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Impact of caste on the Indian labour market: What dostate-based studies indicate

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Abstract

Most of the labour market discrimination studies focus on the All India analysis. India is a diverse country with diverse socio- economic aspects for each state. Caste and religious identity transpires into the social and economic life of each state in its' own unique ways. This is an enquiry into wage differences of various social groups in each of these states. This being an introductory analysis, does not give a detailed wage gap analysis. The study concludes that, even most economically advanced states shows very high wage discrimination based.

Keywords: Labour market, wage discrimination, caste based discrimination

Introduction

Caste is a main concern as it can shape the work lives of restrictions that prevent their entry into the occupation of majority group members, or face differential treatment in acquiring in which one must marry; members of a jati are members of a descent group, traditionally assigned to a specific occupation (Chakravarti, Uma 2006) [12]. Labour market discrimination based on caste, religion and gender transpires in the domain of hiring or in wages or through working conditions and in opportunities for upward mobility. Occupational discrimination occurs when members of subordinate groups face restriction that prevent their entry in to the occupation of majority group members, or face differential treatment in the acquisition of factors and services necessary to enter the market. It is believed to be responsible for the major inequalities in access to education, health, technology and job. There have been a number of government policies addressing the discrimination in general and Labour market discrimination. Beginning with constitutional remedies to political will to reserving seats in the elections, all these phenomena were hailed as possibilities to create a more egalitarian set up in the society and in the labour market. But the outcome of these policies were very marginal.

From 1950 to 1991 Indian economy has stepped up from a feudal economy with a strong caste-centered labour market to a mixed economy with a positive bias towards government controls during which corrective measures were taken to mitigate caste-infused labour market disparities. The 1991 neo-liberal economic reforms overturned most of the earlier economic policies, and three novel words 'globalisation', 'liberalization' and 'privatisation' grew to be the midpoint of the government policies. One immediate effect was on the job prospects of the Dalits owing to the shrinking public sector. 'Burgeoning business class and upper midclass' favourite words 'competition' 'merit' and 'efficiency' has gained tremendous momentum in recent years. Popular opinion has conveniently started believing that caste discrimination is a thing of the past. Given these observations, it would be interesting to take a historical walk to trace the genesis of the problem and eventually find out the latest trends. Caste has historically been the key axis of social and occupational stratification in India- a highly effective Indian instrument of exploitation with far-reaching consequences. Occupations were stratified along the lines of caste, or caste-dictated labour market interactions of Individuals. Polluting jobs like leather work, sanitation jobs etc. were earmarked for 'lower castes. Strict immobility to other occupations held this caste-based occupation system intact for centuries, paving way to the deprivation of lower castes in India's labour market and wage discrimination therein. Other than Dalits, STs and Muslims also did not belong to this fourfold division of Varna System.

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The advent of modernity and globalization has paved way to the opening up of new avenues for the labourers, but it failed to transpire in to the caste composition and structure. In market economies, occupational immobility is the result of the inaccessibility to land, labour, capital, credit, education and other inputs and services necessary for commercial activity. Labour market discrimination is widely researched. Caste and religion-based discrimination affects more than 50 percent of the population. This is same in case of female workers also. It is an issue of immense concern for their consequent outcomes for economic growth, income distribution and poverty. The reservation policies of government were under attack from various corners of life for its visible injustice towards people with merit. Even the private companies and MNC heads emphasized that these days merit is the only tool based on which people are selected so there is no scope for labour market discrimination based on caste. So it will be quite interesting to look into how the privatization and liberalization policies affected the wage and employment prospects of Dalits and tribes.

One more aspect of this issue is that the shrinking public sector in the wake of economic reforms might have a heavy impact on the job prospects of the Dalit population. A state-wise study will be more appropriate as the cultural and social situations in each state differ to a great extent. So I genuinely expect an interstate variation in the economic situation of the people of various castes. A detailed study can facilitate targeted measures to correct labour market discrimination. There haven't been many interstate comparative studies on labour market discrimination in India.

This paper examines the existing inequalities in the labour market in terms of wage inequality and employment inequality among SC, ST and Muslims. SCs are the erstwhile untouchables, a socially segregated section of Indian society.

Past Studies on labour market Discrimination

'Discrimination' studies in Europe were mainly about gender discrimination and in the US it was about racial discrimination. Discrimination based on gender and caste is widely studied in India since the last three decades. Early theory regarding discrimination comes from Becker. According to him, individuals prefer to incur more costs rather than provide jobs to members of a certain social category. For instance, employing women would cost the employer less than employing men. But they would almost always prefer men to women. If he comes in to contact with that group, in order to incur this, cost he should be paying low wages for that group. This model also predicts that the profit which would arise due to the employment of discriminated groups would result in the disappearance of employment discrimination. This theory does not explain the persistence of labour market discrimination in the long run. Arrow tries to explain this through adjustment costs. According to him if there is an adjustment costs of hiring and firing it may not be cost efficient to mix the workforce as quickly as the paradigm of perfect competition suggest. Arrow (1972) also put forward the theory of statistical discrimination. The rationale behind discrimination could be imperfect information. Group characteristics may be attributed to individuals due to asymmetric information. The neoclassical theory of labour market discrimination says that

the caste system brings immobility of labour across the caste occupations leading to segmentation of labour market and inefficiency in the market. Akerlof (1976) ^[13] reasons that the persistence of the caste system despite causing economic inefficiency to the fact that any attempt to break caste custom leads to social suffering.

With regard to studies on labour market discrimination based on caste, there are not much empirical studies which try to study the phenomenon of economic discrimination. Many works of literature were to find out the fact whether labour discrimination based on caste is a reality or not.

Thorat (2001) ^[14] holds the view that the consequences of the caste system in terms of equity are more serious than for economic efficiency and growth. His studies point out the skewed distribution of workers in labour market, majority of the Dalits workers are wage labourers and there is a presence of employment as well as wage discrimination in the labour market that discrimination can be of two kinds, occupational and wage discrimination. Thorat, M. Mahamallik and Ananth S Panth (2007) has tried to develop the including employment discrimination measurement. Using a village based study in three states in India (Orissa, Gujarat and Maharashtra), an analysis of forms, nature and mechanism of caste based discrimination is discussed in this paper. This paper and the article by S. Madheswaran and P. Attewell (2007) ^[6] agree to the fact that discrimination can be of two kinds, occupational discrimination and wage discrimination. They used audit method to measure discrimination. Their study showed labour market working was in favour of upper caste, which includes discrimination in employment in wages and in case of accessibility in labour inputs and transactions. Caste loyalty mattered in case of hiring practices by employers. This study was concentrated on rural areas.

Another study by S. Thorat, Paul Attewell and FF Rizvi (The legacy of social Exclusion: correspondence study of job discrimination in India) discuss the caste based labour market discrimination in today's urban India. It is a field experiment about the employment discrimination, which emphasized the caste and religion based discrimination in the labour market. They concluded that caste favoritism and social exclusion of Dalits and Muslims have infused private enterprises even in the most dynamic modern sector of the India economy. This registers an active exclusion of lower cast people. This study has been taken inspiration from the article by Marianne Bertrand and S. Mullainathan (2004) ^[15] which enquire into the labour market discrimination based on race in US. This argument is more or less supported by the study of A. Deshpande and K.S Newman (2007) ^[16] about the role of caste in post university employment expectations say that graduating reserved category students had lower occupational expectation than their non-reserved category counterparts. Even though they could find a sophisticated form of exclusion which works through social and cultural capital in the urban formal sector labour market. They also emphasize the fact that other than skills and educational qualifications caste, class, family background and network matter a great deal in urban, formal private sector jobs.

Occupation specific study which brings the role of caste in labour market is done by Thorat (2001) ^[14] which examined the economic situation of wage labour in Scheduled caste category. Lack of capital and agricultural land for SC

workers has resulted in a large number of wage labourers whose wage rate is significantly lower than their counter parts.

Measurement of labour market discrimination using NSSO data is done by S. Madheswaran and P. Attewell (2007) ^[6] in their article they have examined the inequalities in employment, occupation and earnings between SC/ST, OBC and forward caste Indians in urban sector and tried to explained these gaps through education and discrimination. Two major findings given by them are that large endowment implies that pre market discriminatory practices with respect to education health and nutrition are more crucial in explaining wage differentials than labour market discrimination and wage discrimination appears to have increased soon after the liberalization. Maitreyi Bordia Das (2006) ^[17] also has used NSSO data in her analysis in labour market discrimination based on cast and religion. She used data till 2000, it says that SCs have remained restricted to their caste based occupation, historically assigned to them in caste hierarchy and STs are agriculturists, as in the earlier times. She also asserts that the effect of caste plays out in the form of an increased likelihood of being in casual labour and reduced chances of being in nonfarm self-employed. In her another paper she also assesses the labour market discrimination based on religion and conclude that due to inability to get in to primary market muslims are getting confined in to self-employment in urban india, forming an ethnic enclave. Aswani Deshpande studied various aspects of Labour market discrimination in her book 'the grammar of Caste'(2011) it provides a comprehensive view of caste and its' impact on Labour market. Duraiswami and Malathy Duraiswami (2017) looked in to wage disparities among deprived communities including and concluded that the wage gap increased for ST, SC and Muslims after reforms.

Avinash Kumar and Nazia Hashmi (2020) ^[18] looked in to wage differentials among Service sector workers and Casual workers and Found that discrimination based on caste is evident in Both the casual labour market and Service sector as well.

At the international level, Aslund, Dan, Olof Roth in their article "Shifts in attitudes and labour market discrimination: Swedish experiences after 9-11" is a research in to the labour market outcomes of 9-11 attacks in US, generally in terms of discrimination against the muslim community in labour market. On the back ground of numerous reports from many countries on hardening attitudes and hostilities, primarily towards people perceived to be muslims. So, Market discrimination studies are quite widely under taken in the recent years but statewise studies did not invite much attention.

Empirical Analysis

The study is Primarily based of nationally representative sample survey done by NSSO. The data is extracted from Unit level samples as the employment unemployment reports do not publish social category wise wages. Wage differential between other castes and SC, ST and OBC will be examined. For this purpose, the wages ratios are taken in to consideration. The concern about the wage gap sprouts from the fact that the wage gap may reflect a gap in the living standard as well. And this as a result of discrimination goes against the ethos of the nation and the simple notion of fairness. The notion of equity is not exactly a central theme of neo-classical economics, nevertheless, this is very much a part of a welfare society and that implies the relevance of policy and also discrimination goes against the productivity notion itself.

Table 1: Average Daily wages and wage gap of casual and regular workers

Social Group	Years	Average daily wage		Raw wage gap	
		Regular salaried wage	Casual wage	Regular salaried wage	Casual wage
ST	2011-12	360.1561	116.5648	71.46381	79.80065
	2004-05	147.2008	42.2904	68.09126	76.3148
SC	2011-13	299.4169	142.3757	59.41166	97.47088
	2004-06	125.1219	50.8842	57.87813	91.82276
OBC	2011-14	330.5026	150.5543	65.57984	103.07
	2004-07	139.6801	53.6720	64.61237	96.85332
Others	2011-15	503.9699	146.0700		
	2004-08	216.1816	55.4157		

The average daily wage of regular salaried workers is much higher than that of casual workers. The raw wage given in the table points out the wage differences between various social category vis- a- vis 'others' or general categories. The wage gap is low or almost non-existent in the case of casual workers except in the case of ST. casual work does usually of unskilled nature or to be precise, skills like education is not exactly a relevant quantity here. And also farm and non-farm casual workers are mostly from the deprived category. A state wise analysis of the wage gap among social groups also produces nearly the same result. Almost every state

shows a low wage gap among workers. Wages of other social groups as a percentage of the wages of general category is higher than 80 percent in almost all states barring quite a few. In Uttaranchal, Mizoram, Orissa and Gujarat, wages of ST workers as a percentage of wages of general workers is lower than 80 percent. In case of Mizoram it is as low as 49%. In case of SC workers, Arunachal shows a higher wage gap compared to all other states. High wage gap among OBC workers is seen in Uttaranchal. Low wage ratio for Muslims is found in Manipur.

Table 2: Wage gap among UPSS workers belonging to various social groups

	ST	SC	OBC	Islam
J&k		91.72	89.83	98.5
Hp	85.73	102.4	94.05	92.19
Punjab	98.92	89.2	90.18	92.35
Uttaranchal	61.46	80.93	77.72	84.84
Haryana	0	101.19	104.49	122.8
Delhi			123.49	0
Rajashtan	83.99	103.59	96.82	94.53
Up	81.44	93.74	97.15	97.54
Bihar	123.87	106.31	109.25	101.47
Sikkim	78.88	86.63	83.34	95.63
Arunachal	161.67	64.55	100.36	150.6
Nagaland	101.76	0	0	100
Manipur	76.92	0	83.17	71.53
Mizoram	49.03	0	0	2.45
Tripura	93.22	102.72	95.52	111.2
Meghalaya	110.87	71.11	110.21	117.23
Assam	94.08	90.86	93.39	101.24
Wb	88.63	93.89	106.43	98.72
Jharkhand	93.1	99.94	97.85	103.94
Orissa	75.67	86.39	84.09	111.92
Chattisgarh	93.2	89.1	86.4	0
Mp	93.6	101.2	95.72	99.63
Gujrat	77.41	80.11	92.24	85.37
Maharashtra	92.09	90.81	91.34	102.58
Ap	90.73	91.11	92.26	98.74
Karnataka	94.37	104.94	108.1	111.11
Goa	0			
Kerala	101.94	113.09	122.81	126.18
Tn	102.65	105.19	114.68	165.46

Source: calculated from NSS EUS unit level data

Urban casual labour market shows some similar features like that of rural market. Wage gap is very low among all the social groups. Bihar is the only exception, here wage gap among workers in the entire social group is high (this is mainly due to the exceptionally high wage gap among female workers). Wage difference is high among ST workers in Tamil Nadu and Goa also. Other than this, SC

Workers in Assam also show a high wage gap. Wage difference among female workers in Assam is quite high compared to all other states. In Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa and Haryana wage difference is high among urban female SC workers. The following table gives a state wise wage difference among urban casual workers

Table 3: Wage gap among urban casual (UPSS) workers belonging to various social groups

	ST	SC	OBC	Islam
1 J&K	91.42	78.64	86.28	88.96
2 HP	109.3	117.48	102.85	107.56
3 Punjab	102.1	88.23	93.6	90.44
5 Uttaranchal	126.93	115.76	122.53	119.27
6 Haryana	0	84.97	92.62	88.69
7 Delhi		109.97	137.46	115.45
8 Rajashtan	90.41	93.66	98.09	98.39
9 UP	74.61	92.41	101.22	98.15
10 Bihar	11.87	36.32	38.23	37.83
11 Sikkim	167.35	162.26	129.32	127.55
12 Arunachal	99.2	148.39	0	91.2
13 Nagaland	110.27	0	87.94	99.72
14 Manipur	61.85	59.81	114.09	113.81
15 Mizoram	138.94	145.1	116.67	171.7
16 Tripura	152.05	105.29	121.22	110.84
17 Meghalaya	92.97	95.75	0	64.5
18 Assam	70.57	49.47	74.87	65.34
19 WB	84.35	101.57	103.7	100.15
20 Jharkhand	105.48	81.18	88.04	92.11
21 Orissa	87.11	85.77	88.63	88.47
22 Chattisgarh	73.07	85.26	76.42	77.94
23 MP	107.6	129.88	125.3	125.43
24 Gujrat	78.37	128.84	93.94	98.64

27	Maharashtra	63.77	75.66	78.62	87.52
28	AP	87.32	103.37	95.14	97.14
29	Karnataka	87.95	104.84	101.48	103.53
30	Goa	48.4	98.12	78.26	88.16
32	Kerala	72.47	98.84	106.5	103.05
33	TN	57.61	96.49	108.43	106.23

Unlike casual workers, wage difference between general category workers and other social groups quite high in case of regular salaried workers. The differences again widens when an interstate comparison is done. Wage gap among regular salaried workers on all India bases is given below. The wage differences are quite stark when analysis is narrowed down to state level. In Punjab and West Bengal, rural ST workers are not even earning half of what a general category worker earns per day. SC workers in Haryana are having the highest wage gap in comparison with SC workers in other states. Wage gap among SC workers in MP and Karnataka is also very high. Average wage gap is low in case of OBC workers compared to workers in other social

groups; where as wage gap is high for OBC workers in Haryana (34.65) and Mizoram (44.00). In case of Muslim workers, a number of states give higher wage gaps; it includes Himachal (43.67), Punjab (19.73), Haryana (30.30), Arunachal (30.89) and Karnataka (50.49). There is a high wage difference between Muslim workers and general category workers in Gujarat, when compared with the wages of other social groups in this state. Compared to other social groups, average rate of wage difference is higher among groups in Muslim community. Table shows wage gap among rural regular salaried workers.

Table 4: Wage gap among Rural regular salaried (UPSS) workers belonging to various social groups

		ST	SC	OBC	Islam
1	J&K	98.32	70.27	104.84	109.35
2	HP	119.32	78.78	97.25	43.67
3	Punjab	46.11	61.46	61.53	19.73
5	Uttaranchal	73.52	67.06	71.64	86.15
6	Haryana	0	33.17	34.65	30.3
7	Delhi		108.13	112.99	67.21
8	Rajasthan	114.97	98.89	90.56	100.9
9	UP	52.81	69.38	74.12	57.28
10	Bihar		68.06	77.76	69.22
11	Sikkim	122.45	93.33	109.52	317.25
12	Arunachal	124.02	53.24	137.15	30.89
13	Nagaland	95.06	0	56.41	0
14	Manipur	117.19	99.61	95.07	107.94
15	Mizoram	56.7	0	44	0
16	Tripura	132.51	75.98	75.63	86.99
17	Meghalaya	77.42	75.28	141.5	106.69
18	Assam	99.77	78.79	69.33	116.13
19	WB	41.48	71.67	75.76	79.4
20	Jharkhand	71.98	84.99	90.5	91.56
21	Orissa	67.39	88.09	92.12	58.77
22	Chhattisgarh	94.55	74.66	66.45	97.21
23	MP	63.33	42.52	51.19	110.44
24	Gujarat	98.32	91.13	80.23	53.84
27	Maharashtra	59.59	73.04	92.7	88.7
28	AP	72.11	63.67	74.69	74.11
29	Karnataka	70.82	57.67	67.12	50.49
30	Goa	85.22	92.19	52.99	36.52
32	Kerala	87.01	80.15	138.1	0
33	TN	66.65	75.33	139.02	0

Source: calculated from NSS EUS unit level samples

Wage gap among rural female workers are quite high compared to rural male workers. Hence it deserves a special attention even though data is insufficient in case of Muslim women. In UP (12.39) and Orissa (46.64) wage gap is quite high among ST female workers. In HP (48.85), Punjab (23.04), Bihar (13.95), West Bengal (49.16), MP (37.77), Goa (26.94), Kerala (46.47) and Tamil Nadu (15.10) wage gap among SC workers is high in comparison with other states. Wage gap among female workers in Bihar, Punjab and Tamil Nadu are very high. In Punjab (25.68), Delhi (39.14), Bihar (25.71), Chhattisgarh (40.4), Goa (35) and Tamil Nadu (20.86) wage gap for OBC are quite high.

Average wage gap among Muslim workers are quite high compared to other social groups, it is very high in Rajasthan (38.08), UP (24.07), Bihar (12.16), Jharkhand (12.20), Gujarat (15.64) and Karnataka (38.98). In case of Gujarat the wage difference between Muslim female workers are quite high compared to other social groups.

The Trend of wage difference among urban regular salaried is quite different from that of rural workers. A noticeable feature here is the high wage gap shown in Tamil Nadu. Workers from deprived castes failed to earn half the amount general category workers are getting. In Jammu Kashmir, Punjab, Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, wage gap among ST workers are high. In Delhi, Rajasthan, Sikkim and Tamil

Nadu, wage difference is higher for SC category. Wage gap among Muslims are high in comparison with all the other states. In Punjab, Delhi, Rajasthan, Bihar, Sikkim, Nagaland, Tripura, and Tamil Nadu, Muslim regular salaried workers are not getting even 50 percent of the general category workers salary. The table shows wage gap among urban regular salaried workers

Table 5: Wage gap among Rural casual workers (UPSS) workers belonging to various social groups

	ST	SC	OBC	Islam
J&K	20.52	58.4	60.67	95.31
HP	66.96	88.1	62.5	52.01
Punjab	48.31	54.12	60.14	26.4
Uttaranchal	152.23	63.09	108.7	132.41
Haryana	91.72	61.94	65.69	54.38
Delhi	107.43	44.64	65.48	38.12
Rajasthan	86.24	50.66	76.41	42.5
UP	60.48	78.02	62.35	53.43
Bihar	88.81	86.43	84.62	46.75
Sikkim	106.45	43.24	123.82	46.71
Arunachal	112.51	94.38	107.01	137.88
Nagaland	191.28	238.26	116.84	44.82
Manipur	111.77	216.07	100.94	88.48
Mizoram	69.4	142.02	48.32	
Tripura	99.67	75.58	84.05	21.15
Meghalaya	84.39	89.79	68.94	112.09
Assam	74.35	70.2	81.4	126.18
WB	64.03	70.47	54.83	73.76
Jharkhand	90.62	56	75.63	60.43
Orissa	68.5	51.93	66.49	65.05
Chhattisgarh	68.45	59.9	66.57	70.91
MP	116.85	52.27	58.45	50.48
Gujarat	71.23	53.4	64.51	69.72
Maharashtra	89.22	71.66	76.03	61.67
AP	105.15	60.84	67.17	60.77
Karnataka	55.96	57.47	62.86	54.64
Goa	42.2	106.8	96.58	74.37
Kerala	35.55	62.97	76.06	80.08
TN	41.23	24.69	38.32	31.96

Source: calculated from NSS EUS unit level sample data

Wage gap among urban female workers are also quite high like in case of rural regular salaried female workers. In Punjab, Rajasthan, UP, west Bengal, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh wage gap is high among ST workers. In Punjab, Uttaranchal, Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, MP, Kerala and Tamil Nadu wage gap is high among urban female workers. In west Bengal and Tamil Nadu wage gap is higher for the entire social category. Other than these two states, in HP, Haryana, UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and MP wage difference is high when OBC is considered. In Orissa, Assam, Tripura, Rajasthan, Delhi and Punjab Wage gap is higher for Muslim workers.

Conclusion

A study on average daily wages and the wage differential between various castes reveal that, wage discrimination is a reality of modern day economics. Most of the states revealed to have either caste based wage discrimination or gender based wage discrimination. In states like Tamil Nadu, SC wage is just a quarter of wage received by the 'others'. There are certain states, where wage rate of 'others' are less than that of ST workers. And this is visible mainly in North Eastern states. In case of states like Jammu and Kashmir, wages of Muslim workers are higher than that of any other social group. Population composition of the state also impacts the wage determination. Where ever

social groups or religious groups are a minority in the population composition, the wage discrimination and employment segregation tend to be higher in those states. The wage determination is influenced by various other factors like education, work experience, location of the employment etc. a detailed enquiry into the wage differential is necessary to ascertain whether there indeed a discrimination or wage differences are due to the endowment differences of the workers. Endowment differences also can be a result of pre market discrimination.

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