

# **Dalit Households in Village Economies**

EDITED BY

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# Introduction

*V.K. Ramachandran*

Caste is an institution of oppression and social discrimination specific to South Asia, more so to India. Central to the caste system were the status assigned to the Dalit people and the now-criminal practice of untouchability. Caste is a creation of, intrinsic to and inseparable from the religion of Hinduism.

Caste is hostile to individual and collective freedom: where there is caste, there can be no democracy. In *Annihilation of Caste*, Dr Ambedkar wrote that democracy is 'primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men' (Ambedkar 1944). 'No matter what the Hindus say,' Ambedkar wrote in his classic denunciation of the concept of Hindu Rashtra, 'Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy' (Ambedkar 1945).

Caste is embedded in production relations. It is an impediment to the growth of the productive forces, and a bulwark against the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling classes. In so far as it has gripped the minds of people, caste has served as a material force. Its main ideological function in the contemporary world is to create, by means of coercion or internalization, an acceptance of social hierarchy based on ascribed status, and to prevent revolutionary action against the cruel and abhorrent forms of oppression and degradation that characterize Indian society today.

In recent years, there have been new scholarship and new attempts to understand the socio-economic conditions of life of Dalit people and households in India, particularly rural India, where oppression is sharpest.

In an important 2004 article, Sukhadeo Thorat wrote that there is now 'a massive literature on the practice of untouchability and atrocities' against the Dalit people (Thorat 2004). The literature to which he refers is one to which a wide range of concerned citizens – academics, political and social activists, and journalists – have contributed. There has been more detailed and concurrent coverage than before in the print, audio-visual and new media, of specific attacks: for all the problems of contemporary journalism, there

is really no comparison between the coverage of, for instance, Khairlanji in 2006 and Venmani in 1968.

Thorat (2004) refers also to new ‘studies based on village surveys [that] bring out the actual magnitude of the practice of untouchability and atrocities’. The first efforts in this direction were to document direct discrimination; among the most important in this regard was a study published in Shah *et al.* (2006). This study presented the results of a major survey, conducted over eighteen months in 2001–02, in 565 villages in eleven States of India (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar).<sup>1</sup> The survey was not a household survey; one questionnaire was canvassed in each village. The summary results give an extraordinary picture of practices of direct discrimination against Dalits in contemporary rural India (Table 1).

TABLE 1 *Overview of the forms in which untouchability is practised in rural India, by degree of prevalence, from a survey conducted in 2001–02, and reported in Shah, Mander, Thorat, Deshpande and Baviskar (2006)*

More than 50% of villages
Denied entry into non-Dalit houses
Bar against sharing food
Denied entry into places of worship
45–50% of villages
Denied cremation and burial grounds
Denied access to water facilities
Ban on marriage processions
Not allowed to sell milk to cooperatives
Denied hair-cutting services
Denied laundry services
Ill-treatment of women by non-Dalit men
30–40% of villages
Schools: separate seating
Payment of wages: no touching
Denied entry into village shops
Denied work as agricultural labour
Cannot sell things in local markets
Denied visits by health workers
Separate seating in eating-places
Denied access to irrigation facilities
Separate utensils in eating-places
Discriminatory treatment in police stations
Separate seating in self-help groups

<sup>1</sup> The combined Dalit population of these States accounted for 77 per cent of India’s Dalit population.

*25–30% of villages*  
Separate seating in panchayats  
Schools: Dalits and non-Dalit students sit separately  
Not employed in house construction  
Cannot make purchases from milk cooperatives  
Denied entry into police station  
Denied carpenters’ services  
Denied entry into shops that are run as part of the public distribution system (PDS)  
Denied access to restaurants and hotels  
Forced to stand before ‘upper’-caste men

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*20–25% of villages*  
Paid lower wages for the same work  
Ban on festival processions on roads  
Denied home delivery of letters  
Segregated seating in schools  
Denied entry into private health clinics  
No access to grazing or fishing grounds  
Tailor refuses to take measurements  
No buying of pots from potter  
Separate drinking water in schools

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*15–20% of villages*  
Discriminatory treatment in post offices  
Bar on wearing new or bright clothes  
Shops: no touching in transactions  
Denied access to public roads or passages  
Denied entry into Primary Health Centres

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*10–15% of villages*  
Denied entry into panchayat offices  
Ban on wearing dark glasses, smoking, etc.  
Public transport: no seats or last entry  
Separate lines at polling booths  
Denied entry into polling booth  
Discriminatory treatment in Primary Health Centres (PHCs)

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*Less than 10% of villages*  
Denied access or entry to public transport  
Separate times for voting at polling booths  
Discriminatory treatment in private clinics  
Forced to seek marriage blessings from ‘upper’ castes  
Forced to seek ‘upper’ castes’ permission for marriages  
Bar on using cycles on public roads  
Denied entry or seating in cinema halls

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There have also been new efforts by mass organizations of Dalits, and



of peasants and rural workers, to understand and document issues related to caste oppression. I wrote to two organizations that are based in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (both are associated with the All India Kisan Sabha and All India Agricultural Workers Union). These are the anti-untouchability organizations Theendamai Ozhippu Iyakkam (Movement for the Destruction of Untouchability) in Tamil Nadu, and Kulavivaksha Vyathireka Porata Sangham (Struggle Committee Against Caste Discrimination) in Andhra Pradesh. Each has conducted extensive village surveys in their States. The method was to canvas a village-level questionnaire and record every form in which untouchability or direct discrimination was practised in the village. The presentation of the data was not in the more statistically satisfactory form of the material in Shah *et al.* (2006), since there was no attempt as in the latter to record the degree of prevalence of a particular practice (in other words, whether a practice occurred in one village or many, it was given equal weightage in a single final list). Despite this shortcoming, the work and the lists are invaluable, carrying as they do the marks and smell of ugly reality (Tables 2 and 3).

TABLE 2 *Extract from the list of discriminatory practices recorded by the Kulavivaksha Vyathireka Porata Sangham in Andhra Pradesh, 1998*

Separate glasses for Dalits in eating-places. Separate plates and spoons. Dalits have to clean the glasses they use.
Separate seating in eating-places.
Dalits forced to sit on the floor in eating-places.
Other Castes served in plates, Dalits on pieces of newspaper.
Bar on temple entry.
Processions of the village temple deity not permitted to enter Dalit areas.
Other Caste barbers do not cut hair, shave Dalits.
Separate seating in panchayat offices.
Dalits forced to sit on the floor in panchayat offices.
Bar on playing <i>halai</i> at Moharram.
Other Caste washermen not permitted to wash Dalits' clothes.
Bar on drawing water from village wells, bore-wells, tanks.
Water for drinking given in separate hand-bowls; food served in Dalits' towels.
Bar on serving in glasses in arrack and toddy shops; served in earthen pots.
Forced to sit on the ground in bus-stands.
Prevented from voting in elections.
Brahman priests do not perform Dalit weddings.
Separate seating at school mid-day meal centres.
Bar on riding bicycles in Other Caste residential streets.
Discrimination in renting out houses.
Separate seating for food at weddings and other functions; Dalits served last.
Use of insulting, casteist language against employees.
Use of insulting, casteist language in educational institutions.

Bar on sitting on chairs or cots in the presence of Other Castes.

Bar on workers, including women domestic workers, working inside the houses of Other Castes.

Untouchability in shops: purchased items not given in the hand.

Bar on wearing slippers in Other Caste areas. Slippers have to be carried in the hand.

Bar on entering Other Caste streets.

Dalit Ganesh processions are not allowed in the residential streets of Other Castes, and Dalits have to perform immersion separately.

Food served to Other Castes at Dalit wedding ceremonies has to be cooked by Other Castes in Other Caste streets.

Dalit homes are away from the main village.

Bar on wearing full *dhotis* and on wearing a towel on the shoulder.

Bar on wearing white clothes.

Other Caste schoolchildren do not eat food cooked by Dalit women in mid-day meal centres.

Bar on funeral processions passing through Other Caste streets.

Separate cemetery.

Separate drinking water supply at *anganwadi* centres.

Bar on participation of Dalit-owned bulls in bull-processions during the Ugadi festival.

Bar on using umbrellas in Other Caste streets.

Bar on touching anything in an Other Caste house.

Bar on musical bands at Dalit weddings.

Dalits have to sit on the floor in the houses of Other Castes.

Dalit worshippers of the deity Ayyappan not allowed to participate equally in rituals.

Bar on participation by Dalit sportsmen and women in village sports and games.

Bar on the erection of Ambedkar statues in village centres.

Dalits not invited to weddings in the families of Other Castes.

Village beggars accept money, paddy and pulses, but do not take any cooked food from Dalits.

Dalit construction workers are not invited for the house-inauguration ceremonies of houses of Other Castes that they have built for Other Castes.

Bar on collecting and presenting *jammi* leaves on the day of the Vijayadasami festival. (The *jammi* is regarded as a sacred tree; it is believed that the Pandavas placed their weapons on the branches of the *jammi* tree and took them back on Vijayadasami. The tree is symbolic of success, and it is customary to offer the leaves of the tree to others as a symbol of wishing them a happy future.)

Dalit performing artists are not permitted to perform on temple stages. (In Andhra Pradesh villages, temples have a stage for performing artists.)

Other Castes do not sell milk to the Dalits – they say that if they do, their cattle will not give milk as they should. Other Castes do not buy milk from Dalit households.

Bar on the participation of Dalit women in the annual Batukamma festival. (In some parts of Andhra Pradesh, women decorate images of the goddess with flowers in large plates and bowls. They dance together, and immerse the decorated image in rivers, canals and tanks.)

Annual wage-labourers, called *paleru*, are served food on stone surfaces. Landlords employ Dalit workers for an annual payment in cash or paddy and cooked food every day. The normal tasks of the workers include taking care of cattle, cleaning them and taking them to the fields, and all sorts of other tasks around the landlord's house and in the fields. The landlords keep flat, smooth stones in their backyards. Dalit workers are served food – generally leftovers from the previous day – on these stones. The workers are expected to clean these stones after they eat.

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Source: Communication from Kulavivaksha Vyatirekha Porata Samiti, Hyderabad.



TABLE 3 *Extract from the list of discriminatory practices recorded by the Theendamai Ozhippu Munnani (Front for the Destruction of Untouchability) in Tamil Nadu, 2007*

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Bar on using public paths and roads.
Bar on wearing slippers.
Bar on riding bicycles.
Bar on carrying a towel-cloth on the shoulder.
Bar on walking about with <i>dhoti</i> folded up.
Bar on wearing a polyester <i>dhoti</i> .
Bar on wearing a head-cloth.
Launderers refuse to wash Dalits' clothes.
Launderers keep separate almirahs for Dalits' clothes.
Bar on haircuts in Other Caste barber-shops.
Separate chairs in barber-shops.
Separate glasses in tea-shops. Separate glasses for each Dalit sub-caste in tea-shops.
Dalits have to sit on the floor in eating-places.
Bar on sitting on benches in tea-shops. Dalits have to squat on the floor in tea-shops.
Dalits served tea in coconut-shells. When a Dalit asks for water to drink, it is poured into their hands.
Bar on taking water from public taps.
Setting special times for Dalits to take water from public taps.
Bar on lighting firecrackers at festivals.
Boycotting meetings in the village that are organized or chaired by Dalit government officials.
Bar on bathing in public tanks.
Separate steps for Dalits at public tanks.
Temple entry barred.
Temple processions do not enter Dalit streets.
Dalits barred from climbing temple steps.
Temple offerings of Dalits sprinkled with water before being accepted.
Separate areas in temples (and churches) for Dalits to worship.
Access to public crematoria barred.
Separate funeral pyres in public crematoria.
Separate crematoria for Dalits.
Even where there is a separate crematorium, Dalits are barred access to the crematorium by public road.
Dalits barred from watching television in the panchayat office.
Separate ration shops.
Separate times for Dalits at general ration shops.
Bar on raising livestock.
Dalit speakers, performing artistes barred from using public stages built in villages.
Postmen do not deliver letters to Dalit households; they send messages to recipients to come and collect their mail.
At temple festivals, Dalits are compelled to give goats free to the heads of the traditional dominant caste.
At the village temple festival, after the traditional <i>kappu</i> is tied to the wrists of the Other Castes, it is considered inauspicious for them to look at the face of a Dalit.

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Ban on raising (male) dogs, in case they mate with bitches belonging to Other Castes.  
 Dalits compelled to dispose all animal carcasses.  
 Dalits compelled to prepare all corpses for funerals.  
 Dalits compelled to play the drums at all village events.  
 Bar on sitting on benches at bus-stands.  
 When there is a death in a Other Caste family, Dalits are compelled to take news of the death to others in the village and elsewhere: no payment.  
 Free labour; unwaged labour services.  
 Bar on eating in the general wedding-tent (*pandal*) at wedding feasts.  
 Private wedding halls do not rent out premises for Dalit weddings.  
 House owners in town and village refuse to lease out houses to Dalits.  
 Other Castes abbreviate Dalit personal names in an insulting way.  
 Calling Dalit elders by children's names; using disrespectful and insulting forms of address.  
 Dalits compelled to clean and carry away night soil.  
 Barred from some schools.  
 Walls constructed to bar access to Dalits to streets passing through the Other Caste sections of a village (as in Uthapuram).  
 In villages (and some towns), Dalits are not permitted to go to the Dalit quarter by the shortest public road; they are compelled to take circuitous routes that circumvent Other Caste habitations.  
 Government employs only Dalits as sanitation workers.  
 Schoolteachers discriminate against Dalit pupils.  
 Encroachment by Other Castes on Dalit agricultural land.  
 Preventing elected Dalit panchayat members from functioning.  
 Not giving Dalits a share in common funds of the village.

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Source: Communication from Theendamai Ozhippu Munnani.

These are cases of outright violations of civil liberties and rights. They represent *direct* discrimination, that is, the denial of universal rights and liberties to members of a group (or perceived group) because of their membership or perceived membership in that group. Each line in each of the tables above represents a crime – not only in a moral and civilizational sense, but also with respect to the law in India.

As the foregoing suggests, there is now important new descriptive and analytical writing on direct socio-economic discrimination. It has also been pointed out that while there is a body of literature that documents discrimination and the denial of civil liberties, there are few studies by economists of market and non-market forms of discrimination and socio-economic exclusion. There is clearly a need for rigorous micro-studies of the access of the victims of sectional deprivation to land, employment, credit and other inputs in the contemporary context.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one of the observations in Thorat (2004)

<sup>2</sup> 'Since in a private economy markets are the place where people get access to factors of productions, employment, consumer goods and service,' Sukhadeo Thorat writes, 'the exclusion and discrimination of some groups in market transactions on the basis of group characteristic is a serious case of market failure' (Thorat 2005).

was that ‘very few empirical studies have tried to study the phenomenon of economic discrimination’.

### **Situation Analyses from the Project on Agrarian Relations in India**

In 2005–06, the Foundation for Agrarian Studies began a programme of village studies, the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI).<sup>3</sup> The broad objectives of PARI are:

- to analyse village-level production, production systems and livelihoods, and the socio-economic characteristics of different strata of the rural population;
- to conduct specific studies of sectional deprivation in rural India, particularly with regard to the Dalit and Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations, women, specific minorities, and the income-poor; and
- to report on the state of basic village amenities and the access of rural people to the facilities of modern life.

In response to a suggestion made directly to us by Sukhadeo Thorat, we selected certain key economic variables from our data, and processed the data separately for Dalits and Other Castes. We define the latter here as non-Dalit, non-Adivasi, non-Muslim social groups in the villages. In most villages, this coincides with what are called ‘caste Hindus’, although in some villages the term Other Castes also includes Jat Sikhs (these villages include 25 F Gulabewala, Sri Ganganagar district, Rajasthan; Gharsondi, Gwalior district, Madhya Pradesh; and Tehang, Jalandhar district and Hakamwala, Mansa district, both in Punjab) and Jains (in Nimshirgaon, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra).

PARI surveys now cover twenty-two villages in nine States of India (see Annexure Table 1). The analysis in each of the essays that follow which derive from PARI data do not cover all the villages. Different authors have used data from different villages, generally from the villages for which the data they have used have been cleaned.

The data here represent only a small section of the material that has been collected as part of the PARI surveys. The articles here do not directly deal with policy, but represent a report on the conditions of life of Dalit households in villages that were surveyed during the years that saw the highest rates of growth of GDP in the post-liberalization period. If any policy conclusion emerges, it is that changing the basic conditions of life requires public action and more direct intervention by the state on behalf of victims of group deprivation.

The results from the surveys, as discussed here and will be evident from the essays in the book, are compelling.

<sup>3</sup> The project was conducted under my overall direction.



*Literacy and Schooling*

Literacy and schooling continue be areas where historical discrimination is reflected in persistent, stubborn social disparities (Tables 4, 5 and 6).

The picture is one of very poor aggregate achievement, characterized further by abysmal levels of literacy and schooling among Dalits, rural Muslims and Adivasis (in ascending order of deprivation).

In the great majority of survey villages, 50 per cent or more Adivasi, Muslim and Dalit women are unable to read and write. In the great majority of survey villages, the median number of years of schooling among Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim women above the age of 16 was zero; in fact, in many villages, more than 80 per cent of women belonging to these socially excluded

TABLE 4 *Proportion of population aged 7 years and above who can read and write, by social group and by sex, PARI villages in per cent*

Social Group	Proportion of literate people	
	Male	Female
Scheduled Caste	61	45
Scheduled Tribe	35	20
Muslim	65	46
Other Caste	75	56
All	67	51

TABLE 5 *Proportion of persons aged 16 years and above with ten years or more of schooling, by sex and social group, PARI villages in per cent*

Social group	Proportion of people in group	
	Male	Female
Scheduled Caste	20	12
Scheduled Tribe	5	2
Muslim	21	8
Other Caste	37	22
All	29	17

TABLE 6 *Proportion of persons aged 16 years and above with no schooling, by sex and social group, study villages in per cent*

Social group	Proportion of people in group	
	Male	Female
Scheduled Caste	37	57
Scheduled Tribe	58	83
Muslim	39	60
Other Caste	21	44
All	28	50

groups had not completed even a year of school. At the same time, only 12 per cent of Dalit women, 2 per cent of Adivasi women and 8 per cent of Muslim women in the study villages had completed ten years of schooling. The data for men and women in this regard are appalling evidence on a massive scale that the people of rural India have been robbed of the right to even basic formal education.

*Land and Other Household Assets*

The results of the village surveys as reported in the articles in this section of the book provide further evidence of the vast economic chasms separating social groups in rural India.

With respect to ownership holdings of land, for instance, in sixteen out of twenty-two villages for which data were processed, 70 per cent of Dalit households had no ownership holdings of land; the corresponding figure for Other Castes was 30 per cent.

The average landlessness ratio for Dalits was pushed up substan-

TABLE 7 *Households with no ownership holdings of land as a proportion of all households (initial computations), selected villages in per cent*

Village	District	State	Households with no ownership ownership holdings of land as a proportion of all households	
			Dalit	Other Castes
Ananthavaram	Guntur	Andhra Pradesh	67	25
Bukkacherla	Ananthapur	Andhra Pradesh	69	70
Kothapalle	Karimnagar	Andhra Pradesh	82	83
Katkuian	West Champaran	Bihar	90	45
Nayanagar	Samastipur	Bihar	89	45
Zhapur	Gulbarga	Karnataka	54	31
Siresandra	Kolar	Karnataka	21	8
Alabujanahalli	Mandya	Karnataka	31	15
Gharsondi	Gwalior	Madhya Pradesh	22	18
Nimshirgaon	Kolhapur	Maharashtra	69	29
Warwat Khanderao	Buldhana	Maharashtra	44	19
Hakamwala	Mansa	Punjab	65	9
Tehang	Jalandhar	Punjab	98	37
Gulabewala	Sri Ganganagar	Rajasthan	98	15
Rewasi	Sikar	Rajasthan	14	3
Harevli	Bijnor	Uttar Pradesh	51	20
Mahatwar	Ballia	Uttar Pradesh	30	6
Amarsinghi	Malda	West Bengal	54	20
Kalmandasguri	Koch Bihar	West Bengal	8	33
Panahar	Bankura	West Bengal	64	17
Weighted average of all villages			70	30

tially by three villages in which Jat Sikh farmers were dominant (Tehang in Jalandhar district and Hakamwala in Mansa district in Punjab, and 25 F Gulabewala in Sri Ganganagar district in Rajasthan), and in Nimshirgaon, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra. Punjab (more specifically, village economies dominated by Jat Sikh landlords) and the Marathwada region represent, of course, very different historical trajectories of social exclusion; they are both, however, characterized by widespread landlessness among the Dalit masses.

The descriptive statistics in the article by Vikas Rawal show sharp and systematic disparity in the ownership of assets, for every type of asset, between Dalit households and households belonging to other social groups (other than Adivasi and Muslim households). With respect to ownership of the means of production, Dalit households had much lower access to productive assets – land, livestock, agricultural machinery, irrigation equipment – than Other Caste households. A stark example comes from the data on ownership of the means of production: only one Dalit household owned a tractor in all fifteen villages for which data are presented in the article. Inequality in ownership of assets was highest in 25 F Gulabewala village, Sri Ganganagar district, Rajasthan, where Dalit households comprised 60 per cent of all households but owned less than 1 per cent of all assets. The average asset-holding of an Other Caste household was 131 times the average asset-holding of a Dalit household.

Partha Saha analyses data from PARI surveys of Harveli village, Bijnor district, and Mahatwar village, Ballia district (both in Uttar Pradesh), to examine patterns of ownership of assets by social group. His conclusion is stark: the ownership of assets is concentrated among caste Hindu households. The implications of not owning means of production are, of course, far-reaching, with implications for incomes and vulnerability to different forms of economic adversity and risk.

### *Household Incomes*

When the main means of production are so unequally distributed, and given the exhaustion of new sources of manual employment (other than by means of state-driven programmes) in the countryside, there are great inequalities in income-earning capabilities as well. Provisional figures from pooled data collected from ten survey villages indicate that per capita household incomes among Other Caste households were greater than among Dalit households by a factor of more than 6.<sup>4</sup>

The essay by Vikas Rawal and Madhura Swaminathan deals with the persistent disadvantage experienced by Dalit households in Indian villages in respect of incomes (a theme also discussed in the article by V. Surjit). The essay examines absolute and relative income deprivation among Dalit

<sup>4</sup> The villages were Ananthavaram, Bukkacharla, Kothapalle, Harevli, Mahatwar, Warwat Khanderao, Nimshirgaon, 25 F Gulabewala, Rewasi and Gharsondi (see Appendix Table).



households in eight villages. In every village, the average household and per capita income among Dalit households was lower than the average among non-Dalit, non-Adivasi households of the same village. In terms of distribution of incomes, Dalit households were under-represented in the top quintile and over-represented in the lower quintiles. A decomposition of income inequality by caste group showed that inequality on account of between-group differences was large in several villages, particularly in villages characterized by canal-irrigated, high-productivity agriculture.

Manual workers usually constitute the single largest class in a village. Data from the Rural Labour Enquiries and village surveys establish that Dalit households predominate among the class of manual workers, and that manual work is the predominant occupation among Dalits. Dalit workers – women workers in particular – predominated among agricultural workers.

### *Housing and Household Amenities*

Adequate housing, sanitation and access to safe water are universal basic needs, and recognized as basic human rights. In our work at the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, we have proposed a simple criterion to test, from PARI data, the quality of actually existing housing in rural India. The test is the following: does the household live in a house that has two rooms; a pucca roof, walls and floor; a source of water for domestic needs inside or immediately outside the premises; a source of electricity for domestic use; and a working latrine? Although this set of criteria falls well below the international norms for adequate housing to which India is committed, data from the PARI surveys show that these requirements are far from being achieved. In pooled data from fourteen PARI villages, not a single Adivasi household lived in a house that met these criteria; only 4 per cent of Muslim households and 6 per cent of Dalit households lived in housing that met the criteria. Even among Other Caste households, only 22 per cent achieved this very limited target. (See also Singh, Swaminathan and Ramachandran 2013.)

The article by Madhura Swaminathan and Shamsheer Singh shows that deprivation among Dalit households with respect to certain simple household amenities is not on account of low incomes alone, but relates to the persistence of various forms of social discrimination. The separation of Dalit hamlets from the main village settlement and the lack of public infrastructure in Dalit settlements is one such form of discrimination.

### **Dalit Households in Village Economies: Overview**

The book is divided into four sections. Sukhadeo Thorat, Nidhi Sadana, and Amit Thorat begin their essay with an important discussion of theories of social exclusion applied to the specific context of India, where 'social exclusion revolves around societal institutions that exclude, discriminate, isolate and deprive some groups on the basis of group identities such as caste, ethnicity, religion, gender, physical disability, regional identity and

other identities, in different magnitudes and forms.’ The empirical sections of their paper show how problems of income poverty are compounded for those members of society who are victims of group-specific discrimination. They use National Sample Survey (NSS) data from 2004–05 to examine problems of poverty among Dalit households and others in selected income-poor States (that is, in Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh).

### Historical Essays

The second section has three papers, each dealing with historical aspects of land, caste and social exclusion.

In Kerala, as is well known, the Left movement brought together three great socio-political struggles: the struggle for freedom from British rule, the struggle against landlordism, and the struggle against caste discrimination. R. Ramakumar tracks the course that the movement took – particularly its anti-caste-discrimination aspect – in one village, Morazha, in Kannur district in the Malabar region of the State. In 1955, Morazha was the site of a detailed socio-economic study by the scholar Thomas Shea. Ramakumar resurveyed the village in 2000. The article combines survey-based material from the village with a discussion of the broader political movements in the village and Malabar. The analysis deals with the role of public action – land reform, in particular – in transforming the living conditions of Dalit agricultural workers. Specific changes in the condition of agricultural workers in Morazha included access to homestead land, to subsidised food from the public distribution system, to government-funded pensions and to (non-usurious) credit from cooperatives. Land reform and the Left-led social reform movement together ended old-style landlordism and old forms of upper-caste domination.

G. Ramakrishnan’s essay is on agrarian struggle and its impact on the lives of Dalit workers in the eastern tracts of the former Thanjavur district (roughly speaking, the present districts of Nagapattinam and Thiruvavur). Thanjavur was, historically, the major rice-growing region of Tamil Nadu – its ‘granary’ – and was where some of the largest landlord holdings of wet land in the State were located. Society in Thanjavur was characterized by large-scale landlordism, and the class and caste oppression of agricultural workers, particularly Dalit agricultural workers. The specific feature of Ramakrishnan’s essay is that it draws on documents in Tamil and interviews with participants in the militant struggles that were conducted in the region by the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party. These movements were waged against big landlords on issues of the eradication of untouchability and different forms of extra-economic coercion of tenants and agricultural workers, and for the right to form class organizations of peasants and agricultural workers.

Aparajita Bakshi examines the impact of land reform in West Bengal on access to land among Dalit and Adivasi households. Data from the Land and Livestock Holding survey of 2003 conducted by the National Sample

Survey Organization (NSSO) show that the index of access to land among Dalit households of West Bengal was twice as high as the national average. The essay presents data from seven village surveys on patterns of ownership by caste group; they indicate clearly that Dalit and Adivasi households were major beneficiaries of land reform. Like Ramakumar and Ramakrishnan, Bakshi uses material from interviews with participants in agrarian movements to build the context in which her essay is located. An important observation of her respondents is that, while the struggles of the peasantry from the 1940s in Bengal did not take up demands that concentrated explicitly and mainly on issues of caste discrimination, Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims, who constituted the major section of peasants and workers in rural Bengal, participated in these struggles in large numbers and became important beneficiaries of agrarian reform in the State.

The third section of the book deals with economic problems confronting Dalits in contemporary rural India. Three articles are based on village-level work, and the fourth on secondary data.

Judith Heyer's study derives from outstanding long-term fieldwork conducted in Coimbatore (now Tiruppur) district from 1981–82 through 2010. The villages are located in a fast-industrializing area, and the industrial transformation that has taken place has had a differentiated impact on Dalits and others in the village. Although Dalit households gained house-site land over this period, they continued to be landless with respect to the ownership of agricultural land. In so far as they remained workers in agriculture, Dalit workers remained landless workers; those who worked in the non-agricultural sector also worked mainly as manual workers, rather than as self-employed entrepreneurs or non-manual workers. Heyer also documents the continuation of practices of untouchability, although she notes that these practices were less severe than during her first fieldwork in 1981–82.

V. Surjit worked in another part of Tamil Nadu – the area about which, in fact, G. Ramakrishnan writes in the preceding section. As a result of long years of agrarian struggle, sections of the Dalit population in the eastern tracts of the old Thanjavur district gained access – as tenants of independent farmers and of temple trusts – to operational holdings of agricultural land. Surjit's main fieldwork was conducted during a year of unprecedented water shortage and farming failure in the Cauvery delta, and he records, in his contribution to this volume, the specific features of economic distress (including huge income losses) among Dalit tenants in the region. While a majority of all cultivators experienced losses during the reference agricultural year, Dalit cultivators were worse off because the costs of cultivation were higher – and incomes lower – for them. Surjit argues that the differences in costs and incomes were made more acute by the fact that Dalit cultivators did not own the instruments or means of agricultural production.

The essay by R. Ramakumar and Tushar Kamble is a vivid and important contemporary case study of the caste Hindu fury that is ignited



when a Dalit household in a Maharashtra village begins to acquire land and higher education.

Pallavi Chavan's unique study of how the system of rural bank credit in India serves Dalit borrowers is exemplary with respect to its rigorous and imaginative use of secondary data (from the Reserve Bank of India and National Sample Surveys), and the social concerns of its content. Chavan demonstrates that banks marginalized Dalit borrowers in the period of liberalization. Her analysis shows that, in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, banks did not meet the official targets that had been set for advances to the 'weaker sections' of society; that the number of small borrowal accounts held by Dalit households fell in absolute terms; and that Dalit borrowers had to turn to moneylenders because of poor access to finance from banks. She shows that, in 2008, for every 100 rupees worth of bank credit received by a non-Dalit, non-Adivasi, male borrower, a Dalit woman received less than a single rupee! For Dalit borrowers, financial *inclusion* is a mirage; the evidence presented by Chavan shows the *exclusion* of rural Dalits from the formal banking system.

The third section of the book has papers that use data from the village surveys that comprise the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI); the papers and PARI have been discussed in a previous section of this essay.

This book is an introduction to some of the issues that require study in the field of economic deprivation and exclusion among Dalits in rural India. The articles in the book are evidence, in some cases, of direct discrimination (discussed above), and in others of what has been described as *differential impact* discrimination (for instance, when an employment practice is neutral on the surface, but has a differential impact across social groups in practice). Most of all, they reflect *cumulative* discrimination and disadvantage, that is, differences in human functionings and ownership of the means of production that are the outcome of discrimination and disadvantage over generations.<sup>5</sup>

Each form of discrimination, or aspect of cumulative deprivation, can have a myriad of consequences for the freedom and livelihoods of its victims. The nature of property rights, for instance, determines not only the ownership of land and other assets, but has consequences for incomes, livelihoods and other aspects of social standing and well-being. Village-level patterns of land sales, mortgage and other forms of the transfer of property are nowhere in India entirely free of non-market forms of exclusion and discrimination. A division of labour and a distribution of assets that is determined outside the market determines access also, for example, to quality housing and sanitation, and, consequently, to safe and healthy environments and lives. To take

<sup>5</sup> These are terms taken from National Research Council (2004: 50–52, 223 ff), a research report on the United States that has very interesting lessons for the study of social discrimination in India.

yet another example, cumulative deprivation and active discrimination with respect to education and mobility jeopardize freedom in a basic way, and also have an immediate instrumental effect on wages, occupational mobility and occupational status.

While the experiences and studies here can be multiplied, and while each theme we have discussed needs careful and detailed further empirical research in different parts of the country, a crucial generalization from the evidence can and must be made: the system of socio-economic class in rural India does not exist independently of caste discrimination and other forms of sectional deprivation.

There can be no end to poverty and deprivation in India without resolution of the agrarian question, and there is no agrarian question in India to which the issues of caste, tribe, gender, and other forms of social exclusion and discrimination based on hierarchies of status are not intrinsic. It is in rural India that such discrimination has its source, and where deprivation and social exclusion are most acute. One of the necessary conditions for the resolution of the agrarian question, thus, is the creation of conditions for the liberation of the Dalit and Adivasi people (and other victims of sectional deprivation and social exclusion).

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APPENDIX TABLE 1 List of villages studied as part of the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI), 2005–12

Village	District	State	Year of survey	Agro-ecological zone	Kharif crop/s	Rabi crop/s	Other crops
Ananthavaram	Guntur	Andhra Pradesh	2005, 2006	East Coast Plains and Hills	Paddy	Maize, pulses	
Bukkacherla	Anantapur	Andhra Pradesh	2005, 2006	Southern Plateau and Hills	Intercropped groundnut	Paddy	
Kothapalle	Karimnagar	Andhra Pradesh	2005, 2006	Southern Plateau and Hills	Paddy, maize, cotton	Paddy, maize	
Harevli	Bijnor	Uttar Pradesh	2006	Upper Gangetic Plains	Paddy	Wheat	Sugarcane
Mahatwar	Ballia	Uttar Pradesh	2006	Middle Gangetic Plains	Maize, red gram	Wheat	
Warwat Khanderao	Buldhana	Maharashtra	2007	Western Plateau and Hills	Cotton intercropped with green gram and red gram	Wheat	
Nimshirgaon	Kolhapur	Maharashtra	2007	Western Plateau and Hills	Soyabean		Sugarcane, grape, vegetables
Dungariya	Udaipur	Rajasthan	2007	Central Plateau and Hills	Maize, red gram, black gram	Wheat	
25 F Gulabewala	Sri Ganganagar	Rajasthan	2007	Trans-Gangetic Plains	Cotton, cluster beans, fodder crops	Wheat, rapeseed	
Rewasi	Sikar	Rajasthan	2010	Central Plateau and Hills	Wheat, mustard, gram	Wheat, mustard, onions, fenugreek	
Gharsondi	Gwalior	Madhya Pradesh	2008	Central Plateau and Hills	Paddy	Wheat, rapeseed, chickpea, lucerne grass	
Badhar	Anuppur	Madhya Pradesh	2008	Central Plateau and Hills	Paddy, wheat, millets, pulses		

(Appendix Table 1 continued on next page)



APPENDIX TABLE 1 (continued)

Village	District	State	Year of survey	Agro-ecological zone	Kharif crop/s	Rabi crop/s	Other crops
Alabujanahalli	Mandya	Karnataka	2009	Southern Plateau and Hills	Paddy, ragi	Paddy, finger millet	Sugarcane
Siresandra	Kolar	Karnataka	2009	Southern Plateau and Hills	Ragi, often inter-cropped with jowar, red gram and sesamum		Potato, tomato, carrot, cauli-flower, beetroot, radish, fodder maize and fodder grass, and other vegetables, condiments and tree crops
Zhapur	Gulbarga	Karnataka	2009	Southern Plateau and Hills	Red gram inter-cropped with maize, sesamum, bajra, green gram		
Panahar	Bankura	West Bengal	2010	Lower Gangetic Plains	Paddy	Potato, mustard, rapeseed and wheat, boro paddy or sesame	
Amarsinghi	Malda	West Bengal	2010	Lower Gangetic Plains	Paddy, jute	Paddy	
Kalmandasguri	Koch Bihar	West Bengal	2010	Lower Gangetic Plains	Paddy, jute	Vegetables, sugarcane, potato	
Tehang	Phillaur	Punjab	2011	Trans-Gangetic Plains	Paddy	Wheat	
Hakamwala	Budhlada	Punjab	2011	Trans-Gangetic Plains	Cotton, paddy	Wheat	
Katkuian	West Champaran	Bihar	2012	Middle Gangetic Plains	Paddy	Wheat and pulses	Sugarcane
Nayanagar	Samastipur	Bihar	2012	Middle Gangetic Plains	Paddy	Maize	

APPENDIX TABLE 2 Proportion of population (7 years and above) who can read and write, by social group and by sex, selected villages

Name of village	State	Proportion of literate people									
		Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribe		Muslim		Other Caste		All	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Ananthavaram	Andhra Pradesh	43	61	24	44	22	54	68	76	54	60
Bukkacherla	Andhra Pradesh	28	43			67	71	47	71	43	66
Kothapalle	Andhra Pradesh	46	57	25	33	40	73	45	72	45	67
Harevli	Uttar Pradesh	40	46			41	48	58	78	50	65
Mahatwar	Uttar Pradesh	37	68					48	68	43	70
Dungariya	Rajasthan			9	26	50	88	100	100	10	29
25 F Gulabewala	Rajasthan	32	40					66	83	48	60
Rewasi	Rajasthan	45	82	55	76			46	79	46	79
Warwat Khanderao	Maharashtra	55	76			66	80	71	87		
Nimshirgaon	Maharashtra	55	84			44	85	73	90	66	87
Gharsondi	Madhya Pradesh	38	70	10	12	17	46	45	69	40	63
Badhar	Madhya Pradesh	0	40	23	35			10	31	20	34
Alabujanahalli	Karnataka	50	61					58	71	56	69
Siresandra	Karnataka	49	58					56	76	54	71
Zhapur	Karnataka	25	36	22	33	71	80	43	57	33	46
Panahar	West Bengal	30	46	35	39	62	87	69	81	49	62
Amarsinghi	West Bengal	40	59	na	50			63	79	52	70
Kalmandasguri	West Bengal	60	73	36	55	43	52	48	76	50	63
Tehang	Punjab	60	69	0	67	73	50	77	79	68	73
Hakamwala	Punjab	41	48					52	65	47	58

ANNEXURE TABLE 3 *Proportion of persons aged 16 years and above with 10 years or more of schooling, by sex and social group, study villages in per cent*

Name of village	District	State	Proportion of persons aged 16 years and above with 10 years and above schooling							
			Dalit		Adivasi		Muslim		Other	
			Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Ananthavaram	Guntur	Andhra Pradesh	22	11	6	3	22	0	42	24
Bukkacherla	Anantapur	Andhra Pradesh	11	5	n. a.	n. a.	38	23	35	15
Kothapalle	Karimnagar	Andhra Pradesh	25	22	0	7	38	25	40	16
Gharsondi	Gwalior	Madhya Pradesh	21	2	2.0	3	n. a.	n. a.	36	13
Badhar	Anuppur	Madhya Pradesh	n. a.	n. a.	2.3	2	n. a.	n. a.	5	0
Warwat Khanderao	Buldhana	Maharashtra	22	8	n. a.	n. a.	34	5	36	25
Nimshirgaon	Kolhapur	Maharashtra	35	11	n. a.	n. a.	23	9	56	30
25F Gulabewala	Sri Ganganagar	Rajasthan	3	2	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	41	29
Rewasi	Sikar	Rajasthan	47	5	24.32	7	n. a.	n. a.	34	11
Dungariya	Udaipur	Rajasthan	n. a.	n. a.	0.6	0	29	0	n. a.	n. a.
Mahatwar	Ballia	Uttar Pradesh	42	7	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	49	25
Harevli	Bijnor	Uttar Pradesh	30	2	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	44	19
Kalmandasguri	Koch Bihar	West Bengal	26	15	20	9	9	10	27	5
Panahar	Bankura	West Bengal	7	2	0	5	57	33	45	21
Amarsinghi	Malda	West Bengal	7	3	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	23	13
Alabujanahalli	Mandya	Karnataka	35	24	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	42	33
Siresandra	Kolar	Karnataka	18	17	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	43	32
Zhapur	Gulbarga	Karnataka	17	1	12	3	n. a.	n. a.	25	15
Tehang	Jalandhar	Punjab	23	24	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	43	45
Hakamwala	Mansa	Punjab	12	6	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	22	16
Katkuian	West Champaran	Bihar	0	0	7	0	9	4	20	8
Nayanagar	Samastipur	Bihar	19	7	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	51	30
Pooled data for all villages			20	12	5	2	21	8	37	22

APPENDIX TABLE 4 Proportion of persons aged 16 years and above with no schooling, by sex and social group, study villages in per cent

Name of village	District	Proportion of persons aged 16 years and above with no schooling									
		Dalit		Adivasi		Muslim		Other			
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women		
Ananthavaram	Guntur	36	54	52	71	22	62	20	28		
Bukkacherla	Anantapur	58	76	0	0	15	39	29	59		
Kothapalle	Karimnagar	51	69	70	86	38	75	26	61		
Gharsondi	Gwalior	22	70	82	88	54	81	20	55		
Badhar	Anuppur	100	100	49	81	n. a.	n. a.	43	89		
Warwat Khanderao	Buldhana	19	54	n. a.	n. a.	16	40	10	32		
Nimshirgaon	Kolhapur	18	51	n. a.	n. a.	15	64	10	28		
25F Gulabewala	Sri Ganganagar	65	79	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	13	33		
Rewasi	Sikar	19	65	30	66	n. a.	n. a.	23	64		
Dungariya	Udaipur	n. a.	n. a.	74	95	14	50	n. a.	n. a.		
Mahatwar	Ballia	33	80	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	20	54		
Harevli	Bijnor	56	80	n. a.	n. a.	63	78	16	44		
Kalmandasguri	Koch Bihar	15	34	25	73	30	52	14	37		
Panahar	Bankura	75	71	63	86	20	42	50	28		
Amarsinghi	Malda	31	59	0	100	n. a.	n. a.	7	30		
Alabujanahalli	Mandya	30	42	0	100	n. a.	n. a.	19	36		
Siresandra	Kolar	33	38	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	16	44		
Zhapur	Gulbarga	43	77	36	55	20	50	35	59		
Tehang	Jalandhar	19	36	0	100	100	100	12	17		
Hakamwala	Mansa	45	53	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	28	42		
Katkuian	West Champaran	65	88	37	79	38	75	35	71		
Nayanagar	Samastipur	49	80	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	17	42		
Pooled data for all villages		37	57	58	83	39	60	21	44		