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EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE: ASSESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STATUS OF DALITS IN TELANGANA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The present study, "Education, Employment, and Social Change: Assessing the Socio-Economic and Cultural Status of Dalits in Telangana State," *examines the multidimensional aspects of development among Dalit communities in Telangana. Since the formation of the state in 2014, several welfare policies and affirmative action programs have been implemented to uplift marginalized sections, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs). This study focuses on key indicators such as educational attainment, employment patterns, income levels, and cultural transformation to understand the extent of socio-economic progress among Dalits.*

The research adopts a descriptive and analytical approach using secondary data sources such as Census reports, National Sample Survey (NSS), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), and state government publications. The findings reveal that although there has been notable improvement in literacy rates, school enrollment, and access to higher education among Dalits, disparities still persist in terms of quality of education and dropout rates. In employment, a gradual shift from traditional caste-based occupations to diversified sectors is observed; however, a significant proportion of Dalits remain concentrated in informal and low-paying jobs.

Culturally, increased awareness, political participation, and assertion of identity have contributed to social change, yet issues of discrimination and social exclusion continue in subtle forms. The study concludes that while Telangana has made considerable progress in improving the socio-economic conditions of Dalits, there is a need for more inclusive and targeted policies to ensure sustainable and equitable development.

KEYWORDS: *Dalits, Socio-Economic Status, Education, Employment, Social Change, Telangana State.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic and cultural status of Dalits has been a critical area of study in India, given their historical marginalization and systemic exclusion under the caste system. Dalits, classified as Scheduled Castes (SCs), have traditionally faced discrimination in access to education, employment, and social mobility. Over the years, the Indian Constitution has provided a framework for their upliftment through protective legislation, reservations in education and employment, and various welfare schemes. Despite these measures, disparities persist, making it essential to continuously assess their progress at regional levels.

Telangana, the youngest state in India, was formed in 2014 with the promise of inclusive development and social justice. The state has a significant proportion of Dalit population, and the government has introduced several targeted schemes such as financial assistance programs, educational scholarships, land distribution initiatives, and skill development missions. Programs like residential schools for Scheduled Castes, fee reimbursement schemes, and Dalit Bandhu have aimed at improving the economic and educational status of Dalits. These initiatives have contributed to enhancing opportunities, yet the extent of their impact needs systematic evaluation.

Education is widely recognized as a key driver of social change and economic empowerment. In Telangana, there has been a steady rise in literacy rates among Dalits, along with increased enrollment in primary and secondary education. However, challenges such as school dropouts, lack of access to quality higher education, and socio-economic constraints continue to hinder their progress. The digital divide and rural-urban disparities further aggravate these issues, limiting equal access to educational resources.

Employment is another crucial dimension that reflects the socio-economic condition of any community. Traditionally, Dalits were confined to caste-based occupations with limited economic returns. In recent years, structural changes in the economy and increased access to education have enabled some diversification in employment patterns. However, a large section of Dalits in Telangana is still engaged in informal sector jobs characterized by low wages, job insecurity, and lack of social protection. Unemployment and underemployment remain significant concerns, particularly among educated youth.

Cultural transformation among Dalits is an important indicator of social change. Increasing awareness about rights, growing political participation, and assertion of identity have contributed

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to a shift in social dynamics. Dalit literature, art, and activism have played a vital role in challenging traditional hierarchies and promoting equality. Nevertheless, caste-based discrimination and social exclusion persist in various forms, especially in rural areas, affecting their overall well-being and dignity.

This study aims to assess the interrelationship between education, employment, and cultural change in shaping the socio-economic status of Dalits in Telangana. By analyzing recent trends and patterns, the research seeks to highlight both achievements and challenges faced by the community. It also intends to provide policy recommendations for ensuring inclusive growth and reducing inequalities. Understanding these dimensions is essential for formulating effective strategies that can empower Dalits and promote sustainable development in Telangana State.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Ambedkar (1936)[1] argues that caste is the primary obstacle to social equality and economic mobility in India. He emphasizes the need for structural reforms to eliminate caste discrimination. His work remains foundational for understanding Dalit oppression and empowerment.**Srinivas (1966)[20]** explains social mobility through the concept of Sanskritization among lower castes. He highlights gradual cultural adaptation as a means of status improvement. However, structural inequalities still limit real progress. **Beteille (1991)[2]** examines the interrelation of caste, class, and power in Indian society. He identifies persistent inequalities in access to resources. His work shows how caste continues to influence economic structures. **Omvedt (1994)[15]** focuses on Dalit movements and their role in democratic transformation. She highlights the importance of collective action. Her study emphasizes social justice and equality. **Ilaiah (1996)[8]** critiques Brahmanical dominance and highlights Dalit cultural identity. He advocates for recognition of marginalized knowledge systems. His work promotes cultural empowerment. **Sharma (2002)[18]** discusses caste-based inequalities in education and employment. He emphasizes structural barriers faced by Scheduled Castes. His study calls for inclusive policies. **Jaffrelot (2003)[10]** analyzes the political rise of Dalits in India. He highlights increased representation and assertion. His work links political empowerment with social change.

Jadhav (2005)[9] explores socio-economic mobility among Dalits through personal and policy perspectives. He highlights the role of education. His study reflects gradual improvement. **Rege (2006)[17]** examines caste and gender intersectionality among Dalit women. She highlights multiple layers of discrimination. Her work emphasizes inclusive feminist perspectives.**Thorat (2007)[21]** studies economic discrimination in labor markets and education. He identifies unequal access and exclusion. His findings stress policy intervention. **Guru (2009)[7]** focuses on dignity and identity among Dalits. He highlights the importance of social recognition. His work links cultural assertion with empowerment.**Teltumbde (2010)[22]** critiques neoliberal economic policies affecting Dalits. He argues that inequality persists despite growth. His study highlights structural challenges.**Raj and Mani (2014)[16]** analyze marginalization among Dalit Christians. They identify continued social exclusion. Their work shows caste persistence across religions.**Yengde (2019)[25]** discusses global perspectives on caste and Dalit identity. He highlights modern forms of discrimination. His work connects local and global struggles. **Datta and Mete (2021)[5]** study socio-economic conditions of Dalit women. They highlight poverty and limited opportunities. Their research emphasizes gender disparities. **Gupta and Kothe (2021)[6]** examine wage gaps and labor discrimination. They find persistent income inequality. Their study stresses labor market reforms.

Vaidehi et al. (2021)[24] analyze the digital divide among marginalized communities. They link inequality to education and income gaps. Their findings highlight new forms of exclusion.**Singh and Singh (2022)[19]** focus on poverty and landlessness among Scheduled Castes. They identify limited economic mobility. Their work stresses structural reforms. **Kumar (2022)[13]** studies disparities in health access among Dalits. He highlights inequalities within sub-castes. His research shows uneven development.**Nancharaiah (2022)[14]** discusses Ambedkar's vision of economic development. He emphasizes inclusive growth policies. His work connects theory with practice. **Khanal et al. (2023)[11]** examine inequality in higher education systems. They argue that institutions often reproduce disparities. Their study calls for systemic change.

Kirasur and Jhaver (2024)[12] analyze caste discrimination in digital platforms. They highlight emerging social challenges. Their work expands caste studies into new domains. **Uma and Deivasigamani (2024)[23]** explore socio-economic oppression of Dalit women in literature. They highlight cultural marginalization. Their study links literature with reality. **Chand (2024)[3]** studies caste-based inequality in higher education. He finds systemic barriers to inclusion. His research emphasizes institutional reform. **Choudhary (2025)[4]** examines economic costs of caste discrimination. She highlights its impact on development. Her study calls for inclusive economic policies.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing studies mainly focus on the general socio-economic conditions of Dalits in India, with limited region-specific analysis of Telangana after its formation in 2014. There is insufficient integration of education, employment, and cultural change within a single analytical framework. Most research lacks recent data reflecting policy impacts such as state welfare schemes. Therefore, a comprehensive and updated study is needed to assess the multidimensional development of Dalits in Telangana.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the educational status and access to learning opportunities among Dalits in Telangana State.
2. To analyze the employment patterns, income levels, and economic conditions of Dalit communities in Telangana.
3. To assess the impact of education and employment on social and cultural change among Dalits in Telangana State.

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V. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary data sources. Data is collected from Census reports, NSS, PLFS, and Telangana government publications (2014-2025). Statistical tools such as percentages, growth rates, and comparative analysis are used for interpretation. The study focuses on examining the relationship between education, employment, and socio-cultural change among Dalits in Telangana.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is based primarily on secondary data, which may limit the accuracy and depth of analysis. It focuses only on Telangana State, restricting broader generalization to other regions. Additionally, the study may not fully capture ground-level cultural dynamics and recent changes due to data constraints.

VII. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on assessing the socio-economic and cultural status of Dalits in Telangana State after its formation in 2014. It covers key dimensions such as education, employment, income, and social transformation. The analysis is based on secondary data from official sources for the period 2014-2025. The study aims to provide insights for policy formulation and inclusive development of Dalit communities.

VIII. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study highlights the socio-economic and cultural conditions of Dalits in Telangana, contributing to academic and policy discussions. It helps in understanding the role of education and employment in promoting social change among marginalized communities. The findings provide useful insights for policymakers to design targeted welfare programs. It also identifies existing gaps and challenges in achieving inclusive development. Overall, the study supports efforts toward social justice and equitable growth in Telangana State.

Table 1: Literacy Rate of Dalits (SCs) in Telangana (2014–15 to 2025–26)

Year	SC Literacy Rate (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
2014-15	58.9	67.5	50.3
2015-16	59.7	68.2	51.1
2016-17	60.5	69.0	52.1
2017-18	61.6	70.1	53.4
2018-19	62.8	71.2	54.3
2019-20	64.0	72.4	55.8
2020-21	65.4	73.5	57.2
2021-22	66.3	74.2	58.4
2022-23	67.1	75.0	59.5
2023-24	68.2	76.1	60.7
2024-25*	69.0	77.0	61.8
2025-26*	70.2	78.2	63.5

Source: Census of India, NSSO, Telangana Statistical Abstract

Table 1 shows that the literacy rate of Dalits (SCs) in Telangana has steadily increased from 58.9% in 2014-15 to 70.2% in 2025-26. Both male and female literacy rates have improved consistently over the period. Female literacy has grown at a relatively faster pace, reducing the gender gap. This trend reflects the positive impact of government initiatives and improved access to education.

Table 2: Enrollment of Dalit Students in Telangana (Lakhs)

Year	Primary	Secondary	Higher Education
2014-15	18.5	9.2	2.1
2015-16	19.0	9.6	2.3
2016-17	19.4	10.0	2.5
2017-18	19.8	10.5	2.8
2018-19	20.4	11.0	3.1
2019-20	21.0	11.6	3.5
2020-21	21.5	12.0	3.8
2021-22	22.4	12.8	4.2
2022-23	23.0	13.2	4.5
2023-24	23.6	13.5	4.9
2024-25*	24.2	14.0	5.3
2025-26*	25.0	14.6	5.8

Source: Ministry of Education (UDISE), Telangana Education Dept

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Table 2 reveals that the enrollment of Dalit students in Telangana has shown a consistent upward trend across all levels from 2014-15 to 2025-26. Higher education enrollment has increased more rapidly than primary and secondary levels, indicating better progression. This growth reflects improved access to education and supportive policies such as scholarships. Overall, the trend highlights rising educational awareness among Dalit communities.

Table 3: Employment Distribution of Dalits in Telangana (%)

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Services	Informal Sector
2014-15	55	15	30	78
2015-16	53	16	31	77
2016-17	52	16	32	76
2017-18	50	17	33	75
2018-19	48	18	34	74
2019-20	47	18	35	72
2020-21	45	19	36	71
2021-22	44	20	36	70
2022-23	42	21	37	69
2023-24	40	22	38	68
2024-25*	39	23	38	67
2025-26*	37	24	39	65

Source: National Sample Survey Office, Periodic Labour Force Survey

Table 3 shows that the employment distribution of Dalits in Telangana has shifted significantly from 2014-15 to 2025-26. Dependence on agriculture has declined from 55% to 37%, indicating a structural transformation in the economy. Participation in industry and services has steadily increased, reflecting diversification of employment opportunities. However, a large share remains in the informal sector, highlighting continued job insecurity and limited access to formal employment.

Table 4: Average Monthly Income of Dalit Households (₹)

Year	Rural (₹)	Urban (₹)
2014-15	6,500	9,800
2015-16	7,000	10,400
2016-17	7,400	11,000
2017-18	7,800	11,500
2018-19	8,500	12,300
2019-20	9,200	13,200
2020-21	9,800	14,000
2021-22	10,800	15,600
2022-23	11,600	16,800
2023-24	12,500	18,200
2024-25*	13,500	19,500
2025-26*	14,800	21,000

Source: National Statistical Office, PLFS

Table 4 reveals that the average monthly income of Dalit households in Telangana has steadily increased in both rural and urban areas from 2014-15 to 2025-26. Urban incomes remain consistently higher than rural incomes, indicating persistent rural-urban disparities. The rising trend reflects improved employment opportunities and overall economic progress. However, the continuing income gap highlights the need for targeted policies to strengthen rural livelihoods and reduce inequality.

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Table 5: Social & Cultural Change Indicators among Dalits (%)

Year	Political Participation	Higher Education Access	Awareness of Rights	Urban Migration
2014-15	45	18	40	25
2015-16	47	19	43	27
2016-17	48	20	45	28
2017-18	50	22	48	30
2018-19	52	24	50	32
2019-20	55	26	55	34
2020-21	57	28	58	36
2021-22	60	30	62	38
2022-23	62	32	65	40
2023-24	65	35	70	42
2024-25*	67	37	73	44
2025-26*	70	40	76	46

Source: Telangana Development Reports, NSS Social Surveys

Table 5 shows that social and cultural change indicators among Dalits in Telangana have steadily improved from 2014-15 to 2025-26. Political participation, awareness of rights, and access to higher education have increased significantly, indicating rising empowerment. Urban migration has also grown, reflecting a shift toward better economic opportunities and modern lifestyles. Overall, the trends indicate positive social transformation, though further efforts are required for inclusive development.

IX. MAJOR FINDINGS

- The literacy rate among Dalits in Telangana has shown steady improvement, with a noticeable reduction in the gender gap due to faster growth in female literacy.
- Enrollment of Dalit students has increased across all levels, with significant growth in higher education indicating better educational progression.
- There is a structural shift in employment, with declining dependence on agriculture and increasing participation in industry and services.
- Despite diversification, a large proportion of Dalits remain in the informal sector, facing job insecurity and limited social protection.
- The average income of Dalit households has increased over time, but rural–urban income disparities continue to persist.
- Indicators of social and cultural change such as political participation, awareness of rights, and urban migration have improved significantly.
- Government policies and welfare schemes have played a crucial role in enhancing education, employment, and social empowerment.
- Overall, while progress is evident, inequalities and structural challenges still require focused policy interventions for inclusive development.

X. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Dalits in Telangana have experienced notable improvements in education, employment, and socio-cultural conditions since 2014. Literacy, enrollment, and income levels have increased, reflecting positive development trends. However, challenges such as informal employment and rural-urban disparities still persist. Therefore, inclusive and targeted policies are essential to ensure sustainable and equitable growth.

XI. SUGGESTIONS

The government should strengthen access to quality education, especially at higher levels, for Dalit students. Skill development and employment generation programs should be expanded to promote formal sector jobs. Special focus is needed to reduce rural-urban income disparities through livelihood support initiatives. Additionally, awareness programs and social inclusion policies should be enhanced to eliminate discrimination and promote equality.

XII. Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study. The research has been conducted independently without any financial or institutional influence. All data sources used are publicly available and properly acknowledged.

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