

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND THE UNEVEN GEOGRAPHY OF LIVING SPACE QUALITY IN INDIA

Alka*

*Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Om Sterling Global University, Hisar

Abstract:

Social groups are collections of individuals who are linked by shared characteristics, interests, and perceive themselves as belonging together. **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Scheduled Tribes (STs)** are specific social groups in India that have historically faced severe social, economic, and political disadvantages. In terms of population share, India comprises of 16.23 percent of its population as scheduled caste i.e. one-sixth of the country's total population as per Census of India, 2011. According to the Census of India, 2011, scheduled tribes make up 8.63 percent of India's population, which is less than one-tenth of the country's total population. When the degree of difference between SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs **increases** (i.e., the gap widens), the disparity index value **increases**, indicating more inequality. Conversely, when the degree of difference between these groups **decreases** (i.e., the gap narrows), the disparity index value **decreases**, indicating less inequality. These variations can be observed in terms of the structure, size, condition, and presence of kitchen, latrine and bathroom within the house as well as the availability and quality of basic amenities such as water, sanitation, cooking fuel and electricity. The data pertaining to all the selected indicators was taken from Census of India, 2011. The districts of relatively better-off states have performed better than districts from backward states. The analysis further reflects that the country is in transition phase, where some areas are doing well while others still struggle to have the reduced disparities.

Keywords:

Living Space, Disparities, Household

Introduction:

Social groups are collections of individuals who are linked by shared characteristics, interests, and perceive themselves as belonging together. These groups can be based on a variety of factors, including ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, occupation, gender, age, and cultural practices, etc. They play crucial roles in social organization, identity formation, and cultural dynamics. Each group has its own norms, values, and behaviors that define membership and influence how individuals within the group interact and relate to others.

Social groups can vary in size from small, informal gatherings like friends and families to large, organized entities such as professional associations or religious communities. The interactions and relationships within social groups contribute to shaping individual identities and social norms. They play a significant role in influencing social dynamics, access to resources, and opportunities within the broader society, as well as reinforcing or challenging social inequalities.

Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are specific social groups in India that have historically faced severe social, economic, and political disadvantages. These groups are recognized under the Indian Constitution for their historical marginalization and are provided with special protections and affirmative action measures to promote their social and economic development.

Objective of Study:

- To give an account of the social stratification and uneven geography of living space quality in India.

Data Base and Methodology:

To fulfil this objective requirement, the data pertaining to all the selected indicators was taken from Census of India, 2011. District has been considered the most appropriate unit of study for which data is available. There were 640 districts in 2011. The raw data was downloaded into 3 categories: **Total, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST)**. Now, for the level of analysis, only two social groups were considered. As Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, both, are considered to be socially and economically disadvantageous, so they are considered as a single social group.

Their data was added to get SC/ST data, which was further subtracted from the data pertaining to Total Population to get another category i.e., Non-SC/ST. Now, to find out the disparity between the 2 social groups i.e., SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs, Sopher's disparity index (1974) modified by Kundu and Rao in 1983 was calculated with the help of the following formula:

$$DI = \text{Log} (X2 / X1) + \text{Log} (200 - X1) / (200 - X2)$$

i.e. $X2 \geq X1$

Where, DI = Disparity Index

X2 = Percentage of non-SCs/STs population having the availability of a particular indicator.

X1 = Percentage of SCs/STs population having the availability of a particular indicator.

The disparity index calculates the difference in two groups' ownership of a certain asset using the odds ratio's logarithm. Reducing the levelling off effect is the goal of taking log.

The disparity Index method is effective for determining how far apart two variables are from one another. In the situation of complete equality, DI has no value. As a result, the magnitude of discrepancy increases with increasing DI value and decreases with decreasing DI value (Raju, 1991; Biswas, 2016).

The disparity was mapped using ArcGIS 10.3. The green colour was used to draw attention to the locations where SCs/STs households outperform non-SCs/STs households. Z-Score was utilized to standardize several sets of observations in order to get an overall picture of the study. The following formula was used to calculate Z-Score:

$$\text{Z-Score} = \frac{X - \mu}{\sigma}$$

X = Per cent value of the indicator in a district

μ = Mean value of the same district

σ = Standard deviation

The composite Z-score was created by adding the Z-scores of all the indicators that were chosen, and the composite index was created by dividing that number by the total number of indicators. Three categories—High, Medium, and Low were added to the composite index.

Indicators selected for the study are:

- i. Households living in Permanent Houses
- ii. Households having Housing Conditions as Good and Livable
- iii. Households having One or More Rooms
- iv. Households having separate Kitchen within the House
- v. Households having Latrine within the House
- vi. Households having Bathroom within the House
- vii. Households with Source of Water within the Premises
- viii. Households with Electricity for Lightning
- ix. Households using LPG/PNG/Electricity for Cooking
- x. Households with Closed Drainage Connectivity for Wastewater Outlet

Results and Discussion:

• Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs having Permanent Houses:

The national level discrepancy between the two categories in terms of having permanent residences is 0.22 points, indicating that there may not be enough measures in place to promote equality between the two groups. At the state level, Mizoram has the lowest disparity value at 0.037, followed by Karnataka at 0.090, and Tripura has the greatest disparity at 0.47, followed by Chhattisgarh at 0.42, indicating that these states' SCs and STs are further behind other groups in terms of development. Most of the people of Chhattisgarh are tribal people who live in make shift constructions. The same is true for other states where there is a huge difference between the two socioeconomic categories and a low standard of life, such as West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh. In these economically disadvantaged states, just around one-third of all households have a permanent house. (Map 1.1)

• Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs having Good and Livable Houses:

The difference between the two categories in terms of good and livable housing is 0.22 points on a national scale. Rajasthan and Punjab have the greatest amount of difference among the states (0.29 points both). Nagaland (0.04 points) has the smallest difference, followed by Assam (0.065points). In terms of the Union Territories, Daman & Diu has the largest gap (0.94 points), followed by Puducherry (0.35 points), while Dadra & Nagar Haveli has the smallest disparity (-0.43 points), followed by Andaman & Nicobar Island (-0.26 points). At the district level, the discrepancy is greatest in Mahe, Puducherry (1.02 points), followed by Daman (0.96 points), and lowest in Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh (-0.43 points), followed by upper Siang (-0.34 points). (Map 1.2)

• Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs having One or More Rooms:

The discrepancy index between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs in terms of dwelling space availability comes out to 0.14 points. While 96.32 percent of non-SCs and non-STs live in one or more rooms, this percentage falls to 95.42 percent for SCs and STs (Census of India, 2011). The gap in living space between the two demographic groups is largest in Kerala (0.35 points), followed by Madhya Pradesh, and lowest in Punjab (0.004 points), followed by Uttarakhand (0.024 points) (0.25 points). Punjab, a state without any STs, reduces the gap between the two social groups. Lakshadweep has the smallest disparity among the Union Territories (-0.21 points), followed by Chandigarh (0.04 points), while Puducherry has the largest gap (0.23 points), followed by the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (0.15 points). The tribal

households have greater access to wider dwelling area in Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, in addition to Lakshadweep and Chandigarh (Census of India, 2011). (Map 1.3)

- **Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs having Separate Kitchen within the House:**

In India, 59.90 per cent of non-SC/ST category houses have a separate kitchen within the house, compared to 44.85 per cent of SC/ST category households. The difference between these social categories on a nationwide scale is 0.20 points. The difference between the two demographic groups' living conditions and economic circumstances is reflected in this gap. The state-level variations are substantial.

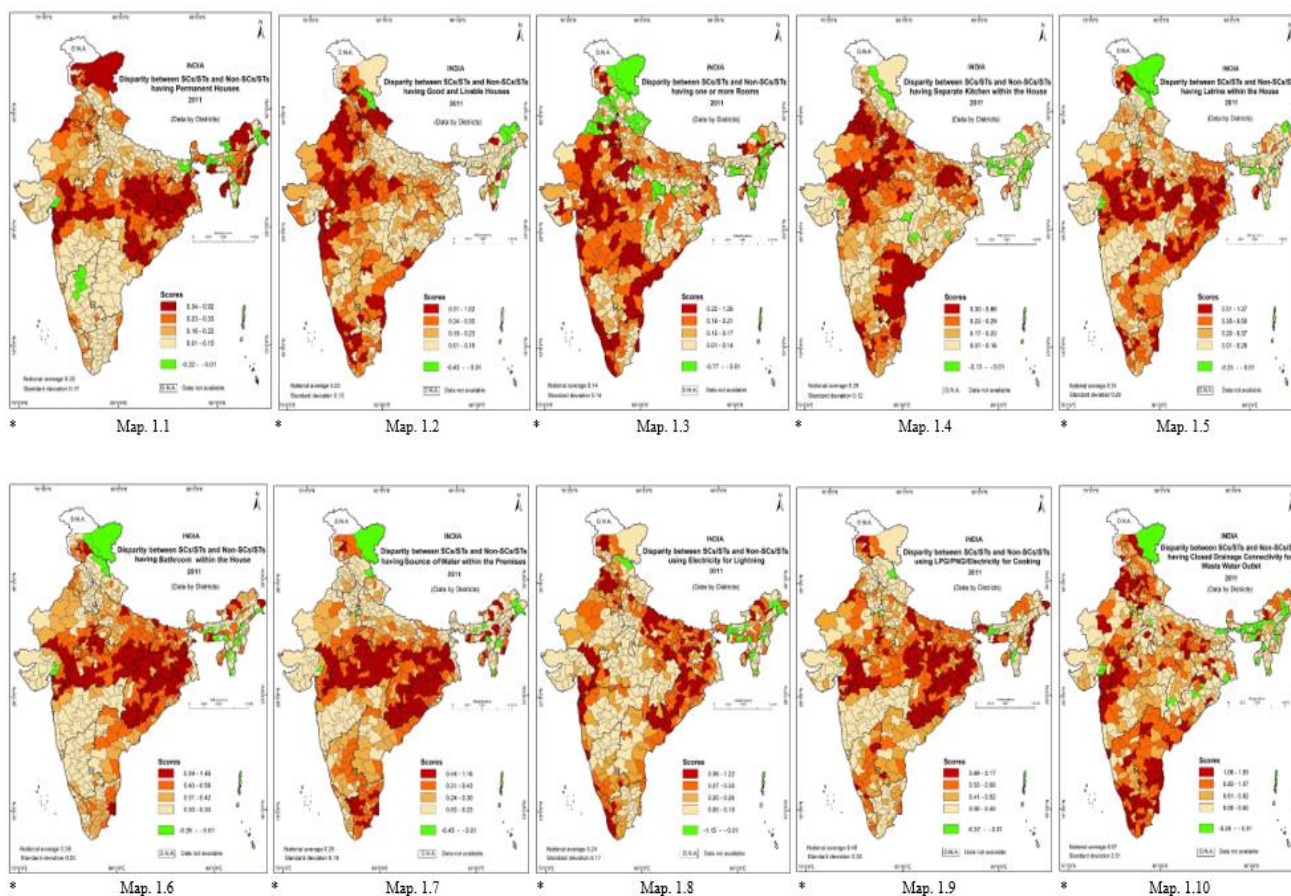
Rajasthan (0.37 points) has the largest difference between the two demographic groupings, followed by Andhra Pradesh (0.31 points). In Rajasthan, the proportion of houses with a separate kitchen for SC/ST residents is 26.11 per cent, compared to 56.30 per cent for non-SC/ST families. In the identical situation, Assam has the lowest difference (0.02 points), followed by Sikkim (0.04 points). Also, in Himachal Pradesh and the north-eastern states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, and Nagaland, where a separate kitchen is a standard feature for all houses, the difference is minimal (Census of India, 2011). (Map 1.4)

- **Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs having Latrine within the House:**

The difference between the two socioeconomic categories having latrines inside their houses is 0.34 points at the national level. Less than one-third of the SC/ST population, or 30 per cent, has a latrine facility within the home, compared to 53.29 per cent of the non-SC/ST population.

The state with the highest level of inequality is Odisha (0.52 points), followed by Jharkhand (0.48 points). Himachal Pradesh is at the bottom (0.11 points), followed by Sikkim (0.115 points), which is in line with Himachal Pradesh, in terms of the gap among states from the bottom of the ladder having separate latrines within the house. Both states are mountainous. In Himachal Pradesh, nomadic pastoral tribes like the Gaddis and Gujjar, who inhabit inaccessible high-altitude regions, make up a significant component of the Scheduled Tribe population. The states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Uttarakhand also have significant levels of disparity. The discrepancy is significant in several states, including Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. The vast majority of SC/ST and Non-SC/ST families in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan lack a toilet within the home, hence diminishing the inequality. In contrast, Goa and Kerala in the south, Punjab in the north, and all the states of northeast India have a considerably higher percentage of houses belonging to both

demographic categories that have toilets (Census of India, 2011). (Map 1.5)



*Source: Census of India, 2011

Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs households having Bathroom within the House:

The difference between the two social groupings at the national level is 0.38 points. Only 24.11 percent of homes in 2011 had a separate bathroom, compared to 48.78 percent of non-SC/ST households.

The disparity between the two population groups with access to a bathroom within the home varies by state, with Odisha having the highest disparity (0.62 points), Chhattisgarh having the second-highest disparity (0.60 points), and Mizoram having the lowest disparity (0.007 points), followed by Sikkim (0.10 points). The high rate of illiteracy and predominance of tribal people in Odisha make it difficult for socioeconomic groupings to be equal. In Mizoram, however, the disparity is negligible since both demographic groups have easier access to restrooms. Other than these, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Rajasthan are the states where SCs/STs have the most difficulty accessing restrooms. These places have a high prevalence of open water bathing dependency. (Map 1.6)

- **Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs households having Source of Water within the Premises:**

On a nationwide scale, 43.5 per cent of households cite taps as their primary source of drinking water (both inside and outside the house). In urban regions, 70.6 per cent of families have access to tap water; in rural areas, this percentage drops to 50.6 per cent. However, just 26.82 per cent of all families have a tap inside their home, which is a tiny increase from 20.8 per cent in 2001.

While 25.13 per cent of non-SC/ST families nationwide have a tap in the house, this number drops to 13.05 per cent for SC/ST households on a national basis. Even though there are twice as many non-SC/ST households as SC/ST households, both demographic groups have limited access to taps within their homes. (Map 1.7

- **Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs Households using Electricity for Lightning:**

The difference between the two demographic groups utilising electricity for lightning at the national level is 0.24 points. Compared to SC/ST families, which use electricity for lightning just is 56.51 per cent of the time, 71.30 per cent of Non-SC/ST households do so. Even fewer SC/ST households in rural areas have access to electricity.

Odisha (0.41 points) and Punjab (0.39 percent) are the two states with the greatest discrepancy in the two groups' use of energy for lighting (0.39 per cent). Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Tripura, West Bengal, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, and Chhattisgarh are among the states with the highest inequality. Arunachal Pradesh (0.032 points) has the smallest difference between the two social groups, followed by Mizoram (0.06), Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. It can be credited to the state governments' admirable efforts to electrify every household. The overall usage of energy is high in each of these states. However, the difference is negligible in Bihar and Assam since both social groups have limited access to power. (Map 1.8)

- **Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs using LPG/PNG/Electricity for Cooking:**

The difference between the two social groupings at the national level is 0.48 points (19.65 per cent). Since 2001, when it was 14.50 per cent points, this difference has grown. More than twice as many non-SC/ST families (33.09 per cent) use LPG, PNG, or electricity for cooking as compared to SC/ST households (14.27 per cent).

The difference between the two demographic groupings is most pronounced in Goa (1.62

points), and Meghalaya (1.51 points), and narrowest in Mizoram (-1.33 points), then Assam (0.78 points). The overall consumption of LPG, PNG, and electricity is high in both Goa and Mizoram. There is more equality on this count in Mizoram because it is a tribal majority state, however in Goa SC/ST families have fallen behind non-SC/ST category households in the usage of LPG/PNG/Electricity. The significant gap in other states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Assam is mostly attributable to both social groups' generally low use of LPG, PNG, and electricity for cooking. (Map 1.9)

- **Disparity between SCs/STs and Non-SCs/STs having Closed Drainage Connectivity for Wastewater Outlet:**

The non-SC/ST social group is in a better position than the deplorable social group at the national level where there is a 0.67-point difference between the social groups. This condition varies among the states, with Jharkhand having the highest score (0.67) followed by Odisha (0.58), and Manipur having the lowest (0.07), followed by Himachal Pradesh (0.15 points). The discrepancy amongst the Union Territories is greatest in Dadra & Nagar Haveli (0.87 points), then Puducherry (0.38 points), and lowest in Andaman & Nicobar Island (-0.09 points), then NCT of Delhi (0.12 points). Because there are no Scheduled Caste residents on Andaman and Nicobar Island, there is less of a divide between the two socioeconomic classes. Surat (1.82 points) in Gujarat has the biggest discrepancy among the districts, and North & Middle Andaman (-5.28 points) in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands has the lowest. (Map 1.10)

- **Composite Index of disparity in Quality of Living Space among Social Groups:**

The composite index highlights the overall disparity levels in the quality of living space between SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs households at different spatial scales. It synthesizes the contribution made by each indicator, as discussed in the proceeding pages. The gap between the two populations is variable, depending upon the composition of the population, its development level, physical setting, and the related social and economic factors.

Table. 1.1. Composite Index of Disparity in Quality of Living Space among Social Groups

S.No.	States/UTs	Scores
1.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	0.844666
2.	Uttarakhand	0.516147
3.	Mizoram	0.481604
4.	Maharashtra	0.398906
5.	Punjab	0.348675
6.	Odisha	0.345344
7.	Tripura	0.32013
8.	Karnataka	0.308082
9.	Chhattisgarh	0.301375
10.	Manipur	0.285503
11.	Jammu & Kashmir	0.241111
12.	Uttar Pradesh	0.231266
13.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	0.216166
14.	India	0.199637
15.	Chandigarh	0.165429
16.	Goa	0.157306
17.	NCT Of Delhi	0.126592
18.	Daman & Diu	0.117726
19.	Nagaland	0.097274
20.	Meghalaya	0.069799
21.	Sikkim	0.013007
22.	Rajasthan	0.005874
23.	Arunachal Pradesh	-0.00783
24.	Puducherry	-0.00977
25.	Madhya Pradesh	-0.06285
27.	Bihar	-0.09716
28.	Assam	-0.13064
29.	Andhra Pradesh	-0.29547
30.	Haryana	-0.36299
31.	Himachal Pradesh	-0.38662
32.	Kerala	-0.41381
33.	Lakshadweep	-0.43634
34.	Gujarat	-0.48834
35.	West Bengal	-0.68
36.	Jharkhand	-1.01129
37.	Tamil Nadu	-1.32532

Source: Calculated by researcher based on data from Census of India, 2011.

Overall, 17 states and 5 UTs fall below the national average (i.e. low household level disparity index) and 11 states and 2 UTs are above the national average (i.e. with high household level disparity index) (Table 1.1). Disparity index is lowest for Tamil Nadu (-1.32 points) and highest for Uttarakhand (0.51 points) among states. Tamil Nadu's low index is attributed to several progressive policies, social reforms and social justice movements spearheaded by leaders and states, which have worked towards promoting equality. These efforts include extensive reservation system in education and employment and various welfare schemes targeted at marginalized communities, thereby achieving a lower disparity index. Whereas in Uttarakhand there are several interrelated factors which are responsible for the highest disparity index of the state. The state's mountainous terrain and remote rural areas pose significant challenges to equitable development and access to resources. SCs/STs communities often reside in less accessible region, face greater difficulties in obtaining education, health care and employment opportunities. Additionally, there is uneven economic development with urban, rural and remote regions and this uneven growth has led to uneven wealth and opportunities among the non-SCs/STs population, widening the disparity gap.

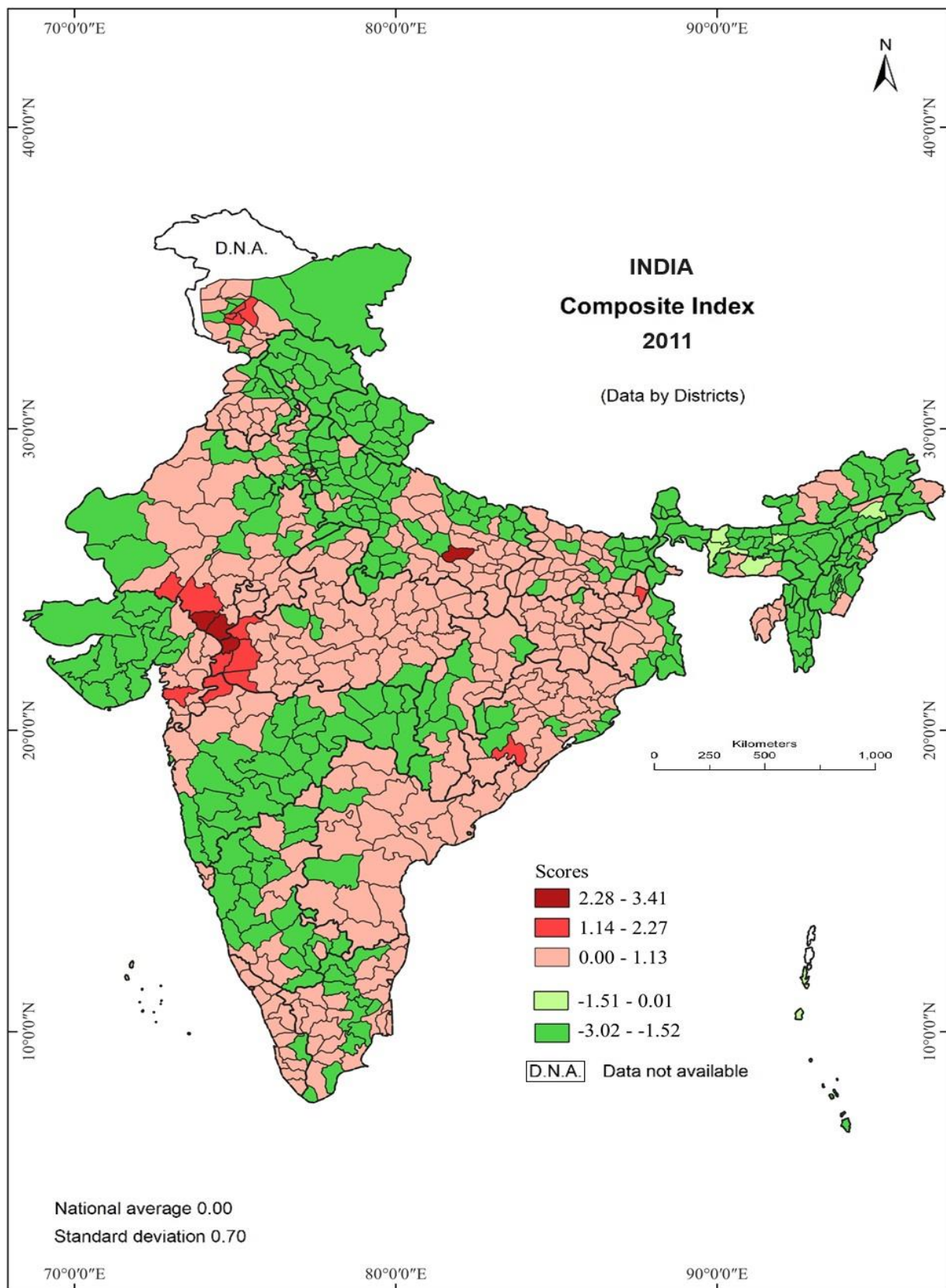
Other than these states, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Punjab, Odisha, Tripura also has high disparity rate. In contrast, the difference between two population groups is low in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Gujarat, Kerala, etc. The case of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Kerala is egalitarian. Here, high quality of living space in general accompanied by low level of disparity. As opposed to this, many of the north-eastern states also has the low level of disparity index. This is due to the fact that here both the social groups i.e. SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs lacks better housing and amenities hence reducing the disparity index.

Among union territories, Lakshadweep (-0.43) has the lowest disparity whereas Dadra and Nagar Haveli (0.84) score the top index (Table 4.3). Lakshadweep is a unique case due to its demographic and social structure. It has a small homogenous population where the majority of people (94.5 per cent of its total population) belongs to a scheduled tribe. This homogeneity minimizes the social and economic division that are more pronounced in larger and more diverse regions. The administrative has also effectively implemented policies that ensure equitable distribution. In case of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, there are several socio-economic and structural factors for its highest index in social disparities. As a UT, with a significant proportion of its population belonging to Scheduled Tribes, the region has struggled with issues of underdevelopment and marginalization. The SCs/STs communities

often reside in remote and rural areas, where access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities is limited. Additionally, the region's economic development has been uneven, with urban and industrial areas experiencing growth while rural regions lag behind. This disparity is further compounded by historical social inequalities and inadequate implementation of affirmative action policies and welfare schemes designed to uplift SCs/STs communities.

At the district level, the disparity value is lowest in Dhubri (Assam) and North and Middle Andaman (Andaman & Nicobar Islands) due to targeted Government interventions and inclusive development policies which aimed at improving education, healthcare and economic opportunities for marginalized communities. The implementation of reservation policies, special schemes and community development programmes has helped bridge gaps and uplift SCs/STs populations.

Banswara (Rajasthan) and Mahe (Puducherry) ranks at the top where disparity among SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs is maximum. Banswara's remote location, limited access to education and healthcare, and historical social and economic exclusion have contributed to this gap. Additionally, the region's tribal population, including the Bhil and Gamit communities, have faced marginalization and discrimination, hindering their access to resources and opportunities. Furthermore, the district's economic backwardness, lack of industrial development, and limited job opportunities have exacerbated the disparities, making it challenging for SC/ST communities to bridge the gap with their non-SC/ST counterparts. The gap between the two groups is more striking as the scheduled caste/tribe population is mainly concentrated in the rural areas of this arid state. Such a situation gets translated into a wide difference in the quality of their living space. The high disparity between SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs populations in Mahe district despite the overall negative disparity value of Pudhucherry is attributed to its historical, social and economic dynamics. Additionally, factors like limited access to quality education, healthcare, lower economic opportunities, and social exclusion are more prevalent in Mahe, exacerbating the gap. Moreover, Mahe's geographical isolation from the rest of Puducherry and limited connectivity have hindered the effective implementation of welfare schemes and development programs, further widening the disparity.



Source: Census of India, 2011

Map 1.11

There are 640 districts as per the census of India, 2011. Among these 640 districts, on the basis of composite index of disparity, 304 districts have the disparity value below the national average. Most of these districts fall in states which have disparity value below the national average. A total of 336 districts have the disparity value above the national average. These 336 districts, whose disparity value is above the national average, are bifurcated into 3 categories:

i. High Composite Index (2.28-3.41): This category comprises of 4 districts namely Banswara (Rajasthan), Jhabua (Madhya Pradesh), Dungarpur (Rajasthan) and Pratapgarh (Rajasthan). This disparity is due to their socio-economic inequalities and entrenched social discrimination and exclusion from their non-SCs/STs counterparts.

ii. Medium Composite Index (1.14-2.27): This category comprises of 15 districts. These are basically scattered all over India in various states.

iii. Low Composite Index (0.00-1.13): This category comprises of 317 districts. These districts are scattered in central and south-eastern parts of the country.

Other than this, the districts whose disparity index is lower than the national average are included in very low composite index category i.e.

Very Low Composite Index (-0.01- -3.02): This category comprises of 304 districts. It shows that 47.5 percent of districts have the disparity value lower than the national average. Some of these anomalous districts are located in the north-eastern region where both the social groups lack better housing space and amenities, hence reducing the disparities. Also here the native predominant tribal population is in a politically more advantageous position. The rest of other districts are scattered in different states and UTs in terms of quality of living space.

The key factors for this reduced level of disparity are effective governance, targeted social policies, equitable access to resources, opportunities, and proactive administration whose focused efforts are embedded in the constitution adopted in 1950. It includes specific provisions for the protection and development of SCs/STs communities. Articles such as 15(4), 16(4), and 46 mandate positive discrimination, including reservations in education, employment, and political representation, to promote their socio-economic interests. Numerous government policies and schemes specifically target SCs/STs welfare. For example, the Special Component Plan (SCP) for SCs and the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) for STs allocate funds directly for their development. These initiatives cover various sectors such as education, health, housing, and livelihoods. Education is a major focus area, with

scholarships, reservations in educational institutions, and special schools designed to increase literacy and educational attainment among SC/ST communities. Programs like the Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for SCs/STs students have significantly contributed to their educational progress.

Economic empowerment programs, including skill development and entrepreneurship schemes, are aimed at improving the economic status of SCs/STs individuals. For instance, the Stand-Up India scheme facilitates bank loans for SCs/STs entrepreneurs to promote self-employment and economic self-reliance. SCs/STs communities have reserved seats in the Parliament and State Assemblies, ensuring their political representation. This political inclusion allows them to influence policy-making and advocate for their rights and development needs. Several legal measures protect SCs/STs communities from discrimination and violence. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, is a significant legal framework aimed at preventing and addressing atrocities against SC/ST individuals. India is a signatory to various international conventions that promote the rights and development of marginalized communities, including SCs/STs. These international commitments reinforce the country's internal efforts towards the upliftment of these communities. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups actively advocate for the rights and development of SCs/STs communities. Their efforts help raise awareness, influence policy, and provide direct support to these communities.

Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of SC/ST development programs ensure accountability and continuous improvement. Bodies like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) play crucial roles in overseeing these efforts.

The combination of these factors reflects a concerted effort to address the deep-rooted inequities faced by SCs/STs communities, fostering their development and integration into the broader socio-economic fabric of India.

Conclusion:

The caste and tribe system represents a distinctive form of inequality in India. There is a significant connection between social and economic disparities, which have historically been influenced by caste. The scheduled castes and tribes have traditionally faced social exclusion, leading to economic and educational disadvantages. The scheduled castes, known as 'untouchables' in the lower rungs of the Hindu caste hierarchy, and the scheduled tribes, typically forest dwellers with animistic traditions, have both endured marginalization. Scheduled caste individuals are often called 'dalits,' while scheduled tribe members are referred to as 'adivasis.'

The SCs and STs together represent the socially, economically and educationally backward segment of the population of the country. A view was taken to access the disparity in the context of Quality of Living Space of SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs category of the population. As expected, the gap between the two social groups is not the same on different indicators adopted for analysis.

National average in the context of disparity among social groups remained at 0.19 points. A total of 17 states and 5 union territories have the disparity value lower than national average. Among these 17 states, in some states like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Haryana, disparities are minimal. These states' stronger economies, higher urbanization rates, and investments in public services like healthcare, education, and sanitation have increased access to resources and modern amenities, reducing the disparities among social groups. Social welfare schemes targeting marginalized communities, cultural emphasis on social harmony and equality, and government initiatives like housing programs have also contributed to reduced disparities. Additionally, higher literacy rates have empowered individuals to access information, resources, and opportunities, further bridging the gap. As a result, these states have made significant strides in ensuring a more equitable distribution of quality living spaces among all social groups, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Disparity is also minimal in states where the quality of living space is poor for both categories. The tribal regions of central and north-eastern India show lower disparities in this aspect. In these regions, the indigenous population is predominantly tribal and rural, whereas the general population is largely composed of urban immigrants. Tribal communities have limited representation in political parties. They faced social/economic/ political marginalization and their marginalization translates into limited access to resources/education

that could help them to prosper. Tribal communities come with their local languages and this linguistic barrier makes it quite difficult to communicate their messages at national discourse. They also have a lack of political representation in the national political parties and this lack of political clout makes it harder for them to get into the mainstream.

The union territories of Chandigarh, NCT of Delhi, Daman and Diu, Puducherry, and Lakshadweep have lower levels of disparity in quality of living space between SCs/STs and non-SCs/STs as compared to all India average. This is due to their unique administrative and demographic characteristics. Being urbanized and economically developed, these union territories have invested heavily in public services, infrastructure, and social welfare schemes, ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities for all. The smaller size and more homogeneous populations of these territories have also facilitated more effective governance, reduced inequality, and increased social cohesion. Additionally, the union territories' direct administration by the central government has ensured more targeted and efficient implementation of schemes and programs aimed at reducing disparities and promoting social inclusion, thereby bridging the gap in quality of living space among different social groups.

There are certain states where the disparity value is higher than the national average value of disparity. Among these, ironically, the gap between the two population groups is quite pronounced in India's more developed states, such as Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Punjab, and Karnataka. This suggests that the development process is still in transition and has yet to fully benefit the weaker sections of society.

Other than these, there are certain states which have a large population share comprising of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes as in the case of Manipur, Odisha, Tripura, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram. These states have historically been characterized by poverty, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to resources and services, which have disproportionately affected marginalized communities. The tribal populations in these states have faced isolation, cultural suppression, and neglect, leading to inadequate housing, poor sanitation, and limited access to healthcare and education. Additionally, the Scheduled Castes have faced centuries of discrimination and social exclusion, further exacerbating their socio-economic disparities. The non-Scheduled communities, on the other hand, have relatively better access to resources, infrastructure, and opportunities, perpetuating the disparity in quality of living space among these social groups. The region's complex geography, political

instability, and limited governance capacity have also hindered the effective implementation of social welfare schemes and programs aimed at bridging this gap.

Amidst this dismal picture, 304 districts have the disparity value lower than the national average i.e. in almost half of the districts, there is an indication of progress or relative equity where traditionally marginalized communities (SC/ST) are improving their living conditions. It points to positive changes in terms of socio-economic status or other key metrics. In these regions the efforts to improve the conditions of marginalized communities have been successful, leading to them being in a better position. Effective implementation of government schemes, higher education and awareness among SC/ST households, stronger community networks, and presence of NGOs and civil society organizations have contributed to reduced disparities. Additionally, district-specific initiatives prioritizing inclusive growth, historical and cultural factors promoting social equity, and better access to basic services like healthcare, sanitation, and electricity have also played a role. These factors have collectively led to improved living conditions for marginalized communities in these districts, narrowing the gap with their non-SC/ST counterparts.

References:

- Abu, B., Aniza., Abdul, M., Nurhayati., Mohit., Mohamad., Othman., Rosniza., Sanusi, A. (2016). Housing space quality towards Quality of Life: A Case study of Double Storey Terrace Houses. *MATEC Web of Conference* 66. 00083. IBCC 2016.
- Ahmed, N. N. (2017). An Assessment of Housing Quality in Uttar Pradesh: Spatial Inequality. *National Geographic Journal of India*, 63, 68-81.
- Annu, (2019). *Regional variations in Quality of life in India*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis. Department of Geography, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak.
- Bhagat, R. B. (2011b). Demographic Strength and Inequality among Castes in India. *Urban India*. 31(1), 1-13.
- Census of India. (2011). Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census>.
- Chakrabarty. G, 1999. Quality of Life of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Rural India. *Yojana*. 44(6), 34-40
- Krishnamurthy., & Mohanty, S. (2004). Deprivation of Basic Amenities by Caste and Religion: Empirical Study Using NFHS Data. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39, 728-

735. 10.2307/4414648.

- Kumar, A. (2015). Disparities in Access to Basic Amenities across Caste, Ethnicity and Classes in Rural and Urban India. *The Indian Economic Journal*, 62(4), 1226-1250.
- Kumar, A. (2015). Disparities in access to basic amenities across caste, ethnicity and classes in rural and urban India. *Social Change and Development*, 12(1). Retrieved from https://www.okd.in/downloads/jr_15_january/Arjun_Kumar.pdf.
- Mistri, A., & Das, B. (2011). Assets Disparities among Social Groups: A Cross Sectional Analysis of Census 2011. *Social Change*, 44(1), 1–20.