

Caste Based Social Exclusion and Vulnerability of Dalits in a Village of Andhra Pradesh: An Anthropological Study

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ABSTRACT: Around 70 per cent of Indian population are found to live in villages and they sustain primarily on agriculture. The social system in rural India is mainly centered around the caste structure, its organization and caste identities. Social divisions of Indian society is primarily based on the caste system, which is the basis for examining the social inequality, discrimination and the levels of equality among the members belonging to different endogamous groups of rural India. The paper discusses on the existing inequality and discrimination between the Dalits and other castes communities in a multi caste village of Andhra Pradesh. The paper explains the form of social exclusion that is prevailing in the case of Dalits such as Mala and Madiga castes in Mandur village of Guntur district, in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It also discusses on the effectiveness of affirmative action programmes on Dalits, and suggests new inclusive policy guidelines for their inclusive growth and development based on the case study of Mandur village in Andhra Pradesh.

INTRODUCTION

Social stratification of Indian society is based on the caste system. There are several theories of origin of the caste system in India propounded by different social scientists based on their scientific analysis with empirical and practical knowledge. Some of the theories that concern on the origin of caste system are *Varna* theory, racial theory, occupational theory, geographical and ecological factors, *varna* hypergamy and hypogamy and Hindu *Karma siddantha*. A theory of the origin of caste which combines both functional and racial origins has been put forward by Slater ('24) in his Dravidian elements in Indian culture. However, caste system persists in Indian even today after much revolutionary changes have taken place with industrialization, urbanization and modernization in

the era of globalization. The institution of caste is considered as the root cause for existing social inequalities and discrimination in between high and low castes. The Dalits are worst affected and victimized with the caste system and experiencing various forms of exclusion, deprivation and marginalization. In regard to origin of caste in India, J.H. Hutton ('33, '46) and G.S. Ghurye ('32, '50) very critically analyzed and had said that in India, caste is a "Bhraminical child". Ambedkar pointed out that "super imposition of endogamy over exogamy is the creation of caste".

Exclusion as a social phenomenon is expressed in different forms all over the world. In India, we observe certain unique systematic forms of social exclusion, which is based on caste and patriarchy. Certain communities categorized under scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward castes

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(classes), women and religious minorities, virtually experience systematic exclusion with regard to the advantage of development. Discrimination, inequality and isolation are the hall marks of social exclusion which have profound negative impact on quality of life. Social exclusion emphasizes the role relational features in deprivation (Sen, '97). It refers to the norms and process that prevent certain groups from equal and effective participation in social, economic, cultural and political life of societies (Narayan, '99). Buvinic (2005) summarizes that meaning of social exclusion as follows: "The inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic, and social functioning of society", and goes on to add that it involves "the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups in society upon others". This definition captures three distinguishing features of social exclusion between them and results in deprivation or low income for those excluded (De Hann, '97; Sen, '97).

Social exclusion leads to various kinds of deprivation. Amartya Sen ('97) mentioned that "it leads to the impoverishment of human life through their casual consequences". The consequences of macroeconomic policies such as poverty, unemployment and involuntary migration, exclude the victims from economic, cultural and political activities, institutional inequality and discrimination have been pervasive feature of Indian society. In short, social exclusion in its more specific manifestation as discrimination — refers to the process through which groups are wholly or partially restricted from full participation in the economic, educational and social institutions that define social membership. Exclusion involves both the act of restricting access and the consequences that follow, thus principally forms of deprivation. In the Indian context exclusion revolves around institutions that discriminate, isolate, share and deprive subordinate groups on the basis of identities like caste, religion and gender. The salient features of social exclusion on the basis of caste are — social stratification, social inequality, hierarchy and hegemony. Patriarchy constitutes the gender inequality. Social exclusion of weaker sections including Dalits is closely associated with the discrimination and inequality embodied in the institution by caste.

RURAL INDIAN BACKGROUND

Around 70 per cent of Indian population are found to live in villages and they sustain primarily on agriculture. The social system in rural India is mainly centered around the caste structure, its organization and caste identities. Social divisions of Indian society is primarily based on the caste system, which is the basis for examining the social inequality, discrimination and the levels of equality in between the members belonging to different endogamous groups of rural India. Even today, the caste system is very rigid in villages as compared to that of urban areas. The institution of caste is very strong in South Indian villages, much greater in relation to other parts of our country. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood to majority of rural people, and economic relations exist between land owning and landless families belonging to different castes. Earlier the *jajamani* system was very much in practice in rural villages of India, now it persists only to some extent, and is not fully in operation. In rural India the division of labour is based on caste, age and sex. In a multi caste village, the caste hierarchy clearly denotes the existing social inequality and discrimination between the different castes. The inter and intra-caste relations in different spheres of rural life is to be taken into consideration to identify the social inequality, discrimination and equality in rural India. Gender issues are also much important to examine the existing discrimination and inequality between men and women. It is a well-known fact that there are inequalities between nations, between classes, between races, between castes and between men and women in the human world.

Sociological studies have mainly dwell on three aspects or forms of the structure of caste, then the system of classes and finally the distribution of power. Social inequality is a perennial problem as it causes high and low positions and the principles on the basis of which it exists, determine the distribution of social resources among individuals, families and groups (Sharma, '77). In traditional Indian society of rural villages, it has been said that it was based on premise of equality and hierarchy, and was particularly conspicuous in the legal order of Hindu society. The principle of equality of opportunity has an important place in the transition from a society based on castes

or caste like groups, to one based on the individual. It plays a liberating role to the extent that it frees the individual from the burden of arbitrary and artificial distinction perpetuated through sheer social inertia (Beteille, '83). Notions of both inequality and discrimination are built into the ideology and practice of the caste system, and these two are not only closely interrelated but have changed over a given period of time. Change occurred both in nature of and in the nexus between inequality and equality.

In rural India, wealth and political power are in equally distributed among different castes (Subramanyam, '97). Economists point to the great inequality of wealth earning and incomes, and the massive concentration of poverty in both rural and urban India. Lots of social gulf exists in between touchable and untouchable (Dalits) castes of rural India. In the rural social system the economic, social and political inequalities are channeled through hereditary groups called castes. Some of the important features of the caste system are that the members of different castes are at different socio-economic levels, which are reflected in their relative caste status, and that the different castes tend to develop their separate sub-cultures thereby each sub-caste is becoming socially exclusive. It is therefore clear that by denying the individual the equality of opportunity, the freedom to choose his own occupation and by restricting his scope to mix freely with the members of other castes, the caste system restrains the individual from being self-reliant, creative and sociable (Samuel, '90).

DALITS IN INDIAN SOCIETY

The institutionalized inequality in the caste system manifests its extreme form in the growth of completely segregated set of castes called 'untouchable' castes'. The scheduled castes who comprises the bulk of 'untouchable' are technically outside the four-fold *varna* scheme. These castes were imputed with maximum degree of ritual and social impurity, while their occupations were held to be the lowest in normative hierarchy. This led to their residential segregation in villages. Physical isolation and social distance very much prevails in between the Dalits and other castes in any rural setting of India. "Instead of dispersed inequalities, we find in 'caste system' an accumulative inequality where social and

political power is concentrated into the hands of the same group. The best proof of descent-based discrimination is that only Dalits are untouchables (Beteille, '83).

The Dalits of India are perhaps the worlds foremost example of community whose rights are violated. Over 17 crores of Dalits also known as untouchables or outcastes Despite the existence of constitutional rights and other affirmative action programmes that are meant to address the issues, today their predicament can be described in terms of a lost humanity and a dispossessed community who live in segregated conditions. Notwithstanding the democratic values, caste hierarchy continues to dominate feudal system of Indian society.

As per People of India project report (Singh, 2002), India has 4693 castes communities, out of which 751 are scheduled castes. In India, scheduled castes population constitutes about 1,66,635,700 persons (16.20%), according to 2001 Census. As per 2001 Census the state of Andhra Pradesh represents 59 scheduled castes with a population of 1,23,39496 persons (16.19%).

The list of scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh (undivided) are as follows:

1. Adi Andhra, 2. Adi dravida, 3. Anuamuk, 4. Aray Mala, 5. Arundhatiya, 6. Arwa Mala, 7. Bariki, 8. Bauri, 9. Bedajangam or Budaga jangam, 10. Bindla, 11. Byagara, 12. Chachati, 13. Chalavadi, 14. Chamara/Mocha/Muchi, 15. Chambar, 16. Chandala, 17. Dakkae/Dokkalwar, 18. Dandasi, 19. Dhor, 20. Dom/Dombara/Paidi/Pano, 21. Ellamalwar/Yellam/Malawandlu, 22. Gashi/Haddi/Relli/Chachandi, 23. Godagali, 24. Godari, 25. Gosangi, 26. Holey, 27. Holey dasari, 29. Jambuwulu, 30. Kolupuluvandhlu, 31. Madlikurava/Madari Kuruva, 32. Madiga, 33. Madigadasu/Mashteen, 34. Mahar, 35. Mala, 36. Mala Dasari, 37. Mala Dasu, 38. Mala Hannai, 39. Mala Jangam, 40. Mala Masti, 41. Mala Sale Natkani, 42. Mala Sanyasi, 43. Mang, 44. Mang Garodi, 45. Manne, 46. Mashti, 47. Matangi, 48. Mahter, 49. Mitha Ayyalvar, 50. Mundala, 51. Paky/Moti/Thoti, 52. Pambada/Pambanda, 53. Pamidi, 54. Panchama/Pariah, 55. Relli, 56. Samagara, 57. Samban, 58. Sapru, and 59. Sindhollu/Chindollu.

Scheduled castes population in Andhra Pradesh (united) is distributed in all the 23 districts. Large majority of the scheduled castes population in rural

India is depending on agriculture, labour and other menial services for their subsistence and survival. This research paper presents the existing inequality and discrimination between the Dalits and other castes in a multi caste village of Andhra Pradesh. The paper examines the form of social exclusion prevailing in the case of Dalits such as Mala and Madiga castes in Mandur village of Guntur district of the state of Andhra Pradesh. It also discusses the effectiveness of affirmative action programmes on Dalits, and suggests new inclusive policy guidelines for their inclusive growth and development based on the case study of Mandur village in Andhra Pradesh.

MANDUR VILLAGE

The village Mandur is located in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. It consists of 649 households with a population of 2635 persons. The village represents 20 caste communities with varied occupational categories, such as priests, traders, peasants, pastoralists, artisans, service castes, cotton carders, basket makers, fishermen, swine herders, leather workers and agriculture labourer. There are three religious groups the village, namely Hindus, Christians, and Muslims.

The caste groups found in the village are Brahmin, Komati, Kamma, Reddy, Kapu, Golla, Goundla, Uppara, Kamsali, Vadrangi, Kummari, Chakali, Jangam, Yerukula, Yanadi, Muslim Sunni, Dudekula, Mala and Madiga. The village consists of different social groups, and reservation categories of castes such as open category (Brahmin, Komati, Kamma, Reddy, Kapu), backward castes (Golla, Goundla, Uppara, Kamsali, Vadrangi, Kummari, Chakali, Mangali and Dudekula, Jangam), scheduled castes (Mala, Madiga) and scheduled tribes (Yerukula, Yanadi); the religious minorities are Muslims and Christians. Majority of the Dalits are converted Christians. Sunni and Dudekula are the Muslims and they considered themselves as religious minorities. The religious institutions like temples, churches and mosque are also located in the village. The village represents several ethnic groups with diversity and show multiple cultural complexity.

About 22.92 per cent of the population in the village belongs to Dalits, 56.28 per cent of population in Mandur village belongs to open category, 2.20 per cent of them belong to scheduled tribe, and the rest

18.60 per cent of them belong to other backward castes. Around 43.72 per cent of the village population belongs to weaker sections and falls under socially excluded category. In the caste hierarchy of the village, Brahmin stand at top and Dalits stand at the bottom; caste hierarchy in the village is classified and is based on the criteria of purity and pollution, occupation and commensality. Social stigma of untouchability is very much attached to the Dalits.

ETHNO-HISTORY OF DALIT CASTES

The present generation of these two Dalit castes in the village is unable to trace out their origin. And also no historical documents available with them. However, documented historical records of pioneer scholars are available and the records suggest the following information about the Mala and the Madiga castes of Andhra Pradesh.

Mala

The Mala community is also referred to as '*Adi Andhra*'. Malas are a broad generic category encompassing different untouchable groups. Hassan ('20) noted that they were known to the Muslims by the name of Dher, Antyaja and Panchama, thus he reported the other synonyms. The Malas are one of the two prominent scheduled castes, the other being the Madiga. Almost every village is invariably inhabited by the Mala in their segregated hamlets '*Malapalli*'. Since they provide the bulk of agricultural labour to the economy of the village, they are considered indispensable to village life. Oppert derives the word '*Mala*' from a Dravidian word, meaning '*Mountain*' (Thurston, '09). In Brown's Telugu Dictionary, it is given that the term '*Mala*' is derived from '*Maila*' meaning dirt.

It is reported that in South India, all the castes are derived into two divisions, the right hand and the left hand division. Hutton ('33) traces their origin to a system of belief prevalent in these parts. Thurston ('09) gives a mythological account for the Mala being identified as a right hand caste, and the Madiga as the left hand caste. According to him Jambhava, a sage, was given a divine cow Kamadhenu, as a gift by Lord Eshwara. Once Sankya, another sage, was treated well by Jambhava's son Yugamuni, in his father's absence. Having found the cream of the milk of Kamadhenu

extremely tasty, Sankhya wanted to taste the meat of the divine cow which was refused by Yugamuni. However, Sankhya managed to kill the animal himself and shared the meat with Yugamuni. Having come to know of this act after return, Jambhava took both Sankhya and Yugamuni to the court of Lord Eshwara for his judgment. Fearing the wrath of Eshwara instead of entering the court, Sankhya and Yugamuni, preferred to stand outside at the entrance on right and left side respectively. Knowing what had happened, Eshwara cursed them to be outcaste. As Sankhya stood on the right side of the entrance, so his descendants became the right hand division, and the descendents of Yugamuni became the left hand division.

Certain strictures were imposed on the members of this caste. They were not allowed to wear any foot wear, or use umbrellas and had to even use different paths for their travel. They even avoided direct eye contact with other caste people. Drawing of water from the public well was prohibited for them and they were not allowed to enter the village temples. But the irony is through doctrinally they were not part of Hindu society, existentially they were an integral part of the local communities (Beteille, '69). Being of medium built and dark complexioned, with thick lips and wide blunt noses, the Mala look like belonging to the Dravidian stock. Isaccs ('65), while tracing the origin of Dalit castes historically states that their dark skin colour also was responsible for their lowly position. But this theory like many others also ended up in controversies.

The lineages found among Mala castes in Mandur village are Tadichetlu, Gundala, Darsa, Kunduru, Galla, Vasumalli, Kondru, Chikkala, Chikati, Dhara, Sodabathula, Addanki, Petta, Putti, Kanamala, Kondraju, Billa, Juraka, Peyyala, Dhammu, Rasuru, Godhati, Chappidi, Yamarthi, Perikala, Pilli, Dasari, Madira, Badugu, Karikutla, Jaladi, Jalli, Giyara, Talathoti, Varadala, Kathe, Manchala, Gone, Nandu, Cherukuru, Jyothula, Kannigangi, Kayyala, Domarapu and Karuna. Each lineage is an exogamous group, marital relations in between the members of same lineage is strictly prohibited.

Madiga

Madiga is one of the scheduled castes of Andhra Pradesh. Madigas are the traditional leather workers,

who usually remove the dead cattle of peasants and do the skinning. Hassan ('20) listed various synonyms of the community, namely Madigodu, Madigalu, Madru, Dher, Chandal, Antyaja, Ethinawandlu, Pendintiwandlu, Pachamollu, Mantangi, Makkalu, Gosangi, Kamathi and Chamber. The word 'Madiga' is derived from 'Mahadiga' meaning great man, who came down. They are found in every village of Andhra Pradesh. They live in segregated hamlets called 'Madigapalli'. There are many legendary accounts which speak about the origin of the Madiga. Singh ('69) gives a popular version of the origin of the Madiga. A boy Chennayya was appointed to look after the divine cow Kamadhenu, but unfortunately it died. The gods requisitioned the services of Jambavanta who was senior most among the gods, so that they could feast on it. The gods wanted Jambavanta to put the flesh in two heaps, one for eating purpose and the other for bringing the cow back to life with mantras. Jambavanta put all the flesh down on the ground. Chennayya picked it up, cleaned it and put it again in the pot. Siva and other gods were angry with Jambavanta as he had not divided the meat into two parts so as to bring the cow back to life, and gods were also angry with Chennayya. They cursed both Jambavanta and Chennayya to lead a degraded life in 'kaliyugam' by earning their livelihood through handling dead cattle and sweeping village lanes. Thus Jambavanta's descendants are the Madiga and Chennayya's descendants are the Mala.

According to Singh ('69), in Telengana, it is held that Jambavanta, the mythological ancestor of the Madiga, came down to help when he was summoned by them with the following words: "*tata maha digira*" (great grandfather, come down). From then onwards he was also known as 'Mahadiga' – the great man, who came down. His descendants were 'Mahadiga waru', later corrupted in to Madiga. Singh ('69) given another explanation connecting the caste name to the groups practice of accepting carrion as an item of food. He writes: "when cattle died, the ancestors of Madiga claimed them with the assertion 'madigoddu' which means this is mine. Thus they came to be called Madigoddu. This name was corrupted into Madigodu and eventually into Madiga. In southern India, all the castes are divided in to right hand and left hand divisions. The Madiga are considered as belonging

to the left hand division. Five sub-divisions among the Madia have been reported by Reddy ('52), viz, Gampa Dhomati, Cheta Dhomati, Teli Dhomati, Vastra Dhomati, and Bhoomi Dhomati. These endogamous groups are seen only in Rayalaseema and Nellore districts. The basic segmentation is the way in which the Madiga partake of the ceremonial feast after marriage. The sacred food, 'dhomati', is taken by some in a basket (*gampa*) or in a winnow (*cheta*) or in a metal plate (*teli*). Some take it on a spread out cloth (*vastram*) and some on a *ghee* smeared floor (*bhoomi*). The container, selected by each group thus stands as an emblem and a mark of distinction.

The Madiga have two main divisions, Telugu Madiga and Kannada Madiga. The Madigas of Mandur village belongs to the Telugu Madiga sub-division. Hassan ('20) mentioned 25 functional sub-castes among the Madiga. Masti Madiga are story tellers and beggars, Cindollu, Chidiwandlu or Bogam Madiga are the courtesans, Ashdaru or Sandwad are vagrant beggars, Bindalas or Bindlawal are the priests to the Madiga, Penta Madiga are sweepers, Dappu Madiga are musicians, Karikuldawaru who make articles from horns, Jogis or Joginis are attached to temple services, Penki Madigas who ran away from the marriage of Vasishta and Arundhate, Kallu Kundalawadu are engaged as carriers of earthen pots filled with the palm juice 'kallu' or shendi, Dasari Madiga are gurus of the Vaishnavite Madigas. Jangam Madiga are worshippers of god Siva, who prose byre to the lingayat creed, Dakkala wads are wandering beggars and genealogists of the Madiga. All the above sub-castes are divided in to numerous exogamous surnames (*inteperlu*) like mukapalli, yulpukonda, and malangurollu, which are of territorial type. Some of their surnames are totemic like, 'ullellu', kunollu' mandyarollu and gatollu, which regulate their marital alliances. Nanjundayya and Iyer ('31) have mentioned several functional groups among the Madiga. The 'gurus' of the Madiga are called Jambavants, an *asadhi* is a Madiga, whose duty is to sing the praise of Maramma during the *jatara*. Gosangi is another functionary whose presence is necessary during the *mari jatara* – Bala basava, who pays them periodical visits and sings the history of Basava and Avalappa, Madiga have priest known as Tappatiga (drummer), Dasayyas are those who are dedicated to Krishna,

Machala are beggars attached to the Madiga caste, Dakkala are the hereditary bonds men of the Madiga. The Madiga have a number of exogamous *kulas* or *bedagas*, such as *ari*, *belli*, *chatri*, *chimalu*, *chittola*, *emme*, *gongadi*, *kambali*, *kuri*, *maddela*, *nakka* etc. which are derived from objects, trees and animals. In Mandur village about 13 lineage groups are found among the Madigas, namely sreeramulu, ella, kummaragunta, gollapudi, devarapati, birudu, puli, vallabhapuram, gaddipogu, mudda, karra, podili and kommu. Lineage is an exogamous group, marital relations in between the members of a same lineage is strictly prohibited.

SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION AND INEQUALITY

Dalits are 'outcaste' of Hindu *varna* system and referred as *panchamas*, occupying the lowest position in the caste hierarchy of the village. Social evil of untouchability is preventing them to interact very closely with the so called pure and touchable castes. Connubial and community restrictions are strictly imposed on the members of Dalits. Physical isolation and social distance very much prevail in between the ritually pure castes and Dalits. Dalits are excluded to participate in socio-rituals of touchable, even invitation also are not extended to them by the purer castes. They have their own priests, barbers and washer men. The Brahmin caste priests do not provide their priestly or ritual services to them. Similarly, the village Mangali and Chakali castes people also not provide their traditional services to the Dalits. Lots of social gulfs exist in between the scheduled castes and other castes. Social inequality, economic inequality and political inequality persists in between different castes of the village, but social discrimination and exclusion of Dalits in the village life is very severe and highly precarious. They are ill treated by other castes and are experiencing large scale vulnerability in their day to day life.

They have their own separate burial grounds, wells, and religious institutions. A separate primary school is also located in Malapalle, which is attended exclusively by the Dalit children. The habitats of Dalits are located at the outskirts of the main village. The Malas habitation is situated on the southern side at a distance of half kilometer from the main village,

which is locally known as 'Malapalli'. The Madigas habitation is situated on the northern side at a distance of half kilometer from the main village, which is known as 'Madigapalli'. These two hamlets are attached to the Mandur Grama Panchayat and also for revenue administrative purposes. Hence, the two hamlets are part of the Mandur village. The settlement pattern or lay out of the village also clearly indicates the existing physical isolation in between the Dalits and other touchable castes of Mandur village.

Ranking order of castes in Mandur village is shown in Table 1 below, which clearly shows the existing social gulf between the Dalits and other touchable castes.

TABLE 1
Ranking order of castes in Mandur village

Varna	Division	Caste
Brahmin	A	Brahmin
Kshatriya	—	—
Vaishya	B	Komati
Sudra	C	Kamma, Reddy, Kapu
	D	Golla, Goundla, Uppara
	E	Kamsali, Vadrangi, Kummari
	F	Chakali, Mangali
	G	Yerukula, Yanadi, Jangam
	H	Muslim sunni, Dedekula
Untouchables	I	Mala, Madiga

The basic principle of the caste system is hierarchy. The essence of hierarchy is the presence of social inequality in between castes. The *varna* model of five fold divisions such as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra and Untouchables (Panchamas) is important reference to identify the local hierarchy within the local patterns. In the village, the lower castes people tend to imitate the dominant or higher castes to raise their social positions, but the members of the high or dominant castes are not allowing them to reach their desired stage. From the table it is noted that the Brahmins in the village are enjoying high social status and stands at top in local hierarchy, whereas the Mala and Madiga castes are at the bottom, and provides the floor for the arrangement of the castes in hierarchical order. Among the Dalits, Mala caste people claim superiority on the basis of their occupation. They differentiate themselves from Madiga, stating that their traditional occupation in the past had been weaving and since it is less defiling

than working with cattle hide, that is why they claim that they are cleaner than Madigas. Based on the criteria of occupation, endogamy, purity and pollution, commensality and connubial relations, all the castes in the village are classified into nine social strata groups, such as priestly caste Brahmin, trading/business caste Vaishya, into two separate social groups, peasant castes like Kamma, Reddy and Kapu as one group, pastorals (*golla*), oil pressers (*goundla*) and earth workers (*uppara*) into one social strata group considering commensal relations as criteria, artisans castes like Kamsali, Vadrangi and Kummari as one social strata group, Yachakas of Jangam caste, plain tribes of Yerukula and Yanadi are considered under one social strata group based on the criteria of occupation and commensal relation. The Muslim Sunni and Dudekula are the religious minority groups, commensal and connubial relations exists in between these two social groups and are classified as one social strata group. Dalits belong to Mala and Madiga castes are classified into one social strata group, based on the criteria of commensality, ritual purity and pollution. Among all the castes in the village, impurity is too much attached to the Dalits.

It is noted that in each social strata group, a specific caste claim superiority over the rest based on the occupational purity and other cultural practices. For instance, among artisan castes, Kamsali (goldsmith) caste claims superiority over the remaining two castes Vadrangi and Kummari. Generally the gold smiths works with the precious metals like gold and silver, whereas the Vadrangi (carpenter) works with wood, and Kummari (potter) works with clay and mud. Similarly among Dalits, Mala caste people in the past worked with cotton material, now majority of them are agricultural labourers. The other Dalit caste, Madiga, traditionally leather workers, still a few of them in this caste, are following their hereditary occupation in addition to agricultural labour. It is observed that inequality exists in between the castes of a same division or social strata group in different contexts. For instance, the peasant castes enjoy same social status in the village, but economic and political inequality prevails in between the traditional farming castes of Kamma, Reddy and Kapu.

The institution of caste is disadvantageous to many low Hindu castes and downtrodden

communities in the village, but it is much more disadvantageous specifically to the Dalit castes. In general the physical isolation and lot of social distance exists in between the touchable and untouchables (Dalits). The social mapping and settlement pattern (layout) of Mandur village are the clear indicators for the identification of existing social gulf between the Dalits and other Hindu castes. The untouchability stigma is barriers for the social mobility of Dalits in the village. Commensal restrictions still persist in between the pure and impure castes, and it is much more severe in between touchable castes and untouchable castes (Dalits). Even today, the members of a particular caste are strictly observing the rule of endogamy at their caste level and rule of exogamy at their respective lineage level. These two factors are considered as the important causes for the continuation of caste system in rural India, specifically in the villages. The Dalits are extremely facing the hardship for their upward social mobility due to the much imposed caste structures on them.

OCCUPATIONS AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

The occupation criteria are very strong in the village caste system. Hereditary status of a particular caste determines its economic status. The occupations of service castes are considered to be impure and the occupation of leather work is more defile and demeaning practice. The occupation of swine herder is more impure, the Yerukulas follow this profession. The priestly profession, agriculture, goldsmiths, dairy farming are considered as purer professions. Economic pursuits of individuals or members of a caste usually determine the status of an individual at the caste level, or the economic status of a caste at the village level. For instance, the traditional peasant castes in the village are enjoying the high economic status as compared to that of the other castes. The other castes including the Brahmins are largely depending on the peasant castes.

Agriculture is the main productive activity in the village. The people from different castes are directly or indirectly involved with agriculture, as self-cultivators, share croppers, tenants and agricultural labourers. Land is the basic means of production in the village. From the land, cultivators produce food

items by using both traditional and modern technology and the labour force. The village carpenters and blacksmith supply the required agricultural implements to the cultivators. The Mala and Madiga caste people provide their labour to the agriculturists of the village. Most of the caste groups in the village interact with one another in the production and exchange of goods and services. Agricultural production activity in the village usually develops matrix of economic relations in between the peasants and other occupational groups.

The village peasant castes act as patrons to other low castes such as washer men, barber, carpenter, blacksmith, potter and leather worker. At present the *Jajimani* system is not functioning fully, but some of the families among washer men, barber, carpenter, potter and leather worker are still providing their services on fixed payment (*mera*) basis and acting as *kamins* to their respective *Jajiman* families. Almost all the service castes are in the village considering the peasants as *Jajimans*. Wisler ('36) said that "land ownership is clearly the single most important determinant of power in the *Jajimani* system. This system is disadvantageous to the service and artisan castes in the village. Some of the Mala and Madiga caste persons are working as *jitagallu* (contractual labourers) with landlords, large and medium farmers belong to the traditional peasant castes. The *jitagallu* look after the farm work and cattle of his master (*jajman*). When a servant works for a longer period, he tends to be treated as member of his master's family. The master shall pay some fixed amount annually to his servant's family.

Land Distribution Pattern

The agricultural land in the village is unequally distributed among families and castes. Landholding is an important variable in finding the economic status of an individual or household in the village. The Table 2 shows the landholding pattern of different castes in Mandur village. From this table it is noted that 50.69 per cent of the families own lands and the rest 40.31 per cent are landless families. Majority of the land in the village as well as most of the larger holdings are held by the three peasant castes — Kamma, Reddy, and Kapu. The three Brahmin families of the village who own land are having substantial landholdings.

TABLE 2
Castes having landholdings in Mandur village

Caste	No. of land holding families	Percentage to total households	No. of landless families	Percentage to total households
Brahmin	3	0.46	8	1.23
Komati	6	0.92	10	1.54
Kamma	50	7.71	18	2.78
Reddy	58	8.94	6	0.92
Kapu	135	20.80	46	7.09
Golla	—	—	5	0.77
Goundla	—	0.62	9	1.39
Uppara	30	4.63	19	2.93
Kamsali	—	—	1	0.15
Vadrangi	—	—	2	0.31
Kummari	5	0.77	4	0.62
Chakali	5	0.77	17	2.62
Mangali	2	0.31	3	0.46
Jangam	1	0.15	2	2.31
Yerukula	1	0.15	1	0.15
Yanadi	1	0.15	13	2.00
Muslim sunni	2	0.31	4	0.62
Dudekula	—	—	17	2.62
Mala	25	3.85	105	16.18
Madiga	1	0.15	30	4.62
Total	329	50.69	230	49.31

These four caste groups are owning 80% of the agricultural land in the village. There is no single land owning family found among the Golla, Kamsali, Vadrangi and Dudekula castes. It clearly indicates that there is a very strong correlation between caste and class as defined by land ownership. The field observations in the village clearly indicates that a farmer owning less than 2.5 acres is not able to achieve economic self-sufficiency through his own cultivation, and will need to undertake additional cultivation as a tenant or wage labourer. Farmers with more than five acres, on the other hand, are likely to be marginal farmers doing little or no manual work themselves. Those with more than 20 acres, function mainly as landlords, leasing out their landholdings to tenants.

The entire village possess an extent of 1,036.20 acres of agricultural land. Out of which 892.26 acres (86.11%) of land is owned by the traditional peasant castes – Kamma, Reddy and Kapu. The rest of the land owning families in 13 castes (Brahmin, Komati, Uppara, Kummari, Chakali, Mangali, Muslim sunni, Jangam, Yerukula, Goundla, Yanadi, Mala and Madiga) collectively possess an extent of 143.94 acres (13.89%) of the agricultural land. It clearly shows the existing economic inequality between the traditional

peasant castes and other occupational groups in Mandur. About 90 per cent of the landless families in different castes (including peasant castes) depend on the land owning families for labour employment. The village tenant cultivators and contractual labourers are at the mercy of large and medium farmers mostly belonging to Kamma caste. It is noticed that some of the large farmers in Kamma caste are successful in business also. Three of them are the owners of village rice mills and another two persons are the rice merchants. A Reddy caste person is also maintaining a provision store and a fair price shop. Another Kapu caste person recently started a medical shop at the centre of the village. Large majority of the literates and considerable number of government employees are also found among these castes. It is clear that majority of the high castes much benefited out of the modern education. Majority of the peasant caste families are economically sound when compared with that of the economic conditions of the other castes. However, a few wealthy families are also found among the other non-peasant castes, but they do not have any prominent role in the village matters.

Political Inequality and Discrimination in Village Polity

There is still an informal traditional *panchayat* operating in the village. The traditional village council consists of five members who are nominated by the members of the village. The village *Munsiff* (headman) is from the Reddy caste and the other members are from the Kamma, Kapu peasant castes (two each). They still continue to perform a leadership function in the village political and economic matters and are called upon from time to time to settle minor disputes. The upper caste still has its own caste *panchayat*, and the Golla, Kummari, Chakali, Mangali, Yanadai, Mala, Madiga and Dudekula, Muslim castes have their traditional caste heads who fulfill their traditional role for their respective castes. They provide advice on social and family matters. Serious breaches of the norms and traditions of the caste, as well as important intra-caste disputes are heard and decided by the caste *panchayat* and caste heads. Cases of divorce, failure in fulfilling agreements and before finalizing marriage arrangements, serious sexual lapses, cases of incest, breaches of the rule of endogamy and exogamy, eating

forbidden food, and pursuing a 'lower' occupation all come under the adjudication of caste *panchayat* or caste heads.

The greater importance of these days is the village statutory *panchayat*, through which the village is linked to the *mandal* and district for development purposes. It consists of all elected members with reserved seats for women and scheduled castes (three each). The *Sarpach* (president) is the key person. At present he is a Kamma caste man. According to the villagers this post has always been held by a man from one of the peasant castes. The other castes role in the statutory *panchayat* is very minimal. It is also noted that the political rivalry exists only among the three peasant castes. A few among these castes are the influentials, who have contacts with the political bodies and administrative units. The observations clearly states that most of the political gains are enjoyed by the dominant peasant castes. The tenant cultivators, agricultural labourers of lower castes and the service and artisan castes are economically dependent on the peasant castes. By virtue of their dependency on the dominant caste, they have to support or accept the leadership of the dominant caste. The politicization of castes is a dominant feature in the Indian society.

Political relations are associated with the social and economical factors. These relationships are considered to be the projections of social relationships. Social and economic dominance are the means to attain the political power. This political power is being enjoyed only by the so-called economically dominant castes in the village. Politics is an instrument wielded by a particular stratum in society to consolidate or raise its position. In rural India even today the caste system is strong and there is close relationship between caste and politics of Indian society, all are given equal opportunities to participate in election, voting and contest. But only the high and dominant castes are occupying the key political positions at regional, state and central levels. The excluded social groups of the village are denied opportunity to participate actively in the political process and are playing very minimal role in both traditional and statutory political bodies.

Generally the horizontal solidarity exists in between the families belonging to the same caste. The

vertical solidarity are found in between the different castes during the socio-religious ceremonial occasions and also in the celebrations of village deity festival and communal feasts. The economic relations in between the different castes, such as Jajman-kamin, master and servant, land owner and tenant, land owner and agricultural labourer, creditor- debtor, projects the existence of vertical solidarity in the village. Wealthier families are usually down-looking the poor and poorest among the same caste. The marital alliances quite commonly occur only in between the families of a same caste which have equal economic status.

Gender Inequality, Discrimination and Exclusion of Women

Sexual bias and discrimination of women in our society are very common. In Mandur village, almost all the castes are following the patriarchal system of inheritance and residence. Women do contribute to the family incomes and participate in socio-economic and religious activities. But they do not have any right to claim share in their parental and ancestral property. Sex-ratio is imbalanced, low literacy rate among females markedly noted in the village. The women are denied in the decision making of political, religious, and economic matters. But they are consulted in social and family matters for decision making. The married women seem to be under the custody of their husbands. Majority of the higher castes women are mostly confined to domestic work and looking after the children. The bride price is replaced by the dowry system. The dowry system is very rampant among the higher and dominant castes of the village. The women are less exposed to outside world earlier but now they have much exposure to modern media devices. The act of violence against untouchable and low caste women is also relatively more in the village. A case of rape of an untouchable woman by a high caste man was also noticed in the village during filed work.

We are also passing through a transitional stage with respect to our treatment of acts of violence against women. Women have attained an increased status in the society to the point that men in society as a whole are willing to acknowledge publicly that many women are abused by their husbands and that it

is the community interest to prohibit these aggressive acts and protect the victims. Public awareness and opposition to this occurrence of abuse, rape and sexual harassment is also growing in the society but are not yet wholeheartedly condemned. Women remain reluctant to bring charges against the perpetrators out of fear that they will be disbelieved and victimized again, and the man who has perpetrated such crime will discredit their claim. Such cases are more in number especially among the Harijans and low caste women of rural India. The Dalit women are experiencing triple forms of exclusion on the basis of being women, Dalit and poor. In general women are experiencing exclusion due to intimidation, harassment and domestic violence.

The practice of *devadasi* is reported to be still in existence in parts of southern India. It means that a girl, usually before reaching puberty is ceremonially dedicated or married to a deity of temple, and thus becomes a female servant of god. Such girls are mostly from scheduled castes communities with poor economic background. Once dedicated to a temple deity they will later have problems getting married. Men, who can afford to pay for the temple rituals are reported to be the patrons of these girls. The girls are also reported to be sexually exploited and often end up as sex workers in urban brothels. Women of scheduled castes communities are more exposed to rape incidents than other women due to their working circumstances. Dalit women are often excluded from decision making processes, more particularly in financial decisions. Dalits women in the village are more prone to sexual exploitation by the men belong to dominant peasant castes.

Hindu Religious Practices and Social Exclusion of Dalits

Dalits are part of the Hindu caste system and traditionally placed at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. The caste hierarchy in Mandur village is the best example for it. Traditionally the Dalits are seen as unclean in a religious sense and are presumed to defile others by their touch or presence. So their entry into the village temple is prohibited. They were born for the purpose of serving others, it was believed, and for carrying out the occupations dealing with ritually defiled materials. Education or rather all kinds

of reading and writing was not meant for *panchamas* according to Vedic scriptures. According to M. K. Gandhi "caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger.... The law of *varna* teaches us that each one of us earns our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high, all are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status."

Based on the Gandhi's statement Ambedkar (see Vasant Moon, '94) intervened and very critically pointed out that "there have been many *Mahatmas* in India, whose sole objective was to remove untouchability and to elevate and absorb the depressed classes; but every one of them has failed in his mission. *Mahatmas* have come, *Mahatmas* have gone. But the untouchables have remained as untouchables". As per the Hindu caste system the dalits became as one of the functional groups in the rural economy and performing their duties in accordance with their castes norms and customs. They are also integrated in to the caste system of the village for all practical and functional purpose. Literally they suffer with discrimination based on demeaning practices, defiling professions and untouchability social stigma. The imposition of purity and pollution principles of Hinduism on dalits, ultimately resulting to made them into a social disadvantage position in the traditional social system of rural India.

Christianity and Caste Identity of Dalits

The impact of Christianity is very much seen in the village Mandur as well as in urban and other rural areas of Guntur district. In general Dalits were attracted towards Christianity basically in order to get rid of from the social stigma of untouchability and to attain the higher social status on par with the clean castes. But in actual practice this stigma is very much attached to the Dalits even after their conversion into Christianity. About 95 per cent Dalit castes families have converted to Christianity, the rest 5 per cent of the families in these two castes are still professing the Hindu religion. It is interesting to note that the converted Christians among the Mala caste are Lutherans, whereas the converted Christians among the Madiga caste are Roman Catholic (Protestants).

Each Dalit settlement has a separate church in its premises. The converted Dalit Christians compulsorily attend the Sunday congregational prayer in their respective churches. They celebrate the important festivals like Christmas, Easter, Good Friday and New Year's Day of English calendar. Apart from these, they also celebrate the Hindu religious festivals like Sankranti, Deepavali and Ugadi. The purpose of their conversion into Christianity has also not helped them much to fulfill their desire to elevate their social status and position in the local hierarchy. It is interesting to note that the caste system exists among the Dalit Christians too. Religion plays very insignificant role in it. Among the Dalit Christians connubial or marital relations exists only in between the members of respective caste, from which they have converted. The rule of endogamy is strictly observed at caste group level, not at religious group level.

It is interesting to note that the Dalit Christians in the village are still following their age-old caste practices, customs and traditions in their day to day life. And also they have commensal relations with the dalit Hindus of the village. Caste identity is very much intact with the Dalit Christians of the village. On the basis of religion, the Dalit Christians are numerically inferior to that of Hindu castes people in the village. They are experiencing the social exclusion on the criteria of religious minority alike that of Muslim minority group in Mandur village. Because of their conversion into Christianity they are also losing the reservation benefits in education and employment under scheduled castes category and considering them under B.C. – 'C' category as per the constitution. It is observed in the village that the Dalit Christians are also enjoying all the fringe benefits of scheduled castes, extended by the state and central governments. In my opinion Christianity is an added disadvantage to the Dalits of Mandur villages as well as other areas of Andhra Pradesh. However, the Dalit Christians are also integrated into the caste system of the village and they have functional responsibilities in the village economy. The major agricultural labour force is from the Dalits. It is also observed that discrimination and inequality exists in between the Mala and Madiga Christians. The Hindu castes people usually refer the Dalit Christians on their respective caste name only, instead of Christians, for all practical purposes.

Effectiveness of Affirmative Action Programmes on Dalits

Certain constitutional safeguards, protection measures, provisions, and concessions were extended to the scheduled castes for their upliftment. After independence, the Constitution of India prescribed protection and safeguards for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The important measures taken are 1. Abolition of untouchability, 2. Protection from social injustice and various forms of exploitation, 3. Throwing open to them religious institutions of public character, 4. Removal of restrictions on their access to wells, tanks, shops, restaurants and roads etc., 5. Giving them the right to move freely and acquire prosperity, 6. Giving them the right of admission to educational institutions and receiving grants out of state funds, 7. Permitting the state governments to make reservation for them in services, 8. Giving them special representation in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas, 9. Setting up separate departments and advisory councils to promote their welfare and safeguards to protect their interests, 10. Prohibiting forced labour, and 11. Making special provision for the administration and control of the scheduled areas.

The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 has described the following acts as punishable crimes:

1. Forcing a SC/ST person to eat or drink some disgusting substance.
2. Throwing in the house or the neighborhood of an SC/ST person refuse, rubbish or dead animal etc, which may humiliate, harm or anger him.
3. Taking away cloths forcibly from the body of an SC/ST person and making him naked or blackening his face and taking round the public places.
4. Forcibly occupying and cultivating the land of an SC/ST person owned by him or allotted to him.
5. Usurping the land / property of any SC/ST person.
6. Compelling an SC/ST person for forced labour or using him as a bonded labourer.
7. Preventing an SC/ST person from voting or forcing him to vote for a particular person.

8. Committing any act against an SC/ST person which may be distinctive or punishable.
9. Humiliating a SC/ST person.
10. Molesting an SC/ST women.
11. Sexual harassment of an SC/ST woman.
12. Polluting the drinking water used by an SC/ST person.
13. Forcing an SC/ST to leave his house, neighborhood or his village.

The machinery for safeguarding the interests of the SC/ST has been created in the form of setting up a commissioner for SCs and STs and recently a National Commission for SCs and STs. This commission functions as an advisory body on issues/policies related to the development of the SC and STs. The state governments have separate departments to look after the welfare of the SCs and STs and OBCs. A number of voluntary organizations is also engaged in promoting the welfare of these people. The important organizations of an all India character include: the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Delhi; The Hindu Sweepers Sevak Samaj, New Delhi; and the Bharatiya Adimajati Sevak Sangh, New Delhi. The expenditure on the welfare of SCs (and STs) is given special attention in the five-year plans. The size of investment in these special programmes have considerably increased from First Plan to Tenth plan.

Certain concerted effort was made by the government for the upliftment of the scheduled castes. But it appears that socially, economically and politically their status has improved very little. Socially, they have not changed their many evil customs and their status remains the same, economically around 40 per cent of scheduled castes people live below the poverty line and their occupational mobility does not lead them to upward social mobility. Educationally they are very backward; politically, they are not organized; and remain weak in the local power structure for asserting their rights. They have no role in the village traditional political system. However, three Mala caste persons and one Madiga caste persons were elected as ward members for the village statutory *panchayat*, under reservation quota. These ward members have literally no role in decision making of the political matters of *panchayat* administration. The *sarpanch* and other ward

members belonging to the peasant castes play a vital role in village *panchayat* administration; because the political dominance is always in the hands of the traditional peasants who have acquired the wealth and power through large extent of landholding in the village. The other castes people including the Dalits forcefully depending on them for their livelihoods. The Dalits economic dependency on the landowning traditional peasants virtually made them to accept the verdict and decisions of the leaders belonging to the Kamma, Reddy and Kapu community. Violence against Dalits is very common feature in the village. In recent times such instance has been noted in the village 'Chundurur' which is a neighboring village of Mandur. In Andhra Pradesh state there are cases of violence against Dalits which came into lime light through press and media. Such cases have occurred in Padirikuppam, Karamchedu, Neerukonda, Chundurur and Laxmipeta villages. Several cases of violence against Dalits were amicably solved at local level and at regional levels itself by the traditional political bodies. However, even though SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act has been passed and is enacting for providing social justice to Dalits and Adivasis, in interior rural India it is not found to be of much help to ameliorate the situation prevailing in the villages.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that the caste system in Mandur village is still very rigid, and it cleanly depicts the existing social, economic, and political inequalities as well as discriminations in the village life of lowest castes. The key persons and opinion leaders are from the dominant castes who are the decision-makers in the village matters, and they are the one who dictate the terms to others. Social inequality is a perennial problem in rural India. The massive concentration of poverty prevails especially among the lowest and Dalit castes in the village. Equal opportunities are to be provided to the people belonging to the lowest ladder of the society in the political, economic and social spheres of the village. In India attempts to create equality have not been confined to constitutional or legislative measures, economic planning has been viewed as another major instrument for the creation

of equality. The government initiated of affirmative action programmes are also not much effective on the weaker sections including the Dalits in order to elevate their social status. The Dalits are still under the influence of the caste based social exclusion and untouchability, and thus the social stigma is very much attached to Mala and Madiga castes of Mandur village. The people of these two castes do not have access to land and other economic resources and their entry is prohibited into the village temples and they are also barred from active participation in the public life of the village. The problem of the poverty and most vulnerability are very much seen among them. Dalits conversion into Christianity is also have not much helped them for their upward social mobility in the village, and moreover, they are losing the reservation benefits of education and employment under scheduled castes category. The Dalits conversion into Christianity is also creating their identity crises in the caste based rural society of India.

Rights based, need based and humanitarian approaches to be strictly followed in order to tackle the issue of social exclusion of dalits and other excluded groups in India. Action oriented research programmes to be initiated with a view to sensitize the issues of social exclusion and inclusion among the public and personnel concerned in implementation of affirmative action programmes and other welfare and development programmes for the benefit of weaker sections including Dalits. It is very difficult to achieve egalitarianism in the caste based society like India, unless the structural change in caste system is brought in. Removal of caste system is possible only by the practice of inter-caste marriages and change in the mindset of people with rational thinking about the social evils of caste institution and its adverse effects on the traditional occupational groups and downtrodden communities. The citizens of India should realize that we are all human beings and belong to one human race and originated from 'hominoid' species. The existing percentage of reservation to the scheduled castes should be enhanced in proportion to their population. Inclusive education policy should be strictly implemented specifically in rural villages, where the Dalits are experiencing the untouchability stigma greatly and also social exclusion of children in school as well as in class room situations.

Empowerment of Dalits though sub-plan strategy definitely elevate the economic status in some extent but not enhance their social status so long as the caste system operates very much in the village. Gender based exclusion also persists even among the Dalits like that of the other castes due to practice of patriarchal system. Modernization and globalization has brought certain cultural changes among the people of almost all castes in rural India too, but still caste based social inequality, discriminate and exclusion exists in between the rich and poor, high and low castes, touchable and untouchable castes. Even today we see the caste consciousness at individual, group and community levels which is the unique feature of the Indian society. The existing all inclusive policies to be strictly implemented in all the public and private sectors to bring equality, quality and integrity, in between different castes by employing humanitarian approach. A continuous monitoring and evaluation system of mechanism is needful to assess the progress of the socially excluded groups and communities from time to time to take up the follow up actions and to extend them for accessibility to all the development initiatives of both government and non-Government organizations.

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