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Inequality in Opportunity among Indian Dalits – An Empirical Study

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Inequality in opportunity in any society is a part of the overall inequality which arises from factors beyond an individual's control such as parental education, caste, gender and religion. The last three decades have seen a number of attempts to formulate the concept of equality of opportunity with a view to policy application. The empirical works showed that equality of opportunity in the policy context could be measured and quantified, and the policies could be formulated and judged accordingly. However, attempts to quantify and apply the concept in policy context have also revealed a host of problems of a conceptual and empirical nature.

Social inequality occurs when resources in a given society are distributed unevenly, typically through norms of allocation, that engender specific patterns along lines of society defined categories of persons. Economic inequality, usually described on the basis of the unequal distribution of income or wealth, is a type of social inequality.

Social inequality is found in almost every society. In simple societies, those that have few social roles and statuses occupied by its members, social inequality may be very low. In today's world, most of our population lives in more complex than simple societies. As social complexity increases, inequality tends to increase along with a widening gap between the poorest and the wealthiest members of society.

Social status is accorded to persons in a society on at least two bases: ascribed characteristics and achieved characteristics. Ascribed characteristics are those present at birth or assigned by others and over which an individual has little or no control. Examples include sex (male or female), skin colour, eye shape, place of birth, parentage and social status of parents. Achieved characteristics are those which we earn or choose; examples include level of education, marital status, leadership status and other measures of merit. In most societies, an individual's social status is a combination of ascribed and achieved factors. In some societies, however, only ascribed statuses are considered in determining one's social status and there exists little to no social mobility and, therefore, few paths to more social equality. This type of social inequality is generally referred to as caste inequality.

The single best predictor of an individual's future social status is the social status into which they were born. Theoretical approaches to explaining social inequality concentrate on questions about how such social differentiations arise, what types of resources are being allocated, what are the roles of human cooperation and conflict in allocating resources, and how do differing types and forms of inequality affect the overall functioning of a society?

The variables considered most important in explaining inequality and the manner in which those variables combine to produce the inequities and their social consequences in a given society can change across time and place. In addition to interest in comparing and contrasting social inequality at local and national levels, in the wake of today's globalizing processes, the most interesting question becomes: what does inequality look like on a worldwide scale and what does such global inequality bode for the future? In effect, globalization reduces the distances of time and space, producing a global interaction of cultures and societies and social roles that can increase global inequities.

In India, the most intricate issue pertaining to deprivation, discrimination, exploitation and oppression is Dalits issue. The term 'Dalits' means depressed, suppressed, oppressed, trampled under social caste system in Hindu social order, the poorest of the poor are being socio-economic trampled people in society are called Dalits and are ill-treated especially by those belonging to upper castes. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar devoted his entire life to eliminate social discrimination and economic disparities in India. Every nation has an economic system, in that system, if people are to lead a life with self-respect, independent and respectful manner, they have to fulfill maximum basic necessities of life; these are food, cloth, shelter, education, health care and other facilities. To fulfill these minimum needs the economy of the country consisting of agriculture, industry service sector, etc should generate an equal amount of income, and Dalits should have sufficient income to purchase the goods and services. Against this background of the relative economic and social backwardness of the 16% of India's population who belong to Scheduled Castes (SCs), and the 8% who belong to Scheduled Tribes (STs).

But the questions are: What is the condition of the SCs and the STs? What do they feel about themselves in relation to others? What distance do others maintain with them at the village through the existence of caste system? A thorough investigation into this matter is necessary. The present paper makes an attempt to find answers to the above questions along with some other relevant questions, which have contemporary as well as long lasting relevance and implications for future socio-economic development of SCs and STs.

The paper addresses various aspects of social inequality and their impact on Dalits in India. Using some micro-econometric techniques, the study tries to find out the causes of social inequality of Dalits in India. A comment on the reservation policy in improving the condition of Dalits has also been made. A number of suggestions have been put forward for better and wider implementation of the reservation package to the disadvantaged people of India. The study is

based on data collected in 2018 through field survey, covering 120 households in four villages, located in the district of Jalpaiguri of West Bengal, India.

The most common metric for comparing social inequality in different nations is the Gini coefficient, which measures the concentration of wealth and income in a nation from 0 to 1. Using some micro-econometric techniques, the study observes that the parental background is the key circumstances influencing inequality of opportunity, followed by gender and place of birth. Inequality of opportunity is also strongly positively correlated with inequality of observed incomes.

The first preliminary results show that in 2011, considering country of origin as a circumstance, 28,3% of inequality in labour earnings in the EU is attributable to circumstances outside the control of individuals. Further analyses are underway to assess how much inequality of opportunity has evolved over time, by applying the model to the 2005 EU-SILC ad-hoc module.