Ethnicity, Caste and Religion: Implications for Poverty Outcomes

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18 December 2010

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In the factors that affect income and poverty outcomes, there are some features unique to India. Caste, ethnicity, religion and even regional origins all influence income outcomes. Therefore while examining individual poverty, the influence of social belongings on the level and the nature of access to economic endowments and the individual's ability to utilise them freely are of considerable significance. This paper examines to what extent some ethnic, religious and caste minorities suffer from chronic impoverishment, especially in rural India. What economic endowments are owned by whom and by how much? What is the level of education and occupational skill across different social groups? The analysis is based on the 61st round (2004-05) of the National Sample Survey Organisation's Consumption-Expenditure Survey.

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India's age-old tussle with the poverty of its millions is quite a unique phenomenon. On the one hand, this scuffle finds consonance with the nature of impoverishment observed the world over. On the other, it has its distinct markers. The globally mirrored economic features are ownership of assets, gainful employment and access to endowments such as land and credit, education, health and housing, either privately or publicly provided.

The Indian experience, however, differs in a much more exceptional way. This emanates from the special features characterising individuals, forming a complex mix of religious, ethnic and caste identities. India is not unique with respect to differential incomes. Therefore, the standard of living from different religious, social and/or ethnic backgrounds of individuals is also not unique. However, it stands quite apart in the impact of the social origin such as the caste of the individual, separately and in conjecture with the religious and ethnic features of an individual, in accessing all types of private and public endowments, employment, etc, and, therefore, the resultant income and outcomes.

Indian society is primarily an identity-based society. This identity of an individual stems from caste, ethnic, religious or even regional belongings amongst others. These identities unfortunately are still entrenched in caste and religious hierarchal institutions, governing social conduct and market transactions. This is seen to be more prevalent in the rural areas, where poverty is also high. Though the strict one to one correspondence of the broad caste categories with class has eroded substantially over time, there still remain strong linkages between the two, which have been strengthened by persistent cultural, social and religious ideas and their practice. India, therefore, suffers from its unique problems with their implications for livelihood outcomes, somewhat different from societies stratified only on class lines.

Historically, an individual's occupation had been caste-linked and occupational mobility across caste groups has been restricted. Similarly, economic rights, such as the right to ownership of land and business was mainly confined to the upper castes. The same holds true for education and skill attainment. In fact, these rights were graded, which meant that all rights were available to the upper caste and access to them got progressively reduced as one moved down the social hierarchy. This implied that the lowest castes, which were located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy – the untouchables (the scheduled castes (SCs)) – received no rights whatsoever. The ethnic minorities (scheduled tribes

(STs)) too have suffered from historic exclusion due to their geographic isolation and cultural/religious differences.

Though the situation has changed substantially over time, strong undercurrents remain and caste/ethnicity is seen to be difficult to dislodge in normal social settings. It seems to have acquired the status of the quintessential social identifier. It is a well-documented fact that the levels of poverty are higher among the SCs, STs on the whole, and among other group minorities such as the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and the SCs and STs within the Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh and Christian communities in India (Borooah 2010; Desai, Adams and Dubey 2010). Poverty, therefore, is more likely to be a visible symptom of the invisible infliction of social division, exclusion and discrimination on the basis of social identity, caste, religion, ethnicity, region and gender to which either one may be linked to and ignored or denied on the basis of.

Therefore, while examining individual poverty, the influence of social belongings on the level and the nature of access to economic endowments and the individual's ability to utilise them freely would be of considerable significance. This paper dwells on this specific feature of poverty and examines why some ethnic, religious and caste minorities seem to suffer from chronic impoverishment, especially in rural India. What economic endowments are owned, by whom and by how much? What is the level of education and occupational skill across different social groups? These are some of the questions to which an answer is attempted in the following sections.

The analysis is based on the 61st round (2004-05) of the National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) Consumption-Expenditure Survey. Since the poor are concentrated largely in rural India, the analysis is restricted to examining the characteristics of the rural poor. Using the Planning Commission's poverty lines, the estimates of poverty are worked out at aggregate and disaggregate levels by caste and religion. The head-count ratios are estimated for SCs, STs, OBCs and others and for main religious groups, namely, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and others. Further, the poverty estimates are also worked out for SCs, STs, OBCs and others by their religion. Moreover, since caste and religious identities are seen to influence the ownership of income earning assets, level of education and skills and occupation type in rural areas and their effect on economic outcomes, we have also estimated poverty for social and religious groups by their economic characteristics, namely, household or livelihood type and education level. (Analysis by land-class ownership is not reported for reasons of brevity.) Thus, the poverty rates are estimated by household/livelihood types, which include the self-employed in farm and non-farm activities, wage labour, households engaged in farm and non-farm works and by education levels. We first capture the incidence of poverty by caste, ethnic and religious groups and for caste groups by their religious grouping. This is followed by the analysis of poverty of caste and religious groups by economic categorisation. Lastly, using a logistic regression exercise we

also measure the risk of being poor, in each social group, given its religious background.

Poverty Levels across Religious Groups

We begin by looking at poverty levels across religious groups in India. Table 1 shows not only the incidence of poverty across religious groups, but also the distribution of India's rural population across religious groups. Slightly more than four-fifths, i e, around 83% of the population, are Hindus; the Muslims (11%) form the second largest group; the Christians and the Sikhs come next at around 2% each, while the remaining groups have a less than 1% share each. However, one must keep in mind that the smaller groups are sizeable in terms of numbers.

Table 1: Poverty Rates and Population Shares by Religion, 2004-05, Rural (%)

Religion	Poor	Pop Share	Estimated No
Hindus	28.9	83.7	61,35,75,158
Muslims	29.26	11.38	8,34,55,885
Christians	16.21	1.99	1,45,93,845
Sikhs	5	1.94	1,42,52,719
Jains	2.59	0.09	6,66,874
Buddhists	40.59	0.54	39,48,603
Zoroastrians	35.42	0.01	58,755
Others	36.02	0.34	24,84,078
Total	28.3	100	61,35,75,158

Based on NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Survey, 61st round, 2004-05.

Aggregate poverty in rural India stood at 28.28% in 2004-05, based on the Planning Commission's rural poverty line for all India and the NSSO data for consumption expenditure.

The disaggregated picture, as expected, shows wide fluctuations in the incidence across religious groups in India. The highest incidence is seen for the Buddhists (40%). The next highest incidence is seen for the second largest and the largest religious groups, respectively for the Muslims (28%) and the Hindus (29%), who suffer near identical rates. The Christians and the Sikhs show the lowest rates at 16% and 5%, respectively, but it is the Jains who have the lowest poverty incidence at 2%. Thus, the Buddhists, one of the smallest religious minorities, have the highest poverty rate, while the two largest groups – the Hindus and the Muslims – show near average rates, while the other three minorities, the Christians, Sikhs and the Jains have the lowest poverty incidence.

The prevalence and widespread reach of education amongst the Christians seems to have helped them in this regard and given them access to regular employment. The Jains are a small and closed religious group. They have, however, been a very successful trading community, and have attained both education and expertise in trading for long. Marriages within the community have ensured that both occupational skill and accumulated wealth remained within the community over generations, acting as a multiplier over time. The Sikhs have benefited from the success which they attained in farming and dairying initially, subsequently diversifying the incomes from these into all forms of ventures. The money from their primary occupations combined with their risk-taking ability and entrepreneurial abilities have seen the community attain economic prosperity over a short period of time in history.

However, if we take a closer look at these religious communities and look at the sub-groups, namely, the low castes (SCs), the OBCs and the tribals (STs), a slightly different picture emerges within them. Before we do that let us quickly look at the poverty level across various social groups in India, at the aggregate.

Social Groups: Caste and Ethnic Features

Table 2 shows poverty incidence across SCs, STs, OBCs and the rest, the others (OTH).

We find that the tribals, who are a numerical minority, still show the highest poverty incidence in the country, of around 47%, nearly half of their population lives below the poverty line. The SCs follow next, with 36% of their population being poor. The OBCs who are the largest single group show the second lowest poverty incidence at 26% and the OTH, with the second largest population, have the lowest share of their population, 15% living below the poverty line.

Table 2: Poverty by Social Groups, 2004-05, Rural (%)

Social Groups	Poor	Pop Share
ST	47.64	10.57
SC	36.81	20.92
OBC	26.73	42.75
OTH	15.98	25.71
Total	28.29	100

Based on NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Survey, 61st round, 2004-05.

The smallest two population groups, the STs and the SCs, show the highest two poverty rates.

Socio-Religious Groups

Taking up from the last two sections, in Table 3 we look at the poverty levels across social groups within religious communities. The first thing to notice is that the highest rates are seen either for the STs or the SCs across all religions. The second highest incidence is seen again, either for the STs or the SCs, except amongst the Muslims and the Buddhists where the OBCs show the same. Looking across religious groups, amongst the Hindus, the highest incidence of poverty is seen for the STs at 50%. They are followed by the SCs with an incidence of 37%. Amongst the Muslims, the highest rates are seen for the SCs at nearly 40%, followed next by the OBCs at 32%.

Table 3: Poverty Incidence by Religious and Social Groups, 2004-05, Rural (%)

Religion	ST	SC	OBC	OTH	Total
Hindus	50.55	37.65	26.49	12.72	28.90
Muslims	21.78	39.61	32.05	27.29	29.22
Christians	21.73	30.08	13.90	6.56	16.21
Sikhs	45.99	7.64	6.84	0.35	5
Jains	0	0	0	2.90	2.59
Buddhists	12.14	45.91	18.36	3.56	40.60
Zoroastrians	0	0	100	0	35.42
Others	37.36	55.75	0.00	0.00	36.02
Total	47.63	36.81	26.73	15.98	28.28

Based on NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Survey, 61st round, 2004-05.

Interestingly, amongst the Muslims, we also notice that incidence figures are available for STs as well. Traditionally, Muslims are not seen as generally having tribal lineages. However, the NSSO data shows households which have identified themselves as not only Muslims, but also being of tribal heritage. These are mostly likely nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, of the kind of people found in regions bordering India and Pakistan, in Rajasthan and Kashmir, etc.

Amongst the Christians, we find the SCs suffering the highest incidence at 30%, followed by the STs at 21%. Amongst the Sikhs, we find that the SCs and the OBCs show a near equal incidence of

around 6% to 7%. The STs amongst them, which is a contentious group, show a very high incidence of 45%. The OTH among the Sikhs show the lowest rates of less than 1%.

The Jains are seen to have not identified themselves as being associated with any social groupings and one of the reasons for this is also the fact of a near zero level of poverty incidence amongst them. The SCs amongst the Buddhists show the highest incidence in this religious group of around 45%, which is also the third highest incidence across all socio-religious groups.

Thus, poverty incidence definitely varies widely within religious communities across social groups. The highest and the second highest incidence are seen for the STs and the SCs in general, while the second highest incidence is for the OBCs amongst the Muslims and the Buddhists. The OTH show the lowest rates in all religious groups. Here it would be appropriate to remember that apart from the Hindus, Christians and the Buddhists, no other community has been constitutionally recognised as having subcaste groups. The Muslim community's recent demand for reservations for the OBCs amongst them is a new recognition of the intra-group differences in well-being standards.

What this therefore implies is that conversion to Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism cannot completely wipe out people's earlier caste/ethnic identities and people seem to carry these with them, even after conversion. Caste/ethnicity seems to be a sticky identifier, difficult to dislodge, not so much for the one trying to convert and form a new identity, but more so for the others receiving him or her into the new faith.

Poverty by Economic Characteristics: Given these differences in poverty incidence across socio-religious groups, we now look closely, at their access to education and type of occupation, as well as the level of poverty suffered by these socio-religious groups by these two characteristics. We have not included the analysis on land, as changing one's ownership of land tends to be difficult, while accessing education and/or changing occupation is easier to accomplish.

Table 4: Poverty Rates and Population Shares by Social and Religious Groups across Household Types (2004-05, %)

Religion		Household Type								
		SENA		AL		OL		SEA		OTH
		Share	Rate	Share	Rate	Share	Rate	Share	Rate	Share
Hindus	ST	6.66	39.03	36.22	61.92	12.30	46.24	40.03	46.39	4.80
	SC	15.61	33.91	40.37	49.07	15.14	35.08	22.17	27.41	6.71
	OBC	16.77	21.73	21.79	43.70	8.82	29.30	44.91	21.31	7.70
	OTH	14.93	9.53	11.86	31.21	6.39	14.81	53.92	11.00	12.90
Muslims	ST	7.10	1.84	21.02	62.88	3.28	–	41.32	26.67	27.29
	SC	23.58	45.65	24.96	62.34	9.30	–	28.64	46.38	13.52
	OBC	34.69	30.42	16.56	49.72	12.54	28.86	22.71	26.78	13.51
	OTH	25.75	26.39	21.21	42.56	9.81	32.18	34.30	19.77	8.92
Christians	ST	7.58	12.42	12.68	35.10	2.96	32.90	63.56	23.00	13.22
	SC	9.84	40.54	54.43	26.31	20.57	42.63	5.07	52.00	10.09
	OBC	15.37	5.02	21.94	32.23	31.85	9.27	17.49	10.83	13.35
	OTH	16.58		14.67	21.67	22.85	5.49	31.26	3.32	14.64
Sikhs	ST	7.37	–	14.09	–	50.09	–	17.58	–	10.88
	SC	16.80	3.31	44.43	11.66	25.24	7.53	3.94	–	9.58
	OBC	25.17	3.89	23.63	13.09	10.44	15.29	27.59	–	13.17
	OTH	9.08		1.64	17.69	5.69	0.26	73.15	–	10.45
Buddhists	ST	7.84	5.40	7.45	2.26	27.69	27.24	44.74	8.65	12.28
	SC	6.80	28.14	65.51	57.66	6.12	50.05	13.10	20.95	8.47
	OBC	31.83	57.70	0.00		11.99		40.30		15.88
	OTH	9.30		0.33		4.00	27.07	83.77	2.96	2.59

" Share" indicates the percentage of household in total households.
Based on NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Survey, 61st round, 2004-05.

Household Type by Source of Livelihood: We first begin by looking at poverty level in socio-religious communities according to their sources of livelihood (Table 4). Rural India is predominantly dependent on agriculture, with 65% of the rural population still directly or indirectly dependent on it. In this context, the ability to own land for cultivation and to run non-farm businesses, and the opportunities to find farm and non-farm work decide the regularity and level of household income, and therefore poverty outcomes. Given an unequal playing field, across socio-religious backgrounds, incomes and poverty outcomes become significantly dependent on these socio-religious affiliations. The NSSO classifies the rural households into five household occupation types, namely, self-employed in agriculture (SEA) and in non-agriculture (SENA), agriculture labour (AL), other labour (OL) and other (Table 4).

Poverty Rates by Social and Religious Groups across Household Occupation Groups

Looking at the occupational features of social groups within religious communities, we start by looking at the majority group, the Hindus. We find that the STs are largely owner-cultivators (40%), as they have traditionally been. A near equal share of their population (36%) work as agricultural labourers. Thus, 76% of the tribals depend on manual labour and earn a living from it by either working their own or someone else's land.

The SCs, on the other hand, are largely agricultural workers, (40%) which is not surprising as traditionally they had no land-ownership rights. Though over time, the situation has changed significantly and we find 22% are now owner-cultivators.

Moving on to the OBCs, we find that they too are largely owner-cultivators (44%), and the second largest share of their population (22%) is employed as agricultural labourers. The largest share of population engaged as owner-cultivators is, however, seen in the OTH of the Hindus at 53%, while among them the second largest share is seen as self-employed in non-agriculture (14%). Thus, the Hindu STs and OBCs are primarily self-employed in agriculture followed by being employed as agricultural labour. For the SCs, it is exactly the reverse, while the OTH are largely self-employed in agriculture and non-agriculture, indicating a better access to assets.

Poverty rates, however, are highest for the STs and the second highest for the SCs, while, across all Hindu household types, the lowest poverty rates are for the OTH. Conversely across social groups, the highest poverty is seen amongst the AL and the OL.

Amongst the Muslims, we observe a much more varied pattern. Of the SC population among the Muslims, those in SEA, SENA and AL are around 25% each of the total. The OBCs, who are the largest group amongst the Muslims, are seen to be largely SENA (34%) – petty business – followed by SEA (22%) and lastly as AL (6%). Nearly 60% of the OTH amongst the Muslims work either as SENA or SEA, while 21% and 9% work as AL and OL, respectively.

Poverty rates for the Muslims are also the highest for the SCs, followed by the STs.

Moving on to the Christians, we find that 63% of the STs are SEA, with an additional 12% working as AL and another 13% in other works. Amongst the SCs, on the other hand, nearly half are working as AL, and another 20% as OL, indicating predominance of dependence on manual labour. Of the OBCs, nearly half are seen to be distributed amongst the SENA (32%) and the SEA (22%) categories, indicating an access to land and capital endowments. Interestingly, amongst the OTH, while 31% are SEA, another 22% work as OL and 14% as AL.

Poverty rates amongst the Christians are the highest for the SCs across all but one household type, namely, AL, where the STs show the same.

The poverty rates within the Sikhs and Buddhists – the two small groups – according to social and occupation types – are listed in Table 4. The largest share of population working as AL across any socio-religious group is seen amongst the Buddhist SCs with a share of 65%. The next highest share is of 13% as SEA. The OBCs are concentrated as either SEA (40%) or as SENA (31%). The OTH amongst the Buddhists are nearly all SEA (83%).

Poverty rates are the highest for the SCs across all categories of household types. Only amongst the SEA, we do see the rates being the highest for the OBCs followed by the SCs.

In conclusion, we can safely say that the SCs are seen largely working as AL in all religious groups, except amongst the Muslims where they are also SEA. The STs, on the other hand, are seen to be SEA in all religious groups. The OBCs are seen to be owner-cultivators in all the religious groups except the Muslims, where they are SENA and the Christians where they work as OL.

Poverty incidence is seen to be invariably the highest for the SCs followed by the STs and this is seen amongst the Muslims, Christians and the Buddhists, irrespective of the nature of occupation. Exceptions to this where these two social groups interchange positions are the Hindus, where the STs suffer more than the SCs and the Muslims and Sikh OBCs, who work as OL and OTHs and the Buddhists working as SEA.

Poverty Rates by Social and Religious Groups across Educational Categories

In this section, we look at the access which various socio-religious communities have had to education and the level of poverty within each education level (Table 5).

Here we focus only on the major religious groups, which might show wide variations across social groups, dropping the Jains and the Zoroastrians, two economically very well-off and highly educated communities and not comprising subgroup identities. We also examine the major stages in the level of education of individuals, therefore focusing on illiteracy levels, levels of informal attainment of literacy, primary and graduate level education.

Starting with illiteracy rates across socio-religious groups, we notice that illiteracy is highest amongst the STs and the SCs across all the selected religious groups. The incidence of poverty amongst the illiterates is seen to be the highest amongst the Hindu STs and Buddhist SCs, followed by the Muslim and Christian SCs. Thus, poverty is seen to be highest in groups with a high rate of illiteracy. The Sikhs are an exception.

As we move from illiteracy to a bare minimum of literacy, we observe a slight shift in the pattern from what we observed amongst the illiterates. Here the highest incidence of informal literacy is seen primarily amongst the OTH (social group) and the OBCs. The only exceptions are the STs among the Christians and the other categories. Amongst the Hindus and the Muslims, it is the OTH (social group), while amongst the Sikhs and the Buddhists, it is the OBCs which have the highest rates. High poverty in this group is seen for the SCs amongst the other, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian groups and the STs from the Hindu faith.

Moving on to the primary level category, we find that except for the Muslims, the highest rate of primary education is seen in the OTH social group. Amongst the Muslims, the STs show up with the highest incidence, but this is difficult to imagine, both due to the suspect reporting as STs by Muslims and

Table 5: Poverty Rates by Social Groups across Education Categories, for Each Religious Group, Rural (2004-05, %)

Religion		Illiterate			Literate without Formal Schooling			Primary			Graduate and Above	
		Share	Poverty		Share	Poverty		Share	Poverty		Share	Poverty
Hindus	ST	58.55	56.91	ST	28.70	47.09	ST	2.39	20.11	ST	0.58	6.47
	SC	52.81	43.94	SC	29.80	34.94	SC	3.84	19.48	SC	0.93	13.55
	OBC	45.80	32.77	OBC	30.61	26.18	OBC	5.89	12.86	OBC	1.45	5.35
	OTH	30.77	18.17	OTH	31.06	13.68	OTH	10.33	6.55	OTH	4.01	3.12
Muslims	ST	50.94	36.30	ST	31.23	9.86	ST	4.06	0.95	ST	1.45	NA
	SC	62.74	43.76	SC	29.32	38.37	SC	1.42	26.38	SC	0.44	NA
	OBC	51.15	39.93	OBC	31.63	29.31	OBC	3.90	10.32	OBC	0.76	9.13
	OTH	46.11	33.31	OTH	37.10	26.45	OTH	3.76	9.97	OTH	0.76	1.37
Christians	ST	31.79	31.85	ST	38.86	18.92	ST	6.80	11.12	ST	1.48	1.13
	SC	45.79	41.42	SC	28.32	24.31	SC	5.08	10.95	SC	1.16	NA
	OBC	23.48	18.17	OBC	34.12	20.02	OBC	10.15	5.67	OBC	3.82	4.17
	OTH	18.85	14.79	OTH	28.01	7.64	OTH	15.10	4.20	OTH	4.98	
Sikhs	ST	56.35	8.48	ST	19.38	NA	ST	12.03	NA	ST	0.90	NA
	SC	50.65	9.58	SC	32.48	7.64	SC	5.73	1.19	SC	0.90	NA
	OBC	35.05	10.14	OBC	35.47	8.48	OBC	12.18	0.93	OBC	1.52	NA
	OTH	29.85	0.33	OTH	32.68	0.45	OTH	14.11		OTH	2.85	
Buddhists	ST	31.01	17.80	ST	38.28	16.40	ST	7.11	0.88	ST	2.29	NA
	SC	34.07	50.73	SC	32.23	50.52	SC	7.23	23.74	SC	1.36	10.77
	OBC	29.76	30.85	OBC	42.97	14.25	OBC	1.59	NA	OBC	0.23	NA
	OTH	21.99	7.38	OTH	40.14	4.64	OTH	14.00	NA	OTH	2.60	NA
Others	ST	49.35	43.25	ST	31.23	33.37	ST	3.87	22.73	ST	0.55	27.22
	SC	48.25	82.53	SC	24.55	64.87	SC	0.67		SC	0.00	
	OBC	26.21	NA	OBC	27.06	NA	OBC	6.53	NA	OBC	5.97	NA
	OTH	23.49	NA	OTH	25.65	NA	OTH	16.08	NA	OTH	11.16	NA

Based on NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Survey, 61st round, 2004-05.

possibility of a small sample size. The second highest incidence is seen primarily among the OBCs across religious groups.

The highest poverty incidence is seen again for the Buddhist, Muslim and Christian SCs. The STs show the same for the Hindus, and the OTH.

Finally, looking at the graduate and above category, the picture becomes quite stark with the highest incidence seen only amongst the OTH across most religious groups, except for the STs amongst the Muslims (problem of significance) and the Buddhists, predominantly from the north-eastern regions of the country.

Poverty patterns amongst the graduates change somewhat with the SCs showing a high incidence amongst the Buddhists and the Hindus. However, we find the OBCs the highest for the Muslims and Christians.

Thus, it is quite interesting to find, first, that, education levels vary across social groups within religious groups, giving rise to the contention that religious similarity does not translate into equal access for group members. Second, the level of education seems to follow the pattern seen at the aggregate level for the social groups in rural areas. That is, a high level of illiteracy amongst STs and the SCs and high levels of education amongst the OBCs and the OTH. Unequal access to education associated with social identities, namely, caste and ethnic groupings, seems to be carried forward even after conversion and is reflected in a low level of education amongst deprived section. Despite this, we find that the rate of illiteracy amongst the Christians and the Buddhist STs and SCs is lower than that amongst the Hindus. Also the percentage of those with primary and graduate level of education is higher in the SCs and the STs amongst the Christians and Buddhists as compared to the Hindus, indicating that the STs and the SCs have improved their access to and the level of education after conversion.

The various social groups within the Sikh community are seen to perform similarly with respect to illiteracy and literacy without formal schooling to the Hindus. At the primary level, however, we find the Sikhs doing much better than the Hindus, but at the graduate level doing equally well across all social groups.

In terms of the incidence of poverty, however, we observe, first, that the rates decline across socio-religious groups, as we move from illiteracy to a higher level of education. Second, irrespective of the level of access or education which the social groups enjoy within religious communities, we find that the poverty incidence is almost always the highest either for the SCs or the STs.

Which Group Is More Prone To Be Poor?

Given the fact that poverty rates vary across religious groups and within them across social groups, it would seem appropriate to ask the question, which group is more likely to be poor, given their socio-religious background, given all else being equal? Could we then predict with some degree of confidence the likelihood of a particular socio-religious group or a social group within a given religious group being poor? In the following exercise we conduct a logistic regression exercise to ascertain this.

Given the categorical nature of both the dependent variable poverty (poor = 1, non-poor = 2) and the independent variables, social groups (ST, SC, OBC and OTH) and religion (Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and others) we use a logistic regression model to calculate the odds for any particular group being poor vis-à-vis another or a mean of all the rest of the groups.

We start by examining what odds people might face of being poor, given that they belong to a particular religious group. Given the incidence of poverty for different religious groups above, we can then rank and code the groups, starting with the group with the highest incidence going down to the lowest. We can then compare the odds of being poor for each social group with respect to a chosen base group or to a mean of all the groups. The exercise below does the latter.

Logistic Regression: Here the dependent variable is the poverty status of an individual, poor being 1 and non-poor being 2. The independent variable is religion with the constituent groups being Buddhist = 1, Others = 2, Zoroastrians = 3, Muslims = 4, Hindus = 5, Christians = 6, Sikhs = 7 and Jains = 9. The Jains are taken as the base. The results of an Indicative Logistic Regression (odds compared with respect to the group mean value) are as follows:

Table 6: Odds of Being Poor for Religious Groups and the Incidence of Poverty, Rural (2004-05)

	Poverty Incidence	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig
Buddhist	40.59	25.66	3.24	0.01	4345803.24	7.00	0.00
Others	36.02	21.15	3.05	0.01	174284.38	1.00	0.00
Zoroastrians	35.42	20.60	3.03	0.01	152360.88	1.00	0.00
Muslims	29.26	15.54	2.74	0.01	68422.31	1.00	0.00
Hindus	28.90	15.27	2.73	0.01	126625.79	1.00	0.00
Christians	16.21	7.27	1.98	0.01	125139.94	1.00	0.00
Sikhs	5.00	1.98	0.68	0.01	65701.94	1.00	0.00
	2.59				7629.55	1.00	0.00
Constant	-3.63	0.03	-3.63	0.01	221473.44	1.00	0.00

Based on NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Survey, 61st round, 2004-05.

In Table 6, we can see the religious groups being ranked from the highest to the lowest by their poverty levels as well as the odds of an individual being poor, given his or her social religious group. The Buddhists are seen to be 25 times more likely to be poor than an individual from any other religious group. (It may be mentioned that majority of Buddhists are converted from the low caste untouchables.) If we avoid the two minor groups of "others and Zoroastrians", then the Buddhists are followed by the Muslims and the Hindus at 15, the Christians at seven and the Sikhs just one more likely to be poor than the average of all these groups.

Let us look at the odds of individuals within the religious groups across social belongings.

Table 7 shows the odds of being poor for individuals from a social group within a particular religious community. The odds are measured with the OTH groups taken as the base. The highest

Table 7: Odds of Being Poor across Social Groups, from Each Religious Group (2004-05)

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Zoroastrians	Jains
ST	7.02	0.74	3.95	241.80	3.74	N A	Base
SC	4.14	1.75	6.12	23.49	22.99	N A	Base
OBC	2.47	1.26	2.30	20.85	6.09	N A	Base
OTH	0.15	0.38	0.07	0.00	0.04	N A	Base

Based on NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Survey, 61st round, 2004-05.

odds of being poor are seen for the STs amongst the Hindus and the Sikhs. The odds for the STs being poor are seven times higher, while those for the Sikhs are 241 times higher. The odds for the ST Sikhs show up so high as the sample size of the Sikh STs (if this was reported at all and is not a data entry mistake) could be minuscule and these would mostly be poor (sample size = 117, poor=100, non-poor=17), hence the exaggerated odds.

The SCs are seen to show the highest odds of being poor amongst the Christians (six times) and the Buddhists (22 times) as compared to the OTH group. The OBCs, on the other hand, show lower odds than the SCs and the STs across all religious groups except for amongst the Muslims, where they share the same level of risk with the SCs. The fact that the odds for the SCs, STs and the OBCs are never negative with respect to the OTH shows that the odds for the OTH are the lowest in the group across all religious communities and are highest for STs and SCs.

Discussion

The results clearly indicates that poverty levels for members of various religious groups are not uniform in India and are seen to vary significantly across ethnic and caste-based identities of group members. The pattern observed for the level of poverty for the STs, SCs, OBCs and OTH at the aggregate national level is more or less seen to be repeated across religious groups, with some exceptions here and there. Therefore, the pattern of poverty being the highest amongst the STs, followed by the SCs, the OBCs, and lastly the OTH, is seen repeating across different religious groups. In some cases the STs and the SCs are seen to trade places as well. The relative differences in the level of poverty, suffered by social groups, however, vary across religious sects. This implies that though the STs might show the highest incidence across most religious groups, the poverty incidence of the Hindu STs would be much higher than that of the Christian STs and lowest for the Buddhist STs. Moreover, we find that this pattern is seen to repeat more or less across economic categorisations of socio-religious groups as well, namely, across education levels and types of household occupations.

The reason for this poverty differential across social groups, within religious communities lies in the fact of the initial unequal and discriminatory access to skill and education (as well as land and capital endowments) and unfree occupational mobility. The tribals across the country, in the absence of access to education, are highly dependent on agriculture, which has been their traditional source of livelihood. However, their agriculture is subsistence and small domestic market-oriented. A few who have improved their situation have had education and got government jobs largely under the reservation schemes. The SCs on the other hand, suffered from a lack of rights to own land and possess capital and are seen to still face problems with respect to both. A traditional denial of the right to knowledge too has kept them out of the sphere of the educated and skilled workforce. On the other hand, the OBCs on the whole have had land and have managed to maintain their status quo. The OTH, who enjoyed all rights, such as that to education, landownership, access to capital, etc, have high levels of education and access to physical and capital endowments.

These particular features of social groups are seen to survive and are carried forward even when people have moved from one religious fold to another. Somehow religious faith seems to be not strong enough to dilute the inter-member differences. This dilution though is higher amongst the Christians, mostly due to better access to education. Amongst the Sikhs, their early adoption of green revolution technologies and dairying, led to economic sufficiency and with the diversification of this growth into entrepreneurial ventures, tapping into their community-based network, domestically and internationally helped see them do very well economically.

For a few religious groups, like the Jains and the Zoroastrians, who are some of the most highly skilled/educated and prosperous communities in the country and whose members do not identify themselves with any subgroup, for these one would be tempted to say that they seem to have been successful in eradicating subgroup identities either ethnic or caste within their fold. We can arrive at this conclusion as our data indicates that individuals from these two religious groups have not identified themselves as belonging to either ST or SC lineage. However, both these groups could be historically from the same ethnic/group background (Zoroastrians descend from a group of Iranian Zoroastrians who immigrated to western India during the 10th century AD, due to persecution in Iran) and are known to marry strictly within their communities.

Religious and social identity, therefore, goes a long way in determining people's final level of well-being, at least in economic terms. This has precise policy implications insofar as poverty mitigating targeting programmes are concerned. Where impoverishment is a result of lack of access to information, education, skill and land and capital endowments and the access/denial/partial access to these, in turn, is a function of one's socio-religious belongings, state-level targeting can play a vital role. By identifying each socio-religious community's specific drawbacks, it would then be possible to direct the existing programmes in a more focused and targeted manner or to develop new and more effective and innovative measures to address group-specific problems.

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