

Jayashree Ambewadikar

**EXPOSING FORMS AND EXTENT OF DISCRIMINATION
OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN RURAL INDIA:
A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

Introduction

Almost all societies in the world are stratified and the Indian society is no exception to this. It is stratified along with differential institutional arrangements, beliefs, customs, religions, etc. In India, the Hindu social system is rigidly stratified and divided into numerous castes and sub-castes, placed in a ritual or religious hierarchy with graded inequality. Hence, the hierarchised social stratification produces innumerable forms and degrees of injustice, inequality, discrimination and exclusion of certain castes and sub-castes in the caste system or the Hindu social system. The uniqueness of discrimination practiced in the caste system can also be seen as based on the pursuits of occupations, which are clearly categorised as 'clean' and 'unclean' or 'pure' and 'impure'. The clean occupations like performing *poojas* (religious rites and rituals), teaching, and even owning and cultivation of land enjoy higher or even highest status and prestige, and are treated as superior, whereas menial occupations like sweeping, tanning and making shoes, washing clothes, cutting hair, etc. are considered as unclean and polluting ones; therefore, the people associated with these are assigned very low prestige and indignified status. The association of a sizable section of population with the latter type of occupations along with their different types of belief systems, customs, rituals, etc., since the earlier time, has resulted into keeping physical and social distance with and practice of untouchability against them by others. Thus, such sections of population, regarded low castes in the caste hierarchy have always depended on the upper castes for their survival. Moreover, they had no right to property and education in the past. Consequently, these castes have suffered from various socio-economic and cultural disabilities till date. These castes, legally called Scheduled Castes (SCs), form a sizable portion (nearly 18 %) of India's total population.

Since the Untouchables (ex-untouchables) or Dalits or SCs in Indian society were denied certain basic rights since the ancient times, they have

remained economically, socially and educationally backward even today. They are socially discriminated and are deprived of traditionally owning land, participating actively in political activities, entering into trade and business, receiving education particularly higher technical and professional one and entering into intellectual articulation of a social phenomenon. Their cultural and economic exploitation still continues, creating the trap of poverty among them.

Because of the fundamental disparities between the SCs and other castes and communities, the Constitution of India has recognised the need for distinct and special provisions related to their protection, welfare and development. Various policies and programmes, formulated as per the constitutional provisions, have been enacted and implemented to reduce their discrimination and poverty, and to include them to participate in almost all spheres of life. Yet, there is still continuation of their discrimination from indulgence in the various avenues. The traditional socio-economic arrangement in rural areas is still very rigid and the intensity of their discrimination is also quite high; but as the pattern of social intercourse in the urban and metropolitan centres is somewhat secular and enforced by the economic and power position and lifestyles, their discrimination is minute and qualified ones. In other words, they are included there, with qualified discrimination, in social, cultural, political, educational, civil, employment and economic spheres. It is a known fact that they are employed there in the secular work sphere and a small section of them are also employed in the bureaucratic and allied jobs, but a large majority of them are engaged as labourer in *safai* (cleaning), and other degraded and menial jobs to fulfil the needs and requirements of the dominant castes and classes in urban areas. There are prejudices directed towards the SC individuals, students, politicians, bureaucrats, and also the SCs as a whole. As the various related policies are half-heartedly implemented and are not much effective, the huge majority of the Scheduled Castes again remain discriminated from their full and active participation in the meaningful socio-economic and political spheres. Thus, they are forced to face discrimination, exploitation, poverty and, in a way, social exclusion both in rural and urban areas.

Keeping in view the differential forms and degrees of discrimination or social discrimination of the Scheduled Castes or the Dalits in both rural and urban areas in various regions in the country, we have concentrated, in this paper, to empirically examine these in a particular region - Marathwada in rural Maharashtra, which is regarded as one of the economically developed states in India. It is, however, imperative to mention that, unlike the largely individual-centric western societies, discrimination in Indian society, particularly in rural areas, are group or caste or community-centric wherein the entire group or caste or community has remained the victims of these for centuries together. Since the present paper is a synoptic view of a larger study,

we have tried here to understand the conceptual and theoretical orientations about discrimination in general that in rural setting in particular. In other words, we have attempted, in this paper, to examine various aspects of the 'caste-based discrimination' practiced against the Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Dalits in rural areas and investigated their practice in the forms of denial of social, cultural, civil, political and economic rights of the SCs. Besides examining how the forms of and the extent to which their caste-based discrimination have been causing lack of their earning income and acquiring capital assets (such as agricultural land, access to employment in private and public sectors), their access to social sectors (educational opportunities, health, housing, food security, clothing, water, electricity), active political participation and availing the benefits of other amenities like post office, telephone, road, etc., we have, finally, tried to enquire into the caste-based discrimination in the studied rural areas.

Research Issues

Before we look briefly at the areas where we have located the present study for the purpose of empirical data, it would be necessary to have a look at the rural areas in general wherein a large number of the Dalits or Scheduled Castes are located even today. Generally speaking, Indian society is divided into a number of hierarchically arranged strata, i.e., groupings, which are more clearly visible in rural areas. These groupings have assumed numerous historical and cultural variations. It is clear that the primary unit in Hindu society is caste. So, the rights and privileges (or the lack of them) of individual are on account of his/her being member of a particular caste. It means that the caste ranking is based on superiority and inferiority, with the graded inequality (Ambedkar, 1987: 320-326). This also reduces the opportunities, especially privileges and rights, of its members as it goes down in the hierarchy of ranking of castes placed in the caste system. In caste system, even the socio-economic, cultural, civil and political rights of each individual caste are traditionally fixed. The unacceptability of fixed rights as regulatory mechanism, provided through social arrangements, social interactions and social relations, etc., leads to social ostracism through social and economic penalties. Therefore, "the untouchables (the Scheduled Castes) located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy have much less economic and social rights" (ibid). Since they had no right to property and education in the past, as stated earlier, these castes or communities and their members have suffered from various socio-economic and cultural disabilities till date. Thus, caste system has evolved the negation of not only equality and freedom, but also of the basic human rights, particularly of the Scheduled Castes. This is more sharply felt in rural areas since the peculiar characteristics of caste system are still alive there in practical sense and could be observed through naked eyes, though the caste system undoubtedly works, in a subtle manner, in urban areas also. This simply means that discrimination or social discrimination, in its various forms and degrees,

as well as its practice is well-entrenched in the caste system itself. Therefore, we have explored empirically and analysed within the theoretical framework of the caste system itself.

Anyway, due to such sorry state of caste system in rural areas, a sizeable number of Scheduled Castes have been migrating, both temporarily and permanently, to the nearby towns and cities. Their plights can be expressed in the words of Ambedkar who says that, "The Indian village is not a single social unit". Stating about its social composition of touchables (majority living inside the village) and untouchables (minorities living outside the village), he further said that, "in every village the touchables have code which the untouchables are required to follow. This code lays down the acts of omissions and commissions which the touchables treat as offences (Ambedkar, 1989: 20-21) on the part of the untouchable and Scheduled Castes.

But both the quantitative and qualitative types of changes have been taking place in the villages. The Scheduled Castes or Dalits are seen engaged in the struggle with the upper and landowning castes. This transformation is so because of change in the interdependency of castes and also a tendency among the SCs to find common causes in the economic or political interests (Marriott, 1959). Today, the social as well as physical structure of villages has further changed along with change in the relationship between the (SCs) and non-SCs. In villages, discrimination or differential treatment, ascribed by non-SCs to the SCs, is practiced in variation. Yet, this variation is more blatant for the poor SCs who face discrimination in a rude or crude form and the better-off SCs face it in a subtle form. Anyway, the SCs as a whole are protesting now-a-days in villages against their discrimination or violation of rights. Since the state machinery like police, judiciary, hospital, etc., is administered by the non-SCs, the various government provisions meant for the SCs are less effective. Hence, discrimination against the SCs still continues, in one form or the other, causing their inability to participate effectively in various types of functioning of the village society.

More so, discrimination against the SCs in public as well as private spheres of life in villages is visualised in the form of their less or no access to infrastructures and services, social security, protection or physical safety, etc. More specifically, discrimination is experienced by the SCs in their access to owning land, trade and business, education and intellectual articulation, means of political empowerment, food security schemes, housing facilities, health services, public water sources, postal and telephone services, road transport, communication, etc (Shah, 2006). This leads to their social, cultural, economic and political exploitation. Thus, they remain socially, economically and politically marginalised and their marginalisation has further created the trap of poverty for them.

Because of the continued fundamental disparities between the SCs and non-SCs, the Constitution of India has recognised the need for enacting special

provisions related to protection, welfare and development of the SCs, as stated earlier. These provisions, covered under the positive discrimination policy, are implemented as corrective and ameliorative strategy, in the form of policies, programmes, laws, rules etc. for removing the cumulative disadvantage of the socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged SCs (and also the STs) and also bringing them at par with the rest of population. This positive discrimination has been initiated to provide them opportunities in social, civil, economic, political and cultural spheres, which were denied to them for centuries. But it is also evident by now that these positive measures are unable to fully emancipate the SCs from their past disadvantages and enable them to freely compete with others the non -SCs in all spheres of life. Interestingly, their caste occupation has become their identity or their caste-identity, which usually remains with them even if they change their occupations (or even religion). Hence, even economic opportunities or their access to economic opportunities remain stagnant for them and are unable to bring them out of poverty.

The various constitutional provisions and measures to overcome inequality, discrimination and poverty of the Dalits or Scheduled Castes have been implemented through the two-fold-strategies or measures, namely (a) anti-discriminatory or protective measures, and (b) developmental and empowering measures. Such policies vis-à-vis measures or interventions are legal enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, reservations or preferential measures in education, employment and political participation through their membership in Lower Legislative Assembly, Parliament and local political bodies. In addition, measures have also been adopted to ensure food security, housing, civic amenities, etc. to them, which come as part of more than anti-poverty programmes (Thorat, 2004). More specifically, the constitutional and legislative mechanisms to reduce discrimination against the SCs are the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976 (amended version of the Untouchability Offences Act 1955), the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and the various land reform Acts. Right to Equality includes “the abolition of untouchability (Article 17), according to which untouchability is legally abolished and its practice, in any form, is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. Similarly, right against exploitation includes promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, and under the specific constitutional provision, “the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people of the Scheduled Castes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”.

Keeping in view the general frame of justice and equality, the Government of India has adopted a mechanism of the Special Component

Plan (now renamed as 'Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP) for economic empowerment of the SCs, which has certainly succeeded, to some extent, in its endeavour (Reports 2000-2001). Besides, it has initiated a number of Poverty Reduction Programmes (PRPs) like Public Distribution System (PDS), Small Farmers Development Programme (SFDP), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Programme (MFALP), National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Employment Assurance Scheme, and Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme. The Maharashtra government has also adopted a scheme called Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) for the eradication of poverty of the Dalits or Scheduled Castes of the State. The centrally sponsored Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY) and the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) have recently been renamed as the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) and the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). These programmes have definitely assisted the SCs, marginal and small farmers, agricultural labourers and artisans, besides others, with investment in minor irrigation, livestock purchases and alike through the grants and loans provided by the government at the subsidised interest rates. The Panchayat, a village level political organisation, has been made directly responsible for implementing the Poverty Reduction Programme (PRP). As mentioned above, the government has also evolved the schemes to improve access of the SCs to the public distribution of food, civic amenities like drinking water, housing, sanitation, electricity and approach road. Since the settlements of the SCs in rural areas are mostly segregated, often the civic amenities have failed to reach their localities. A special assistance is, therefore, provided to the state (under the Special Central Assistance of the Special Component Plan for the SCs) to ensure the supply of these amenities to the SCs.

Further, problems faced by the SC women occupy a special place in the government programmes. Therefore, in each of the programmes related to economic empowerment, educational development, etc., special focus is given to the SC women. Several 'credit-based subsidy projects', self-help groups, education projects, projects to reduce malnutrition, etc. are specifically designed and implemented for SC women. Despite the constitutional provisions and development schemes, the socio-economic status of the SCs in general and their women in particular has not improved in rural areas.

Being poor, the SCs generally live in the miserable condition and are marginalised, powerless and socially excluded. Further, there is caste-based discrimination in almost all spheres of life of the SC community. There is also a gap between the legislative provisions and their implementation, as stated earlier, causing poverty as well as continuation of discrimination and exploitation of the SCs. It is seen that poverty is also social and cultural along with its economic aspect. In fact, the policies and schemes have brought some changes among them, but the rate of improvement in their socio-economic

status has not been fast enough to reduce the absolute level of their socio-cultural discrimination and poverty. Thus, their discrimination is also both the cause and consequence of their poverty, *and all these have been examined* the help of data extracted from two villages in Maharashtra about which we mentioned in the section on study areas.

Theoretico-analytical Perspective

The relevant data collected from the study areas has been analysed in a particular theoretico-analytical perspective or framework evolved in the process. But before we spell what briefly its various properties are, it would be quite in order to explain the concepts of discrimination or social discrimination, which could easily be seen in or extracted from the empirical reality found therein. Although the concepts of discrimination, extracted from certain empirical situation or situations, have been standardised and generalised to apply in each and every situation, irrespective of time-frame, their meanings and applications could easily be understood in accordance with time and space. In other words, their meanings and applications would easily differ from region to region and from one time to the other. Anyway, this would get easily demonstrated in the analysis of our data. Here, it would be relevant to explain briefly the concept or conceptual tools used for extracting and analysing our empirical data.

Many studies, discussing caste system in India, have either sparsely or fully analysed the various forms of discrimination of Scheduled Castes in both rural and urban areas. Before analysing our empirical data, we have briefly reviewed below the available studies on these inter-related institutional phenomena, which have played crucial role(s) in the life chances of the Scheduled Castes both in the past and which they play even today.

The term used in the present paper is discrimination, which needs to be conceptualised here. Discrimination, generally speaking, is the differential treatment of a person given to another person or of people of one group or social category to that of another. It emanates from dislike on accounts of filth or impurity, differential habits, attitudes and behaviour patterns, values, etc. and gets rooted in perennial prejudice, hatred, institutional diversifications or divisions and so on. The form of discrimination in India, which has received more attention, is the caste or community based discrimination. Such discrimination is more subtle in urban than being blatant in rural areas, as stated earlier. There is a long history of the caste-based discrimination of Dalits or Scheduled Castes in various forms, including untouchability, practiced by people of the touchable castes or non-Dalits against them.

To understand the caste-based discrimination in India, Sharma (1974) has analysed stratification and inequality in India, both in present and past times, in the theoretical, structural and processual aspects, besides considering

the *varna*, caste, family and individual as units of social ranking. The nature and forms of social inequality among the SCs have also been discussed in the rural-agrarian and the urban-industrial contexts. However, according to Fuller (1997), there are diverse and changing understanding of caste and inequality. He articulates that there is no solution to ignore India's contemporary relations with its past. Ram (2008a) also has situated the institution of untouchability and the untouchables in the caste system, specifically in south India. More precisely, he has explained the existing social structure, change and mobility of the Scheduled Castes living in the South.

It is a fact that both the caste system and untouchability are found to be rigid in rural areas, compared to that in urban areas. But now, some changes are taking place in these in villages also, as stated earlier. According to Marriott (1955), these changes, for the untouchables or depressed castes groups, are seen in the form of their fight with the upper and landowning castes (see also Ram, 1998). These are also due to some modifications in the interdependency of the Scheduled and non-scheduled castes and in their tendency to find common causes in their economic or political interests. However, outside the common causes and interests, members of the dominant castes in villages generally abuse, beat and grossly underpay the non-dominant castes, including untouchables (Srinivas, 1987). Ram (2008b) also has discussed the nature and forms of social discrimination of Dalits in different regions of India. He has explained their assertions and movements in the existing socio-economic and political arrangement. In the same sequence, Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) say that the Untouchables or Scheduled Castes in villages are among the very bottom elements of Indian society in both status and economic terms. They suffer from subordination, discrimination and poverty in relation to public policy and the role of the State.

The SCs are marginal, especially in the economic sphere, compared to the non-SCs in rural India. According to Shah (2001), a vast majority of the SCs are have-nots, i.e., landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers and artisans. The reasons behind their being landless are related to their high percentage having weak resource position and also facing the discriminatory working of the land market, which reduce their access to purchase and leasing of agricultural land (Nanchariah, 2000). Similarly, in economic sphere as well, Dalits have ever been forced both directly or indirectly, even today to undertake the so-called 'traditional', 'unclean' occupations such as sweeping, scavenging or disposing of animal carcasses. This is because of the compulsions of traditional customs and the forbidding challenges of finding alternative employment opportunities. There is also differential treatment in various types of markets namely agricultural land, capital investment, employment, marketing consumer goods as well as the transactions conducted through the non-market channels. This has created their less or lower access to the resources like agricultural land and non-land capital assets (and/or low

productivity of these assets), higher underemployment, lower daily wages, particularly in non-farm activities, compared to non-SCs (Thorat, 2004). It has also been said that there is no occupational mobility as there is lack of job-choice for the SC individuals (Srinivas 1964, Beteille 1965).

Thus, the low occupational status, low wages and poverty among the SCs are to be considered the main impediment of their educational attainment. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, through its Reports for 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, has tried to comprehend the SCs' educational status. It affirms that they are deprived and discriminated in educational field, causing their high drop-out rate. The SCs' drop-out rate during 1990-91 was as high as 49.35 per cent at the primary level, 67.77 per cent at the middle level, and 77.65 per cent at the secondary level. This was largely the case in rural areas. The other reason for drop-out is the location of schools. Jeebanlata Salam (2004) says that the schools, in many areas, are situated in localities inhabited by dominant castes, which are hostile to students belonging to the lower castes. Members of the high-ranked castes groups and the dominant actors of villages often see education for the working and labouring castes as waste and also a threat. This denial is linked to the popular perception that members of the low ranked castes are incapable of being educated. If they are educated, they pose a threat to the village hierarchies and power relations. Apart from these, the other discriminatory behaviour also causes problems in receiving education. The discrimination by teachers, peer groups and the larger society places them to low self-esteem, severely affects their performance in school and causes them to drop-out in large numbers. For the poor SC students, the Mid-Day Meal is an incentive to attend the schools. But Thorat and Lee (2005) say that there are reports of massive scale exclusion and discriminatory treatment in operation of the Mid-Day Meal in schools. This concludes that the SC children, attending lower levels of schooling, remain at greater risk of being poor and deprived ones.

In the health sphere also, the SCs are having low access to the nutritional and health services due to their poverty, illiteracy and low educational level, and discriminatory practices. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has also found that there is significant difference between the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and non-Scheduled Castes children in the infant mortality, child mortality and children under-five mortality rates. According to NFHS (1998-99), more than three-fourth of the SCs children are anaemic, and about half of them suffer from malnutrition and under-nutrition. It is further revealed that 56 per cent of the SC women are anaemic. Rege (1995) also has stated that the plight of the SC women in rural areas is more of concern regarding their serious health problems because 80 per cent of them are engaged as agricultural labourers. Further, discrimination in all other spheres is due to the fact that untouchability is not the fast fading remnant of our 'feudal' past or contemporary reality (Shah 2006).

The caste-based discrimination in social sphere, by way of differential social relations and interactions, is also extended to the cultural, civic and political spheres. In cultural sphere, there is intolerance to worship the common deities by Dalits, performing common religious rituals and rites or to participate in festivals along with non-Dalits. As stated earlier, discrimination is experienced by the Dalits or SCs even in their access to public services related to educational opportunities, health services, public water sources, postal services, participation in the village political institutions, etc. (see also Shah, 2006, Jogdand, 2000). It had the residual impact on denial of right to property, employment, education, political participation and social life in the past and has also the same in the present time. Thus, the Dalits face discrimination in both the public and private spheres of life and also in their participation in various socio-economic organisations (Ram, 2008a).

In almost all parts of rural areas, there is stifling environment for Dalits concerning discrimination. They face restrictions in various forms, ranging from social and economic boycott to physical violence or atrocities, in their attempts to secure even their human rights and lawful entitlements. As stated earlier, there are discriminatory treatments against them by public institutions like police and judiciary in the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in delivering of social justice to them due to the fact that these are not independent of caste prejudices and the powerful and influential interests. Even the state monitoring system is marked with inadequacy to enforce the provisions of equal opportunity and punish the guilty. The more worrisome aspect of the state organs is their discriminatory attitudes that make the State more of a threat than a support in the fight against caste discrimination. A fact cannot be denied that the state has evolved the strategies to overcome the discrimination, which also include the policy interventions such as the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in favour of the target groups, provision of reservation or preferential treatment, general empowering measures and anti-poverty programmes, as stated earlier. These policies and programmes have brought some positive changes, but the rate of improvement in socio-economic condition of the Dalits has not been fast enough to reduce the absolute level of denial of various opportunities to the Scheduled Castes and the gap between them and non-scheduled castes in different spheres of life.

The continuing discrimination of the SCs in high magnitude indicates that it is often a far difficult challenge rather than the formulation and half-hearted implementation of the anti-poverty policy or programmes. The social and cultural sources of discrimination in social, economic, civil and political spheres, including low self-esteem, stigma and untouchability, are rooted in the social structural arrangement and institutions of the caste system, which cover not only the private but also spill over to the public domains managed by the State. Fighting discrimination, therefore, calls for additional policies,

complementing anti-poverty and economic development programmes, for equal rights and social inclusion of the disadvantaged SCs. Hence, it is not out of context to mention here that the theoretical orientation about discrimination or social discrimination in Indian society is group or caste or community-centric rather than individual-centric. In other words, individual belonging particularly to the Dalit or Scheduled Caste is discriminated against not because of his or her demerits, but that of his or her caste or community background.

Study Areas and the Data

For the purpose of this paper, the Maharashtra state has been selected, as mentioned above. We have done this because of the fact that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar made major contributions in initiating social movement, particularly among the SCs in this state. Secondly, Maharashtra has the historical background of awareness among the SCs that has led to their social assertion and the resultant inclusion in one or the other aspects of life.

The Maharashtra state has five regions, i.e., Western Maharashtra or Desh, Marathawada, Konkan, Vidharbha or Berar and Khandesh or Northern Maharashtra. These regions show a wide disparity in their socio-economic development. For instance, the western Maharashtra, apart from Mumbai and Pune, is the most advanced region, compared to the Vidharbha region which is the most backward region in the State. The western Maharashtra is also socially and economically as well as industrially developed region, whereas the Marathawada region is the developing one. The advanced or developed regions also dominate the politics and bureaucracy of the State. This has led, time and again, to resentment among the people from the backward regions like Vidarbha and Konkan and developing region like Marathwada.

The study has been carried out in the developing region of Marathawada in Maharashtra, as stated earlier. For the purpose of data collection, three-stages sampling has been adopted. The first stage is for the selection of districts, as all the districts in the respective region are neither equally developed nor equally backward. Therefore, the most developed district of Aurangabad and the most backward district of Osmanabad from the Marathawada region have been selected for the study. At the second stage, since it was not possible to study all the villages located in both the districts of the selected region, one village from each respective district was chosen for the study. More specifically, one most advance or developed village- Maliwada from the selected developed district and one most backward village- Kond from the selected most backward district have been identified for the purpose of this study. The basic criteria in the selection of villages have also been (i) the village which is closer to (ii) and the village which is far away from each district town, and (iii) their being multi-castes villages. Also, only those two villages have been selected where number of the SC households is not less

than 200-300. The census data have been used to know the Scheduled Castes population in each village.

Village is, thus, the primary unit of analysis for the study. Attempt has also been made to understand the historical background of the study area, though we have tried to situate our studied villages in the changing patterns of social structure in rural India. More specifically, the Maliwada village represents social structure of a developed village and the Kond village remains representative of underdeveloped or developing villages. Being multiple caste-villages, both have the Mahar, Mang and Chambhar as the major SCs, with sizable number of households. Finally, at the third stage of sampling, households survey has been conducted to acquire basic information about the SC households in each village. This has enabled us to find out the specific life situations of the SCs in the village like their personal profile (age, education, family size, migration status, etc), their social composition (sub-caste, religion, etc), economic pursuits (engaged in the working organisations, if other than cultivation and or agricultural labourer, with working hours, their property ownership, income, expenditure patterns and saving, if any) and so on under the study.

The selection of the Scheduled Caste respondents, for the purpose of data collection, has primarily been based on the stratified random sampling technique for the SC households in each village. The stratification of the households is done on the basis of sub-castes, gender and age. Thus, the size of sample is 215 respondents- 100 respondents from Kond village and 115 respondents from Maliwada villages, representing 50 percent of the total SC households in each village. Although the focus of the research has been to capture the intra-regional variations in the practice of discrimination of the SCs, yet it has concentrated more in the specific locales selected for the purpose of the study.

The study is based on both the primary and secondary sources of data collection, the former being the main source. In the primary sources of data, the interview and the case-studies methods have been used. An Interview-Schedule, consisting of both the structured and unstructured questions, has been administered to the respondents and in the case studies, the selected cases-respondents have narrated a few significant events pertaining to their life or that of members of their households. Similarly, in the case of secondary sources of data, the data or information has been collected from all the related documents like reports of the concerned government departments and institutions, commissions, censuses, besides the relevant journals and books, magazines, newspapers, news bulletins, electronic media, etc.

More specifically, the present paper is descriptive and exploratory in its design. The purpose of such design is to describe the SCs' status in the existing social and caste hierarchy, to know their socio-personal backgrounds

like family size, educational level, pattern of income and expenditure, and to explore the major forms of discrimination faced by them in social, cultural, civil, political and economic spheres. A number of social institutional indicators such as caste system, untouchability, gender disparity, proximity with town, etc. are applied to explore the nature and forms of discrimination in Indian society in general and of the SCs in the study locales in particular.

During field work, data pertaining to the individual or collective discrimination committed against them by the dominant castes or their members and the state machinery have also been collected. Apart from this, the in-depth analysis of a few cases has been made to understand the nature and extent of discrimination encountered by the SCs in the selected villages. Data on discrimination has been tabulated to know the nature, forms and extent or degree of discriminatory social behaviour of the non-SCs against the SCs in the studied villages. Their such behaviour includes denial of the SCs' access to public utilities and services, their practices of overt or observable forms of untouchability in the public and private spheres of life, and their behaviour towards the SC women. It is a fact that the SC women face dual oppression of their being SC and women. The data have been collected and tabulated on the 'forced' traditional occupations of the SCs, causing their poverty.

Forms and Extent of Discrimination

In this section, an attempt is made to examine the forms and extent of discrimination at caste or community level and government level in the field area of Kond and Maliwada villages of Marathwada region. At the community level, the caste-based discrimination includes the forms of physical touch; receiving water, sharing food; being neat and tidy, and usage of roads and passages by all the three communities of Mahar, Mang and Chambhar in varying degree. In the case of physical touch, the account of historical events ascertains the practice of touch-me-not through differential pattern of social interactions and inter-relations. The field data of the study reveals that for physical touch, there is no discrimination in Maliwada village, but when compared with Kond village, it has been noted that there is less extent of discrimination. Further, water was and is seen as a source and resource of life and dignity. Looking in the studied villages, the matter of receiving water from the community sources displays that there is less discrimination for Mahar and Mang respondents and no discrimination for Chambhars in the Kond village. But in the village in the Maliwada village, the picture is different for the Mahar and Mang respondents who face no discrimination at all, but the Chambhars are the most discriminated ones. Further, for being in the social system, sharing of water and food, even in the community feast, was an essential course vis-à-vis social interactions and relations. The data on sharing food with Marathas and Lingayats by Mahar and Mang and Chambhar

respondents disclose less discrimination in the case of the first two and the least discrimination in the case of the last in the Kond village. Same is the case in the Maliwada village, where fifty per cent of Mahar and Mang respondents face discrimination and in the contrary to this case, all of respondents of Chambhar face most discrimination. One of the factors for practicing untouchability was stigmatising them by labelling them as being unclean and untidy. Even if they try to be clean and tidy, they are discriminated though to less and least extent. Our data for their being neat and tidy supports that all the respondents of Mahar, Mang and Chambhar castes are facing least extent of discrimination from the Malis, Marathas and Lingayats in both the villages. The role of ex-untouchables had been multi-tasking, but the use of roads and passages were refrained and restricted for them. It is evident now that the usage of road and passages in the Maliwada village is free from discrimination, but in the Kond village there is less extent of discrimination for Mangs and Chambhars and the maximum no extent of discrimination for Mahars.

The religious sphere was or is having the polarity or bi-polarity, based on purity and impurity, sacred and profane, touchability and untouchability, male and female, etc., causing discrimination or no discrimination at all. But now, there are changes causing multi-polarity in the religious spheres and giving rise to various forms and degrees of discrimination in this sphere. Even then, the ex-untouchables or SCs are differentially treated for their ex-untouchable status. More precisely, in the religious sphere, the maximum degree of discrimination is experienced by respondents of all the three castes in the cases of their entry in the temple, worshipping and performing rituals or giving contribution for collectively celebrated religious festivals, extending invitation in religious celebration or anniversaries of religious saints and participation or contribution by non-SCs in celebration of the SC festivals or anniversaries of their leaders and religious saints, etc. in both villages. Yet, the Mahar and Mang respondents in the Maliwada village have confirmed the less and to some extent least degree of discrimination due to their somewhat better educational and economic position.

The Mahars, Mangs and Chambhars were integral part of performing marriages of the non-SCs in the villages. They are also needed to play certain roles in performance of the marriage rituals such as being messengers, for maintenance of domestic chores, etc. with the maximum degree of discrimination. Even today, discrimination is practiced against them by non-SCs in celebrations of their marriage and inter-dinning on such occasions. More specifically, discriminations in varying degrees are practiced in the form of extending invitation to the SCs in the non-SC marriages for respondents of all the three communities in both the studied villages. In the case of marriage feast, all the respondents accepted the maximum degree of discrimination, except a few Mahar and Mang respondents of Maliwada village who expressed

about the less discrimination practiced against them. The data for attending SC marriages by the non-SCs also shows the practice of discrimination, in varying degrees including most and to some extent less discrimination, by the latter in the case of sharing food, sitting arrangement, etc. in the Kond village. Similarly, the Mahars and Mangs have faced discrimination in varying degrees, including most and also to the extent of less and least discrimination; and the Chambhars respondents have experienced the maximum or most discrimination in the Maliwada villages.

The residential location has remained the main foundation of segregation which resulted in discrimination from historical period till now (Ambedkar 1989). In this case, there is most or maximum degree of discrimination for people of all the three communities in both the villages. The access of the SCs to the non-SCs house on rent or purchase of their land shows that the Mahar and Mang respondents are most discriminated and the Chambhar respondents are less discriminated in the Kond village. But if we look at the Chambhars of the Maliwada village, they are the most discriminated as compared to the Mahars and the Mangs.

Earlier, it have been stated that like community level, at the governmental level also, there is full representation of the upper castes policy makers, bureaucrats, implementers and care-takers which makes the system of distributive justice sluggishly implemented and less effective for the SCs. Thus, as stated in the beginning of the section, discrimination at the governmental level is analysed with the support of our field data. Thus, at the governmental level, there is discrimination in adequate access to full benefits of government schemes, public water sources, educational facilities and health services is analysed for the respondents of all three communities in both the villages. In case of their access to the benefits of government schemes, there is maximum discrimination in view of the most respondents and less discrimination in view of a few respondents from all the three communities in both the villages. Interestingly, the access to public water sources shows less discrimination for all the three communities in the Kond village. But in Maliwada village, Mangs and Mahars are less discriminated, compared to the Chambhars who are most discriminated in this respect.

Similarly, in educational sphere, which was prohibited for the then untouchables till the latter part of the colonial period, and opened up for them fully after independence, there are educational facilities for them, but discrimination is part and parcel in availing these facilities. This is more in rural than in urban areas. In our study locales also, there is less discrimination against the Chambhar respondents and least for the Mang respondents in the Kond and Maliwada villages respectively. This is manifested in the form of much difficulties in receiving government educational facilities for Mangs and Chambhars in both villages. Same is the situation regarding sitting arrangement, mid-day meals and other auxiliary works of the students in

schools, where both upper caste teachers and students are seen mostly discriminating to the Mahar and Mang students in the Kond villages. But in Maliwada, village, all the SC students face highest level of discrimination. In the health services also, the doctors, nurses or health workers practiced discrimination in varying degrees, including less and to some extent least degree for all the three SCs in both the villages.

Conclusion

Thus, when we look at the various forms of discrimination or social discrimination practiced by the middle level non-scheduled castes like Mali, Maratha and Lingayat against the Scheduled Castes in both the Maliwada and Kond villages, we find that such discrimination is distinctively visible not only in their social interaction with and interpersonal relationship between the Mahars, Mangs and Chambhars there, but also in the latter's participation in the socio-religious, including cultural activities, in the economic and political spheres alongwith the decision-making processes. These are visible even in the government- provided public services like BPL (Below Poverty Line) and APL (Above Poverty Line) cards and groceries available at the Public Distribution shops, health-care facilities at the Primary Health Centre, Postal services, etc. However, the poor SCs in both the villages face discrimination in a crude form, whereas the economically and educationally better-off SCs face discrimination in the subtle form. Then, our hypothesis is, to some extent, valid as there is some sort of variation in discrimination due to differences in the development of both the studied villages of the two different districts. The differences are even at the socio-cultural, educational, political and economic levels of development of these villages. The study of both the villages also shows the instances of discrimination on the basis of caste-occupations. As such, the Lingayat and Maratha castes or communities are dominant in the Kond village, while in the Maliwada, the Mali is the dominant caste, whose members consider the Mahar, Mang and Chambhar castes as their inferior or subordinate castes.

REFERENCES

Ambedkar, B.R.

- 1987 "Philosophy of Hinduism"; "The Hindu Social Order Its Essential Features". In *Dr Babasheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (compiled by Vasant Moon), Vol. 3, Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, PP. 1-94.
- (1989) "The Indian Ghetto - The Centre of Untouchability- Outside the Fold". In *Dr Babasheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (compiled by Vasant Moon), Vol. 5, Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, pp. 19-26.

Beteille, A.

- 1965 *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Social Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- Fuller, C.J.
1997 *Caste Today*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Jogdand, P.G.
2000 (ed.), *New Economic Policy and Dalits*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.
- Marriott, Mckim
1959 Interactional and attributional theories of caste ranking, *Man in India*, 39(2):92-107.
- Mendelsohn, Oliver and Vicziany, Marika
1998 *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.
- Nanchariah, G.
2000 "Economic Development of Scheduled Castes". In Chandu Subba Rao and D. Francis (eds.), *Development of Weaker Sections*, Rawat Publications, Delhi.
- Ram, Nandu
1998 "Dalit Movements in India: A Macro-Sociological Analysis. In Anand Kumar (ed), *Nation Building in India: Culture, Power and Society*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi.
2008a *Caste System and Untouchability in South India*, Manak Publications, Delhi.
(ed), 2008b *Dalits in Contemporary India: Discrimination and Discontent*, Vol.I, Siddhant Publications, New Delhi.
- Rege, Sharmila
1995 "Caste and gender violence against women in India". In Jogdand, P.G, (ed), *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives*, Gyan Publishing House, Pune.
- Report 1999-2000 and 2000- 2001, *National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- Salam, Jeebanlata
2004 *Social Exclusion and Education*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.
- Shah, Ghanshyam (ed.)
2001 *Dalits and the State*, (Published for Centre for Rural Studies, Mussoorie), Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.
(2006) *et al.* (eds.), "Untouchability in Rural India", Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- Sharma, K.L.

- 1974 *The Rural Stratification System: A Comparative Study of Six Villages in Rajasthan, India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi.
- Srinivas, M.N. (ed.)
- 1964 *India's Villages*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.
- 1987 *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Thorat, Sukhadeo
- 2004 *Persistence of Poverty: Why are Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Chronically Poor?*, IIPA for Centre for Studies on Chronic Poverty, London.
- Thorat, S. K. and Lee, Joel
- 2005 'Caste Discrimination and Food Security Programmes', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September.