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**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF SCHEDULED CASTES:
A CASE STUDY IN ALAND TALUKA OF KALABURAGI DISTRICT**



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ABSTRACT:

The scheduled castes are most backward since immemorial years. As such, as per the provisions of Indian Constitution and Government welfare schemes, they are encouraged in terms of education, employment and such other schemes so as to get socio-economic status in society. Still, it is observed that the scheduled castes are backward, especially in backward areas like Aland taluka in Gulbarga district. To look into socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes, a survey based on interviews was made in Aland taluka. Totally 400 people of scheduled castes were interviewed and the collected data revealed that, there is gender inequality among scheduled castes and majority of the scheduled castes are backward. Hence, it is

suggested to scheduled castes to get higher education and employment and for this purpose, the Government has to encourage scheduled castes in higher education, employment and self-employment.

KEYWORDS

Socio-economic Conditions, Indian Constitution, education, employment.

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INTRODUCTION:

The terms 'Dalits', 'Shudras', 'Scheduled Castes', 'Mlechchas', 'Chandals', etc are used synonymously to mean scheduled castes in India. There is also confusion, as many authors have stated that the untouchables or Dalits were belonged to 'Shudras', while few of the authors writes that the Dalits were not belong to any of the groups including 'Shudras' and are outcastes. As stated by Nirupama Prakash (2004) since the dawn of history, Indian society has suffered from diverse types of social disabilities. Some of the most unsocial and unscrupulous social inequalities and disabilities were centred on the institution of caste. The caste is hierarchial determining the social status in the group. The caste can be classified into four groups—'the highest castes, the upper castes, the lower castes and the lowest castes..', The highest castes are the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and among the lowest castes are the Harijans that is Scheduled Caste or untouchables or dalits.

As per the Census of India 1901 it was found that there were altogether 2378 tribes and castes in India, some with numbers running into millions and others of microscopic size. There are over fourteen million Brahmins alone. The next most numerous castes is that of the Chamars (eleven millions), who work in hides and leather and are at the bottom of the social scale. The third is that of the Rajputs (nearly ten millions), who rank next to the Brahmins. After the census of 1901 the practice of tabulating figures for every tribe and caste, however small, was abandoned, as it was thought that to do so for small or even minute communities, representing a negligible or infinitesimal proportion of the population, involved an expenditure of time, labour and money which was not justified by the practical value of the results obtained. Separate statistics are now compiled only for tribes and castes reaching a certain figure or representing a certain percentage of the total population (Yurlova, 1990).

The history of categorizing some castes as Scheduled Castes commenced with the Government of India Act, 1935. This step, on the part of the then British Government, was meant to treat the most oppressed and exploited castes with a degree of special political dispensation. Most of these castes were known as 'untouchable' in the context of the Hindu social structure. Thus, the 'Scheduled Caste' category initially comprised castes that were isolated and disadvantaged by their 'untouchability', i.e. their low status in the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy, which exposed them to an oppressive life, characterized by a blatant deprivation of opportunities.

Even after achieving Independence in 1947, the Constitution of India has used the word 'Scheduled Castes'. The term 'Scheduled Castes' has not been defined anywhere in the Constitution. Article 34 of the Constitution reads as follows: "Scheduled Caste" means such castes, races or tribes parts or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under Act 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of the Constitution of India. The president of India has powers to issue the list of the Scheduled Castes order of 1950 after consultation with the Governor of any State.

After Independence, the Government of India took up the removal of untouchability as one of its main and important tasks. Equality constitutes the "basic structure" of the Indian Constitution. Excessive "redress" of disadvantages to a group, class or caste sought through privilege of protection by positive discrimination in jobs militates against it. Thus, the subject is attended by splendid legal niceties (Chapter 9, 2005). In order to end exploitation of these sections at the hands of upper caste Hindus, the modern polity provided many protective measures in the constitution and initiated many pro-programmes of their social development. The schemes which have been taken-up for socio-economic upliftment of scheduled castes are in the field of education, occupation, economic upliftment, health

and housing schemes. The Indian Government has provided many facilities in the field of education and occupation to scheduled castes in order to bring about their upliftment. Many scheduled castes people have sought urban employment, away from their rural exploitative system. Now that members of scheduled caste community are in a position to seek entry in urban occupation, a change in their life pattern is expected.

Scheduled Castes in Karnataka present a complex and mixed story of development. Their literacy, health and nutritional status and overall living condition as such have been improving considerably. Yet, they show poorly in terms of other development indicators. Poor housing conditions, landlessness, child and girls' problems, social stigma of untouchability, illiteracy and such other social disabilities have made the Scheduled Caste people the victims of all forms of discrimination and deprivation- Caste, Class and Gender. Due to the welfare schemes of the Government, to some extent, development has taken place among the scheduled castes. Hence, the present study is made to explore the changes and developments among the scheduled castes in backward Aland taluka of Kalaburagi district in Karnataka.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study is made:

- 1.To know about the social conditions of Scheduled Castes in Aland taluka in Kalaburagi district;
- 2.To explore the economic status of scheduled castes; and
- 3.To look into the problems of scheduled castes in Aland taluka.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS:

The author searched for relevant theoretical information sources from books and research journals including statistical reports. Based on theoretical background, interview schedule was designed. Totally 400 scheduled caste people living in rural areas and Aland town of Kalaburagi district were interviewed to collect the primary data.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

The collected primary data is analyzed, interpreted and discussed as under.

1. Age-wise Distribution of Respondents:

Age plays significant role in knowledge level and awareness of people in different aspects such as welfare schemes, socio-economic conditions and politics, etc. Hence, the respondents from different ages were selected to collect the primary data. The following table shows the age of the respondents covered under the study.

Table No. 1. Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25 Years	49	12.2
26 to 40 Years	187	46.7
41 to 60 Years	129	32.2
Above 60 Years	35	8.7
Total	400	100

The age of all the respondents shows that 187 (46.7%) are in the age group of 26 to 40 years followed by, 129 (32.2%) are in the age group of 41 to 60 years, 49 (12.2%) are of less than 25 years and the remaining 35 (8.7%) are of above 60 years respectively. It is highlighted from the collected data that a great majority of the respondents are from the middle age groups.

2. Education:

Education is fundamental for the overall development of the scheduled castes. Hence, the information is collected from the respondents on their educational qualifications and presented in the following table.

Table No. 2. Education

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	54	13.5
Primary/ Secondary	142	35.5
Under Graduate	62	15.5
Graduate	107	26.7
Post-Graduate	35	8.7
Any Other	--	--
Total	400	100

Of all the respondents, 142 (35.5%) have completed primary or secondary education followed by, 107 (26.7%) have completed graduation, 62 (15.5%) have completed under-graduation and 54 (13.5%) are illiterates respectively. It is highlighted that the educational level of majority of the scheduled castes is lower and as such, they do not have awareness about their rights and legal safeguards.

3. Marital Status:

Marital status determines the social traditions, culture and belief in social practices. As such, information was collected from the respondents on the marital status of the respondents and tabulated as under.

Table No. 3. Marital Status

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Married	290	72.5
Unmarried	62	15.5
Widower	26	6.5
Widow	17	4.2
Separated/ Divorced	05	1.2
Total	400	100

Among all the respondents covered under the study, 290 (72.5%) are married and living with their husbands, 62 (15.5%) are unmarried, 26 (6.5%) are widowers, 17 (4.2%) are widows and the remaining 05 (1.2%) are separated or divorced from their spouses. It is highlighted that majority of the respondents are married and living with their spouses.

4. Occupation:

Occupation determines the economic status of the respondents and also reveals livelihood of the respondents. Hence, the information collected on the occupation of the respondents is tabulated as under.

Table No. 4. Occupation

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	98	24.5
Industry/ Business	36	9.0
Formal Sector Employment	64	16.0
Informal Sector Employment	132	33.0
Caste based Occupation	70	17.5
Total	400	100

Among all the respondents covered under the study, 98 (24.5%) are engaged in agriculture, 36 (9.0%) are engaged in business or industries, 64 (16.0%) are engaged in formal sector employment, 132 (33.0%) are engaged in informal or seasonal employment and 70 (17.5%) are engaged in their caste based traditional occupations.

5. Husband and Wife are Equal in Family:

Even though women are suppressed and treated as weaker sex in the society, by the time, the status of women is changed and in many families, they are treated as equal by their husbands. But, still in many of the backward castes, the status of women is lower. As such, information was collected from the respondents on whether the husband and wife are equal in their family and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 5. Husband and Wife are Equal in Family

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Husband & Wife are Equal	78	19.5
Husband is Superior to Wife	314	78.5
Wife is Superior to Husband	08	2.0
Total	400	100

As expressed by all the respondents, 314 (78.5%) have agreed that husband is superior to wife, only 78 (19.5%) have agreed that husband and wife are equal and 08 (2.0%) have stated that wife is superior to husband respectively.

6. Decision Making in Family:

In many families, women are deprived in terms of decision making and in some cases, still parents or parents-in-law are dominating in decision making. Further, in few families, both husband and wife are making the family decisions. The decision making authority shows the power of a family member in terms of social respect in their families. Hence, the information collected on the decision making in family is tabulated as under.

Table No. 6. Decision Making in Family

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Husband & Wife	167	41.7
Parents	38	9.5
Parents-in-law	40	10.0
Husband Alone	147	36.7
Wife Alone	04	1.0
Children	04	1.0
Total	400	100

Among all the respondents, 167 (41.7%) have stated that both the husband and wife are making the family decisions followed by, 147 (36.7%) have expressed that only husband is making the decisions, 40 (10.0%) have expressed that their parents-in-law are making the decisions, 38 (9.5%) have stated that their parents are making the decisions, 04 (1.0%) have remarked that wife alone are making the decisions and 04 (1.0%) have stated that their children are making the decisions. It is generalized that females have lesser authority in decision making in the families of the scheduled castes.

7. Present Conditions of Scheduled Castes:

Considering the backwardness and social evil practices imposed on the scheduled castes in India since the ancient and medieval age, the Government has formulated many of the welfare schemes and programmes for the overall development of the scheduled castes since independence. As such, it was asked to the respondents, due to such welfare schemes, whether the conditions of the scheduled castes have improved now. The collected responses are tabulated as under.

Table No. 7. Present Conditions of Scheduled Castes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Improved Considerably	159	39.7
Has not Improved	197	49.2
It's as bad as before	06	1.5
Can't Say	38	9.5
Total	400	100

As expressed by all the respondents, 159 (39.7%) have agreed that there is improvement in the socio-economic status of the Scheduled Castes due to welfare schemes and programmes of the government, 197 (49.2%) have not agreed to the same, 06 (1.5%) have stated that the conditions of the scheduled castes are as bad as before and 38 (9.5%) have not expressed their views on the same.

8. Faced Embarrassing Situations due to Caste:

The scheduled castes are facing many of the embarrassing situations, even though legislations were already passed to curb such situations. Information was collected from the respondents on whether they have faced such situations and presented in the following table.

Table No. 8. Faced Embarrassing Situation due to Caste

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Social Discrimination/ Alienation	14	3.5
Lower Treatment in Religious, Cultural & Public Functions	110	27.5
Atrocities from Forward Castes	24	6.0
Social Inequality	171	42.7
Not Faced Anything	191	47.7
Total	400	100

As expressed by all the respondents, 191 (47.7%) have not faced any of embarrassing situations followed by, 171 (42.7%) have faced social inequality, 110 (27.5%) have faced lower treatment in religious, cultural and public functions, 24 (6.0%) have faced atrocities from forward castes and the remaining only 14 (3.5%) have faced social discrimination and alienation from the society. It is observed from the collected primary data that comparatively more respondents belongs to the scheduled castes have suffered from different kinds of embarrassing situations in their life.

9. General Problems Associated with Caste:

The scheduled castes are suffering from different problems, which made them as backward in the society since centuries. These general problems include illiteracy, negligence, occupation with lower

status, etc. Information was collected from the respondents on the general problems associated with the castes of the scheduled castes and tabulated as under.

Table No. 9. General Problems Associated with Caste

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty/ Negligence	211	52.7
Lower Caste Based Occupation	83	20.7
Social Injustice/ Inequality	137	34.2
Discrimination/ Alienation	40	10.0
Any Other	55	13.7
Total	400	100

Of all the respondents on the general problems of their communities, 211 (52.7%) have stated that poverty and negligence are the problems, 83 (20.7%) have stated their lower caste based occupation is the problem, 137 (34.2%) have expressed that they have problems of social injustice and inequality, 40 (10.0%) have stated that there is problem of discrimination and alienation and 55 (13.7%) have mentioned other type of problems also.

10. Boys are Equal to Girls in Community:

In many of the communities and castes the boys are not equal to girls and boys are always superior over girls. Hence, gender discrimination is there in majority of the communities and castes. As such, information was collected from the respondents on whether the boys are equal to girls in their respective communities and the collected information is shown as under.

Table No. 10. Boys are Equal to Girls in Community

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	08	2.0
No	364	91.0
Can't Say	28	7.0
Total	400	100

Among all the respondents, only 08 (2.0%) have agreed that the boys are equal to girls in the communities, whereas a great majority that is 364 (91.0%) of the respondents have agreed that the boys are not equal to boys and about 28 (7.0%) have not expressed their views on the same. It is amazing that even though girls are well educated and getting employment equally in the society; still almost all the respondents have stated that the boys are not equal to girls.

11. Socio-economic and Educational Conditions Changed Since Independence:

Before independence, the scheduled castes were suffered from poverty, negligence, illiteracy, untouchability, caste hierarchy, discrimination, etc. But after independence, many of the welfare

schemes of the government emphasized the education and economic security of the scheduled castes. As such, to a greater extent, the socio-economic and educational conditions of the scheduled castes are changed and improved. Hence, information was collected from the respondents on whether the socio-economic and educational conditions of the scheduled castes are changed since independence and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 11. Socio-economic and Educational Conditions Changed Since Independence

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Fully Improved	53	13.2
Improved to a Greater extent	123	30.7
Moderately Improved	119	29.7
No Change	105	26.2
Total	400	100

Among all the respondents, 123 (30.7%) have expressed that the socio-economic and educational conditions are improved to a greater extent followed by, 119 (29.7%) have stated that these conditions are moderately improved, 105 (26.2%) have stated that there is no change in these conditions and only 53 (13.2%) have agreed that the socio-economic and educational conditions of the scheduled castes are fully improved since independence respectively.

12. Average Monthly Income:

Monthly income reveals the purchasing and spending power of people. It also discloses the economic status of scheduled castes. The information collected on the average monthly income of the scheduled castes covered under the study is shown as under.

Table No. 12. Average Monthly Income

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Less than Rs. 2000	80	20.0
Rs. 2001 to Rs. 5000	117	29.2
Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10000	124	31.0
Rs. 10001 to Rs. 25000	54	13.5
Rs. 25001 to Rs. 50000	25	6.2
More than Rs. 50000	--	--
Total	400	100

Monthly income of the respondents revealed that, monthly income of 124 (31.0%) is between Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10000 followed by, that of 117 (29.2%) is between Rs. 2001 to Rs. 5000, monthly income of 80 (20.0%) is less than Rs. 2000, monthly income of 54 (13.5%) is between Rs. 10001 to Rs. 25000 and the monthly income of 25 (6.2%) of the respondents is between Rs. 25001 to Rs. 50000. It is surprising to note that none of the respondents have higher income level that is more than Rs. 50000 and majority of

the respondents have lower income that is below Rs. 10000 per month.

13. Worth of Properties Owned:

As discussed above, 284 of the respondents have owned properties of different types and the information was collected from the respondents on the worth of properties owned by them and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 13. Worth of Properties Owned

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Less than Rs. 50000	59	14.7
Rs. 50001 to Rs. 1 lakh	75	18.7
Rs. 1 lakh to 2.5 lakhs	96	24.0
Rs. 2.5 lakhs to Rs. 5 lakhs	32	8.0
More than Rs. 5 lakhs	22	5.5
Not Applicable	116	29.0
Total	400	100

Among all the respondents, 116 (29.0%) have not owned any of the properties followed by, 96 (24.0%) have owned properties worth between Rs. 1 lakhs to Rs. 2.5 lakhs, 75 (18.7%) have owned properties worth between Rs. 50001 to Rs. 1 lakh, 59 (14.7%) have owned properties worth less than Rs. 50000, 32 (8.0%) have owned properties worth between Rs. 2.5 lakhs to Rs. 5 lakhs and only 22 (5.5%) have owned properties worth of more than Rs. 5 lakhs. Like their monthly income, the worth of properties owned by majority of the respondents is also lower.

14. Barriers to Overall Development of Scheduled Castes:

It was asked to the respondents to furnish the barriers, which prevent the overall development of the scheduled castes in Aland taluka and the collected responses are tabulated as under.

Table No. 14. Barriers to Overall Development of Scheduled Castes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate Caste based Reservation	118	29.5
Regional Imbalance	98	24.5
Negligence of Scheduled Castes	84	21.0
Social Barriers	16	4.0
Natural Factors	--	--
Financial Problems	84	21.0
Total	400	100

Of all the respondents covered under the study on the barriers for overall development of scheduled castes, 118 (29.5%) have stated that there is inadequate caste based reservation, 98 (24.5%) have responded that there is regional imbalance, 84 (21.0%) have expressed that there is negligence of

scheduled castes, 16 (4.0%) have stated that there are social barriers and 84 (21.0%) have responded that there are financial problems as barriers to overall development of the scheduled castes in Aland taluka.

15. Factors to Minimize the Caste Barriers and Improve the Status of Scheduled castes:

Information is collected on the factors to minimize the caste barriers and improve the status of scheduled castes in the society and presented in the following table.

Table No. 15. Factors to Minimize the Caste Barriers and Improve Status of Scheduled Castes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Higher Education	229	57.2
Improvement of Economic Status	268	67.0
More Reservation	155	38.7
Encouraging Inter Caste Marriages	34	8.5
Any Other	--	--
Total	400	100

It is revealed from the above table that many of the respondents have suggested for more than one factor to minimize the caste barriers and overall development of the scheduled castes in the society. To summarize to overcome caste barriers and to achieve overall development of the scheduled castes, 268 (67.0%) have suggested to improve the economic status, 229 (57.2%) have expressed that there is need for higher education, 155 (38.7%) have responded that there is need for more reservation and 34 (8.5%) have stated that there is need to encourage the inter-caste marriages in the society. Hence, it can be concluded that there is need to assure economic status and higher education, which overcome caste barriers and develop the scheduled castes.

16. Improvement of Status of Scheduled Castes:

Many of the factors, that help to improve the status of scheduled castes in the society and they include economic assistance, higher education, reservation, etc. Information was collected on the factors for the improvement of the status of the scheduled castes in the society and presented in the following table.

Table No. 16. Improvement of Status of Scheduled Castes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Higher Education	134	33.5
Employment & Economic Assistance	190	47.5
Individual Caste based Reservation	66	16.5
Any Other	10	2.5
Total	400	100

Of all the respondents for the improvement and development of status of scheduled castes, 190 (47.5%) have suggested for employment and economic assistance followed by, 134 (33.5%) have suggested for higher education, 66 (16.5%) have suggested for individual caste based reservation and 10 (2.5%) have give other suggestions respectively. It has been found that the employment, economic assistance, higher education and individual caste based reservation are major suggestions given by the respondents for improvement of the status of the scheduled castes.

CONCLUSION:

It is observed from the present study that though Government has extended welfare schemes and facilities for the scheduled castes, still majority of the scheduled castes are backward and even they are still facing the caste based evils such as discrimination, alienation, atrocities, etc. Hence, it is essential on the part of the scheduled castes to gain higher education and employment, so as to gain social status and social equality. Further, it is suggested to the government to formulate welfare schemes to encourage self-employment with financial assistance among the scheduled castes living in rural areas.

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