

## SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG THE DHOR COMMUNITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN KARNATAKA

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### Abstract:

*The Dhor community is one of those community engaged in traditional occupation of leather tanning in Karnataka. In the recent times, the impact of globalization, liberalization and upward mobility in education has significantly influenced the life choices of Dhor. Their participation in both rural and urban setting in occupational mobility is clearly visible and they are found engaged in modern occupations such as government, private and self-employed (entrepreneurial work). The occupational status impacts the socio-economic and cultural behavior and practices of the community. It is considered that eminent to study the mobility and understand the new occupations adopted by the community and witness their response of their own process of social change. The present study was conducted in both rural and urban set-up of Karnataka and the response from semi-structured interview of 240 respondents are taken into consideration.*

**Keywords:** Scheduled Castes, Dhor, Occupational Mobility, Karnataka

### Introduction

The caste was a rigid practice defined as a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system (M. Subedi, 2016). Occupational mobility helps in asserting “identity negotiation in power and resources”. The occupational mobility as a concept from the field of sociology refers to movement that process movement of one occupational category to another. The moving away from traditional relationships of socio-economic interdependence towards more competitive models of social interaction is seen as liberation and education is another factor through which the function, income, and standards of living could be revived. The occupational mobility among Dhor attempts to address the vertical occupational mobility in the community.

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The term mobility has been defined by different thinkers in different ways. The first systematic formulation of the concept of “Social Mobility” was done by Pitrim A. Sorokin. In his book “Social and Cultural Mobility”, he defines social mobility as any transition of an individual or social object or value, anything that has been created or modified by human activity, from one social position to another (Pitrim A. Sorokin, 1959: 133).

Similar definition of the concept has been offered by Lipset and Bendix. According to them, social mobility “refers to the process by which individuals move from one position to another in society. Position which by general consent have been given specific hierarchical values. When we study social mobility, we analyze the movement of individuals from position possessing certain rank or lower in the social system” (Lipset and Bendix, 1959:1-2). According to Barber B. the social mobility refers to “movement, either upward or downward between higher or lower social classes, or more precisely, movement between one relatively full time functionally significant social role and another , that is evaluated as either higher or lower” (B. Barber, 1957: 356-57).

All these definitions emphasize the changes in ‘position’ rather than giving less consideration to the changes in roles. It is argued that both ‘position’ and ‘role’ are inseparable entities. Infact, the position of an individual is determined by his role. Therefore, mobility always corresponds to the changes in position as well as in the roles of individuals. Thus, social mobility is much wider term and includes within it upward and downward changes in economic, political or occupational status of either the individual or a whole group. Despite the diversity of interests, mobility has been studied in a limited and traditional way. The spatial mobility is change in the location of occupation. It involves two major phenomenon; one kind of spatial mobility which must be considered among the salient characteristics of any occupation is the amount of travel and the changes in residence or in work place which are entailed by the occupation itself. Most high status and many low status occupations are relatively mobile in this sense and there are a number of ceilings which are marked by an extreme degree of spatial detachment such as spatial mobilization or migration (M. Gurulingaiah, 2007).

#### **Scheduled Castes in Karnataka**

The Scheduled castes populations in Karnataka are system of sub-groups of communities and among them; there are communities that are found interwoven in the leather industry. The communities are sub-grouped according to the occupation they traditionally undertook such as cleaning the leather, tanning the leather and others that make shoe out of leather. The Dhor have been traditionally concentrated in tanning procedure that gives the colour pigments to the skin of the leather.

The earliest reference to the communities that undertook leather occupation can be found in “tanners” and “leather” finds mention in the Vedic literature. The earliest

known literary text and work of India, the Rig-Veda, refers to various types of skin to carry water, liquor, poison, honey and curd. The first reference of a leather worker, more precisely tanner, also found mentioned in the Rig-Veda. Mahabharata referred to the use of leather variously as the hand guard for the bow, shields (ox-hides), cuirass, and abreast-plates and the sword sheaths. It further attest that the war chariot was protected with shields of leather, the box of the chariot was fixed to the axle with thongs of leather, the horses were yoked to the pole of the chariot with leather straps and the reins were of leather and the drums, especially the great kettle-drums, were fashioned with leather heads (Geo W. Briggs, 1920; Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, Tr., 1037).

The present study is undertaken in the active clusters of those who have engaged in the occupation and those that have mobilized. The 240 respondents have participated in the semi-structured interviews from separate settlements in rural areas to homogeneous settlement locality in urban locality of Karnataka. They have been purposively selected for the study from rural to urban from those that represented their clans as respondents. The study has been empirical analysis of responses and observational findings. The Dhor findings through responses and observations are put through data table.

The occupational mobility of the Dhor can be assessed by the data collected from the respondents on their memory of occupations addressed to them on their ancestry occupations and their responses. The ancestral occupations among the Dhor that the research tried to addresses their cultural behavior and their rights in asserting their identity in occupational history. The traditional occupations had the colonial impressions of fixed accounts on their social status and lower castes and higher castes arguments. Their ancestor's occupation study can help depicts the understanding of community of their personal history and their eagerness to shift in occupational mobility and address the social, cultural and economic study of the community.

**Table 1: Present Occupational Background of the Respondents**

| Occupation                               | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Agriculture/ Livestock                   | 02        | 0.8        |
| Agriculture Labour                       | 13        | 5.4        |
| Government Service                       | 41        | 17.1       |
| Private Sector                           | 67        | 27.9       |
| Self-Employed                            | 63        | 26.3       |
| Other                                    | 05        | 2.1        |
| Retired                                  | 15        | 6.3        |
| Auto-Driver                              | 11        | 4.6        |
| Leather Tanner & Other Allied Activities | 03        | 1.3        |
| Social Service                           | 01        | 0.4        |
| Clinic                                   | 01        | 0.4        |
| Clerk                                    | 05        | 2.1        |

|                            |     |       |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|
| Livestock                  | 01  | 0.4   |
| Shop (Cycle repair)        | 01  | 0.4   |
| Shop (Cigarette & Grocery) | 03  | 1.3   |
| Delivery Person            | 01  | 0.8   |
| Unorganized Sector         | 02  | 0.4   |
| Auto-mobile repair shop    | 01  | 0.4   |
| Teacher (High school)      | 01  | 0.4   |
| Hospitality Industry       | 01  | 0.4   |
| Private Hospital           | 02  | 0.8   |
| Total                      | 240 | 100.0 |

Source: Fieldwork

The above table (no-1) depicts that majority respondents 27.9 per cent are involved in the private sector while 26.3 per cent are self-employed, about 17.1 per cent are engaged in Government Service. About 5.4 per cent are Agriculture labor, 6.3 per cent are retired population, 4.6 per cent work as auto-drivers and 2.1 per cent are engaged as clerks in offices. 2.1 per cent are based in other sectors, 0.4 per cent population is engaged in varied occupations and in services such as unorganized sector, Repair shops, Hospitality industry, Social service, and teacher. Further about 12 per cent of Dhor community is engaging in traditional leather tanning and allied occupations.

**Table 2: Occupation of Respondents Father**

| Occupation          | Frequency  | Percentage   |
|---------------------|------------|--------------|
| Agriculture labor   | 18         | 7.5          |
| Farmer              | 02         | 0.8          |
| Government Employee | 69         | 28.8         |
| Private Sector      | 10         | 4.2          |
| Business            | 33         | 13.8         |
| Other               | 18         | 7.5          |
| General Store       | 12         | 5.0          |
| Auto- Driver        | 07         | 2.8          |
| Leather Tanning     | 40         | 16.7         |
| Daily wage labor    | 04         | 1.7          |
| Clerk               | 11         | 4.5          |
| Post-Office         | 02         | 0.8          |
| Mechanic            | 01         | 0.4          |
| Head Master         | 01         | 0.4          |
| Rice Mill           | 04         | 1.7          |
| Factory Worker      | 01         | 0.4          |
| Bank Employee       | 03         | 1.3          |
| Driver              | 04         | 1.7          |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>240</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source: Fieldwork

The above table (no-2) indicates that some transition in the social mobility is seen 28.8 per cent of the respondents are occupied with Government Service; the data reveals the reduced engagement of community in their traditional occupation with 16.7 per cent and the increased presence of community diverging into the sector of growth and liberty of Business 13.8 per cent and 7.5 per cent are found engaged in Agriculture labor and 7.5 per cent are found scattered in Any Other category; 5 per cent are found holding the enterprising unit of General Stores and 4.6 per cent are inducted into clerical positions in various sectors; 2.9 per cent were found diverged as Auto-drivers and 1.7 per cent found presence as Daily wage labors; rest 0.8 per cent are found in occupations such as Farmer and Post-Office employee and 0.4 per cent were engaged in Factory work, Mechanic and post of Head Master.

**Table 3: Inter-Generational Occupational Mobility**

| Occupation                  | Grand Father | %            | Father     | %            | Respondent | %            |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Agriculture labor           | 25           | 10.4         | 18         | 7.5          | 13         | 5.4          |
| Farmer                      | -            | -            | 2          | 0.8          | 2          | 8.0          |
| Government Employee         | 45           | 18.8         | 69         | 28.8         | 41         | 17.1         |
| Private Sector              | -            | -            | 10         | 4.2          | 67         | 27.9         |
| Business                    | 25           | 10.4         | 33         | 13.8         | 63         | 26.3         |
| Other                       | 33           | 13.8         | 18         | 7.5          | 5          | 2.1          |
| General Store               | 12           | 5.0          | 12         | 5.0          | 4          | 1.7          |
| Auto-Driver                 | -            | -            | 7          | 2.9          | 11         | 4.6          |
| Leather Tanning             | 81           | 33.8         | 40         | 16.7         | 3          | 1.3          |
| Daily wage labor            | 1            | 0.4          | 4          | 1.7          | -          | -            |
| Clerk                       | 10           | 4.2          | 11         | 4.6          | 5          | 2.1          |
| Post-office                 | 2            | .8           | 2          | 0.8          | -          | -            |
| Mechanic                    | -            | -            | 1          | 0.4          | -          | -            |
| Head-Master                 | -            | -            | 1          | 0.4          | -          | -            |
| Teacher                     | -            | -            | -          | -            | 1          | 0.4          |
| Auto-Mobile                 | -            | -            | -          | -            | 1          | 0.4          |
| Rice Mill                   | 4            | 1.7          | 4          | 1.7          | -          | -            |
| Factory Worker              | -            | -            | 1          | 0.4          | -          | -            |
| Bank Employee               | -            | -            | 3          | 1.3          | -          | -            |
| Driver                      | -            | -            | 4          | 1.7          | -          | -            |
| Retired                     | -            | -            | -          | -            | 15         | 6.3          |
| Delivery Person             | -            | -            | -          | -            | 1          | 0.8          |
| Private Hospital            | -            | -            | -          | -            | 2          | 0.8          |
| Social Service              | -            | -            | -          | -            | 1          | 0.4          |
| Livestock                   | -            | -            | -          | -            | 1          | 0.4          |
| Unorganized Sector          | -            | -            | -          | -            | 2          | 0.4          |
| Hospitality Industry        | -            | -            | -          | -            | 1          | 0.4          |
| Industrialist               | 1            | 0.4          | -          | -            | -          | -            |
| Physical Ed (Football coach | 1            | 0.4          | -          | -            | -          | -            |
| Clinic                      | -            | -            | -          | -            | 1          | 0.4          |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>240</b>   | <b>100.0</b> | <b>240</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>240</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source: Fieldwork

Above Table (no-3) reveals the new occupations that have emerged in the respondent's generation. The wide-gap of stability, increase and decrease in the occupational pattern of Government service can be observed. The Agriculture labor sustains itself without hindrance. There is steady increase in Business sector and also increase in occupation of Auto-driver; the private sector only was in its infancy in Father's generation and now has grown tremendously. The occupation of leather tanning is in its decline and other industry and hospitality based sector is marking its presence.

**Table 4: Respondents Continuing the Traditional Occupation**

| Response     | Frequency  | Percentage   |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes          | 24         | 10.0         |
| No           | 216        | 90.0         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>240</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source: Fieldwork

The above table (no-4) indicates that 10 per cent of the respondents are engaged in the leather tanning occupation in the community with "Yes" and 90 per cent of the respondents described the occupational continuity status as "No".

**Table 5: Difficulty Faced by the Community in Leather Tanning**

| Particulars                        | Frequency | Percentage   |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Economic Hardship                  | 7         | 29.2         |
| Health Issues                      | 6         | 25.0         |
| No Government Support              | 7         | 29.2         |
| Economic Difficulty/ Health issues | 4         | 16.6         |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>24</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source: Fieldwork

It can be interred from Table the occupation is rather difficult and full of challenges. About 29.2 per cent of respondents engaged in leather tanning for main source of livelihood shared that economically it is not supportive of managing and maintaining family, it is not resourceful; 25 per cent shared that health issues are prominent due to the profession; 29.2 per cent that are pursuing referred to it as declining occupation with no support from government. 16.7 per cent of the respondents resorted to it has not just economically unfulfilling but root to health issues.

General position of community to move from traditional occupation to different occupation is due many factors. They are:

- The modern education and awareness among families and youth.
- Leather tanning is hard-labor and not in demand, commercially they are sandwiched between Madigas and Samagaras. With whom they cannot demand higher worth for their labor.

- The community is shifting to other commercial ventures such as preparation and selling of dog foods.
- The traditional occupation is tinted with lower caste occupational status and reduces the dignity of labor for community that is engaged in the profession.
- Tanning is traditionally and hierarchically considered as impure occupation and it is socially and economically structured as stigma attached profession by the society; that has also forced the community to mobilize socially and economically.

The study on traditional occupational mobility among Dhor Community reveals that the traditionally engaged leather tanning occupation is gradually in decline. The community as mobilized into different occupational choices due to many concerns. The community wants to live a better life and not struggle with economic based insecurity. The profession is considered derogatory and job security is quite evidently low. The community wants to pursue profession that could enhance their standard of living and provide other securities such as medical insurance, ability to own lands, higher educational advancement and finally secure self from negative attitude over identity based concern that comes with being associated with leather tanning occupation.

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