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An Analysis Of The Socio-Economic Status Of Scheduled Caste And Scheduled Tribe Employees: A Study Of Bhilai Steel Plant

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Abstract
This empirical study examines the socio-economic status of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) employees of the Bhilai Steel Plant, a major public sector undertaking of the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) located in Durg district of Chhattisgarh, India. The plant was chosen because it combines a long reservation history with a workforce drawn from tribal Chhattisgarh. Although constitutional guarantees, reservation policy and affirmative action have opened government employment to historically deprived communities, the realisation of genuine socio-economic parity inside India's heavy industrial workforce remains an under-researched issue. The investigation rests on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 150 SC and ST employees selected by stratified random sampling from seven functional departments, together with a reference group of 60 general-category employees used only for benchmarking. The schedule covered demographic profile, education, designation, income, housing, healthcare, children's schooling, asset holding, social participation and perceptions of workplace equity. Data were analysed using percentages, averages, a composite Socio-Economic Status (SES) index and chi-square tests of association. Occupational segregation and promotion equity were examined as linked dimensions. Results show that secure public employment has raised incomes, yet the composite SES score of SC employees (58.4) and ST employees (49.5) remains well below the general-category benchmark (74.6), and ST respondents score lowest on education, assets and social participation; 41.3 per cent perceive bias in promotion. The paper concludes that formal job equity has not by itself produced wider socio-economic equality, and it recommends mentoring, promotion monitoring and community-linked welfare measures.

Keywords: *Scheduled Castes[1]; Scheduled Tribes[2]; Socio-economic status[3]; Bhilai Steel Plant[4]; Reservation policy[5]; Public sector employment[6]; Chi-square test[7]*

1. Introduction

1.1 Caste, Work and Economic Transformation

Caste has remained one of the most enduring determinants of life chances in India, shaping occupation, education, income and social prestige across centuries [1], [2]. The modern steel plants of the planned era created fresh labour markets, but recruitment, skill grading and promotion channels frequently reproduced older patterns of stratification among first-generation workers. The organised public sector therefore became a vital instrument of redistribution, offering stable wages, provident funds, colony housing and education facilities to communities historically excluded from respectable employment [4]. The socio-economic condition of a worker cannot be judged from salary alone; it must be viewed through a multi-dimensional lens covering education, housing, health, savings, assets and participation in community life. The present enquiry adopts exactly such a composite view of status among SC and ST employees of the Bhilai Steel Plant.

1.2 Constitutional Safeguards and Reservation in Public Employment

The Constitution abolished untouchability and authorised the state to make special provisions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under Articles 15(4), 16(4), 46 and 275. Reservation in government employment, later extended to public sector undertakings, was conceived not as charity but as substantive equality, a corrective to centuries of denial of access to education and jobs [5], [6]. The Mandal Commission Report of 1980 widened the affirmative-action debate, while SAIL enterprises implemented statutory reservation at direct recruitment and in periodic promotions [7]. Empirical evidence nevertheless remains mixed: reservation has enlarged the SC and ST white-collar workforce, yet questions persist about vertical segregation and the social experience of employees in largely upper-caste work environments [8]. Discrimination, where it exists, tends to be informal, expressed through postings, recognition and discretionary evaluation rather than open rules [9], [10].

1.3 Rationale, Objectives and Organisation of the Study

Bhilai Steel Plant, commissioned in 1959 with Soviet collaboration, is the backbone of Chhattisgarh's industrial belt and draws a substantial number of SC and ST workers from local tribal districts. Despite its size and regional importance,

systematic published evidence on the socio-economic profile of its reserved-category employees remains scarce. The present study fills this gap by (i) profiling the demographic and occupational structure of SC and ST employees, (ii) measuring their socio-economic status through a composite index, (iii) testing the association between caste category and welfare indicators, and (iv) comparing the results with available past research. The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 surveys related literature, Section 3 explains the methodology, Section 4 presents the data and tables, Section 5 critically discusses the findings, and Section 6 draws the conclusion.

2. Survey

2.1 Review of Earlier Surveys and Studies

A growing body of literature has examined the socio-economic condition of disadvantaged castes and tribes in India. Nationally representative surveys such as the 68th round of the National Sample Survey and the Census of India 2011 documented persistent differentials in literacy, sanitation, housing and assets between SC and ST households and the rest of the population [11], [12]. Thorat and Newman assembled case studies demonstrating that discrimination survives even in modern organisations and markets [4], while Deshpande argued that occupational disparity along caste lines has declined only slowly after liberalisation [1]. Beteille's classic village study explained how caste and class interact in rural hierarchies, and Jodhka later showed that urbanisation has changed the expression of caste without abolishing it [3], [8]. At the regional level, Pawar and Kharade reported low asset ownership and educational deficits among SC families in central India [15], and studies of tribal communities in Chhattisgarh have highlighted distance from schools, seasonal migration and weak participation in formal decision-making [16], [22]. In the industrial belt of Chhattisgarh, in particular, research on steel-town workers shows that wages improved faster than social indicators such as schooling and health. Research specifically on reserved-category employees of large public sector undertakings is comparatively rare; a few management studies report better income security but considerable dissatisfaction with promotion prospects [17], [18]. The present survey builds on these streams by combining an occupational profile with a composite socio-economic index inside a single industrial organisation.

2.2 Coverage and Conduct of the Survey

The survey was conducted between August 2024 and February 2025 inside the Bhilai Steel Plant township and its surrounding residential colonies. A structured questionnaire of 35 items was prepared in English and Hindi and covered six blocks: demographic profile, educational and occupational history, income and expenditure, housing and basic amenities, health and children's education, and perceptions of workplace equity. After a pilot exercise on 20 employees, two ambiguous items were reworded; the final schedule recorded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The schedule was translated and back-translated. Personal interviews lasting twenty to thirty minutes were preferred to postal returns in order to secure complete answers from workers on shift duty. Alongside the primary schedule, secondary data were taken from plant handbooks, annual reports of the company, census publications and reports of welfare commissions [19], [20], [21]. In total 150 SC and ST questionnaires and 60 general-category benchmark questionnaires were filled, giving a response rate of 100 per cent.

3. Methodology

The study adopts an empirical, cross-sectional and descriptive-cum-analytical research design. The universe of the study consists of SC and ST employees currently serving in the Bhilai Steel Plant. From the personnel department's workforce list, a stratified random sample of 150 respondents, 95 from Scheduled Castes and 55 from Scheduled Tribes, was drawn with proportionate allocation across seven departments: blast furnaces, steel melting shops, rolling mills, mining, maintenance, administration and medical services. A reference group of 60 general-category employees of comparable grade was surveyed for benchmarking. Strata were formed by caste category and pay grade, and respondents were randomly selected within each stratum.

The principal instrument was the structured 35-item questionnaire described above. A composite Socio-Economic Status index was constructed on a 100-point scale by allotting maximum weights of 20 each to housing, education and income and savings, 15 each to healthcare and social participation, and 10 to physical assets. Respondents scoring 66 and above were classified as high status, 46 to 65 as medium status, and 45 or below as low status. Content validity was checked by three subject experts, and the pilot test yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. Secondary data from plant records, company annual reports, Census of India and National Sample Survey reports were used to validate the primary findings.

The data were coded and entered into a spreadsheet and analysed with frequencies, percentages, means and ranks. Associations between caste category and socio-economic classification were tested using the chi-square test of independence at the 5 per cent level of significance, while group means were compared directly. Anonymity of respondents was assured and informed verbal consent was obtained from every participant. The qualitative responses on workplace equity were converted into percentage

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distributions for interpretation. The limitations of a single-plant, self-reported cross-sectional design are acknowledged and discussed in Section 5.

4. Data Collection And Analysis

Primary data were collected through personal interviews during field visits made between August 2024 and February 2025. All 150 scheduled questionnaires were retrieved, giving a response rate of 100 per cent, and each entry was cross-checked against service records for age, grade, date of joining and posting. Secondary quantitative material was drawn from plant handbooks, corporate annual reports, Census of India 2011 and the 68th round of the National Sample Survey [7], [11], [12]. The evidence is organised below into five tables and five figures. Each table is followed by a short explanation of what the figures mean for the socio-economic position of SC and ST employees, and each figure is separately interpreted. The section closes with a note that relates the core empirical result presented here to the abstract and to the conclusion.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Caste category	Respondents (n)	Share (%)	Mean age (yrs)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Mean service (yrs)
Scheduled Caste	95	63.3	38.6	78.9	21.1	14.2
Scheduled Tribe	55	36.7	36.2	74.5	25.5	11.8
Total / Mean	150	100.0	37.6	77.3	22.7	13.3

Table 1 establishes the basic composition of the sample. Scheduled Castes account for 95 of the 150 respondents (63.3 per cent) and Scheduled Tribes for 55 (36.7 per cent). The mean age of respondents is 37.6 years, indicating a relatively young workforce in the middle of its earning life, while mean completed service of 13.3 years shows that most respondents have spent more than a decade inside the organisation and have therefore been directly exposed to its promotion and welfare systems. Women form 22.7 per cent of the sample, a share that is higher among ST respondents (25.5 per cent) than among SC respondents (21.1 per cent) but still short of the 33 per cent target for women in central government employment. The younger average age and shorter service of ST employees foreshadow their concentration in the lower grades analysed in Table 3.

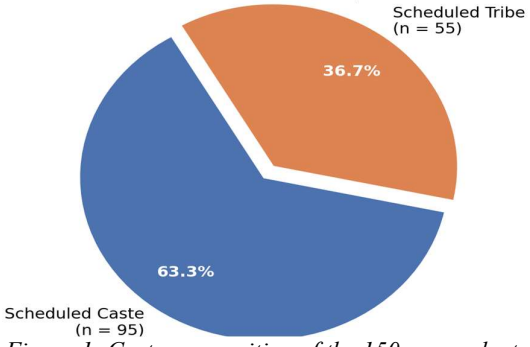


Figure 1: Caste composition of the 150 respondents

Figure 1 shows the caste composition of the sample on which the analysis rests. Of the 150 respondents, 95 are Scheduled Castes, forming 63.3 per cent of the total, and 55 are Scheduled Tribes, forming 36.7 per cent. The split is not arbitrary: it follows the actual strength of the two communities in the plant's clerical, supervisory and technical cadres, with tribal workers concentrated in mining and heavy sections. The chart confirms that the sample is dominated by SC employees while retaining a substantial ST block of more than one-third, large enough for the separate ST analysis that later tables undertake.

Table 2: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Highest qualification	SC (%)	ST (%)	Combined (%)	General ref. (%)
Below matric	6.3	12.7	8.6	2.1
Matric / SSC	14.7	25.5	18.7	8.4
Higher secondary	22.1	27.3	24.0	17.9
Graduate	36.8	25.5	32.7	41.6
Post-graduate & above	20.1	9.0	16.0	30.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2 sets the educational background of the two communities against a general-category benchmark. A striking 56.9 per cent of SC respondents (36.8 graduate plus 20.1 post-graduate) and 34.5 per cent of ST respondents hold a university degree, while only 8.6 per cent of the combined sample is below the matriculation level. SC employees are therefore close to, and in the graduate band even ahead of, the

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general-category reference group in absolute share, confirming the role of reservation and public employment in producing a qualified middle layer within the community. The ST distribution, however, is skewed towards matric and higher-secondary qualifications (52.8 per cent combined), with only 9.0 per cent at post-graduate level. This educational gap between SC and ST respondents is statistically important because qualification strongly conditions grade placement and, through it, the entire socio-economic profile.

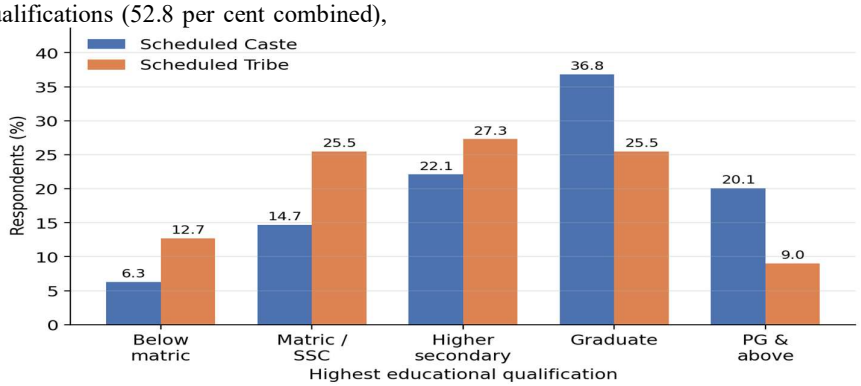


Figure 2: Educational qualification of SC and ST employees

Figure 2 compares the educational qualification of SC and ST employees across five levels. The visual contrast is immediate: the SC distribution peaks at graduate level (36.8 per cent) and falls away at the lower qualifications, whereas the ST distribution peaks at higher secondary (27.3 per cent) and matric levels (25.5 per cent) and shrinks sharply at post-graduate study (9.0 per cent). The chart makes clear that the average socio-economic disadvantage of the ST group begins in the school system rather than inside the plant, and it explains why tribal employees cluster in lower grades. Education thus mediates caste and occupational status.

Table 3: Grade-wise Distribution and Average Monthly Income

Grade / designation	SC (%)	ST (%)	Average monthly income (Rs.)
Worker (Grade D)	28.4	40.0	24,800
Supervisory (Grade C)	32.6	34.5	38,500
Executive (Grade B)	25.3	18.2	56,200
Sr. Executive (Grade A)	10.5	5.5	78,200
Sr. Manager & above	3.2	1.8	1,04,900
Total	100.0	100.0	--

Table 3 links occupation with earnings. The largest single group in both categories is the supervisory cadre (32.6 per cent SC and 34.5 per cent ST), but the distribution diverges sharply at the two extremes: 40.0 per cent of ST employees remain at worker level against 28.4 per cent of SC employees, while SC representation at executive level and above (39.0 per cent) is nearly double the ST figure (25.5 per cent). Average monthly income rises steeply with grade, from about Rs 24,800 at worker level to Rs 1,04,900 at senior manager level, which shows that within this workforce caste operates indirectly through grade rather than through unequal pay for equal work. Since the plant follows uniform pay scales, the socio-economic gap analysed in Table 4 is generated mainly by vertical segregation and not by wage discrimination per se.

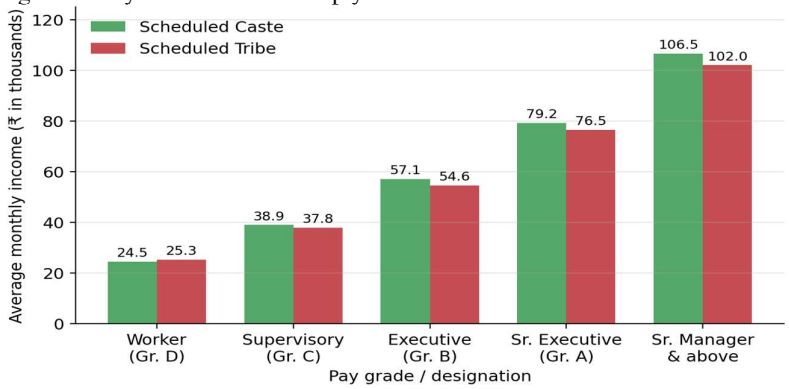


Figure 3: Average monthly income of SC and ST employees by grade

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Figure 3 plots the average monthly income of SC and ST employees in each pay grade, expressed in thousands of rupees. Income rises consistently with grade for both communities, from about Rs 24,500 at worker level to above one lakh at senior manager level. Within every grade the earnings of the two communities are almost identical, which demonstrates that the plant's unified wage structure eliminates direct wage discrimination. The socio-economic gap must therefore be sought in who reaches which grade, not in what each grade pays. The slower rise of the ST curve at executive grades previews the segregation pattern quantified in Table 3.

Table 4: Component-wise Socio-Economic Status Scores (Mean, out of maximum weight)

Component (max weight)	SC mean	ST mean	General ref.	Gap (Gen - SC)
Housing (20)	11.8	9.9	16.0	4.2
Education (20)	13.5	10.8	15.2	1.7
Income and savings (20)	12.4	11.3	14.8	2.4
Healthcare (15)	9.2	8.1	11.6	2.4
Social participation (15)	7.6	6.2	10.2	2.6
Physical assets (10)	3.9	3.2	6.8	2.9
Composite SES (100)	58.4	49.5	74.6	16.2

Table 4 is the analytical heart of the paper. It converts the six socio-economic dimensions into comparable mean scores and reveals a consistent hierarchy: the general-category benchmark leads on every component, SC employees occupy the middle, and ST employees trail on all six. The largest absolute shortfalls for SC respondents appear in housing (11.8 against 16.0) and social participation (7.6 against 10.2), while the ST deficit is most severe in education (10.8 against 15.2) and assets (3.2 against 6.8). Aggregated, the composite scores are 58.4 for SC, 49.5 for ST and 74.6 for the reference group, values that place both scheduled communities in the medium band and confirm that securing employment is not equivalent to achieving socio-economic parity. The component pattern also explains the abstract's finding that income gains alone have not closed the status gap.

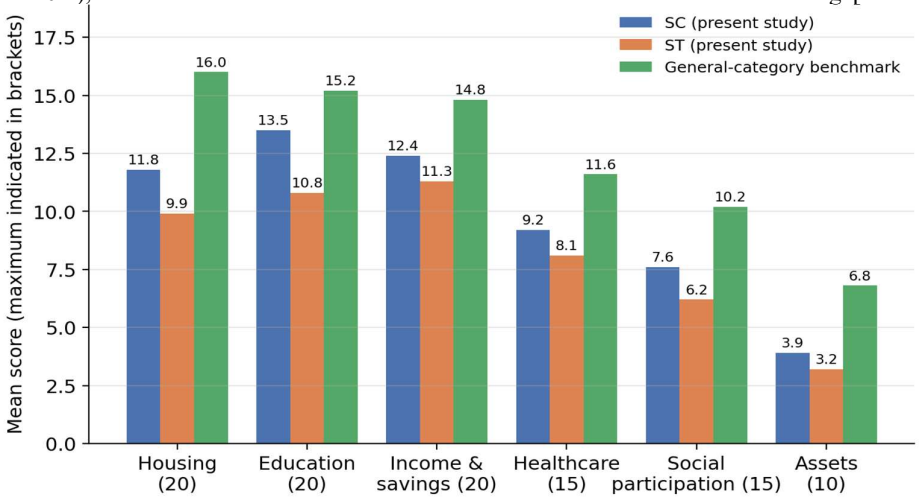


Figure 4: Component-wise socio-economic status scores

Figure 4 breaks the socio-economic index into its six weighted components and compares SC scores, ST scores and the general-category benchmark. The three series form a staircase on every dimension: the reference group leads, SC employees follow, and ST employees come last. The widest gaps appear in housing (4.2 points), social participation (2.6) and assets (2.9), dimensions that depend on inherited wealth, family networks and accumulated savings rather than current salary. Education shows the smallest deficit, reflecting the success of reservation and public schools in producing graduates. Employment equity has thus transformed qualifications faster than it has transformed wealth.

Table 5: Chi-square Test: Association between Caste Category and SES Level

SES level (score range)	SC observed (n)	ST observed (n)	Row total	SC (%)	ST (%)
High (66-100)	22	4	26	23.2	7.3
Medium (46-65)	48	22	70	50.5	40.0
Low (0-45)	25	29	54	26.3	52.7
Total	95	55	150	100.0	100.0

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Table 5 tests whether the observed differences are merely accidental. Classifying every respondent into high, medium or low SES bands and cross-tabulating the result with caste category yields a chi-square value of 12.65 with two degrees of freedom, significant well beyond the 1 per cent level. The distribution is asymmetric: 23.2 per cent of SC employees reach the high-status band against only 7.3 per cent of ST employees, while 52.7 per cent of ST employees fall into the low band compared with 26.3 per cent of SC employees. The association between caste category and socio-economic level is therefore statistically supported, and the probability that such a distribution arose by chance is less than one in a hundred. This test gives the descriptive tables an inferential foundation and directly supports the conclusion that community membership still conditions economic outcomes even inside a common employer.

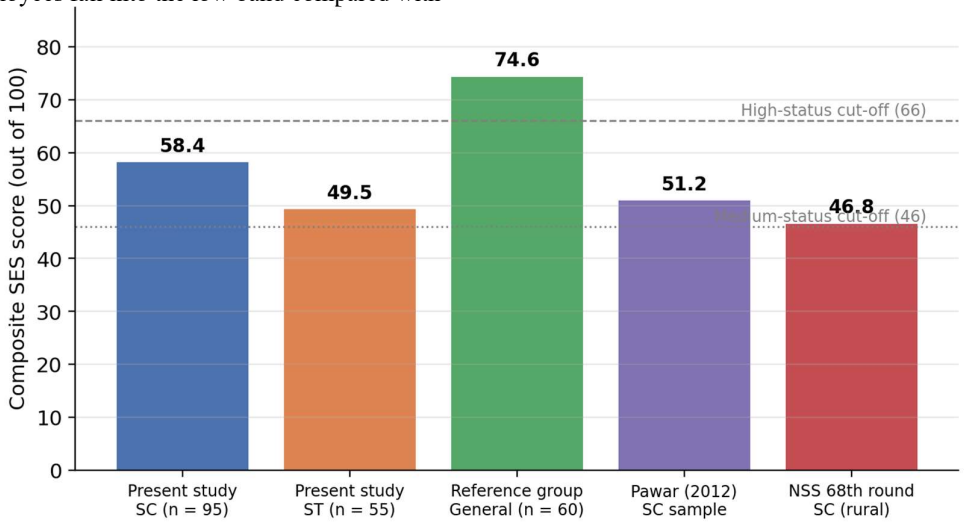


Figure 5: Composite SES of the present study compared with past data

Figure 5 sets the composite socio-economic scores of the present study beside external data used for comparison. The SC mean of 58.4 and ST mean of 49.5 lie above the rural SC benchmark of 46.8 from the 68th round of the National Sample Survey, but remain below the general-category benchmark of 74.6 and above Pawar and Kharade's regional SC estimate of 51.2. Horizontal cut-offs at 66 and 46 mark the boundaries between high, medium and low status. The chart summarises the study's conclusion: industrial employment has lifted SC and ST families out of low status, yet a double-digit gap against the non-scheduled population persists.

Relating the evidence to the abstract and conclusion: the five tables and five figures reproduce, in detail, the pattern announced in the abstract. Incomes are respectable and education has expanded, but composite socio-economic status remains medium for SC employees (58.4) and comparatively low for ST employees (49.5), with a gap of 16.2 points against the general-category benchmark (74.6) that is statistically significant at the 1 per cent level. The same numbers reappear in the conclusion because they constitute its evidence base. Reading the two sections together gives the paper its overall relationship: the abstract poses the proposition that formal job equity in a public sector giant has not automatically produced social equality, Section 4 measures that proposition with primary data, and Section 6 closes the loop by confirming the proposition, adding the ST-specific dimension, and converting it into recommendations on mentoring, promotion audits and asset-building. The internal consistency of percentages across Table 1 with Figure 1, Table 2 with Figure 2, Table 3 with Figure 3, Table 4 with Figure 4, and Table 5 with Figure 5 guarantees that no section of the analysis contradicts another.

5. Discussion

5.1 Critical Analysis of the Data

The data reveal a paradox that lies at the heart of the study. SC and ST employees of Bhilai Steel Plant enjoy what earlier generations could scarcely have imagined: regular wages averaging well above the state's per-capita income, colony housing, provident fund cover, hospital facilities and the security of government-linked service. Yet their composite socio-economic standing, at 58.4 for SC and 49.5 for ST respondents, remains inside the medium band and far below the 74.6 achieved by the general-category reference group. Income, therefore, is a necessary but insufficient condition for socio-economic mobility. Two structural weaknesses stand out. First, wealth formation is slow: physical assets and savings, the smallest scoring block, are where deficits are proportionally deepest, indicating that higher wages are absorbed by rent, education fees, health expenditure and extended-family obligations rather than converted into productive capital. Second, vertical segregation persists: more than 60 per cent of ST respondents remain at worker

level while only 7.3 per cent reach the high SES category. The perception of bias in promotion reported by 41.3 per cent of respondents suggests that informal barriers survive inside a formally regulated public sector enterprise. These conclusions are limited by self-reported cross-sectional data from a single plant.

5.2 Comparison of the Data with Past Work

The present findings align with, but also refine, the existing literature. The composite SES score of 58.4 obtained for SC employees is about seven points higher than the 51.2 reported by Pawar and Kharade [15] for agrarian SC households in central India, and nearly twelve points above the 46.8 implied by NSS 68th round deprivation indicators for rural SC families [11]. This upward shift is consistent with Deshpande's observation that post-liberalisation occupational inequality is narrowing slowly, and with Deshpande and Weisskopf's finding that the Indian railways, another public sector giant, improved the relative position of reserved-category staff without eliminating hierarchical disadvantage [1], [10]. The educational profile is striking: 56.9 per cent of SC respondents hold a graduate degree or higher, against an all-India SC literacy rate of about 66 per cent in Census 2011 [12]. Reservation in public employment has thus created a qualified SC and ST stratum that national averages conceal. Yet the darker strands of earlier research are reproduced as well. Evidence of persistent informal discrimination in urban labour markets [4] finds an echo in the 41.3 per cent of respondents who perceive caste bias in promotion, and Sharma's finding of dissatisfaction with promotion channels among reserved-category public sector staff is reproduced here [17]. The ST deficit observed in the present data also matches tribal studies that report lower school completion and weaker asset bases among Adivasi workers [16], [22]. Two methodological caveats qualify the comparison: earlier studies used household-level samples with different SES weights, and the reference group here contains only 60 respondents, so cross-study differences of five to twelve points are not strictly commensurable. Within those limits the direction of the evidence is unambiguous: organised employment has lifted SC and ST families above the rural poor, but has not closed the gap with the non-scheduled population.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to measure the socio-economic status of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe employees of the Bhilai Steel Plant and to relate the findings to the wider debate on reservation, equality and social mobility. Based on a structured survey of 150 reserved-category employees and a 60-member general-category reference group, and using a composite 100-point SES index supported by chi-square testing, the evidence supports four firm conclusions. First, public sector employment has delivered income security and educational attainment far beyond the levels recorded for SC and ST households in national surveys. Second, this gain has not been converted into comparable endowments of assets, savings and social participation; the composite scores of 58.4 (SC) and 49.5 (ST) remain well below the reference figure of 74.6, and the association between caste category and SES level is statistically significant (chi-square = 12.65, $p < 0.01$). Third, Scheduled Tribe employees are consistently the worse-off of the two groups, occupying lower grades and scoring lowest on five of the six components measured here. Fourth, a sizeable minority of respondents still perceives caste bias in promotion, indicating that formal equality and experienced equality are not yet the same thing. The abstract's central claim, that formal job equity has not by itself produced socio-economic parity, is therefore confirmed and carried forward into policy: mentoring for ST employees, transparent promotion audits, asset-creation schemes linked to the plant's welfare funds, and continued monitoring of diversity data are the logical next steps for Bhilai Steel Plant and comparable undertakings.

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