

CASTE BASED UNTOUCHABLE IN ODISHA: A STUDY OF RURAL COASTAL VILLAGES

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ABSTRACT: *Untouchability is part of the experience of those against whom such discrimination is practised, it is also a dynamic phenomenon that has changed over time. Only some aspects of the practice of untouchability have been discussed here, on the basis of the perceptions of the Dalits. It is difficult to get a comprehensive assessment of the practices of untouchability through a single period, field-survey based study. Untouchability is practised 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 etc. In specific regional contexts, caste based untouchable or discrimination practices might vary. The perception of discrimination among the Scheduled Castes reveals that caste is an important indicator for almost all important activities. So the access to any activities which is related to the social economic perspective of survival of life affect by the caste identity of the individual.*

Key Words: *Untouchable, Caste Identity, Social and Economic Exclusion, Discrimination, Odisha.*

1. Introduction:

The level of discrimination varies from state to state and it is related to 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. It is further converted to the social norm of the dominant caste groups in society. It describes the perception of people from the marginalised communities towards the 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). So basically the caste based discrimination in the form of untouchable not provide to the individual for freedom of choice on the occupation. Therefore, in the social norms and regulation in the village of rural areas graded the society among some groups. One is the dominants groups and another are marginalised groups. The dominant of caste control the village society irrespective the proportion of the population in the village because of economically advanced and socially higher caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy.

2. Review of Literature:

Caste based untouchability has been made illegal in India. Yet, it is being practiced in various forms (Thorat and Joshi 2015). It also varies place to place. The practice of untouchability depicted 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, access of common property etc. The lower caste basically scheduled caste 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 certain groups out of the village and categories these people as deprived and backwards. Spatial segregation reinforces social segregation and isolation. Their occupation is fixed and they bear the traditional occupation for the survival in the society. So the dalits or lower caste individual occupation is to serve the other four groups and they are generally attached with manual work or unclean tasks (Barooah et al. 2015)

Barbara Harriss-White (2003) has argued that the economy of India is socially regulated. The divisions and discrimination on the basis of caste, religion and gender perform new 'regulatory functions'. Most of Dalits and tribals work in the informal economy. The informal economy may not be regulated by the government or the state, but it is socially regulated. In this social regulation caste and caste-based

organisations play an important role. Thus old identities do not go away with economic progress, rather such identities acquire new meanings and functions. That is the crisis of democracy because large sections of the people who are poor or depressed not participate in both the political and economic sphere. In the context of Odisha, for the last fifteen years, caste and class-based dominance has been long enduring (Mohanty, 2014).

3. Objectives: The study focuses on the caste based untouchable in the rural Odisha, where mainly discussed the practice of untouchable in the access of occupation and social activities. The main objectives of the study are:

- ❖ Caste based untouchable on the ground of various activities like land transaction, participation in village festival/ceremonies, access to education in the village, temple entry etc.
- ❖ Behaviour of higher caste to the lower caste in the rural village in the social, economic and political sphere.

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 (see table 1). The size of the sample from each caste group was proportionate to the share of the castes in each of the villages.

Table 1. Sample size of the study villages.

Social Groups	No of Sample & %	JAJPUR		BHADRAK		Total Sample
		Kanikapada	Mukundapur	Rahania	Chudamani	
SCs	Number	30	34	46	44	154
	Percentage	19.48	22.08	29.87	28.57	100
STs	Number	29	16	8	0	53
	Percentage	54.71	30.18	15.11	0	100
SC/STs	Number	59	50	54	44	207
	Percentage	28.50	24.15	26.09	21.26	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2016-17.

5. Result and Discussion: In certain kinds of self-employment and wage employment related to water and food the practice of untouchability comes out starkly from the analysis of the perceptions of the people. Around 17 per cent of respondents said that due to idea of purity and pollution associated with untouchability they are put through such discrimination. Only 1.9 per cent of total respondents said that because they are perceived as unclean and unhealthy they are not allowed to use the same pot or glass as the higher castes.

5.1 Caste based discrimination in Land markets: The caste feeling makes market failure more acute in the rural areas than in the urban areas, because demand and supply of land market breaks down. On the question of land transactions, lower caste respondents feel that higher caste people do not buy any land in the areas where they live due to caste bias. Even though the price of land is lower than the market rate, higher castes do not buy the land in Dalit localities. Even if lower caste bureaucrats or officers search for rented house, they also face discrimination by the higher castes. More than 27.5 per cent of respondents said whatever be the position of Dalits or lower caste people, they do not get accommodation on rent in the home of the higher caste. However, around 60 per cent of individuals said that Dalit officers and government employees can rent houses easily because of their position.

5.2 Caste based untouchable in village festivals: In the public ceremonies such as *Puja, Mahotsava* (community festivals), lower caste people are not allowed to sit anywhere near the eating the places. More than 92 per cent of households said that they cannot sit anywhere in this festival (see table 2).

Table 2. Practice of Untouchable in village Public Ceremonies:

Determinants of Practice Untouchables		V-1	V-2	V-3	V-4	All
Can you sitting any where together for eat in village function/mohatsava ?	Yes	6.8	2.0	11.1	13.6	8.2
	No	93.2	98.0	88.9	86.4	91.8
If not allowed to sit anywhere, how you sitting	Any where we can sited no caste bar	3.6	12.2	6.3	10.5	7.8
	Make separate sit for SC/ST	96.4	87.8	93.8	89.5	92.1
In public ceremonies, Do all person throw their own eating plate to dustbin.	Yes all are taking their own plate to dustbin	11.9	18.0	27.8	29.5	21.3
	Only SC do that HC not taking the plate	78.0	44.0	57.4	63.6	61.4
	They kept a person who carry the plate (maybe he HCs)	0.0	10.0	3.7	0.0	3.4
	LC caste people doing this for carry the plate to dustbin	10.2	28.0	11.1	6.8	14.0

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

Due to the feeling of untouchability, they have to sit separately. More than 98 per cent of Mukundapur village lower caste respondents said that they cannot sit anywhere in the public function in the village. More than 28 per cent in Mukundapur said that lower caste people doing the job like taking the plate to the dustbin, sweeping, caring woods for cooking in the public function. It is decided by the meeting for distributing the work to the lower castes which ensures no physical contact with food or any festival material. Like, the lower caste people are to be denied by higher caste to participate in the public work, function. although they are contributing the same fees. This happens only due to the caste based idea of purity and pollution. If the committee member distribute work of the function, scheduled caste people are involved only in activities like wood cutting, taking up the plate to the dustbin, sweeping the floor etc (see table 2).

5.3 Banned from Entry to Temple: In coastal Odisha, such as in Kendrapada, Jajpur and some part of Jagatsinghpur districts, scheduled castes are not allowed to enter into the temples. In the study village practice like untouchable much more seen in Mukundapur than the other villages. Out of total 207 respondents belonging to the scheduled caste 32.4 per cent said today caste does not matter for entry into the temple, 46.4 per cents said only in the past few years they were allowed to enter to the temple (see table 3). Only 2.4 per cent said that they cannot enter the temple even today. Other than Dalits most other castes can enter into the temple. More than 18 per cent of respondent says we are gone to outside the village temple where we can enter because in that place our identity becomes unknown. We can enter and freely worship to Goddess irrespective of any type of discrimination feeling. This is because of their social identity unknown in the out of village. In Kanikapada more than 28 per cent respondent says Dalits villagers go outside the village, to temple in other villages for worship as they are not allowed to go to temples in their villages.

Table 3. Practice of Untouchability in Temple entry.

Practice of discrimination in Temple entry		V-1	V-2	V-3	V-4	All
Are you allowed to enter in temple in your village ?	Yes no caste bar to enter in our village to enter into temple	37.3	14.0	37.0	40.9	32.4
	Last some year we enter to temple	33.9	64.0	44.4	45.5	46.4
	We cannot enter to temple even today		6.0	3.7		2.4
	We go outside the village for worship	28.8	16.0	14.8	13.6	18.8
If you enter Do you allowed to take milk/liquid type product for worship?	Yes we can take all worship items to temple	32.2	12.0	25.9	27.3	24.6
	Only molasses (Gudo) and Milk not take	33.9	44.0	46.3	50.0	43.0
	If we interested we take the help of HC	15.3	30.0	24.1	22.7	22.7
	Not take anything from our home even not take flowers	18.6	14.0	3.7	-	9.7

Are the HCs person eat the worships fruits or Prasad from you?	No Chance to take from us	52.5	66.0	46.3	45.5	52.7
	Yes take before we touch the Prasad or fruits	30.5	12.0	33.3	40.9	29.0
	Cannot say about this	16.9	22.0	20.4	13.6	18.4

Sources: Same as Table 2.

As reported in **Table 3**, it was found that after the worship no higher caste persons accept the *Prasad* from the lower castes. If persons from the lower castes, particularly Dalits, touch the *Prasad* it is thought to have got polluted. More than 52 per cent of respondents said that upper caste persons never to that. Around 30 per cent individuals said that if we do not touch *Prasad*, they can take otherwise they refuse the *Prasad*. Thus, so far as temple entry, participation in rituals and offering of food for worship is concerned Dalits continue to face more discrimination than that in other spheres.

5.4 Caste based untouchable and level of education: While it is clear that in the perception of the Dalits, there is high level of discrimination against them, there are indications that the level of discrimination gets reduced to some extent under the impact of education. As shown in **Table 4**, responding to the question if discrimination against Dalits in the village will reduce if the Dalit individual is engaged in jobs like teacher, doctor, officer etc., more than 68 per cent of lower caste individuals agreed that caste based discrimination might get reduced if they are in a high-level job. However, around 24 per cent of respondent says whatever be the Dalits person's position, he would be discriminated in the village by higher caste. That means, according to them, education and economic status has no impact on the discrimination reduction. However, 82 per cent of dalit individuals said that education reduces discrimination.

Table 4. Level of discrimination with education

Practice of untouchable with level of education		V-1	V-2	V-3	V-4	All
If a SCs doing high level jobs, Is he also discriminate?	Yes but less than other scheduled caste (lower caste)	61.0	82.0	66.7	65.9	68.6
	No such type discrimination	8.5	6.0	7.4	6.8	7.2
	Whatever the job he must be discriminate due t caste (strongly agree)	30.5	12.0	25.9	27.3	24.2
Are educated person are less discriminate than illiterate of in a lower caste (Y/N/C)	Yes	84.7	66.0	85.2	93.2	82.1
	No	3.4				1.0
	Can't say	11.9	34.0	14.8	6.8	16.9

Sources: Same as Table 2.

Women from the higher castes keep a safe distance from the lower caste females, even while crossing the road. Even in the meetings of Polio Sabha or self-help group (SHGs) higher caste women keep a separate mat for the lower castes. The level of discrimination faced by Dalit women from the women of the higher castes, they felt is more than that is experienced by the Dalit men. Lower caste people are unemployed most of the time due to lack of opportunities and also because of the some restriction of occupation. They cannot work in the hotels in nearby the villages. Around 83 per cent of respondents said Dalits are not able to work in the nearby hotels where their identity can be known.

6. Conclusion:

The overall analysis of this paper suggests that caste based untouchable 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. It is proved that the coastal belt village although develop than an interior village, but social stigma like caste based discrimination and practice of untouchable still persistence in the society. Lower caste people are unemployed most of the time due to lack of opportunities and also because of some restriction of occupation. In the case of the land transaction and rent market, dalits faces many challenges in the village. The caste feeling makes market failure more acute in the rural areas than in the urban areas because demand and supply of land market break down. Whatever be the position of Dalits or lower caste people, they do not get accommodation on rent in the home of the higher caste. In the public ceremonies, lower caste people are not permitted to sit anywhere or near the *mandap*, although they are provide same amount of fees for the ceremonies. The main reason behind of the caste and feeling of untouchability. On the distributing work among the village people decide by the higher caste work to the

lower castes which ensures no physical contact with food or any festival material. Basically involved only in activities like wood cutting, taking up the plate to the dustbin, sweeping the floor etc. In coastal Odisha, such as in Kendrapada, Jajpur and some part of Jagatsinghpur districts, scheduled castes are not allowed to enter into the temples. Thus, so far as temple entry, participation in rituals and offering of food for worship is concerned Dalits continue to face more discrimination than that in other spheres. While it is clear that in the perception of the Dalits, there is a high level of discrimination against them, there are indications that the level of discrimination gets reduced to some extent under the impact of education. According to the education and economic status has no much impact on the discrimination reduction and it varies place to place. However, 82 per cent of dalit individuals said that education reduces discrimination. The level of discrimination faced by Dalit women from the women of the higher castes, they felt is more than that is experienced by the Dalit men

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