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Impact of Reservations on the Socioeconomic Mobility of the Scheduled Castes

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Abstract

Caste has been used historically as a tool of oppression against the marginalised lower castes. Since India's independence and abolishment of untouchability and other forms of discrimination, a considerable section of the society holds the view that Caste-based discrimination is a thing of the past. While the cases of explicit forms of discrimination have surely decreased, caste still plays a very important role in the modern economy and so does the implicit form of discrimination accompanying it. To undo this injustice, reservations were introduced, hoping that they would act as a catalyst in the upward mobility of the Scheduled Castes. However, the situation continues to be grim and the opposition against caste-based discrimination has only increased. Therefore, to analyse these arguments and provide a quantitative analysis of the plight of Scheduled Castes becomes necessary. This paper is an examination of the different facets of caste in a modern economy and how effective reservations have been in ensuring the upward mobility of the Scheduled Castes. It also analyses the present intergenerational mobility in India and traces how reservations have impacted this socio-economic mobility. The paper starts with an extensive introduction of sociological as well as historical aspects of Caste in India and contextualises socio-economic mobility in India with respect to caste. This is followed by a literature review of mobility studies in India and the identification and impact of caste-based discrimination in the modern economy of India. The paper concludes with a quantitative analysis of the impact of reservations on the socio-economic mobility of Scheduled Castes in India.

Keywords: *scheduled caste, reservations, socio-economic mobility*

1.0 Introduction

Caste has always been one of the focal points of exploration while understanding development in India, as well as intergenerational mobility of the different social groups. It has been viewed from a myriad of perspectives such as sociological, economic, anthropological, political, historical, etc. This paper aims to understand the impact of reservation on the intergenerational socio-economic mobility of the backward social groups, in particular, the Scheduled Castes.

2.1 What is Caste?

Caste, sometimes commonly known as *Varna* or *Jati*, has been derived from the Portuguese word 'Casta' meaning breed or race and has been used in the Indian Context in two possible ways; Caste as *Varna* or Caste as *Jati*. According to Andre Betelle (Vaid, 2014), caste is categorised by '*endogamy, hereditary membership and a specific style of life which includes the pursuit by tradition, of a particular occupation.*' Therefore, caste has always been more than just a social identity. It has been a means of acquiring opportunities, wealth and social capital in society. The French Anthropologist Louis Dumont in his classic book *Homo Hierarchicus* condenses the (Vaid, 2014) caste system into one central feature: *The hierarchy of the opposites, that is, of the pure and impure.* However, it is to be noted that this classification is not unique and varies across regions. For instance, Brahmins are considered to be the most superior caste, however, that is not the case as some Brahmins are anomalous because they are involved in cremation duties and hence, are considered to be impure. He explains that they are considered '*acchut*' and no person of a clean caste can sit or dine with them. Though there are rituals to 'cleanse' them, the Mahabrahmans (funeral priests) themselves explain that they participate in *sutak (death pollution)* which afflicts their *jajmans (patrons)*, and since they have many *jajmans*, they are in a permanent state of pollution. (Parry, 1980) Hence, instead of following the quotidian categorisation assuming Brahmins to be at the top of the caste structure everywhere,

irrespective of their material or numerical strength, Prof. Srinivas coined the term 'Dominant Caste' (Srinivas, 1951). The best illustration of this is the Gujjar community (A *jati* found in certain Northern States of India) which is better placed than Brahmins, both in terms of social and economic capital, though they stand at a much lower position in the traditional caste structures.

The Caste system in India has also been redefined to become a political construct (Vaid, 2014). The Indian Constitution recognises three broad groups for consideration while providing affirmative action. They are the Scheduled Castes (predominantly ex-untouchable *Jatis*), Scheduled Tribes (that are geographically isolated groups) and OBCs (which were provided reservation during the Mandal Commission). The definition of OBC is quite complex and hence, our scope of the study is restricted to the Scheduled Castes.

2.2 What is Socio-Economic Mobility?

To think of caste as a static and rigid structure providing no mobility is a concept that brings with it a lot of impediments, especially when trying to understand the possibility of social mobility in the caste structure. It is defined as the persistence of socioeconomic rank across generations, following Solon (1999), Chetty et al. (2014) and Chetty et al. (2020), all of whom emphasize isolating the rank persistence from changes in economic growth and inequality (Asher, Novosad, and Rafkin 2021). The debate among scholars regarding social mobility comprises two diametrically opposite views. Some scholars are of the view that Caste provides no means of upward mobility. The other group claims that some form of mobility is always present but is largely restricted to certain groups within these lower castes who accumulate capital, and consequently capture all opportunities. However, social mobility of caste can be measured at two levels: The first is group mobility which occurs through imitation of lifestyle and behaviour of the upper castes and requires them to accept that these groups have integrated into their community. The second means of measuring social mobility is intergenerational, that is, can individuals across caste avail themselves of all social and economic opportunities? (Vaid 2014).

2.3 Reservation in India

Affirmative action policies have always been at the centre stage of controversy and debate. While there is no doubt that for the increase in the share of SC student enrollment ratio in higher educational institutions, reservation policies deserve a major credit, however, it is difficult to ascertain the difference these policies have actually made, majorly because of the way India's reservation policy is structured (Weisskopf, 2004). Firstly, these policies only apply in universities under public administration, and though the major Indian universities are public, the proportion of private universities has been rapidly increasing since the 1990s.

The provision of Reservation was implemented for the SC/ST and OBC after the enforcement of the Constitution of India. In the beginning, it was 15% and 7.5% for the SC and ST respectively. But in 1991 after the Mandal Commission, 27% reservation was provided to the OBCs. In 1995, 3% of reservation was allocated to the other weaker section i.e. physically disabled in jobs. After a long struggle by the teachers for SC/ST reservation in universities and colleges, the same was allowed in 1997, after 50 years of Independence. Apart from it, after the Supreme Court order, 3% reservation in jobs of universities and colleges was provided to the physically challenged in the year 2005 and to OBCs in 2007.

Although the reservation of seats at higher level institutions was there from the 1950s, the actual implementation was prolonged and as a result, took a decade or two to act at the ground level. To date, while it happens to be functional on paper in every educational institution, the same does not translate into a ground reality for all the institutions. In the case of educational universities controlled by the state, the percentage of reservation is contingent upon the proportion of SCs and STs in the population. (Weisskopf 2004).

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Caste in Modern India

At the outset, it is important to note that Caste in modern India continues to exist and its effects are still profound. However, the nature in which caste affects employment opportunities

has changed drastically. With the presence of State intervention and positive discrimination, a 'dual process' has emerged. While disadvantages attached to being a lower caste continue to exist, a trend of 'opportunity hoarding' has also developed. (Mosse 2018). In the context of the caste system, hoarding implies the social exclusion of the lower castes by the dominant caste in the form of restrictions from accessing certain opportunities. In a modern state like India, which explicitly prohibits Caste-based Discrimination, this can happen through 'credentialing' which includes creating an almost monopoly kind situation with respect to certain degrees of high employability and then ensuring that most of the well-paid jobs require those credentials. This amounts to structural violence against the lower castes but is generally not recognised as a form of discrimination by modern states. For instance, seven of the top ten higher education institutions are IITs(Indian Institute of Technology) and one in every three students in India is employed in an engineering degree because of the high returns to investment.

However, the entrance exams to IITs, which is the JEE (if analysed without reservation), values merit but completely ignores the social structural factors which increase or decrease accessibility to these institutions via such national level examinations.

Similarly, in the case of IIMs, latent discriminatory practices can be seen in the faculty hiring where only five of the 642 faculty members across all the branches belong to SCs and STs(Subramaniam and Paliath 2020). Also, the absence of more SC and ST professors in the university makes it a hostile space for the lower caste students as the faculty cannot empathise with their life experiences.

At a general level, economic liberalisation is supposed to have eliminated caste privilege. However, data from the IT industry in India suggests that most of the managerial positions continue to be dominated by members of the dominant caste. Therefore, rather than reducing the caste effect, economic liberalisation has intensified it as it has increased inequality in a society that is highly stratified along caste lines. (Subramaniam and Paliath 2020)

In Businesses, we find three effects of castes:(1) network effects, (2) the ranking of markets, and (3) caste exclusion and barriers (Mosse 2018)

1. The Network Effect of Caste:

The urban-rural divide has intensified the caste divide in villages severely and has unmasked another important feature of the caste system: its network effect. (Mosse 2020). For any Dalit worker, employment in an urban area is a big step from ‘poverty, humiliation, and torture’ to ‘mere poverty’. However, when such opportunities arise, they are immediately captured by members of the upper caste, because however economically weak they might be, they have access to a better network of better-placed people by the virtue of belonging to the upper caste.

In one of the studies, David Mosse shows that in the village of Allupuram, members of the upper caste were the first ones to exploit their connections for more lucrative employment opportunities in the urban areas, whereas Dalit workers had to achieve economic mobility by investing in farm livelihood. At the scale of national level, analysing data sets (Thorat, Madheswaran, and Vani, 2020) has made it clear that post-reform development and its economic diversification have not, as regards employment, breaking the association of ‘upper’ castes with higher-status professions and Dalits with manual and casual labour. For the post-reform period, the data reveal glass walls against Dalit occupational mobility out of caste-typed roles or low-end service trades into more profitable ones, or self-employment (Das 2013). A widening caste disparity in earnings at the top of the income distribution, and in access to the most prestigious jobs, indicates a ‘glass ceiling’ effect. To borrow Kirsten Hastrup's distinction here, caste is less ‘substance’—that is ethnicized collective identity in struggles for political power—and more ‘set’—that is, looser, intentional, strategic network, pragmatically realized in the search for jobs, skills, marriages, and support in local dispute mediation (Mosse, 2020).

2. Ranking of Markets:

The ranking of markets plays an extremely crucial role in caste-based discrimination in employment. The more inferior the markets, the more caste linked it is to occupational history. This, therefore, determines their differential access to different labour markets.

For sectors such as agriculture, mining, etc. there is relatively greater access to Dalit workers. However, in the case of sectors such as finance, hospitality, education, Dalit workforce entry is relatively restricted (Harriss-White et al., 2014; Thorat & Newman, 2010) In a research experiment conducted by Oh in rural Odisha, it was concluded that the 'average take up' rate of a task fell by 23% if it was not associated with the traditional task of the worker's caste. The study also concluded that the rate fell even by 47% if the task was traditionally associated with a caste ranked lower than the worker's caste. Another important feature of the study was that these choices were made in private spaces instead of public, indicating that the reason behind the choices was the workers' own caste consciousness instead of their concern for social image. (Kwatra 2019)

3. Caste Exclusion and Barriers:

A study of 90 cases (Prakash 2015) highlights the experience of a Dalit entrepreneur in a liberalised economy. It suggests that Dalit entrepreneurs have to face higher implicit costs in a business venture. By virtue of belonging to a lower caste, they face exclusion from network circles that provide access to business information, provide preferred interest rates, etc. As a result, a significant proportion of these ventures by Dalit businessmen, fail.

One of the papers also mentions (Mosse,2018) the lack of demand faced by such Dalit businessmen. They are of the view that while other businesses are evaluated for their service and goods produced, these businesses are evaluated simply on the basis of the caste of these owners. Even in the liberalised economy, an environment of pervasive discrimination exists according to which, 'Dalits are expected to be labourers'. Any occupation other than that is perceived as a 'social transgression', consequently, even setting up a business as small as selling fruits is seen as a form of 'social assertion'.

These barriers push several educated Dalits, aspiring to be self-employed, into unemployment.

3.2 How do we Measure Socioeconomic Mobility?

The term “Sanskritisation”, coined by Prof. Srinivas, is used to describe this process of ‘upward’ social mobility wherein members belonging to the lower caste start following norms such as renouncing alcohol, vegetarianism, and other aspects of lifestyle which are deemed to be the culture of the Brahmins. Robert Merton in his ‘Reference Theory’ talks about the creation of a reference group within a larger group whose tenets and lifestyle are emulated by members of lower social groups. This can also be viewed as a means of social mobility in the caste system. To elucidate further, it means a *Jati* emulating members of higher *varna* and therefore becoming a reference group for its *varna*. Therefore, when the process of Sanskritization takes place, these groups are the first to climb up the ladder (Vaid, 2014).

Yadavs, though belonging to OBCs, are a strong example of this process. According to their caste occupation, they are supposed to be cow shepherds, however, capitalising on their numerical strength and backed by reservations that were provided by the State, they were able to transform themselves and through upward social mobility, they are affluent sections of the society in many parts of Northern India. In Uttar Pradesh, they have been gaining economic power since the 1950s after the abolition of the zamindari system. They purchased land rights from the State and became dominant agricultural communities. Their wealth and economic power increased substantially post the Green Revolution and emerged as the new “bullock capitalists”. They were given a political voice after the Kisan Movement of the 1970s and 1980s and backed by the socialist leaders, these ‘low ranking’ castes challenged the Congress system. By the 1970s, the Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh started to gradually introduce themselves in the political process at the local, state and national level, backed by the reservations provided by the State. Christophe Jaffrelot has rightly pointed out “The rise of Other Backward Castes is the rise of Yadavs and Kurmis’. (Jaffrelot 2010)

It is important to note that the process of Sanskritisation is not a silent and effortless one. The mere imitation, without a simultaneous economic and political rise, does not result in successful upward caste mobility. There are two reasons for the same. First, according to Prof. Jodhka, the process of Sanskritization is not something that members of the upper caste naturally appreciate.

The initial response to such an activity is that of immediate suppression, either through means of power structures or violence (Dube 1955). This is because it threatens the position of the upper caste people and also violates the hierarchical relationship they have with the members of the lower caste. That is why this process entails negotiation with the local power structures. For example, Dr BR Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) talks about the Sonars of Maharashtra, who in an attempt to enhance their social status, styled themselves as 'Daivadnya Brahmins' wearing their dhotis with folds on and used the word *Namaskar* for salutation, both of which were endemic to the Brahmins. Not liking this imitation, the Brahmins (The Upper Caste), under the authority of Peshwas (The power structure) put down this attempt and even got the President of the Council of EIC (Again a power structure) in Bombay to issue a prohibitory order against the Sonars residing in Bombay from styling themselves as 'Daivadnya Brahmins'.

To look at it from a contemporary perspective, we see that in an intercaste marriage between a lower caste and an upper caste member, there is almost always caste-based violence against members of the lower caste, not only because it violates the endogamous nature of the caste system but also because the idea of a lower caste member appropriating the “property” (women in orthodox communities are unfortunately always seen as the property of a father or husband, and never an individual in herself) of an upper-caste man. Secondly, according to Professor Jayaram (Vaid 2014), the public endorsement of the Sanskritized castes is a slow process and is not likely to be reinforced if there is no simultaneous improvement in economic status and political clout of the concerned caste.

With respect to the second means of social mobility, while studying intergenerational mobility in developing countries, social scientists prefer to use education as a representative symbol for social status primarily because of the lack availability and quality of data pertaining to income, and also because it is a challenge to measure individual income in households that have a joint production system (Asher, Novosad, and Rafkin 2021), for instance, a family of Scheduled Castes working in the fields of an upper-caste landlord. Two diametrically opposite narratives prevail concerning intergenerational mobility in India. On one hand, we have witnessed

economic liberalisation and consequently rapid economic growth which has generated an array of opportunities, thereby increasing access to opportunity. The political arena has also become relatively more open to different social groups with political parties organising themselves around caste and other social groups. The targeted affirmative action of the Government has also drastically increased the variety of opportunities available to a lower caste son vis-a-vis his father. (Asher, Novosad, and Rafkin 2021). However, at the same time, inequality continues to be persistent, cultural alliances such as marriage are still visible along caste lines and elites in business, civil society and the government continue to be majorly from the upper caste (Chancel and Piketty, 2019). Therefore, it becomes important to define intergenerational mobility in a way that is reflective of these disparities and contradictions.

3.3 Reservation for Scheduled Castes: Impact and Prejudices

While the main task of anti-discrimination laws such as the SC-ST Prevention of Atrocities Act has been to ensure protection against discrimination of Scheduled Castes, an additional responsibility of the Reservation policies is to develop conditions that are conducive to their growth and empower them with equal citizenship. However, the reservation policy faces strong opposition from the society, and the opposition is not said to be anti-reservation, rather it is anti-caste (Thorat, Tagade, and Naik, 2016), the most recent being that the basis of the reservation should be replaced with economic criteria rather than caste. Over the years, there have been an array of allegations against the working of Reservation Policies which include but are not limited to “ineffective outcomes” and “benefits only for affluent Scheduled Castes”.

The data suggests that most of these prejudices and apprehensions regarding reservation are misplaced. For instance, the most common opposition regarding reservations is that those who are better off among the Scheduled Castes appropriate the most benefit out of it, whereas the economically weaker Scheduled Castes are left out. Therefore, many are of the view that the basis of the reservation should be replaced by economic criteria instead of caste (Thorat, Tagade, and Naik 2016) While the basis of this argument is correct, the proposition of economic criteria is flawed. Casteism, like other forms of social discrimination, is a group theory. It discriminates

because of the social identity (caste in this case) of the individual and is blind to the economic strength of the individual. The government can definitely withdraw economic support to such groups, but extending this to claim that reservation in itself should be withdrawn, is incorrect.

Similarly, another common criticism against reservation is that it hampers the productivity of organisations. This again has no empirical basis. Data (Deshpande and Weisskopf 2011) suggests that affirmative action policies including reservation have no effect on productivity. The authors conducted their research in the Indian Railways and concluded that there was no evidence supporting the claim that an increased number of SC-ST employees will adversely hamper productivity growth. On the contrary, some of the results in their research suggested that the proportion of SC-ST employees in upper job categories (A+B) was positively associated with higher productivity.

They also draw a comparison with affirmative action studies in the United States and show that even those studies claim that there are no “statistically significant” studies to claim that Affirmative Action in labour markets hampers productivity. In fact, they claim that their research is better in the sense that there is some evidence to suggest that there is a positive correlation between labour productivity and affirmative action in labour markets.

While the proof behind this correlation is beyond the scope of their paper, they propose three theories advanced by other theorists (Deshpande and Weisskopf 2011)

1. Individuals from marginalized groups may well display especially high levels of work motivation when they succeed in attaining decision-making and managerial positions, because of the fact that they have reached these positions in the face of claims that they are not sufficiently capable – in consequence of which they may have a strong desire to prove their detractors wrong.
2. Individuals from marginalized groups may simply believe that they have to work doubly hard to prove that they are just as good as their peers – and so they may actually work harder. Having greater numbers of SC & ST managers and

professionals working in high-level A+B positions in the Indian Railways might also serve to increase productivity because their community backgrounds make them more effective in supervising and motivating SC & ST workers in C and D jobs.

3. Finally, improvements in organizational productivity may well result from the greater diversity of perspectives and talents made possible by the integration of members of previously marginalized groups into high-level decision-making teams.

Another important criticism raised is that there is no definite timeline as to when this policy will be finished. While data suggests that there has been significant improvement in the status of Scheduled Castes, it also shows continued discrimination though in a more hideous manner now. Therefore, while there is no set timeline, it is in the best interests of the Scheduled Castes that the policy is continued until the data shows that there has been uniform socio-economic mobility of the Scheduled Castes across the spectrum, irrespective of their economic prosperity. Until policymakers are not certain of that happening, reservation cannot be discontinued at any cost.

4.0 Data and Methodology

In order to understand the impact of reservation on the mobility of Scheduled Castes, this paper attempts to have a quantified analysis of the disparities between Scheduled Castes and the Forward Castes. To understand and analyse the situation, we use the following parameters using data from other research papers (Joshi, n.d) (Krishnan 2018).

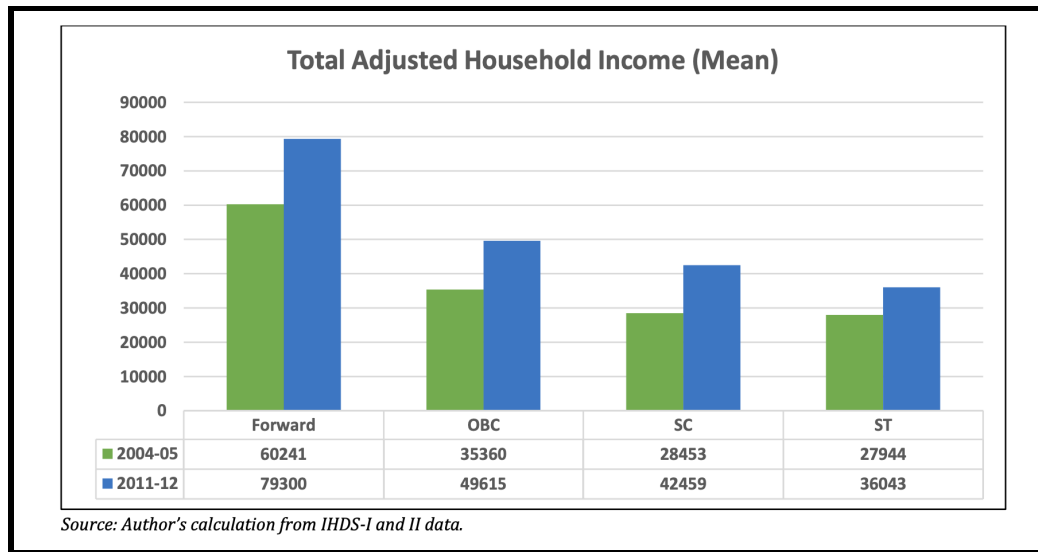
1. Gini Coefficient: The Gini coefficient is a tool often used in inequality studies to measure the inequality in a society. A score of 0 suggests a highly equitable society where everybody earns the same amount of income. A score of 1 suggest that all the wealth and earning of the region is earned by a single person. This paper uses this measure to understand the inequality between Scheduled Castes and Forward Castes as well as the inequality among the Scheduled Castes.

2. **Theil Coefficient:** The Theil Coefficient or the Theil Index as it is known, is also a statistical measure to identify the economic inequality in the region. It measures the distance of the society (or a particular group in this paper) from the ideal, utopian, egalitarian society. The higher the score, the more distant the society is from equal distribution.
3. **Great Gatsby Curve:** Great Gatsby Curve signifies the relationship between income inequality and intergenerational income mobility. The concept was introduced by Alan Krueger while delivering a speech at the Center for American Progress in 2012. The Curve tracks the intersection of two measures (Krishnan, 2018).

5.0 Results

According to the data collection by the author (Joshi, n.d.), the below-mentioned graph suggests that between the two rounds of the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) survey, the mean household income of both Scheduled Caste, as well as Forward Caste groups, has increased. However, the increase for Scheduled Castes is greater than that of the Forward Castes. This means that though the Forward Castes have much higher mean income, the Scheduled Caste groups are quickly closing in. At the same time, looking at the numbers in absolute terms suggests that the income gap between Forward Castes and Scheduled Castes has widened between the two rounds.

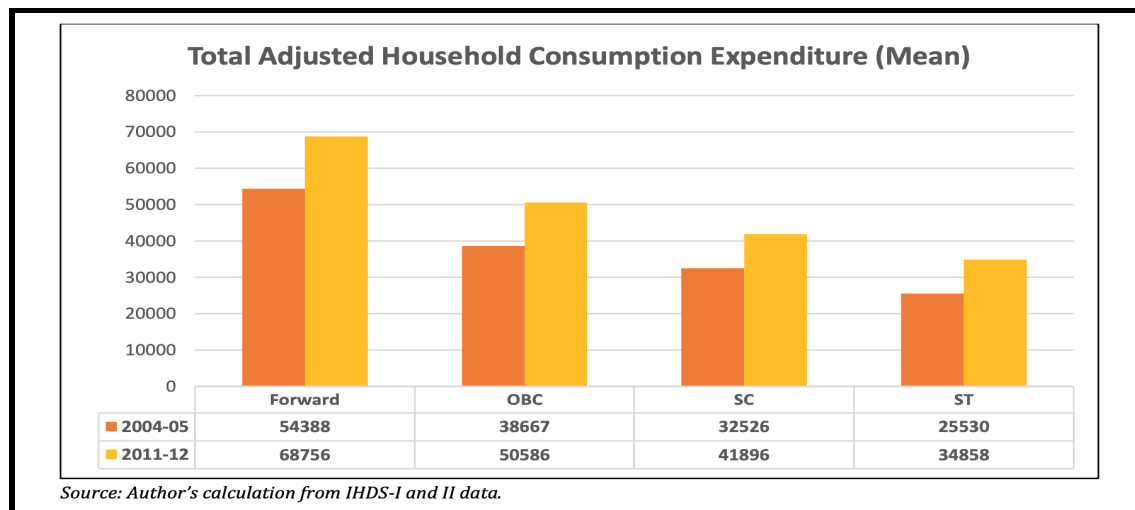
Table 1.0



Source: (Joshi 2017)

Similarly, in the case of mean consumption expenditure, the gap in absolute terms between a Scheduled Caste household and a Forward Caste household has increased, however, the increase in consumption expenditure of Scheduled Caste households is much more than Forward Caste households suggesting that while the Scheduled Caste households are progressing relatively faster, the gap between them and the Forward Castes still persists.

Table 1.2



Source: (Joshi 2017)

A more accurate way of calculating inequality is by using Gini Coefficient. As is clear from the table, the inequality has increased for both the SC as well as Forward Caste groups (value of Gini has increased). With respect to the two welfare aggregators, income and consumption, the author (Joshi, n.d.) has shown the value of coefficient separately. It shows that while the consumption of Gini for both Scheduled Castes and Forward Castes has increased equally, in the case of the income Gini, the increase has been more in the case of Forward Castes.

Table 1.3

Caste Groups	Income Gini		Consumption Gini	
	2004-05	2011-12	2004-05	2011-12
Forward caste	0.491	0.521	0.357	0.368
OBC	0.486	0.506	0.344	0.358
SC	0.436	0.464	0.329	0.340
ST	0.507	0.524	0.361	0.367

Source: Author's calculation from IHDS-I and II data

Source: (Joshi 2017)

However, since data cannot be totally decomposed, the Theil index is used to present a more vivid picture of the between-group and within-group inequality.

Table 1.4

Theil Index	Income		Consumption Expenditure	
	Within-caste	Between-caste	Within-caste	Between-caste
2004-05	0.451	0.053	0.222	0.025
2011-12	0.497	0.042	0.243	0.022

Source: Author's calculation from IHDS-I and II data.

Source: (Joshi 2017)

The Theil Coefficient presents a different story with respect to inequality in the caste structure. With respect to both income and consumption expenditure, the Scheduled Castes are catching up with the Forward Castes, as suggested by a fall in the Theil coefficient. However, between the two rounds of IHDS, the author’s calculation suggests that within-group inequality has increased. This means that there is unequal access to opportunities within a caste group as well and as a result, inequality within each caste is rising. This reaffirms the idea of Robert Merton’s Reference Theory, as the data suggests that within a caste group, a particular social group, with access to opportunities, has started to emulate the upper caste groups and their rise is accompanied by economic power and social clout as a result of which their access to opportunities increases as compared to other members of the caste. As a result, within caste inequality is rising.

Table 1.5

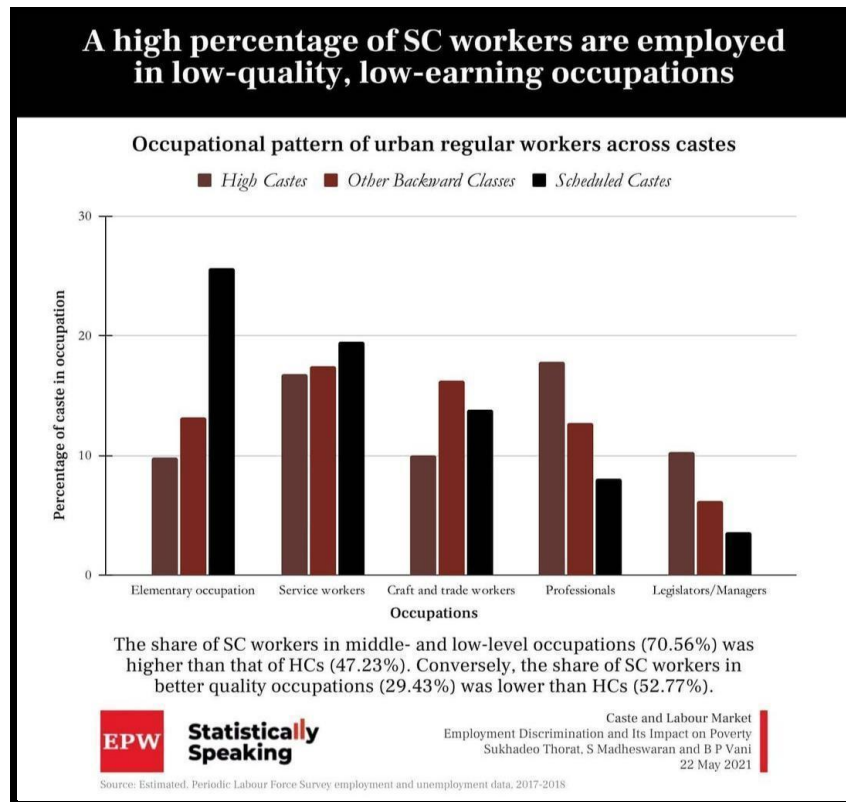
Log Household Adjusted Income	2004-05			2011-12		
	Robust Coefficient	Standard Error	P>z	Robust Coefficient	Standard Error	P>z
Overall						
Non-SC	10.309	0.032	0.000	10.529	0.029	0.000
SC	10.014	0.029	0.000	10.354	0.027	0.000
difference	0.295	0.017	0.000	0.175	0.013	0.000
explained	0.198	0.012	0.000	0.145	0.008	0.000
unexplained	0.097	0.014	0.000	0.031	0.011	0.007
Explained						
Highest Education	0.158	0.009	0.000	0.118	0.007	0.000
Urban	0.040	0.007	0.000	0.027	0.004	0.000
Unexplained						
Highest Education	0.147	0.013	0.000	0.194	0.013	0.000
Urban	-0.002	0.013	0.869	-0.012	0.010	0.253
_cons	-0.047	0.016	0.004	-0.152	0.018	0.000

Source: Author’s calculation from IHDS-I and II data

Source: Inequality in India (Joshi, 2017)

While the overall inequality between different caste groups has decreased over the years, the Theil and Gini coefficients do not explain the reason behind this closing of the gap. Therefore, the data is decomposed further using the Oaxaca-Blinder technique. This suggests that the overall difference in income between non-SC and SC in 2004-05 was about 30%. Out of this difference, about 20% was explained by factors of education and urbanisation, which are generally seen as engines of mobility, whereas about 9% was due to unexplained factors. In 2011-12, we see that this gap has decreased from about 30% to about 18% and the share of explained factors in this gap is about 15% and the share of unexplained factors is about 3%. This suggests that the two factors- education and urbanisation (considered to be the explanatory factors)- have helped in closing the gap between the Scheduled Castes and Non-Scheduled Castes.

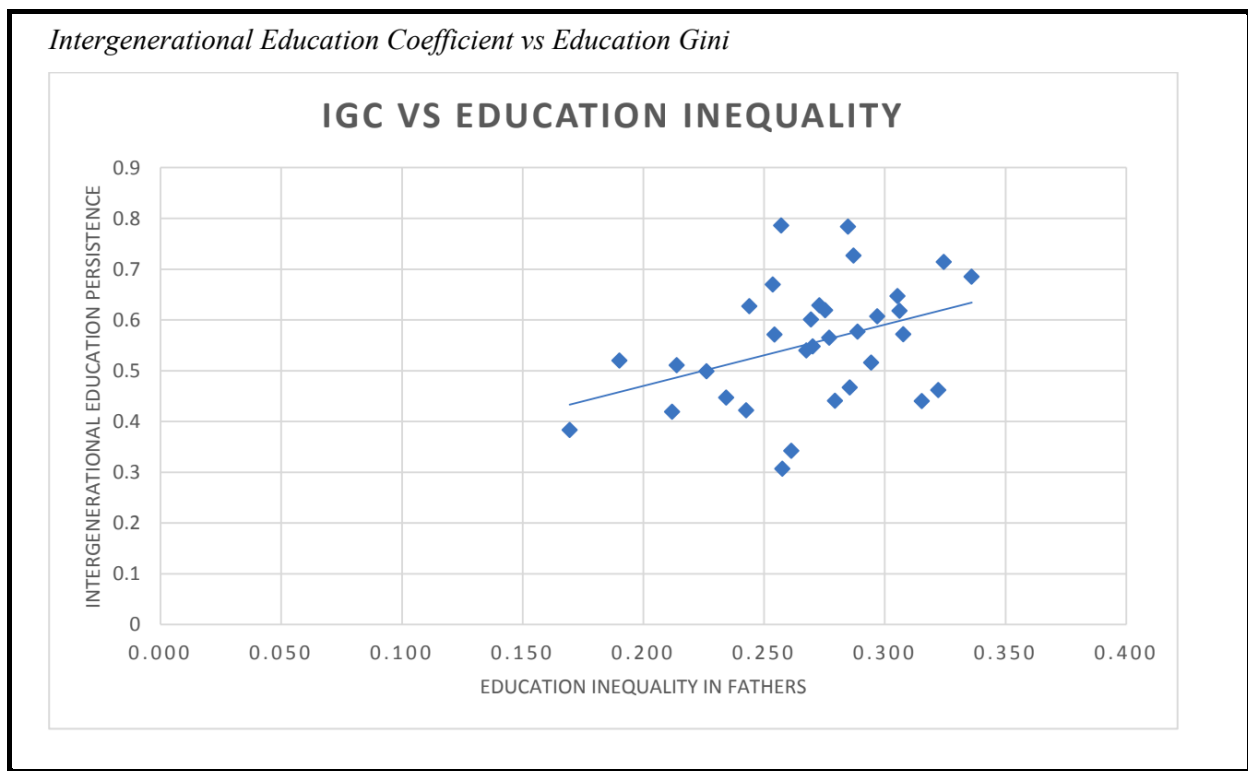
Table 1.6



Source: (Thorat, Madheswaran, and Vani, 2021)

However, data (Thorat, Madheswaran, and Vani 2021) also suggests another side of the story. While there has definitely been upward socioeconomic mobility for the Scheduled Castes, they continue to dominate lower occupations and their presence in traditionally elite professions such as legislators, etc. remain abysmally low in comparison with other caste groups. As the quality of occupation rises, the presence of Scheduled Caste workers in comparison with higher caste workers in that particular occupation decreases.

Table 1.7



Source: (Krishnan, 2018)

The study of educational inequality also plays a very important role in understanding theories of caste inequality. Educational inequality refers to the unequal distribution of academic resources such as availability of faculty, school facilities, education levels of the previous generation, purchasing power of additional books, and other factors, which, though happen to be beyond the control of the children, but still continue to affect their educational outcomes. A study (Krishnan,

2018) suggests that the Great Gatsby Curve for education is true in the Indian Case. In those Indian States where there is high educational inequality during father's time, by implication, it becomes difficult for the son to rise up the ladder. Therefore, the Great Gatsby Curve, in essence, makes a strong case against the common narrative of "meritocracy and credentialism" used to oppose reservations. It suggests that reservations and other policy actions such as affirmative action are important for the upliftment of these groups and for fostering conditions conducive to their upward mobility. Also interesting to note is that while the Great Gatsby Curve is true for India, in the sample of this research, the sons were more educated than their fathers. I hypothesise that the reservations in educational institutions have provided a great impetus to increasing the education levels of the latter generation as compared to their former generations, and hence, the difference in the sample despite the Great Gatsby curve being true for the Indian States.

6.0 Conclusion

The Caste System plays a very important role in the lives of people. For some, it acts as a structural barrier while for others, it acts as a catalyst for progress.

To increase the socioeconomic mobility of Scheduled Castes, firstly it is important to eliminate the prejudices about reservations. As has been shown above through empirical evidence and theoretical arguments, the opposition against reservation is not anti-reservation, rather it is anti-caste. In fact, the upper caste has no problem if the criterion for reservation is substituted from caste to economic backwardness. In a modern Welfare State, the strongest and most effective tool yet to tackle caste-based discrimination is affirmative action. And India, like most of the other countries, faces opposition to such policies due to misplaced antagonisms like "low productivity, less deserving, opportunity snatching" etc. which have been methodologically busted in this paper. The government should introduce active awareness programs for eliminating caste distinctions as well as promoting the reality of reservations so that the opposition against reservations can be reduced.

The government should also re-assess the implementation of its policies since most of them on paper seem to be extremely effective but are not effective enough when implemented. For instance, the SC-ST Prevention Of Atrocities Act: while it is an air-tight policy of the Indian Government, people continue to suffer severely from discrimination and many Scheduled Castes are victims of incidents where the discrimination is indirect and ‘due to reasons other than caste’. In a judgment passed in 2018, a two judge bench of the Supreme Court of India ordered the removal of certain provisions of the SC-ST Prevention of Atrocities Act on the grounds that it was being used to ‘perpetuate casteism’ and ‘blackmail innocent citizens and public servants.’ The order prohibited aspects such as “immediate arrest of public servants” from the act and also included provisions such as filing for an anticipatory bail (Johari, 2018). However, according to public intellectuals like Sukhadeo Thorat, most of these ‘fabricated cases’ under the SC-ST Act already suffer from weak investigation and relatively easier means of manipulating evidence such as medical autopsies. Many times, these scheduled castes are overwhelmed by facing an increasingly complex judicial system which requires heavy financial investments. At such times, they place their faith in the local politicians, who according to them, are their true ‘messiah’. However, these politicians are often the ones to disappoint them the most. In one case, a Dalit rape victim in Rajasthan was forced to change her testimony by their local leader, as he had arranged for an informal out of court ‘settlement’ between him and the accused party, which would result in a hefty payment to the politician (Fuchs, 2018). Therefore, the government not only needs to revamp its implementation structure to avoid such incidents, it also needs to lay down comprehensive mechanisms in addition to the law implemented for their protection to avoid the influence of capital and institutions of caste in the judicial redressal mechanism. By reducing the incidence of such acts, the State can effectively curtail the structural disadvantage that the Scheduled Castes face at every step in their life.

As for the widening economic inequality within the Scheduled Castes, the State can withdraw financial support from those SC groups that are economically sound due to stable income, and allocate these resources to those who need it more, thereby strengthening the economic support provided by the State to support these marginalised groups.

There is also a need to have an affirmative action policy in employment in the private sector. Employment preference for SC is not on the agenda of the current affirmative action policy of the private sector. The private sector should give some thought to ensure adequate representation to the SC in their workforce to make it more inclusive and non-discriminatory. Given the high discrimination in high-level jobs in the private sector, it needs to take some steps to ensure due share to the SC in high-level posts in the private sector. Similarly, the public sector is not free from discrimination in employment and wages. Therefore, labour market reforms in public sector employment are also necessary. (Thorat, Madheswaran, and Vani, 2021)

As the data suggests, while the Scheduled Castes have been redistributed upward, they continue to dominate “lower-level occupations” and as the level of occupation rises, their domination in the category decreases. One of the reasons provided for this is that in the government, lower-level jobs are outsourced to private sector firms who have a prejudice in employing Scheduled Castes for such kinds of jobs. Therefore, the State needs to actively fight against this mindset of the private sector and formulate policies to curtail this kind of indirect discrimination against the Scheduled Caste in the labour market.

As mentioned earlier, the Great Gatsby curve is evidence of low intergenerational mobility in India. Therefore, the government needs to introduce more policies at the primary education level to increase the student enrolment ratio and provide additional support at tertiary levels of education to ensure that students belonging to backward castes are able to continue their education and fight against the systematic credentialism which denies them better job opportunities in the first place.

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