

A Critical Study of Socio-Economic Conditions and Upliftment Measures of the Musahar Caste in Bihar: A Sociological Analysis Using Latent Constructs

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ABSTRACT

The present study critically examines the socio-economic conditions and upliftment measures of the Musahar caste in Bihar, one of the most marginalized Scheduled Caste communities in India. Drawing upon sociological, historical, and development perspectives, the study analyses how caste-based exclusion, poverty, limited education, insecure livelihoods, inadequate health facilities, and restricted access to government welfare schemes shape persistent deprivation. Using primary survey data, a multidimensional latent construct system was developed comprising economic upliftment, educational access, employment opportunities, welfare access, social inclusion, health facilities, and social empowerment. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling were employed to examine interrelationships among these constructs. The findings reveal that education and access to government welfare schemes play a decisive role in promoting economic stability and social empowerment, while employment and health act as supportive but insufficient factors in isolation. The study emphasizes the need for integrated, caste-sensitive, and inclusive development strategies to ensure sustainable upliftment of the Musahar community.

Keywords: *Musahar Caste, Socio-Economic Conditions, Government Welfare Schemes, Educational Access, Social Empowerment, Bihar.*

I. Introduction

The Musahars, widely described as one of the most marginalised caste groups in the Indian subcontinent, occupy a distinctive and socially subordinate position within the caste hierarchy of Bihar. Historically identified as rat-catchers and extreme manual wage labourers, their sociocultural identity has been shaped by entrenched caste stigma, economic deprivation, landlessness, and discriminatory practices extending from pre-colonial through colonial to contemporary times (Sahay, 2019; Kumar, 2006; Singh & Singh, 2023). Anthropologists and sociologists alike have described Musahars as the archetype of caste-based disadvantage, whose everyday life practices, occupational roles, and spatial segregation reflect enduring socio-economic inequalities perpetuated by caste norms and structural exclusion (Rai & Dutta, 2025; Chand, 2024). The Indian caste system, as a hierarchical and hereditary social order, has historically institutionalised inequality and stratification across the subcontinent. Scholars emphasise its deep historical roots, tracing its origins to early Vedic texts and tracing its evolution through post-Vedic, medieval, and colonial eras (Deshpande, 2010; Ramesh, 2023; Prasad, 2020). These inequities translated into persistent discrimination against lower castes, particularly Dalit communities like the Musahars whose socio-economic conditions worsen in tandem with limited access to education, land, and formal employment (Pandey, 2019; Saha, 2024). The colonial census and administrative classifications further hardened fluid caste identities, often reducing them into static, pejorative social categories that legitimised

marginality (Samarendra, 2011; Jassal, 2001). Contemporary developmental studies and policy research have underscored that caste does not operate in isolation but intersects with economic status, literacy, gender, and geographical disparity to shape lived inequalities (Choragudi, Pellissery & Jayaram, 2022; Subramaniam, 2017). Therefore, to understand Musahars' sustained exclusion, one must situate their condition within broader socio-historical, structural, and institutional frameworks. This demands a holistic investigation into both their socio-economic conditions and the effectiveness of upliftment measures enacted through public policy, welfare programmes, educational interventions, and community mobilisation.

II. Review of Literature

Reference	Objectives of the Study	Methodology Used	Key Findings	Other Remarks / Research Contribution
Pandey (2019)	The study aimed to examine the structure of the Indian caste system and its impact on social stratification.	Descriptive and case-study based analysis using secondary sources.	It was found that caste continued to influence occupation, education, and social mobility despite constitutional safeguards.	The study provided foundational sociological understanding useful for analyzing caste-based marginalization.
Shukla (2021)	The study sought to analyse constitutional provisions related to equality under Articles 14–18.	Doctrinal legal research and constitutional interpretation.	The research revealed that legal equality existed formally, but substantive equality remained limited in practice.	The paper strengthened the legal framework discussion on caste discrimination.
Deshpande (2010)	The objective was to trace the historical evolution of the caste system and its contemporary consequences.	Historical–analytical approach using classical and modern texts.	The study concluded that caste hierarchies had transformed but not disappeared in modern India.	Useful for linking ancient caste ideology with present social realities.
Kassam (2025)	The work aimed to explain religious diversity in India and its social implications.	Interpretative religious and philosophical analysis.	It was observed that religious pluralism interacted deeply with caste identities.	Helped contextualize caste within broader religious traditions.
Ramesh (2023)	The study analysed socio-political structures of the Vedic period.	Historical textual analysis of Vedic literature.	It was found that early social stratification laid ideological roots of later caste divisions.	Provided ancient historical grounding for caste evolution.
Burstein (2017)	The objective was to situate Indian civilization within global ancient history.	Comparative historical analysis.	The study noted parallel development of hierarchical systems across civilizations.	Useful for comparative perspective beyond India.
Prasad (2020)	The study aimed to examine polity during Rig-Vedic and post-Vedic periods.	Historical and political analysis of scriptures.	It was found that varna-based governance gradually became rigid over time.	Contributed to understanding institutionalization of caste.

Carmichael (2023)	The study explored rise and fall of Indian dynasties and governance systems.	Narrative historical method.	Political power was observed to reinforce social hierarchy and exclusion.	Helped link empire politics with social inequality.
Momen et al. (2024)	The research examined Muslim attitudes toward colonial education.	Historical–qualitative analysis using archival documents.	It was found that colonial education produced uneven social inclusion among minorities.	Useful for analysing colonial restructuring of identities.
Samarendra (2011)	The study investigated the role of colonial census in shaping caste identities.	Historical and archival analysis.	It revealed that colonial classification rigidified fluid caste identities.	Highly relevant for identity construction studies.
Jassal (2001)	The objective was to examine caste enumeration of Mallahs under colonial rule.	Census document analysis.	The study found that state categorization intensified marginalization.	Provided micro-level colonial caste insights.
Narayan (2008)	The study explored Dalit reinterpretation of history.	Discourse and cultural analysis.	Dalits were found to reclaim dignity by reconstructing historical narratives.	Important for identity and resistance theory.
Waghray (2010)	The study analysed caste discrimination under international minority rights law.	Legal–comparative methodology.	It concluded that caste discrimination qualified as a human rights issue globally.	Strengthened international legal framing of caste.
GP (2025)	The study examined constitutional exclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims.	Doctrinal constitutional analysis.	It found that religious conversion resulted in denial of constitutional SC benefits.	Raised concerns on constitutional secularism.
Saha (2024)	The study analysed complexity of caste hierarchy in Indian culture.	Conceptual and interpretative analysis.	Caste was found to function as both cultural and power structure.	Useful theoretical lens for sociological chapters.
Karade (2009)	The study focused on development status of SCs and STs.	Edited volume using empirical and policy-based studies.	Development outcomes remained uneven across states.	Important for policy evaluation.
Choragudi et al. (2022)	The study examined caste in public policy formulation.	Policy analysis and institutional review.	Policies often failed due to caste-neutral assumptions.	Recommended caste-sensitive governance.
Subramaniam (2017)	The study investigated health inequities among Dalit and Adivasi groups.	Secondary data synthesis and public health analysis.	Severe disparities in health access were identified.	Extended caste analysis into health domain.
Jose et al.	The study examined	Conceptual and	Identity was both a	Useful for identity-based

(2013)	Dalit identity formation.	sociological discourse analysis.	result and cause of marginalization.	analytical framework.
Ranjan & Singh (2021)	The book examined life and philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.	Historical–biographical method.	Ambedkar’s ideology was found central to Dalit emancipation.	Provided ideological foundation for Dalit studies.
Pankaj (2023)	The study analysed migration as a tool of Dalit assertion.	Qualitative migration studies and interviews.	Migration enhanced autonomy but created new vulnerabilities.	Linked mobility with dignity and assertion.
Sahay (2019)	The study examined socio-economic invisibility of Musahars in Bihar.	Empirical sociological field study.	Musahars were found landless, excluded, and policy-invisible.	Core reference for Musahar-focused research.
Kumar (2006)	The study analysed cultural capital among Musahars.	Ethnographic and sociological analysis.	Cultural stigma severely restricted upward mobility.	Early scholarly documentation on Musahar marginality.
Rai & Dutta (2025)	The study examined colonial construction of Musahar identity.	Archival content analysis.	Colonial narratives reinforced stigma and bonded labour.	Strong theoretical contribution on identity formation.
Giri (2025)	The study analysed Musahar cosmology and nature–human relations.	Long-term ethnographic fieldwork.	Musahars followed an alternative ecological worldview.	Introduced “Musahar perspectivism” framework.
Thakur (2025)	The study assessed indigenous knowledge systems among Musahars.	Qualitative ethnographic methods.	Traditional knowledge supported sustainability but was declining.	Highlighted link between culture and livelihood resilience.
Adhikari (2025)	The study reviewed early marriage among Musahar community.	Narrative review of reports and studies.	Extremely high prevalence of child marriage was observed.	Emphasized urgent policy and data gaps.
Budhathoki (2025)	The study examined digital exclusion among Dalit communities.	Mixed-method approach with surveys and life histories.	Severe digital deprivation limited education and inclusion.	Framed digital divide as structural violence.

III. Developments of Multidimensional Latent Construct System

The upliftment of historically marginalized communities such as the Musahar caste cannot be understood through a single-dimensional perspective. Existing sociological, economic, and development literature clearly indicates that social exclusion, poverty, limited education, restricted employment opportunities, inadequate welfare access, poor health conditions, and persistent discrimination operate simultaneously and interactively. Therefore, the present study conceptualizes upliftment as a multidimensional latent construct system, rather than as isolated observable variables. Based on an extensive review of literature (Pandey, 2019; Deshpande, 2010; Sahay, 2019; Rai & Dutta, 2025; Giri, 2025; Budhathoki, 2025), seven latent factors were identified to comprehensively capture the structural realities influencing the socio-economic condition of the Musahar community. These latent variables represent unobservable theoretical dimensions that are measured through multiple observed indicators collected from primary survey data.

The selection of these latent constructs is theoretically grounded in caste stratification theory, social exclusion framework, capability approach, and empowerment theory, all of which emphasize that sustainable development among marginalized communities emerges from the combined functioning of economic security, educational mobility, welfare inclusion, health access, and social dignity.

The seven latent factors included in the present study are:

- i) Economic Upliftment (EUP)
- ii) Educational Access and Attainment (EAA)
- iii) Employment and Livelihood Opportunities (ELO)
- iv) Access to Government Welfare Schemes (AGW)
- v) Social Inclusion and Discrimination (SID)
- vi) Health and Nutritional Facilities (HNF)
- vii) Social Development and Empowerment (SDE)

Each latent factor is briefly described below.

- i) Economic Upliftment (EUP):** Economic upliftment represents the core foundation of social mobility among marginalized caste groups. Literature consistently highlights that chronic poverty, landlessness, and informal labor trap the Musahar community in intergenerational deprivation (Sahay, 2019; Kumar, 2006). Economic upliftment in the present study refers to improvement in household income, employment stability, savings, asset ownership, and reduced financial vulnerability. This construct reflects the ability of households to move beyond survival-level existence and attain minimum economic security. Economic upliftment is treated as a key endogenous variable, as it is influenced by education, employment, welfare access, health conditions, and social inclusion.
- ii) Educational Access and Attainment (EAA):** Education has been widely recognized as the most powerful instrument for dismantling caste-based inequality (Ambedkar; Ranjan & Singh, 2021). However, Musahar households continue to face barriers such as school distance, discrimination, dropout, child labor, and limited scholarship awareness (Bara & Prasad, 2024). Educational Access and Attainment refers to availability of schooling, continuity of education, scholarship support, fair treatment in educational institutions, and perceived value of education within households. This latent factor captures education not merely as literacy, but as a pathway toward awareness, dignity, and long-term empowerment.
- iii) Employment and Livelihood Opportunities (ELO):** Livelihood insecurity remains one of the most persistent challenges for the Musahar community. Studies indicate heavy dependence on agricultural wage labor, seasonal migration, and informal employment with low wages and social insecurity (Pankaj, 2023; Chand, 2024). The Employment and Livelihood Opportunities construct measures access to local employment, availability of skill development programs, stability of work, and livelihood diversification. This factor reflects the capacity of households to sustain regular income beyond exploitative labor relations.
- iv) Access to Government Welfare Schemes (AGW):** Government welfare schemes constitute one of the most significant institutional mechanisms aimed at reducing caste-based deprivation.

Programmes such as PDS, MGNREGA, housing schemes, pensions, scholarships, and health insurance are designed to enhance social protection among Scheduled Castes. However, literature emphasizes that awareness gaps, administrative exclusion, documentation barriers, and discrimination often prevent Musahar households from fully accessing these benefits (Priyanandini, 2024; Budhathoki, 2025). The AGW latent factor captures awareness, accessibility, receipt, and effectiveness of welfare schemes and represents the institutional dimension of social justice.

- v) **Social Inclusion and Discrimination (SID):** Despite constitutional safeguards, caste-based discrimination continues to shape everyday experiences of Musahar households (Pandey, 2019; Waughray, 2010). Social exclusion manifests through restricted participation in village institutions, humiliation, unequal treatment in public spaces, and denial of dignity. The Social Inclusion and Discrimination construct measures perceived discrimination, social acceptance, participation in community decision-making, and sense of belonging. This latent factor reflects the socio-cultural environment within which economic and educational outcomes operate.
- vi) **Health and Nutritional Facilities (HNF):** Poor health and chronic malnutrition are closely associated with poverty, unsafe living conditions, lack of sanitation, and limited healthcare access among Musahar communities (Yadav et al., 2024). Health and Nutritional Facilities represent access to primary healthcare centers, maternal and child health services, nutrition schemes, immunization, and food security. Although health does not directly generate income, it remains essential for sustaining productivity and quality of life.
- vii) **Social Development and Empowerment (SDE):** Social Development and Empowerment represent the ultimate outcome of upliftment. Empowerment goes beyond economic improvement and includes self-confidence, awareness of rights, participation in governance, ability to raise voice, and social dignity. This construct integrates psychological, social, and political dimensions of development, reflecting whether Musahar individuals perceive themselves as active citizens rather than passive beneficiaries. Literature emphasizes that true empowerment emerges when education and institutional support translate into confidence and agency (Narayan, 2008; Giri & Ganga, 2022).

IV. Analysis and Result

4.1 Conceptual Integration of Latent Factors

The proposed model assumes that educational access, employment opportunities, welfare inclusion, health access, and social inclusion interact dynamically to influence both **Economic Upliftment (EUP)** and **Social Development and Empowerment (SDE)**. Rather than functioning independently, these latent constructs operate as an interconnected system reflecting the complex realities of caste-based marginalization. Accordingly, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were employed to validate the measurement structure and examine causal relationships among these latent variables.

4.2 Factor Analysis of Respondent Data

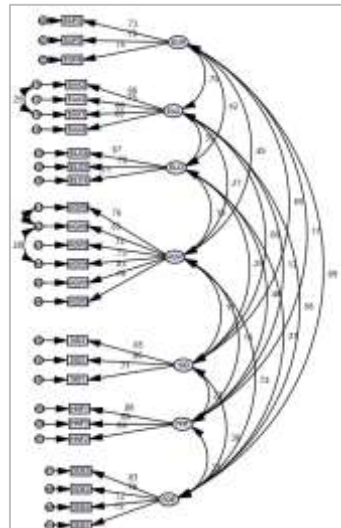


Fig 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The Confirmatory factor analysis illustrates as in above figure 1, the interrelationships among the key dimensions influencing the upliftment of the Musahar caste within the Dalit community. The model consists of seven latent constructs: Economic Upliftment (EUP), Educational Access and Attainment (EAA), Employment and Livelihood Opportunities (ELO), Access to Government Welfare Schemes (AGW), Social Inclusion and Discrimination (SID), Health and Nutritional Facilities (HNF), and Social Development and Empowerment (SDE).

The measurement model shows satisfactory factor loadings across all constructs, indicating strong construct validity. For Economic Upliftment (EUP), factor loadings range from 0.73 to 0.79, demonstrating reliable representation of income improvement, employment stability, and asset growth. Educational Access and Attainment (EAA) also show acceptable loadings between 0.66 and 0.76, confirming the significance of school accessibility, scholarships, and equal treatment in education.

Employment and Livelihood Opportunities (ELO) exhibit factor loadings from 0.67 to 0.71, highlighting the importance of local employment availability and skill development. Access to Government Welfare Schemes (AGW) records strong loadings between 0.65 and 0.83, reflecting the relevance of scheme awareness, benefit receipt, PDS, housing, and MGNREGA. Social Inclusion and Discrimination (SID) shows good reliability with loadings ranging from 0.66 to 0.85, while Health and Nutritional Facilities (HNF) demonstrate high explanatory power with loadings between 0.64 and 0.88. Social Development and Empowerment (SDE) also present strong indicators with loadings from 0.72 to 0.83.

The structural paths indicate meaningful relationships among constructs. Educational Access (EAA) shows a moderate positive association with Employment Opportunities ($\beta = 0.35$), suggesting that education enhances livelihood prospects. Employment (ELO) further influences Economic Upliftment ($\beta = 0.42$). Access to Government Welfare Schemes demonstrates a strong effect on Economic Upliftment ($\beta = 0.49$) and Social Development ($\beta = 0.58$). Health and Nutrition significantly contribute to Social Development ($\beta = 0.36$), while Social Inclusion strongly influences Social Empowerment ($\beta = 0.74$).

Overall, the model confirms that economic upliftment of the Musahar community is a multidimensional process, where education, employment, welfare access, health, and social inclusion jointly determine sustainable social empowerment.

4.3 Computation and Interpretation of Degrees of Freedom and Model Fit

In the present study, the Structural Equation Model (SEM) was evaluated using the default model estimation procedure in AMOS to examine the relationships among the latent constructs related to the upliftment of the Musahar caste within the Dalit community. The computation of degrees of freedom forms an essential step in assessing whether the proposed model is statistically identifiable and theoretically sound. The analysis shows that the number of distinct sample moments obtained from the variance–covariance matrix is 351, while the number of distinct parameters estimated in the model is 76. Based on these values, the degrees of freedom (df) were calculated as:

$$\text{Degrees of Freedom} = 351 - 76 = 275$$

The presence of positive degrees of freedom ($df = 275$) indicates that the model is over-identified, meaning that sufficient information exists in the data to estimate the parameters and test the model empirically. An over-identified model is a necessary condition for meaningful hypothesis testing in SEM and confirms the statistical adequacy of the proposed conceptual framework. The model estimation process successfully converged, as indicated by the message “Minimum was achieved”, which confirms that the estimation algorithm reached an optimal solution and the parameter estimates are stable and reliable. The chi-square statistic for the default model was found to be $\chi^2 = 450.130$ with 275 degrees of freedom, and the associated probability value ($p = .000$). The significant chi-square value suggests a difference between the observed covariance matrix and the model-implied covariance matrix. However, in SEM research, especially with large sample sizes, the chi-square test is known to be highly sensitive and often becomes statistically significant even when the model fit is acceptable. Therefore, the significant chi-square value does not necessarily indicate poor model fit but rather reflects the complexity of the model and the sample size. Consequently, researchers typically rely on additional fit indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and GFI for a more comprehensive evaluation of model adequacy. Overall, the degrees of freedom and chi-square results confirm that the proposed SEM model is statistically identifiable, properly estimated, and suitable for further interpretation using alternative goodness-of-fit indices.

V. Conclusion

The present sociological study critically examined the socio-economic conditions and upliftment measures of the Musahar caste in Bihar through a multidimensional latent construct framework. The findings clearly establish that the marginalization of the Musahar community is not merely a consequence of economic poverty but the outcome of deeply embedded caste-based social structures, historical stigma, and institutional exclusion. The persistence of deprivation across generations reflects the rigid nature of caste stratification, which continues to shape life chances, social mobility, and access to resources. The analysis confirms that upliftment among the Musahar community is a complex and interrelated process. Educational Access and Attainment and Access to Government Welfare Schemes emerged as the most influential latent determinants of both Economic Upliftment and Social Development and Empowerment. Education functions as a critical source of cultural capital, enhancing awareness, confidence, and opportunity, while welfare schemes provide institutional support that reduces vulnerability and strengthens social security. However, the study also reveals that employment opportunities and health facilities, although essential for survival, are insufficient in isolation to produce sustained empowerment without supportive institutional and social structures. The latent construct of Social Inclusion and Discrimination highlights that economic improvement alone does not automatically eliminate caste-based exclusion. Social dignity, participation, and recognition remain uneven, indicating that symbolic inequality continues to coexist with material development. This finding reinforces sociological arguments that redistribution without social recognition produces limited transformation. True empowerment requires changes not only in income and service delivery but also in social relations, attitudes, and power

structures at the community level.

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