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# ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION OF SCs AND STs IN NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME (NREGS)

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper analyses evidence of any discrimination against or in favor of Scheduled castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). Through construction of a state-wise SC/ST Index, we find evidence of discrimination in favor of both SCs and STs in most of the states. Based on our finding we try to assess, by running regression models, the reason because of which these communities may be getting favored. Through the analysis this paper reaches the conclusion that these communities (SCs/STs) have been self targeted due to their underlying characteristics of low levels of relative literacy and income.*

## KEYWORDS

SC; ST; NREGA; EGA; MPCE.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- SC - Scheduled Caste
- ST - Scheduled Tribe
- NREGA - National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
- NREGS - National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
- Govt. - Government
- EGA - Employment Guarantee Act
- MPCE - Monthly Per Capital Consumption Expenditure

## INTRODUCTION

**W**e find lot of evidence of discrimination against SCs and STs in almost all spheres of the Indian economy. There may be different reasons for discrimination (statistical, taste based etc.), however, the end result is that these communities are locked up in a low level equilibrium characterized by low levels of educational attainment, consumption, income, etc. In this paper, we try to analyze evidence of discrimination against or in favor of SCs and STs in the recently implemented policy of employment guarantee in rural districts. The policy is known as National Rural Employment Scheme.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA, also known as National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, NREGS) is an Indian legislation enacted in 2005. The idea is to give a legal guarantee of employment to anyone who is willing to do casual manual labor at the statutory minimum wage (set by the state govt.). Any adult who applies for work under the Act is entitled to being employed on public works within 15 days of applying. If work is not provided within 15 days, he/she is entitled to an unemployment allowance. Thus, an Employment Guarantee Act provides a universal and enforceable legal right to the most basic form of employment. It is a step towards legal enforcement of the right to work, as an aspect of the fundamental right to live with dignity.

However, NREGA is a kind of “half-hearted” Employment Guarantee Act. Under this Act, the entitlement for work is subject to some important limitations. For instance, the work guarantee applies in rural areas only, and is limited to “100 days per household per year”. Also the kinds of projects associated with this scheme are very limited and their selection is quite arbitrary. This does not mean that the NREGA is worthless. For the first time, the Act provides employment opportunities to rural laborers as a matter of right. It is also a major departure from elitist economic policies, and a potential stepping stone towards other forms of social security. In this and other ways, the Act is a real “breakthrough”.

The potential benefits to the rural society from this programme are enormous. An effective Employment Guarantee Act (EGA) would help to protect rural households from poverty and hunger. One hundred days of guaranteed employment at the minimum wage is not a great privilege, but for those who live on the margin of subsistence, it can make a big difference. Secondly, the Act is likely to lead to a substantial reduction of rural-urban migration: if work is available in the village, many families will stay in place instead of heading for the cities. Thirdly, guaranteed employment can be a major source of empowerment for women. Based on past experience, women are likely to account for a large proportion of laborers employed under the Act, and guaranteed employment will give them some economic independence. Fourthly, the Employment Guarantee Act is an opportunity to create useful assets in rural areas. For instance, there is plenty of scope for building productive water-harvesting structures through labor-intensive methods. Fifthly, guaranteed employment is likely to change power equations in the rural society, and to foster a more equitable social order. Last but not least, the Employment Guarantee Act is a means of strengthening the bargaining power of unorganized workers. This, in turn, could help them to struggle for other important entitlements, such as minimum wages and social security.

Given the potential implications of this programme, we need to assess its impact on social structure of the Indian rural society.

## EVALUATION OF DISCRIMINATION IN NREGA

### DATA SOURCE

Since the programme has been started recently, not much work has been done in lieu of discrimination aspect within NREGA. For our paper, to analyze evidence of discrimination in favor or against SCs and STs in NREGA, we have used employment data of SCs and STs for the year 2006-07, given in terms of person days per year. The data for employment has been picked up from the website of Ministry of Rural Development of India. Further, for the construction of SC/ST discrimination index, population figures for the year 2006-07 have been picked from the website of India Stat. This exercise is done for 27 Indian states.

### KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- We were given SC/ST population for the year 2001, to derive the figure for 2006-07; we have used the decadal growth rate of SCs and STs.
- The Data on literacy has been provided for the year 2001, we have assumed literacy ratio of SCs and STs to be the same even in 2006.
- MPCE of 2006 for ST and SC has been extrapolated from the growth rate of total MPCE from 2004 to 2006.
- MPCE of 2006 for eastern states were not available, hence average of neighboring states (growth rate of MPCE) has been used as proxy.

### DISCRIMINATION INDEX

The discrimination index that we have constructed is a crude measure of discrimination. The Index would indicate what proportion of total NREGA works are done by SCs (STs), in proportion to their population share. The indices have been constructed in the following way:

$$\text{SC Discrimination Index} = \frac{(\text{SC person days} / \text{Total person days})_i}{(\text{SC rural population} / \text{Total rural population})_i}$$

$$\text{ST Discrimination Index} = \frac{(\text{ST person days} / \text{Total person days})_i}{(\text{ST rural population} / \text{Total rural population})_i}$$

(The subscript i represents state)

Since NREGA projects are limited to rural areas, we have taken total SC (ST) rural population as a proportion of that state's total rural population.

Now if the index number calculated from our data is equal to 1, it would represent that No discrimination against SCs (STs) is present. If it is greater than 1, it would mean discrimination in favor of SCs (STs) and an index number of value less than 1 indicates discrimination against SCs (STs). Further, due to lack of data, the discrimination index values for some states are coming out to be nil. We would ignore such states for further analysis. The state wise discrimination indices for SCs (STs) are given below.

TABLE 1

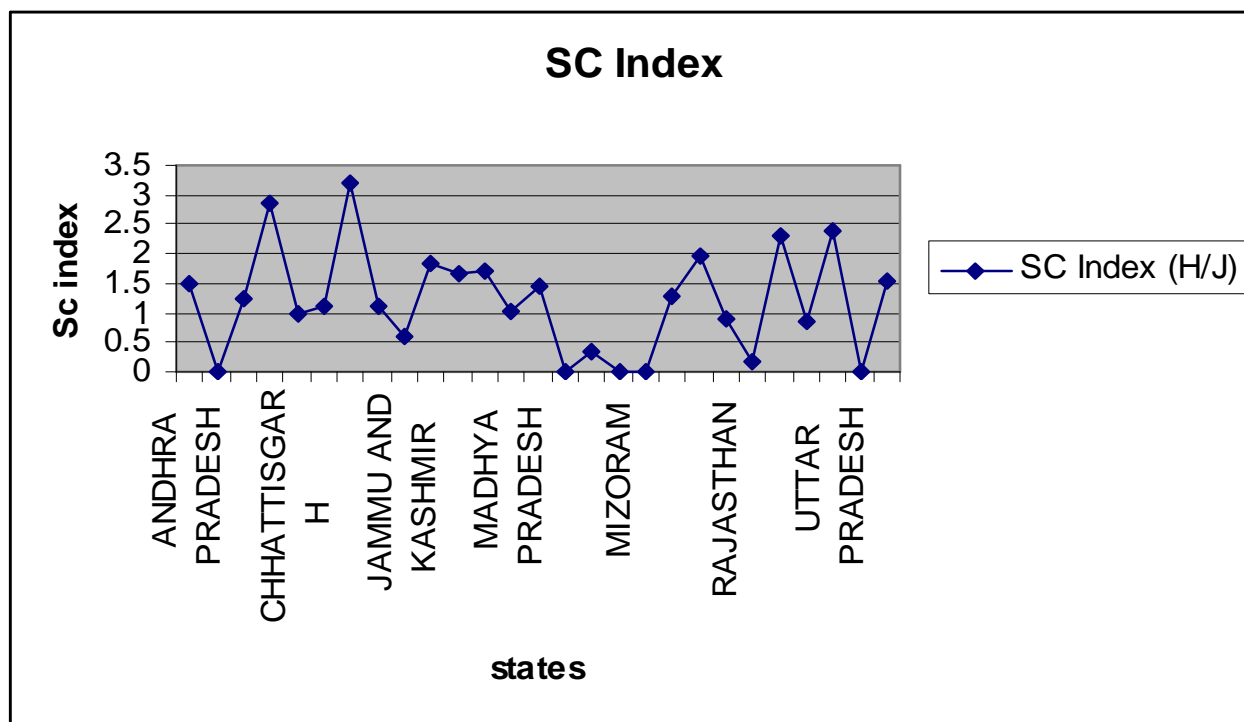
No.	States	SC Index	ST Index
1	ANDHRA PRADESH	1.5061	1.4395
2	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	0.0000	1.3783
3	ASSAM	1.2219	3.2053
4	BIHAR	2.8725	3.5837
5	CHHATTISGARH	1.0013	1.1470
6	GUJARAT	1.0928	2.6907
7	HARYANA	3.2076	0.0000
8	HIMACHAL PRADESH	1.1065	4.8084
9	JAMMU AND KASHMIR	0.6140	1.5810
10	JHARKHAND	1.8199	1.2711
11	KARNATAKA	1.6775	2.2501
12	KERALA	1.7013	7.6227
13	MADHYA PRADESH	1.0171	1.9117
14	MAHARASHTRA	1.4576	3.3686
15	MANIPUR	0.0000	2.6510
16	MEGHALAYA	0.3561	0.4285
17	MIZORAM	0.0000	0.9686
18	NAGALAND	0.0000	1.6318
19	ORISSA	1.2751	1.8489
20	PUNJAB	1.9687	0.0000
21	RAJASTHAN	0.8817	4.0761
22	SIKKIM	0.1555	4.3169
23	TAMIL NADU	2.3041	1.5387
24	TRIPURA	0.8662	1.5864
25	UTTAR PRADESH	2.3699	41.2872
26	UTTRANCHAL	0.0000	0.0000
27	WEST BENGAL	1.5469	2.8665

#### SC DISCRIMINATION

From the table above, we can observe that, for most states the index number value is greater than one, implying prevalence of discrimination in favor of SCs (excessive participation of SCs). The plausibility of this result is a matter that would be discussed in the next section. For states like Tripura and Rajasthan, the value of the index is quite close to one, so there is no clear evidence of discrimination against or in favor of SCs. The states showing discrimination against SCs are Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya and Sikkim. However, it cannot be said with certainty that there is prevalence of discrimination against SCs in these states because the total number of person days of work under NREGA in these states was quite low, hence the possibility of high variance in numbers. So we can safely conclude that there is case of discrimination in favor of SCs. Now the question is that, whether the result we are getting due to some specific government policy measure to target SCs or is it due to some feature of NREGA policy itself due to which SCs are being self targeted to their differentiated community characteristics. The answer to this question too would be probed in the next section.



FIG. 1

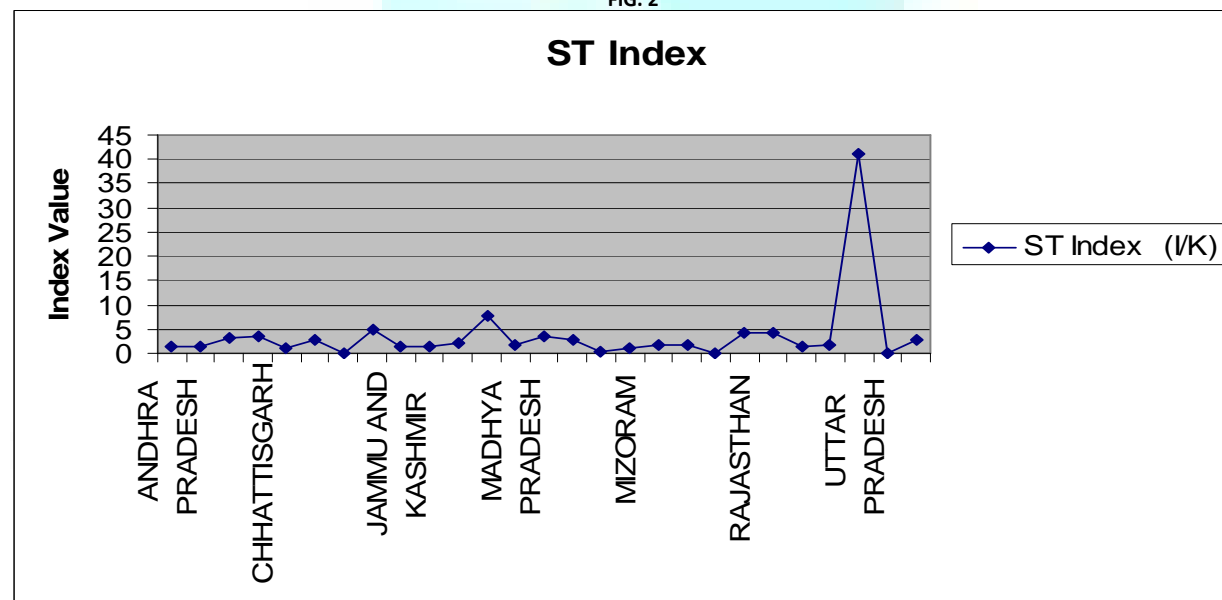


#### ST DISCRIMINATION

We observe, from the table above, that for all states but one, the index value is coming out to be greater than one. Therefore there is clear evidence of discrimination in favor of STs across states. Further, we observe that the index value for the state of Uttar Pradesh is very large, this is due to the fact that the percentage of STs in rural areas is very low (0.0008%), as a result the denominator (Total ST rural population / Total rural population) while calculating the index value is very low. This is also the reason behind high index values in case of states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh. Now in case of STs too we face the same question: whether the excessive participation of STs in NREGS, a resultant of govt. initiative, or is it because of certain special characteristics of ST community due to which this group becomes self targeted in lieu of NREGA programme.

Therefore, the index on a whole indicates that there exists discrimination in favor of SCs and STs for most of the Indian states. The result is quite surprising, given the fact that SCs and STs usually face discrimination against them in most of the cases. Hence, we would now probe into the anomaly of our result.

FIG. 2



#### IS THERE DISCRIMINATION IN FAVOR OF SCs AND STs

To answer this question, we need to analyze the reason(s) for excessive participation of SCs and STs in this programme. One possible explanation is that Government has specifically designed the policy of NREGS for empowerment of SCs and STs. However, in the policy formulation of NREGS, there is nothing mentioned with respect to reservation of jobs for SCs (STs). Also there is no mentioning in the Act regarding projects being undertaken on lands of SCs (STs). The policy just states that "one member per rural household is eligible for guaranteed employment, to do casual **manual unskilled labor** at the statutory **minimum wage**, for 100 days in a year". We should take note of these two features (highlighted) of the policy.

Now it is quite plausible that an uneducated and unemployed person would like to participate in this programme since this would offer them certain minimum income. Persons with these characteristics would be even more attracted towards this programme as their opportunity cost is almost zero. Therefore, we would like to probe into the fact that whether the excessive participation of SCs and STs due to low levels of literacy and low household income levels in their communities. If this is true then, we can say that, it is these particular community characteristics (low literacy and low income level) that make SCs/STs self targeted in this programme. To analyze this, we build the following regression model for the year 2006-07:

$$\text{SC Index} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 (\text{SC literacy} / \text{Total literacy}) + \beta_3 (\text{SC MPCE} / \text{Total MPCE}) + \mu$$

Here, SC Index is the dependant variable, (SC literacy / Total literacy) and (SC MPCE / Total MPCE) are independent variables, we code these independent variables as  $SC_L$  and  $SC_M$  respectively.

In this regression model,  $SC_L$  is a proxy for relative educational attainment of SCs in a state and  $SC_M$  is a proxy of relative income level of SCs in a state as consumption has a strong correlation with income level. The term relative over here means, in comparison to the rest of the communities in the state and this is why we have taken total literacy and total MPCE as the denominator of the explanatory variables respectively. The reason why we took these variables as the explanatory variable is the following:

$SC_L$  : The coefficient of this variable explains, to what extent is the excessive participation of SCs in NREGA explained by the relative deprivation of SCs in terms of their educational attainment. This is given by SC literacy rate in a state upon that state's overall literacy rate.

$SC_M$  : This variable explains the extent to which excessive participation of SCs in NREGA projects is explained by the relative deprivation of SCs in terms of their consumption (income) level. This expression is given by total SCs MPCE in a state upon that state's total MPCE.

We expect sign of the  $SC_L$  coefficient to be negative because as the literacy levels in SCs rises, the opportunity cost of their participation in NREGA rises (as they would now be able to handle more skilled jobs), therefore they would now be less willing to work at state set minimum wages.

In case of  $SC_M$  too, we expect the coefficient sign to be negative because as the consumption (income) level of SCs rises, their participation in NREGA would fall as it is usually a fall back option for low income level households.

We have run regression on 27 states but because of lack of data the index value (dependant variable) was taken as zero for 5 states i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Uttarakhand. Thereby the final regression was run on rest of the 22 states.

The Regression Model in case of STs is the following:

$$ST\ Index = \beta_1 + \beta_2 (ST\ literacy / Total\ literacy) + \beta_3 (ST\ MPCE / Total\ MPCE) + \epsilon$$

Everything in this model is analogous to the SC model that we explained above. In this model we code the explanatory variables as  $ST_L$  and  $ST_M$ . The explanation of these variables is the following:

$ST_L$  : The coefficient of this variable explains, to what extent is the excessive participation of STs in NREGA explained by the relative deprivation of STs in terms of their educational attainment. This is given by ST literacy rate in a state upon that state's overall literacy rate.

$ST_M$  : This variable explains the extent to which excessive participation of STs in NREGA projects is explained by the relative deprivation of STs in terms of their consumption (income) level. This expression is given by total STs MPCE in a state upon that state's total MPCE.

Further, we expect the sign of the coefficients to be negative for both the explanatory variables, for reasons discussed above. Let us now analyze the results of these regression models. We have run the regression on 27 states but because of lack of data, the index value was taken as zero for Haryana and Punjab. Also, Uttar Pradesh with an index value of 41.28 was removed because it was an outlier and an influential variable. Hence, the regression was run on 24 states.

#### RESULTS OF THE ECONOMETRIC MODELS

SC REGRESSION TABLE

regress scindex scl scm					
Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs. = 22	
Model	8.20236889	2	4.10118444	F (2, 19)	= 19.62
Residual	3.9706874	19	0.208983547	Prob > F	= 0.0000
Total	12.1730563	21	0.579669347	R-squared	= 0.6738
				Adj R-squared	= 0.6395
				Root MSE	= 0.45715
scindex	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
scl	-3.111481	.9968142	-3.12	0.006	-5.197837 -1.025125
scm	-3.642342	.9788399	-3.72	0.001	-5.691078 -1.593607
constant	7.431872	.9617047	7.73	0.000	5.419001 9.444743

From the SC regression table, we can observe that, our theoretical analysis is well backed up by the statistical analysis. The coefficients for both explanatory variables,  $SC_L$  and  $SC_M$ , are coming out to be negative and significant at .6% and .1% level respectively. Also, the R-square for our model is 67%, which is quite high given the fact that we have taken only two explanatory variables. Lastly our overall model is significant at 0% level.

Therefore we can conclude, from results of our model that, to a large extent, low levels of relative literacy and income is the reason for excessive participation of SCs in NREGA projects and it is cannot be said that discrimination in favor of SCs is the reason for excessive participation of SCs.

ST REGRESSION TABLE

regress stindex stl stm					
Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs. = 24	
Model	21.6423975	2	10.8211988	F (2, 21)	= 5.54
Residual	40.9936341	21	1.95207781	Prob > F	= 0.0117
Total	62.6360316	23	2.72330572	R-squared	= 0.3455
				Adj R-squared	= 0.2832
				Root MSE	= 1.3972
stindex	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
stl	-4.098338	1.816191	-2.26	0.035	-7.875313 -.3213628
stm	-4.451999	2.438775	-1.83	0.082	-9.523709 .6197109
constant	9.248529	2.219356	4.17	0.000	4.633125 13.86393

From the ST regression table above, we can observe that, our statistical results are good enough to back the theoretical analysis. As expected, the coefficients of explanatory variables are coming out to be negative.  $ST_L$  is coming out to significant at 3.5% level whereas  $ST_M$  is significant at 8.2% level. The R-square for this model is 35%; it's on the lower side but given the fact that we have taken only two explanatory variables, is good enough. Our overall model is also significant at 1% level.

Hence, based on our statistical results, we can conclude that, even in case of STs excessive participation in NREGA is due to low levels of relative literacy and income within the ST community itself.

So, from the regression models that we have run, there not much evidence of SCs and STs being positively favored for NREGA projects. The projects in NREGA involve unskilled work at minimum wages and the fact that these communities get self targeted is because they are largely characterized by low levels of literacy and income, making these projects more attractable to them.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In general, we observe discrimination against SCs and STs in most spheres of the Indian economy. However, in the case of policy of NREGA, we find that there is clear evidence of excessive participation of SCs and STs (through construction of state wise SC/ST discrimination index), so we analyze, with help of regression models, the reasons for it. We find that it is due to community characteristics (low level of literacy and income) of SCs and STs that we observe index values for discrimination index being greater than one. We therefore conclude that there no evidence of discrimination against SCs and STs in NREGA. In fact these communities have been self targeted for these projects. Hence, NREGA could help in process of empowerment of these communities; break the low level equilibrium that they are stuck in.

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**APPENDIX****TABLE FOR CALCULATION OF SC AND ST DISCRIMINATION INDEX FOR THE YEAR 2006-07**

No.	States	Persondays In Lakhs			SCs persondays/ total persondays	STs persondays/ total persondays	SC rural population as a percentage of Total rural pop.	ST rural population as a percentage of Total rural pop.	SC Index	ST Index
		Total	SCs	STs						
1		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	ANDHRA PRADESH	678.77	202.41	88.31	0.2982	0.1301	0.1980	0.0904	1.5061	1.4395
2	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	4.53	0	4.53	0.0000	1.0000	0.0037	0.7255	0.0000	1.3783
3	ASSAM	572.92	49.57	265.05	0.0865	0.4626	0.0708	0.1443	1.2219	3.2053
4	BIHAR	596.87	281	19.13	0.4708	0.0321	0.1639	0.0089	2.8725	3.5837
5	CHHATTISGARH	700.21	84.08	318.98	0.1201	0.4555	0.1199	0.3972	1.0013	1.1470
6	GUJARAT	100.48	7.07	64.57	0.0704	0.6426	0.0644	0.2388	1.0928	2.6907
7	HARYANA	24.12	14.48	0	0.6003	0.0000	0.1872	0.0000	3.2076	0.0000
8	HIMACHAL PRADESH	29.9	9.09	6.7	0.3040	0.2241	0.2747	0.0466	1.1065	4.8084
9	JAMMU AND KASHMIR	32.3	1.75	7.5	0.0542	0.2322	0.0882	0.1469	0.6140	1.5810
10	JHARKHAND	520.47	122.19	209.7	0.2348	0.4029	0.1290	0.3170	1.8199	1.2711
11	KARNATAKA	222.01	73.37	45.18	0.3305	0.2035	0.1970	0.0904	1.6775	2.2501
12	KERALA	20.48	4.12	2.54	0.2012	0.1240	0.1182	0.0163	1.7013	7.6227
13	MADHYA PRADESH	1971.77	312.96	959.05	0.1587	0.4864	0.1561	0.2544	1.0171	1.9117
14	MAHARASHTRA	159.28	25.79	65.12	0.1619	0.4088	0.1111	0.1214	1.4576	3.3686
15	MANIPUR	18.57	0	18.57	0.0000	1.0000	0.0000	0.3772	0.0000	2.6510
16	MEGHALAYA	24.22	0.07	20.14	0.0029	0.8315	0.0081	1.9406	0.3561	0.4285
17	MIZORAM	7.85	0	7.85	0.0000	1.0000	0.0002	1.0325	0.0000	0.9686
18	NAGALAND	13.08	0	13.08	0.0000	1.0000	0.0000	0.6128	0.0000	1.6318
19	ORISSA	799.34	189.06	393.87	0.2365	0.4927	0.1855	0.2665	1.2751	1.8489
20	PUNJAB	15.57	10.8	0	0.6936	0.0000	0.3523	0.0000	1.9687	0.0000
21	RAJASTHAN	998.87	159.5	642.9	0.1597	0.6436	0.1811	0.1579	0.8817	4.0761
22	SIKKIM	2.42	0.02	2.38	0.0083	0.9835	0.0532	0.2278	0.1555	4.3169
23	TAMIL NADU	182.79	102.48	4.34	0.5606	0.0237	0.2433	0.0154	2.3041	1.5387
24	TRIPURA	50.13	7.98	31.17	0.1592	0.6218	0.1838	0.3919	0.8662	1.5864
25	UTTAR PRADESH	822.91	467.82	25.62	0.5685	0.0311	0.2399	0.0008	2.3699	41.2872
26	UTTRANCHAL	40.6	10.84	0.57	0.2670	0.0140	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
27	WEST BENGAL	440.08	158.78	81.88	0.3608	0.1861	0.2332	0.0649	1.5469	2.8665
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9050.56</b>	<b>2295.24</b>	<b>3298.73</b>						

TABLE FOR VALUES FOR EXPLANATORY VARIABLES FOR THE YEAR 2006-07

No.	States	SCs /Total Literacy in the States (SC <sub>i</sub> )	STs/Total Literacy in the States (ST <sub>i</sub> )	SC MPCE/Total MPCE (SC <sub>m</sub> )	ST MPCE/Total MPCE (ST <sub>m</sub> )
1	ANDHRA PRADESH	0.8843	0.6122	0.8455	0.7344
2	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	1.2449	0.9138	1.4307	1.0157
3	ASSAM	1.0553	0.5877	0.9409	1.0315
4	BIHAR	0.6064	0.5994	0.8264	0.9460
5	CHHATTISGARH	0.9892	0.8051	1.1518	0.8508
6	GUJARAT	1.0203	0.6909	0.8750	0.8113
7	HARYANA	0.8159	0.0000	0.6639	1.1435
8	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.9190	0.4562	0.7965	0.9858
9	JAMMU AND KASHMIR	1.0631	0.7328	0.9385	0.9072
10	JHARKHAND	0.7015	0.6989	0.9001	0.9150
11	KARNATAKA	0.7943	0.7248	0.8216	0.8394
12	KERALA	0.9098	0.7079	0.7433	0.5113
13	MADHYA PRADESH	0.9199	0.6462	0.8741	0.7806
14	MAHARASHTRA	0.9350	0.7179	0.8053	0.7365
15	MANIPUR	1.0255	0.9340	0.9504	0.9000
16	MEGHALAYA	0.8994	0.9799	0.9834	0.9952
17	MIZORAM	1.0045	1.0061	1.6097	1.0019
18	NAGALAND	0.0000	0.9902	0.0000	1.0091
19	ORISSA	0.8796	0.5922	0.9098	0.7119
20	PUNJAB	0.8063	0.0000	0.7698	0.7566
21	RAJASTHAN	0.8642	0.7394	0.8924	0.7857
22	SIKKIM	0.9157	0.3759	1.0940	0.9518
23	TAMIL NADU	0.8599	0.5650	0.7909	0.8267
24	TRIPURA	1.0205	0.7716	0.9853	0.8934
25	UTTAR PRADESH	0.8224	0.6240	0.8534	0.8994
26	UTTRANCHAL	0.8855	0.8831	0.8560	0.8787
27	WEST BENGAL	0.8601	0.6327	0.9421	0.7865

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