

# Scheduled Caste Agricultural Labourers of Saran District

## A case Study

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Manusmriti, the fundamental Hindu code system has no description of caste system. Caste system is not a synonym of "Varnashram". Indian society was grouped into four "Varnas" based on the principle of quality and nature of works performed. With the rolling wheel of time India was made slave and during long period of slavery many distortions took place in our society and "Shudras" of Manusmriti became untouchables and "low-borne". From here a new system of caste came into prominence. During British period of administration, the term "Scheduled caste" was coined by Simon Commission for depressed classes of India. After independence the term scheduled caste or scheduled Tribe has got constitutional validity even then socio-economic conditions of majority people of this section have been deplorable. Still about 89 to 93% population of this section are either agricultural labourers or marginal agricultural labourers.

Human society is dynamic. Its socio-economic and cultural landscape goes on changing constantly consequent upon the interaction of physical and socio-cultural forces. From the time immemorial, the society has moved from primate communism to the present industrial stage. The scheduled caste community has remained isolated, deprived and neglected from the days of Manu. This community was secluded from the very beginning and was treated inhumanly by the privileged section of the Hindu society. Scheduled caste people were object of hire and fire from the early period. The theory of 'Chaturvarna' kept them deprived from the mainstream of national life. Their economic base was without any solid foundation. In the early period, a 'chamar' was asked to carry dead animals. They were also asked to beat drums and rural musical instruments on various religious occasions and also during ceremonial or ritual performances for which they were paid petty amount either in case or kind. Similarly Dusadh, Dhobi, Pasi, or Doms were asked to perform specified works to suit the interest of other castes. They were branded as untouchables. They were punished physically and socially if they defied the social system.

The idea of economic development being a determinant of socio-culture development is implicit in Marxian literature. Many economists and social anthropologists although rejecting the Marxian economic views have accepted the Marxian approach that

economy proceeds the society. Further, it had been observed that changes in the system of production led to remodeling of the social, political and cultural set up of the society. But the scholars like G. Myrdal stresses upon the role of social institutions in the economic development, particularly in the Asian aegion Many other sociologists underline the supremacy of the economic forces determining the changes in th society. They have given priority to some social and non-economic factors. The economic growth also depends upon economic activities, increasing knowledge and increasing capital.

To study the socio-economic condition of the scheduled caste agricultural labourers of Saran district would not be out of place to focus on the historical background of the social stratification of the caste system under greater fold of Hinduism.

India is a classical land of caste. More than 2800 castes and sub-castes with all their peculiarities exist. Of these four prominent groups of castes such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras (depressed and untouchable) are found in every corner of the country. The caste stratification of the Indian society has had it's origin in the 'Chaturvarna' system. The Varna system which was prevalent during the Vedic period was mainly based on the division of labour and occupation. The sacredness of the caste system in India consisted in belief that it was established with divine sanctions hence it was everybody's concern to fulfil his caste duties in accordance with his Dharma. This is the doctrine inculcated in the popular 'Bhagwad Gita'.

### **Occupations:**

In a caste-ridden society, there is a gradation of occupation also some occupations are considered to be superior or sacred, while certain others degrading and inferior. For a long time occupations were very much associated with caste system. Each caste had its specific occupations and the occupations were almost hereditary. The caste system put restriction on the range of social relation also . The idea of pollution makes their point clear. It means that a touch of a higher castes man particularly by the scheduled caste defiles a man of higher caste. Even his shadow is considered enough to pollute a higher caste man. In kerala for a long time a Nayar could approach a Nambudari Brahmin but would not touch him. Further a Tiyan was expected to keep himself at a distance of 36 steps from Brahmins and a Pulaya at a distance 96 paces. They were considered to be unholy, inferior, low and were looked down upon by other castes. The society even today suffers from the stigma of untouchables. The scheduled castes were not allowed to use common wells, ponds and otehr civic facilities. In facts, the practice of untouchability is a stigma attached to Hindu society. It is an age old system which has its root in our social and religions system. Gandhiji regarded this practice as leper wound.

But the orthodox rural society particularly the upper caste and even intermediate caste to look upon the scheduled caste workers (both male and female) as most hateful object although their agricultural works including other domestic works would remain incomplete in their absence. Their antagonistic attitude is still deeply rooted in their hearts when they find young scheduled caste boy and girls educated and well dressed. They become envious when these educated boys and girls deny working in their fields and at home.

The caste system was undemocratic and authoritarian in the extreme. This is still hierarchically graded, each caste being considered inferior to those above it and superior to those below it. The status of a person born in a particular caste was determined by the rank of that caste in this hierarchy. Once born in that caste his status was pre-determined and immutable. Thus birth decided his status which could not be altered by any talent he might have or wealth he might accumulate.

### **Population of Scheduled caste in Saran District:**

In column two of Table No.1 total population of scheduled caste in Saran district has been shown. In 2011 the total population of scheduled caste was 4.74 lakhs. It constituted 12% of the total population of Saran district as against about 16% computed for Bihar. Thus, this district has less population of scheduled caste than Bihar. But speed of growth of scheduled caste is very swift because its decadal growth between 2001-2011 was more than 21.5%. It means that growth of scheduled caste population is on uptrend.

### **Literacy:**

The literacy among the scheduled caste of Bihar is dismally low. The overall literacy of scheduled caste is 28.5 percent (2001 census) which is nearly half of that recorded for all scheduled caste of national level (54.7 percent) Male and Female literates constitute 40.2 percent and 15.6 percent respectively. Among the major castes, Dhobis have the highest proportion of matriculate (19.7 percent) whereas Mushar have the lowest proportion of matriculates (6 percent). Educationally, the entire district is most backward. The literacy percentage of Bihar as a whole is 54.6 as against 90.92 percent of Kerala or 77.27% of Maharashtra. The percentage of literacy among the scheduled caste agricultural labourers stands at low ebb even after independence. More than 90 percent of them are still illiterate; only their sons are going to the primary schools of attending 'Anganwari Kendras or Sarva Siksha Kendras' but their percentage is again poor. This district is having 5612 primary schools, 118 middle schools, 39 high schools and 8 constituent colleges, but their admission is quite negligible. Most of their sons and daughters are engaged in light works in order to supplement their parent's income. The parents also seldom encourage their sons and daughters to go to schools. Thus, educationally, they are dwarf and economically bankrupt.

Literacy plays an important role in determining occupational structure. In 2001 the total literacy among SC population in the Saran district works out to 26.06% with only 13.54% among females . In 2011 literacy rate grew up to 51.55% . Female literacy rate went up to 39.42 % in 2011 from 13.54% in 2001 . This is a great achievement so far female literacy is concerned. From Table-1 column 5 and 07 occupational structure may be perused.

**Table No. 1**

**Selected Demographic Characteristics of scheduled caste, 2011**

| S.No. | C.D. B's Name    | Total population | % of total population | Literarily rate (%) | % of agricultural laboures to Sc main workers | % of agricultural labourers to SC marginal workers |
|-------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---|--|
| 1     | 2                | 3                | 4                     | 5                   | 6   | 7  |
| 1     | Sonepur          | 27558            | 10.20                 | 52.31               | 45.4  | 72.4   |
| 2     | Dighwara         | 16763            | 12.94                 | 53.12               | 44.6  | 72.5   |
| 3     | Garkha           | 38729            | 14.44                 | 50.98               | 59.8  | 81.5   |
| 4     | Dariapur         | 33852            | 11.43                 | 47.75               | 44.3  | 83.5   |
| 5     | Parsa            | 20435            | 13.11                 | 46.45               | 55.8  | 89.8   |
| 6     | Maker            | 11806            | 13.94                 | 44.87               | 68.9  | 88.9   |
| 7     | Amnour           | 24797            | 12.37                 | 49.37               | 58.8  | 85.5   |
| 8     | arhaura          | 29065            | 10.95                 | 46.88               | 66.2  | 82.3   |
| 9     | Nagara           | 15142            | 12.21                 | 55.21               | 61.7  | 74.1   |
| 10    | Chhapra          | 49318            | 11.14                 | 54.29               | 32.2  | 61.5   |
| 11    | Rewelganj        | 15349            | 12.83                 | 60.60               | 51.0  | 58.6   |
| 12    | Jalalpur         | 26507            | 15.22                 | 55.11               | 53.6  | 71.8   |
| 13    | Maqnjhi          | 29740            | 11.09                 | 60.87               | 54.4  | 70.8   |
| 14    | Ekma             | 26359            | 12.29                 | 59.78               | 33.3  | 91.6   |
| 15    | Lalladpur        | 10466            | 13.09                 | 57.85               | 42.7  | 86.2   |
| 16    | Baniapur         | 29006            | 11.04                 | 50.05               | 60.6  | 77.4   |
| 17    | Ishupur          | 15358            | 10.46                 | 60.35               | 60.6  | 77.4   |
| 18    | Taraiya          | 17900            | 12.90                 | 44.76               | 64.6  | 76.2   |
| 19    | Panapur          | 12735            | 10.46                 | 41.90               | 62.6  | 81.4   |
| 20    | Masrakh          | 23181            | 12.27                 | 46.15               | 31.5  | 84.1   |
|       | Total Saran Dist | 4,74,066         | 12.00                 | 51.55               | 56.10   | 79.0   |
|       | Bihar            | 16567325         | 15.91                 | 55.10               | 59.8  | 78.0   |

Source: P < A, Saran, 2011.

The socio-cultural life is most horrible. Their social relationship with other higher caste people is very restricted. Both male and female are not allowed to enter into the courtyard of higher castes. Higher caste people will not take anything offered by the labourers belonging to scheduled caste. The cultural life is also very limited and deplorable.

The sanitary condition of the villages inhabited by the agricultural labourers of scheduled caste community is extremely primitive. The ignorance of civic sense and unwholesome habits of the people renders the task of village sanitation very difficult. The arrangement of lavatory hardly exists in the rural areas and the villagers resort to promiscuous excretion generally by the side of road, ponds and the rivers. They live in a small room without ventilation where the entire family sleeps on the ground floor ignoring the privacy required for grown up ladies. The houses are mud-built, without any proper arrangement for ventilation and drainage. Use of unfiltered river water, tank or pond water is the normal feature. Consequently, infectious and water borne diseases are common in them.

In a feudalistic society of Saran district social exploitation, economic discrimination and deprivation have given birth to anti-social activities in which large number of frustrated labourers belonging to scheduled castes and other backward castes have shaken hands to fight against injustice. The wealthy farmers, having major portion of agricultural land are their common target. The unequal distribution of landed property and socio-economic exploitation has led to the migration of labourers of district to other states. The incident ('kand') at Belchi (1977), Paras bidha (1980), pipra (1986), Kanbsara (1986), Arwal (1986), Bathanitola (1996), Senari (1999) and many other places are the reflections of exploitation of labourer at outside places in Bihar. Simmering discontentment due to denial of social justice in respect of weaker section of society, under and uneconomic wages, demand and deprivation of fruits of political participation in democracy have led to the social unrest in rural society. Political discrimination in respect of scheduled caste is the ground reality. They are terrorized by private armed groups like Ranvir Sena, Kunwar Sena, Brahmarishi Senas, Lorik Sena, Bhumi Sena etc. during general and local bodies' election. They are forced not to come out of their houses during polling hours; otherwise, they would face serious consequences. Thus these poor and helpless labourers swallow up social deprivation due to lack of support by the government or other agencies. Untold miseries and atrocities perpetrated on poor and downtrodden agricultural labourers particularly belonging to scheduled caste on trifling matters have become the talk of the people. They are frightened even today of being arrested by the police who are being influenced by the feudal lords, zamindars and rich influential people.

It is no denying fact that the scheduled caste agricultural labourers are economically hard pressed and socially secluded. No governmental agency or even NGO's are keenly interested to bring them into the mainstream of social and economic life. These labourers have no labour organization to fight for social justice. They are under constant pressure of the feudal lords or rich peasantry class. They are unable to raise their voices to demand higher wages in wake of soaring prices of the essential commodities of their daily lives.

In fact, the benefits of our development are still to reach all sections of scheduled castes. We can not look at the future without addressing the needs of disadvantaged sections of our society. Mahatma Gandhi has emphasized long back that 'Farmers and workers make India. Their poverty is India's curse and crime. Their prosperity alone can make India a country fit to live in. Neither the lawyers, not the doctors nor rich landlords are going to secure it.

In 2001 the main SC workers of the district was 21.50% of the total SC workers which went down to 12.16% in 2011. It is not a good trend. it means that percentage of main workers has shifted to other occupations. In 2011 percentage of agricultural labourers in SC main workers category was 56% and SC marginal workers' share went up to 79% . It means that shift of Sc labour force is towards marginal category from agricultural labor category. This shows that economic conditions of SC population are showing no encouraging change. This aspect must be perused by administrators so that reformative steps may be taken at the earliest. These days incidents of road robberies, bank loots, gunshots, skirmishes at futile things etc. are nothing but the frustrations among youths of this section of the society.

#### **References:**

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