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Agricultural practices and socioeconomic status of scheduled castes in Bilaspur division, Chhattisgarh

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Abstract

This research article investigates the agricultural practices of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the Bilaspur division of Chhattisgarh, examining how these practices influence their socioeconomic status. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews. The findings reveal a complex relationship between agricultural methods, resource access, and socioeconomic conditions. This paper discusses the implications for policy and development programs aimed at improving the livelihoods of SC farmers.

Keywords: Bilaspur division, caste-based discrimination, Govt. policies and scheduled caste farmer

Introduction

The social hierarchy in India has been characterized by the caste system, a rigid social stratification that categorizes individuals into hierarchical groups based on birth and occupation. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the SCs, who have historically been marginalized, oppressed, and subjected to various forms of discrimination, including social segregation, economic exploitation, and political disenfranchisement. The origins of the caste system can be traced back to ancient scriptures and religious texts, perpetuating a hierarchical social order that has endured for centuries. The British colonial rule further entrenched caste-based discrimination through policies of divide and rule, which exacerbated existing social tensions and inequalities. Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India, including those in Chhattisgarh, often face socioeconomic challenges due to historical discrimination and limited access to resources. Agriculture is a primary livelihood source for many SC communities in the Bilaspur division, which comprises several districts including Bilaspur, Korba, and Janjgir-Champa. Understanding their agricultural practices and socioeconomic conditions is crucial for targeted interventions.

Objectives

1. To analyze the agricultural practices of SC farmers in

Bilaspur division.

2. To assess the impact of these practices on their socioeconomic status.
3. To identify factors influencing agricultural productivity and economic well-being.

Materials and Methods

Study Area

Bilaspur division is located in the central part of Chhattisgarh. The region is characterized by a diverse agro-climatic environment, which affects agricultural practices.

Data Collection

1. **Quantitative Data:** A structured questionnaire was administered to 150 SC households across various villages in Bilaspur, Korba, and Janjgir-Champa districts. The survey covered aspects such as crop types, farming techniques, land ownership, income levels, and access to resources.
2. **Qualitative Data:** In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 SC farmers, key informants, and local agricultural extension officers to gain insights into traditional practices, challenges, and resource management.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Statistical methods were employed to analyze survey data, including descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to interpret interview transcripts and identify recurring themes related to agricultural practices and socioeconomic status.

Results

Agricultural Practices

Crop Diversity: SC farmers predominantly grow rice, pulses, and vegetables. Rice is the main staple crop, cultivated using traditional methods with limited use of modern inputs.

Farming Techniques: Traditional farming practices are common, with minimal mechanization. Use of organic fertilizers and traditional irrigation methods are prevalent.

Land Ownership: Many SC households operate on small, fragmented plots. Land ownership is often limited, affecting their ability to invest in modern agricultural technologies.

Socioeconomic Status

Income Levels: The average income of SC farmers is significantly lower compared to other social groups in the region. The primary sources of income are agriculture and daily wage labor.

Access to Resources: SC farmers face challenges in accessing credit, modern inputs, and government schemes. Limited access to irrigation and market facilities further hampers their productivity and income.

Challenges

Resource Constraints: Limited access to quality seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation infrastructure.

Market Access: Difficulties in accessing markets and fair pricing for their produce.

Education and Skills: Low levels of education and limited training on modern agricultural practices.

Housing and Infrastructure: SCs are disproportionately affected by inadequate housing and basic infrastructure, with many residing in slums or informal settlements lacking access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity. Discrimination in housing markets, forced evictions, and lack of tenure security further marginalize SC communities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the traditional agricultural practices of SC farmers in Bilaspur are influenced by socio-economic constraints and resource limitations. The reliance on traditional methods and the lack of access to modern agricultural inputs contribute to lower productivity and income levels. The fragmentation of land ownership further exacerbates these issues, limiting the scale of operations and investment in technological advancements.

The study highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance agricultural productivity among SC farmers. Policies should focus on improving access to resources, providing training on modern farming techniques, and facilitating better market linkages. Additionally, addressing systemic issues related to land ownership and access to credit can play a crucial role in improving the socioeconomic status of SC farmers.

Conclusion

The agricultural practices of Scheduled Castes in Bilaspur division are deeply intertwined with their socioeconomic status. Traditional farming methods, combined with limited resources and market access, contribute to the challenges faced by SC farmers. Effective policy interventions and support programs are essential to enhance their agricultural productivity and overall economic well-being.

Government policies, social movements, and community empowerment initiatives play complementary roles in advancing the socio-economic rights and dignity of SCs and building a more just and inclusive society in Chhattisgarh. As Chhattisgarh continues its journey towards socio-economic development and inclusive growth, addressing the challenges faced by SCs must remain a central priority to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of progress and prosperity.

This research provides a foundational understanding of the agricultural practices and socioeconomic status of SCs in Bilaspur division, paving the way for more focused studies and interventions.

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