

Awareness and Benefits availed from Government Welfare Schemes in Rural Punjab

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Abstract

Dalits in India have been given specific rights, benefits and program to uplift their low status in society. The present paper is an attempt to study the awareness and benefits availed from government-sponsored welfare schemes by Dalits, Punjab. This paper is based on the primary data sourced from 120 respondents randomly taken from eight villages of four districts (Amritsar, Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib and Jalandhar). Majority of the respondents were aware of the welfare schemes but one-fourth of them (25.83%) did not avail benefits from these schemes. Health (100.00%), education (87.50%) and Atta-dal (98.33%) schemes emerged as most popular and had benefited to the most of the households. However, a significant gap was found between the awareness and availment of the schemes. An easy implementation procedure of the welfare schemes is essential to reach the disadvantaged population.

Keywords: Dalits, Welfare Schemes, Punjab Government, Rural

JEL Classification: J53, I31, H75, O18

Introduction

Caste is the social institution that has been part of Indian history and culture for thousands of years (Saha 1993). There are about 6000 castes and sub-castes in India. It is a hierarchal system in which people are immobile and are granted a status at birth as a result of their ancestry (Kumar, 2014, Brar, 2017). This hierarchy is based on the distinction between ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’. This is a division between something believed to be closer to the sacred (connoting ritual purity) and something believed to be distant from or opposed to the sacred, considering ritually polluting (Dickey, 2000, Farooq, 2021, Kumar and Kumar, 2022). Castes considered ritually pure have high status, while those considered less pure or impure have low status. The phrase “Scheduled Castes” was first used in 1935 by the British, who also defined the category as containing the castes, races, and tribes formerly known as the “Depressed Classes” in the Government of India Act, 1935. The Constituted Assembly compiled a complete list of castes and tribes via two orders, The Constitution Order (SC) 1950 and the Constitution Order (ST) 1950, and continued the existing definition of SCs and STs by article 341, 42 after independence (Srinivas, 1962, Kumari and Prasad, 2021).

In India, Dalits comprise about 17 percent of the overall population, with Punjab having the highest (32%) in the nation

(Census, 2011). Most of the Dalits live in rural areas and work as agricultural laborers, whereas those who live in urban areas work as industrial workers. Despite the government’s numerous welfare and development initiatives, their situation is still dire. The government has consistently tried to address the Dalit community’s issues since independence (Singh, 2022). The three categories of affirmative, protective, and development support is offered by the government. The term “affirmative action” refers to a series of government policies designed to assist members of disadvantaged groups that have historically experienced discrimination in housing, employment, and social respect. Affirmative action primarily aims to eliminate disparities in access to work, education, fair pay, and higher living standards (Yadav and Sharma, 1995).

They have been given specific rights and benefits, and the Constitution’s different provisions have been created to safeguard their interests and protect them against harassment, carelessness, and discrimination committed by members of upper castes. In the first two decades following independence, a number of statutes and regulations were implemented to eliminate social and legal disadvantages and to better the socioeconomic circumstances of the Dalits (Singh, 2009, Shalini, 2013, Sharma and Sidhu, 2014).

The majority of SCs continue to struggle to meet their basic necessities *viz.* food, clothing, and shelter. Despite the

existence of employment reservation quotas, the presence of SCs in higher levels of all government services remains low. They are vulnerable due to their landlessness, which fuels and fosters the continuation of atrocities against them. The state Department of Social Justice & Empowerment and Minorities are responsible for looking after their problems and economic and social needs through various schemes. The current study is being conducted to assess the awareness and benefits availed from government sponsored welfare schemes by Dalit households.

Data Sources and Methodology

The present paper is based on the primary data sourced from Punjab's three cultural zones (Majha, Malwa and Doaba). A list of districts with the highest Dalit population was prepared; from this list, four districts (Amritsar, Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib and Jalandhar) were chosen. One district each from *Doaba* and *Majha* regions and two from *Malwa* region were selected. *Malwa* region is comparatively larger than *Majha* and *Doaba*. So, two districts were taken from it. Further one block from each district and two villages from each block were randomly selected. Thus, eight villages were taken for the study. Then from each selected village, 15 Dalit households were selected making a sample of 120 respondents. A structured interview schedule was used to collect the data. The primary data collected pertained to the year 2021-2022.

Results and Discussion

Awareness is a process that aims to teach and educate people about a topic or issue. Availment is when an individual enrolls or takes advantage of any benefit given to him. In order to identify the awareness and benefits availed by the Dalit households, their socio-economic background, like their age, education and income need to be analyzed.

Indian society is divided into different castes and sub-castes. In the present study sub-castes of Dalits were classified into two categories i.e. *Ad-Dharmi* and *Mazhabi/Balmiki*. Data given in Table 1 constitutes that more than half of the respondents i.e. about 56 per cent belonged to the *Ad-Dharmi* caste and 44.16 per cent were *Mazhabi/Balmiki*. Data further shows that in *Majha* region all the respondents were *Mazhabi*, and in *Doaba* all the respondents belonged to the *Ad-Dharmis*. In *Malwa* more than half of the respondents (61.66%) belonged to the *Ad-Dharmi* and rest 38.33 per cent were *Mazhabis*. So, the majority of respondents were *Ad-Dharmis*.

Gender is either of two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. Data indicates that more than half (51.66%) of the respondents were females and 48.33 per cent were males. Thus, majority of the respondents were females. About 46 percent were aged up to 30 years, forty-four per cent belonged to the age group of

31-60 years and only ten per cent of respondents were aged above 60 years. So, it shows that majority of respondents fall in the age group of up to 60 years.

Further it was found that 24.16 percent of the respondents cannot read and write. Ten per cent of respondents were educated up to primary and middle level. Up to high school level education was attained by one-fourth of respondents (25.83 %). About one-fifth of the respondents (18.33%) had a graduation degree and about 11 per cent were post-graduate.

Awareness and Benefits Availed from Government Sponsored Welfare Schemes

Awareness is the quality or state of being aware, knowledge and understanding that something is happening or exists. Data about the awareness of schemes among Dalit households (Table 2) divulged that all the respondents were aware about the reservation in education and employment, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Supplementary nutrition programme, *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* (PMMVY), *Atta-dal* scheme, Housing scheme for scheduled castes, Self- help groups (SHGs), *Shagun* scheme, *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* (PMUY), Sanitation programme, Old age/ widow/ handicapped pension *yojana*, and MGNREGS.

Almost all the of respondents were aware about Pre-matric scholarship and Mid-day meals followed by the Supply of free text-books for the students studying in classes 1st to 10th (98.33%), the Supply of free uniforms (98.33%). Eighty-seven percent of the respondents were also aware about Post-matric scholarship and *Janani Suraksha Yojana* (JSY).

Thus, data shows that the level of awareness among respondents was quite impressive regarding the schemes.

From above discussion, it is clear that all the respondents were aware about the schemes mentioned in Table 2. It was tried to find out that how many from this availed these schemes. The perusal of Table 3 indicates that all the respondents had availed *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* and more than ninety percent of the respondents availed the benefits from the Supply of free text-books for the students studying in classes 1st to 10th, Supply of free uniforms, National Rural Health Mission, Mid-day meal, *Atta-dal* scheme. The schemes that benefited seventy to eighty percent of the respondents were Pre-matric and Post-matric scholarships, *Janani Suraksha Yojana*, *Shagun* scheme, *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* and Old age/ widow/ handicapped pension *yojana*.

In reservation schemes, all the respondents were aware but not availed by all of them. Reservation in education benefited 45 per cent of respondents and in employment, only nineteen per cent of them gained jobs. It means that 55 per cent did not get benefits in education and 80 per cent were unable to obtain employment benefits. It shows a huge gap between awareness and the availment of schemes. When

Table 1. Socio-economic profile of the respondents

Particulars	Majha	Malwa	Doaba	Total
Caste				
<i>Ravidassia, Ramdasia & Ad-dharmi</i>	–	37 (61.66)	30 (100.00)	67 (55.83)
<i>Mazhabi & Balmiki</i>	30 (100.00)	23 (38.33)	–	53 (44.16)
Gender				
Males	14 (46.66)	39 (65.00)	5 (16.66)	58 (48.33)
Females	16 (53.33)	21 (35.00)	25 (83.33)	62 (51.66)
Age (years)				
Up to 30	4 (13.33)	31 (51.66)	20 (66.66)	55 (45.83)
31-60	26 (86.67)	17 (28.33)	10 (33.33)	53 (44.16)
Above 60	–	12 (20.00)	–	12 (10.00)
Education				
Cannot read and write	16 (53.33)	9 (5.62)	4 (13.33)	29 (24.16)
Primary	6 (20.00)	1 (1.67)	6 (20.00)	13 (10.83)
Middle	4 (13.33)	3 (5.00)	5 (16.66)	12 (10.00)
High School	4 (13.33)	16 (4.44)	11 (36.66)	31 (25.83)
Graduation	–	19 (31.67)	3 (10.00)	22 (18.33)
Post-graduation	–	12 (20.00)	1 (3.33)	13 (10.83)

Note – Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

the gaps for educational schemes were calculated, it was observed less gap between the awareness and availment of these schemes. The majority of respondents were aware of these schemes and all got benefits, although few of them remained outside the benefited window for some reason.

Regarding health and nutrition schemes same trend of awareness was found i.e. all the respondents were aware about the schemes. In *Janani Suraksha Yojana* and *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* where awareness and availment were at same level. All the aware respondents also availed the benefits. Only these two schemes were found implemented with no gap between awareness and availment. There was a large gap between awareness and availment of Supplementary nutrition programs found in which 45.83 per cent did not get

benefits whereas awareness was hundred per cent.

In rural development schemes, all the respondents were aware about all the mentioned schemes, but not availed by half of them. In Housing scheme for scheduled castes, only one-third got the benefits. Sixty-eight per cent did not get opportunity to avail. In Self-help groups 42 per cent were successful in forming groups and got loans, whereas 57 per cent remained disadvantaged. Beneficiaries of *Shagun* scheme (72.50%) and *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* (82.50%) were more in this category, still a gap has been there.

Hundred per cent awareness was found for Sanitation programme, Old age/ widow/ handicapped pension *yojana* and MGNREGS but more beneficiaries were of pension scheme (77.50%). An initiative of the government is to

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents on the basis of awareness about welfare schemes

(Multiple responses)

Scheme	Awareness			
	<i>Majha</i>	<i>Malwa</i>	<i>Doaba</i>	Total
Reservation				
Education	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Employment	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Educational schemes				
Pre-matric scholarship	30 (100.00)	59 (98.33)	30 (100.00)	119 (99.17)
Post matric scholarship	20 (66.67)	59 (98.33)	30 (100.00)	109 (90.83)
Supply of free text-books for students studying in class 1 st to 10 th	29 (96.66)	59 (98.33)	30 (100.00)	118 (98.33)
Supply of free uniforms	29 (96.66)	59 (98.33)	30 (100.00)	118 (98.33)
Health and nutrition schemes				
National rural health mission	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Mid- day meal	30 (100.00)	59 (98.3)	30 (100.00)	119 (99.17)
Supplementary nutrition programme	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Janani suraksha yojana	27 (90.00)	53 (88.33)	25 (83.33)	105 (87.50)
Pradhan mantri matru vandana yojana	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
<i>Atta-dal</i> scheme	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Rural development schemes				
Housing scheme for scheduled castes	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Self-help groups	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
<i>Shagun</i> scheme	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Pradhan mantri ujjwala yojana	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Other schemes				
Sanitation programme	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Old age/ widow/ handicapped pension <i>yojana</i>	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
MGNREGS	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)

Note – Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

Table 3. Distribution of the respondents on the basis of welfare schemes availed

(Multiple responses)

Scheme	Avail			Total
	<i>Majha</i>	<i>Malwa</i>	<i>Doaba</i>	
Reservation				
Education	7 (23.33)	31 (51.66)	16 (53.33)	54 (45.00)
Employment	3 (10.00)	8 (13.33)	12 (40.00)	23 (19.17)
Educational schemes				
Pre-matric scholarship	28 (93.33)	53 (98.33)	24 (80.00)	105 (87.50)
Post matric scholarship	18 (60.00)	45 (75.00)	24 (80.00)	87 (72.50)
Supply of free text-books for students studying in class 1 st to 10 th	29 (96.66)	57 (95.00)	30 (100.00)	116 (96.66)
Supply of free uniforms	29 (96.66)	58 (96.66)	30 (100.00)	117 (97.50)
Health and nutrition schemes				
National rural health mission	30 (100.00)	59 (98.33)	30 (100.00)	119 (99.17)
Mid- day meal	28 (93.33)	57 (95.00)	30 (100.00)	115 (95.83)
Supplementary nutrition programme	16 (53.33)	29 (48.33)	20 (66.66)	65 (54.16)
Janani suraksha yojana	27 (90.00)	53 (88.33)	25 (83.33)	105 (87.50)
Pradhan mantri matru vandan yojana	30 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
<i>Atta-dal</i> scheme	28 (93.33)	60 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	118 (98.33)
Rural development schemes				
Housing scheme for scheduled castes	9 (30.00)	15 (25.00)	14 (46.66)	38 (31.66)
Self-help groups	17 (56.66)	14 (23.33)	20 (66.66)	51 (42.50)
<i>Shagun</i> scheme	22 (73.33)	39 (65.00)	26 (86.66)	87 (72.50)
Pradhan mantri ujjwala yojana	19 (63.33)	54 (90.00)	26 (86.66)	99 (82.50)
Other schemes				
Sanitation programme	9 (30.00)	14 (23.34)	10 (33.33)	33 (27.50)
Old age/ widow/ handicapped pension yojana	22 (73.33)	45 (75.00)	26 (86.66)	93 (77.50)
MGNREGS	8 (26.66)	25 (41.66)	9 (30.00)	42 (35.00)

Note – Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

Table 4. Association of age with awareness and avail of welfare schemes

Age (years)	Awareness of welfare schemes				Avail of welfare schemes			
	Low	Medium	High	Total	Low	Medium	High	Total
Below 30	-	9 (7.50)	46 (38.33)	55 (45.83)	23 (19.17)	20 (16.67)	12 (10.00)	55 (45.83)
31 to 60	-	17 (14.17)	36 (30.00)	53 (44.17)	17 (14.17)	26 (21.67)	10 (8.33)	53 (44.17)
Above 60	-	3 (2.50)	9 (7.50)	12 (10.00)	1 (0.83)	2 (1.67)	9 (7.50)	12 (10.00)
Total	-	29 (24.17)	91 (75.83)	120 (100.00)	41 (34.17)	48 (40.00)	31 (25.83)	120 (100.00)
		$\chi^2 = 42.78^*$			$\chi^2 = 60.16^*$			

Note – Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

*Significant $p < 0.05$

provide toilet facility to all Dalit households but 72 per cent did not get any assistance. A much-promoted scheme, MGNREGS also failed to give employment to 65 per cent of respondents. Thus, study found a significant gap between awareness and availment in all the schemes besides educational, *Janani Suraksha Yojana*, *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* and *Atta-dal* scheme.

Association of Age, Education, Caste and Gender with Awareness and Availment of Welfare Schemes

Age and schemes

Age is an important factor in awareness and availment

of anything. In study it was tried to find out an association between the age, awareness and availed welfare schemes. Level of awareness and availed welfare schemes has been divided into low, medium and high. Table 4 indicates that none of the respondents in any age group fall in the low awareness level. High awareness was found among the 30-60 age group (68.33%). Respondents above 60 years of age had medium awareness (2.50%) but high availment level (7.50%). Majority of the respondents below 30 years of age had low (19.17%) availment level while in 31-60 years majority had medium (21.67%) availment level. Results were found to be significant at 5 per cent level of significance.

Table 5. Association of education with awareness and avail of welfare schemes

Education	Awareness of welfare schemes				Avail of welfare schemes			
	Low	Medium	High	Total	Low	Medium	High	Total
Cannot read and write	-	12 (10.00)	17 (14.17)	29 (24.17)	8 (6.67)	14 (11.67)	7 (5.83)	29 (24.17)
Primary	-	3 (2.50)	10 (8.33)	13 (10.83)	5 (4.17)	4 (3.33)	4 (3.33)	13 (10.83)
Middle	-	4 (3.33)	8 (6.67)	12 (10.00)	6 (5.00)	4 (3.33)	2 (1.67)	12 (10.00)
High School	-	5 (4.17)	26 (21.67)	31 (25.83)	10 (8.33)	14 (11.67)	7 (5.83)	31 (25.83)
Graduate	-	4 (3.33)	18 (15.00)	22 (18.33)	10 (8.33)	8 (6.67)	4 (3.33)	22 (18.33)
Post graduate	-	1 (0.83)	12 (10.00)	13 (10.83)	2 (1.67)	4 (3.33)	7 (5.83)	13 (10.83)
Total	-	29 (24.17)	91 (75.83)	120 (100.00)	41 (34.17)	48 (40.00)	31 (25.83)	120 (100.00)
		$\chi^2 = 46.65^*$			$\chi^2 = 42.88^*$			

Note – Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 6. Association of caste with awareness and avail of welfare schemes

Caste	Awareness of welfare schemes				Avail of welfare schemes				
	Low	Medium	High	Total	Low	Medium	High	Total	
Ad-Dharmi	-	11 (9.17)	56 (46.67)	67 (55.83)	21 (17.50)	25 (20.83)	21 (17.50)	67 (55.83)	
Mazhabi & Balmiki	-	18 (15.00)	35 (29.17)	53 (44.17)	20 (16.67)	23 (19.17)	10 (8.33)	53 (44.17)	
Total	-	29 (24.17)	91 (75.83)	120 (100.00)	41 (34.17)	48 (40.00)	31 (25.83)	120 (100.00)	
				$\chi^2 = 35.37^*$					$\chi^2 = 12.16^*$

Note – Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 7. Association of gender with awareness and avail of welfare schemes

Gender	Awareness of welfare schemes				Avail of welfare schemes				
	Low	Medium	High	Total	Low	Medium	High	Total	
Male	-	10 (8.33)	48 (40.00)	58 (48.33)	20 (16.67)	22 (18.33)	16 (13.33)	58 (48.33)	
Female	-	19 (15.83)	43 (35.83)	62 (51.67)	21 (17.50)	26 (21.67)	15 (12.50)	62 (51.67)	
Total	-	29 (24.17)	91 (75.83)	120 (100.00)	41 (34.17)	48 (40.00)	31 (25.83)	120 (100.00)	
				$\chi^2 = 92.25^*$					$\chi^2 = 8.92^*$

Note – Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Education and Schemes

Education determines the awareness of persons for anything, it is assumed that an educated person will be more aware. So, it was tried to find out an association between the education, awareness and availed welfare schemes. Data in Table 5 revealed that none of the respondents was in low awareness level in any educational category. Respondents who were unable to read and write had high (14.17%) awareness level but for availment they slipped to medium (11.67%) level. Respondents who attained high school level education had high (21.67%) awareness level and for availed they too had medium level (11.67%). Graduates and post-graduates also had high availment level. Majority of the highly aware and even had high availment level were in high school. It shows a significant association between school education and implementation of welfare schemes. Results were found to be significant at 5 per cent level of significance.

Caste and Schemes

Data showing the association of caste and welfare schemes is given in Table 6. It highlighted that none of the respondents of any caste fall in the low awareness level.

Highly aware (46.67%) respondents belonged to *Ad-Dharmi* caste whereas 29.17 per cent *Mazhabi/ Balmiki* had high awareness level. One-fifth of *Ad-Dharmis* and 19.17 per cent of the *Mazhabi/ Balmiki* respondents had availed welfare schemes at medium level. In availing the schemes *Ad-Dharmi* (55.83%) were ahead than their counterpart *Mazhabi/ Balmiki* (44.17%). Chi-square value showed significant association between caste, awareness and availment.

Gender and Schemes

Indian society is a patriarchal society. Whether this patriarchy dominate in the utilization of welfare schemes or not, it was tried to assess. Data pertains in Table 7 revealed that forty per cent of males were highly aware about welfare schemes and for females this percentage was thirty-five per cent. In the medium awareness level females (15.83%) superseded the males (8.33%). When it comes to the availment level, females (21.67%) also lead at the medium level, when compared with males (18.33%). There found more awareness (51.67%) and availment by females. It does not mean patriarchal dominance has decreased, but many welfare schemes are women centric only, so their participation will automatically be more. Value of chi-square

showed significant association between gender, awareness and availment.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The study concludes that the level of awareness of government-sponsored welfare schemes among Dalit households was quite impressive whereas the benefits availed from them were less and the gap between awareness and availment was massive in some schemes. Efforts need to be made to enhance their income earning capacity to become self-reliant. There is a need to create awareness among the Dalit population, about government welfare schemes through regular meetings so that they can better avail of them. Comprehensive and effective publicity must be done before the beginning of the academic session in schools about the maintenance, and allowance fixed under the scheme.

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