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Protective Discrimination: Why Scheduled Tribes Lag Behind Scheduled Castes

The pattern of historical development has been different for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes with the latter never having been an integral part of mainstream society. How effective has been the policy of protective discrimination in removing the disabilities suffered by the scheduled tribes? This paper attempts a comparison between the relative benefits to the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes as a result of the policy of protective discrimination. Following upon this, the author examines why one category has fared better than the other.

VIRGINIUS XAXA

The groups identified as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes suffered from certain disabilities. The Constitution of India hence made certain provisions for their welfare and upliftment. All the same, the provisions are far from uniform for the two groups. Indeed, there are more provisions for the scheduled tribes than for the scheduled castes. The Articles 15(4), 16(4), 19(5), 23, 46, 330, 332, 334, 335 and 338 are common to the two categories and Articles 29, 164, 244, 244(A), 275(1), 339(1), 339(2) pertain only to the scheduled tribe category. Besides, there are Articles 371(A), 371(B) and 371(C), which are in force only in certain states of the north-eastern region either in the whole state or part of it [Verma 1990].

Of the provisions ensured for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the policy of protective discrimination has been one of the most debated and discussed. Based on the policy, the government has laid down three kinds of arrangement for people belonging to the category of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. First, there has been reservation of seats for these groups in the parliament/state legislatures. Second, there has been reservation of jobs for them in government and semi-government services. Third, seats have been reserved for them in the educational institutions especially in institutions of the higher learning such as colleges and universities for their social and educational advancement. To this end, a certain percentage of seats or quota was earmarked in the parliament/state legislatures, government services and the educational institutions

for members of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe category. The quota was fixed keeping in mind the population size of the two groups then. It was 15 per cent for the scheduled castes and 7.5 per cent for the scheduled tribes. The size so fixed has remained the same till today though the population size of the two communities has undergone changes. As per 1991 Census, the scheduled castes constitute 16.5 per cent of the total population and the scheduled tribes 8.01 per cent.

Though the reservation policy has been in force for five decades and the population size of the two communities has grown over the years, the filling up of the quota as fixed by the government is a problem even today. This is far more the case at the upper levels of the government and semi government services. There are many reasons as to why the quota reserved for the two communities could not be filled up. Much has already been written on the issue. And the reasons put forward range from apathy and indifference of the government to the unavailability of suitable candidates from the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribe category, on account of their social, economic and educational backgrounds [Ram 1981]. Therefore the focus in the paper is not on this aspect of reservations. Instead, the paper will consider the following issues: (1) a comparison between the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in relation to the benefits derived by them of the facilities extended to them so far; (2) an analysis, even though tentative, as to why one category has fared

better than the other, or alternatively, as to why one has not fared as well as the other. It is interesting to note that though the filling up of the quota falls short of the government stipulation both with respect to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes particularly with respect to the higher-grade services, the distribution of the two categories has been disproportionate.

I Relative Positions of the SCs and STs

As pointed out earlier, the provision of reservations for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been made in three areas – parliament/legislatures (politics), government services and educational institutions. In politics, the provision of reservation was initially meant for the period of 10 years, but, ever since then, it has been renewed on a regular basis. It is worth noting here that such time limits contrary to general beliefs was not fixed in the areas of government services and educational institutions [Galanter 1984: 46]. Unlike the scheduled tribes, who have been unable to create a space for themselves in the national or regional scene, the scheduled castes have been able to do so, especially in cases where the two have been sharing these facilities.

Politics

Let us start with the sphere of politics. As noted earlier 15 per cent and 7.5 per cent of seats in parliament are reserved for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes

respectively. In state legislatures the percentage of seats earmarked for them varies corresponding to size of their respective population in the concerned state. Now the question is how have the two categories fared at the regional and national levels? In services or education the relative position of the two categories can be discerned from the statistical figures. After all the statistical figures are to a greater or lesser extent related with performance. In politics one cannot judge the relative positions of the two categories in terms of their share in the parliament or state legislatures for two reasons. First of all, the share of each category is invariably related to the size of its population. Secondly, and more importantly, there exists in political sphere congruence between what is stipulated and what is actually held. In 1999, the share of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the parliament was 79 (14.5 per cent) and 41 (7.5 per cent) respectively. The corresponding figure for the legislative assemblies was 562 (13.8 per cent) for the scheduled castes and 539 (13.2 per cent) for the scheduled tribes [Planning Commission 2000]. The higher

share of the scheduled tribes in the assemblies is due to the creation of tribal states, mainly in the north-eastern region. The performance of the two categories in politics has to be therefore examined elsewhere. Over the question of what should be those dimensions, there is surely going to be a difference of opinion among scholars. All the same, criteria such as political appointment within the parliament/legislatures or in the government such as council of ministers or membership on the standing committees, even an office within political parties may be considered of critical significance in this context. And yet the share of the two categories in respect of the above may greatly depend on the nature of their participation and mobilisation process. The two together may therefore be taken as the domain where relative performance of the two categories can be assessed. There are however no data at our disposal on the aspect corresponding to the ones we have on service and education.

All the same evidences, sketchy though they may be, are not altogether absent. In democratic politics, the numerical strength that the groups or categories enjoy is of

strategic importance both at the national and regional levels. The numerical strength that the scheduled castes enjoy over the scheduled tribes gives them an advantage over the latter in national politics. It is true that the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes do not constitute a homogeneous and cohesive social group both in the parliament and in the state legislatures. They are fragmented along lines of political party and linguistic/regional considerations. Yet any government cannot ignore the issue of adequate representation of groups described as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In all these, the scheduled castes have had an edge over the scheduled tribes. It may not be out of place to point out here that the scheduled castes have invariably had better representation in the government in the form of holding ministerial portfolios or other positions like state governors through the years. Further, whereas the scheduled castes can boast of having produced leaders and administrators such as B R Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram in the past and K R Narayanan, Buta Singh, Paswan, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati in more recent times,



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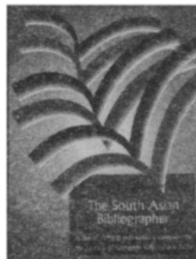
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it is hard to find any from the scheduled tribe category. P A Sangma may be considered as one such leader, though he does not even have a following within a region, let alone among tribes across regions. In short, tribes have not been able to carve out a space akin to that of the scheduled castes in national politics. Even at the regional level, where tribes have been sharing power with the scheduled castes, their presence is hardly noticeable.

Service

Now if one takes the relative position of the two categories in government services, one finds that the scheduled tribes have not fared as well as the scheduled castes in availing of the facilities of reservation extended to them by the government. This is clearly reflected in Table 1. The data are based on information available on January 1, 1995.

It is evident from the above that the share of the scheduled tribes in respect of A, B, C, and D group of services has been that of 2.89, 2.68, 5.69 and 6.48 per cent respectively as against 10.15, 12.67, 16.15 and 21.26 respectively in case of the scheduled caste. The scheduled tribes thus fall short of the required stipulation both in respect of the aggregate and the different groups of the services. Moreover, the shortfalls at the higher levels are far greater in comparison to those for the scheduled caste. In contrast, the scheduled castes fall short of the stipulated quota only in respect of group A and B services and that too, if one may add, not substantially. In respect of C and D, their share exceeds the required quota of 15.5 per cent of reservation.

The position of tribes with respect of their share in academic or teaching posts in colleges and universities is no better. In Delhi University, till 1995, out of 700 teachers in the university departments, there were only nine teachers from the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribe category. Out of these, only two were from the scheduled tribe category. If one were to include under-graduate colleges of Delhi University, the scenario would be even worse. The picture is no different elsewhere, as evidenced by the data in Table 2, in the other universities in the country.

They are also more sparsely distributed in the field of science and technology than in other areas of employment. It has not been possible to furnish detailed and comprehensive data for the above state-

ment. There is however no dearth of data, fragmented though they may be, in support of the point made above. In public sector undertakings like Hindustan Aeronautics, Bharat Electronics, Bharat Dynamics, etc, the share of the scheduled castes in class I jobs was 3.39, 2.38 and 7.90 per cent as against 1.88, 14.37 and 23.70 for class II jobs respectively. In contrast, the share of the scheduled tribes was 0.12, 0.20, and nil respectively for class I jobs and 0.26, 0.90 and again nil in respect of class II jobs respectively (Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1975-77).

Education

One of the major prerequisites for filling up positions meant for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in government/ semi-government services is the attainment of the minimum educational qualification specified for jobs or positions. Hence reservation has also been provided for in the educational institutions especially in higher education. Now, the scenario with respect of enrolment of the scheduled tribes in institutions of higher learning such as colleges and university departments is almost similar to the situation in the sphere of services (Table 3).

It is obvious from the above that the presence of the scheduled tribe at the national level is less strong than that of the scheduled caste. Also, the share of the tribes in respect of education like science, engineering/technology, law, etc, is much lower than that of other fields of education. The data that we have from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur for the period between 1969-70 and 1973-74 further corroborates the pattern (Table 4).

One finds that the entry of tribes in various courses offered at the higher levels of education falls below that of the scheduled castes. Moreover, the share of the tribes in various courses that are offered is very uneven. One finds that in comparison to natural sciences, more scheduled

tribes prefer arts and humanities courses. This is apparent from the enrolment data shown above as well as employment data of the scheduled tribes in sectors/ departments/faculties where science and technology training is crucial. The employment pattern of the scheduled tribes in public sector undertaking has already been referred to earlier. The pattern is similar in colleges and university departments. In the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, for example, of the 30 teaching positions held by the scheduled tribe candidates in 1986, only three were in the faculty of sciences. The scenario at Delhi University or elsewhere is no different. Even within the sciences, more tribes opt for courses such as agriculture, medicine rather than other science courses. Of equal significance is the fact that the enrolment of the scheduled tribes in arts and humanities, contrary to the general belief, is lower than that of medicine and agriculture.

Even at regional levels, where the SC and ST partake in resources, the performance of the scheduled castes, as one can see from Table 5 has been invariably better. Paradoxically, this is the case even in states where tribes easily outnumber the scheduled castes in terms of their numerical strength. Madhya Pradesh and Orissa may be taken as two appropriate cases in point. The scheduled tribes constitute between 22 and 23 per cent of the total population in each of the two states as against 4 and 7 per cent for the scheduled castes in

Table 2: Designationwise Position of SC/ST Teachers in University Teaching Departments/University Colleges (1992-93)

Designation	Total	SC	Per-centage	ST	Per-centage
Professor	3338	32	0.96	11	0.33
Reader	5837	104	1.78	31	0.53
Lecturer	10191	328	3.22	81	0.79

Source: UGC, 'Representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Enrolment, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff in University Teaching Departments/University Colleges', p 55.

Table 1: Share of SCs and STs at various Levels of the Government Services

Group	Total No of Employees	No of SC	Percentage	No of ST	Percentage
'A'	65,408	6,637	10.15	1,891	2.89
'B'	1,08,857	13,797	12.67	2,913	2.68
'C'	23,41,863	3,78,179	16.15	1,33,179	5.69
'D'	10,41,082	2,21,380	21.26	67,453	6.48
Total	35,57,210	6,19,986	17.43	2,05,436	5.78

Note: 'D' excludes sweepers.

Source: Report of the National Commission for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, Vol 1, 1996-97 and 1997-98.

respect of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

II Explaining the Phenomenon

Though reservations have been provided for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the filling up of these seats especially in service and higher education is not routine and mechanical. Rather it is dependent upon their performances in test, examinations or interviews, etc, besides of course the prerequisites of appropriate educational attainments. This partly explains as to why the state has not been able to fill up these posts and seats for both the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. And this has been especially so in the case of scheduled tribes than scheduled castes. What is striking is that the scheduled tribes have invariably played a second fiddle to the scheduled castes in taking advantage of the resources granted to them, whether it is education, science and technology or civil services and politics. An attempt is being made here to explain as to why the scheduled tribes do not achieve as much as the scheduled castes. It is thus obvious that the paper is not aimed at examining the basic assumption underlying the educational system with its overriding focus on individual performance and the ability to compete with others. The provision of reservations by itself does not question the basic premises.

Why have the scheduled tribes not performed as well as the scheduled castes? Before one proceeds to explain, it is interesting to ascertain if the discrepancy in the performance of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes has any thing to do with such phenomena as demographic size, rate of literacy or the geographical mobility of the concerned groups. It is true that the scheduled caste population is twice the size of the scheduled tribe population but for the purpose under consideration it is hardly significant as the issue under examination is in keeping with the size of the respective population. In terms of overall literacy, the scheduled castes have fared better than the scheduled tribes. As per the 1991 Census they enjoyed literacy rate of 37.4 per cent as against 29.6 per cent for tribes. Again the geographical mobility of the scheduled tribes, especially the educated, is not as pronounced as that of the scheduled castes both within and outside of the states. It is precisely these differences, which need to be pro-

blematised, rather than ignored or taken for granted corollaries of reservations.

Any attempt at understanding such problems entails discussion of two aspects/levels – both of which are intricately related to one another. The relative positions of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in availing of the benefits provided by governments are to a great extent dependent upon two factors. One is the relative role of the two groups with respect to their general educational attainment, especially at the level of higher education. The other factor is their over all performances at these levels. For it is not only their enrolment in the courses offered for higher education, but also the quality of performance in the duration of the course and their successful completion of the same, which is critical in assessing their eligibility for jobs/positions at different levels. It may not be out of place to point here that the drop-out rates amongst the scheduled tribes between classes I-X is higher than those the scheduled castes. The figure in 1980-81 and 1990-91 was 91.18 and 86.00 percent respectively as against 86.91 and 80.58 per cent for the scheduled castes [Planning Commission 2000].

Before one embarks on exploration of the above question, it is of significance to note that certain arbitrariness is invariably involved in demarcation of the population into categories such as the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. The arbitrariness is however not limited to the demarcation alone. It also extends to the demarcation of the population into this or that category. Such arbitrariness creeps in bordering cases; it cannot be generalised for the whole of the categories.

One could begin by looking into the logic of the reservation for the two categories for an exploration of the above question. It must be mentioned here that the logic of reservation for the two categories, in contrast to the popularly held belief, is not identical. The scheduled tribes were extended reservation because they suffered certain disabilities arising from life of segregation from the dominant community. The scheduled tribes, on the other hand, were given reservation not because they were segregated from the dominant community, but because they lived in isolation from the dominant community. This difference is hardly ever pinpointed, let alone explicated. Rather, the general tendency is to treat the two similarly.

In fact, this may be taken up as the starting point for discussion as to why the

scheduled castes have fared better than the scheduled tribes. The scheduled castes have been generally described as those falling outside the 'varna' system. Though outside of the varna system, the scheduled castes or the erstwhile untouchables had been integral to the dominant community whether in a village or town, the only difference being that the untouchables were unjustly segregated from the community and subjected to all forms of disabilities and discrimination. The scheduled castes have, therefore, had a greater exposure to the larger society as compared to the scheduled tribes. This is to say that opportunities made available to the larger societies or the higher castes in the form of knowledge, information, technology, employment, etc, were also in sight for the scheduled castes, even though they were denied access to it. Such advantages were absent for the scheduled tribes. Tribes thus suffered the disadvantage of isolation in this regard.

It is very unlikely that educated Indians are unaware of the category 'scheduled caste' and 'scheduled tribe'. Yet, while they may be quite familiar with the category of scheduled caste and have an idea of what it means and represents, the same cannot be said, with a similar degree of certainty, about the scheduled tribe. To begin with, despite being segregated, discriminated and oppressed, the scheduled castes are invariably as being a part of the Hindu society. And since the Hindu society can be effectively understood at the regional level, the scheduled castes too are in effect an integral part of the regional community. This regional community is also at the same time a linguistic community. Hence, though divided on the basis of castes, the scheduled castes share language, culture, and tradition, etc, of the linguistic community. They constitute a

Table 3: Facultywise Percentage Position of SC/ST Enrolment (1992-93)

Faculty	SC	ST	SC and ST
Arts	8.0	3.9	11.9
Science	5.8	2.1	7.9
Engg/Tech	8.1	2.1	10.2
Medicine	11.9	4.4	16.3
Agriculture	10.7	5.4	16.1
Law	11.7	2.7	14.4

Note: Enrolment facultywise includes levels ranging from undergraduate to research plus diploma/certificate course.

Source: UGC, 'Representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Enrolment, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff in University Teaching Departments/ University Colleges', p 5.

part of the dominant nationality of the region. It is not so with tribes and that turns out to be one of the most serious handicaps before tribes. In fact, an average Indian is unable to figure where the tribes fall. Tribes are therefore invariably seen as outsiders, ones who not only do not speak their language but also do not share their customs, tradition and values. Belonging to the tribe, though advantageous at the local level, is hardly so at the regional and national levels. In fact, tribes suffer from all the disadvantages of the community associated with ethnic minorities/communities. Hence the scheduled castes have generally been able to fill the jobs earmarked for them at the lower levels. Jobs allocated for tribes at such levels however remain vacant mainly for two reasons. Either the scheduled tribe candidates are generally not available or even when available there is a general discrimination or prejudices against them as being outside of their language and religion. Further, to get into these jobs, the tribes have also to learn the language of the dominant community, an advantage that the scheduled castes already possess. In short, whereas the scheduled castes are acceptable to the dominant community, the scheduled tribes are not.

The presence and absence of exposure, though necessary and important, is not a sufficient explanation for the differentials between the scheduled castes and tribes in making the most of the provision of reservations. Tribes, as we all know, are not a homogeneous category. Not only do they differ in terms of size, language, region, etc, but also in terms of exposure to the larger society. The contact of the tribes with the larger society though not altogether absent was tenuous and limited prior to the arrival of the British. With the onset of the colonial rule, the scenario has however undergone change. Tribes have been increasingly brought in contact with the larger society and exposed to the wider world through means of transport like roads and railways on the one hand and growth of trade, commerce and market on the other. Such a process has been followed more vigorously in the post-independent India through various ways of integration of which geographical, economic and political has been crucial. Of course, the degree and history of integration vary from tribe to tribe. Yet tribes with a history of such contacts and exposure, especially for over a century, have not necessarily fared better than those who have been minimally exposed.

Hence to seek reasons as to why the scheduled tribes have not fared as well as the scheduled castes, we have to go beyond the aforementioned explanations. My contention is that the exposure per se is not as important as the social structure that they represent and of which they were a part. Tribes in India besides being outside of 'civilisation' represented a different type of society. Tribal societies on the whole are small in scale and marked by great deal of homogeneity despite being differentiated along lines mentioned above. They are characterised more by resemblance than by differentiation and heterogeneity, especially in terms of their structural features. Thus tribal societies suffered from absence of interdependence, division of labour/occupation and correspondingly heterogeneity of values, skills, knowledge, income, wealth, status, privilege, etc.

There were disadvantages arising from the structure specific to the tribal society. Tribes, for example, are small-scale societies and are not a part of the larger society, though they may have been in some kind of contact and interaction with it. The description of the tribal society as small-scale is relative. They are small-scale in relation to the dominant community but they vary in size among themselves. The size varies from over seven million in case of the gonds and bhils to even less than one thousand in case of many tribal communities. Notwithstanding such variation in size, the societies are characterised by great deal of homogeneity in their social structure, a point that has already been made earlier. Interestingly, there seems to be no co-relation between the size of the population of the different tribal groups and their performances. Rather, the pattern seems to be one of larger the size, lower is the rate of literacy, educational attainment and share in the facilities extended by the governments. The case of the gonds, bhils, santhals, the three major tribal

communities in India could be taken as the point of illustration in the context. What this means is that the size of the population has nothing to do with differential share of tribal groups with respect to facilities extended through reservation.

A lack of heterogeneity in terms of social division of labour, occupation, skill, class, access to power, style of life, etc. has been considered as the hallmark of tribal societies. This being the case there exists hardly any group or stratum, which can be taken as the reference point for emulation by tribes. Of course there have been tribal societies with some forms of stratification, if one may use the term, but they have been rudimentary and mainly based on clan or lineage. Moreover they were not characterised by status differentiation though privileges of some kinds were not altogether ruled out. Further there is hardly anything like tribal identity among tribes at the pan-India level. If at all there is anything like tribal identity, it is confined either to a locality/region or at best to an institution or organisation. Moreover such identity is at work more at the level of the political or of interest articulation than at social or cultural plane. And even when there has been identity such as this, it has not been assertive and active. Such an identity among the scheduled castes both at the regional and national level is more

Table 5: Enrolment of SCs and STs at UG/PG Courses (Statewise)

State	Undergraduate		Postgraduate	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Gujarat	3.6	1.9	6.4	12.8
Karnataka	23.3	2.6	21.7	6.4
MP	13.9	6.1	12.5	4.8
Maharashtra	11.4	3.0	12.1	2.0
Orissa	14.1	4.8	13.1	5.2
W Bengal	11.2	0.5	7.3	0.4

Source: UGC, 'Representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Enrolment, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff in University Teaching Departments/University Colleges', pp 12-18.

Table 4: Admission of Scheduled Caste/Tribe Students in IIT-Kanpur (1967-78)

Year	No of Candidates Applied for JEE			No of Candidates in Merit and Called for Interview		No of Candidates Offered Admissions		No of Candidates Actually Admitted		
	Total	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	Total
1967-68	62	47	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1968-69	47	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
1969-70	35	29	6	7	1	7	1	7	1	3
1970-71	28	-	-	6	1	6	1	6	1	7
1971-72	35	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1
1972-73	79	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1
1973-74	98	86	12	42	6	42	6	-	-	46

Source: K N Sharma et al (1974): 'Educational Arithmetic of Social Inequality', A Study of Admission and Adjustment of IIT, Kanpur Students, (Mimeographed)

pronounced in comparison to those of the scheduled tribes. One of the reasons as to why such identity is much stronger among the scheduled castes is that they have gone through the common historical experience of oppression and discrimination for centuries. This was not the case with the scheduled tribes. Further the oppression and exploitation of tribes, for the form that it took, was economic and political. It did not percolate down to social and cultural level, as was the case with the scheduled castes. The reason for this is that the scheduled castes were part of the larger community but tribes were not. The scheduled castes therefore have had reference points not only within the system of which they were a part, viz, higher caste groups but also within their own social category as they have been able to develop a very strong sense of identity both at the regional and national levels despite being regionally and linguistically heterogeneous. This has been helpful and important in social networking, but importantly, at interest articulation and social and political mobilisation.

No doubt, tribes have now become exposed to the market, bureaucracy, state and the wider social and cultural groups but had little knowledge of interaction and negotiation with them, largely because they had little to do with people different from their own. Even if they had to interact with them, they did so only marginally. In fact, not only did non-tribes treat them as outsiders, but also tribes considered them basically as outsiders and therefore not worthy of emulation. Of course there had always been exceptions. The incorporation of tribes in the larger society had paved way for more intense interaction between tribes and non-tribes leading to increasing exploitation and discrimination of tribes. These were, broadly speaking, confined in the economic field. In social and cultural plane, tribes lived a life outside of the larger society. This is not to deny altogether that there were moves among segments or sections of tribes to adopt the lifestyle of castes and groups of the larger society. Such emulation however remained confined to the cultural level and could not get translated at the structural level. Where it got translated, tribes by virtue of being absorbed into the larger society had lost their distinct identity of their own. The urge for integration with the larger society and to be identified with it was on the whole missing. The larger society was seen as exploitative and oppressive, as a category to be opposed and fought. In the

process it could never become a standard for evaluation, emulation and aspiration.

Equally important aspect worth noting is that it is the collectivity and not individuality that dominates the larger part of the life of the tribes. Hence the principle of individuality and individual performance and excellence is less acceptable as the ethos of the tribal societies. Collectivity is still the central value or ethos among tribes despite existence of certain forms of inequality among them. Of course with incorporation into the wider world and the provision of protective discrimination for the advancement and welfare of the tribal people, tribal societies are increasingly becoming differentiated. The processes are however uneven among them. Notwithstanding this, egalitarianism to a lesser or greater degree continues to be guiding ethos/spirit of the tribal societies. In view of values such as these, the significance of individual/individualism does not assume the place it assumes in other categories of the population. Hence performance and achievement that stems from the spirit of individualism is not adequately reflected in the tribal societies. That such a tendency or spirit is also partly responsible for poor performance of tribal students cannot be denied.

It is also important to bear in mind that tribes by and large were dependent on the mode of livelihood that was mainly dependent on nature, viz, land and forest. They make their living more as food-gatherers, hunters, livestock-holders, cultivators or combination of one or more of them. In view of this, magic, ritual or at best rational adaptation rather than rational calculation and domination characterise their orientation to life. The fact that the scheduled tribes have relatively better representation of enrolment and employment in disciplines connected with agriculture and medicine may have something to do with linkage that tribes have with the organic world. The scheduled castes in comparison to the scheduled tribes were less rooted in nature and hence more prone to abstract disciplines that were sine qua non for science and mathematics. The scheduled castes were engaged in occupations that were either service or craft oriented. They were engaged in occupation that was characterised by some degree of calculation, reciprocity, and commitment and therefore went beyond the rhythm of nature. This may partly explain the higher ratio of enrolment and employment of the scheduled castes in the field of science and technology in comparison to the scheduled tribes.

By virtue of being engaged in such works, they had the advantage of being absorbed in industries that came up during the British rule. They had thus the historical advantage of being not only a part of the modern industrial organisation but also the process of urbanisation and urbanism, which got accelerated under the British rule.

Given the structural setting in which the scheduled castes lived in comparison with the scheduled tribes, the constitutional provision turned out to be the major break through for the scheduled castes but not so for the scheduled tribes. With the adoption of the Constitution, ideology of hierarchy/inequality was formally replaced by ideology of equality and social justice. For the first time in history the scheduled castes were considered as having the same civil and political rights as the others. The harmonic system, viz, congruence between the ideology and the social structure that characterised the Indian society gave way to disharmonic system with the adoption of the Indian Constitution [Beteille 1974]. Now there was disharmony between a structure that was inherently inegalitarian and the ideology that proclaimed abolition of discrimination based on race, caste, religion, etc. The actual social system, then, was far from conducive to the realisation of the ideal that was set in motion in independent India. The various kinds of provisions were therefore provided within the Constitution for those affected by the system. Of these, reservation has come to be the most important provision. As noted above, the scheduled castes were a part of the larger society and were exposed to discrimination at almost all levels of the social life from time immemorial. The extension of the constitutional provision was the beginning of the phase of setting the process in reverse direction. Hence the scheduled castes grabbed the advantage made open by the Constitution with aggression and vengeance so to say. The fact that they were part of the dominant community and were exposed to whatever the dominant community was exposed to, turned out to be handy and instrumental in helping them to take advantage of the facilities extended by the government under the constitutional provision. The driving force that helped the scheduled castes in availing of the benefits was the position that they occupied in the structure of the society. Since discrimination was experienced at all levels of social life, any opportunity that was provided to them for reversing such an arrangement was made

use of by the scheduled caste population. Since the traditional occupations pursued by the scheduled castes were at the root of low social status, the scheduled castes were desperate to abandon their traditional occupation. In the context new and diversified occupations let open by the British administration and the process of industrialisation assumed place of critical importance. Industrialisation and urbanisation not only opened up a space for geographical mobility but also for social mobility in view of a scope for interaction and reference points that it provided for the scheduled castes categories. In fact, it acted as a major catalyst. The adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950 and the constitutional provision for the scheduled castes therein gave a major boost to the process of mobility unleashed by the process of industrialisation and urbanisation.

This was not the case with tribes. They did not experience the kind of discrimination that the scheduled castes experienced primarily because they were not an integral part the dominant society. What they did experience with the colonial encounter was the exploitation at the economic level and domination at the political level. This they aimed at fighting by greater articulation of rights over land and forest on the one hand and political autonomy on the other rather than share over government jobs and state structure. The Constitution however did not extend such guarantee to them. The industrialisation process did not benefit them in the way it did for the scheduled castes mainly because of the nature of their occupation. Tribes also had no disliking for their occupations as were the case with the scheduled castes. First of all, there was no stigma attached to their occupation. Secondly, there was little inclination to abandon traditional occupation among the tribes. In fact, tribes more often than not were engaged in agriculture or hunting-food gathering. Tribes have been more interested in acquiring land and start life as agriculturists at the slightest opportunity available to them.

In addition tribes face disadvantages, which have accumulated with time. Since they have been independent of the larger community and therefore not a part of the dominant linguistic and religious community, they have invariably been seen as alien to that society and therefore not the legitimate partakers in the share. They have by and large lived in relatively inaccessible areas; hence have been the last to be exposed

to the modern world especially the state along with its legal-bureaucratic structures and market. Even when they came to be exposed, it was not as a part of this structure but as the victims of it.

In the sphere of politics too, as noted earlier, the impact made by the scheduled castes at the national/regional levels has been greater than that of the scheduled tribes. This is so partly due to their numerical strength but more importantly due to their better articulation, manoeuvring strategy and mobilisation process. The mobilisation processes in case of the scheduled castes unlike in case of tribes cuts across districts, regions and even states. In course, the latter have invariably emerged as the national leaders, with followers from social categories cutting across different regions and states.

Since the scheduled castes have been part of the dominant community, they are spread all over the length and breadth of the country. Hence their presence is much strongly felt at the national/ regional level. Their presence becomes even more visible and significant due to their numerical advantage. Also, because of the common experience they have gone through – irrespective of the part or region they come from, unity comes easily and intensely among them as against the tribes.

Unlike the leaders from within the scheduled caste, the impact made by leadership from within tribes, even when nationally recognised as in case of P A Sangma for example, has been less visible than those in case of the scheduled castes. It is most glaring at the level of interest articulation and pushing up of the tribal cause. The tribal leadership including Sangma is unable to pursue the interest of tribes as aggressively as ones from the scheduled castes are. He is not seen as a liberator by the tribes he represents, which is evidently the case with Paswan, Kanshi Ram or Mayawati, etc, in relation to scheduled castes. Much of the causes for it are rooted in the nature of the tribal society, which even within a given region, is divided among themselves in terms of language, territory, and culture on the one hand and needs, interests and aspiration on the other. There is also an inherent difficulty for the scheduled tribes to negotiate with the members of the larger community for the latter invariably see them as alien and not an integral part of their society. Hence there has been inherent centrifugal tendency rather than centripetal tendency among tribes in India. At the sub-regional or local

levels, the scheduled tribes have however been able to make some impact but only where they are in numerical majority

Differences among Tribes

As mentioned above, the scheduled castes have, in general, fared better than the scheduled tribes. But, within the category of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe, some castes or tribes/communities have fared better than the others. Among the scheduled castes, for example, the mahars of Maharashtra or chamars and jatavs of north India have done better than the other groups within the scheduled castes. Similarly, among tribes, there are some that have done better in comparison to other tribal groups, if not as well as the scheduled castes. Indeed, there are cases wherein some tribal groups have done better than some of the scheduled castes groups. It would be interesting to explore as to what accounts for such differences in case of groups so found. The focus/interest here is not so much on castes as it is on tribes; hence differences among the scheduled castes have not been highlighted as much as the differences among the tribal groups. Some of the tribal communities that have done relatively better than the others are the minas of Rajasthan, mizos of Mizoram, khasis of Meghalaya, oraons of erstwhile Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, etc. Of these, the minas would be conspicuous as the most outstanding.

The minas and the oraons with a population ranging between two and three million each are smaller than the groups as the gonds, bhils and santhals. The khasis and mizos are even smaller groups than the minas and oraons. What seem to account for better representation of the minas in the government services is that the minas was a fairly differentiated community. There were, among them, large and small landowners besides the class of chowkidars. They were also differentiated into other categories depending on their geographical spread, nature of their social intermingling with caste groups such as jats, ahirs and especially the rajputs, adoption of specific occupations, etc. As lords/zamindars, many lived off land as extractors of rent. Also, as lords, they were in more regular interaction with their counterparts in other communities and also the state authorities. The privileged section of the mina community was thus in a position to take advantage open to similar people in other communities. The provision of

reservation gave an added advantage to the members of the Mina community. Once such processes were set in motion within the community, the not so privileged too began to take the path set by the more privileged from within the community.


Besides the minas, the other tribal groups, which have done relatively better than the others are the mizos and khasis of the north-east and the oraons of the eastern and central India. The mizos and the khasis with a population of less than one million each had a form of chieftainship among them. There were also some social differentiation based on rank and some rudimentary form of status. The ranks and status based on lineage were not open to all. It is with Christianity and modern education that opened up new opportunities of rank and status among them. The growth of township within the tribal heartland resulting from opening up of new administration and the rise of trade and commerce gave not only a major boost to the process of social differentiation in those societies but also led to intense interaction between groups living there including the tribes. It may not be out of place to point

out here that there is a strong co-relation between urbanisation and higher rate of literacy among tribes. The oraons, on the other hand, were characterised by relative absence of chiefs and kings within the community. The community was hence relatively egalitarian. The onset of Christianity and the modern education among them however opened up the road of social differentiation, viz. Christian, non-Christian, educated, and non-educated and also certain level of occupational differentiation within the community. It gave rise to emergence of a priestly class, teachers, and others from within who were also being accorded high status within the community. The emergence of such groups fairly early within the community helped such community to take advantage of the services provided by the modernising process. This explains, even though partially, as to why the oraons have done better than the other in availing the facilities provided by the government under the constitutional provision. These then were some of the structural features within which better performance of the scheduled tribes and castes has to be understood. **[EW]**


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