

State of Life of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India*

Abusaleh Shariff, Tarujyoti Buragohain and P K Ghosh**

This paper presents the levels of household income and material well-being among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and landless wage earners in rural India. Income differentials have been estimated from the NCAER's Human Development Indicator 1994 data set, for landowners, the landless and landless wage earners among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the other category (not including Scheduled Castes and Tribes). Among Scheduled Castes and Tribes, landholding households have a much lower level of household income than the national average. This implies that a large proportion of households among Scheduled Castes and Tribes own a very little amount of land. The household income of landless others is much higher than the household income of landless among Scheduled Castes and Tribes. However, the income differentials are least among landless wage earners irrespective of caste. Among landless others only 42 per cent are wage earners, compared to 63 per cent among Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Agricultural and allied activities contribute 56 per cent of household income among Scheduled Tribes. However, the landless wage earners derive only 2.8 per cent of income from this very important source of income. Landless wage earners receive a total of 92 per cent of their income from wages out of agricultural as well as on agricultural wage work. Work participation rate (an indication of employment stress in the Indian context) is much higher among landless wage earners or compared to that among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and all of rural India. It must be reiterated that land is the main asset for a decent living in rural India. But the number of landless households is increasing over time more so among Scheduled Castes. As much as 63 per cent of Scheduled Castes own land less than one hectare, compared to all-India rural average of 46 per cent and 43 per cent among Scheduled Tribes.

Introduction

At the time of Independence, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) accounted for about 20 per cent of India's population and were the most deprived groups in most of the parameters of development. The governments and planners, both at the Centre and states, formulated and implemented various policies to improve the social and economic conditions of these two groups. The classification and identification of SCs and STs is a state subject, and hence is not uniform in all the states. However, in all the states both these two groups are considered to be the most disadvantaged groups based on social group criteria. The Constitution of India, based on the principle of growth with

* Paper presented at a national level workshop on "Economic Development of the Scheduled Castes, with Special Reference to Agricultural Landless Labourers" held at Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, during March 16-17, 2001.

** National Council of Applied Economic Research, Human Development Programme Area, 11, I. P. Estate, New Delhi 110 002.