

Conditions of SC/ST Households

A Story of Unequal Improvement

R B BHAGAT

The economic and living conditions of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households have experienced changes during the phase of accelerated economic growth in the last decade based on 2001 and 2011 Census data. There has been considerable progress in the well-being of SCs and STs during the last decade, but the gap between SCs and STs and of both these groups and the rest of the population has widened.

India witnessed reasonably high economic growth over the last decade. The economy grew at about 8% per annum during the Tenth (2002-07) and Eleventh Plan (2007-12) periods (Planning Commission 2011). As the economy expands, inclusiveness has been a major concern in our planning process. Inclusive development is viewed in terms of economic and social inclusion reflected in poverty reduction, better health outcomes, increased access to education and improved access to basic amenities such as electricity, drinking water, sanitation, transport, banking facilities, etc. A large part of the population, particularly segments like scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), and landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers continue to suffer social and economic exclusions. Accordingly, government policies are directed towards economic and social upliftment of these segments to enable everyone to reap the benefits of growth and bring marginalised sections of the society into the mainstream (Ministry of Finance 2012).

The recent *Human Development Report 2011* prepared by the Planning Commission in collaboration with the Institute of Applied Manpower Research (IAMR) highlighted several aspects of living conditions and well-being of the SC and ST populations. The report shows that the condition of SCs and STs not only improved in terms of human development outcomes, but also there was a convergence of several human development indicators between 1999-2000 and 2007-08 (IAMR and Planning Commission 2011). It would be pertinent to re-examine the findings based on the latest data available from Census 2011.

This note attempts to show the changes experienced by SC and ST households in terms of economic and living

conditions during the phase of accelerated economic growth in the last decade since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991.

Nature of Census Data

National-level databases like the census, National Sample Surveys (NSS), and the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) play an important role in understanding the socio-economic conditions and degree of inclusiveness with respect to marginalised groups like SCs and STs. Census is also unique in the sense that it provides information based on complete enumeration of all households unlike sampled households in NSS.

Census has been a source of demographic data, but data on housing and household conditions collected during census operations six months prior to the population enumeration as a part of house-listing exercise has become extremely useful during the last three censuses. This has happened as India entered into a new phase of globalisation in the middle of the 1980s with a new economic policy launched in 1991. Census was expected to provide more data on the economic and living conditions of the Indian people. The 1991 Census published huge data on household amenities like source of drinking water, source of lighting, toilet facilities and source of fuel used in the household. These data have been made available for both rural and urban areas and right up to district and city levels and also for SC and ST households. In the 2001 Census the household amenities were expanded to include waste-water outlets from the house such as connected to closed drainage, open drainage or no drainage. It also provided information on the availability of bathroom and kitchen. One of the important additions in 2001 Census was to know the assets possessed by the households. This was considered important to understand the wealth distribution in Indian society in absence of information on income either from census or NSS. Also, the 2001 Census, for the first time, provided information on assets like radio/transistor, telephone, scooter, car, etc,

R B Bhagat (rbbhagat@iips.net) is at the Department of Migration and Urban Studies, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai.

and also the household availing any banking services. The same information has been collected in 2011 Census as well. The information on mobile phones was not collected in 2001 Census separately; however this is now available in 2011 Census. Data on household assets and amenities are also available for SC and ST households, but these are not available for religious groups.

This study has tried to measure the living conditions and ownership of assets among the general population and also among the SCs and STs on the basis of a few indicators.

For living conditions the following indicators are used: (i) concrete roof, (ii) tap water facility, (iii) electricity as source of lighting, (iv) latrine facility, (v) connection with drainage system, and (vi) use of liquefied petroleum gas/piped natural gas (LPG/PNG). For ownership of assets the following indicators are used: (i) television, (ii) telephone, (iii) mobile phone, (iv) computer/laptop, (v) scooter/motorcycle/moped, (vi) car/jeep/van, (vii) households with no specified assets, and (viii) availing of banking services.

A General Picture

For a majority of households living conditions as well as ownership of assets are at very low levels. In many surveys, housing is categorised in terms of pucca,

semi-pucca and kaccha houses depending upon the housing structure. But in census such type of classification is not available, instead the materials used in wall, floor and roof are classified separately. Table 1 shows that the percentage of households with concrete roof was only 21% in India as a whole, and 18% and 52% in rural and urban areas, respectively, in 2011. Only about half of the households in rural areas used electricity as a source of light in 2011, although there has been an increase of about 12 percentage points since 2001. Also, only 47% of the households have a latrine facility within their premises, 41% have a bathroom, and 28% use LPG/PNG as cooking fuel and 43% households have access to tap water as per 2011 Census for rural and urban areas put together. A majority of the households do not have access to treated drinking water which is a major factor of waterborne diseases like diarrhoea and dysentery. Access to safe water and sanitation has been considered as one of the most important social determinants of health. Water-related illness constitute one-third of the morbidities among adults and two-thirds among children (HLEG 2011).

Sanitation: The lack of latrine and bathroom facility is distressing for women who cannot use open spaces as freely as

men can in the day time and have to wait till after sunset. This is also laden with health risk to women in want of latrine and bathroom facilities in both rural and urban areas. Further, due to lack of access to clean fuel like LPG/PNG, majority of households in rural areas use wood, cow dung and crop residue as cooking fuel and suffer from the risk of indoor air pollution. Studies show that indoor air pollution is a major public health problem in developing countries, where it accounts for much ill health and well over a million deaths annually. In India alone several hundred thousand women and children die prematurely because of indoor air pollution (Mishra et al 2002). Asthma, tuberculosis and acute respiratory infections (ARI) are some of the major diseases associated with indoor pollution. Prolonged exposure might lead to lung cancer, adverse pregnancy outcomes, cataract and blindness. Most of these households are below poverty line SCs and STs. Rural areas are more deprived in all indicators of living conditions compared to urban areas. On the other hand, in urban areas also, the small and medium towns are more deprived than the big cities. The deprivation of drinking water, sanitation and toilet facilities is most glaring in rural areas and also in small and medium towns of urban areas (Bhagat 2011a).

Other Durables: As economic conditions improve, an increasing number of households relate themselves with other households in terms of possession of certain goods and assets. This promotes consumerism – the fundamental basis of the economic growth driven by market forces. A number of indicators show this trend. For example, television and mobile phone show huge expansion in both rural and urban areas from 2001 to 2011. About half of the households have access to television (47%) and mobile phone (53%) in 2011 (Table 2). Information on mobile phone was not collected in 2001 Census which is included in 2011 Census, separately. Scooters, motorcycles and mopeds seem to have emerged as the most convenient mode of transport with one-fifth of households using this mode of transportation. It has expanded more

Table 1: Household Living Conditions in Rural and Urban Areas, India (2001 to 2011, % of households)

Amenities	Rural 2011	Rural 2001	Urban 2011	Urban 2001	Total 2011	Total 2001
House with concrete roof	18.5	11.9	52.9	44.4	29.6	21.2
Tap water	30.8	24.3	70.6	68.7	43.5	36.7
Electricity as a source of lighting	55.3	43.5	92.7	87.5	67.2	55.8
Latrine facility within the premises	30.7	21.9	81.4	73.7	46.9	36.4
Connected to drainage	36.8	34.1	81.8	77.8	51.1	46.4
With bathroom	25.4	22.8	77.5	70.4	42.0	36.1
LPG/PNG	11.4	5.7	65.0	48.0	28.5	17.5

Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011.

Table 2: Household Assets in Rural and Urban Areas, India (2001 to 2011, % of households)

Assets	Rural 2011	Rural 2001	Urban 2011	Urban 2001	Total 2011	Total 2001
Availing banking services	54.4	30.1	67.8	49.5	58.7	35.5
Television	33.4	18.9	76.7	64.3	47.2	31.6
Telephone	3.1	3.8	5.9	23.0	4.0	9.1
Mobile	47.9		64.3		53.2	
Computer/laptop	5.1	NA	18.7	NA	9.4	NA
Scooter/motorcycle/moped	14.3	6.7	35.2	24.7	21.0	11.7
Car/van/jeep	2.3	1.3	9.7	5.6	4.7	2.5
None of the assets including radio/ transistor/cycle	22.9	40.5	7.0	19.0	17.8	34.5

Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011.

rapidly in rural areas where the percentage of households having a scooter, motorcycle or moped almost doubled from about 7% in 2001 to 14% in 2011.

We live in a world of information technology. The information on the possession of computer/laptop is very vital to assess the social and economic condition of households. This information was not collected in 2001 Census but according to the 2011 Census about one-tenth of households own computer/laptop. Every fifth household in urban areas owns a computer/laptop compared to one in every 20 households in rural areas. Although the rural-urban gap is huge, the fact remains that about 25 million households in India possess computer/laptop as per 2011 Census, which shows huge supply of this commodity as well as market for computer-related services.

From Table 2 it must be noted that the percentage of households with car/van/jeep increased from 2.5% in 2001 to about 5% in 2011. The increase has been almost of the same magnitude in both rural and urban areas. In absolute numbers about 12 million households possess car/van/jeep in India in 2011. Those households who did not possess any assets including radio/transistor or even a bicycle declined from 34% in 2001 to 17% in 2011 – a percentage point decline. This is also true for both rural and urban areas.

Runaway Consumerism: The analysis of data on living conditions and assets

shows that the speedy economic growth experienced during the last decade has made significant impact in improving the economic and living conditions of a large number of households. However, the household assets have expanded faster due to runaway consumerism compared to the improvement in living conditions.

Information on availing banking services was also collected along with household amenities and assets. This information is particularly important as the government has been emphasising financial inclusion as one of the pillars of inclusive growth and the basis of conditional cash transfer to the bank account of the beneficiary in order to plug duplication and corruption in the social security, poverty alleviation and employment generation programmes. Those who do not have bank accounts will be enabled to open them through Aadhaar, a biometric identity with residential proof provided by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) under the aegis of the Planning Commission of India. The 2011 Census shows that about 60% of households are availing banking services – up from 35% in 2001. Also, in rural areas the banking services are availed by half of the households.

SC/ST Households in India

In social science literature, there has been a debate about the correspondence between economic status/class and caste status (Béteille 1974; Desai 1984;

Deshpande 1996; Mukherjee 2000; Sharma 2001). Recent empirical studies also show the low economic status of SCs compared to other social groups like Other Backward Classes and forward castes (Bhagat 2011b). STs on the other hand, constitute number of tribes who are endogamous but having no traditional social hierarchy similar to caste. Also, their isolation from mainstream communities is well known as they mostly lived in hilly and forested tracts. Out of the 246.6 million households listed in Census 2011, 44.2 million (17.9%) were SC and 23.3 million (9.4%) were ST households.

STs have been at the lower end in all indicators of living conditions and household assets. Only one-tenth of ST households have houses with concrete roofs, one-fourth have tap water and half of them have electricity as compared to one-fifth of households with concrete roofs, two-fifths with tap water, and three-fifths with electricity among SC households in 2011. Similar disparities are found with respect to other indicators like access to drainage, toilet and bathroom facilities. The percentage of households using LPG/PNG was just 9% among STs compared to 17% among SCs and 29% among all households in 2011. Due to lack of access to clean fuel like LPG/PNG, SCs and STs are heavily dependent on woods, crop residue and cow dung for cooking fuels in both rural and urban areas (Table 3).

There has been a huge expansion of banking facilities among SC and ST households during 2001 to 2011. The access to banking services is found to have more than doubled – an increase from 19% to 45% among STs and from 25% to 51% among SC communities. This shows that the financial inclusion of SC and ST communities has been rapid as a result of several government programmes implemented through banking channels. The expansion of mobile phones is another significant development during the last decade which also benefited the SC and ST communities. About 48% households reported to have mobile phones compared to 31% among STs and 53% among all households in 2011 (Table 4).

Table 3: Household Living Conditions by SC and ST Status, India (2001 to 2011, % of households)

Amenities	SC 2011	SC 2001	ST 2011	ST 2001	Total 2011	Total 2001
House with concrete roof	21.9	13.1	10.1	6.1	29.6	21.2
Tap water	41.2	32.1	24.4	20.0	43.5	36.7
Electricity as a source of lighting	59.0	44.3	51.7	36.5	67.2	55.8
Latrine facility within the premises	33.8	23.6	22.6	17.0	46.9	36.4
Connected to drainage	46.6	42.8	22.7	21.8	51.1	46.4
With bathroom	27.7	22.2	17.2	15.0	42.0	36.1
LPG/PNG	16.9	7.9	9.2	5.3	28.5	17.5

Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011.

Table 4: Household Assets among SC and ST Households, India (2001 to 2011, % of households)

Assets	SC 2011	SC 2001	ST 2011	ST 2001	Total 2011	Total 2001
Availing banking services	50.9	25.1	44.9	19.1	58.7	35.5
Television	39.1	21.2	21.8	12.0	76.7	31.6
Telephone	3.0	3.4	1.9	2.5	4.0	9.1
Mobile	47.5		31.1		53.2	
Computer/laptop	6.4	NA	5.2	NA	9.4	NA
Scooter/motorcycle/moped	12.0	5.3	8.9	4.1	21.0	11.7
Car/van/jeep	1.8	1.0	1.6	0.8	4.7	2.5
None of the assets including radio/transistor/cycle	22.6	42.6	37.3	54.0	17.8	34.5

Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011.

Figure 1: Percentage Gap in Selected Amenities among STs Compared to All Households (All > ST households) according to 2001 and 2011 Census

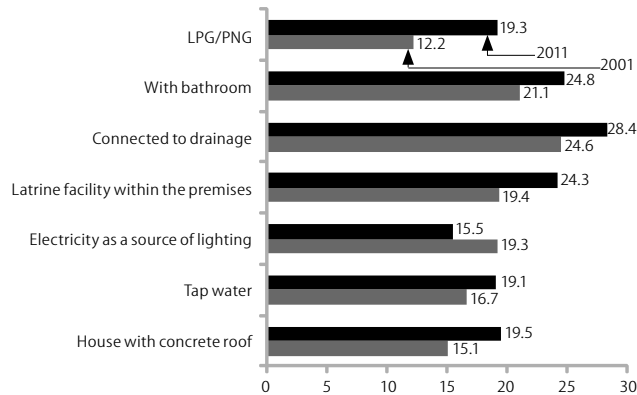


Figure 2: Percentage Gap in Selected Amenities among SCs Compared to All Households (All > SC households) according to 2001 and 2011 Census

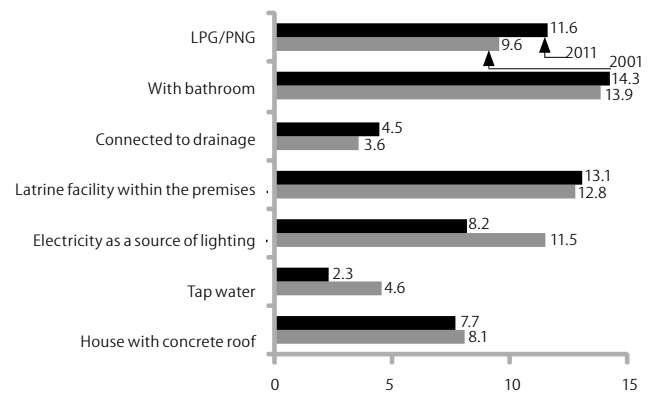


Figure 3: Percentage Gap in Selected Assets among STs Compared to All Households (All > ST households) according to 2001 and 2011 Census

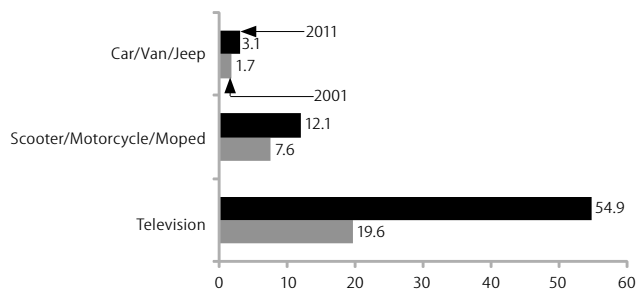
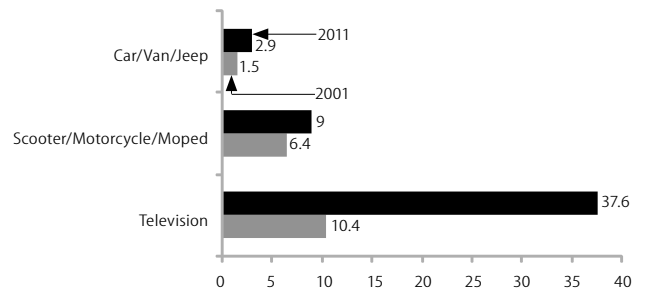


Figure 4: Percentage Gap in Selected Assets among SCs Compared to All Households (All > SC households) according to 2001 and 2011 Census



Although scs and sts have progressed very well between 2001 and 2011, the gap between them and all households (average level) has widened in almost all indicators of living conditions except electricity among st households (Figure 1), and electricity and concrete roof among sc households (Figure 2). Similarly in assets like car, jeep and van, scooter/motorcycle/moped and television, there has been a widening gap between sc and sts on the one hand and all households on the other (Figures 3 and 4). This shows that although scs and sts have benefited, but the benefits have extended faster among non-sc/st communities during the decade of rapid economic growth during 2001-11.

It would also be pertinent to know how inequality between scs and sts within the marginalised communities has taken shape during the last decade. In fact the gap between scs and sts has widened as scs have benefited more than sts in the last decade. For example, the percentage of sc households with possession of television was 9% higher than the sts in 2001 which increased to

17% in 2011. Similarly, the inequality in the possession car/jeep/van increased from 1 percentage point in 2001 to 3 percentage points in 2011 between sc and st households. Similarly there has been a widening inequality between scs and sts in all indicators of living conditions except electricity as a source of lighting between 2001 and 2011. From the analysis of census data between 2001 and 2011 it is evident that the fruits of development have accrued most to the non-scs and sts, followed by scs and the least to st communities.

At the state level, a recent study on human development showed that the indicators of human development continue to remain quite low in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (IAMR and Planning Commission 2011). This study also shows that most of the indicators of levels of living and household assets were found to be low in these states, and the scs and sts living in these states have the worst living conditions and one of the lowest level of asset ownership. Any study on the status of marginal communities like scs and sts

and minority communities must take into account the regional dimension of India's social reality. Nowhere is this better reflected than by census-based indicators.

However, the large variations within sc and st communities cannot be assessed only with the help of census data as census does not publish data on living conditions and assets by individual sc and st, although demographic data is available. As per state-specific lists declared by the president of India, there are 1221 individual castes within the sc category¹ and 663 distinct tribes within the st category.² The large number of communities within each scheduled category are not homogeneous, and availability of data by individual sc/st will be helpful in enhancing the utility of census-based studies.

Conclusions

This article shows considerable progress in the well-being of people during the last decade as India kept on moving on the path of economic growth. Although marginalised social groups like scs, sts progressed significantly as reflected by

the various indicators of living conditions and assets, the gap has widened between scs and sts on the one hand and sc-sts and the rest on the other. Also among the scs and sts, the gap between sts with that of the scs has widened in most of the indicators which shows scs being more politically organised and assertive with the rise of several political parties with a strong base among sc communities. However, the same cannot be said with respect to st communities. There has been a clear regional pattern in level of human deprivation as states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh show one of the lowest levels of living conditions and assets for all the households in general and sc and st households in particular.

In recent years, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with poverty alleviation, employment generation and social security programmes. Conditional cash transfer through the banking system is being considered as an alternative strategy to plug various loopholes like

elimination of ineligible households and to minimise corruption. Census data on the access to banking services throws light on this. For example, about 58 households have access to banking services which goes down to 50% among scs and 44% among sts. This shows that banking services should have been universalised first before launching the scheme of conditional cash transfer. In a nutshell, this study shows that we have been giving too much emphasis on either economic growth or development indicators related to education and health, but not on the micro processes and components related to access to drinking water, toilet facility, sanitation, clean fuel and bathroom facility as determinants of life chances, capability, and social and gender equity.

NOTES

- 1 See state-wise list of notified scheduled castes (http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/SC%20Lists.pdf).
- 2 See state-wise list of notified scheduled tribes (http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/ST%20Lists.pdf).

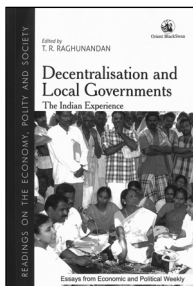
REFERENCES

- Béteille, Andre (1974): *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Bhagat, R B (2011a): "Urbanisation and Access to Basic Amenities in India", *Urban India*, 31(1): 1-13.
- (2011b): "Demographic Strength and Inequality among Castes in India" in Sandeep Anand, Isha Kumar and Anjula Srivastava (ed.), *Challenges of the Twenty-First Century: A Trans-disciplinary Perspective* (Noida: Macmillan).
- Desai, L P (1984): "Should Caste Be Basis of Recognising Backwardness", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 19(28), pp 1106-16.
- Deshpande, V N (1996): "Some Methodological Issues in the Study of Caste and Class in the Indian Village/Rural Social Structure" in M S Dhadave, K G Joshi and S G Melkundi (ed.), *Rural and Urban Studies in India* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications).
- HLEG (2011): *Universal Health Coverage in India*, High Level Experts Group (New Delhi: Public Health Foundation of India).
- IAMR and Planning Commission (2011): *Human Development Report 2011: Towards Social Inclusion* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Ministry of Finance (2012): *Economic Survey 2011-12*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- Mishra, Vinod, R Retherford and K R Smith (2002): "The Indoor Air Pollution: The Quiet Killer", *Asia Pacific Issues*, Analysis from East-West Centre No 63, Honolulu.
- Mukherjee, Ramkrishna (2000): "Caste in Itself, Caste and Class or Caste in Class", *Journal of World Systems Research*, 2: 332-39.
- Planning Commission (2011): *Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive Growth: An Approach to the 12th Five-Year Plan* (New Delhi: Government of India).
- Sharma, K L (2001): *Reconceptualising Caste, Class and Tribe* (Jaipur: Rawat Publication).

Decentralisation and Local Governments

Edited by

T R RAGHUNANDAN



The idea of devolving power to local governments was part of the larger political debate during the Indian national movement. With strong advocates for it, like Gandhi, it resulted in constitutional changes and policy decisions in the decades following Independence, to make governance more accountable to and accessible for the common man.

The introduction discusses the milestones in the evolution of local governments post-Independence, while providing an overview of the panchayat system, its evolution and its powers under the British, and the stand of various leaders of the Indian national movement on decentralisation.

This volume discusses the constitutional amendments that gave autonomy to institutions of local governance, both rural and urban, along with the various facets of establishing and strengthening these local self-governments.

Authors:

V M Sirsakar • Nirmal Mukarji • C H Hanumantha Rao • B K Chandrashekar • Norma Alvares • Poornima Vyasulu, Vinod Vyasulu • Niraja Gopal Jayal • Mani Shankar Aiyar • Benjamin Powis • Amitabh Behar, Yamini Aiyar • Pranab Bardhan, Dilip Mookherjee • Amitabh Behar • Ahalya S Bhat, Suman Kolhar, Aarathi Chellappa, H Anand • Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, Esther Duflo • Nirmala Buch • Ramesh Ramanathan • M A Oommen • Indira Rajaraman, Darshy Sinha • Stéphanie Tawa Lama-Rewal • M Govinda Rao, U A Vasanth Rao • Mary E John • Pratap Ranjan Jena, Manish Gupta • Pranab Bardhan, Sandip Mitra, Dilip Mookherjee, Abhirup Sarkar • M A Oommen • J Devika, Binitha V Thampi

Pp xii + 432

ISBN 978-81-250-4883-1

2012

Rs 695

Orient Blackswan Pvt Ltd

www.orientblackswan.com

Mumbai • Chennai • New Delhi • Kolkata • Bangalore • Bhubaneswar • Ernakulam • Guwahati • Jaipur • Lucknow • Patna • Chandigarh • Hyderabad

Contact: info@orientblackswan.com