

PRACTICE OF UNTOUCHABLE IN THE VILLAGES OF RURAL ODISHA

Dr. Chandi Charan Mehentar

Assistant Professor in Economics, Delhi NCR,

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ABSTRACT

Untouchability is practiced in various forms, such as restrictions on eating together with persons from other castes, separate glasses or utensils, discriminatory seating arrangements in restaurants or other public places, segregation in village or community functions, separate ghats in ponds and common water bodies, separate burial grounds etc. In specific regional contexts these practices might vary. Untouchability is part of the experience of those against whom such discrimination is practised, it is also dynamic phenomenon that has changed over time. Only some aspects of the practice of untouchability have been discussed on the context of rural villages of Odisha, on the basis of the perceptions of the Dalits. The perception of discrimination among the Scheduled Castes reveals that caste is an important indicator for almost all important activities. More or less discrimination is found to be present in all the villages. Thus, as per the experience of the Dalits, their caste status affect their citizenship status.

Keywords: Untouchable, Discrimination, Social Restriction, Caste, Odisha.

1. Introduction:

Caste-based discrimination is not limited to wage discrimination in the labour market. Often, discrimination in one market has a spiralling effect on other markets. Market and non-market discriminations are also interrelated. This study is primarily focused on discrimination in the economic sphere. But the causes, manifestations and implications of discrimination is not limited to the economic sphere alone. The consequence of non-market discrimination further pulls down the progress of lower caste, irrespective of various governmental steps to the development of socially backward groups. However, the level of discrimination varies from state to state and is related with the social and historical context which have shaped the relationship among castes. Unequal access to certain social assets and exclusion from or participation in the graded institutional structures, perpetuates caste based discrimination.

2. Review of Literature:

This section of the study focuses on the caste based discrimination on the rural Odisha other than labour markets. It describes the perception of people from the marginalised communities towards day to day life and their perception about discrimination. Unequal treatment of individuals based on their birth status, various degrees of social exclusion based on group status and social segregation of the marginalised groups are some of the important features of the caste system in India. Though caste based discrimination has been found to be present among different social and religious groups in South Asia, it is particularly severe among the Hindus in India (Borooah, 2017). The diagrammatical caste system of an occupational structure about the four castes in Indian caste system describes that individual occupation is determined by his birth. Which is fixed and continues to his death. In the ladder of this caste system there is a line of pollution where only scheduled caste or Dalits, considered outside the Varna system are considered as impure and 'untouchable'. Their main traditional occupation is service to the other four groups and they are generally attached with manual work or unclean tasks (Barooah et al. 2015). Typically, they are forbidden from ownership of durable assets like land and are forbidden from entry into important social spaces and institutions (Thorat and Newman, 2008). Caste based discrimination in rural areas push the certain groups out of the village and categories these people as deprived and backwards. Spatial segregation reinforces social segregation and isolation. The practice of caste discrimination is not only seen in the labour markets, but also in the other market like the land market, credit market, output market. But the ability to participate in and benefit from the transactions in these market is conditional upon access to various kinds of non-tangible assets like trust, friendship and membership of social networks.

Deliege (2002) argues that in India, the people at the bottom or outcastes of the caste system do not face much discrimination due to caste rather it arises due to an economic problem like unemployment, inequality of assets distribution like land etc. It does not mean that unemployment is not prevalent among other social groups. Because of their weak economic position, lower castes are suffering more than the

higher castes. In a context where opportunities are tied to the identity of individuals, they cannot enter the other occupations due to societal restrictions (Deliege, 2002).

3. Objectives: The study focuses on the caste based discrimination on the rural Odisha, where mainly discussed about the practice of untouchable other than labour or land markets. The *prime* objectives to find out the dalits or tribals faces the caste based untouchable on the ground of various activities operates in the village. *Second* objectives describes the perception of people from the marginalised communities towards day to day life and their perception about discrimination. The *third* objective explain the access of village activities like festival, ceremony, etc.

4. Data Sources: The study based on the primary survey of the four villages from two districts of coastal Odisha, (Kanikapada and Mukundapur from Jajpur district and Rahania and Chudamani from Bhadrak district). Primary data is collected through field study by using structured and pre-tested questionnaire (closed and open-ended questions) by making a personal investigation to elicit information from the sample respondents. So on the process of stratified random sampling based on their occupation as categories of households type, around 207 total sample individual information collected in two districts of coastal areas. The size of the sample from each caste group was proportionate to the share of the castes in each of the villages. The village wise lower caste (i.e. jointly taking both SCs and STs) proportion of individual respondents have been presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents in the study villages: SC and ST

Name of Villages	SC		ST		SC/ST	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Kanikapada	30	19.48	29	54.71	59	28.50
Mukundapur	34	22.07	16	30.18	50	24.15
Rahania	46	29.87	8	15.09	54	26.08
Chudamani	44	28.57	0	0	44	21.25
All villages	154	(100) [74.4]	53	(100) [25.6]	207	(100)[100]

Sources: Field Survey, 2016-17 Note: Square brackets indicate column total.

The village wise proportions of respondents are more or less as equal to around 25 per cent of the total sample. It is important to examine the perception of the marginalised groups regarding discrimination, as such awareness and perception is often found to be critical for their emancipation. The perception of the Dalits could have a bearing on the effectiveness of various the affirmative action policies implemented by the government. This section describes the practice of untouchability in the villages in the different spheres.

5. Result and Discussion:

Untouchability has been made illegal in India. Yet, it is being practiced in various forms (Thorat and Joshi 2015). Untouchability is practiced in various forms, such as restrictions on eating together with persons from other castes, separate glasses or utensils, discriminatory seating arrangements in restaurants or other public places, segregation in village or community functions, prohibitions from entering temples and other places of worship, prohibitions from entering the homes or kitchens of people from other castes, separate ghats in ponds and common water bodies, separate burial grounds etc. In specific regional contexts these practices might vary. In the different sphere how discrimination of the caste based practice operates explain in below.

5.1 Access of Drinking Water: Normally Dalits are not allowed to touch the drinking water of other castes. In the case of private tube well such a practice is more widely prevalent. Around ninety per cent of lower caste respondents said that they are not permitted to take water from the private tube well of upper castes. In the village Mukundapur, 94 per cent said that they were not able to take water from the tube well of others (**Table 2**). It is the notion of purity and pollution inherent in the idea of untouchability that is behind such denial. On the response of how higher caste practice untouchability in water, more than 40 per cent say higher caste directly refuse to take the water, 30.9 per cent households say due to we are lower caste we have to wait for a longer period of time to fetch water from common sources. Around 35 per cent of lower caste households in each of villages Mukundapur and Rahania respond that they have to wait for longer period of time when they are going to take water from private tube well of higher castes households, when the government tube well breaks down.

5.2 Access of Common Property: The village common property are an important source of survival for the poor. But access to such critical resources are often mediated through caste and Dalits are generally denied the rights to access the village commons. More than 60 per cent of households in Kanikapada, said that they could use the common property resources like grazing land, ponds, public place etc freely (**Table 2**).More than 62 per cent of total households in four villages said that if they (lower caste) used the ponds or grazing land higher caste do not use this same resources. As the resources used by the Dalits are considered to be polluted and unclean by the higher castes. More than 60 per cent among respondents from each of the villages, reported that if they use any common property resources, people from the higher caste do not use the same resource.

Table 2. Practice of Untouchability in different activities in study villages

Determinants of Practice Untouchables		V-1	V-2	V-3	V-4	All
Can you use HC (private) well/pump set/pond for taking water nearby village ?	Yes	8.5	6.0	13.0	15.9	10.6
	No	91.5	94.0	87.0	84.1	89.4
If no how you are isolated by higher caste?	HC deny to take water from their tube well	35.6	48.0	38.9	43.2	41.1
	They wash the whole tube well if we used	40.7	16.0	25.9	27.3	28.0
	If we take water we have to wait for long time (after they are taking)	23.8	36.0	35.2	29.0	30.9
Do you use freely village level common property like ponds, river, grazing land ?	Yes	39.0	56.0	51.9	52.3	49.3
	No	61.0	44.0	48.1	47.7	50.2
If no freely use common property, then how you isolated ?	They refuse/deny to used this	33.3	30.8	38.0	36.4	34.8
	If we used they are not used	60.8	61.5	62.0	63.6	62.0
	If they used we have to wait	5.9	7.7	0.0	0.0	3.3
Do you use common ponds for bathing where HC also bath ?	Yes	28.8	20.0	29.6	29.5	27.1
	No	71.2	80.0	70.4	70.5	72.9
If yes same ponds use, Is it the same ghato where HC also bath ?	Yes	3.5	2.0	0.0	0.0	1.5
	No	96.5	98.0	100.0	100.0	98.5
Do you use same water pot/glass for drinking water at public meeting which is used by the HCs ?	Yes	10.2	14.0	31.5	36.4	22.2
	No	89.8	86.0	68.5	63.6	77.8
If not used the same glass/pot for drinking water why?	Due to we are untouchable or low caste	81.4	88.0	77.8	77.3	81.2
	Not maintaining cleanness	6.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9
	Considering polluting so we used plastic or use & through glass	11.9	12.0	22.3	22.7	17.0

Sources: Field Survey, 2016-17 Note: V-1 (Kanikapada), V-2 (Mukundapur), V-3 (Rahania), V-4 (Chudamani).

On being asked about the bathing of lower caste people village ponds, more than 72 per cent said that they do not take bath in the same ponds where higher caste people take their bath. In Mukundapur more than 80 per cent of households said they have a similar experience. Separation of the bathing place like *Ghatas*, is another form of discrimination that was found to be widely prevalent. Among those respondents who had said that they can use the ponds freely, 98.5 per cent said that they used separate *Ghatas* (see **table 2**).

5.3 Discrimination in Public Place: Regarding the feeling of discrimination to lower castes by higher caste in n the public meetings, which can be held in Gram Panchayat (GP), in school, in village etc., it was reported that the lower castes cannot take water from the same vessel or pot from where the higher castes drink water. Around 78 per cent of households said that they are not allowed to use the same pot in the public place for drinking water. On the second query, when the reason behind such practice was asked the respondents could link it to caste and the practice of untouchability (**Table 2**). In Mukundapur, more than 88 per cent of lower caste respondents said that they were denied to take drinking water from the common

pot in public places like the meeting or polio sabha. Even in the breakfast shop, they are not allowed to use the same glass or pot as other customers.

6. Conclusion:

The overall analysis of this paper suggest that caste based discrimination is acutely felt by the Dalits respondents in the various activities and various spheres of life and livelihoods in rural Odisha. The perception of discrimination among the Scheduled Castes reveals that caste is an important indicator for almost all important activities. More or less discrimination is found to be present in all the villages. Among the four villages, in Mukundapur of Jajpur district, Dalits or lower caste (specially *pana* sub-caste) face much discrimination than the other villages of study.

Lower caste individuals suffer many problems in the village related to caste. It may directly or indirectly affect the dignity of the Dalits in the village. In rural Odisha, especially in the coastal belt discrimination against the SCs has not changed significantly over time, although signs of improvements could be found in the analysis various paper. It still operates in the villages where lower caste stays under of economic and social dominance of the higher castes. Caste status of Dalits puts restrictions on their economic mobility. In the public places likes schools, panchayat, public meetings etc. higher caste dominance work more than the lower caste representation. Thus, as per the experience of the Dalits, their caste status affect their citizenship status. The operation of government programmes are far from being caste neutral. Perceptions of the marginalised and oppressed sections are an important component of discrimination. The ability to resist or change the pattern of discrimination results from the way it is perceived by the marginalised groups.

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