks, housing schemes for homeless Scheduled Castes was also in operation. The beneficiaries were themselves employed in the construction of their own houses thus, creating additional employment potential. The intensity of work and the duration of employment in different the duration of employment in different categories of programme under the special component plan are comparatively higher in rural industries which have been able to give employment to beneficiaries between 99 days and 250 days. In the animal husbandry programmes, the employment was maximum upto 123 days. A limited number of beneficiaries were able to obtain finance for the second time under the special component plan. However, the number of such beneficiaries is very small. Most of the beneficiaries in all categories have come in higher income brackets which have raised them above the poverty line.

A. K. Daftuar⁸ studied indebtedness among 'Harijans' in Bihar. He reveals that bulk of the scheduled castes families

are chronically in debt. This is on account of a perpetually deficit budget. Absence of stable assets uncertainly of obtaining work as agricultural labourers and dwindling prospects of the caste occupation, the inability to get the prescribed minimum wages have all led to create conditions for keeping the bulk of scheduled caste families in debt. The various socio-economic schemes meant for the scheduled castes have touched only a handful of families who have links with local authorities. The bulk of the loans are taken for consumption purposes, in other cases, customary expenses have also led to borrowing. The excessive rates of interest charged by the rural money lenders have further worsened their exploitation. The bulk of the bonded labourers come from the bulk of the ranks of the scheduled castes. Although bonded labour has been abolished by law, it is still continuing in one form or another, since adequate funds have not been provided for the rehabilitation of all the liberated bonded labourers. Lack of awareness of debt relief, minimum wages and sources of alternative credit even for consumption expenditure have impeded the amelioration of their economic condition.

The scheduled caste has a great hopes from land reforms. It was also hoped that the land released from the large landholders after implementation of Land Ceiling Act would be distributed among the scheduled castes. It was observed in the study K.K. Sinha that the expected amount of land was not released due to benami transactions and the land made available to the scheduled caste was extremely small. Even on those lands which were allotted to them it was difficult to get possession because they were under the control of other people who had already encroached on it. Legislation was also enacted to give them rights on their homestead land but in a large number of cases, such has not been possible to check the landlords from ousting the share cropper-at will. The Sikmidari rights have not been guranteed to the schedule caste and other share croppers. Going to the law court cannot be afforded by the poor scheduled castes.

The government has taken a number of steps of increase the percentage of literacy and level of education among the scheduled castes so that they can seek alternative employment and not concentrate on land for making a living. B. Kumar conducted a survey in the four districts of Gaya, Munger, Samastipur and vaishali.

It showed that the percentage of children enrolled in the age group of 6 to 14 was 68 percent. Among the non-scheduled castes, the percentage was 76%. The percentage of girls enrolled was even less than half percentage of boys. However, there was a heavy dropout on account of poverty, engagement in domestic work, lack of educational facilities, dim view of the prospects of education etc. The rate of dropout is heavier at the primary stage than at the middle stage. The National Adult Education Programme for scheduled castes has great potentiality. It has led to more enrollment and reduced dropouts. It has also created among the scheduled castes adults consciousness about their rights and knowledge of the various facilities available for them in the socio-economic schemes under the special component plan. Through the education they are also able to claim minimum wage and the land rights under the privileged persons Homestead Act. Here have been chosen a sample of 233 respondents for studying the impact of these developmental programme among the scheduled castes in terms of the awareness of such programmes among the SCs,

the impact of and beneficiaries through such programmes as given below under different schemes.

Conclusion

The Scheduled Castes attracted towards the modern facility like electricity. Mehtar, Dom, Dusadh and Dabgar are living in the municipality area where almost each and every non scheduled castes have the electric connection. Other castes are living in the village. Only those caste (Dhabi and Passi) have the electric connection, whose houses are just near the upper castes. Rest of the castes village are not electrified. It also exposed the government policy to provide electricity facilities in the Scheduled Castes' bastis.

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