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### Comparison of socio-economic profile characteristics of scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste farm families in Karnataka

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#### Abstract

The rural society is a mix of people belonging to various caste, creed and religion. Also there are agricultural labourers, tenants and share croppers who are socially weak and economically poor. Many of these farmers come from socially backward groups such as scheduled castes (SC) which is found at the bottom of rural social hierarchy. This study was undertaken in the State of Karnataka to compare the socio-economic status of SC and non-SC farm families and develop strategies to empower SC farm families. The results indicated that middle aged farmers (36-50 years) from both SC and non-SC community dominated in agriculture, female labour participation rate was higher among SC farm families (29.17%), more than 90 per cent of the SC and non-SC respondents were married, nuclear families were predominantly found, SC farm families involved more in agricultural labour, higher educational qualification was rarely found among SC farm families, more than one third of SC farm families (38.33%) were landless while only 11.25 per cent of the non-SC farm families did not own any land and agricultural labour was the main source of livelihood to SC farm families in the study districts. The stark differences in socio-economic status of SC and non-SC farm families calls for strategies to bring them on to the forefront of mainstream society.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic status, scheduled castes, non-scheduled castes, labour force

#### Introduction

India is a land of diversity. Diversity can be seen in each and every aspect of life beginning from soil, topography, resources availability, crops grown, food pattern, lifestyle, dressing, culture, customs, tradition, occupation and many more. Apart from huge urban and rural gap there exists stark differences within the urban and rural societies itself. Urban societies are complex in lifestyle aspects while rural societies are complex in their social structure. One can see deep social stratification within the rural society as compared to urban society where the stratification is not so deep. Agriculture is the main occupation of the rural people. It provides employment to about 47 per cent of the country's population (Economic Survey, 2022-23). Majority i.e., 86 percentage of the farmers in India are marginal and small farmers with a land holding of less than one hectare and one-two hectares respectively (Agriculture Census, 2015-16). There are some more classes such as agricultural labourers, tenants and share croppers who constitute meagre percentage. These farmers usually belong to socially disadvantaged groups such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Scheduled caste is one of the most exploited, neglected and backward social groups in India. They account for a large proportion of India's agricultural workers but they generally do not own land and they are forced to do low-paying and undesirable occupations which do not permit social and

economic upward mobility (Raghavendra, 2020). Scheduled Caste population possesses only about 11.84 per cent of the total operational holdings and operates 8.54 per cent of it as compared to 79.33 per cent of the total operational holdings held and 79.21 per cent of it operated by general farmers (Agriculture Census, 2015-16). This striking disparity and dispossession is a consequence of centuries of oppressive practices where Scheduled Caste cultivators mostly worked as slaves or labourers on the lands of elite property owners. The continuation of this system has only prolonged the docile status of Scheduled Caste farmers. In this regard a comprehensive analysis of socio-cultural status of scheduled caste (SC) would throw light on their standard of living and help in framing a development oriented strategy towards egalitarian society through appropriate interventions in agriculture.

#### Methodology

After a thorough review of the available literature several variables related to the socio-cultural status were considered for inclusion in the study. Ex-post-facto research design was employed to analyze the socio-cultural status of Scheduled Caste farm families as the researcher had least control over the selected variables. The study was conducted in Karnataka as Scheduled Castes form a sizeable portion (17.15%) of the State's population and also there are about 101 different sub-castes which is highest for any given State

in the country. Based on the percentage of SC population to the total population in the district the following districts Kalaburagi and Belagavi in the northern part, Kolar and Mysuru in the southern part and Dharwad in the north western part of the State were selected. Two blocks were randomly chosen from each district and from each block two villages were selected randomly thus constituting 10 blocks and 20 villages for the study. From each village 12 SC and 12 non-SC farmers were chosen randomly to assess their socio-cultural status. In total 240 SC farmers and 240 non-SC farmers were interviewed in the study areas. Statistical tools like frequency, simple percentage were used and the data was collected from the respondents using structured interview schedule.

## Results and Discussions

### 1. Age

Fig. 1 revealed that, more than one third of the SC respondents (40.00%) belonged to middle age group (36 to 50 years) followed by nearly a third (32.08%) belonging to young age group (upto 35 years) and remaining 27.92 per cent were elders (> 50 years) while 47.92 per cent of non-SC respondents were of middle age, 26.25 per cent were young and 25.83 per cent were elders. The middle and younger age groups can be motivated for practising scientific farming with higher farm efficiency. Similar findings were supported by Ponnusamy and Gupta (2006).

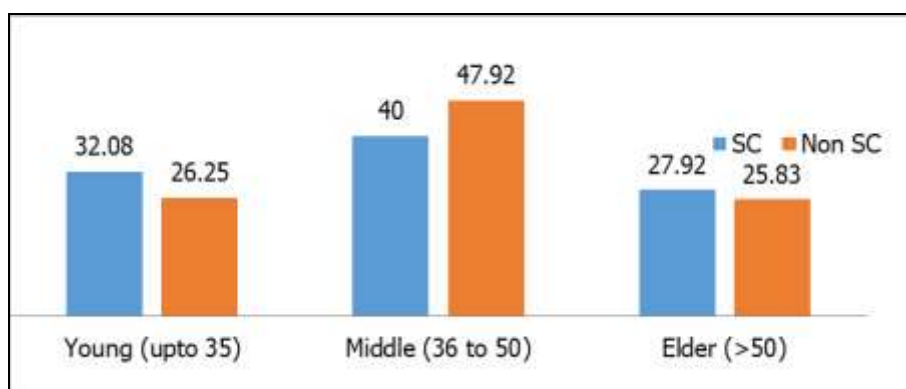


Fig 1: Distribution of respondents according to their age

### 2. Sex

Fig. 2 indicated that, majority of the SC (70.83%) and non-SC respondents (85.42%) were men and the rest i.e. (29.17%) and (14.58%) were women respectively. The findings correlate with Sardar (2020). Women perform most of the activities on farm including sowing, weeding, intercultural operations, transplanting, harvesting, winnowing, grading, packaging and branding except marketing over which the men have complete control. More than 80 per cent of the economically active women in the country are involved in agriculture. Their participation in agriculture and allied activities is mainly as unpaid family labour. In dairying, more than 70 per cent of the activities such as cleaning the cattle shed, milching, grazing is done by women.

However, SC women who were involved in carrying out

farming and allied activities were more compared to non-SC women during the time of data collection. It was observed that the SC women worked as farm labourers for wage on others' farm during early morning hours as well as evening hours. The reason might be that SC households are relatively poor in economic status as compared to non-SC households which prompts the SC family members to work in order to secure their livelihood. Moreover, farm labour and animal husbandry, particularly dairy were the important sources of livelihood for the SC community. Since care and maintenance of dairy animals were largely looked after by SC women in the study areas, they constituted a considerable number of respondents. Indian society is typically patriarchal where it is difficult to get opportunity to interact with women although major farming operations are being looked after by them.

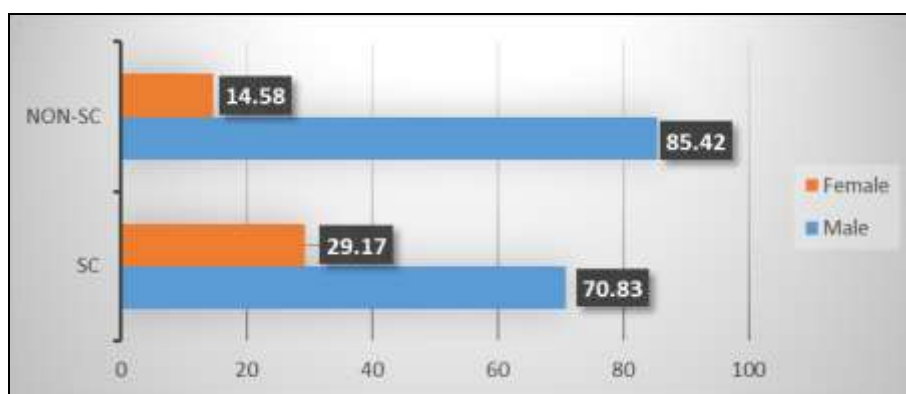
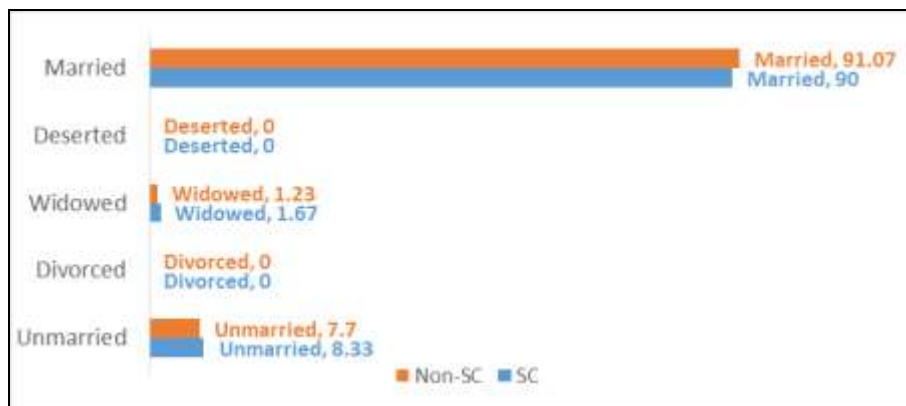


Fig 2: Distribution of respondents according to their sex

### 3. Marital status

Fig. 3 showed that, majority of the SC (90.00%) and non-SC (91.07%) respondents were married with only 8.33 per cent and 7.70 per cent respondents being unmarried in both the communities respectively. The rural population has discontinued the ill-practices such as child marriage and also the youths are more inclined towards finding secure

livelihood before getting married as a result of which the average age for marriage has pushed higher in rural areas compared to earlier time. This might be due to the awareness among the youths regarding health problems associated with the child marriage as well as strict implementation of laws against child marriage by the authorities.

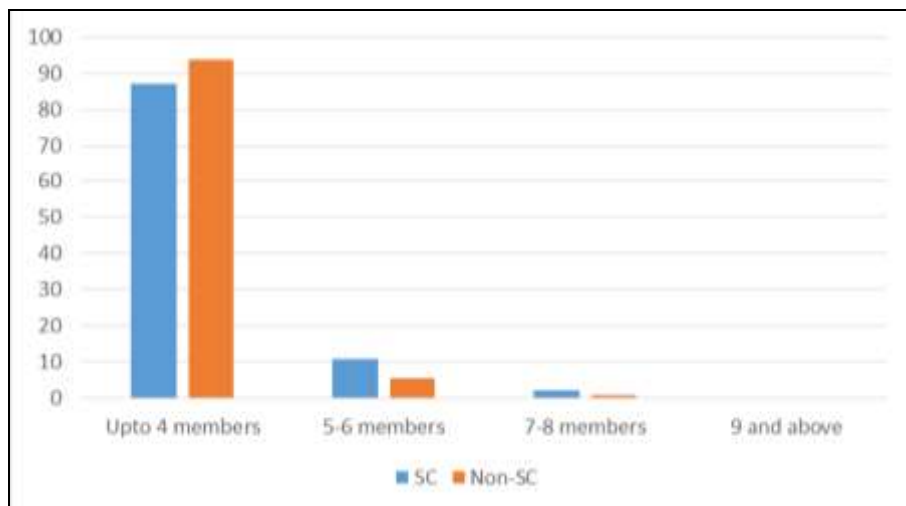


**Fig 3:** Distribution of respondents according to their marital status

### 4. Family size

Size of the family indicates the family labour available for agriculture and allied enterprises. Fig. 4 discloses that, majority of SC (87.08%) and non-SC (93.75%) farm families had upto 4 members in the family, 10.83 per cent of SC and 5.42 per cent of non-SC families had upto 6 members and only 2.08 per cent and 0.83 per cent had eight members in the family respectively and none of the SC and

non-SC families possessed nine members and above. The Indian society has moved away from joint family system and small family has become the norm in the rural society. The smaller family size limits the opportunity to practice the multiple farm enterprises by any single family as it cannot share the proportionate labour requirement for multiple operations. The comparable findings were reported by Kaur (2015).



**Fig 4:** Distribution of respondents according to their family size



**Fig 5:** Data collection at Kalaburagi and Dharwad districts

### 5. Family type

Fig. 6 shows that, majority of the respondents in both SC (76.67%) and non-SC (93.33) categories had nuclear families consisting of respondent, wife/husband and their unmarried children whereas higher percentage of SC respondents (23.33%) were living in joint families with more than one married couple in the family compared with

6.67 per cent of the non-SC respondents (Table 5.5). Similar findings were reported by Deshingkar and Start (2003). The proportion of traditional joint family system is declining in rural areas due to modern lifestyle and migration of farm families into urban areas in search of regular wage-based jobs and also families get separated due to social, educational and financial reasons (Ponnusamy, 2006).



**Fig 6:** Distribution of respondents according to their family type

### 6. Experience in agriculture and allied activities

Table 1 clearly showed that, more than half of the non-SC respondents (57.08%) and nearly half of the SC respondents (48.75%) had medium experience in farming. More than one third of non-SC respondents (35.00%) and 30.42 per cent of SC respondents had high farming experience. One fifth of SC respondents (20.83%) and less than one-tenth (7.92%) of non-SC respondents had low level of farming experience. The overall involvement of SC respondents in farming activities was lower compared to non-SC respondents. This might be either due to landlessness among

SC respondents or they owned meagre land holdings which were insufficient for practising sustainable agriculture and also majority of them were agriculture labourers who worked on other farms or migrated to urban areas for earning regular wages, which indicated that casual labour is the main source of livelihood. These findings correlated with the findings of Krishnan (2019). However, it is to be noted that being farm labourers, SC farmers have better manual work experience rather than planning and monitoring experience.

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents according to experience in agriculture and allied activities N=480

S. No.	Years of experience	SC (n=240)		Years of experience	Non-SC (n=240)	
		F	%		F	%
1	Low (1-16 years)	50	20.83	Low (1-12 years)	19	7.92
2	Medium (17-29 years)	117	48.75	Medium (13-24 years)	137	57.08
3	High (30-47 years)	73	30.42	High (25-42 years)	84	35.00



## 7. Educational qualification of the respondent

Table 2 indicated that, about 30 per cent of SC respondents had no schooling compared to 9.58 percent SC respondents. Twenty per cent of SCs had education upto primary school compared to 26.25 per cent of non-SCs. About 27.50 per cent SC and 35.00 per cent non-SCs had received education

upto 10<sup>th</sup>. About 10 per cent SCs and 15 per cent non-SCs were educated upto college level. There were 7.50 per cent and 9.58 per cent graduates among SC and non-SC respondents and only 2.50 per cent of SC and 5.00 per cent of non-SC respondents had qualification upto post-graduate level.

**Table 2:** Distribution of respondents according to educational qualification N=480

S. No.	Educational qualification	SC (n=240)		Non-SC (n=240)	
		F	%	F	%
1	No schooling	73	30.42	23	9.58
2	Primary school (1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> )	52	21.67	63	26.25
3	Secondary schooling (6 <sup>th</sup> to 10 <sup>th</sup> )	66	27.50	84	35.00
5	College (11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> )	25	10.42	35	14.58
6	Graduate	18	7.50	23	9.59
7	Post-Graduate and above	6	2.50	12	5.00

## 8. Size of land holding

Table 3 revealed that, more than one third of SC farm families (38.33%) were landless while only 11.25 per cent of the non-SC farm families did not own any land. These landless SC farm families work as farm labourers on other farms for their livelihood. Huge disparity was observed in the size of landholdings between the SC and non-SC farm families. Nearly one third SC farm families (32.50%) were marginal farmers with less than 1 ha land while only 22.08 per cent of non-SCs belonged to this category. Small and big farmers among SC farm families accounted for about 17.92 and 11.25 per cent with land holding of 1-2 ha and more than two ha respectively. However, higher percentage

of non-SC farm families belonged to small (37.92%) and big (28.75%) land holding categories. These findings correlate with the work of Ponnusamy (2006) and Krishnan (2019). These landless SC farm families have no alternative source of income in villages other than agriculture. Thus, the only option left for the community is to explore jobs in the service sector. Hence, they are forced to migrate to cities during off-season and work in low paying jobs. But many of these migrants try to find menial jobs such as maids, construction workers, security guards, and casual labourers to secure their livelihood and settle in slums which make them vulnerable to diseases, uncertainties like COVID-19 lockdown.

**Table 3:** Distribution of respondents according to size of land holding N=480

S. No.	Size of land holding	SC (n=240)		Non-SC (n=240)	
		F	%	F	%
1	Marginal (Upto 1 ha)	78	32.50	53	22.08
2	Small (1-2 ha)	43	17.92	91	37.92
3	Big (>2 ha)	27	11.25	69	28.75
4	Landless	92	38.33	27	11.25

## 9. Annual family income

Table 4 indicated that, majority of SC households (69.58%) belonged to low annual income category ranging between Rs.20000 to 40989 while 19.58 per cent of them had medium annual income ranging from Rs.40990 to 45417 and only 10.83 per cent of them were found to be high annual income households ranging from Rs.45418 to 70000. Nearly half of non-SC households (47.08%) belonged to medium annual income category ranging from Rs.100,001

to 156,000 and 30.42 per cent of them belonged to high income categories ranging from Rs.156,001 to 250,000 while one fourth of the (25.83%) belonged to low annual income category ranging from Rs.70000-100000 as depicted in table 5.36. The tiny land size and farm labour cannot generate regular employment opportunities. SC farm households have to resort to seasonal time bound employment and therefore, their income level is very low as compared to non-SC farm households.

**Table 4:** Distribution of respondents according to annual family income N=480

S. No.	SC (n=240)			Non-SC (n=240)		
	Annual family income (Rs.)	F	%	Annual family income (Rs.)	F	%
1	Low (20000-40989)	167	69.58	Low (70000-100,000)	62	25.83
2	Medium (40990-45417)	47	19.58	Medium (100,001-156,000)	105	43.75
3	High (45418-70000)	26	10.83	High (156,001-250,000)	73	30.42

## 10. Conclusion

X From the above results and discussions, it is clear that the socio-economic situation of Scheduled Caste farm families was lower than the non-Scheduled Caste farm families. The proportion of young people among both the SC and non-SC farm families were almost the same which indicates that

there was a good chance of motivating young population to continue in the agricultural sector through suitable and attractive policies. Since the women constituted significant percentage of the respondents in the study, implementation of gender favourable policies might enhance the status of women in agriculture from mere labourers to farmers and

helps in mainstreaming them into the progressive platforms. Improvement in basic literacy, education and awareness of stringent laws have led to reduction in child marriages which has resulted in increased age of marriage which empowers the women directly. Thus awareness creation through health activists in rural areas might uproot the evil practice and promote healthy lifestyle among rural mass. The poor economic situation of the rural household forces all the family members to seek employment which has led to discontinuance or drop-out from educational institutions. This can be checked through appropriate social security schemes and incentives for higher studies. Nuclear family was predominantly found in the study areas which indicated the transformation in rural demographic structure. Due to inheritance of ancestral property the fragmentation of land holdings has become unavoidable which has resulted in low per capita land holdings where mechanization and higher productivity are not possible resulting in lower annual income for the farm families. Consolidation of agricultural holdings by establishing Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) will be of great help in improving production, processing and marketing. Agricultural labour has become the main source of income to the rural families. Crop and livestock income have declined. Labour supply is more in rural areas which can be efficiently used to create public infrastructure in agriculture by guaranteeing minimum wages which is a win-win situation for both the government as well as farmers.

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