

Original Article

Employment Status of SC and ST Women in India

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Abstract - In the past few decades, SCs and STs have faced social exclusion and discrimination in society in accessing various opportunities due to their low social status. They also have very limited access to employment opportunities due to their caste barriers. Women in these two groups face a double disadvantage due to their lower status compared to males and the social stigma attached to them as belonging to the deprived section. Regarding occupational status, they also have a very low position compared to males. In this context, the paper presents SCs and STs Women's employment status in Indian society by analysing the annual PLFS report for 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20, 2020-21. The study found extreme gender inequality among SCs and STs. Findings show that in comparison to SCs and STs Men, women in these groups have limited participation in employment resources. This research also critically analyses some policies and programmes for disadvantaged women and reflects on some of the suggestive measures.

Keywords - Employment, Inequality, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Gender.

1. Introduction

In India, inequality in scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) could be best understood through the exclusion and discrimination that they have faced since historical times (Deshpande 2011). They face social exclusion due to their inferior social position in society. SCs are socially excluded groups that suffer from untouchability, whereas STs are physically excluded groups identified with primitive traits, distinct cultures, geographical isolation, and general backwardness (Mutatkar 2005). Women in these two groups experience even more deprivation due to their lower gender and caste status. They have been subjected to oppression due to low education and few skill endowments, which either push them out of the labour market or confine them to low-paid menial work (Madheswaran and Attewell 2007; Thorat et al. 2010, Deshpande 2007; Liddle and Joshi 1986, Deshpande and Sharma 2013, Neetha 2014).

A Global Gender Gap Report found that economic opportunities for women are very limited in developing countries such as India (35.4%), Pakistan (32.7), Yemen (27.3), Syria (24.9), and Iraq (22.7) (World Economic Forum 2020). The report identified several factors causing the gender gap, such as the burden of motherhood and other household work. The study also shows some stereotypes in the context of earnings and promotion opportunities for women (Deen 2020).

In this context, the paper tries to focus on SCs and STs female work participation in the labour market in different sectors. It highlights different dimensions and the trends of gender inclusion and exclusion in employment.

Particularly, the paper's objectives focussed on three aspects of SC and ST.

- To analyse the gender difference between SC and ST in all sectors like agriculture, industry and service sector
- To analyse the difference in female participation between SC and ST.
- To critically analyse the measures and steps taken by the Govt. for SCs, and STs to achieve their equal status in the labour market.

2. Data Sources

The study has taken PLFS reports of the last four year data, i.e. 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 and analysed SCs and STs male and female participation (for the age group 15 and above) in rural-urban and different sectors like agriculture, industry, and service sector. Besides PLFS reports, various government reports are used to give a comprehensive scenario of SC and ST female workforce participation in India.

3. Gender Inequality in Employment Participation

Since the last decade in India, women have had greater access to education and employment, but this facility is only available for upper-class women (Karlekar 1982; Liddle & Joshi 1986). But the major part of the female population in India still suffers from disadvantages (Mukhopadhyay 1984).

Gender inequality has attracted the attention of many big organisations like the ILO and World Bank, and it remains a goal of sustainable development goals (SDGs 5) to promote gender inequality. The study also shows that while the gender gap across politics, education, health, and work has narrowed, the economic gender gap has widened among women and men (Global Gender Pay Report 2020). The report identified several factors of gender difference,



such as women being more engaged in part-time to carry the burden of motherhood and other work, evidence of discrimination, stereotyping, and biases in the earnings and promotion opportunities for women (Deen 2020). The most extreme deprivation exists among women in the scheduled caste and tribe populations.

4. Trends, Patterns and Performances of Female and Male Workforce among SCs and STS

As per Census 2011, the work participation rate for women is 25.51 per cent. In the case of rural, it is 35.1 percent and in urban, 17.5 percent, respectively (Census 2011). While the overall Female Labour Force Participation rate has been decreased from 31.1 per cent to 27.4 per cent (Census 2011)

Various studies argued that different sectors in India, such as the primary sector (agriculture) and tertiary sector, are progressing toward feminisation. It shows that female participation has increased in these sectors, while the manufacturing industry shows very limited women's participation (Neetha 2014).

Table-1 shows the actual work population of SCs and STs. The table shows that both male and female work participation has increased from the last years to the current years (2017-18 to 2020-21). A significant percent of female participation has increased. In the case of ST females, it has increased to 7.9 percent, and their rural and urban percentages increased to 14.2 and urban 5, respectively. In the case of SC females, it has increased to

7.9 percent, and rural and urban females increased to 9.3 and 3.1 percent, respectively, in the period 2017-18 to 2020-21.

However, the actual male and female work population shows higher gender differences. SC female has 29.4, and ST female has 17.4 gender differences. The higher difference for SC females has been seen in urban that is 35, and ST female is 32 percent in the 2020-21 period.

4.1. Work Participation among STs

Table-2 analyses the total work participation of males and females in three sectors- agriculture, industry, and service. The table above shows the total male and female participation in rural and urban areas. The total work participation of males and females has increased to 2.3 and 17 percent from 2017-18 to 2020-21. In all sectors, while female participation has increased to its previous year, particularly from 2017-18, the gender difference between males and females has been seen in all the sectors: agriculture (4.8 percent difference), industry (12.3 percent), service sector (9 percent) in 2020-21. The overall picture shows that more Scheduled Tribe females are engaged in industry and service sectors. If we see their rural and urban participation, a clear gender disparity can be seen in male and female participation.

The comparative analysis of Scheduled Tribe females in rural and urban in 2020-21 shows that more rural females (48.5 percent) participate in agricultural activity. In urban, more participate in service sectors, i.e. 16 percent.

Table 1. Work Participation of SCs and STs in Four periods

Social Group	Rural			Urban			Rural+Urban		
	Male	Female	Persons	male	female	Persons	male	female	Persons
PLFS 2020-21									
ST	56.8	41.2	49.1	54	22	38.3	56.5	39.1	47.9
SC	54.4	26.7	40.9	55.3	20.3	37.9	54.6	25.2	40.2
All	54.9	27.1	41.3	54.9	17	36.3	54.9	24.2	39.8
PLFS 2019-20									
ST	55.2	37.3	46.4	52.3	23.6	38.2	54.9	35.7	45.5
SC	53.1	23.7	38.7	54.1	19.2	36.8	53.3	22.7	38.3
All	53.8	24	39.2	54.1	16.8	35.9	53.9	21.8	38.2
PLFS 2018-19									
ST	54.8	28	41.6	48.6	15.8	32.3	54.1	26.7	40.6
SC	51.6	18.9	35.6	51.8	16.8	34.8	51.6	18.4	35.4
All	52.1	19	35.8	52.7	14.5	34.1	52.3	17.6	35.3
PLFS 2017-18									
ST	53.8	27	40.8	49.9	17	33.9	53.4	25.9	40
SC	52.3	17.4	35.2	52.5	17.2	35.2	52.4	17.3	35.2
All	51.7	17.5	35	53	14.2	33.9	52.1	16.5	34.7

Source: Annual PLFS Report 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20

Table 2. Work Participation of Scheduled Tribe by Sector Percentage distribution of workers according to usual status (ps+ss) for 15 & above age-group for STs in total, rural and urban

Sector	rural			urban			rural+urban		
	male	female	persons	male	female	persons	male	female	persons
2020-21									
Agriculture	51.1	45.8	48.5	5.6	5.6	5.6	45.8	41	43.5
Industry	16.9	5.6	11.2	26	6.7	16.5	18	5.7	11.9
Service	11	4.5	7.8	39	16	27.7	14.3	5.8	10.1
All	79.1	55.8	67.5	71	28.2	49.8	78.1	53	65.4
2019-20									
Agriculture	53.2	42	47.5	6.2	5.2	5.7	47.4	38	42.4
Industry	15.1	4.7	9.9	27	8	17.5	16.6	5.1	10.8
Service	10.3	4	7.2	37	17.4	27.1	13.6	5.7	9.6
All	78.5	50.7	64.6	70	30.6	50.4	77.5	48	62.8
2018-19									
Agriculture	49.8	32.1	41	4.3	2.3	3.3	44.8	29	36.8
Industry	16.5	3.6	10.1	25	5.3	14.9	17.5	3.8	10.7
Service	10.7	3.3	7	37	12.5	24.5	13.5	4.3	9
All	77	38.9	58.2	66	20.1	42.7	75.8	37	56.4
2017-18									
Agriculture	52.6	31.6	42.2	6.3	4.5	5.4	47.1	28	37.8
Industry	15	3.1	9.1	25	5.2	15.1	16.1	3.3	9.8
Service	9.3	2.8	6.1	37	12.8	25	12.6	4	8.3
All	76.9	37.4	57.3	68	22.5	45.5	75.8	36	55.9

Source: Annual PLFS Report 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20

4.2. Work Participation among SCs

Table-3 shows the total work participation of males and females belonging to Scheduled castes in three sectors- agriculture, industry, and service. It shows the same trend of increasing participation of females in three sections. Male participation has increased to 2.9 percent, whereas female participation increased to 9.7 percent respectively from 2017-18 to 2020-21.

So, female participation is significantly higher than male. However, if we see sector-wise, females lag behind males, such as in agriculture 8.7 difference, in industry 19.8 percent difference, and in the service sector 13 percent difference in 2020-21. The rural and urban trends of gender difference also show the same result in all sectors.

The employment status of ST and SC in different categories such as self-employed, salaried work, and casual labour; the study found that ST females are engaged more in self-employed activity. They share 62.9 percent more than male, who shares only 53.5 percent. But female has a lower rate in the case of salaried wage and casual labour category. The gender disparity is 5.2 percent and 4.2 percent in regular wage and casual activity, respectively (PLFS Report 2019-20).

5. Data Analysis

To conclude, the study found that though SCs and STs female's work participation has increased progressively in succeeding years, the gender inequality between males and females is very high. Particularly, in rural and urban, the female has low participation compared to male (see table-2 and 3). The same gender difference has also been observed sector-wise (agricultural, industry, and service) (see Table-2 and 3).

Women's participation is high in self-employed occupations, while they have low participation in regular wage and casual labour categories. The less Participation of women in regular wage and casual labour categories shows that women are still far away from mainstream occupations. Due to the lack of opportunities for women to work, they prefer to work as a helper in household activities and other self-help activities (PLFS Report 2019-20).

Briefly, it could be seen that though SC and ST female work participation has increased since last years in different sectors, the higher gender disparity between males and females in work participation is still a major challenge for their development.

Table 3. Work Participation of Scheduled Caste by Sector Percentage distribution of workers according to usual status (ps+ss) for 15 & above age-group for SCs

Sector	rural			urban			rural+urban		
	male	female	persons	male	female	persons	male	female	persons
2020-21									
Agriculture	37.2	26.1	31.7	3.5	3	3.3	29.4	20.7	25.1
Industry	24.9	5.9	15.5	29.8	7.5	18.6	26.1	6.3	16.3
Service	13.9	3.9	9	38.9	15.6	27.3	19.7	6.7	13.2
All	76	35.9	56.2	72.2	26.1	49.2	75.2	33.6	54.6
2019-20									
Agriculture	36.2	23.1	29.5	36.2	2.2	2.6	28.6	18.3	23.5
Industry	23.8	5.4	14.7	23.8	7.1	17.6	24.8	5.8	15.4
Service	14.4	3.9	9.2	14.4	15.8	28.3	20.4	6.7	13.6
All	74.5	32.4	53.6	74.5	25.1	48.5	73.8	30.7	52.5
2018-19									
Agriculture	33	17.6	25.4	2.9	1.8	2.3	26.2	14.1	20.2
Industry	24.4	5.3	15	29.1	5.9	17.7	25.5	5.4	15.6
Service	15.3	3.3	9.4	37.5	14.2	26	20.3	5.7	13.1
All	72.7	26.1	49.7	69.5	21.9	46	72	25.2	48.9
2017-18									
Agriculture	36.2	17.1	26.9	3.6	2	2.8	28.8	13.6	21.4
Industry	23.1	4	13.7	29.8	7.2	18.6	24.6	4.7	14.9
Service	13.4	3.1	8.4	37.4	13.7	25.7	18.8	5.6	12.3
All	72.7	24.2	48.9	70.8	22.9	47.1	72.3	23.9	48.5

Source: Annual PLFS Report 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20

To resolve the issue of the low employment status of SCs and STs women, initiatives taken by Govt. to improve their work participation in the labour market, such as skill development programmes, improvement in literacy, and so on.

6. Policy Suggestions and Recommendations

Several initiatives are taken by the government to reduce poverty and increase employment opportunities for SCs and STs females.

According to scholarships, gender inequality could be reduced if it could detect the historical pattern of inequality (Barbosa et al. 2017). There are also some schemes taken to improve their economic status. They are discussed in the following.

- To empower women workers, various training programs have been given pay attention, for instance-

Initiated taken, by Dattopant Thengadi National Board for Workers Education & Development.

- Enhance skill development strategies for Women Workers.
- Set up Educational Complexes in tribal areas to improve the literacy level of STs women.
- Wage Employment Programmes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) act as a step towards employment generation in rural India (Dev 2006).

Besides these, some initiatives could be taken to increase women's employment participation, such as increasing women's participation in male-dominated jobs. Their participation could also increase by supporting women's caring labour and infrastructure such as home health aides for the elder and disabled people, teachers' aides in classrooms, additional aides in nursing homes, and supplementary educational aides to support adults (Institute for women policy Research 2011).

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