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CASTE INTERFACE IN INDIA: A STUDY IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Abstract

This study on inter-caste relations between Other Backward Classes (OBCs), referred here as backward castes and the upper castes enquires into contemporary state of relations covering the social, economic and political relations. Some findings of the study are: A significant number of BCs are still illiterate. The respondents' occupation is predominantly agricultural either as cultivators or agricultural labour. The respondents are mostly poor and only a few are in the low-middle class. The respondents are realistic about their relative caste status vis-à-vis others. Many of the respondents are invited to the marriages, engagements, naming ceremonies and other rituals by the upper castes. As most of the respondents are landless, marginal or small farmers, they have taken land on lease from the upper caste farmers. Only about one-fourth of the respondents are involved in politics. Many respondents feel that enough space is not given to them in social and political matters. The utilization of welfare and development schemes by the respondents is poor or below average. It may be concluded that caste is a strong and rigid institution in the country.

Keywords: *Relative caste status, Backward Castes, upper castes, commensal relations, deprivation of opportunities.*

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INTRODUCTION

The context of the study is that caste, with its associative privileges for the upper castes and discriminations against the lower castes, continues to be a stark reality in the Indian society. It needs no scientific study to prove that; one has to just look around with all the senses on alert. The complexities of the caste system have been explained, elaborated, debated and contested by both western and Indian scholars in great detail; yet there is no one model or

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school of thought that explains its continuity in spite of religious reform and social movements, modernization, education, marketization, industrialization, urbanization, planned development, constitutional safeguards, universal franchise, welfare measures and such other influences and factors. All these seemed to have impacted on caste only slightly; changes can be noticed in commensal relations or a spirit of comraderie between the upper and lower castes before and at the time of elections, social occasions like marriages, etc. but stop with that. Those influences and factors have not destabilized the caste system or even attempted to destructuralize the system.

That what are referred to as Other Backward Classes are actually the backward castes practising different traditional occupations like gold-smith, iron-smith, carpentry, washing clothes, shepherding, hair-cutting, etc. besides agriculture is generally known both in academic and general literature. They are situated lower than the agricultural castes referred to as upper castes and higher to the service castes, namely, the Scheduled Castes. The problems that the BCs have, since ages, suffered like landlessness, poverty, illiteracy, social isolation and subordination, economic exploitation, political subordination and such others, were similar to the problems of the Scheduled Castes except that the latter suffered from an additional and a more grave problem of untouchability. Both the BCs and SCs continue to suffer a subordinated status in spite of Mahatma Gandhi's wish,

"The present caste system is the very anti-thesis of Varnashrama. The sooner public opinion abolishes it, the better" (Gandhi 1964: 3).

The BCs have become, traditionally, sandwiched between the upper castes, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Scheduled Castes. They are, without a choice, dependent on the farmer families in rural areas, who mostly are from the upper castes, for wage-work in their fields or as lease-holders of the land belonging to the latter. Thus, they are placed in a no-win situation vis-à-vis the upper castes. Gail Omvedt also agreed that the common peasantry among these castes was, however, impoverished by the exploitation of the upper caste landlords (Singh 1997; 217). Although they may feel a sense of relative deprivation about their hopeless situation in social matters and economic and political relations, they have no choice as they cannot earn their sustenance standing against the upper castes. On the other, the Scheduled Castes, who have become assertive against and independent of upper castes due to implementation of constitutional safeguards and associated legislations and scores of welfare measures since First Plan, have started viewing the BCs suspiciously perceiving them to be supporters of the exploiter class and hostile to their interests. This false perception has led to several conflicting situations between the SCs and the BCs with even the elite from these two sections, unfortunately, unable to grasp the realities of the situation in an objective manner. Such confrontations have occurred from the village-level to national-level, to the amusement of the sources of such situations, who seem to enjoy from the side lines.

During the last six decades of freedom and under several programmes of planned development, attempts have been made to correct these historical injustices and to improve the general status of the BCs. This study attempts to enquire and find out the nature and character of such changes, if any, and to what extent and degree such changes have impacted these sections of society.

METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken on a selected sample of 330 distributed equally among three districts, namely Kurnool, Warangal and West Godavari districts, of erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh (that existed prior to June 2 2014). This was part of a larger study in the erstwhile combined State of Andhra Pradesh. The three districts were chosen to represent the three different regions of the combined State. Each district was in turn selected taking into account the general implementation of welfare and development programmes for Listed Backward Classes or Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (as the Other Backward Classes were known in the State) or, simply BCs, as commonly referred to. In each district, two Mandals (as Blocks are called officially in the State) were selected on the basis of the same criterion as applied in the case of the selected districts, and those predominantly rural in character were preferred to study the nature of inter-caste relations between the upper castes and the BCs. Thus in Kurnool district - *Mahanandi* and *Serivella Mandals*, in Warangal district - *Darmasagar* and *Station Ghanpur Mandals* and in West Godavari district - *Dwaraka Tirumala* and *Bhimadolu Mandals* were selected. Further, fifteen villages were selected in the three districts and six *Mandals*, which were more rural in character than urban or semi-urban. The districts, *Mandals* and the villages were selected on the basis of secondary data available in the respective offices. The number of sample interviewed in each village differed but the total in each district was constant at 110. The sample was selected by a simple random sampling method. The field work was conducted in different spells during September-November, 2014.

Sex-composition of the Sample: The sample consisted of both male and female respondents but the males are overwhelming in number (98%). This is because of the reason that only the head of a household was chosen as the respondent as most of the development programmes choose only the male as the beneficiary.

Age-composition: The sample is distributed age-wise among all the age-groups. But a majority of the sample (52%) is in the most productive age-group of 26 to 45 years. However, the number is significant in the higher age-groups too. There are 21 per cent of them in the 46 to 55 years' group and 16 per cent even among the 55+ group. When the sample is analyzed district-wise, in Kurnool district, the highest number i.e. 27 per cent are in both 26 to 35 and 46 to 55 years' age-groups. In Warangal district, the highest number i.e. 28 per cent is in 26 to 35 years' age-group. In West Godavari district too, the

same age-group has the highest number at 28 per cent. Commonly, all the three districts have the lowest number in the under-25 years' group.

Family Size: Almost all the respondents have a normal family size with one or two children and some of them with dependent parents or parents-in-law. Most of the respondents have nuclear families. A significant number (27 per cent) have up to only 3 members in the family. The largest number (54%) has 4 to 5 members. Only a few (19%) have 6 or more members.

West Godavari district has the largest number (37%) of small families with up to 3 members compared to other districts. Warangal district has the highest number (61%) in the family size of 4 to 5 members and Kurnool dominates in the highest family size of six and above members with 33 per cent.

When the sex-composition of respondents' families is analyzed, as can be generally expected, the males outnumber the females in all the family sizes. This reflects the general trend in the State and the country of males outnumbering the females. The trend is same in all the three districts in the size of family up to three members although it is slightly different in the size of four to five members in Warangal and West Godavari districts in which females slightly outnumber the males.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Literacy and Education: It is to be noted that most of the respondents (68%) are literate and educated. Among the educated, those who had studied up to middle school are the highest at 24 per cent. Seven of them had a graduation degree or above. Among the districts, Kurnool has the highest educated (20%) up to primary and high school levels. Warangal (23%) and West Godavari (26%) have the highest number of educated up to high school level. Although it is a positive fact that more of the respondents are educated, it is also to be noted that only some of them are educated up to high school level. It is a known fact that the educated have a higher level of awareness about the development programmes as well as they realize the purpose of these programmes which should result in better use of them. That many of the uneducated do not have this advantage is worth noting. As Yogendra Singh opined,

“There is a vicious circular relationship between poverty, susceptibility to fall a victim to exploitation, proneness to health morbidity, high fertility rate and illiteracy. Education is a single most effective factor which breaks this process of vicious cumulative causation. The effective implementation of the programmes of welfare and social justice, such as the reservation of jobs for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the backward classes have not yielded desirable results primarily due to lack of education” (Singh 1993: 15).

Sharma also holds the view that compared to the upper castes, the OBCs still lag behind in social and educational spheres (Sharma 2007; 225).

Education of Family Members: The parents of most of the respondents (70%) are not literate considering the state of education in rural areas about twenty-five years ago. Both parents of only 12 per cent of respondents are educated. Whereas fathers of 18 per cent of respondents are educated, mothers of only two of them are educated. Therefore, either both parents and either of the parents of only 30 per cent of respondents are educated. Thus most of the respondents do not hail from educated family background.

The siblings of a substantial number (40%) of respondents are educated but those of a higher number (45%) of them are not educated. More than one-fourth of the respondents (31%) have also an educated spouse. Combined together, 64 per cent of families have at least one educated adult person in the family. In the case of 29 per cent of families, neither the respondent nor the spouse is educated.

In respect of education of children, more number of respondents (37%) have educated all the children in the family. However, in the case of education of only some children, preference for sons' education (22%) is more compared to the education of the daughters (15%) reflecting the patriarchal bias in the larger society.

Almost a similar number of respondents in all the districts have educated both the sons and daughters which is a welcome feature. Kurnool district exhibits higher sons' preference (29%) in education than Warangal (18%) or West Godavari (20%) districts. Warangal has the highest number (23%) of respondents in which all the daughters are educated compared to West Godavari (17%) and Kurnool (5%).

Occupation: Most of the respondents (62%), as expected, are engaged primarily in agriculture, directly or indirectly with 25 per cent in cultivation and 37 per cent in agricultural labour as a primary occupation. A significant number (36%) are in non-agricultural occupations with 26 per cent in various occupations like government service, teacher in private schools and others and 10 per cent in non-agricultural occupations. District-wise, Kurnool district has the highest number (51 per cent) engaged in cultivation and West Godavari district having the least number (7%). The latter has the highest number of respondents (49%) in agricultural labour which is least (21%) in Kurnool district. Warangal district has the highest number (19%) in non-agricultural labour. In Kurnool district, none is engaged in non-agricultural labour. Only 2 per cent are engaged in occupations like business.

Land-Ownership: Most of the sample (62%) in all the three districts do not own any wet land, the highest number being in West Godavari district at 84 per cent followed by Warangal district at 75 per cent and significantly less

in Kurnool district at 27 per cent. Among those who own wet land, more respondents have less than one hectare (18%). In the districts, Kurnool district's respondents have mostly up to two hectares; in Warangal district, more number of landed respondents have up to one hectare (20%) and in West Godavari district, an equal number (7%) has up to one and two hectares. An insignificant number (1%) has ten acres and above in all the three districts.

Compared to the owners of wet land, the picture with regard to dry land is worse with landless being still higher at 80 per cent. More number of the landed own up to one hectare only (14%) with no one owning more than 7.5 acres. Very few (5%) own between 2.5 acres to 5 acres and a highly insignificant number (just 1%) up to 7.5 acres.

Family Income: The family income of a majority of respondents is less than Rupees 50,000 per annum. 10 per cent of the total earns only up to Rupees 25,000 p.a., earning roughly about Rupees 17 per day in a family of four members and given that the main earner works throughout the year which is quite unlikely. A substantial number (20%) earns more than Rupees one lakh in a year. 14 per cent earn between Rupees fifty thousands to Rupees seventy-five thousands and 9 per cent between Rupees seventy-five thousands to Rupees one lakh.

Perception of Relative Caste Status: The backward classes are placed in the caste system below the upper castes and higher than the Scheduled Castes although there may be a difference of opinion with regard to the status of castes like gold smiths, carpenter caste and a few other castes. A question about perception of self-caste status vis-à-vis upper castes like *Reddy, Kamma, Velama, Kapu* and other such higher castes was asked to know whether the respondents' perceptions are similar to the existing reality or if they felt differently. However, more than three-fourths of the respondents (82%) perceived their caste status in tune with the existing reality (Table 1). Of others, 3 per cent felt that their caste status was higher compared to the above-mentioned higher castes and 14 per cent felt that their status was equal. Two respondents felt that they deserved a status on par with those of the Scheduled Castes.

It was common in the earlier years that the lower castes (backward castes and Scheduled Castes) were not called or referred by their real names but only by a nick name or some derogatory name. This practice seems to have declined in the recent years. 94 per cent of respondents answered that they were addressed by their real names by the higher castes and only 6 per cent said otherwise. The latter are either farm servants or menial servants engaged by upper castes.

Commensal Relations: Commensal relations with regard to water and food are one of the main variables of relative caste status among Hindus in Indian society. Many respondents (62%) said that they had offered food or water to the upper caste persons and others (38%) did not offer any to the latter.

Commensal relations seem to have undergone a social change as in other spheres of social life. A majority of the respondents (52%) admitted that the upper castes accepted water or both water and food from them. However, the practice of not accepting the same from the hands of lower castes does still exist as indicated in the answers pointing to the discriminatory custom of the upper castes in the rural areas. This discrimination does continue in various forms and types in rural areas and modernization seems to have added to them rather than weakening them.

Social Equality: The discrimination shown by the upper castes in matters of social ceremonies like marriage engagements, marriages, naming ceremonies and other such rituals in their families appears less as most respondents (71%) admitted that they had been invited (Table 2). This is more in Kurnool district (96%) followed by Warangal (59%) and West Godavari districts (57%). Similarly, the upper castes also seem to reciprocate this gesture by accepting the invitations of the respondents. 72 per cent of the respondents had invited the upper caste persons to such functions at their home with Kurnool district leading in this respect too (95 %).

Collective Decision-making: That the BCs and SCs are not treated as part of the mainstream even at the micro-level setting of a village is proved once again with the response of the respondents in the matter of their involvement in collective decision-making on organizing village-level festivals like a *jatara* or formal collectives like a *gram-sabha*. Nearly three-fourths (72%) expressed that they had not been involved in such matters. Only 28 per cent of them were taken into confidence. This is the general picture in all the three districts, with slight to moderate differences in the number of respondents involved.

More than half of those (50) involved in the collective decision-making were involved in all matters – social, religious, political and others which were discussed at those meetings. The others (44) said that they were consulted only on specific matters and not in all. Among those involved, the least were in Warangal district and the highest was in Kurnool district.

It is not simply enough that the BCs are consulted. Their importance would lie in the fact that their opinions were considered. More than half of the respondents (50) admitted that their opinions were taken into account by the collective body. When this number is considered as a part of the total number of respondents (330), it is just 15.15 per cent which is not a significant number. This indicates the least importance given to the opinions of the BCs in the rural society.

Economic Relations: That the respondents were mostly landless was already presented earlier. Therefore, in order to maintain a minimum standard of livelihood, 88 per cent of the respondents had taken land on lease from upper castes (Table 3). However, very few (20%) of the upper castes work on

the farms of BCs, whether own or taken on lease. This indicates the general reluctance or better economic status of the upper castes. The BC farmers mostly (85%) borrow loans from the upper caste farmers which show higher economic status of the latter. Most of the former (83%) repaid the loans that had been borrowed. That the upper castes are in a dominant position in the village economy is proved by the fact of they being in a position to lease land to the BCs, very few of them working on the farms of the BCs and of lending loans to the BCs.

Political Status: The extent of involvement of respondents in active politics at various levels from village to higher ones is in tune with their involvement in collective matters as the former is almost same as in the latter. Only 26 per cent said that they were involved in active politics and all others said that they had not been involved. The number of those involved is more or less same in different districts with only marginal differences.

Two thirds of those (18%) involved in active politics are doing so at village-level politics and others at other levels (Table 4). Among others, more number (6%) play politics at the *Mandal* (Block)-level and just 3 per cent at higher levels. That their political role is mostly confined at the village-level is more than obvious. This is in tune with the social face of the state and national-level politics which is dominated by upper caste-class leadership which doesn't allow a major role for BCs or SCs at higher levels. They are best suited to be followers or flag-bearers of various political parties.

The observation made above is proved by the responses to the question about the role of respondents in politics. A majority of those involved (16%) in politics perceive their role as only followers and a few as leaders albeit at lower levels. That number is less in Warangal district (13%) compared to West Godavari (15%) and Kurnool (18%) districts. The number of respondents that claim to play the role of a leader is almost same in all the three districts with no significant difference.

That the respondents are treated as subordinate and, at the best, second rates, by the upper castes is proven by their responses to some questions on the subject. Only some of them are accepted as leaders (21%) by the upper castes who take active interest in politics (Table 5). The latter would heed to the opinions of around the same number (22%) of respondents in informal political gatherings. Slightly higher number (29%) is permitted by the upper castes at public meetings.

The scenario is similar in all the three districts except that higher number is permitted to speak at public meetings in Warangal and West Godavari districts. The BCs are yet to be accepted on par in politics in spite of their keenness to participate and play active role and readiness to play the role of a leader. This inference negates the inference of some eminent social scientists given at least four decades back that introduction of Panchayat Raj, hailed as the harbinger of

grass roots' democracy, neutralized the power base from dominant sections and empowered the lower castes too. For instance, M.N. Srinivas had observed that the introduction of Panchayat Raj had resulted in giving a new sense of self-respect and power to lower castes (ICSSR 1974; 69) although he also maintained in the same context that the traditional leaders, who have been occupying positions of dominance for centuries, do not want to give up their interests, even in the changed context. Retzlaff also concluded, on the basis of his study of a village Panchayat in Uttar Pradesh that the introduction of *Panchayats* and elections had resulted in a change in the power structure of different castes ((ICSSR 1974; 69). Only Bhalerao disagreed with them and pointed out that many members of the emerging ruling elite in the villages belonged to the dominant caste (ICSSR 1974; 69). Doctor was of a view that the introduction of Panchayat Raj led to the emergence of new values in the shape of reduced social distance and an increase in political consciousness (ICSSR 1974; 70).

A very small number of respondents (12%) did contest in elections at various levels. This number is high in Warangal (14%) and West Godavari (13%) districts and less in Kurnool district (9%).

Those who had contested did so at mostly Panchayat-level (9%) and a few at Mandal-level (2%) (Table 6). Only one had contested at the district-level i.e. for a *Zilla Parishad* Territorial Constituency (ZPTC) Membership and none in Legislative Assembly or *Lok Sabha* elections. That the BCs are not allowed much leverage at higher level of politics is proved by this analysis.

There are a few respondents who had aspired to contest in elections (3%) but were denied the opportunity to do so. This number is more in Warangal (7%), less in Kurnool district (2%) and nil in West Godavari district.

Most of those (9) who had been denied to contest wanted to contest in *Panchayat* elections and only one at the *Mandal*-level. However, the number is small; yet it does exist. More had been denied ticket in Warangal district and none in West Godavari district. It is to be noted that the BCs did not have high ambitions of becoming M.L.As. or M.Ps. Their aspirations stopped mainly at the *Panchayat*-level; yet they were denied an opportunity.

Perception of Backwardness: More than three fourth of the respondents (78%) feel that they are not given enough space in social and political matters pointing to the extent to which the BCs are subjugated (Table 7). The situation is more acute in Warangal district in which 94 per cent have admitted to such an attitude. It is less in West Godavari district (67%) although this number is also disturbing.

The respondents perceived that the reasons for their backwardness were mostly economic (83.94%) in nature, i.e. their poverty, lack of wealth and such others (Table 8). Social reasons (59.09%) like relatively low caste status, deprivation of opportunities also contributed significantly to their

backwardness. A small number (39.07%) attributed the reasons to lack of political power, lack of commitment on the part of political leadership to improve their conditions, etc. That more than three-fourths of the respondents attribute the reasons to economic causes which points to the perceptible and, objectively correct, analysis of the ground-level realities.

The respondents also suggested measures for betterment of their general status. In accordance with perceptions about their backwardness, the measures suggested were also mostly economic (42.12%) in nature like grant of land for cultivation, liberal sanction of loans and subsidies, waiver of loans at times of natural calamities like floods/heavy rains, drought, etc. Secondly, political measures (38.48%) like reservations for BCs in Legislature Assembly and Parliament, freedom to vote for the candidates of their choice, etc. were suggested. Social measures (33.33%) like more incentives for improvement of higher education among their children, more hostels for the children pursuing education, strict formal and legal actions in cases of discrimination, etc. were also suggested for betterment of their status in social sphere.

Utilization of Welfare Schemes: The utilization of welfare/development schemes has been below average or poor, except for *Indira Kranti Patham* (IKP), which was known earlier as Development of Women and Children (DWACRA) (Table 9). This programme was used by 65 per cent of respondents. Programmes like MGNREGS, agricultural loans and *Indiramma* Housing were used by some respondents, 33 per cent, 30 per cent and 22 per cent respectively.

All other programmes were of no help to the respondents practically. Even the pensions meant for Old Aged people and Differently Aabled were used only by 15 per cent of respondents. Others like *Rajeev Arogyasree*, *Bangaru Thalli* and others were used by a very negligible number of respondents. All these betray the claims of political parties that have been in power and the successive governments about the achievements in respect of BCs. Publicity claims and performance parameters just do not match in respect of BCs. There is definitely a huge gap between the needs of the deserving and meeting them by the government. This is due to, as Murali Manohar pointed out, the fact that

“successive governments could not implement the policies and programmes meant for backward castes effectively due to their failure to keep up their constitutional obligation. Lack of political will and commitment towards the programmes may be the main reason, for the bad state of affairs. Monopolization of politics by upper castes and their political hegemonisation may be the other reasons” (Manohar 2005: 32).

Justice to Backward Castes and Classes cannot be done by half-hearted measures and by issue of mere Government Orders. A prominent leader of BCs argued that in post-independent India, while achieving development through mixed economy and, as promised, instead of reducing poverty, unemployment and inequalities, implementation of land reforms to usher in a socialistic system, the higher caste ruling class has made only empty promises to BC, SC, ST and Minority

sections but continued to thrive on their vote banks. Forward castes and some castes in *Shudras* toed the line of that class in implementation of ruling class policies and in promoting capitalism (Krishnaiah 2005; 21). Murali Manohar expressed an opinion, rather strongly, elsewhere that ever since the formation of Andhra Pradesh, the higher caste feudal sections displaced the *Brahmanical* domination and have been subjugating and exploiting the SCs, STs and BCs in social, cultural, educational, economic, administrative and political spheres (Manohar 2005; 95). This was not countered as the kind of social revolutions that emerged in Maharashtra through Mahatma Phule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in Tamil Nadu through Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker, in Kerala through Narayana Guru, in Karnataka through Basaveswara and Ramanujacharya did not occur in Andhra Pradesh. Further, a leadership with a long-term vision and perspective was lacking. The few leaders who emerged used the BC plank for their own advancement aggravated the subjugation of the BCs (Manohar 2005; 96).

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Some important findings can be drawn from the above study. Most of the BCs have small-sized families indicative of the same among other sections. They have proved to be second to none in realizing the advantages of a small family.

A significant number of BCs are yet to become literate. Many of those who have become literate have not proceeded beyond high school-level in spite of the existence of Junior Colleges offering plus-two education even at the *Mandal* (Block)-level. Needless to say, higher the education, higher would be the awareness on relative deprivation and forms of subjugation and more likely the resistance against these thus paving the way for an equalitarian society. Most of them, as can be expected, have come from families in which parents and siblings too were illiterate. However, nearly one-fourth of them have an educated spouse, mostly wife as the respondents are mainly males. It is a good augury that more than one-third of them are educating their children although sons' education is generally given a preference over that of the daughters.

The respondents' occupation is predominantly agricultural either as cultivators or agricultural labour. As most of them are landless, marginal or small farmers, they are inevitably dependent on the upper caste landlords and farmers' class thus easily being subjugated and exploited by the latter. This lays bare the claims of successive governments both at the centre and in the State about the huge grants of land to the BCs and other poor sections of the society. However, a significant number of the respondents are in non-agricultural occupations due to the influences of urbanization, education, improved transport to nearby towns and others.

The family income of the respondents is in accordance with their economic status, as described above, indicating that they are mostly poor and a few in low-middle class. This also negates the tall claims of the governments over the years

about the impact of the scores of welfare schemes and programmes. All these have not enhanced the economic status of the BCs beyond a small push.

The respondents are realistic about their relative caste status in society vis-à-vis others in their perceptions. Although they may aspire to achieve higher status, they have assessed their social status correctly. Unlike in the earlier years, they are called and addressed by their actual names. However, the farm and agricultural labourers continue to be called by other or nick names, sometimes derogatory.

In respect of commensal relations, the situation seems to have changed somewhat in the recent years in terms of offer or acceptance of water and food from the hands of lower caste persons by higher caste persons. A slight majority of respondents admitted to offering water and food to the upper caste persons and many of the latter have accepted the same, with minor differences in acceptance of water or food or both. This change may be due to the impact of education, modernization, universal franchise and others and no inference may be drawn about the broader social change on the anvil.

Many of the respondents are invited to the marriages, engagements, naming ceremonies and other rituals by the upper castes, indicating a significant improvement in the social relations between the BCs and upper castes. However, this may also be due to the influence of factors as mentioned earlier and no structural dent has occurred out of that. This would be clear when the BCs' involvement and participation in collective matters such as deciding a *grama-sabha*, a *jatara* and other such matters is examined. More than three-fourths of the respondents are not involved in the collective decision-making. Among those involved, the opinions of only a few are considered when the decisions are taken.

As most of the respondents are landless, marginal or small farmers, they have taken land on lease from the upper caste farmers which further strengthen their hold over the former. The former also depend on the latter for loans as the lease is mostly not registered and, therefore, are not eligible for institutional loans or other financial support. Only a small number of upper caste labour work on the fields cultivated by the respondents.

Only about one-fourth of the respondents are involved in politics, that too, mostly at the village-level. A very negligible number have participated at higher-level politics. This is in spite of existence of reservations for BCs in Panchayat Raj from village-level to district-level. This indicates the fact that the BCs are yet to function independent of upper caste-dominated politics in the country in spite of constituting more than fifty per cent of the population. They have been relegated to the follower-class only and not accorded any leadership role. Their opinions at political meetings are not given much consideration. A very small number of the respondents have contested in elections that too at the village-level for ward-membership or *sarpanch* post. A few who also wanted to contest were denied such an opportunity by the upper caste leaders.

Many respondents feel that enough space is not given to them in social and political matters. The main reason that they cite is poverty including landlessness which forces them to be dependent on the upper castes making it impossible to be assertive or demanding. Low caste status, deprivation of opportunities, denial of political power are also perceived to be the root-causes of their backwardness. The respondents have a good idea about the measures, if taken, that would improve their overall status in the society. The measures suggested by them include economic measures like grant of cultivable land, liberal sanction of loans and subsidies and political measures like reservation in State Assembly and *Lok Sabha*, real freedom to vote for the candidates of their choice in the elections (from *Panchayat* to *Lok Sabha*) rather than under duress or compulsive circumstances. Social measures like encouraging incentives for promotion of higher education for their children, strict actions under law in cases of discrimination and subordination also have been suggested by them.

The utilization of welfare and development schemes by the respondents can only be described as poor or below average considering the hype the government publicity has given to them. Only *Indira Kranti Patham* (IKP) has been largely used by the respondents. One of the largely popular schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has been useful to only some of them. So were *INDIRAMMA* (a housing scheme for the poor) and loan schemes for different sections. Surprisingly, somewhat old schemes like pensions for senior citizens and differently abled, Rajeev *Arogyasree* (NTR *Arogya Pradayini* now) and *Bangaru Thalli* have not been extended to many of them, or they were grossly under-utilized by the respondents as either they had not received them although they had had applied for them or they were not eligible for such schemes.

In conclusion, it is more than apparent that caste continues to be a crucial institution in the country. It thrives on as strong and rigid as ever, except for minor and insignificant changes which have not led to any structural destabilization in the caste system. This is the contemporary situation in spite of constitutional provisions on equality, social and economic justice, other fundamental rights and specific directive principles. Therefore, it may be said that the BCs continue to remain backward, subjugated and exploited in all spheres of social life – education, social interaction, collective decision-making, property ownership, economic relations and politics. They have never had a 'life-chance' (in Weberian terms) to improve their general status. Their backwardness in education and economic dependence on upper castes has made it inevitable for them to depend on the latter for sustenance. This, in turn, has precluded their chance to assert their voice in politics. All these factors cumulatively lessened their chances of improving their status in the society. In this respect, caste throws a challenge to the entire body polity of the society and a problematic challenge for the development of the whole country.

The many welfare and development programmes launched since the

First Plan have failed to improve the quality of life in respect of BCs, not withstanding the tall claims of the successive governments. That the selection of beneficiaries under various schemes at the ground level is based on social group identity and political faction rather than on objective criteria is too common and widely known. It also lays bare certain realities. The political parties, including those which claim to champion the causes of BCs, have successfully manoeuvred and manipulated politics in such a way that the BCs continue to remain backward. Thus the parties continue to wield power over the BCs and put the latter's development on hold.

It is unfortunate that the BCs and, especially the elite of these sections, fail to recognize these obvious and not so obvious actions of the parties and politicians and, so far, have not made any serious attempt to collectivize and mobilize their brethren to assert, demand and undertake movements, like, for example, the *Madiga* Reservation *Porata Samithi* (MRPS) that has worked for *Madigas* (one of the lowly-placed Scheduled Castes). There are too many associations and bodies proclaiming to be champions of BCs but not strong enough to force the upper caste-dominated political parties to take cognizance and sit across the table for collective bargaining. This competition for leadership of BCs has only further strengthened the sway of the parties on the common masses of BCs. That some of the BC leaders have backtracked on the demands or put the collective interests below their power interests when the morsels of power were thrown at them is nothing but criminal on their part. The sooner the BC leaders realize the potential of collectivization of their sections and, not necessarily dependent on the upper castes, the better it is for the larger community of BCs and their own power interests too.

Table 1 : Perception of Self-Caste Status vis-à-vis Upper Castes like Reddy/ Kamma/ Kapu/Velama/others

	Kurnool	Warangal	West Godavari	Total
Higher	02(02)	04(04)	05(04)	11(03)
Equal	16(14)	05(25)	27(25)	48(14)
Lower	91(83)	100(71)	78(71)	269(82)
Untouchable	01(01)	01(01)	N(0)	02(01)
Total	110(100)	110(100)	110(100)	330(100)

Table 2 : Invitation to Respondents by upper castes and Vice-versa to attend functions like Marriage Engagements, Marriages, Naming Ceremony and other rituals

	Kurnool			Warangal			West Godavari			Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
A.	106	04	110	65	45	110	63	47	110	234	96	330
	(96)	(04)	(100)	(59)	(41)	(57)	(100)	(43)	(100)	(71)	(29)	(100)
B.	105	05	110	67	43	110	65	45	110	237	93	330
	(95)	(05)	(100)	(61)	(39)	(100)	(59)	(41)	(100)	(72)	(28)	(100)

- A. Invitation to respondents by upper castes.
- B. Invitation to upper castes by respondents.

Table 3 : Economic Relations

	Kurnool			Warangal			West Godavari			Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
A	110	N	110	98	12	110	84	26	110	292	38	330
	(100)		(100)	(89)	(11)	(100)	(76)	(24)	(100)	(88)	(12)	(100)
B	39	71	110	08	102	110	19	91	110	66	264	330
	(35)	(65)	(100)	(07)	(93)	(100)	(17)	(83)	(100)	(20)	(80)	(100)
C	109	01	110	98	12	110	72	38	110	279	51	330
	(99)	(1)	(100)	(89)	(11)	(100)	(65)	(35)	(100)	(85)	(15)	(100)
D	105	05	110	92	18	110	77	33	110	274	56	330
	(95)	(5)	(100)	(84)	(16)	(100)	(70)	(30)	(100)	(83)	(17)	(100)

- A. Leasing out of land by upper castes to Respondents
- B. Labour work by upper castes in Respondents' farms
- C. Lending Personal Loans by upper castes to Respondents
- D. Prompt Repayment of loans by Respondents

Table 4 : Level of Politics at which involved

Level	Kurnool	Warangal	West Godavari	Total
Village-level	20(18)	17(16)	22(20)	59(18)
Mandal-level	08(07)	07(06)	04(03)	19(06)
Municipal-level	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)
District-level	02(2)	N(0)	02(02)	04(01)
State-level	N(0)	01(0.91)	N(0)	01(0.61)
National-level	01(1)	N(0)	01(01)	02(01)
Not active in Politics	79(72)	85(77)	81(74)	245(74)
Total	110(100)	110(100)	110(100)	330(100)

Table 5 : Importance in Politics

PoliticalStatus	Kurnool			Warangal			West Godavari			Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
A.	22	88	110	23	87	110	24	86	110	69	261	330
										(21)	(79)	(100)
B.	22	88	110	26	84	110	24	86	110	72	258	330
										(22)	(78)	(100)
C.	26	84	110	32	78	110	38	72	110	96	234	330
										(29)	(71)	(100)

- A. Treatment of Respondents as leaders in politics by upper castes
- B. Heeding Respondents' opinions in informal political gatherings
- C. Permission to Respondents to speak at public meetings

Table 6 : Level of Contest

Level of Contest	Kurnool	Warangal	West Godavari	Total
Panchayat-level	09(08)	10(09)	10(09)	29(09)
Mandal-level	01(01)	05(05)	03(03)	09(02)
District-level	N(0)	N(0)	01(01)	01(01)
Municipal-level	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)
Legislative Assembly	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)
Lok Sabha	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)	N(0)
Not contested	100(91)	95(86)	96(87)	291(88)
Total	110(100)	110(100)	110(100)	330(100)

Table 7 : Perception of space given to BCs in Social and Political Matters

Kurnool			Warangal			West Godavari			Total		
Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
28	82	110	07	103	110	36	74	110	71	259	330
(25)	(75)	(100)	(06)	(94)	(100)	(33)	(67)	(100)	(22)	(78)	(100)

Table 8 : Perception of Reasons by Respondents for social, economic and political backwardness of BCs

Reason	Kurnool	Warangal	West Godavari	Total
Social	46	74	75	195(59.09%)
Economic	83	108	86	277(83.94%)
Political	38	26	67	131(39.70%)

Table 9 : Development/Welfare programmes availed or presently availed by Respondents

Programme Availed	Kurnool			Warangal			West Godavari			Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
MGNREGS	36	74	110	58	52	110	16	94	110	110	220	330
										(33)	(67)	(100)
IKP/DWACRA	60	50	110	90	20	110	66	44	110	216	114	330
										(65)	(35)	(100)
Indiramma Housing	29	81	110	27	83	110	16	94	110	72	258	330
										(22)	(78)	(100)
Agricultural Loans	55	55	110	26	84	110	19	91	110	100	230	330
										(30)	(70)	(100)
Old Age/Physically Challenged Pension	21	89	110	17	93	110	12	98	110	50	280	330
										(15)	(85)	(100)
Rajeev Arogyasree	06	104	110	04	106	110	02	108	110	12	318	330
										(04)	(96)	(100)
Bangaru Thalli	N	110	110	02	108	110	01	109	110	03	327	330
										(01)	(99)	(100)
Others	N	110	110	01	109	110	N	110	110	01	329	330
										(01)	(99)	(100)

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