



OCCUPATIONAL DIVISION AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGES IN INDIA: CASE STUDY OF A TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY AND THEIR ALTERNATIVE OCCUPATIONAL-BASED SOCIAL MOVEMENT

SRINIVASALU, Sumathi
SELLADURAI, Manjubarkavi

ABSTRACT

Occupational divisions in any country are understood largely as change in the activities of the members in a given society and the way to earn their livelihood. Mostly, the change is observed in terms of changes in the distribution activities in relation to socio-economic structure of the society. India was a traditional caste-based Hindu society, and a person who is born into a particular caste cannot easily escape from its prescribed values including occupational activities. Its hierarchical nature reveals its rigid values attached and hence change should also be understood in terms of socio-cultural aspects and not merely socio-economic. In the caste hierarchy, the groups of people commonly known today as Dalits occupy the lowest rung. The point of departure of this paper is the caste affirmation and its ramifications on a traditional Dalit community that has been protesting against its nomenclature and trying to revive its lost identity through its traditional occupation. This affirmation in turn is expected to lead to a shift in the socio-political relationships of the community with the other dominant communities in the social hierarchy. In India, occupational changes are taking place more widely than statistical changes and emerging with an alternative social movement. The paper empirically validates the emerging alternative collective social movement of a community; authenticate its social status through traditional occupation, knowledge system and its resistance to State nomenclature.

Keywords: Traditional occupation. Contemporary changes. Community nomenclature Identity. Social Movement.

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

Kwat (2019) states that occupations can be broadly classified into three categories, namely, primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary occupations include all those essential and sustainable acts such as agriculture and allied activities like animal husbandry, forestry, fishery, and poultry farming. Secondary activities include both large- and small-scale manufacturing industries and mining. Tertiary activities include all other activities like transport, communication, banking, insurance, and trade. The occupational structure indicates the distribution as well as absorption of population into these three classified types of occupations. Similarly, tertiary occupations are also considered as important, as these have huge employment potential. In developed countries, the absorption capacity of this sector is very high. According to ILO (2020), India's employment in agriculture is about 42.4% and the dimension of work, employment and vulnerability has been taken for base categorization. On the other hand, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 9.2 promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, it is expected that there will be a significant increase in industry's contribution toward employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in line with national conditions, and double its share in the Least Development Countries (LDC).

Based on the occupational distribution of India, from early 1901 to 1951, agriculture seemed to have occupied the dominant position and its absorption capacity had

increased marginally from 66.9% in 1901 to 69.7% during 1951. Agricultural labourers in the total labour force increased from 17% in 1901 to nearly 20% during 1951. The percentage of population engaged in other allied activities like forestry, livestock, and fishery declined from 4.3% in 1901 to only 2.3% of the total workforce in 1951. Further, from 1951 to 2000, which marks the post-independence period, there was a shift in the occupational structure of the working force from agriculture to secondary and tertiary sectors, such as industrialisation, and this plays a major role in regulating the growth rate of Indian economy. The highest recorded change occurred from 1975 to 1976, particularly with the agricultural labour force, which accounted for 60% or so.

India's diverse traditional occupational variation encompasses occupational models such as traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries, and a multitude of services. Slightly less than half of the workforce is related to agriculture, and services are the major source of economic growth, accounting for nearly two-thirds of India's output but employing less than one-third of its labor force. Similarly, another aspect of occupational division in India is widely spread such as primary, secondary, and tertiary with respect to labour force analysis that shares primary sectors as well as service sector in an increasing manner. The primary occupation is categorised as comprising of cultivators, agricultural labourers and livestock, forestry, and fishing; the secondary sector comprises mining and quarrying, manufacturing and construction; and tertiary sector includes trade and commerce, transport, storage, communication and other services.

OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN IN INDIA

Mehta (2020) points out that the statistics report on occupational distribution in India during 1901–2000 emphasizes that the primary occupation constituted 71.8 % in 1901; 72.1% in 1951; 71.8% in 1961; 72.1% in 1971; 68.2% in 1981; 66.8% in 1991; 56.7% in 2000. In the secondary occupational category, labour force was 12.6% in 1901; 17.3% in 1951; 12.2% in 1961; 11.2% in 1971; 13.5% in 1981; 12.7% in 1991; 17.5% in 2000. Finally, tertiary occupational division was 15.6% in 1901; 17.3% in 1951; 16% in 1961; 16.7% in 1971; 17.7% in 1981; 20.5% in 1991; 20.8% in 2000.

The occupational impetus in India suffers from a constant stagnancy in terms of the ratio of labour force employed in secondary and tertiary sectors. A total of 27.9% of the labour force was employed in secondary and tertiary sectors till 1971. In 1951, 10.7% of the labour force was engaged in the industrial sector which slightly increased to 12.7% in 1991. The National Sample Survey (NSS) estimate shows during 1999–2000, 17.5% of total labour was engaged in the secondary sector. In the second five-year plan, huge investments were made to industrialise the economy. This has had a small impact on the occupational structure of the country.

Further, according to Karmel and MacLachlan's Index (2001–2011), the Indian occupational groups are divided into four major categories, namely, Cultivators, Agricultural labourers, Household Industrial Workers and Other Workers. The figure that represents them during 2001 is as follows: (Cultivators – 03.5%; Agricultural labourers 03.79%; Household Industrial Workers – 00.73% and Other Workers – 05.15%). Similarly, according to 2011 data, the representational figures are as follows: Cultivators – 02.44%; Agricultural Labourers 04.55%; Household Industrial Workers – 00.59% and Other Workers – 04.11%. The outcome of percentage point decline was affected, whereas among household industrial workers the decline was only 0.14 percentage point.

This low decline is due to the already low segregation in 2001 itself. Through the analyses, it is to be noted that there is less diversity in the distribution of occupational categories among the states of India (Prasad and Pratap, 2017). Duncan Index of Dissimilarity analysis compared the occupational gender segregation and represents (32.23) in 2001 and in 2011 (39.79).

Table 01 Workforce participation rates of gender segregation

Nation and State	Male		Female		Total	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
India	50.85	53.26	11.55	25.51	32.33	39.79
Tamil Nadu	56.37	59.31	18.42	31.80	37.59	45.58

Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) during July 2017 to June 2018, the male workers in rural areas constituted 9.1% and female workers 8.7% in the following occupational divisions: Division 1: Legislators, Senior officials and Managers, Division 2: Professionals and Division 3: Technicians and Associate professionals. In urban areas, 30.4% of the male workers and 34.6% of the female workers were engaged in the following occupation divisions: Division 1: Legislators, senior officials and managers, Division 2: Professionals and Division 3: Technicians and associate professionals. NSSO introduced the household type in their survey, which was based on the sources of household's income during the year preceding the date of survey. Only the household's income (net income and not gross income) from economic activities was considered accordingly but the incomes of servants and paying guests were not taken into account. In rural areas, a household occupation division belonged to any one of the following six household types: 1. Self-employed in agriculture, 2. Self-employed in non-agriculture, 3. Regular wage/salary earning, 4. Casual labour in agriculture, 5. Casual labour in non-agriculture, and 6. Others. In urban areas, the household types are as follows: 1. Self-employed, 2. Regular wage/salary earning, 3. Casual labour and 4. Others. According to NSSO (2011–2012), India's occupational categories are classified as rural and urban. Both rural and urban populations have similar occupational divisions, namely Self-employed, Regular wage/ Salaried Employee and Casual Labour and all these workforces comprise of men and women equally.

Desai (1971) analyses the combined effect of all the occupational changes that compare the social groups of the traditional society both in urban and rural areas. The comparison relatively changes the traditional social or functional relations between the communities that are hierarchically placed in the social structure of Indian society. The emerging occupational changes become problematic when it comes to the question of 'division of labour' that is based on sex and the other old stratificatory system based on caste, family and village community.

CASTE THEORIES AND THEIR RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY OCCUPATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Every region of India has its own cultural context relying on 'caste marks' or the community symbols and the existing caste theories constructed mostly on the mythological interpretations. Thus, it becomes a point of review for the researchers to study the socio-

cultural, economic, and political structures of the Indian society and it is taken for granted that the caste stratification principles include occupational ethics along with the concept of purity and pollution. The most common theory was that the caste system is believed to have evolved out of the conquest of *Aryan* or Indo-European invaders on the *Dravidians* while at the same time absorbing some of their proto-caste hierarchies, namely *Aristocracy* and *Slavery*. In the middle of the first millennium BC, caste inequalities were clearly institutionalized by the academicians, and were entered into the governmental documents by Risley and others, and legitimised constitutionally, along with the rise of *Brahmanaic Hinduism*. It continued with the formalisation of the '*law of Manu*' and its interpretations justified the principles and practises of discrimination against *Sudra*, the service communities, and *Avama*, the communities, who were involved in menial jobs, polluting in nature and the subjugation of women well intertwined.

The four major caste formations in India ramify into an enormous number of sub-divisions. The basic caste-based division was based on *Varna* or colours; sub-caste or *Jati* are the sub-divisions of the *Varna*. The most crucial criteria of caste principles were believed to be based on occupation, namely the *Brahmin* or priestly caste, *Kshatriya* or warrior caste, *Vaishya* or merchants and traders, *Sudra* or the service communities. *Avamas* do not fall within the caste structure and are believed to be born out of the sweat of Lord *Brahma*, caused by exhaustion of creating human beings. Traditionally, physical touch with such communities was considered as polluting and if and when one touches a person beneath their caste status, elaborate purification rituals were followed before contact with one's own caste could be re-established. Such discriminatory practices were part of the systematic social ranking and created institutional structures justifying unequal access to valued resources like education, occupations, wealth, income, power, and prestige. The Indian Caste System is considered as a closed system of stratification, which means that a person's social status is obligated to which caste they were born into. There are limits on interaction and behaviour with people from another social status (Deshpande & Kerbo, 2010).

Post India's independence, there has been considerable relaxation of rules related to the caste system. There was also a significant change in occupational goals and pursuits especially among men from 1954 to 1992. Earlier, most men were dedicated to their traditional caste-related jobs, but by 1992, most had taken up newer occupations utilizing special privileges that were constitutionally determined to the subjugated communities. Special privileges provided opportunities in education, employment and political participation. In spite of the changing patterns in the above three sectors, at the ground level, caste-based prejudice and ranking still exist.

The post-independent India, however, shows that constitutional measures meant to end caste oppression and the division of caste system and its hierarchical order remain caste oppressive in different forms. For example, caste distribution of persons employed within each occupation divisions becomes the same as that of the society as a whole. Caste oppression has not ended through economic change, as the caste identity, and its associated occupational division of labour in everyday activities has been established as a structural necessary condition of the Indian society.

Desai (1971) highlighted the social dynamics associated with landholding pattern and caste system. India's main occupation was agriculture. Agriculture was an open occupation in the sense that anybody irrespective of his caste or religion could get into it. But their differences existed as between owning the land and tilling it. The Brahmin, even

the poor one, though he owned the land did not till it due to a religious belief attached to his caste or "*varna*" position. The other Dwija castes without the religious belief did not till the land but owned it. They either got it tilled through 'other' labourers or rented it out to 'others.' People belonging to other castes owned their land and tilled it themselves and also took other's land to till, in addition to their own. Some others tilled the lands that were taken on rent basis only. Others never possessed or rented land but only tilled it as labourers. So, the preordained beliefs associated with landholding pattern and getting into the occupation of agriculture is determined by caste.

The occupational roles of village artisans such as Carpenters, Blacksmiths, Potters, Tailors and Barbers were caste determined and the skills were acquired and transferred across generations across the workbench. With respect to the above-mentioned professions, the occupational relationships were known as *Jajmani* relationships. Weaving of cloth was a caste inherited occupation and it was done largely in the home of the weaver. But the raw materials were supplied by the trader and the cloth was owned and sold by him. Therefore, the nature of relationship between an agricultural labour and the owner of land or between a weaver and the trader included the remuneration of labour and was governed by traditional and customary practices.

The labourer and his labour were not separated to the degree to which it is separated today. Labour was not a commodity that was sold and bought and there was no labour market nor labour force as there is in contemporary India. There is a big change in occupational relations and occupational structure in terms of the way in which human labour is disposed in contemporary Indian society. Thus, the type of activity that would be allotted to an individual was largely determined by his birth in a family and caste (Desai, 1971).

The relation between occupation and caste can be broken and yet the overlap of caste and class can be very strong. If this is true, then the contemporary situation could be regarded as a permutation of an earlier caste structure where the link between caste and occupation may be strong for some castes, weak for others, but the association between caste and status or more correctly between caste and privilege persists, albeit in a different form. It can even be argued that the cumulative advantage of the upper castes has been so strong that they no longer need an institutional structure of hereditary 'reservation' in order to perpetuate their privilege. The Constitution of India through its reservation policies protects and supports the rights of communities who have been denied opportunities through the systemic practise of 'untouchability' and also as a result of granting special privileges to 'historically discriminated communities. The ground reality in terms of the division of labour still lingers over historical deprivation of rights and labour choices for underprivileged communities.

POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION AND OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY

The practice of "Positive Discrimination" started in India under specific socio-historic conditions. At the bottom of the caste hierarchy, the 'untouchable' communities are found with the lowest ritual standing and economic position. They were subjected to several social participatory exclusions. They have also borne the brunt of several civic disabilities over a long period of time and often were victims of caste-based discrimination and violence.

There were several attempts to overcome these historical injustices starting with the British Period. That was the starting point for the practice and integration of “Positive Discrimination” methods in administrative policies. This is popularly perceived as reservation policy reflecting the changing nature of the Indian polity, economy, and society as a whole. In India, the policy usually refers to provisioning of “special treatment”; special concessions, privileges, and preferential treatment for certain historically deprived social groups. The term “Positive discrimination” was first used by Aexand Rowiez in 1957. Galenter (1984) prefers the use of “Compensatory discrimination” for purposes of his research and feels it is appropriate for the Indian situation. Thus, it is clearly seen that the aim of this Policy is to constitutionally provide reservation in education, employment and political office. Scholars have taken efforts to understand the issue linking the relevant variables and caste proved to be the most crucial underlying impetus for all.

Seth (1999) and Shah (2007; 2002) attempt to capture the contemporary scenario of caste and occupations. Kumar (2002a) tries to map occupational mobility across two generations and attempts to investigate the patterns of intergenerational occupational mobility across caste groups. Kumar (2002 and 2002) may be appropriately described as the pioneer of contemporary mobility studies in the sociological analyses of Indian society. Using the Non-Employer Statistics (NES) datasets, they have made an effort to focus on the issue of occupational mobility and its relation to caste. The studies mostly centered on the communities placed at the top of the hierarchy (*Brahmin*) and the communities placed lowest (*Dalit*).

Satyanarayana (1991) summarised the context of dominance of ‘Brahmin’ with a particular social affiliation and an index of rank and privilege. Further, he argued that caste is the most crucial factor to explain the dominance of Brahmins and the other factors that go with it are based on traditional occupation and education. The fact remains that Brahmins are the well-educated people in India because of their caste privileges and occupation. Caste, occupation, education, and income are not independent determinants of elitism. He describes that it is possible only through de-brahminisation and through violation of the traditional caste rules but not the identity of caste itself. The social change that the Brahmins are said to have associated with can be explained as "ensuring (their) survival but facilitating all the courses of social events to retain a position of high status and authority". The situation continued with the social mobility models like Sanskritization, Westernization and modernization and several other processes including democratization which added momentum to the beliefs of the dominant population and continue to explore new alternatives globally. The emergent "democratic model" demands a new role and would imbibe more consciousness as one of the hallmarks of a developing Indian society creating more conflicts and simultaneously finding ways for resolving them (Gupta, 1972).

Traditional Indian society was characterized by the dominance of strict religious and social customs that minutely defined an individual's position and hierarchy in society, limiting his personal contacts, mobility, and potential for self-development. Personal and business affairs were regulated by cultural norms and religious dogmas in an unvarying routine by birth to a particular social and occupational status through the caste system. The individual in the group was isolated from contact with lower or higher units by the religiously inspired fear of “pollution” or “polluting”. Regulation of government, education, and social life by age-old convention, denial of individual merit, monopoly of the charisma of leadership by religious hierarchy all defined traditional India and resulted in a closed,

static society which deprived individuals of alternatives to develop knowledge, skills, and social contacts (Dardinski, 1972).

Ethnographic studies have documented the changes in occupational structure in Indian villages across caste over time. Several studies find clear evidence of occupational mobility among low castes over time. The occupational mobility may act as a catalyst in case of Schedule Caste (SC) upliftment because they are subjugated since time immemorial. They are still engaged in low-ranked fixed occupations. If they are able to show upward occupational mobility, then their social and economic status would surely improve. But such studies on the occupational mobility of Scheduled Caste population are meagre (Butool, 2018).

Besides its internal structural complexity and the most crucial policy, pluralism, unity and diversity, secularism, democracy have emerged as iconic markers of the policies of contemporary India. The social, economic and political structures of the sub-continent have been studied, analysed, and interpreted by different schools of thought. The universalized theories on Indian socio-cultural aspects justify the relevance of multidisciplinary perspectives but are still unable to apply positivist approach especially in understanding the origin of the stratified hierarchical positions of every Indian community. Thurston's volumes on 'Caste and Tribes of India' were the first documents published from an anthropological perspective but still the interpretations of the then field assistant Rangachari's epistemic view had brought out certain controversies for being an insider. The People of India project (1985-92) identified 4635 communities and their cultural specificity has been validated empirically.

The process of democratisation and modernisation of India involves creating a level playing ground to for all its citizens, which resulted in the policy of 'Protective Discrimination'. All the subjugated communities, who were discriminated, were enumerated within the nomenclature, namely Backward Classes (BC), Scheduled Caste (SC), and Scheduled Tribe (ST). This nomenclature was created in 1950 and the last community-wise census of 1931 yielded the base data that exist in India and the discourses on their socio-economic, and political status, mobility and development could not come to consensus, even after the legal intervention of the Supreme Court.

A society has many levels of institutional structuring, and some are more inter-dependent than others. Culture is expressed through all of these different kinds of institutional establishments, and the activities structured at one level need not be integrated with those structured at another level, in the sense that they are interdependent of each other. The most inclusive structures of a society are those that have to do with its political or governmental institutions. Horan (1974) states that the interpretations of occupational mobility are simple movement among communities and he argued that presumes occupational positions are nothing more than economic status and certainly not social status.

The most obvious source of theoretical justification for the assumption of equivalence between occupational position and occupational status is the functional theory of stratification presented by Parsons (1940) and Davis and Moore (1945). According to them, the underlying system of "moral evaluation" (presumably reflecting the functional requisites of a particular social system) provides the basis for differential evaluation of a set of occupational positions. Thus, a set of occupational positions differentiated among the communities with respect to requisite skills and training and a shared set of values

defining the socially important tasks of society are combined through the mechanism of differential rewards to produce and maintain a unidimensional continuum of caste.

OCCUPATION, DIGNITY, AND SPACE OF SCHEDULED CASTE

Rawat (2013) stated that Dalit Studies emerged as a new field of study since the 1990s in continuation of discourses on occupational positions, occupational status and occupational mobility. Based on the basic tenets of the subject, he highlights three thrust areas of focus that are examined by scholars of Dalit Studies, namely, occupation, dignity and space. Perhaps, occupation was a prominent organizing category in colonial and early post-colonial ethnographic writing that was used to catalogue Dalit socio-economic and traditional occupational practices. Struggles for dignity and efforts to eradicate caste inequality have become central concerns in the whole process of community development.

The contribution of colonial sociology since from 1870s and 1930s has played an influential role in conceptualizing traditional occupational perspectives. Nearly every Dalit caste came to be associated with one traditional occupation as a way of explaining the caste's ritually impure status, their accounting for the stigma of untouchability. The Indian census of 1901 and 1911, and the provincial castes and tribes volumes narrate that the *Dalit 'jatis'* (castes) with the *Bhramanic* "myths of origin" described the caste's polluted status through the occupational stereotype that justifies "untouchables" employment, as appropriate workers in the leather industry and in the sanitary departments of urban municipalities. Since then, theoretical and analytical frameworks have remained largely unchanged, while at the same time grassroots-level resistance has emerged in isolation. The concept of urbanisation created a push factor in strengthening their resistance.

Occupation and dignity have been the prominent conceptual models for studying the history and practice of untouchability in modern India. Dalit writers draw particular attention to the experience of growing up untouchable in their *jati*, the most commonly used term in everyday life, and brings out the reality of understating Indian social structure. The socio-economic and political institutions have to be understood through 'Jati' as far as the Indian society is concerned.

Writing histories of untouchability, need to engage with sources, Gopal Guru has urged us to pay attention to "the role of space" because "space determines the emergence and the efficacy of thought" for Ambedkar and Gandhi. Extending on the attention already given to the themes of occupation and dignity, we also need to develop a more critical model that takes into account the role of *jati* in the study of India (Rawat, 2013) The political challenges and their collective alternative occupational-based social movement to fight against the oppressive social system, claiming the dignified occupational identity and the existing administrative nomenclature have become newer tenets.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The social movements of India's deprived castes are based on three major tenets: firstly, the social movement identifies the basis of exploitation by identifying two categories, namely, the exploiter and the exploited subjects. The caste system which is based on "pure and impure" births becomes the base for the above categorisation. Secondly, in the struggle against the oppressive social system, the movement challenges the domination of the oppressed in all the arenas of civilisation. Thirdly, the social movement imagines

the alternative model that brings complete destruction of the brahminical system for a better society. Ambedkar prioritised a society, which would be based on the values of liberty, equality and fraternity, against the cherished *varnashrama* dharma of Gandhi. Thus, a self-conscious dignified social identity, committed to ending the oppressive social order and hope for the establishment of an equal and libertarian society, has become the basic tenet of the social movements in India.

Social movements are built on identities and they are populated by people who identify with collectivism and initiate movement. Identity is thus simultaneously a characteristic of collectivities *and* people. Sociologists tend to study identity at the collective level on the supply side of contentious politics, while social psychologists typically focus on the individual level of social identity and group identification at the demand side of politics.

Scholars, like Stekelenburg (2013), have increasingly emphasized the significance of collective identity as a factor in stimulating protest participation. Similarly, Taylor & Whittier (1992) argued that the generation of a collective identity is crucial for a movement to emerge as a new distinctiveness in the social status. Collective identity is conceived as an emergent group phenomenon. According to Melucci (1989) "Collective identity is an interactive, shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action produced by several individuals that must be conceived as a process because it is constructed and negotiated by repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals to groups." Hence, identity is not a given fact; identity is a practical accomplishment, a process. Identifying ourselves or others is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation (Jenkins, 2004).

Empirically, the theory of Collective identity has been validated and become prominent in contemporary movements. It has encouraged social scientists to assess its role in all movements, new and old. Focusing on identity seemed a way to explain how interests emerged rather than rationally justifying. By examining the formation of collective identities, we would be able to shed light on the macro-historical context within which movements emerge. Sumathi's (2001) empirical grassroots-level study points out that the *Shanar* community (Southern Tamil Nadu) signifies the social upliftment movement by changing their traditional occupation of toddy tapping to traders and changing the administrative nomenclature from Scheduled Caste (SC) to Backward Class (BC) for their collective identity from *Shanar* to '*Nadar*' and also Gramminy to indicate the higher social status after becoming traders. The late-19th century and 20th century of India saw momentous continuities of development through the new forms of socio-political and socio-economic movements with historical context. Exploring the intellectual formation, which can be called caste radicalism, and the contexts in which it arose, we find that *Dalit* critique initially allied with radical anti-Brahmanism separated from it in the first decades of the 20th century, later, *Dalit* pursued its own trajectory of distinctive analysis joined to activism from socio-political perspective. In these processes, some castes seized the opportunity for horizontal integration, bringing about pan-India caste unification. This process, eulogized by some sociologists as *ethnicisation*, basically transcended the 'classical' caste boundaries and brought the collective to bear a new 'ethnic' identity. It represented a fusion of castes and thus expanded endogamy. Scholars saw in this ethnicisation of caste a potential to bring about positive social change, since it imparted a new identity, which apparently ignored caste differentiation and grouped them into larger units, albeit based on caste. Hardgrave also (1968) observed the process of fission and fusion that broke down castes into new endogamous sub-units and at the same time

amalgamation of analogous castes for the acquisition of social and political influence. Various levels of segmentation within caste are meaningful for different purposes and activities and the basis of segmentation itself varies greatly from one unit to another. The prominence of class segments within the caste provides for much greater mobility than the earlier sub-castes.

CASE STUDY

The present case study of Tamil Nadu followed the same trajectory, exploring positive social change which has brought about newer identity by interpreting their traditional occupation and mobilizing the sub-communities integration through collective protest. In Southern India, Dalits are known as *Adi Dravida*, *Adi Karnataka*, and *Adi Andhra*. This practice began around 1917 when the *Adi* prefix was appropriated by Dalit leaders in these regions. It embodies a theory that they were the original inhabitants of India, although this is dubious. These terms are used in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, respectively, to identify people of "untouchable" castes in official documents. India's National Commission for Scheduled Castes considers the official use of *dalit* as a label to be "unconstitutional" because modern legislation prefers *Scheduled Castes*; however, some sources say that *Dalit* has encompassed more communities than the official term of *Scheduled Castes* and is sometimes used to refer to all of India's oppressed peoples. It is proved by Yengde (2019:99) by establishing that there were 1200 Dalit sub-castes and approximately 4000 "sub-sub-caste."

The community in the case study is the *Pallan* community of Tamil Nadu, it falls into the category of Scheduled Caste (SC) list; the traditional occupation of *Pallans* includes agriculture and allied agricultural activities. The majority of them are small and medium farmers for decades and are known for their technical/scientific knowledge in *Vayal*, *Vayalsaarntha Velai* (agriculture-oriented activities). In pre-Independent India, the farmlands were mostly perceived as common property resources and land documentations were not established administratively. The lands were attached with the village temples; the upper and other dominant communities had a socio-political spread over the resources as representatives of the village administration.

In the *jajmani* system, the high caste landowning families are rendered services and products by the lower castes. The serving castes are called *kamins*, whereas the served castes are known as *jajmans*. The *kamins* are paid in cash or kind for their services. The *Jajmans* involved decision-making process and the resource were under the control of *Zamindar*.

The land ceiling Act in India, 1961, created certain implications and encourage capitalist farming. Though, the policy might be effective in curbing the large *Zamindari* type of holdings, encouraged and transformed agriculture as a business. They thus leave totally untouched the power relations within the village, and hence also the distribution of land. Many land documents were created then and continued to benefit the dominant and upper caste and not the marginalized or the real producers. The policy facilitated few landless households that gained from the distribution of some government land without registration or record of rights *poromboke* land, but even part of that somehow tends to find its way into the hands of the medium-size farmers who are relatives or allies of the wealthy (Mencher, 1974).

The minimum tail end of the agricultural/farmland as well as their homestead land (1 acre to maximum of 25 acres) is owned by every household of the community and landless *Pallan* is hardly found. The landless household members work as farm coolies (laborer) for the dominant community who own large farms and sometimes the *Pallans* also work as exchange laborers within the community. The major crop cultivated by *Pallans* is Paddy. The role sharing of the work is gender-specific (sense of being male or female) and their indigenous knowledge system is meticulously transmitted as a culture from one generation to the other. Traditionally, the *Pallan* community claims that they were providers and distributed grains to other non-agricultural-dependent communities like *Aasaari, Kuyavan, Goldsmith, Pandaram, etc.* known as service caste groups and so fall into the nomenclature of Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The empirical study of the community validated their established indigenous knowledge in water resource management both for irrigation as well consumption of equitable use. The age-old water management practice, known as *Eri* (reservoir) system of Tamil Nadu, initiated by the traditional communities, is still widely used in the state and controlled by the government departments. *Eris* act as flood-control systems, prevent soil erosion and wastage of runoff during periods of heavy rainfall, and also recharge the groundwater. In Tamil Nadu, the *Pallan* community initiated an innovative movement by mobilizing their sub-communities namely ***Kudumban, Pannadi, Kadayan, Kaladi, Vathiriyaan, Pallan and Devendra Kulathan***. '*Madai Kudumban*' the sub-community of *Pallan* had holistic knowledge of these activities and ensured perennial availability of water. The traditional irrigation system could be the major activity of these communities for livelihood security. Knowledge about traditional water management was very extensive and has been handed over from generation to generation. Collective action and role specification in livelihood activities were maintained by the local community and established as a social structure which ensured ecology.

All sub-communities have similar cultural practices and traditionally endogamy was practiced. The consanguineal and affinal patterns of kinship are strongly visible among the sub-communities. This kinship determines the roles and status based on the belief system and well-established customs in everyday life and social interrelations exist among the sub-communities. Agriculture is practiced by all sub-communities, and there is no visible difference in their economic condition. Members of the sub-community believed the term "*Pallan*" had an unfavourable connotation and was used derogatorily by "others." Though the community moved upward in the economic ladder by utilizing Positive Discrimination Policy, the social status remains the same in the society they lived and humiliated by 'others' and thus the point of reference was alternative social cohesion. The community also has archaeological and literary evidences to prove their elite social status as agriculturists and it has been protesting to replace the community name from '*Pallan*' to *Devendrakula Velalar*'. The community has been fighting against the discrimination for past five decades in different forms and realised that they should be aiming for social empowerment and not just economic empowerment and initiated alternative trajectory, through collective mobility in achieving their goal.

CONCLUSION

The community perceived that the nomenclature of 'Scheduled Caste' and the communities listed out within the category generically allied with the cognition of untouchability, impure, oppressed, subjugated, not skilled, and so on. Hence, the *Pallan*

community has worked tirelessly to eradicate the way in which 'others' including the administration, in an organised manner, undermine their traditional occupation and the socio-political status. The protective discrimination policy provides the right to a world of work for the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities and contemporary India's goal is to make it truly inclusive and future-ready. Such empowerment process provides space for the community to collectively protest and gain sociopolitical identity through innovative mobilization. The case study empirically substantiates the emerging alternative collective social movements of a community trying to reinterpret its social status through traditional occupation, knowledge system and resisting its wrong inclusion in the administrative community list in the existing nomenclature and change of community name.

As per the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in India, the convention 190 (c190) establishes that everyone has the right to a world of work along with recommendation 206 (R206) that makes it truly inclusive and future-ready. These interventions at the national level do create an impact at the grassroots-level communities to fight against the existing system with more specified goals. Violence, humiliation and harassment in work cannot be demarcated in the name of caste, creed and religion keeping the so-called coherent and tangible national approach; rather it needs to have an alternative outlook depending on the contemporary context. The collective community movements should ratify the campaign needs to be rooted with all the stakeholders, lobbying with the government to utilise the opportunity for administrative reforms to achieve alternative socio, economic and political identity.

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