Involvement of Scheduled Castes in Poverty Alleviation Programs: An Analysis of Muzaffarpur District, Bihar

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Research Paper	India, the world's second most populous country, faces a complex social problem of poverty. The country faces the challenge of eradicating poverty, with two basic approaches: absolute poverty and relative poverty. Rural India has a poverty line estimation of Rs 972 per month, while Urban India has Rs 1407 per month. Bihar, the state with the highest Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) value, recorded the most rapid absolute reduction in MPI value, with the percentage of the multidimensional poor decreasing from 51.89% to 33.76% in 2019–21. The Indian Bihar governments have implemented various poverty alleviation programs to address its significant poverty issue, with the policy-making efforts to raise social, economic, and political positions since independence among the scheduled caste population, but poverty rates among reserved castes remain high. Despite these efforts, achieving true equality and ending prejudice remains a significant challenge.
Keywords: *Scheduled castes, Poverty, Poverty alleviation programs, MPI, Population*	

Introduction

Poverty is a very complex social problem in India. India is a third-world country that has the biggest challenge of eradicating poverty. In the field of economics, the majority of analysts of poverty categorize those who are considered to be poor as individuals who are unable to sustain a specific level of consumption or income that is suitable to those circumstances. Absolute poverty and relative poverty are the two primary approaches to the concept of poverty that can be found in the literature on economics. Absolute poverty is a concept that is based on an absolute form of living that is defined in terms of consumption expenditure that is put down according to a certain minimum standard. All persons or groups that have consumption expenditures that are below this standard are considered to be poor. An estimation is produced of the income distribution of the population throughout the various fractal groupings, and a comparison is performed between the standard of living of persons living at the bottom layer of the population and those living at the top layer of the population in order to determine the relative standard of poverty. The Rangarajan Committee report that was released in June 2014 said that the poverty line estimation for rural India is Rs 972 per month, which is equivalent to Rs 32 per day. On the other hand, the poverty line assessment for urban India is Rs 1407 per month, which is equivalent to Rs 47 per day.

Bihar, the state with the highest Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) value, recorded the most significant absolute decline in MPI, with the proportion of the multidimensional poor reducing from 51.89% to 33.76% between 2019 and 2021. Bihar was recently ranked as the poorest state in the country by the Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2021, with a population of about 44 million people. Patna district has the lowest Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of the districts, with a value of 0.138, while Araria has the highest, at 0.356. Muzaffarpur district had a 48% headcount ratio on the Multidimensional Poverty Index, with a value of 0.239.

Definition of poverty

The World Bank Organization defines poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, illness, lack of access to education, unemployment, and fear for the future, all resulting from a daily struggle to survive and adapt to one's circumstances. Amartya Sen highlighted that poverty is not just about financial constraints; it also involves a lack of the ability to reach one's full potential as a human being. When a person is totally unable to meet their fundamental requirements, such as the need for food, clothing, and a place to live, they are said to be living in absolute poverty. It's possible that social, economic, and political factors all

play a role in poverty. The poverty highlights the multidimensionality of poverty; it means not having enough to feed and having a low level of health and education, having poor access to clean water and sanitation, and not having adequate physical security and opportunities to live a better life.

Socio-Economic Status of Scheduled Castes

Scheduled castes are castes or races that are socially, economically, and educationally backward in India. The term was first used in the Government of India Act, 1935, and the scheduled caste order was promulgated in August 1950. The purpose of classifying castes as scheduled castes is to patronize those who face caste discrimination and to provide them with special concessions. The scheduled castes are the communities at the bottom of the Indian social hierarchy. They are also known as Harijan, Dalit, Panchama, exterior castes, or the untouchable from a substantial segment of the Indian population. They split into about 1100 castes and subcastes in India. To identify the most underprivileged Dalits, the Bihar government created a new category known as Maha Dalits. 21 out of 23 scheduled (Dalit) castes in Bihar are considered Maha Dalits. The scheduled castes, arranged hierarchically as castes and subcastes, practice untouchability among themselves and do not share social status. They do not eat together, do not accept water from the hands of any other scheduled caste groups, and do not allow intermarriage among the different groups. They are characterized by two key words: population and poverty. The mass population of the scheduled castes are landless and almost destitute. A large segment of the scheduled castes does not have homestead land. Their extreme poverty and unhygienic living conditions make them suffer from malnutrition and the onset of diseases. As a result, they find themselves perpetually in debt and compelled to engage in bonded labor.

The government has made various efforts since independence to improve social, economic, and political positions. There are many poverty alleviation programs that were formulated to mobilize national resources directly toward the removal of poverty from the country, especially for the scheduled castes.

Bihar and Poverty Alleviation Programmes

Bihar is one of India's poorest states that has implemented various poverty alleviation programs to address its significant poverty issue. In 1950, the planning commission was constituted and fiver-year plans were adopted with major objectives to remove the poverty from the country as well as to equalize the income, employment, and wealth. The major programs undertaken by the central and state government for the benefits of the weaker section of the rural community in Bihar are as follow;

Integrated Rural development Programme (IRDP-1978), Development of women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA 1982-83), Self Helf Groups (SHGs), Minimum Needs Programmes (1974-78), Food for Work Programme (1977-78), Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM-1979), Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (1989), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA-2005), National Rural Health Mission (2005), Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (2005), National Food Security Mission (2007), Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (2009), Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (2011), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (2014), Atal Pension Yojana (2015), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Grameen (2016), Stands Up India (2016), Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (2016) Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Scheme (2018) etc…

In the struggle against poverty in the state of Bihar, the implementation of these ambitious initiatives by the central and state governments represents a turning point. The government's goal is to improve the lives of the most vulnerable members of society by tackling important issues like education, healthcare, infrastructure, and the generation of livelihoods. This will allow the government to give these individuals prospects for a brighter future. Even though the success of the project will be contingent on its successful execution and continuing commitment, it is an important step towards the creation of a more equal and prosperous Bihar. Through the implementation of these programs, the government intends to facilitate the empowerment of its population, the elimination of poverty, and the promotion of inclusive growth for future generations.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Despite 75 years of structured development in India, economic prosperity has overlooked the impoverished population. For the impoverished, particularly those belonging to the Scheduled Castes, who face compounded disadvantages, the disparity between the affluent and the destitute is expanding despite swift globalization and technical advancements. For poor people and people from Scheduled Castes, the main goal of economic development has been seen as increasing agricultural output, sanitation, healthcare, education, and other activities that bring in money. The scarcity of resources and the deprivation of capacity have adversely affected the most impoverished segments, predominantly comprising members of the Scheduled Castes. Socio-economic and political discrimination happens all the time or in part because of a strong system that either keeps people from the Scheduled Castes from getting jobs or puts them in jobs that don't pay well. Historically marginalized, most of the Scheduled

Castes lack access to essential resources for survival and growth, resulting in continued deprivation. This study, titled 'Involvement of Scheduled Castes in Poverty Alleviation Programs: An Analysis of Muzaffarpur District, Bihar,' aims to address the identified gap.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The following are the primary aims of the current study:

1) To study the socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes respondents in the selected area.
2) To examine the various poverty eradication schemes launched in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar.
3) To examine the causes of poverty among scheduled castes in the selected district and suggest the measures to implement the programs more effectively.

METHODOLOGY AND TOOLS OF DATA ANALYSIS

In accordance with the objectives, the current study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. We intentionally chose the Muzaffarpur district for the current investigation. To analyze the diverse poverty alleviation programs throughout the district, Mushahri has been randomly picked from the 16 blocks, and three villages within this block, which has the highest population of scheduled castes, have been at random chosen for sample inquiry. We selected a total of 100 respondents from scheduled castes for the study using a random sampling approach.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

After the questionnaire was constructed, data was collected from all around the Muzaffarpur area. Statistical techniques such as frequency tables, graphs, and more were used to analyze the collected data.

Table-1: Gender-wise distribution of the respondents

Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Male	59	59
Female	41	41
Total	**100**	**100**

Source: Primary field survey.

Table 1 illustrates that data were selected from a total of 100 respondents, of whom 59 were male and 41 were female.

Table-2: Age-wise distribution of the respondents

Age Groups	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
20-25	8	8
25-30	13	13
30-35	15	15
35-40	13	13
40-45	12	12
45-50	18	18
50-55	4	4
55 and above	17	17
Total	**100**	**100**

Source: Primary field survey.

Table 2 shows the age-wise distribution of the respondent and the mean age of the respondents is determined to be 41 years.

Table-3: Educational status of the respondents

Education	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Illiterate	33	33
Primary level	28	28
Secondary level	27	27
Intermediate level	9	9
Graduate level	2	2
Post-graduate and above	1	1
Total	**100**	**100**

Source: Primary field survey.

Table 3 illustrates that out of the total 100 respondents, 33 percent are illiterate, 28 percent are educatedup to the primary level, and 39 percent are educated at the secondary level and above. Therefore, it can be concluded that the studied area is characterized by povertydue to the educational backwardness of the population.

Table-4: Occupations of the respondents

Occupations	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Agri. Labor	61	61
Agri. Farmer	8	8
Private job	5	5
Govt. job	1	1
Self employed	2	2
Retired	2	2
Unemployed	21	21
Total	**100**	**100**

Source: Primary field survey.

It is clear from the table 4 that 69 percent of the respondent are involved in primary occupation (agriculture) as a labor or farmer. Only 10 percent of the respondents are involved in service and business. Whereas 21 percent are unemployed. The majority of the population is either unemployed or dependent on the agriculture sector, which is why impoverished is so prevalent in this region.

Table-5: Annual income of the respondents

Income (in Rs.)	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
10000-20000	8	8
20000-30000	27	27
30000-40000	22	22
40000-50000	27	27
50000 and above	16	16
Total	**100**	**100**

Note: The respondent's average income is Rs. 36,600.

Source: Primary field survey.

Table-6: Financial assets & investments of the respondents

Particulars	No. of Respondents		Total
	Yes	**No**	

Cash in Hand	24	76	100
Deposit	2	98	100
Jewelry	6	94	100

Source: Primary field survey.

It reveals from the table that maximum respondents have no minimum maintenance of cash in hand and only 2 and 6 respondents out of 100 have deposits and jewelries respectively. It resulted into poverty among the respondents in the study area.

Table-7: Indebtedness details of the respondents

	Particulars	No. of respondents	Percentage
Indebtedness	Yes	82	82
	No	18	18
Total		**100**	**100**
If yes,	1000-10000	4	4.87
Amount (in Rupees)	10000-20000	6	7.31
	20000-40000	11	13.41
	40000-60000	34	41.46
	60000-80000	20	24.39
	80000-1 lakh	5	6.10
	1 lakh and above	2	2.43
	Total	**82**	**100**
Source of Debt	Local money lander	9	10.97
	Land lords	15	18.29
	Friends/ relatives	10	12.19
	Bank/ SHGs	48	58.53
Total		**82**	**100**

Note: the average indebtedness of the respondents is found Rs. 51365.

Source: Primary field survey.

It is clears from the table-7 that every respondent in the study area is in indebtedness and the average indebtedness among the respondents is found 51365 rupees; that is the big reason for the poverty in the study area. It also reveals from the table that self help group have played a very important role in distributing loans among the people in the study area, yet despite all this many people are still dependent on moneylenders or land lords for loans, which can be a major reason for poverty.

Table-8: Awareness of the respondents on poverty alleviation programs

S. No.	Particulars		No. of respondents	Percentageof respondents
1	**Be aware of poverty?**			
	Yes		81	81
	No		19	19
	Total		**100**	**100**
2	**Knowledge of government initiatives to reduce poverty?**			
	Yes	Well-known	65	65
		slightly known	18	18
	No		17	17
	Total		**100**	**100**
3.	**Knowledge of Rural Development Programs?**			
	Programs only for the BPLs		21	21
	In the interest of society as a whole		28	28
	In the interest of rural people		51	51
	Total		**100**	**100**

Source: Primary field survey.

Table-9: Saving Habits of the respondents in bank and post office

S. No.	Particulars	Before Poverty Alleviation Programs	Percentage	After Poverty Alleviation Programms	Percentage

1	Saving habits in the bank				
	Yes	38	38	98	98
	No	62	62	2	2
	Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
2	**Saving habits in the post offices**				
	Yes	15	15	52	52
	No	85	85	48	48
	Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Primary field survey.

After the implantation of the various poverty alleviation programs in the study area, the saving habits among the respondents in banks and post offices have drastically increased but in case of post office even today it is very less i.e. around 48 percent of the respondents have no savings in post offices. Due to the lack of understanding of savings and ack of financial education, even today people do not understand the importance of saving in the post office. So, by promoting saving habits in post offices, individuals can ensure financial security, stability, and growth, while also contributing to the country's economic development and

Table-10:

Saving details of family of the respondents before and after Poverty Alleviation Programs

S. No.	Particulars (In Rs.)	Before Poverty Alleviation Programs	Percentage	After Poverty Alleviation Programms	Percentage
	Below – 5000	21	21	51	51
	5000-10000	13	13	26	26
	10000-15000	2	2	16	16
	15000-20000	2	2	3	3
	20000-25000	1	1	2	2
	No savings	61	61	2	2

| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Note: 1. The average saving of the respondents before poverty alleviation programs are Rs. 5961.

2. The average saving of the respondents before poverty alleviation programs are Rs. 6326.

Source: Primary field survey.

Conclusion

Poverty is characterized as a lack of access to essential needs such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare. Poverty is the result of a complicated combination of variables, including unemployment, a lack of education, and political instability. Poverty alleviation aims to raise the living standards of low-income individuals and families. The country cannot claim economic growth while a large percentage of its population remains impoverished. The scheduled caste population in India faces different socioeconomic challenges and inequities than other groups. Poverty is a big issue for the scheduled caste population in India. The Indian and Bihar governments have implemented a variety of social programs and policies to alleviate these gaps and enhance the lives of the scheduled caste population. Despite these efforts, poverty rates among reserved castes remain high. The current study seeks to analyze the causes of persistently high poverty rates among India's scheduled castes, with a focus on their participation in poverty alleviation programs. The socioeconomic position of the underprivileged segment of society has improved greatly because of the government's poverty alleviation measures, but there is still a long way to go in terms of establishing true equality and ending prejudice. Their participation in these initiatives is insufficient to address all the underlying causes of poverty and inequality. The policy-making body should keep the scheduled caste in mind as not only beneficiaries but also as participants, because the society in need cannot completely profit from any scheme unless they participate adequately.

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