PERCEPTIONS OF SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN DROUGHT –PRONE DISTRICT OF ANANTAPURAMU- AN ENALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract
Women's status is a complex subject. Around the world, it varies in each society and culture. Women's status has, in general, improved gradually in many societies. There has been, however, slow progress on this aspect in some societies/social groups. And this is the case with Dalit women in India. In a highly hierarchical society such as India, women are bearing the burden of caste and the division of labour based on sex. This paper examines the status of Rural Dalit women in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. The analysis shows that over 40 per cent of the respondents were illiterate. Less than 3% of respondents have studied graduation or above. Less than 5% of the respondents were from women headed households. About 30% respondents have married before legal age of marriage. And 75% of the respondents have paid dowry at the time of marriage. In terms of working status, 38.5% were wage labourers, 9.1% were self-employed in agriculture/services and 1.6% were salaried employees. Others were into household work or unemployed or students or cannot work. The average income of the respondents was Rs.5650. The study recommends that empower Dalit women – economically and as rights holders. It also proposes for making separate allocations made for addressing concerns of Dalit women.

Introduction

In India, caste determines one's social status. The caste system is based on the division of people into social groups (or castes) in which the civil, cultural, and economic rights of each individual caste are predetermined or ascribed by birth and made hereditary. Dalit or untouchables remain as one of the most oppressed and exploited community in the country. Along with the social inequality of class and caste in Indian society there is one more dimension of stratification which is gender stratification. The oppressions of caste, class, and gender are interlocking, which makes the lives of many Dalit women even more burdensome (Sharma and Anurag, 2020). The primary objective of this study was to examine the socio-economic profile of the Scheduled Caste Women respondents in Anantapuramu.

Introduction

The present Paper on Scheduled Caste Women was carried out in the rural areas of Anantapur and Madakasira Manadals of Anantapur district. Women who constitute almost half of the country's population are known to suffer from many social and economic disadvantages. For centuries women have been suppressed, oppressed, deprived and discriminated. As discussed in previous chapters, Dalit women are more disadvantageous than women from other communities due to caste and gender nexus. Fortunately, there is an increasing concern to improve this situation globally and so also in India. Despite development efforts and women empowerment process over the decades, Dalit women in particular are lagging behind in attainment of social justice.

Methodology

The study, based on primary survey, attempted to understand the socio – economic situation of Scheduled Caste women in Ananthapuramu District of Andhra Pradesh. The key methodological **aspects are:**

- Selection of the study area: Anantapur district was selected for this study as it is one of the backward districts in AP state. The district is also exposed to sever droughts prone conditions, making disadvantaged groups like SCs more vulnerable. Dalit women in this region, therefore, continue to struggle for their livelihood due to low literacy levels, lack of agricultural activity, high levels of unemployment, forced migration, and lack of social and political awareness.

- Within the district, two mandals with highest proportion of rural Dalit women were selected. The mandals selected for the study were Anantapur and Madakasira. The sample villages (five from each mandal) from the selected mandals were randomly selected after listing villages having SC population. From each of the sample villages 30 Dalit women were randomly selected.

- Sample size: All the Scheduled Caste Women residing in the rural areas of Ananthapuramu constitute the population for the study. As explained above, from each of the sample villages women from 30 SC women were selected randomly. The study covered 300 rural Dalit women spread across 10 villages of 2 mandals. In other words, the sample respondents covered from each mandal was 150.

- Data Analysis: The information was collected from the sample households by using interview schedule. The data, thus, collected was organized in excel; and analysis was carried out by using SPSSS.

Analysis and Findings

The profile of respondents was analysed in terms of availability of basic facilities, education and marital status of women, access to land, occupational profile and income. This analysis would enable us to understand the socio- economic background of women respondents.

Madakasira mandal is primarily a rural mandal. On the other hand, 86.2% people in Ananatpaur mandal lives in urban areas. The total population in Anantapur and Madakasira Mandals was 388,023 and 81227 respectively (Table 1). While 92,905 families were residing in Anantapur Mandal, 18,763 families were residing in Madakasira Mandal. Schedule Caste population constitutes 9.1% (35,321 persons) in Anantapur mandal and 22.2% (18029 persons) in Madakasira mandal.

Table 1: Population details in the sample mandals

Sl. No.	Details	Mandal	
		Anantapur	Madakasira
1	Total population	388,023	81227
2	Male population	195,645	41,068
3	Female population	192,378	40,159
4	The total number of families residing	92,905	18,763
5	Schedule Caste population	35,321	18029
6	Proportion of SC population to total population	9.1	22.2
7	Female SC population	17,926	8,918

Availability of basic facilities: Drinking water, electricity and toilet were basic facilities required for a household. Table 2 shows the availability of basic facilities in the respondents' house. Drinking water

And electric connections were available in houses of all the respondents. In regard individual latrine, 84.3% respondents' have this facility in their house.

Table 2: House Facilities of Rural Dalit Women

Sl. No.	Facilities	No. of women	Percentage
1	Water	300	100
2	Electricity	300	100
3	Individual latrine	253	84.3
4	Open defecation	50	16.7

Source: Field Survey

Educational profile: Literacy may serve as an effective instrument of social change. Hence, Education is an important indicator of social development. It prepares women on their social and legal rights, reproductive health, child development, etc. Table 3 shows the educational profile of the respondents. The data show that 40.2 per cent of the respondents were illiterate. The data also show among the respondents, 16 % studied up to the primary level, about 24.5 % studied up to high school, 16.3 per cent studied up to intermediate and 1.9 % studied Degree or technical education. Just over one percent respondents have studied post-Graduation or professional course. On the whole literacy levels among respondents are low.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by Education level

Sl.No.	Literacy level	No. of Women	Percentage
1	Illiterate	121	40.2
2	Primary	48	16
3	Secondary	74	24.5
4	Intermediate	49	16.3
5	Graduate	6	1.9
6	Post Graduate	3	1.1
	Total	300	100

Source: field Survey

Marital Status: Among the respondents, 'married' is the majority group with 74.33 per cent. Widows account for 14.33 percent of the total respondents (Table. 4). The sample also comprised of a small proportion of unmarried women (5 per cent), divorced (2.67 per cent) and separated (3.67 per cent). Thus, proportion of single women within the sample is 20.67 per cent.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by marital status

Sl.No.	Marital Status	No. of Women's	Percentage
1	Unmarried	15	5.00
2	Married	223	74.33
3	Widow	43	14.33
4	Divorced	8	2.67
5	Separated	11	3.67
	Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey

The data of age at marriage show that 29.7 percent respondents got married when they were below 18 years (Table. 5). The prevalence of child marriage among Dalits was mainly due to poverty and illiteracy. Over 64 percent respondents got married after attaining legal age of marriage i.e., above 18 years. There were six percent unmarried women in the sample.
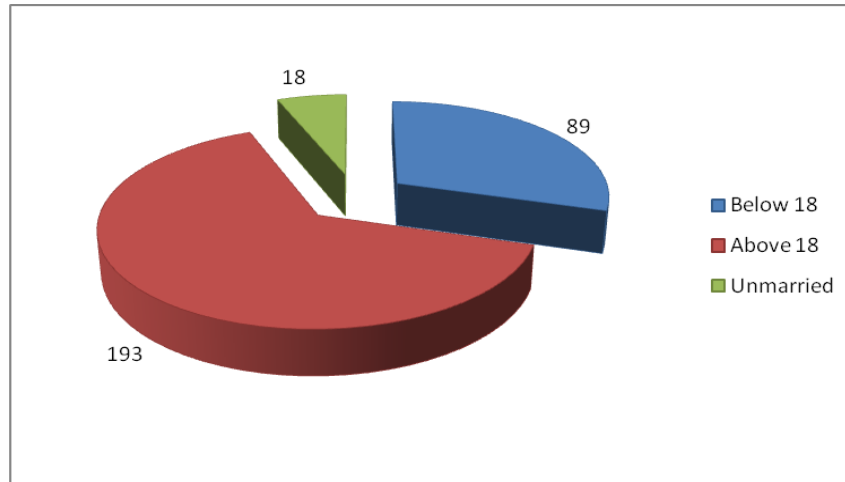

Fig. 1 Distribution of respondents by Age at Marriage

Access to Land: The agricultural land is an important source of livelihood in rural areas. It is also an important determinant of the economic status of a community. Table. 5 shows the land owned by the respondents' families. As can be seen from the table, a majority of them were landless. These landless families depend on wage employment for their livelihood. The analysis of land ownership shows that 23% of women was from Small and marginal holder families. Very few respondents were from medium holder families. Only 01.5 per cent of the respondents own more than 4 ha.

Table 5: Land ownership among respondents' families

Sl. No.	Size class	No. of women	Percentage
1	Landless	219	73.2
2	Marginal (below 1 ha)	47	15.6
3	Small (1-2 ha)	22	07.4
4	Semi-medium (2-4 ha)	7	02.3
5	Medium (4-10 ha)	5	01.5
6	Large (10 ha and above)	0	00.00
	Total	300	100.00

Source: field Survey

Occupational Profile: The occupational status of the respondents (Fig.2) indicates that nearly 32.5% of them were involved as wage labourers in agriculture. While 6% of the respondents were involved in non-agricultural wage labour, 5.6% of them were self-employed in the service sector. A small proportion of members were agriculturists (3.5%) and salaried employees (1.6%). The percentage of the respondents who cannot work is 15.3.
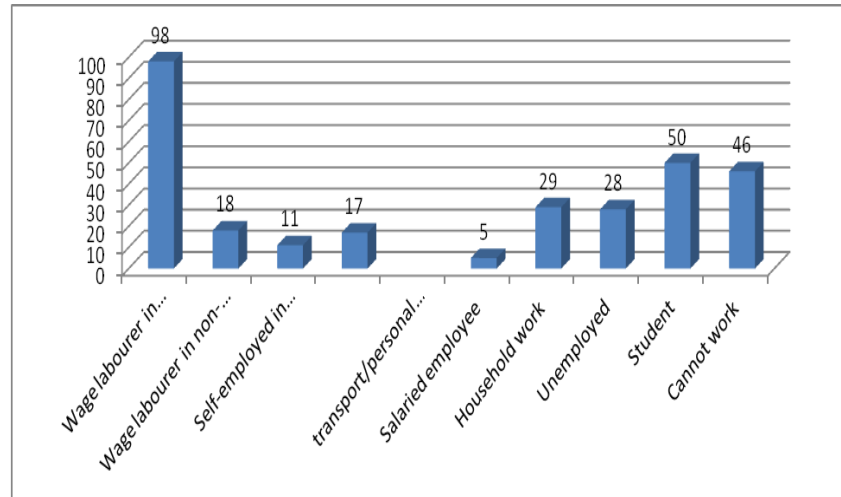
Fig.2. Distribution of respondents by working status

Income profile: Table. 6 show the distribution of respondents by their income. The income of the respondents depends upon their occupation. Income level is between Rs. 5,000 and Rs.9,000 for 35 percent respondents. The monthly earning is between Rs. 9,000 and Rs.11,000 for 17% respondents. Only 12 respondents, monthly income was more than Rs. 11000. The average income of the respondents was Rs.5650.

Table 6 Distribution of Respondents by Income

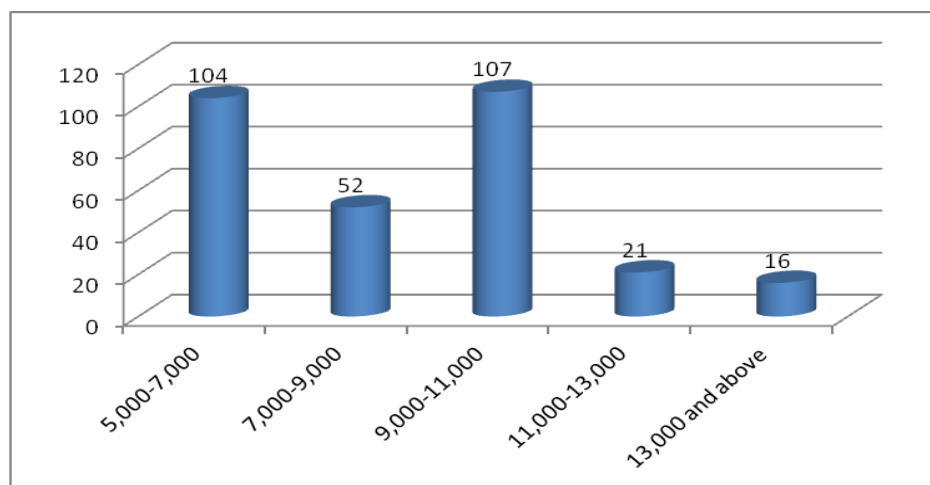| Sl.No.	Income level	No. of women	Percentage
1	5,000-7,000	104	34.67
2	7,000-9,000	52	17.33
3	9,000-11,000	107	35.67
4	11,000-13,000	21	7.00
5	13,000 and above	16	5.33
	Total	300	100

Source: filed Survey

Fig.3. Income levels of women

Conclusion

In a highly hierarchical society such as India, women are bearing the burden of caste and the division of labour based on sex. Dalit women are a deprived section and at the lowest level of economic and educational structures. The foregoing analysis on demography educational and economic data of Dalit women indicates that over 40 per cent of the respondents were illiterate. Less than 3% of respondents have studied graduation or above. Thus, low levels of education were found among respondents. Less than 5% of the respondents were from women headed households. About 30% respondents have married before legal age of marriage. And 75% of the respondents have paid dowry at the time of marriage. In terms of working status, 38.5% were wage labourers, 9.1% were self-employed in agriculture/services and 1.6% were salaried employees. Others were into household work or unemployed or students or cannot work. The average income of the respondents was Rs.5650.

The study recommends that empower Dalit women – economically and as rights holders. Dalit women need gender specific policies and programmes to address the issue of multiple deprivations. There is a need to ensure safe and equitable access to all community resources such as land, water and education for all Dalit women and children. Above all, separate allocations are to be made for addressing concerns of Dalit women.

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