

## **Living Conditions and Consumption Standard of Rural Scheduled Castes of Punjab: A Preliminary Estimate**

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The quantitative estimates of present standard of living of Rural Scheduled Castes (RSC) of Punjab presented in this paper shows that 22 percent of them have graduated to the usual middle class level of living conditions and consumption standard; and another 36 percent have also attained an almost middle-class level of living conditions and consumption standard. Only about 4 percent of Punjab's RSC households are living in poor conditions, without any durable consumer good whatsoever. The remaining 38 percent have certainly risen out of poverty and reached a lower middle-class level of living conditions and consumption standard. Comparison of Punjab's RSC with RSCs of other Indian States shows them at the top rank in living conditions and consumption standard. Higher level of agricultural development of Punjab compared to other Indian States is the main factor that enabled Punjab RSC to attain the best living standard among RSC in Indian States

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### **Introduction**

The rural Scheduled Castes (SC) are the most disadvantaged group of society. The percolation of benefits of economic growth and Government Welfare Schemes to them is slow and disproportionate due to their location in rural sector, and social exclusion from the mainstream castes of the village (Deshpande, A. 2011). The rural location puts even the mainstream castes of villages at a disadvantage in economic competition due to urban bias of economic growth and government welfare schemes (Lipton, 1976). Added to that is the segregation of SC into separate localities outside the villages, due to their low caste status (Beteille, 1991). Their virtual landlessness compels SC to work as agriculture labourers at low wages, and irregular uncertain employment (World Bank, 2011). Their social exclusion, lack of experience and poor capital endowment puts them at a disadvantage in fully availing the economic opportunities created by economic growth (Iversen et. al 2014). Their inability to organise politically deprives them from their due share in government welfare schemes (Besley, T. et. al, 2004). All these disadvantaged faced by rural SC are widely accepted by Government and Social Scientists. It is also recognised that rural SC are at the lowest level of society in terms of living conditions and consumption standard. But, there seems to be no systematic estimate of their living conditions and consumption standard; only partial information is available about their higher poverty rate, low literacy rate, high mortality rate

etc. The absence of information on per capita income of rural SC as a separate social group is probably the reason for their being no study on their standard of living. The purpose of the present paper is to prepare a quantitative estimate of living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC of Punjab and compare it with the living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC of other States of India.

### (I) Data and Methodology

The information on living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC available in secondary published sources is dated and inadequate. To get the latest picture of their living conditions and consumption standard, a primary census survey of 30 randomly selected villages from various regions of Punjab was conducted in October/December, 2019. The number of villages selected from each region was approximately in proportion to the rural SC population in the region. The detail of the sample design and relevant features of SC households of sample villages is given in table one.

**Table 1**  
**Sample Design and Profile of Sample SC**  
**Households**  
**(October/December, 2019)**

Region	Districts in Region	Number of Sample Villages	Number of SC Households in Sample Villages	Population of SC in Sample Villages (Number)	Proportion of SC in Sample Village Population (%)
Foot Hills	Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Hoshiarpur, Ropar, Nawan Shahr, Mohali	7	714	3896	-31.96
Central	Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Jalandhar, Kapurthala	7	1057	4858	41.42
Northern Malwa	Ludhiana, Moga, Fatehgarh Shaib	4	817	4324	39.09
Eastern Malwa	Patiala, Sangrur, Barnala	4	510	2937	31.50
Southern Malwa	Bathinda, Faridkot, Mansa	4	533	3814	37.52

Western Malwa	Ferozpur, Farilka, Mukatsar	4	843	5517	23.25
All	-	30	4474	25346	37.15

**Notes:** (1) Number of Villages selected from each region was approximately in proportion to the percentage of SC in rural population of the region.

(2) Complete census of SC households was made.

In the 30 sample villages, the total number of SC households was 4474 and their total population 25346. The SC population of sample villages constituted 37.15 percent of the total population of the sample villages. From the 4474 SC households of the sample villages detailed information was collected on their living conditions and ownership of durable consumer goods. Information on consumption of non-durable goods was not collected because of the large number of non-durable goods items consumed; the respondents were not able to correctly recall the amount of each non-durable good consumed even during the last one month. Moreover, the ownership of durable consumer goods is a better and more reliable indicator of consumption standard of a household owning to these being more expensive, and almost zero chance of making a mistake in verifying these being owned or not owned by the investigated SC households.

The information on living conditions was collected on the following items:

- (1) House Type: Pucca or kutchra.
- (2) Drinking water source in house premises.
- (3) Latrine in house premises.
- (4) Proper drainage outlet for disposal of waste water.
- (5) LP Gas connection.
- (6) Electricity connection.

The detailed description of these living conditions items is given in table three. The information on durable consumer goods ownership was collected on the following items:

- (1) Refrigerator, (2) Television, (3) Phone/Mobile, (4) Bicycle, (5) Motor Cycle/Scooter, (6) Car/Jeep etc.

More detailed description of these items is given in table four.

The level of living conditions and standard of consumption was measured in terms of percentage of the 4474 SC households owning/having these items. To get an overall average estimate of the living conditions and consumption standard a Composite Index of living conditions, and of durable consumer goods was constructed on the lines of Human Development Index (HDI) of UNDP (UNDP, 1990). The proportion of rural SC households having/owning an item was used as indicator of its living conditions and consumption standard. For constructing the Composite Index the minimum value of each item was fixed at zero percent SC households having/owning an item; and the desirable value at 100 percent rural SC households having/owning it. The Composite Index is the

simple average ( $\bar{x}$ ) of percentage of SC households having/owning various items. The value of the Composite Index varies between zero and 100 on the lines of HDI of UNDP. So, higher the value of Composite Index, higher the standard of living of the SC households. The Composite Indexes of living conditions and durable consumer goods ownership were used to evaluate the level of living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC households of the State and to make comparison across SC caste groups and across the States. These two Composite Indexes give a good preliminary estimate of the living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC of Punjab at present i.e. after more than half a century of fast agricultural growth under the Green Revolution. Of course, a more accurate estimate of standard of living of rural SC will be possible only when information on per capita income of rural SC as a separate social group becomes available. But the probability of that happening in the near future is virtually nil. Till then the estimates presented here will be useful as a quantitative picture of living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC of Punjab and their relative position vis-à-vis rural SC of other States.

## (II) Profile of Sample Rural SC Households

Some relevant features of the profile of sample SC households are given in table two to provide the necessary background to the discussion of their living conditions and consumption standard. In the SC social group a large number of castes are clubbed together that normally do not inter-marry. But their social exclusion, spatial segregation and reservation by Government in provision of jobs and educational opportunities makes them all a separate social group. In the sample SC households, two castes are preponderant in numbers: 42.07 percent of sample SC households belonged to Mazhabi/Balmiki/Chura etc. Caste and 33.13 percent to Chamar/Ramdasia/Ad Dharmi caste, and the remaining 24.80 percent to a large number of other small castes. About half (47.38 percent) of sample households were earning the major proportion of their income from agriculture labour work; 6.12 percent were engaged in farming as cultivators; and 53.50 percent were engaged in a large number of other non-farm occupations. Only 3.60 percent of SC households owned some farmland, and average size of their holdings was rather small, only 2.42 acres. Out the sample 4744 SC households 35.71 percent owned one or more milch animals. The literacy rate of sample SC population was 61 percent, and their average size of households was 5.22 members.

This is the broad profile of rural SC households whose living conditions and consumption standard estimates that are presented and discussed in this paper.

**Table 2**  
**Profile of Sample Rural SC Households**

Feature	Description	Percentage of Total Sample
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<b>Caste:</b>	(1) Mazhabi/Balmiki/Chura etc.	42.07
	(2) Chamar/Ramdasia/Ad Dharmi etc.	33.13
	(3) Other Scheduled Castes	24.80
<b>Occupation:</b>	(1) Agriculture Labourers	47.38
	(2) Cultivators	6.12
	(3) Other occupations	53.50
<b>Land Ownership:</b>	(1) Owning farm land	3.60
	(2) Average size of holding (Acres)	2.42
<b>Household Size</b>	Average number of members	5.22
<b>Literacy Rate</b>	Percentage of literate	61.00
<b>Milch Animal Ownership</b>	Owning one or more milch animal	35.71

Notes: Primary Survey.

### (III) Living Conditions of SC Households

The picture of living conditions of rural SC households is captured in terms of eight features defined and described in table three. The most important feature of living conditions is the type of house in which the rural SC households live. About 58 percent of sample rural SC households were living in pucca houses. A pucca house is defined as one that has walls, roof, and floor of some pucca material; the remaining 42 percent were living in semi pucca or kutchha (Mud) house; and none in Thatch/Bamboo Huts. About 96 percent of them have drinking water source (Hand Mump or Tap), in their own house premises; and out of these about 73 percent were having a piped tap water connection in their own house premises. Above 80 percent (84.11%) of sample SC households were having a latrine (pit type or flush type), in their own house premises; and out of these 25.58 percent were having a flush latrine in their own house premises. For the disposal of waste water, 78.13 percent of sample SC houses were connected to the village network of street drains that take waste water to a pit outside the village. More than 90 percent (93.85%) of sample SC households have electricity connection for lighting, and 82.17 percent owned an LP Gas set and connection for cooking. The Composite Index of living conditions prepared on the lines of Human Development Index was 82.89, which indicates that the rural SC of Punjab have attained a fairly good living conditions level; because the desirable level of the Composite India is 100.

The information on living conditions of the three broad caste groups within the SC population is also given in this table. In terms of the Composite Index, Chamar/Ramdasia/Ad Dharmi caste households are at a better position (89.79) than the Mazhabi/Balmiki/Chura caste (80.37), and the other castes group (77.64). In spite of the difference in the Composite Index of living conditions of the three castes groups, it can be said that the living conditions of all the caste groups within the SC population are at a good level i.e. at the above average level.

**Table 3**  
**Living Conditions of Rural SC Households**

Sr. No.	Living Conditions Indicator	Percentage of Households/ Having			
		All SC	Chamar/ Ramdasia etc.	Mazhabi / Chura etc.	Other SC
1.	Pucca House	57.91	58.14	53.61	74.54
2.	Drinking water source in house premises (Hand pump or tap)	96.38	100.00	97.34	90.94
3.	Piped tap water connection in house premises	72.90	85.16	78.59	44.33
4.	Latrine in house premises (Pit type or flush type)	84.11	95.11	77.84	100.00
5.	Flush latrine in house premises	25.58	37.57	18.84	16.03
6.	Proper drainage outlet for disposal of waste water	78.13	90.70	81.62	38.56
7.	LP Gas connection	82.17	91.74	79.54	71.85
8.	Electricity connection	93.85	98.72	92.24	89.96
	Composite Index	82.09	89.09	80.37	77.64

Note: Composite Index is the average ( $\bar{x}$ ) of percentages of items at Serial Numbers 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8.

#### **(IV) Ownership of Durable Consumer Goods**

Information on the proportion of sample SC households owning the durable consumer goods that usually define a good consumption standard is given in table four. More than two-third (69.36%) of sample SC households owned Refrigerator; a facility usually enjoyed by better off households. More than three-fourth of sample SC households (76.72%) own Television; out of which 51.44 percent even have a cable connection to their Television set. The cable connection indicates even a still better standard because a monthly rent has to be paid for it. Almost all (96.13%) of the sample SC households owned Phone/Mobile; and 41.01 percent owned Bicycle. In terms of modern petrol/diesel driven vehicles also the rural SC are found in a fairly good condition; 22.08 percent of them owned a Motor cycle/Scooter, and 2.50 percent owned even a Car/Jeep. The Composite Index of durable consumer goods ownership works out to 51.30; and if Car/Jeep is excluded then it rises to almost

60. So, in terms of durable consumer goods ownership also the rural SC of the State are in an above average situation.

The comparison of Composite Index of ownership of durable consumer goods among the three caste groups within the SC population given in this table shows that the Chamar/Ramdasia/Ad Dharmi caste is in a better position (55.70), compared to the Mazhabi/Balmiki/Chura caste (47.33), and the other SC castes group (48.05). However, the difference in the Composite Index of durable goods ownership among the three caste groups is not big, therefore, one can say that in terms of durable consumer goods ownership also the intra-SC castes variation is not very high.

On the basis of living conditions and durable consumer goods ownership taken together, the Composite Index comes to 67, which indicates that standard of living of rural SC of Punjab is significantly better than the average. The range of variation of the Composite Index being between zero and hundred, 50 can be taken to represent the average standard of living.

**Table 4**  
**Durable Consumer Goods Ownership by Rural**  
**SC Households**

Sr. No.	Durable Consumer Good	Percentage of Households Owning			
		All SC	Chamar/Ramdasia etc.	Mazhabi/Chura etc.	Other SC
1.	Refrigerator	69.36	75.14	68.88	58.52
2.	Television	76.72	80.11	57.51	70.01
3.	Cable Television	51.44	54.45	52.12	45.66
4.	Phone/Mobile	96.38	97.11	96.14	94.86
5.	Bicycle	41.01	48.44	37.39	39.29
6.	Motor Cycle/Scooter	22.08	20.69	22.61	21.67
7.	Car/Jeep etc.	2.50	3.69	1.45	3.97
	Composite Index	51.30	55.70	47.33	48.05

Note: Composite Index is the average ( $\bar{x}$ ) of percentages of items at Serial Numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

#### **(V) Stratification of Rural SC Households**

On the basis of information presented in tables three and four an attempt is made to work out an approximate stratification of the sample (4474) rural SC households in terms of standard of living. The results of that exercise are given

in table five, and the five categories into which the 4474 sample SC households have been classified are defined and described there.

The upper most category is of those SC households who own a Car/Jeep and all the other items mentioned in Tables 3 and 4. Out of the sample 4474 SC households 112 (2.50%) fall in this category and are called *well-off* households. They own Car/Jeep, Motorcycle/Scooter, Refrigerator, Cable TV, Phone/Mobile, and live in pucca houses having piped water tap and flush latrine in own house premises. Their houses are connected with village drain network for disposal of waste water, and they have an electricity connection and a LP Gas set and connection as well. So, these 2.50 percent of rural SC households are living at a good middle class standard of living.

The second category is given the nomenclature of *Better Off* households to distinguish them from the well-off group. Out of 4474 sample households 19.58 percent (876 number) fall in this category. These households have all the items that the well-off 2.50 households have, except the Car/Jeep. So, these 19.58 percent can also be said to have a middle-class type standard of living.

So, out of the sample 4474 SC households these two categories constituting about 22 percent of total can be ranked at a middle-class type of standard of living.

The third category is labelled *lower middle*. Out of the total 4474 sample SC households 1603 (35.87%) fall in this category. They live in pucca houses, have piped tap water connection and pit type latrine in their own house premises, have proper drainage outlet for waste water, LP Gas and electricity connection. They own Refrigerator, Television, Bicycle and Phone/Mobile.

The fourth category is called *Lower, But Not Poor* for want of a suitable name and 1721 SC households (38.47%) fall in it. These SC households live in Semi-Kutch/Kutch houses, have drinking water hand pump and pit latrine in own house premises, and have proper drainage outlet for disposal of waste water. Out of these, 1721 households 93 percent have electricity connections, 63 percent have LP Gas connection, 30 percent have Refrigerator, 49 percent have Television set, and all 100 percent have Phone/Mobile.

The lowest category is rightly labelled as *Poor* because they live in Mud/Kutch houses, without any drinking water source and latrine facility in house premises; no drainage outlet for disposal of waste water, no electricity and LP Gas connection, and do not own any of the durable consumer goods mentioned in tables three and four. They are really poor. Out of the sample 4474 SC households 162 households (3.62%) are living in such poor conditions, without any durable consumer goods whatsoever.

**Table 5**  
**Standard of Living Stratification of Rural SC**  
**Households**

Category	Description of Items of Standard of Living Owned	Number of Households	Proportion of
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			<b>Households (%)</b>
<b>(I) Well-off</b>	Pucca house, piped tap water and flush latrine in house premises, proper drainage outlet for waste water, LP Gas and electricity connection, car/jeep, motor cycle/scooter, refrigerator, cable TV, phone/mobile	112	2.50
<b>(II) Better-off</b>	All the above items, except Car/Jeep.	876	19.58
<b>III Lower Middle</b>	Pucca house, piped tap water and pit latrine in house premises, proper drainage outlet for waste water, LP Gas and electricity connection, refrigerator, TV, phone/mobile, Bicycle	1603	35.87
<b>IV Lower But Not Poor</b>	Mud (Kutchra)/Semi Pucca house, drinking water hand pump and pit latrine in house premises, proper drainage outlet for waste water, 93% have electricity connection, 63% have LP Gas, 30% have refrigerator, 49% have TV, all have phone/Mobile	1721	38.47
<b>V Poor</b>	Mud house, no drinking water source, no latrine in house premises, no proper outlet for disposal of waste water, no LP Gas, no electricity, no durable consumer good, no phone/mobile	162	3.62
All		4474	100.00

#### **(VI) Comparison with Rural SC of Other States**

The picture of absolute level of living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC of Punjab is quite clear from the information given in tables 3, 4 and 5 and described in the previous sections. Their living conditions and consumption standard is compared in this section with rural SC of other Indian States, to estimate their relative position vis-a-vis rural SC of other States. Since

comparable information for 2019 is not available about rural SC of other States, the Census 2011 data is used for purpose of this comparison. The 2011 Census information on living conditions is similar to our 2019 sample survey, but on durable consumer goods ownership, it is not that comprehensive e.g. it does not include information on rural SC households owning Refrigerator, Cable Television connection etc.

### **(A) Living Conditions**

We also tried to work out the Composite Index of living conditions of rural SC households of twenty major Indian States to get a comparative perspective on Punjab. Our data, for the Composite Index of living conditions of rural SC households, along with the proportion of rural SC households having the eight items that describe the living conditions (identified in Table 3 above) shows that in terms of living conditions, the rural SC households of Punjab are at the top rank. In fact, our data (not included here) shows, except for the rural SC of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, Punjab rural SC enjoy much better living conditions than rural SC of all other States. The comparison of Punjab rural SC with rural SC of Gujarat and Maharashtra (two high per capita income States), highlights this fact very markedly. The Composite Index of living conditions of Punjab rural SC (53.65) is almost double that of Gujarat (28.30) and Maharashtra (29.56) rural SC. To further highlight the difference, one may look at the flush latrine facility in house premises. In Punjab 31.65 percent rural SC have a flush latrine in their own house premises, compared to 14.15 percent in Gujarat and 13.77 percent in Maharashtra rural SC households having this facility in their own house. So, in living conditions the rural SC of Punjab are in the best position compared to rural SC of other States. Our data shows that there is a massive contrast in living conditions of Punjab rural SC and rural SC of eastern Indian States like Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand.

### **(B) Durable Consumer Goods Ownership**

The proportions of rural SC households owning seven durable consumer goods in the twenty major Indian States in 2011 are detailed in table six below. In durable consumer goods ownership also the rural SC of Punjab are at the top rank position among rural SC of twenty major States. In durable consumer goods ownership even the rural SC of neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and Haryana are at a significantly lower level than rural SC of Punjab. The Composite Index of rural SC of Punjab (46.27) is double than the Composite Index of rural SC of Gujarat (23.43) and more than double that of rural SC of Maharashtra (20.01); the two high income States. The comparison of Punjab rural SC and rural SC of Gujarat on some specific durable consumer goods makes the better position of Punjab rural SC even more clear. For example, in Punjab (64.72%) rural SC households own Television, compared to only 22.93 percent rural SC households of Gujarat and 23.62 percent of Maharashtra. So,

in durable consumer goods ownership also rural SC of Punjab are in a better position than rural SC of other major Indian States.

**Table 6**  
**Durable Consumer Goods Ownership by Rural Scheduled Castes:**  
**Comparison with Other States**

Sr. No.	State	Percentage of Households Owning						Rank
		Radio/ Transistor	TV	Phone/ Mobile	Bicycle	Motor Cycle/ Scooter/ Car/Jeep	Composite Index	
1.	Punjab	11.23	64.72	63.33	63.58	28.47	45.27	1
2.	Himachal Pradesh	23.74	67.46	75.75	7.43	15.05	37.89	2
3.	Haryana	12.83	47.84	60.40	42.54	14.35	35.60	3
4.	Assam	25.64	20.70	42.03	62.24	9.29	31.98	4
5.	Utrakhand	12.30	44.40	58.25	30.15	10.72	31.17	5
6.	Uttar Pradesh	3.18	16.34	53.34	69.26	8.55	30.13	6
7.	Kerala	2.35	52.13	72.11	10.05	8.80	29.09	7
8.	Karnataka	14.73	35.84	51.26	30.60	10.21	28.53	8
9.	Tamil Nadu	14.67	8.45	56.88	39.54	16.73	27.25	9
10.	Andhra Pradesh	5.83	38.40	45.42	26.51	6.67	24.57	10
11.	Gujarat	10.20	22.93	42.32	27.23	14.46	23.43	11
12.	West Bengal	12.30	14.91	28.58	54.75	4.08	22.92	12
13.	Jharkhand	15.87	7.69	25.01	58.93	5.73	22.65	13
14.	J & K	29.08	27.80	40.32	6.75	8.37	22.46	14
15.	Rajasthan	10.37	15.07	51.93	21.58	10.20	21.83	15
16.	Bihar	19.51	5.22	40.46	38.57	3.45	21.44	16
17.	Orissa	10.38	9.02	20.86	55.01	4.93	20.04	17
18.	Maharashtra	9.33	23.62	35.72	22.62	8.74	20.01	18
19.	Chhattisgarh	9.20	13.54	14.55	55.92	5.88	19.82	19
20.	Madhya Pradesh	10.47	9.51	23.25	30.28	5.23	15.75	20

Notes: (1) Data Source: GoI: Census of India, 2011, Series I: Tables on Houses, Household Amenities and Assets, New Delhi, 2012.

(2) Rank is on the basis of Composite Index which is average ( $\bar{x}$ ) of state wise sum of percentages of the five durable goods ownership.

### Explanatory Factors

The observed disparity in living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC households across the States is the result of complex interaction of historical, sociological, political and economic factors over the past centuries. A detailed analysis of the role of these factors requires a full-fledged study in itself and cannot be done here. However, we did attempt a preliminary analysis of the role of two economic factors on which reliable data are available i.e. level of economic development and level of agricultural development. The indicator

used for the former is per capita state domestic product, and for the latter state domestic product originating in agriculture per capita of agricultural population. The average value of both these indicators for the triennium ending 2012-13 was used. Our preliminary results show that these two factors, taken together, explain about 61 percent of the inter-state variation in the living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC. Out of these two factors, the level of agricultural development appears to have a stronger positive impact on living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC. Based on these preliminary results we can tentatively surmise that the better performance of rural SC of Punjab, can be attributed to the highest level of agricultural development attained by Punjab over the Green Revolution period, compared to other Indian States. The great expansion of area under rice and wheat in Punjab over the Green Revolution period created an acute shortage of agricultural labourers that benefited the rural SC of the State in terms of higher wage rate and more regular employment. The more liberal and less caste ridden culture of rural Punjab due to dominance of Sikh religion in Punjab's villages may also have made a positive impact on the living conditions and consumption of standard of rural SC of the State.

### **Conclusions**

Based on information presented and discussed in this paper, one can say with some confidence, that in terms of living conditions and consumption standard, the rural SC of Punjab have fared quite well. Only a very small proportion of them (3.62%) are living in poor conditions, without owning/using any durable consumer goods. More than one-fifth of them (22.08 percent) have in fact graduated to the usual middle-class standard of living in terms of house type and living facilities and ownership of durable consumer goods. Another one-third of them (35.87%) have also attained a fairly satisfactory standard of living conditions and consumption standard. The remaining about fourth-tenth (38.47%), through living in Kutcha houses, are also not in a bad situation. The comparison of living conditions and consumption standard of rural SC of Punjab with rural SC of other States shows rural SC of Punjab to be at the top. Even rural SC of high-income States like Gujarat, Maharashtra etc. do not approach even near the standard of living conditions and consumption levels of Punjab's rural SC. The highest level of agricultural development in Punjab compared to other States seems to be the main factor that has enabled rural SC of the State in attaining a good level of living conditions and consumption standard.

[Please note full details of the Survey and data analysis discussed in this paper are available from the authors at IDC, Chandigarh]

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