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Occupational Shifts and Economic Mobility in Scheduled Caste Communities

Anshuman

Research Scholar, Department of School of Humanity and Culture,
Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

This study examines occupational shifts and economic mobility among Scheduled Caste communities, with a focus on understanding how traditional livelihood patterns have changed in response to socio-economic development, policy interventions, and expanding educational opportunities. Historically, Scheduled Castes have been concentrated in low-paid, informal, and socially stigmatized occupations with limited scope for upward mobility. The present research evaluates the extent to which diversification into agriculture, non-farm activities, wage employment, self-employment, and service-sector jobs has influenced income levels, job security, and living standards. Using a combination of secondary data from census records, government reports, and primary field-level observations, the study analyzes intergenerational occupational mobility and variations across rural and urban settings. The findings indicate a gradual shift away from hereditary and manual occupations toward semi-skilled and skilled employment, particularly among younger and educated individuals. However, the pace of economic mobility remains uneven, constrained by factors such as limited access to quality education, land and capital, informal employment conditions, and persistent social discrimination. The study highlights the critical role of education, skill development programmes, and inclusive labor market policies in facilitating sustainable occupational transformation. It concludes that while occupational diversification has contributed to improved economic outcomes for some Scheduled Caste households, targeted interventions are still required to ensure broad-based and equitable economic mobility within these communities.