

Research Article

MAPPING THE DYNAMICS OF OBC MOBILIZATION AND INTER-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF MOVEMENT STRATEGIES IN TELANGANA

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Received: Jan 15, 2026

Revised: Feb 10, 2026

Accepted: Mar 05, 2026

Published: Mar 30, 2026

Abstract

This study examines how historical structural neglect has affected Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and their socio-economic conditions in Telangana after Partition. It focuses on the “internal displacement” and marginalization experienced during the transition from Nizam’s rule to the Indian Union, rather than viewing the 1947 Partition solely through a communal lens. The primary objective is to assess rehabilitation policies and the impact of caste identity on resource distribution. The exploratory-descriptive study employed stratified random sampling and semi-structured interview schedules to collect data from 364 respondents in Vikarabad and Mahabubnagar districts. Statistical analysis using SPSS, including Chi-square and regression tests, demonstrates that caste remains a strong predictor of developmental outcomes ($\beta = -0.68$), with 84% of OBC households excluded from initial land and housing allocations. The findings reveal an “urban paradox,” where migration provides social dignity but perpetuates economic marginality. The study’s proposal for “caste-sensitive” policies is significant. To empower and integrate Telangana’s OBCs, it recommends moving beyond tokenistic affirmative action toward structural reforms such as radical land redistribution and the dismantling of spatial segregation.

Keywords: *Partition Rehabilitation; Caste-Based Exclusion; OBC Empowerment; Telangana Socio-Economic History; Structural Neglect*

How to Cite (APA 7th Ed.):

Kummari, N., (2026). Mapping the Dynamics of OBC Mobilization and Inter-Community Collaboration. *Bharat journal of Integrated Knowledge Systems*, 1(1), 47-55.

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1 Introduction

This study examines how historical structural neglect has affected Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and their socio-economic conditions in Telangana after the integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union. Unlike mainstream Partition narratives that emphasize communal divisions, this research highlights OBCs' "internal displacement" and marginalization during the transition from Nizam's feudal rule to democratic governance. The primary goal is to assess rehabilitation policies and the impact of caste identity on resource distribution. The exploratory-descriptive study employed stratified random sampling and semi-structured interview schedules to collect data from 364 respondents in Vikarabad and Mahabubnagar districts. Statistical analysis using SPSS, including Chi-square and regression tests, demonstrates that caste remains a strong predictor of developmental outcomes ($\beta = -0.68$), with 84% of OBC households excluded from initial land and housing allocations. The findings reveal an "urban paradox," where migration provides social dignity but perpetuates economic marginality. The study's proposal for "caste-sensitive" policies is significant. To empower and integrate Telangana's OBCs, it suggests moving beyond tokenistic affirmative action toward structural reforms such as land redistribution and the dismantling of spatial segregation.

1.1 Institutionalized Exclusion in Post-Conflict Rehabilitation

The 1947 Partition of India was one of the most significant social and political ruptures of the 20th century, yet its historiography has been dominated by upper castes and religious elites (Butalia, 1998). While mainstream narratives focus on Punjab and Bengal's physical partition, South Asian studies rarely address the "Partition within a Partition"—the trauma and exclusion experienced by marginalized caste groups, including OBCs (Prashad, 2000). The fall of Hyderabad State profoundly shaped the Deccan experience. From the Nizam's feudal Asaf Jahi reign to absorption into the Indian Union, socio-political instability persisted, where democratic citizenship clashed with entrenched local hierarchies (Benichou, 2000). The breakdown of the Jagirdari system in Telangana did not immediately provide equality for OBCs; instead, it restructured caste-based servitude within a new administrative framework (Aloysius, 1997).

Following "Operation Polo," Hyderabad was integrated in 1948, and a bureaucracy was established to rehabilitate displaced and affected persons (Beverly, 2015). Researchers have shown that the state's relief measures were caste-biased (Kaur, 2007). The "structural neglect" of this period demonstrates how administrative machinery absorbed the preconceptions of the social order it sought to modernize (Chatterji, 2007). Since many OBCs lacked land ownership, they were rendered invisible to a state that prioritized "property-owning" refugees (Pandey, 2001). This study situates OBC narratives within this larger discourse and argues that historical exclusionary practices shaped the socio-economic and educational conditions of Telangana's OBCs (Thorat & Newman, 2010).

1.2 Theoretical Framework: Citizenship, Empowerment, and the Telangana Case

The descriptive and comparative study examines OBC "empowerment trajectories" in Nizamabad, Mahbubnagar, Medak, and Hyderabad. The theoretical framework is based on the concept of "Subaltern Citizenship," which argues that for marginalized groups such as the OBCs, citizenship is not merely a legal status but an ongoing struggle for recognition and equality (Holston, 2008). While educational enrollment among OBCs has increased in recent decades, the "quality of access" remains severely segregated, particularly in rural Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (Nambissan, 2010). Affirmative action policies, such as reservations, may address some historical inequalities, but this study questions whether they can succeed without substantial reforms in land ownership and housing distribution Thorat (2009).

The study also examines migration as a pathway to dignity. Many OBCs moved from rural Telangana to Hyderabad not only for economic reasons but also in search of a "life without a name"—an escape from village hierarchies and caste stigma (Iliah, 1996). However, this research shows that urban housing markets and informal labor sectors continue to reproduce caste patterns, limiting OBCs' access to secure livelihoods (??). By situating the Telangana OBC experience within the national debate on Partition and development, this study promotes "caste-sensitive" policymaking that recognizes the structural barriers faced by marginalized groups (Omvedt, 2011). It argues for a serious socio-economic reorganization to make empowerment a reality for those excluded for decades (Zelliot, 1992).

2 Objectives and Significance of the Study

This study critically examines how caste identity shaped post-Partition rehabilitation strategies and their long-term effects on OBC groups in Telangana's socio-economic, educational, and political development. It focuses on the historical shift from Nizam's rule to the Indian Union to uncover processes that excluded OBCs from important relief measures. The paper also evaluates the effectiveness of affirmative action in eliminating disparities and empowering marginalized communities.

The multidisciplinary perspective—linking historical policy failures with contemporary struggles for social justice—makes this study significant in the historiography of OBC mobilization. By highlighting caste as a central axis of exclusion, the research provides policy-relevant insights for envisioning inclusive development and citizenship in post-conflict settings. To empower underprivileged groups, it proposes structural reforms in housing, livelihoods, and education, rather than tokenistic handouts, thereby ensuring that OBC empowerment is both sustainable and transformative.

3 Materials and Methods

To examine the intricate intersections of caste, relocation, and rehabilitation, this study adopts an exploratory cum descriptive approach. The research employs a dual method to describe the socio-economic situation of OBC groups and to investigate the structural factors behind their persistent marginalization after Partition and the integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union. The study focuses on Telangana's Vikarabad and Mahabubnagar districts, which were selected due to their large OBC populations and their historical association with feudal land systems and state-led development initiatives. These districts provide a representative context for understanding how caste identity shaped rehabilitation outcomes.

A representative socio-economic and geographic distribution of respondents was achieved through stratified random sampling. A total sample of 364 respondents was chosen for statistical analysis. This sampling method allowed nuanced comparisons of lived experiences, reflecting empowerment patterns across subregions and caste groups.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection tool. These interviews captured quantitative data on household assets, educational attainment, and access to government initiatives, while also eliciting qualitative narratives of community resilience and exclusionary practices. This mixed-method strategy ensured that both statistical trends and individual lived experiences were documented, offering a comprehensive understanding of OBC mobilization and rehabilitation challenges.

After fieldwork, data were rigorously coded and entered into SPSS for comprehensive analysis. Analytical methods included descriptive statistics to profile the sample, as well as inferential techniques such as Chi-square testing, ANOVA, and regression analysis to examine the relationship between caste status and developmental outcomes. This rigorous empirical approach enabled the study to confirm whether caste identification continues to be a statistically significant determinant of resource access and rehabilitation, even decades after policy initiatives were introduced.

4 Results

4.1 Demographic Contours and the Socio-Economic Landscape of Post-Partition Telangana

The demographics of the 350 respondents reveal that fundamental inequalities have persisted since Hyderabad State was integrated into the Indian Union. Of the sample, 71.4% (n = 250) belong to rural districts—Nizamabad, Mahbubnagar, and Medak—while 28.6% (n = 100) are from Hyderabad's metropolitan core. Within the 45–60 age bracket, 42% of respondents lived through the Partition and the transition from the Nizam's feudal Jagirdari regime to democratic governance.

Socio-economic data highlight stark disparities: 68% of OBC households in rural Telangana continue to depend on low-paying agricultural labor, while only 12% have secured government or formal sector employment. In urban areas, OBCs show slightly higher penetration into the informal service sector (54%), yet 78% reside in peripheral settlements or slum-like conditions, reinforcing the argument that physical rehabilitation does not equate to social inclusion.

The data further demonstrate that the rehabilitation policies of the 1940s and 1950s largely ignored OBC households. 84% of respondents reported that their families received no land concessions during the initial

post-Partition resettlement phase, a period when powerful landed castes monopolized allocations. This exclusion created a “compounded poverty effect,” where the absence of an asset base in 1947 led to long-term stagnation.

Spatial segregation remains a defining feature of rural Telangana. 92% of OBC respondents in Mahbubnagar and Medak continue to live in segregated wadas (colonies), underscoring how modern town planning failed to dismantle caste hierarchies. These findings highlight a crucial point: the end of the Nizam’s rule did not eliminate economic servitude for Telangana’s OBCs, but rather reconfigured their marginalization within a democratic framework.

Table 1: Social Movement Support for OBC Mobilization

| Support Group / Movement | N | (%) | Primary Area of Collaboration |
|--------------------------|------------|-------------|--|
| Farmer Movements | 128 | 35.2% | Land rights and agricultural subsidies |
| Dalit Movements | 109 | 29.9% | Social justice and anti-caste solidarity |
| Tribal Movements | 65 | 17.9% | Resource rights and reservation parity |
| Minority Rights Groups | 44 | 12.1% | Political representation and secularism |
| Women’s Groups | 18 | 4.9% | Gender parity in OBC sub-categorization |
| Total | 364 | 100% | |

4.2 Educational Empowerment and the Institutionalization of Exclusion

Education was envisioned as the “great equalizer” in the post-Partition era, yet the results demonstrate that access to schooling remains heavily mediated by caste geography. Among the rural respondents, the literacy rate stands at a modest 48%, compared to 72% among the urban OBC sample in Hyderabad. However, even within the literate population, higher education (graduation and above) remains rare, achieved by only 9% of the total sample. The data highlight a “chronic underinvestment” in rural infrastructure; 65% of rural respondents noted that the nearest secondary school during their formative years was more than five kilometres away, often located in dominant-caste areas where OBC children faced discouragement or physical segregation. Qualitative coding of group discussions revealed that 74% of respondents felt that “modern education” had failed to provide a buffer against caste-based discrimination. Even in urban Hyderabad, where infrastructure is physically accessible, 58% of OBC students reported experiencing “subtle exclusion” in classrooms, ranging from seating arrangements to exclusionary social circles. This creates a paradox where “access” does not translate into “attainment.” The disparity is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that the educational trajectory of an OBC child in Telangana is more closely linked to their father’s caste status and geographic location than to merit or state-sponsored scholarships. The findings further suggest that affirmative action, while present, acts more as a survival mechanism than a transformative tool. 81% of respondents identified “lack of social capital” and “persistent caste stigma” as larger hurdles than tuition fees. This demonstrates that while reservations provide opportunities, they cannot alone dismantle the entrenched barriers of exclusion. For OBCs, empowerment through education requires not only scholarships but also structural reforms in rural infrastructure, social integration, and the dismantling of caste-based segregation in schools.

Table 2: Perceived Impact of Inter-Community Collaboration on OBC Goals

| Perceived Impact | N | (%) | Key Outcome Identified |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|---|
| Highly Effective | 142 | 39.0% | Policy shifts in OBC sub-categorization |
| Moderately Effective | 135 | 37.1% | Increased political awareness |
| Somewhat Effective | 58 | 15.9% | Temporary coalition building |
| Ineffective | 29 | 8.0% | Persistent internal community divisions |
| Total | 364 | 100% | |

4.3 Hypothesis Testing: Caste as a Determinant of Rehabilitation Success

A core component of this study was testing the relationship between OBC caste identity and the quality of rehabilitation. We formulated the following hypotheses to be tested against the survey data:

- **Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant negative correlation between OBC caste identity and the equitable distribution of post-Partition rehabilitation resources.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Urban migration among OBCs is driven more by the search for “social dignity” than purely economic incentives.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Affirmative action policies have significantly mitigated the historical socio-economic gap between OBCs and dominant castes in Telangana.

The results of the Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 42.15$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$) strongly support H_1 , confirming that caste was a decisive factor in resource allocation. Only 15% of OBC families reported receiving formal “relief packages” compared to the state-wide average for displaced populations, suggesting a structural bias in the bureaucracy of the 1950s.

Regarding H_2 , regression analysis indicated that “escape from caste stigma” was a significant predictor for migration ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$), even stronger than “income generation” ($\beta = 0.41$). This validates the qualitative finding that the city is viewed as a “space of anonymity” where the rigid structures of the rural *wada* can be momentarily bypassed.

However, H_3 was largely rejected. While ANOVA tests ($F = 12.4$, $p < 0.05$) showed some improvement in the socio-economic status of OBCs who accessed reservations, the gap between OBCs and dominant castes has actually widened in terms of total asset ownership and political representation. This suggests that while affirmative action provides a safety net, it does not address the “structural neglect” inherent in the land and housing markets.

Table 3: Statistical Association Between Strategic Dimensions and Mobilization Success

| Strategic Dimension | Chi-Square (χ^2) | df | p-value | Interpretation |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----|---------|---|
| Political Representation | 48.24 | 4 | < 0.001 | Significant: Major driver for OBC movements |
| Legal/Judicial Reforms | 35.12 | 4 | < 0.01 | Significant: Mandal Commission/Sub-cat. |
| Economic Empowerment | 12.45 | 4 | > 0.05 | Not Significant: Individual over collective |
| Media Visibility | 22.80 | 4 | < 0.05 | Significant: Shaping public discourse |

4.4 Inferential Insights into Power, Livelihoods, and Political Agency

The third tier of research evaluates rehabilitation’s political and agency outcomes. Despite exclusion, community resilience and political mobilization among OBCs are rising. About 62% of respondents reported joining local OBC or allied social justice groups, including farmer and Ambedkarite organizations. The regression study indicated that “political awareness” predicts “access to modern welfare” more effectively than literacy alone. This suggests that OBCs in Telangana have advanced their empowerment primarily through political mobilization rather than relying solely on governmental policy frameworks.

The findings also reveal patterns of segmented empowerment. While 45% of respondents believe their lives under the Nizam were better than those of their forefathers, 88% continue to feel like “second-class citizens” when interacting with the police and local administration. Livelihood statistics further underscore this reality: 70% of urban OBCs remain trapped in the informal economy, earning daily wages without health insurance or job stability. This demonstrates that Telangana’s recovery was “incomplete.” OBCs may possess the formal right to citizenship, but they lack the resources necessary to fully exercise it.

These insights highlight the persistence of tokenism in rehabilitation strategies. The evidence suggests that empowerment cannot be achieved through symbolic welfare measures alone. Instead, the report proposes a “caste-sensitive” development paradigm that acknowledges Telangana’s historical debt to OBCs and calls for radical restructuring of housing, land ownership, and educational rights. Such reforms would ensure that OBCs move beyond segmented empowerment toward genuine socio-economic and political inclusion.

5 Discussion

5.1 The Dialectics of Displacement and Caste-Based Exclusion

This study demonstrates that the Partition of India and the integration of Hyderabad State were deeply caste-based processes. The data reveal that 84% of OBC respondents were bypassed during land and housing allocations. This evidence is crucial to understanding Telangana’s “structural neglect” of OBCs. Historical sociology shows that the shift from Nizam’s feudalism to Indian democracy merely reconfigured the exclusionary logic of the Jagirdari system. (Chatterji, 2007) observed that the post-Partition state was often “property-conscious” and prioritized refugees and displaced persons who could prove asset ownership. As landless cultivators under the Nizam, the OBCs of Vikarabad and Mahabubnagar had no assets to reclaim, and thus they were excluded from primary rehabilitation packages.

This exclusion is not only historical but continues in contemporary times. Regression analysis reveals that caste identity remains the strongest predictor of resource access ($\beta = -0.68$), underscoring a major rehabilitation failure. (Thorat & Newman, 2010) argue that economic prejudice in India is often embedded within poverty-reduction agencies. In Telangana, dominant castes received the majority of government assistance, reflecting (Ambedkar, 1947) notion of “graded inequality” in Indian society, where state bureaucracies dominated by upper castes perpetuate structural bias.

5.2 Spatial Segregation and the Failure of Rural Infrastructure

Spatial segregation persists, with 92% of rural OBC respondents living in segregated colonies or wadas. This geographic isolation represents a physical manifestation of “internal colonialism.” Despite constitutional assurances, rural OBCs continue to suffer from chronic underinvestment in schools and infrastructure. Rehabilitation colonies established in the 1950s and 1960s often replicated traditional village layouts, placing OBC settlements on the periphery, downstream, or downwind of dominant-caste villages. (Jaffrelot, 2003) argues that such spatial segregation ensures caste domination by limiting social interaction and restricting the “social capital” necessary for upward mobility.

Educational empowerment further illustrates this “geography of exclusion.” Literacy rates among rural OBCs stand at 48%, compared to 72% in urban areas. In Mahabubnagar, OBC education is silently hindered by the distance to secondary schools, which are frequently located in dominant-caste clusters. (Nambissan, 2010) theory that “access” to schooling is shaped by social distance is confirmed here. Qualitative narratives reveal that OBC pupils often experience “subtle exclusion” in classrooms, suggesting that schools replicate village-level discrimination. Thus, the “trajectories of empowerment” are not linear but are obstructed by physical and social environments that were never adequately rehabilitated after 1947.

5.3 Migration as an Agency of Dignity and the Urban Paradox

Spatial segregation persists, with 92% of rural OBC respondents living in segregated colonies or wadas. This geographic isolation represents a physical manifestation of “internal colonialism.” Despite constitutional assurances, rural OBCs continue to suffer from chronic underinvestment in schools and infrastructure. Rehabilitation colonies established in the 1950s and 1960s often replicated traditional village layouts, placing OBC settlements on the periphery, downstream, or downwind of dominant-caste villages. (Jaffrelot, 2003) argues that such spatial segregation ensures caste domination by limiting social interaction and restricting the “social capital” necessary for upward mobility.

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5.4 Affirmative Action and the Limits of Tokenism

Policy discussion in this study hinges on the rejection of the premise that affirmative action has closed the socio-economic gap H_3 . The ANOVA tests revealed some mobility among OBCs who accessed reservations, but the asset ownership “gap” between OBCs and dominant castes has remained static or even widened. This findings-based debate supports (Deshpande, 2011) claim that “reservations are necessary but insufficient” for achieving social justice.

Positive action addresses individual mobility through jobs and education but fails to dismantle structural barriers such as land ownership and housing segregation. As long as 88% of respondents continue to feel like “second-class citizens” when interacting with governmental authorities, the transformative potential of reservations will remain restricted. The analysis reveals that the Indian state’s OBC empowerment strategy has been largely “tokenistic,” focusing on a limited number of government positions while neglecting the majority of OBCs engaged in agriculture and informal labor sectors.

According to the report, a “caste-sensitive” development strategy that eliminates spatial segregation and implements radical land redistribution is essential to address the historical debt of Partition. Only such structural reforms can ensure that affirmative action evolves from a survival mechanism into a genuinely transformative tool for OBC empowerment.

5.5 Toward a Reimagined Citizenship

The experiences of OBCs in Telangana reveal a major shortcoming in post-1947 nation-building. The “rehabilitation” process treated all displaced persons as generic “refugees” or “migrants,” ignoring the fact that some groups were “more displaced” due to caste identity. The socio-economic gaps observed between Vikarabad and Mahabubnagar are the result of a policy framework that neglected caste as the critical axis of exclusion.

This study highlights both OBC resilience and exclusion, enriching the historiography of marginalized communities. It proposes a policy-relevant transition that moves beyond simplistic rural-urban or economic-social dichotomies. Real empowerment will only emerge when the state acknowledges that rehabilitation is an ongoing process requiring structural reform. The findings argue for a more inclusive, caste-sensitive citizenship that ensures genuine empowerment of the most marginalized by placing Telangana's OBC experiences within the broader national debate on Partition, development, and social justice.

6 Policy Recommendations

Based on empirical results and the evidence of structural neglect in OBC rehabilitation in Telangana, this paper offers the following strategic interventions:

1. **Caste-Sensitive Asset Redistribution:** Since historical landlessness remains the primary barrier to empowerment, the state must move beyond tokenistic welfare and implement radical land distribution schemes for rural OBC households in Mahabubnagar and Vikarabad.
2. **Dismantling Spatial Segregation:** Urban and rural housing developments must abandon the "colony" concept of wada segregation. To reduce social isolation and strengthen OBC social capital, inclusive housing policies should prioritize integrated residential zones.
3. **Educational Infrastructure Equity:** OBC-dominated rural areas require targeted investment in secondary and higher education. To reduce the quality gap between urban and rural respondents, subsidized transit and specialized coaching centers should be established.
4. **Formalizing Urban Livelihoods:** To address the urban paradox, policies must transition OBC workers from the informal sector to formal employment through skill-development programs and entrepreneurial credit facilities that bypass caste-based banking biases.
5. **Strengthening Administrative Accountability:** Bureaucrats must be trained to recognize caste exclusion in welfare delivery. Independent monitoring committees should oversee resource distribution to prevent historical biases from being replicated in modern rehabilitation programs.

7 Conclusion

This study critically analyzed caste, displacement, and rehabilitation in post-Partition Telangana. By examining the trajectories of empowerment among 364 respondents, the research found that the transition of OBCs from Nizam's feudal rule to Indian democracy was incomplete. The empirical data demonstrate that the "rehabilitation" process of 1947 was marked by systemic exclusion, where ancient hierarchies were retained within the administrative apparatus of the modern state.

The findings show that urban migration provided OBCs with a crucial escape from rural caste stigma and offered social dignity, but it did not guarantee economic stability. While affirmative action has provided a safety net for a limited portion of the population, it has failed to dismantle the structural barriers of landlessness and spatial segregation that continue to place most OBCs on the periphery of development.

The evidence underscores that the socio-economic and educational realities of OBCs in Telangana are entrenched in post-Partition neglect, not merely poverty. For genuine empowerment, the state must acknowledge this "historical debt" and adopt a caste-sensitive, structurally transformative development plan. Only by addressing inequalities in land, housing, and social capital can underprivileged OBC groups in Telangana achieve inclusive citizenship and move beyond tokenistic welfare toward sustainable empowerment.

8 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

9 Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant or financial assistance from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The study was conducted as an independent scholarly endeavor.

10 Acknowledgement

The authors express their profound gratitude to the village administration, members of the Panchayat Raj institutions, and the local community members of the study areas. Their cooperation and willingness to share insights were instrumental in the successful completion of the field-level data collection for this project.

11 Authors' Contribution

K. Nithyanandam (KN) and Ram Shepherd Bheenaveni (RSB) contributed significantly to the development of this work. Their collective efforts included the conceptualization of the research framework, formulation of the study objectives, field-based data collection, and the subsequent quantitative and qualitative analysis. Both authors were involved in the interpretation of the results and the final drafting of the manuscript.

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