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**A Comparative Study of the Economic Growth Among the
Dalits Peasants of Commercial and Non-commercial
Crop Cultivators of Rural India**

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ABSTRACT This paper has sought to examine how the cultivation of a cash crop (tobacco) has impacted the socio-economic profile of a village (Karavadi) where this crop is being extensively cultivated. For comparison purposes, another village (Veerabhadrapuram) in the same district, where this crop is has not been cultivated was considered for this study. The issues discussed were income levels, educational status of the children, quality of houses and inter-caste relations. One very significant fact that emerged from the study is that greater economic empowerment of the deprived sections of society mean much more than a materially better quality of life for them. It can also bring in its wake upward social mobility of the so-called Dalits due to the gradual eradication of social evils like untouchability.

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this paper is to understand the impact of tobacco cultivation on the rural society, particularly the agricultural labourers in Andhra Pradesh who are mostly Dalits. Agriculture continues to be the backbone of the Indian economy. Agricultural economy also remains as the foundation of rural social structure of Indian society. The agriculture changes, in terms of land tenure, landholding, and provision of irrigation facilities and commercialisation of crops, have brought substantial changes in the social relationships among the rural communities. The post-independence era has witnessed commercialisation of crops in a big way. The resultant new market economy also created new occupational categories replacing traditional social relationships. Tobacco is one of the important crops being grown in Andhra Pradesh.

History of Tobacco

Tobacco found in cigarettes, *bidi*, snuff, etc., is the leafy product of tobacco plant, which grows naturally in North and South America. Tobacco has also been cultivated in other parts of the world. It is believed that the plant was first grown in America. The American Indians were the first to realise the potential healing pow-

ers of tobacco plant and tobacco leaves were used both for medicinal and religious purposes in 1 BC (tobaccofreelife.org).

Tobacco Cultivation: Indian Scenario

Tobacco is an important commercial crop grown in India. It occupies the third position in the world with an annual production of 800 million kilograms. Of the different types of tobacco grown, flue-cured tobacco, country tobacco, burley, *bidi*, rustica and chewing tobacco are considered as important for various uses. Tobacco and tobacco products earn INR 20,000 crore to the national exchequer by way of excise duty, and INR 5,000 crore by way of foreign exchange every year (Tobacco Board 2019).

Tobacco Cultivation in Andhra Pradesh

In India, tobacco was initially grown in the Deccan region (South Central India) during 1605. This later spread to other parts of the country. The Virginia variety was introduced in Andhra Pradesh in 1920 by the British officers of the Indian Leaf Tobacco Development Company. The Central Tobacco Research Institute was established in 1947 at Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh by the government of India. Later on, the government set up the Tobacco Board in

1976 with its headquarters in Guntur. The Board was mandated to provide guidance for the integrated development of the industry (Trader 1980: 57). As a result, several tobacco factories were set up in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru. For supplying tobacco of the required quality, several re-drying factories were established. At present, more than 50 re-drying factories are functioning in the state. Among the commercial crops, cotton, tobacco, sugarcane, coconut, and groundnut are prominent in Andhra Pradesh. About ninety percent of the flue-cured Virginia tobacco is cultivated in Andhra Pradesh alone.

Cultivation of tobacco in Guntur and Prakasam Districts in Andhra Pradesh has brought tremendous changes in the profiles of rural areas by providing employment to thousands of poor families. Employment in the tobacco industry has affected not only the social relationships in rural areas, but also the health of individual workers, who are mostly Dalits. Further, it has created a variety of new occupations and more income and imparted new skills amongst people of mentioned districts. The skilled workers have also started migrating to the state of Karnataka where there is dearth of expertise in the tobacco industry. The increased incomes have empowered many families to send their children to schools.

Review of Literature

Since the author focusses on the agricultural labourers who are predominantly Dalits, it is only proper to review the socio-economic changes brought about in their lives. There are several studies on Dalits, but only a few have discussed social change or mobility among them, much less in the case of Dalits in Andhra Pradesh.

Epstein (1962) undertook a comparative study of the impact of economic factors on social institutions in two villages in Mysore (now Karnataka). One of these villages could use irrigation, while the other one could not. She found that prosperity through agriculture did not lead to any great change in the traditional social system. There was diversification of economic roles and relations within the village. The economic change, in turn, led to political change that broke the traditional economic relations between peasant-masters and their so-called "untouchable"

clients. This led to rupture in ritual relations among individual households.

In this regard, the case of Karavadi is different in the sense that economic improvement has resulted in social change both in the case of Dalits and non-Dalits. To some extent, this is due to extraneous factors like the presence of the Left political party and its ideology. Education is the most important factor that has given them the means for change, which was supported by economic prosperity. Again, education also helped in bringing in political consciousness and participation.

Education is one of the most significant determinants of status and socio-economic change in present day Dalits in Karavadi village. Most of them are sending their children for higher studies, even in fields like engineering and law. Some have become teachers, doctors or engineers. In Veerabhadrapuram, most of the Dalits are illiterate and many Dalit children are school drop-outs. The government has established primary schools and high schools in Karavadi and Veerabhadrapuram, but Karavadi Dalits have been able to educate their children because they are getting higher wages in tobacco-cultivation and tobacco-grading industries.

Bailey (1957) undertook a study in a Bisipara Village in Orissa. He found that the untouchable *Boad* distillers, who were trading in hide and liquor, could earn enough money to purchase land equal to that of the warrior castes and had been able to improve their economic position, ritual status and political clout. A similar situation prevails in Karavadi. Many Dalits have now become cultivators and taken land on lease from the upper castes for cultivating tobacco. Some of the Dalits cultivators have even purchased land from the upper caste people. A very significant change in Karavadi is that the Dalits are now able to get ritual status as they can freely enter temples. In Veerabhadrapuram, the Dalits are facing the problem of untouchability against the upper caste. Their political status is still very weak.

There are several studies on tobacco cultivation, production, marketing and exchange (Venkateswarlu 1957; Singh 1992; Chojar 2002), commercial capital and agrarian relations (Duvvury 1986), credit requirement of tobacco trade (Hattangady 1980), culture of tobacco (Kumar

2013), and alternative to tobacco crop cultivation (Krishna Rao and Nancharaiiah 2012). Thus, all these studies are oriented towards the economy, market, production and prospects of tobacco, rather than on the social phenomenon, or relationships, between producers and labourers. In light of the above, the author has sought to find out the impact tobacco has brought about in the lives of labourers working in tobacco farms and the tobacco industry.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to study the socio-economic conditions of Dalit agricultural labourers and changes that have occurred in their lives. The cultivation of tobacco and the employment opportunities in the tobacco industry has enabled the Dalits to improve their economic conditions due to higher wages and almost assured employment throughout the year.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study basically attempts to understand social and cultural changes that are taking place among the agricultural labourers, particularly Dalits, who participate in the tobacco cultivation and processing in a small industrial set up. It needs to be pointed out here that tobacco cultivation is about a hundred years old and is different in many ways from traditional crops cultivated on the basis of which rural social structure was built. Tobacco cultivation has become an important factor for social change in the rural communities. Anthropological knowledge about Indian society reveals accelerated social and cultural change in the post-independence era through the modernisation process. The change was initiated by the British colonial administration. Attempts have been made to understand the nature, quality and direction of change through various anthropological conceptualisations of social and cultural change.

The civilisation approach (McKim and Singer 1955), understanding the consequences of land reforms and emergence of new economic avenues (Bailey 1957) Sanskritisation and westernisation (Srinivas 1972), modernisation (Singh

1973) and development approach of planned change (D'Souza 1991) have been used to theorise the complex social cultural changes in India. While the civilisation approach focused more on the historical aspects of the great Indian civilisation, the British reforms and taxation that generated change is limited to the British period. Sanskritisation and westernisation are narrow concepts, which do not comprehensively deal with macro level changes that have taken place in the post-independence era. The changes expected to take place due to implementation of development plans are so universal that the approach has limitation with reference to political and economic life of the community. Therefore, it seems Singh's conceptualisation of modernisation, which deals with the orthogenetic and heterogenetic changes in Indian society, is more comprehensive. This complex and comprehensive concept has room to explain changes due to interaction of great and little traditions, urbanisation and industrialisation. It also encompasses the structural changes initiated by the British and continued in independent India and India's effort to enjoy the benefits of the technological changes, industrialisation and modernity, while not totally discarding the traditional life.

The framework of modernisation provides the needed conceptualisation of micro level changes that are taking place in rural communities as a result of macro-structural changes. Therefore, the present study will attempt to understand the impact of tobacco cultivation on agricultural labourers in rural Andhra Pradesh. According to Singh (1973), changes in Indian society can be noted from the distinction between micro and macrostructures of the society. The microstructures include family, caste, sub-caste, and village communities. The caste structures play a significant role in defining the network of relationships, both of the family and the community. The macrostructures have an inter-regional relational network. The macrostructures include economic, political, administrative and religious frameworks. These two kinds of structures function in a dialectical relationship. Despite the fact that they enjoy a high degree of autonomy, changes in macrostructures can affect the microstructures. The inter-structural autonomy has helped in selection, synchroni-

sation of new cultural modes, social forms, behaviour and structures. Innovation at one level could affect the other, without causing a breakdown in the social structure as a whole. From these perspectives, the establishment of tobacco industry can be seen as located in the macro-economic structure.

The local market of tobacco, which has a network with international markets and the economy, has brought changes at the local market level and the economy of traditional cultivation of various crops. In order to promote the tobacco industry, the government has established various institutions that are interacting with farmers at the micro level. The structures of families of agricultural labourers have been undergoing changes, and similarly intra and inter caste relationships. Rural communities have also experienced changes in the values of labour patron and client relationships integration of different communities in the rural development, along with the macrostructures developed by the government. Therefore, it is considered that the framework of modernisation can help provide a viable framework to understand the impact of tobacco cultivation and setting up of the tobacco industry for the agricultural labourers, particularly the Dalits.

The present study has followed the comparative method due to non-availability of historical data, particularly on social and cultural factors. A quasi-experimental design has been planned for the study. It includes the study of a village where tobacco cultivation has been in practice for more than fifty years and another village where there has been no tobacco cultivation at all so far.

The first village, Karavadi, selected for the study is located at a distance of 12 kilometres from Ongole, the district headquarters. The village has 1,239 households with a total population of 4,212. Of them, males are 2,155 (51.1%) and females, 2,047 (48.9%). The Scheduled Castes constitute 47.2 percent of the total population and Scheduled Tribes, 3.9 percent. There are 134 tobacco barns. Of these, 116 are owned by high castes and 18 by Scheduled Castes (Malas). Karavadi villagers mainly depend upon tobacco production. Today, several Dalit families of Karavadi cultivate tobacco on lands taken on lease from the upper caste families.

Veerabhadrapuram, the other village selected for this study is located in Yerragodapalem Mandal in Prakasam district. The village is at distance of 80 kilometres from Ongole, the district headquarters. The village has 1,005 households with a total population of 3,640, and of them, males are 1,888 (51.87%) and females are 1,752 (48.13%). The Scheduled Castes constitute 55.1 percent of the total population and Scheduled Tribes, 5.1 percent.

Structure of the Paper

This paper is organised into six sections. The first section consists of review of literature. This also includes the objectives of the study, the methodology adopted, the theoretical framework of the study and the sources from which data was obtained. The second section will present a comparative account of the wages and income in these villages. The third section will present the conditions of work and living of the women labourers. In the fourth section the impact of increased income in Karavadi will be discussed in the areas of dwellings, furniture, family structure, expenditure, loans and education. The fifth section will explore the overall impact on the villages in terms of social relations and power structure. The last section will present the conclusions drawn from the study.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Castes in Karavadi and Veerabhadrapuram

Nineteen castes and two tribes are represented in Karavadi, and fifteen castes and one tribe in Veerabhadrapuram. Castes such as Mala, Madiga, Golla/Yadava, Reddy, Kummury and Chakali, Vaisya, Telaga, Balija, Brahmin and Naidu, as well as Muslims, are present in both the villages. However, castes of Rajputra, Vadde and Yanadi and Dommari tribes, which are present in Karavadi, are absent in Veerabhadrapuram. Similarly, the Chenchu tribe, which is present in Veerabhadrapuram, is absent in Karavadi. While there are 1,239 households in Karavadi village, Veerabhadrapuram has 1,005 households. Table 1 provides the details of population by caste and ethnic composition in the villages. It may be noticed that in both the villages, Mala and Madiga,

Table 1: Caste composition in the villages

S. No.	Caste	Karavadi				Veerabhadrapuram			
		No. of families	Male	Female	Total population	No. of families	Male	Female	Total population
1	Brahmin	9 (0.7)	19 (54.3)	16 (45.7)	35 (0.8)	6 (0.6)	15 (50.0)	15 (50.0)	30 (0.8)
2	Rajputra	4 (0.3)	12 (57.1)	9 (42.9)	21 (0.5)	-	-	-	-
3	Vaisya	11 (0.9)	18 (52.9)	16 (47.1)	34 (0.80)	11 (1.1)	18 (52.9)	26 (47.1)	24 (0.9)
4	Kamma	201 (16.2)	365 (53.8)	314 (46.2)	679 (16.1)	159 (15.8)	310 (54.1)	263 (45.9)	573 (15.7)
5	Reddy	44 (3.6)	92 (59.4)	63 (40.6)	155 (3.7)	43 (4.3)	92 (59.4)	63 (40.6)	155 (3.4)
6	Telaga	17 (1.4)	33 (61.1)	21 (38.9)	54 (1.3)	16 (1.6)	32 (60.4)	21 (39.6)	53 (1.5)
7	Baliya	13 (1.0)	27 (49.1)	28 (50.9)	55 (1.3)	18 (1.8)	35 (48.6)	37 (51.4)	72 (2.0)
8	Chowdary	4 (0.3)	7 (36.8)	12 (63.2)	19 (0.4)	3 (0.3)	6 (40.0)	9 (60.0)	15 (0.4)
9	Naidu	17 (1.4)	33 (50.8)	32 (49.2)	65 (1.5)	17 (1.7)	33 (50.8)	32 (49.2)	65 (1.8)
10	Mala	516 (41.6)	904 (59.5)	924 (50.5)	1828 (43.3)	103 (10.2)	203 (52.5)	184 (47.5)	387 (10.6)
11	Madiga	192 (15.5)	269 (47.4)	299 (52.6)	568 (13.4)	446 (44.4)	797 (49.2)	822 (50.8)	1619 (44.5)
12	Yadavas	66 (5.3)	139 (54.3)	117 (45.7)	256 (6.1)	72 (7.2)	146 (54.3)	123 (45.7)	269 (7.4)
13	Kamsali	3 (0.2)	8 (47.1)	9 (52.9)	17 (0.4)	2 (0.2)	4 (36.4)	7 (63.6)	11 (0.3)
14	Muslim	9 (0.7)	15 (51.7)	14 (48.3)	29 (0.7)	11 (1.1)	19 (48.7)	20 (51.3)	39 (1.1)
15	Kummari	36 (2.9)	49 (51.0)	47 (49.0)	96 (2.3)	19 (1.9)	28 (50.9)	27 (49.1)	55 (1.5)
16	Chakali	18 (1.50)	27 (60.0)	18 (40.0)	45 (1.1)	20 (2.0)	30 (60.0)	20 (40.0)	50 (1.4)
17	Mangali	25 (2.0)	32 (45.7)	38 (54.3)	70 (1.7)	10 (1.0)	13 (48.1)	14 (51.9)	27 (0.7)
18	Vadde	5 (0.5)	8 (40.0)	12 (60.0)	20 (0.5)	-	-	-	-
19	Mutharachi	3 (0.2)	7 (58.3)	5 (41.7)	12 (0.3)	-	-	-	-
20	Yanadi	44 (3.6)	94 (57.7)	69 (42.3)	163 (3.9)	-	-	-	-
21	Dommari	2 (0.2)	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0)	4 (0.1)	-	-	-	-
22	Chenchu	-	-	-	-	49 (4.8)	107 (57.5)	79 (42.5)	186 (5.1)
	Total	1239	2160	2065	4225	1005	1888	1752	3640

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in parentheses)

which are Scheduled Castes, constitute the majority, and they also form the main agricultural labour force.

Social Structure and Social Relations

The social relationships in these two villages can be viewed primarily in terms of inter-caste relations, which are basically founded mostly on economic, political and religious considerations. While the economic affairs are based on individuals and traditional occupations connected with caste, the others are mostly related to issues of local residence and individual choices. The caste element plays its role due to economic inequality, wherein those belonging to the upper castes manage the economic activities in the village. The politics, wherein the upper castes take the leadership role, again have followers from the low castes. The religious and economic spheres together connect several castes in which some provide services and some others receive services. The inter-caste relations

such as the *jajmani* system have been quite intensively and elaborately studied by anthropologists (Dumont 1966; Gould 1958; Kolenda 1981; Wiser 1936) from different theoretical perspectives that provide models of village communities. In the villages under the study, one can notice the changes accompanied by the economic changes in the traditional relations among different castes.

In Karavadi, as well as Veerabhadrapuram, Reddys and Kammas are the landlords (*jajmans*), respectively. However, the other upper castes such as Vaisyas, Baliyas, Chowdarys, Telagas, and so on, are also *jajmans*, as they receive the services of Brahmin, Kamsali, Chakali, Mangali, Kummari, Mala and Madiga castes. Brahmins provide religious services related to life cycle rituals in both the villages. Though Brahmins provide ritual services, they are also *jajmans* because they receive services of others like Chakalis (washermen), Mangalis (barbers) and Kummaries (potters). Traditionally, these relations based on the services are termed as *asamy* and

mirasi relations, wherein the farmer is the land-lord, or patron, and the latter, the client. In both the villages, Malas and Madigas, the Dalit castes, form the main labour force.

Crops Grown in the Villages and Agricultural Practices

Tobacco is cultivated predominately in Karavadi, whereas cotton is grown mostly in the Veerabhadrapuram village, followed by chillies. After tobacco, Bengal gram and eucalyptus are the main items of cultivation in Karavadi. In Veerabhadrapuram, the main crops are chillies, sunflowers, cotton, *jowar* and paddy.

Agriculture is the axis around which the economy of the villages revolves. In Karavadi, about 4,271 (97.8%) of the villagers are directly dependent on agriculture and allied pursuits, whereas a significant proportion of the workers in the non-agricultural occupations also are dependent on artisans and other services, which are directly dependent on agriculture. In Veerabhadrapuram, the cultivators equal 528 (39.5%), while the agricultural labourers are 765 (57.2%). The total number of workers is 1,293 (96.6%) that are mainly dependent on agriculture in the village. The commercial crops like cotton, sunflower and chillies besides the food crops like *jowar* are grown by the villagers. All these crops are seasonal and provide employment for about eight months and for the rest of the year, the labourers depend on several manual unskilled jobs. In such cases, many people are forced to migrate to other places in search of livelihood options. Such a migration can bring in issues like disruption in the education of the children and the need to run two establishments in case the wage earners move to a different place and leave their families behind.

Wages and Labour Relations

In Karavadi, wages are fixed through negotiations between the farmer and labourers. The *mutah-maistry* plays a key role and is the mediator between the labourers and the farmer. As the demand for workers increases, the labourers, through the *maistry*, demand an increase in their wages. Even though the final decision is left to the farmer, at least the labourers have some

bargaining capacity. Once labourers succeed in getting the wages increased in one instance, particularly at the beginning of the season, the other farmers follow suit. The bargaining capacity has to be seen, not only in the context of demand for labour, but also in the context of tobacco farming and industry, vis-à-vis the other crops. The political environment, including the large presence of Left Party Cadres, also has to be considered. The introduction of FCV tobacco technology and the consequent reorganisation of the labour process in the agrarian and agro-processing sector mark a qualitatively new stage in the evolution of the agricultural labour class. The element of attachment rapidly disappeared and casual labour employment became the norm. Given the high demand for labour, the *mutah* labourers, especially the curing workers, are able to assert themselves. By the end of the 2006, there were numerous strikes by agricultural labourers in this village for better wages.

In Veerabhadrapuram, labour markets are unorganised and scattered. In this village, there is no labour organisation either for the socially backward agricultural labourers or for the non-Dalit community or the Dalit agricultural labourers. During the agricultural season, the farmer usually informs a labourer who has good rapport with him about the number of labourers he needs that day. Then one worker gathers the labourers. The wages are fixed for each operation, totally at the farmer's discretion. The decision to increase wages or keep them the same as the previous year totally depends on the large farmers. There is no chance for the labourers to participate in the process. Forced by their social and economic conditions, the labourers usually accept even if the wages fixed by the farmer are the same as the previous year. To that extent, the situation is akin to a win-win situation for the farmers and a lose-lose one for the agricultural labourers.

Agriculture is the only source of livelihood for landless labourers in this village. The landless labourers, who belong mostly to the Dalit castes, borrow money from farmers for marriage, illness and children's education. It is this debt of landless labourers to farmers that has suppressed their voice against the low wages. According to one of the senior agricultural labourers, "We usually borrow money from the land-

lords for our unexpected expenses and needs, so if we ask for any increase in wages, they may ask for immediate repayment of the debt. Thus, we are unable to raise any voice about the wage fixation process and wage rates. Last year we asked for the hike of our daily wages and they rejected it. Moreover, we never even dare to question the landlords, for if we questioned them, they may not call us for work and we will lose our livelihood." High illiteracy is recorded in households of the landless labourers. This proves that they are educationally backward, resulting in economic backwardness. Interestingly, among all Dalit households in the village, only one person is found to be a graduate. Schooling is discontinued at a very early age due to their adverse economic conditions. The poor social and economic conditions of these landless labourers are exploited by the landlords, leaving the labourers without a voice in fixing wages.

One needs to take cognisance of the fact that a significant element of gender discrimination can be seen in both the villages. This is evident from the differential wage rates for men and women. In Karavadi, the usual daily wage for men is INR 150 and for women is INR 120, for making the land fit for cultivation, applying manure or fertilisers and transplanting, but for the same operations in Veerabhadrapuram the wages are INR 100 and INR 80 for males and females, respectively. Only for harvesting tobacco are workers of both sexes paid equal wages (since equal skills are required). In spraying of pesticides for all the crops, men are paid more than double the wages of women because women only mix the chemicals, whereas men spray the chemicals, with the risk of inhaling the hazardous vapours (Table 2).

Annual Income of the Dalits Peasants

Income is the major determinant in the economic status of the people and this is more so in case of Dalits labourers. The main sources of income for the villagers are tobacco cultivation and government institutions. Many families depend mainly on tobacco cultivation. The average annual incomes of Dalit labourers in the villages were as presented in Table 3. There is a clear difference in the annual incomes of the Dalit

Table 2: Wages in the villages

S.No. Crops	Karavadi						Veerabhadrapuram					
	Tobacco			Cotton			Chilies			Sunflower		
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1 Land preparation	Rs. 150	Rs. 120		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80	
2 Manure	Rs. 150	Rs. 120		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80	
3 Fertilizers spread	Rs. 150	Rs. 120		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80	
4 Transplantation	Rs. 150	Rs. 120		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80	
5 Gap filling	-	Rs. 120		-	Rs. 80		-	Rs. 80		-	Rs. 80	
6 Weeding	-	Rs. 120		-	Rs. 80		-	Rs. 80		-	Rs. 80	
7 Flower crossing	-	-		-	-		-	-		-	-	
8 Plant protection	-	Rs. 120		-	Rs. 80		-	Rs. 80		-	Rs. 80	
9 Spraying Pesticides	Rs. 250	Rs. 150		Rs. 200	Rs. 100		Rs. 200	Rs. 100		Rs. 200	Rs. 100	
10 Collecting insects	-	Rs. 120		-	-		-	-		-	-	
11 Topping	-	Rs. 120		-	-		-	-		-	-	
12 Removing aphid	-	Rs. 120		-	-		-	-		-	-	
13 Harvesting	Rs. 150	Rs. 120		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80		Rs. 100	Rs. 80	
14 Curing	Rs. 350	-		-	-		-	-		-	-	
15 Grading	-	Rs. 100		-	-		-	-		-	-	

Source: Primary data

Table 3: Annual income of Dalits

S.No.	Income	Karavadi			Veerabhadrapuram		
		Income		Total	Income		Total
		Mala	Madiga		Mala	Madiga	
1	Less than Rs 20,000	23 (4.5)	1 (0.5)	24 (3.4)	76 (73.1)	377 (84.7)	453 (82.5)
2	Rs 20,001-60,000	48 (9.4)	183 (93.8)	231 (32.6)	27 (26.0)	67 (15.1)	94 (17.1)
3	Rs 60,000-100,000	360 (70.2)	4 (2.1)	364 (51.4)	1 (1.0)	1 (0.2)	2 (0.4)
4	Rs 100,001-140,000	29 (5.7)	5 (2.6)	34 (4.8)	-	-	-
5	Rs 140,000 and above	53 (10.3)	2 (1.0)	55 (7.8)	-	-	-
	Total	513 (100)	195 (100)	708 (100)	104 (100)	445 (100)	549 (100)

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in parentheses)

households of Karavadi and Veerabhadrapuram. The Dalits of the former village are in a much better position, as only 3.4 percent of them are earning less than INR 20,000, whereas 82.5 percent are in this economic group in the latter village. There is no one earning more than INR 100,000 in Veerabhadrapuram, whereas 83 (11.7%) of the Dalit households in Karavadi are earning more than INR 100,000 annually. While the majority of Dalits in Karavadi (83.5%) earn between INR 20,001 and INR 60,000, in Veerabhadrapuram the majority of them (82.5%) earn less than INR 20,000. Comparing the Malas and Madigas in Karavadi, the majority of them earn between INR 20,001 and INR 60,000 and almost the same percentage of the households earn less than INR 20,000. However, the percentage of the households earning more than INR 100,000 is greater among the Malas than among the Madigas. Thus, the Malas are better off in their annual incomes.

Land Acquisition

The increased income among the Dalits of Karavadi has brought about two changes, that is, purchase of land and education of children. These children, in turn, now add to the income of the family, as they have started earning by obtaining employment in government or private services. The Mala and Madiga who are traditionally agricultural labourers are found to be cultivators to the extent of 13.3 percent and 8.2 percent respectively, though 76.5 percent and 74.5 percent of them continue to be agricultural labourers. However, it is to be noted that there is no change in Veerabhadrapuram as 97.8 percent of the Dalits are agricultural labourers only. Among the landholders, as the data reveals, while 34.9 percent of them purchased land in Karavadi during the last fifty years, and none have purchased land in Veerabhadrapuram. This clearly reflects the increase of incomes in Karavadi due to tobacco cultivation.

The following two case studies reveal how the experience in tobacco cultivation has enabled them to improve socio-economic conditions of the Dalits labourers in Karavadi.

Case Study I: Tanga Venkateswarlu (84 years) owns 6 acres of land and he belongs to the Bali-ja caste. Gorrumuchu Venkateswarlu (83 years), a Mala, inherited two acres of land from his ancestors. Both jointly constructed a barn by spending around INR 1,800 for processing the

tobacco that they had been cultivating on 12 acres since 1952. They earned a net income of INR 9,000, which they divided between themselves. After a year or so, Gorrumuchu Venkateswarlu bought the barn for INR 1,500 from Tanga Venkateswarlu, and he leased six acres of land from upper castes to cultivate tobacco. After five years, he bought six acres of land, which cost him INR 15,000. In 1952, the rate for lease of land was INR 400 per acre and the daily wage was only INR 5. The total expenditure on an acre of tobacco was INR 1,000. One tonne of coal cost INR 600. Financiers charged one percent interest on the credit. He never incurred loss on tobacco cultivation. In the early days, East India and Navabharath Tobacco Companies used to purchase the tobacco leaves. The reason why he has shifted to tobacco was that he was getting more profit from it than from crops like *jowar* and *variga*. Seeing his success, others also shifted to tobacco. In 1952, he earned INR 3,000 profit but did not know where to save the money. Someone advised him to save money in a bank and took him to Ongole where he attempted to open a bank account in Andhra Bank. His application was rejected, as he had filled the form incorrectly. In 1980, he bought another four acres of land for INR 20,000. He says he got the money for purchase of lands only from tobacco cultivation. His two sons are married and the first son is in business and bought a new motorbike in the year 2000. Gorrumuchu Venkateswarlu is the richest person among the Malas of Karavadi. He is still cultivating tobacco in the village.

Case Study II: Tatitoti Suvarthamma, a 55-year-old woman who belongs to the Mala caste, started tobacco cultivation in 2003. She had only one acre of land initially and she took seven acres of land on lease from Boduluri Kotaiah, a Kamma caste person, in 1985. The lease has continued since then. She says that she started tobacco cultivation by seeing the profits enjoyed by others. According to her, in tobacco cultivation, family members get enough work for themselves and can also give work to others. She purchased one acre of land in 1986 for INR 2,000. Since then, she has been getting good profits from tobacco cultivation. The money she earned was spent in extending her house, which cost her INR 100,000. Her first daughter got married in 1991 and she gave her a dowry of INR 30,000. Her second daughter got married in 1995 and INR 50,000 was given as dowry. In 2000, her last

daughter got married and she gave her a dowry of INR 70,000. Recently, she purchased 10 sovereigns of gold for about INR 130,000. Her son is pursuing an undergraduate course in Ongole. In 2001, she purchased a house site for INR 100,000 and constructed a house in Ongole town, for which she spent INR 100,000.

Impact of Tobacco Cultivation on Dwellings

The cultivation of tobacco has changed the nature and style of dwellings in Karavadi village due to increased income. The dwellings of Dalit agricultural labourers, in particular, have undergone considerable change after tobacco cultivation was introduced. They used to live in houses with mud walls thatched with braided palm leaves and floor smeared with cow dung, which became damp and wet in the rainy season. Now the dwellings are of city type using lateritic stone, cement, concrete and tiled roofs. The Dalits have started building houses in imitation of farmers or landlords. In Karavadi, only one Dalit household lives in a thatch-roofed house (Table 4), whereas in Veerabhadrapuram, 17.3 percent of the Dalits continue to live in thatched houses. Interestingly, while 45.6 percent of the Dalits in Karavadi have flush toilets in their houses (Table 5), 97.1 percent of the Dalits in Veerabhadrapuram do not have these facilities in their houses and use open

Table 4: Types of house of Dalits

S. No.	House types	Karavadi	Veerabhadrapuram
1	Houses with thatched roof	1 (0.1)	95 (17.3)
2	Houses with tiled roof	-	-
3	Houses with cement slab	707 (99.9)	454 (82.7)
	Total	708 (100)	549 (100)

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in Parentheses)

Table 5: Toilet facilities in the houses of Dalits

S. No.	Types of toilet	Karavadi	Veerabhadrapuram
1	No facility	385 (54.4)	533 (97.1)
2	Flush toilets	323 (45.6)	16 (2.9)
	Total	708 (100)	549 (100)

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in parentheses)

spaces, bushes and farms to attend to the call of nature. The Dalits in Karavadi made use of the government scheme of *pucca* houses in 1985 under the Indiramma houses scheme, an Andhra Pradesh initiative to help below poverty line families build permanent houses, by adding money from their own savings. Under this scheme, there was no provision for construction of toilets, but the Dalit constructed the toilets on their own.

Type of Family

The traditional joint families, though it persists, is breaking up and paving the way for nuclear families due to the increased incomes of the Dalit agricultural labourers in Karavadi. In Veerabhadrapuram however, there is no change in the institution of family among the Dalit agricultural labourers and one finds more joint families in the Veerabhadrapuram village (Table 6). The table shows that nuclear families are common among the Dalits in Karavadi village though a very small proportion of traditional joint families still exist. In Veerabhadrapuram, a joint family is a common pattern among the agricultural labourers though nuclear families do exist in some proportion. Elders complain about the break-up of joint family living in Karavadi and there is predominance of nuclear family among the castes. The main causes of the break-up of joint family villagers perceive is due to economic changes that have taken place during the last five decades. New economic opportunities and more remunerative tobacco cultivation have given rise to the display of individual abilities, and desire for independent living. Among the agricultural labourers the new opportunities to earn cash induce married couples to seek indepen-

dence from the parents. They want to work independently and save money for independent houses and acquire consumables such as cell phones, motorbikes, jewellery, costly saris, etc. Farmers have bought tractors and agricultural labourers have bought buffalos in Karavadi village.

Items of Expenditure

The expenditure pattern reveals the other side of the income. It shows that in Karavadi, the Dalit labourers are spending more on education of their children (20.2%). In case of Veerabhadrapuram, the major amount goes towards food (49.5%) and only (4.6) percent is spent on education. Similarly, medical and health care is another area where a good percentage of income is spent in Karavadi (Table 7).

Indebtedness of the Dalits Peasants

Along with the increase of incomes, the aspirations of the people have also increased. The spending on various needs such as farming, education and health has led to indebtedness also. However, the pattern of indebtedness in the two villages is different. In Karavadi, indebtedness is very low because the labourers are able to meet their basic necessities with higher income and certainty of employment in tobacco cultivation, whereas, in Veerabhadrapuram with low incomes and uncertainty about employment in agriculture, the labourers are unable to meet their basic necessities and other social and cultural responsibilities (Table 8).

Educational Levels of the Children of Dalits Peasants

The increased incomes in Karavadi have motivated the labourers to educate their children. While the percentage of illiterates in Karavadi is 45.0 percent, it is 82.1 percent in Veerabhadrapuram. The increased incomes have enabled the agricultural labourers to send their children to schools, and the educated children who have acquired jobs are helping the families in achieving a better standard of life. Table 9 shows the details of education among the children. It may be noticed that there are quite a few who have studied beyond high school and at-

Table 6: Types of families among the Dalits

S. No.	Types of family	Karavadi	Veerabhadrapuram
1	Nuclear family	676 (95.5)	249 (45.4)
2	Nuclear extended family	12 (1.7)	40 (7.3)
3	Joint family	6 (0.8)	-
4	Joint extended family	1 (0.1)	240 (43.7)
5	Broken family	13 (1.8)	20 (3.6)
	Total	708 (100)	549 (100)

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in parentheses)

Table 7: Item household expenditure and main occupation

S. No.	Items of expenditure	Karavadi				Veerabhadrapuram			
		Cultivators	Tobacco labourers	Other employment	Total	Cultivators	Agri. Labourers	Other employment	Total
1	Food	25,000 (11.9)	20,600 (34.7)	40,000 (30.3)	85,600 (31.0)	20,000 (20.1)	15,000 (49.5)	21,000 (48.4)	56,000 (46.7)
2	Agriculture	125,000 (59.7)	-	-	-	40,000 (40.0)	-	-	-
3	Tobacco, pan, Intoxicants	5000 (2.4)	3000 (5.1)	8000 (6.1)	16,000 (5.8)	3000 (3.0)	2000 (6.6)	3500 (8.1)	8500 (7.1)
4	Fuel and lighting	1500 (0.7)	1200 (2.0)	2000 (1.5)	4700 (1.7)	500 (5.0)	400 (1.3)	600 (1.4)	1500 (1.3)
5	Clothing	10,000 (4.8)	6000 (10.1)	15,000 (11.4)	31,000 (11.2)	5000 (15.1)	4000 (13.2)	6000 (13.8)	15,000 (12.5)
6	Education	20,000 (9.5)	12,000 (20.2)	30,000 (22.7)	62,000 (22.5)	1500 (2.0)	1400 (4.6)	1800 (4.1)	4700 (4.5)
7	Medical/personal care	8000 (3.8)	4000 (6.7)	10,000 (7.6)	22,000 (8.0)	2000 (2.5)	1600 (5.3)	1800 (4.1)	5400 (4.8)
8	Transport	3000 (1.4)	2000 (3.4)	7000 (5.3)	12,000 (4.4)	2500 (2.0)	1400 (4.6)	1900 (4.4)	5800 (3.8)
9	Recreation	4000 (1.9)	4500 (7.6)	6000 (4.5)	14,500 (5.3)	2000 (2.0)	1500 (5.0)	1000 (2.3)	4500 (4)
10	Religious	3000 (1.4)	3000 (5.1)	8000 (6.1)	14,000 (5.1)	2000 (2.0)	1000 (3.3)	1800 (4.1)	4800 (4)
11	Miscellaneous	5000 (2.4)	3000 (5.1)	6000 (4.5)	14,000 (5.1)	3000 (3.0)	2000 (6.6)	4000 (9.2)	9000 (7.5)
	Total	209,500(100.)	59,00 (100)	132,000 (100)	275,800 (100)	99,500(100)	30,300 (100)	43,400 (100)	104,400 (100)

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in parentheses)

Table 8: Amount of loans taken by the Dalit

S. No.	Loan amount	Karavadi	Veerabhadrapuram
1	Below Rs1000	9 (18.8)	20 (10.1)
2	Rs 1000-5000	16 (33.3)	46 (23.2)
3	Rs 5000-10,000	10 (20.8)	55 (27.8)
4	Rs 10,000-15,000	4 (8.3)	16 (8.1)
5	Rs 15,000-20,000	-	27 (13.6)
6	Rs 20,000-25,000	-	22 (11.1)
7	Above Rs 25,000	9 (18.8)	12 (6.1)
	Total	48 (100)	198(100)

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in parentheses)

tended, or are attending professional courses from among the agricultural labourers families of Karavadi. However, this is not the case in Veerabhadrapuram.

Relationship Between Landlords and Agricultural Labourers

Before the introduction of tobacco cultivation in the Karavadi village, the Dalits were working as agricultural labourers on the farms and in the houses of *asami* on very low wages and grains. Every Dalit household was found attached to an *asami* household. Most Dalits were illiterates and not aware of their rights and did not participate in social development programmes and political activities as well. No one was a member of the Panchayat or trade union. There were no caste organisations in the village. After the start of tobacco cultivation in Karavadi village, the agricultural labourers started forming groups like *muttas* and demanding higher wages also. The *muttas* organisation took up the most burning issues of wages and employment. They are basically workers and are driven by their consciousness, their self-perception and their interpretation of social relations. They are politically motivated and organised and go on strikes demanding higher wages. In Veerabhadrapuram village, the agricultural labourers do not have any labour organisations and most of them are illiterate. The tradition continuing in Veerabhadrapuram village is that Dalits go to the house of the landlord after brushing his teeth with charcoal or *neem* twigs to work as a farm servant and receive three measures of *jowar* (*three manikalu*).

Table 9: Educational levels of the agricultural labourers children

S. No.	Level of education	Karavadi			Veerabhadrapuram		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Illiterate	36 (21.3)	131 (78.4)	167 (8.7)	294 (46.6)	337 (53.4)	631 (58)
2	Able to read and write	185 (48.1)	200 (51.9)	385(20.2)	74 (48.7)	78 (51.3)	153 (14)
3	Up to primary	300 (51.7)	280 (48.3)	580(30.4)	84 (51.2)	80 (48.8)	164 (15.1)
4	UP to high school	280 (54.9)	230 (45.1)	510(26.7)	75 (53.2)	66 (46.8)	141 (13)
5	Engineering, medical graduates	53 (63.4)	30 (36.3)	82 (4.3)	-	-	-
6	Inter from degree	80 (57.1)	60 (42.9)	140 (7.3)	-	-	-
7	I.T.I and polytechnic	10 (71.4)	4 (28.6)	14 (0.7)	-	-	-
8	PG and PhD technical and general	22 (68.8)	10 (31.3)	22 (1.7)	-	-	-

Source: Primary data
(Percentages in parentheses)

Tobacco cultivation in Karavadi has changed the village economy from subsistence to surplus. The increased annual income and agricultural capital of the people has intensified economic differentiation of various communities. Some of them have also entered trade or business activities and Karavadi has developed urban characters with various types of shops, schools, health care facilities, banking facilities, and so on. However, the economic changes have not radically affected inter-caste relations. Tobacco cultivators have been economically, numerically, politically, and ritually the most important social group over labourers.

Inter-caste and inter sub-caste relations were at one time very rigid in Karavadi village. Earlier, the Dalits were never allowed to sit in front of the upper caste people and they sat on the floor. The latter always maintained distance from the Dalits. The different castes and sub-castes lived in social and geographical isolation. Inter-dining was looked upon with horror by the upper caste Hindus. The lower castes were not permitted to worship in temples. However, this state of affairs has undergone a profound change in recent times and inter-caste barriers have practically broken down. After the introduction of tobacco cultivation in this village, the growth of English education among the Dalits and increased numbers of government employees have brought change in the practice of untouchability. They participate in the meetings organised by left parties. They have formed two caste organisations, namely, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Association and Babu-Jagjeevanram Association. These associations collect donations and supply textbooks and notebooks to the schoolgoing children from the Dalit castes. They are conscious objectors to untouchability. They also organise state level competitions on education, games and other activities among the schoolgoing children. As a result of these and with the ideology of Communist Party workers, the Dalits are now allowed draw water from the wells used by the upper castes. The inter-caste relations between the Dalits and non-Dalits are cordial in matters like village festivals and agricultural operations. Almost every Hindu caste in the village has some defined work in conducting the village festivals. People of all castes eat in the houses of Brahmins, but in places assigned

to them, while earlier none of them were allowed to eat along with Brahmins. Secularisation has been accelerated with education and people are now less orthodox in such matters. The gap between the upper castes and lower castes, particularly the Dalits is narrowing. However, in Veerabhadrapuram village, even now the Dalits are facing the acute problem of untouchability. They are not allowed to enter non-Dalit homes, and non-Dalits do not eat together with Dalits on any occasion. They are prohibited from using the common village path, and prohibited from entering the village temples. They have no access to village common/public properties and resources such as wells, ponds, temples, etc. Segregation in seating and food arrangements in village functions and festivals is the social order.

Impact of Tobacco on Power Structure in the Village

With education imparted to their children, the Dalits have got employed in railways as gang men and clerks and in government offices and banks. Some are working in the institutions of teaching and allied professions. Some have become professionals such as lawyers and doctors and they have shown their presence in the new power structures of the village. At the panchayat level as at the youth associations, the top posts in the village hierarchy go to the Dalits. The social distance between upper castes and Dalits has reduced considerably. Earlier, when the Dalits were visiting the houses of the upper castes or Brahmins, they were entering through the back door and they were asked to sit on the floor. But today, the Dalits can enter through the front door and are offered chairs to sit, but this happens more with educated and rich Dalits.

Political Empowerment

In Karavadi, the tobacco labourers are politically conscious and empowered. There are more ward members in the *Panchayat*, but in Veerabhadrapuram, the Dalits are very weak politically. In Karavadi, Dalits contested the 2001 *Panchayat* election for the post of Sarpanch and got elected. In the Mandal Parishad elections of

2001, a Dalit woman was elected as Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency (MPTC) member. In Veerabhadrapuram, no Dalit has ever been elected as Sarpanch of the village and no MPTC member has been elected so far. In Karavadi, the Dalit caste associations function to maintain their political consciousness.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the socio-economic conditions of the labourers in the tobacco industry have improved vastly. Also, they have become more assertive now. On the other hand, in Veerabhadrapuram the agricultural labourers still tend to feel beholden to the big landowners and continue to depend on farming on traditional lines. In Karavadi, many Dalit families are sending their children to schools. On the other hand, in Veerabhadrapuram many Dalit families are withdrawing their children from school and putting them to work as agricultural labourers. In Karavadi, some of the Dalits have transformed themselves into farmers from the earlier stage of wage earners. The traditional relations between landlord and agricultural labourers have been disrupted. Consequently, the hereditary economic relations between upper-caste farmers and the labourers have disappeared. In Veerabhadrapuram, caste-based ritual relationships between Dalit agricultural labourers are still in vogue. The Dalits continue to act as drummers and are still working as annual farm workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While it is clear that cultivation of tobacco has significantly improved the socio-economic conditions of many Dalits, one cannot totally ignore the widespread outcry about the harmful effects of tobacco, both on the consumers and the growers. One must also take into consideration the growing global concern about the need to conserve water. One would recall the recent message of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the farmers to avoid wastage of water while irrigating their fields. He had suggested methods like drip irrigation. Perhaps it is time to consider growing cultivation of crops, which would require the least amount of water.

It is felt that alternative cash crops like coffee, sugarcane and cashew, depending on the climatic and geographical conditions be considered for adoption. For this purpose, a proper cost-benefit analysis should be adopted.

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