



Socio-Economic Status And Development Gaps Among The Mala Community: A Village Study In Jagtial District

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Introduction:

Caste is the predominate social factor in Indian society. It has historically shaped social, economic, and political structures in rural India. The Mala community is one among the 59 Scheduled Castes in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Historically, they have faced social discrimination, economic exploitation, and limited access to education and resources due to the caste system. Post-independence India introduced constitutional safeguards, reservations in education and employment, and targeted welfare schemes to promote social justice. Despite various government welfare schemes and constitutional protections, many Mala families continue to experience socio-economic backwardness. Jagtial district, located in Telangana, has a significant Scheduled Caste population. While some sections of the Mala community have progressed through education, employment, and political participation, others remain underdeveloped.

Development is not just an economic growth but also a multidimensional progress which includes,

- Housing conditions
- Educational attainment
- Occupational mobility
- Income enhancement
- Land ownership
- Social dignity and political participation

Underdevelopment refers to structural disadvantages that prevent sections of the community from accessing these opportunities.

About Mala Community:

The Mala community is one of the largest Scheduled Caste (SC) groups in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Historically placed at the lower end of the caste hierarchy, Malas were subjected to untouchability, social exclusion, and economic exploitation. Traditionally, they worked as agricultural labourers, village servants, and in other low-paid manual occupations. Because of this historical marginalization, access to land, education, and social mobility remained limited for generations. According to the Census of India 2011, Scheduled Castes constitute a significant proportion of the population in both Telangana and the erstwhile undivided Andhra Pradesh, and the Mala community forms one of the largest sub-groups within the SC population. The data reflect improvements in literacy rates among SCs compared to earlier decades, indicating gradual educational progress. Post-independence constitutional safeguards, reservations in education and employment, and welfare schemes have enabled sections of the Mala community to achieve upward mobility, particularly in government service and higher education. However, in many rural areas, landlessness, wage dependency, and poverty continue to shape everyday life. Thus, while measurable progress is visible, structural inequalities and internal disparities remain important challenges.

Socio-Economic Profile of the Mala Community

Education

Education is a crucial factor in the development of the Mala community. According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate among Malas was around **60%**, significantly lower than the state average. In recent years, this has improved, with many young people now achieving literacy through government schools, scholarships, and hostel facilities. However, approximately **25–30%** of students still leave school early due to financial constraints, the need to earn income, or lack of access to nearby colleges. Families with at least one graduate or members employed in government jobs estimated at about **10% of households** tend to be more economically stable and socially empowered. This illustrates that education increases opportunities for better jobs, higher income, and improved living conditions, while limited access to education continues to keep a portion of the community underdeveloped.

Occupation and Income

Traditionally, most Mala households have relied on agricultural labour and a significant portion still work as daily wage labourers. A few families have historically served as village servants in revenue administration and small-scale irrigation work. A smaller segment of the community has diversified into government jobs through reservation policies, established small businesses, engaged in private-sector employment, or sought work in other regions and abroad through migration. These differences have led to noticeable income disparities within the community. Families with stable salaried employment generally enjoy greater economic security and opportunities for upward mobility, whereas landless laborers continue to face poverty, limited access to resources, and restricted socio-economic advancement.

Land Ownership

Land remains a crucial determinant of rural development. The majority of Mala households in the selected village are either landless or marginal farmers. Limited access to productive assets perpetuates economic vulnerability. Land-owning families experience relatively higher economic security.

Housing and Living Conditions

Housing and living conditions among the Mala community have improved in recent years, largely due to government welfare schemes such as housing programs for Scheduled Castes. Many households now live in pucca (permanent) houses with access to electricity and drinking water. However, disparities still exist, especially in rural areas, where some families continue to live in semi-pucca or kutchra (temporary) houses. Sanitation facilities, road access, and connectivity remain inadequate in certain villages, affecting overall health and quality of life. Families with better income or government jobs usually enjoy improved housing and basic amenities, while landless labourers and low-income households face persistent challenges. These conditions reflect the uneven development within the community and highlight the need for targeted programs to improve living standards for the most vulnerable households.

Need of the Study:

Following the Supreme Court verdict granting states the authority to categorize Scheduled Castes, the Government of Telangana constituted a one-man commission under Shamim Akhtar. The commission recommended dividing Scheduled Castes into three groups based on their level of development. In this classification, the Mala community was placed in Group III, with the commission suggesting that they are relatively well-developed among Scheduled Castes. However, many members of the Mala community continue to argue that they remain underdeveloped and that opportunities for education, employment, and social advancement should be equitably shared among all Scheduled Communities. In this context, there is a pressing need to examine the socio-economic status of the Mala community at the grassroots level to assess whether they have truly achieved development as claimed.

Scope for the Study:

The selected village is a roadside settlement located approximately 25 kilometres from both Karimnagar and Jagtial district headquarters. Accessibility to the village is relatively easy, which increases the likelihood of educational and employment opportunities for its residents. The village has a significant presence of the Mala community, with 56 households comprising a total population of about 210 individuals.

About the Selected Village:

Namilikonda is one of the major villages situated in Kodimial Mandal of Jagtial District beside the National Highway 563. The total population of this village is about 2700, among them Backward Castes have highest population and Upper castes have low. Among the Backward Castes this village consists of 11 communities namely, Kuruma, Yadava, Gouds, Munnuru Kapu, Padmashali, Mudiraj, Vadrangi, Gold smith, Rajaka, Turaka Kashi, Katika among the Scheduled castes this village consist of 02 communities i.e., Mala and Madigas, among the STs only Erukala community is there. Apart from this the forward communities Reddies, Velmas, Vyashyas and Brahmins and Minorities, are also having significant population in the village.

Objectives:

1. The Main objective for this study is whether the Mala's are forwarded in Development Matrix or not.
- Besides this, there are other objectives as well,
2. Whether the majority of the population from this community is having better infrastructure facilities or not.
3. Whether majority of the families are able to access good employment opportunities or not.
4. Whether the Social and Cultural discrimination still practicing against this community or not.

Hypothesis:

1. H₀: The Mala's are in better position developmental matrix.
H₁: The Malas are still backward in developmental matrix.
2. H₀: The Malas are having better infrastructure facilities, and they are able to access good employment opportunities.
H₁: The Malas not having better infrastructure facilities and they are not able to access good employment opportunities.
3. H₀: The Social and Culture Discrimination is still practicing against this community.
H₁: The Social and Cultural Discrimination is not visible against this community.

Methodology:

The data will be collected from both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data will be gathered from the respondents directly by asking them set of questions on structural format and the secondary data will be poised from the documents which are available in the government offices and websites. The explanatory research design was utilized for this study.

Data Analysis and interpretation:**1. Type of House:**

S. No	Type of House	Number	Percentage
1	Concrete Building	09	16.1%
2.	Semi Pucca	39	69.6%
3	RCC Roof	08	14.3%
4	Hut	00	-
	Total	56	100%

The above data shows, the type of the Housing of all the families in the selected Village. Among the total 56 Households, Majority of the households living in Semi Pucca house, followed by 09 (16.1%) of them living in Concrete building and 08(14.3%) of them living in RCC Roof shelter and none of them living in huts.

2. Condition of the House:

S. No	Type of House	Number	Percentage
1	Good	18	32.1%
2.	Moderate	29	51.8%
3	Worst	09	16.1%
	Total	56	100%

The above table shows the conditions of the houses, among the total number of 56 families, majority of the families 29(51.8%) housing conditions are moderate, followed by 18(32.1%) of the families housing conditions are good and remaining 09(13.1%) of the families housing conditions are worst.

3. Basic Amenities:

Name of the Facility	Number of Families available	Percentage
Separate Kitchen	23	50%
Separate Bedroom	21	37.5%
Vehicle	49	87.5%
TV	51	91%
Toilet	48	85.7%
Tap	45	80.3%
Electricity	56	100%
Phone	54	96.4%
Road Connectivity	46	82.1%

The above table shows availability of the facilities in Malas families of selected village. Out of 56, 23(50%) of the families are having separate kitchen, 21(37.5%) of the families are having separate bed room, 49(87.5%) of the families are having vehicles, 51(91%) of the families are having TV, 48(85.7%) of the families are having toilet facility, 45(80.3%) of the families are having taps, all the families are having electricity facility, 54(96.4%) of the families are having Phone and 46(82.1%) of the families are having road connectivity to their homes.

4. Land Holdings:

S. No	Type of House	Number	Percentage
1	Less than 1 Acre	24	42.8%
2.	1-3 Acers	21	37.6%
3	More than 3 Acers	11	19.6%
	Total	56	100%

Above table shows the land details of the malas. Out of 56. Majority of the families 24(42.8%) are holding less than one acre of land, followed by 21(37.6%) of them having 1-3 Acers and only 11(19.6%) of them holding the land more than 3 Acres.

5. Education:

Education	Num of Families	Percentage
Illiterates	56	100%
School Drop outs	39	69.6%
10 th Class	32	57.1%
Intermediate	11	19.6%
Graduation	21	37.5%
Post-Graduation	17	30.3%
Ph.D.	02	3.5%
ITI	08	14.3%

The above table shows the education qualifications of the family members. Out of 56 families, all the families are having illiterates in their families, whereas 39 (69.6%) of the families are having school dropouts in their families, 32(57.1%) of the families having SSC qualified candidates, 11(19.6%) of the families are having Intermediate qualified, 21(37.5%) of the families are having graduates in their families, 17(30.3%) of the families are having post graduates in their families, 02(3.5%) of the families having Ph.D. holders in their families and 08(14.3%) of the families are having ITI qualified candidates in their families.

6. Employment in the family:

Name of the Facility	Number of Employees	Percentage
Government Employees	08	14.3%
Contract employment in the government sector	05	8.9%
Private Employees	18	32.1%
Wage Laborers	47	83.9%
Agriculture	34	60.7%
Business	03	5.3%
Gulf Migrants	27	48.2%

The above table shows employment pattern within the families. Out of 56, 08(14.3%) of the families are having government employees, 05(8.9%) of the families are having contract employees in government sector, 18(32.1%) of the families are having private employees, 47(83.9%) of the families have wage labourers in their families, 34(60.7%) of the families are having agriculture, 03(5.3%) of the families have business and 27(48.2%) of the families having gulf migrants in their families.

7. Average Family Income:

Name of the Facility	No. of Families	Percentage
Less than 1 Lakh	03	5.3%
1-2 Lakhs	16	28.6%
2 – 3 Lakhs	22	39.3%
3-5 Lakhs	09	16.1%
More than 5 Lakhs	06	10.7%
Total	56	100%

Income is one of the key factor to measure the development of the individual and families. From the about table it can be noted that majority of the families 22(39.3%) are earning 2-3 lakhs annually whereas 16(28.6%) are earning 1-2 lakhs, 09(16.1%) of them earning 3-5 lakhs, 06(10.7%) of the families earning more than 5 lakhs and 03(5.3%) of the families earning less than 1 lakh per annum.

8. Average Family Expenditure:

Range	No. of Families	Percentage
Less than 1 Lakh	17	30.4%
1-2 Lakhs	24	42.8%
2 – 3 Lakhs	11	19.7%
3 Lakhs above	04	7.1%
Total	56	100%

The above table shows annual expenditure of the families. Out of 56, majority of the families 24(42.8%) of the families annual expenditure is between 1-2 lakhs, followed by 17(30.4%) of the families annual expenditure is less than 1 lakh, 11(19.7%) of the families annual expenditure is between 2-3 lakhs and 04(7.1%) of the families annul expenditure is more than 3 lakhs annually.

9. Socio-Culture Discrimination:

Name of the Facility	No. of Families	Percentage
High	02	3.6%
Moderate	20	35.7%
Low	29	51.8%
No Discrimination	05	8.9%
Total	56	100%

Socio-culture discrimination is one of the crucial things which is done by the uppar communities against Scheduled castes including malas. The above table displays current status of socio-economic discrimination. Out of 56 respondents, majority of the respondents 29(51.8%) said the socio-cultural

discrimination against malas is low, followed by 20(35.7%) of the families said it is moderate, 05(8.9%) of them said there is no discrimination and 02(3.6%) of them said high socio-cultural discrimination against malas.

10. Political participation:

Name of the Facility	No. of Families	Percentage
Sarpanch	02	3.5%
Ward Member	06	10.7%
MPTC	02	3.5%
ZPTC	-	-
Any Nominated Posts	02	3.5%
Total	56	100%

The above table shows the political participation of the mala families in selected village. Out of 56 families, 06 (10.7%) families were elected as ward members through the years, followed by 02(3.5%) of the families each elected as Sarpanch, MPTC and get nominated positions. None of the family involved in Mandal Level and Zilla level positions.

Discussion:

1. Housing structure is the important social factor to assess the status of any family. Even today 70% of the families are living in semi pucca houses and majority of the families housing condition is moderate which shows their backwardness. 50% of the families having separate kitchen facility and 37.5% of the families have separate bedroom facility and all most 87.5% of the families have toilet facility and 82.1% of the houses are having road connectivity with their houses. This shows the mala families living with moderate infrastructure facilities.
2. Vehicle, TV, Mobile are most common things in modern day society. More than 80% of the families having all these facilities.
3. Land is the key factors to measure the development of a family. The malas in selected village are small farmers. 42% of them holding less than 1 Acre and 37.5% of them is having less than 3 acres of land. In this aspect they are under developed.
4. Education is another important factor to measure the development of the families. Nearly 37.5% of the families having graduates in their homes and 30% of the families are having post graduates and 3.5% of the families having Ph.D. holders. It shows the families are marching towards development in education sector. With the availability of educational institutions and welfare schemes like scholarships and fees reimbursement the malas focused on educational sector.
5. Employment is another important factor to measure the development. Nearly 15% of the families having government employees and 9% of them having contract employees. But majority 84% of the families having wage laborers and 60% of the families having agriculture, but it is also very lesser quantity. 49% of the families having gulf migrants which means still most of the families are engaging in unorganized sector. So, the employment opportunities need to improve.
6. Average income of the families in 2-3 lakhs, 39% of them said that and 28% of the families' income is between 1-2 lakhs per annum. At the same time 42% of the families annual expenditure is between 1-2 lakhs and 30.4% of the families annual expenditure is less than 1 lakh annually. Which means the annual income is more than the annual expenditure.

7. Political participation is another important factor to measure the development. Less than 10% of the families get the political opportunity that to at village level only which means more than 90% of the families didn't get any political opportunities.

8. Caste based discrimination is still existing against the malas from other communities. 52% of the families cases it is low and 35.7% of the families cases it is moderate and 9% of the families cases there is no caste based discrimination which means the discrimination against the malas is decreasing gradually.

9. The study indicates **partial development** within the Mala community. Improvements are visible in Educational attainment and Basic infrastructure. However, structural constraints persist in Limited land ownership, High dependence on wage labour, Migration for livelihood, restricted access to stable government employment and political participation. Development is uneven and not uniformly distributed among all families.

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Most Mala households have moderate housing, small landholdings, limited income, and low educational attainment, indicating they remain underdeveloped. Therefore H_1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: While basic amenities like electricity and phones are widespread, employment is largely low-paying or informal, showing limited access to infrastructure and stable jobs. Therefore H_1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Over 90% of families report some level of socio-cultural discrimination, confirming that caste-based discrimination persists therefore H_0 is accepted.

Conclusion:

The Mala community, like other Scheduled Castes, has faced social, economic, and political disadvantages for a long time. Even with government welfare schemes, reservations, and legal protections, development has not reached everyone equally. While there is progress in education, basic facilities, and some income from migration, many families still struggle with low income, small land holdings, and insecure jobs. Social and cultural discrimination, though less than before, still exists in some areas. To help the community grow, there is a need for skill development programs, better access to jobs, land reforms, and continued support for education. These steps can help the Mala community improve their living conditions and fully participate in the development of rural Telangana.

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