

**The Dalits in India : Search for a Common Destiny.** By Sukhdeo Thorat, SAGE Publications: New Delhi, 2009, pgs.313.

*Review by Gowhar Yaqoob*

The book is an extensive study based compilation which has presented socio-economic status of Scheduled Castes with an aim to provide policies directed for their empowerment; especially through the changes in various indicators assumed to be the registers for mapping human development. The recognition of the problems of the Schedule Castes is premised on the historical processes of economic and social exclusion and discrimination based on caste. The study relies heavily on statistical publications and micro-level studies, and is further supplemented with the analysis of the same.

The first chapter begins with the nomenclature of the Scheduled Castes and the legislation in India with briefing on the approach of government toward the empowerment of these groups. The second chapter explicates government strategies and safeguard policies toward this section of the population. It gives in-depth details on the schemes and other nodal ministry which specifically develops interventionist approaches and strategies for SCs. The third chapter is focused to explicate the demographical profile of SCs in India, drawn from the analysis based primarily on the census of three decades from 1981 to 2001. It looks at the population size and changes of the SCs *vis-à-vis* total population of the country; including the gender aspect in terms of sex ratio. The chapter further elucidates the levels and patterns of urbanization among SCs. Chapter four summarizes the trends toward occupational diversification of the rural workforce across all social groups showing that both rural and urban SCs are in a relatively disadvantageous position in comparison to non-SCs and STs, ending with the fact-finding that the brunt of slackening public employment in the economic reforms period was borne more heavily by SCs. Proving that SCs are under privileged, chapter five probes further into the issue of inequitable land distribution among the social groups in India. The pattern of landownership is highly skewed against SCs. It evaluates the comparative position of SCs and analyse the nature and extent of inequality in the ownership of agricultural land among different social groups. The next chapter brings an overview of the status of SCs rural labour force in India. It successfully provides insightful inferences into the characteristics of rural labour in India and the prevalence of discrimination with regards to them. The chapter ends with the suggestion note that in order to reduce the magnitude of wage labour, discrimination in wages and occupation, their access to physical capital assets, human capital and market forces are necessary among SCs.

Chapter seven , eight and nine present an overview of the current employment scenario of SCs in rural and urban areas bringing to light substantial levels of disparities and the progress of reservation policy and its consequences on public employment. The collation of the data in chapter eight elucidates that the benefits of the reservation policies have not percolated down to SCs, despite the elaborate constitutional statutes on reservation in government jobs. It reiterates the suggestion at the end that reservation together with other policy instruments is equally important for the up-lift of socially disadvantaged groups. And the ninth chapter assesses poverty in rural areas, capturing the impact of the

past exclusion of SCs in India by an inter-social group poverty analysis to identify economic factors associated with the persistently high poverty among SCs. Chapter ten presents an account of current literacy and educational scenarios of SCs with emphasis on the progress to the social, gender and inter-state inequalities *vis-vis* non-SCs/STs. According to the author, educational deprivation among SCs and social inequities are subjection to and largely attributed to the historical and cumulative socio-economic and structural deprivations they have suffered for centuries. Poverty is to a large extent responsible for the poor educational enrolment of SCs. The shift from the economic status to health status and healthcare is shown to represent the unambiguous health conditions of SCs which is quite poor in India and more deprived than the other sections. And subsequent chapters follow up the discussion on the disparities in access to civic amenities. Chapter thirteen has located the violation of civil rights, forms of caste based discrimination and untouchability in public life, and the incidence of crimes and atrocities against SCs using micro-level evidence and official statistics on atrocities based on National Crime Records Bureau and evidence based on regional studies. The author necessitates the importance to draw a multi-prolonged strategy dealing with the problems pertaining to discrimination and violence against SCs amplified by an overall framework of rights to confer equality of status to SCs. This shall indeed enable to remove all disabilities which the customary relationship of the caste system has placed upon them. Finally, the last chapter concludes with the Policy Direction, which recollects the purpose of the study and endorses positivist approach to improvements and policy directions.

The Annexure at the end of the book provide the reader with details of immense importance. Overall, the book can prove to be resourceful hand-book and significant guide-book for purposes of diverse nature; including advocacy. The structure of the book including tables, figures, widely spread across 14 chapters is more likely compilation of certain individual (micro-level) studies, which has woven a strong pattern, in shape of the discourse this book brings forth. The book gives insightful readings on various policy directions which however yield the reiterations of the focus of the study more precisely. The floating discourse in the work, on historical and structural deprivations, engage on surface as bedrock of legitimizing particular identity for Dalit, in search for a common Destiny.

e-mail: [gowharjacob@dalitstudies.org.in](mailto:gowharjacob@dalitstudies.org.in)