

Economic and Political Perspectives of Fourth World Populations In India

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Introduction

The Fourth World concept is an expansion of the “Three Worlds” model of economic classification of states that emerged after World War II when the world split into large geopolitical blocs and spheres of influence with contrary views on government and society. Three Worlds Theory, developed by Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong, posited that international relations comprise three politico-economic worlds: the First World consisting of the bloc of democratic-industrial countries within the American sphere of influence (e.g. United States, England, Canada), the Second World of communist-socialist states in the Eastern bloc (e.g. Soviet Union China, North Korea, North Vietnam), and the remaining Third World was three-quarters of the world’s population in states not aligned with either bloc.

However, unlike the three classifications, the Fourth World is not geographically and economically bounded in terms of performing state economies and does not map onto citizenship regimes of a specific state. It refers to original populations, often excluded from global society and living outside of the modern industrial norm. It can be said that the Fourth World is a special world within the other worlds.

The concept of Fourth World emerged with the publication of the book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* by George Manuel and Michael Posluns. Both leaders in the North American Indian movement, this book presented an informative and important historical document that traces the struggle for Indian survival as distinct nations and

cultures (Slowey, 2005). Dyck (1985) describes the Fourth World as original populations who have been politically weakened, economically marginalized, and culturally stigmatized by members of the state societies that have overtaken them and their lands. The Fourth World (usually referred to as native or first peoples) consists of the ancient nations from which the patchwork quilt of states was stitched, yet who have no internationally recognized sovereignty (Griggs, 1992). Thus, the peoples of the Fourth World have only limited or no influence in the states to which they belong (Šavelková, 2011).

Fourth World Populations of India and their Socioeconomic Conditions

In India Fourth World peoples are those having historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories and who consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies (Erni, 2008), such as Tribals, Dalits, Adivasi communities, and other so-called “low caste communities.” The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are official designations given to various groups of historically disadvantaged peoples in India. The Simon Commission in 1935 first coined the term ‘Scheduled Castes.’ All the so-called untouchable castes, listed in the 1931 Census of India, came under the category of ‘Scheduled Castes’ through the Government of India Act of 1935. Scheduled Castes are sometimes referred to as Dalits (Das & Mehta, 2016), while ‘Scheduled Tribes’ is used as an official term for Adivasis. The popular tribal communities of India are Naga, Kuki, Bhil, Santhal, and Gond. In India, 461 ethnic groups are recognized

as Scheduled Tribes.

Scheduled Tribes are often conflated with Scheduled Castes in development literature, although they are completely different social categories. Scheduled Tribes do not fall within the caste hierarchy and have distinct cultural and religious practices and social mores. Also, they do not face ritual exclusion, like untouchability, etc. However, Scheduled Castes or 'Dalits' are so-called lower class, untouchable sometimes, in the caste hierarchy (Beteille, 1991). Until the eighteenth century the tribe and caste were used synonymously (Xaxa, 1999). The bifurcation was basically constructed as a census method and it was shown, even if not very clearly, in the 1901 census. After independence the distinction was officially clarified. Scheduled Castes were living in the same society of the existing Three Worlds with certain social restrictions, but Tribes, as mentioned earlier, were in absolute isolation and in a system of absorbing into their own traditional society in terms of all living activities.

The terms are recognized in the Constitution of India and the various groups are designated in one of the categories. During the period of British rule in the Indian sub-continent, they were known as the Depressed Classes. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes comprise about 16.6 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively, of India's population (2011 census).

Gandhi named the untouchables as 'Harijans.' 'Hari' means 'God' and 'Jan' means 'People,' i.e. 'People of God.' Dr. Ambedkar, a reknown leader of Dalit and low caste exploited people of India, strived hard for the recognition of Dalit identity because they are victims under the name of vulnerable caste in Andhra Pradesh.

Fourth world populations in India are socially, religiously, and economically deprived. They are given a very low position in society.

In most of the areas of India, they have no right to worship in the temple. Education and health facilities are utterly inadequate for these deprived nations, even today. The economic characteristic of these Fourth World peoples is largely measured in terms of traditional ways of living, specific to the societies. The position of the Scheduled Castes has a bearing on the division of Hindu society into caste groups. Brahmanas are at the top of the caste hierarchy and 'Untouchables' come at the bottom. Nearly ninety per cent of the Scheduled Caste people live in villages, and work under the command of the dominant castes and landlords. They continue to be economically dependent on the upper castes and because of that they remain exploited.

The Indian Tribes, in comparison, live in the forests and hills. Their occupations or sources of livelihood are hunting and food gathering, cattle rearing, cultivation, and small industrial activities. Often described as "primitive," (implying inferiority) their ancient modes of production mean that little is left for surplus accumulation and exchange with outside groups. With no regulated markets and little motivation for profit, the barter system is still dominantly present within these nations.

The Scheduled Castes constitute a significant demographic strength in India. In 1935, the Scheduled Castes were estimated at about 5 crores;¹ in 1981, they were estimated at 10.475, crores; and in the year 1991, the population was estimated at 13.822 crores—a 36 percent increase in 10 years. According to the 2001 Census, the Scheduled Caste population in India was 166,635,700 people, constituting 16.2 per cent of the country's total population. In 2011 the proportion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population were 16.6 and 8.6 respectively. The 2011 census data of

¹ Five crores=50,000,000 (one=10,000,000)

Table 1: Population of Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribe in India (in millions)

	Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribe	
Year	2001	2011	2001	2011
Persons	166.6	201.4	84.3	104.3
Male	86.1	103.5	42.6	52.4
Female	80.5	97.9	41.7	51.9

Source: India Census 2011

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes population, gender-wise, are shown in Table 1.

In India the largest concentrations of Fourth World populations are found in the Northeast states. Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana are the top five Scheduled Caste - populated states of India. Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh are at the top five states in terms of Scheduled Tribal population in India (Table 2).

Poverty is a worldwide phenomenon but is particularly prevalent within Fourth World populations. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2010) thirty seven percent of the population in India lives below the national poverty line. Of this, the rural population accounts for 41.8 percent and within this group, eighty percent of the

rural poor belong to the marginalized caste and tribal nations. According to a 2014 report to the Ministry of Minority Affairs, over 44.8 percent of Scheduled Tribes and 33.8 percent of Scheduled Caste populations in rural India were living below the poverty line in 2011-12.

In recent years, however, there has been a slight decrease in the overall poverty levels of Fourth World peoples in India—with the steepest reduction seen in the case of Scheduled Castes, both in urban and rural regions. The Planning Commission data showed that the poverty level among Scheduled Castes was closer to that among the overall population (Table 3). In 2004-05, more than half the Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribal population in rural areas was below the poverty line. By 2011-12, poverty among Scheduled Castes in rural areas fell 22 percentage points

Table 2: Top Five Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Populated States

1. No.	Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribe	
	State	Percentage	State	Percentage
	Punjab	31.9%	Lakshadweep	94.8%
	Himachal Pradesh	25.2%	Mizoram	94.4%
	West Bengal	23.5%	Nagaland	86.5%
	Uttar Pradesh	20.7%	Meghalaya	86.1%
	Haryana	20.2%	Arunachal Pradesh	68.8%

Source: India Census 201

Table 3: Poverty Level of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Categories

Year	Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribes		Others		Total	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
2004-05	53.5	40.6	62.3	35.6	27.1	16.1	41.8	25.7
2009-10	43.5	33	47.1	28.8	21.1	11.9	33.8	20.9
2011-12	31.5	21.7	45.5	24.1	15.5	8.2	25.5	13.7

Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs

from 53.5 per cent in 2004-05 to 31.5 percent. During this period, poverty among the overall rural population fell 16.1 percentage points to 25.7 percent. For Scheduled Castes in urban areas, the decline was 19 percentage points from 40.6 percent in 2004-05 to 21.7 percent in 2011-12.

For the overall population in urban areas, poverty fell 12 percentage points to 13.7 percent. The figures are based on the poverty line drawn by former National Statistical Commission Chief Suresh Tendulkar. According to this methodology, a person spending more than Rs 33.33 a day in urban areas and Rs 27.2 in rural regions is considered above the poverty line. After this methodology drew flak from many sections, the government appointed a committee under C. Rangarajan, chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, to revisit poverty estimation.

In rural areas, the number of Scheduled Tribes below the poverty line fell 17 points from 62.3 percent in 2004-05 to 45.3 percent in 2011-12. During the same period, the number of such STs in urban areas fell 11.4 percentage points from 35.5 percent to 24.1 percent.

As shown in Table 4 there is a significant improvement in the literacy rate among both the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes populations. Despite developmental policies undertaken by Indian states and the central government, the vulnerable socioeconomic conditions and livelihoods of Adivasis are

alarming. This is clearly reflected in their poor access to health services, education, employment opportunities, and to various public welfare programmes (Nayak, 2015).

In some areas the Scheduled Castes are still not allowed to access temples, stalls, and public wells or water taps. Sometimes they are not allowed to wear shoes in the presence of an upper caste. Separate areas on the riverbanks (or 'ghat')² are reserved for the upper castes and the Dalit community. In some places Dalits are not allowed to enter the temple. Offerings from Dalits are left at the temple entrance to be picked up later. Separate crematoria for Brahmins and non-Brahmins are still in existence. In some states, 'chamar toil,' a segregated place for the Dalit community, is observed, even in the present era of global liberalization. Dalit children are made to sit separately in schools. Dalits are discouraged from contesting elections. The so-called high caste groups, Thakurs, do not take food cooked by Dalit.

In the ancient period of India, the "primitive" castes were denied all kinds of social and economic endowments. Hence, they lagged behind in the process of "development." The reason for this economic gap is absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit openings, land ownership, and inheritance, lack of access to education and support

² River bank is popularly known as ghat in local vernacular.

Table 4: Reservation Status of Scheduled Castes in Central Government Recruitment (%)

Year	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
1953	00.35	01.29	04.52	20.52
1995	10.13	13.13	15.46	20.46
2004	12.20	14.50	16.90	18.40

Source: 1. Department of Personnel, Government of India, Report-1993 2. Social Welfare Committee for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Report-99-2000, 2004.

services, and their limited ability to participate in political decision-making processes. Since independence, special emphasis has been given to improve the economic conditions of this group because most of the people under this group are below the poverty line.

Special Measures for Fourth World Populations

Indian independence brought with it special emphasis on improving the livelihoods of Fourth World populations in India. It was reflected in the First Five Year Plan³ in the 1950s in the form of welfare programmes by different government initiatives such as the Elwin Committee (1959), and the Scheduled Areas and Tribes Commission (1961). In the eighties and nineties, more specific types of developmental projects like Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs) and the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) were launched for some 'target groups' such as Scheduled Castes and Tribes. These schemes were meant to expose the communities to markets, and products of these schemes could receive monetary value leading to decline in poverty, unemployment, and migration. In the later stage of development a reservation system⁴ was introduced and modified from time to time.

³ After independence India had started development of the country through five year planning. The first five year plan was for the period of 1951-56.

⁴ Special opportunities for the said group remain reserved.

Various movements were also initiated by the leaders of these communities. The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe Act of 1989 was enacted to protect these classes, under which any type of activities mentioned in the previous section like exploitation, untouchability, etc. are considered punishable crimes. Article 15(4) and 16(4) of the Indian constitution has made provisions of reservation for "backward classes" in educational institutions and public employment. The reservation policy is supposed to be adhered to by both central and state governments.

Conclusion

The social and economic inclusiveness of Fourth World populations in India have improved but the perception of their "untouchability" persists like an incurable disease. Fourth World populations are still struggling for the inclusiveness that has become more challenging in the era of globalization. Despite increased incomes, the economic gap between upper caste and lower caste communities continues to remain discriminatory. Even if the institution of untouchability is no longer functioning in rigid ways, it still exists in birth and marriage practices, and community feasts and festivals. An evaluation of target programmes shows only partial, minimally significant results over the years. The lack of recognition as distinct nations with political sovereignty is one of the greatest obstacles facing Fourth

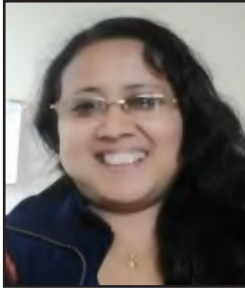
World peoples in India.

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