Extended Abstract:

The census of India continued to be the main source of information on various castes and tribes in India. It usually provides information on schedule caste (SC) and schedule tribe (ST) from 1941 until 2001. This information is largely utilized for framing various policies at national and state level. These policy measures intended to minimize the social and economic deprivations in the population. In addition to the welfare measures for SC and ST, under Article 340(1), 340(2) and 16(4) of the constitution, Govt of India suggest measures to promote welfare of other backward classes (Singh,1996). The last census that counted other backward classes (OBC) was in 1931 and thereafter the country does not have authentic and reliable information on the size of OBC population and their socio economic backwardness. The various policies of the government of India used the estimates of backward class commissions on size of OBC for various policy issues. Given the demographic diversity among the caste groups, the census count of 1931 cannot be taken in policy issues and the estimates of backward commissions questioned. Moreover, caste and religion have been two competing identities in the political sphere (Bhagat, 2006).

All India Backward Class commission was set up under the chairmanship of B.P. Mandal to consider affirmative action policies for backward and disadvantaged castes in order to redress caste discrimation. *The population of various OBCs identified by the commission were culled from 1931 census, and extrapolated on the basis of population growth trends over this period.* The authenticity of the figure of 52 percent has been questioned following reports of the NSS that OBC constituted about 32 percent of the population and the National Family Health Survey, which placed the figure at 30 percent. (Times of India, 2, April 2007). Given the sensitivity nature, it is essential to obtain the authentic information on the caste groups, particularly the OBC and others.

Need for the study:

In the large-scale demographic survey, caste is largely used as a critical variable to understand the differentials in fertility and mortality differentials, contraceptive use as well as health care utilizations.

The recent policy issues necessitated analyzing the information on other backward classes from large-scale surveys. In this regard, it was felt that the information collected on large-scale survey such as National Sample Survey (NSS) Organization and National Family Health Survey (NFHS) may be useful to understand the socio-economic differentials among OBC and other caste groups.

Accordingly, this paper attempts to understand the socio economic dimensions of caste structure using the NFHS 2 data at national level. It also attempts to examine whether the inequalities prevailing within and among the different caste groups

Objective of the study:

The broad objective of the paper is to understand the socio-economic differentials of various caste groups by the stage of ***economic development*** in states of India. The specific objectives are;

i) to examine the spatial distribution of population by caste in India.

ii) to examine the inter caste and intra caste differentials in educational level and female age at marriage of girls in India

iii) to examine the inter caste and intra caste differentials in standard of living status and occupational pattern in India.

Hypothesis:

1. Inter-caste differentials in socio economic status have narrowed down with the stage of economic development
2. Intra-caste differentials in socio status have narrowed down with the stage of economic development

Methodology:

The following variables are used to understand the socio economic differential among various caste groups:

1. Year of schooling by sex
2. Female age at marriage
3. Consumer durables and household amenities
4. Size of land holding
5. Occupational pattern

To carry out the analysis following methods are used

1. **Bivariate analysis** : The socio economic variables are tabulated by caste groups , sex and place of residence
2. **Principal component analysis (PCA):**

The PCA is used to arrive at the quintile distribution of the population. The PCA analysis was carried out separately for rural and urban areas for the country level. To carry out the PCA analysis first the variables are recoded into binary, then factor score are derived which are considered weights for each variable. By using these scores composite index computed both for urban and rural separately. The composite Index is used to know the standard of living of the caste groups. The variables used and the score is given in the Appendix 1.

3. **The statistical test (t test)** is carried to examine the differentials among the groups.

By analyzing the social indicators, it is found that there is significant difference in the mean year of schooling among the caste groups by stage of economic development. In general, the. There are little differences in mean years of schooling among OBC and

others in urban areas. The mean age at marriage of girls follows the similar pattern. Taking into consideration the economic indicators it is found that there is significant difference in the mean value of the composite index, mean socio economic score as well as size of land holding which reflects the standard of living between the caste groups particularly between OBC and others.

As a whole, the findings also reveal inter-caste inequality in economic well being among all caste groups. But it is narrowed down among group of states. Intra caste differential is high in all type of states.