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Variation in the Level of Living Across Social Groups in India During 1973-74

1. Introduction

THE data on household consumption expenditure obtained from different rounds of the NSS have been utilized for various types of analyses, e.g., analysis of consumer demand, studies on disparities in level of living, studies on the incidence of poverty etc (Bhattacharya, 1978). Data on religion and on (social) group affiliation of the household were collected in all the rounds of NSS, but the level of living of different social and religious groups has not been compared so far.¹

The 28th round countrywide enquiry on consumer expenditure covered 15,467 sample households in the rural sector and 7,881 sample households in the urban sector.² These were divided into five social groups : The Scheduled Tribes (ST), the Scheduled Castes (SC), "other Hindus," Muslims, and others. Most of the Scheduled Tribe households reported themselves as Hindus, and a very small proportion of them called themselves Muslims, while the rest belonged to the other religious groups. For this reason, it may be noted, the five groups

1. The only exception is NSS Report No. 158 : Consumption Patterns of Scheduled Tribe Households of Manipur and Tripura, which shows separate estimates of consumer expenditure for ST households though only for Manipur and Tripura. A recent Ph.D. thesis submitted by Sm. Shailaja Raghuprasad of Bangalore Centre of ISI (Supervisor : Professor N. S. Iyengar) examines inter-social-group variation in consumption patterns within Karnataka using NSS consumer expenditure data.

2. The Sample sizes are given from NSS Report No. 240. In the special tabulation carried out for this study, the number of sample households was 1,545 for rural India and 7,898 for urban India.

mentioned above are not mutually exclusive. Three classification schemes are considered in Table 2 to answer the most likely questions.

Some non-Hindu households reported themselves as belonging to SC. According to instructions to field workers only Hindu and Sikh households could report themselves as SC, but for the purpose of the present study only Hindu SC households were taken to form the SC group.

The data on affiliation to SC or ST categories were collected without any special probes in course of the enquiry on consumer expenditure. The figures in Table 1 show that when compared with the 1971 census, the NSS enquiry reported nearly the same percentages of persons in the different groups.

TABLE 1—COMPARATIVE ESTIMATES OF SHARES OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN INDIA'S POPULATION

<i>Source of data and sector</i>	<i>Percentage of India's population belonging to</i>			
	<i>ST</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>Hindus</i>	<i>Muslims</i>
Census of India, 1971				
rural	8.4	16.1	—	—
urban	1.2	8.8	—	—
combined	6.9	14.6	82.7	11.2
NSS, 28th round, enquiry on consumer expenditure				
rural	9.4	17.3	—	—
urban	1.8	9.4	—	—
combined	7.9	15.7	82.9	10.7

Level of living was measured by per capita total consumer expenditure (PCE) of the households on all items taken together. No attempt was made to adjust these nominal figures for price variation (across regions etc.) to get real PCE.

2 The Findings

Taking the mean PCE for rural India or urban India as base (= 100), one can express the mean PCE for each social group as an index.³ Such indices are

3. The results obtained in this fresh tabulation are, broadly speaking, extremely close to those presented in NSS Report No. 240. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion, only relative values or indices are presented here instead of the actual values of the estimates.

shown in Table 2 which shows the relative positions of different social groups in respect of average PCE. This all-India picture masks differences in the regional distribution of the population belonging to the different social groups,

TABLE 2—AVERAGE PCE FOR DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES OF AVERAGE PCE FOR THE GENERAL POPULATION : NSS 28TH ROUND ENQUIRY ON CONSUMER EXPENDITURE, ALL-INDIA

Social groups compared	No. of sample households		Average PCE as percentage					
	rural	urban	rural			urban		
			hs 1	hs 2	combined	hs 1	hs 2	combined
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
I								
Sch. tribes (ST)	1614	190	81.5	77.5	79.6	76.3	76.9	76.7
Sch. castes (Hindus) (SC)	2691	772	80.9	78.9	79.9	79.9	77.0	78.5
Other Hindus	8379	5222	107.4	109.0	108.2	106.7	106.6	106.7
SC + other Hindus	11070	5994	101.4	102.1	101.7	103.4	103.0	103.2
Other Muslims	1674	1120	95.3	93.7	94.5	78.3	78.0	78.1
Others	1094	394	122.6	117.9	120.2	119.6	117.2	118.4
II								
Hindus	12389	6130	99.2	99.5	99.4	102.9	103.3	102.6
Muslims	1678	1123	95.4	93.7	94.5	78.3	78.4	78.3
Others	1385	645	117.5	115.9	116.7	119.0	116.2	117.6
III								
<i>Within ST population</i>								
Hindus	1319	136	100.0	98.2	99.1	99.4	90.8	94.7
Muslims	4	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Others	291	51	99.5	125.4	110.7	107.8	122.7	119.6

Note. Dash (—) indicates that results are too unreliable to be presented.

and in principle, this can distort the indices because inter-regional variation in consumer prices are by no means negligible. However, statewide results broadly corroborate the findings based on all-India estimates presented here.

The NSS sample comprised two independent and interpenetrating sub-samples, called half-sample 1 (hs 1) and half-sample 2 (hs 2). The indices are presented separately for the two half-samples and for the combined sample.

4, *Vide* Bhattacharya, Chatterjee and Pal (1986, 1987) for statewide results for rural and urban sectors of the country.

The divergence between the half-sample estimates indicates the reliability of the combined sample estimate.

Cols. (2) and (3) clearly show that some of the indices in Table 2 are based on relatively small-sized samples, especially those for some of the subgroups of ST population. In most cases, however, the sample size is moderately large and the half-sample divergence fairly small, so the indices can be taken as reliable.

Broadly speaking, the average PCE for the scheduled tribes (ST) and Scheduled castes (SC) population is only about 80 per cent of that for the general population in both rural and urban areas of the country.

'Other Hindus' are about 7 or 8 per cent above average, and all Hindus, including some belonging to the ST group, are roughly on par with the general population in both the sectors. Looking more closely, the average for all Hindu is slightly below 100 for rural India and 2 to 3 per cent above 100 for urban India; the rural-plus-urban figure (not presented) would be almost exactly 100.

Muslims are about 5 per cent below average in rural India but about 20 per cent below average in the urban sector. Thus, in urban India, Muslims are nearly as poor as the SC and ST groups. This is the only marked difference between rural and urban sectors brought out by the table.

Finally, the average PCE for 'others' Jains, Parsis, Sikhs, Christians etc. taken together) is 17 or 18 per cent above that for the general population in both the sectors of the country.

The Lorenz ratios for the size distributions of PCE were computed separately for the different groups. These are not presented for reasons of space. It may, however, be stated that, in general, the distributions of population by PCE are relatively egalitarian for the poorer groups (like ST) and most unequal for the most prosperous group, viz., 'others'.

The above findings are preliminary, based on nominal PCE and subject to the well-known limitations of NSS household budget data. (*Vide* Srinivasan, Radhakrishnan and Vaidyanathan, 1974). Further, as stated above, there are some doubts about the reliability of NSS data relating to the social group to which the household belonged. The corresponding figures from the population census may also be challenged. However, the agreement between the two sets of percentages presented in Table 1 appears to be encouraging.

Acknowledgements

The NSS 28th round budget data have been presented in Report No. 240 : Tables with Notes on Consumer Expenditure : Twenty-eighth Round, published by NSS Organisation, Govt. of India (1978). The results presented here are based on a special tabulation of the same data carried out by the authors from a copy of the up-dated Honeywell tape provided by the authorities of the National Sample Survey Organisation, Govt. of India; the authors are also

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