

Socio-Economic Conditions of Pourakarmikas – A Sociological Study in Mysore City Corporation

Dr. K. Yoganarasimhachari

Assistant Professor of Sociology, Government College (Autonomous), Mandya-571401

Abstract:

Untouchability is one of the worst features of the Hindu Society. In the process of evolution of caste on the principles of graded chaturvarna (four Varnas) such as Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra the vast body of people known as Panchama, exterior, Antyajas or scheduled castes fell outside the purview of chaturvarna. They were denied the rights enjoyed by Brahmin's, Kshatriya's, Vaishya's and Upanayana even they were prohibited to perform upanayana to wear sacred thread, learning Vedas, doing trade and other clean occupations. They were forced to live on the outskirts of village, thus restricting their movement. In this way, they were segregated and become the Anthyajas or Untouchables. The untouchables (Panchamas or Avarnas) had no share in social, political and judiciary power.

Introduction:

According to Oxford Dictionary, the word 'Scavenger' denotes a person or animal that scavenges. The Scavenger is derived from Old French *escauwer* means 'inspect'. At present this word has been replaced by 'Pourakarmika' that means one who cleans the street / drainage/carry the night soil and dead animals of the city.

Stratification is universal phenomenon of human society. The essence of social stratification is social inequality which manifests in various forms. There are two types of social stratification.

1. Fluid system of social stratification and
2. Rigid system of social stratification

The contemporary American Society with its class system of social stratification, in which there is a greater scope for 'achieved' social status on the other hand, in the rigid social system of social stratification, there is a greater scope for 'Ascribed' social status of an individual in the society and movement between the strata is extremely difficult, membership in a caste group was determined by birth as was prevalent in traditional Hindu Society.

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Untouchability in India is intimately and organically associated with the institution of caste. Its rigid form is a logical outcome of a peculiar notion of pollution sanctified by religion and codified by the brahminical discriminative laws. Thus not only institutionalized the caste hierarchy and untouchability, but also gave it socio-religion and legal approval.

Scavengers are also called untouchables and they were not allowed to enter the houses of the higher castes. However, they were allowed to work as laborers during construction repair or storing the grains and carry the night soil on their head, later the house was purified by sprinkling cow urine or cow dung. Food was served to the scheduled castes only outside the house in leaves or broken vessels which were to be washed by him before and after use. These people were not allowed to enter temple. In the court of justice, the man had to shout from the appointed distance and take his chance of being heard. He was prohibited from entering the village or town and hence virtually kept away from employment, business and contact with higher caste people. The concept of pollution was attached to them and they were treated as untouchable castes.

The word 'Dalit' being equated with those who are engaged in the profession of scavenging that is manual cleaning of excreta of others. Before independence of our country they were called untouchables. According to Article 17 of the Indian Constitution Existence of this class of people is peculiarly related to the practice of Untouchability in any form is prohibited. The Indian caste system, which even today prevails in India.

Scavengers are also known as Bhangis, Balmiki, Chuhra, Mazhabi, Rangreta, Lalbegi, Hela, Hari, Dom, Dhanuk, Thoti, Pakay, Mukhiyar etc.

The religion of the sweepers of scavengers is a curious mixture of various faiths they profess to be Hindu, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. They stand at the very bottom of the social ladder. Though all religion, except Hinduism, Preach the social equality of all men, they refuse to recognize them as brethren in the faith they are compelled on the ground of "Untouchability" to do scavenging or sweeping or to remove any carcass to flay any animal. The "Compulsion" includes a threat of social or economic boycott. It was untouchability and the practice of social discrimination amongst the Hindus that was largely responsible for conversion to another faith. But the scourge of untouchability never really left those who converted.

The hereditary occupation of the 'Pourakarmikas' has been 'Pourakarmikas' removing night soil and cleaning of latrines, removal of filth, dead cattle, sweeping of houses and roads.

In a large number of states, the job of scavenging of private latrines have been municipalized. It is estimated that about two-third of the scavenging population works as municipal employees and the remaining one-third is engaged in the cleaning of bucket privies in private houses. Though, those engaged in private houses considered themselves superior, the wages paid to them are lower than those of the municipal employees. The 'Pourakarmikas' of private latrines are in a very disadvantage position as compared to the municipal corporation 'Pourakarmikas'. Their housing condition is also far from satisfactory, the habitation of these people is the filthiest spot very near and around public latrine or dumping ground and far from their place of work.

The jobs of 'Pourakarmikas' are not only undesirable, polluting and tedious, but is also low paid within the scavenging castes some sections are superior to others, depending upon the types of work, a particular section is doing. The lowest place is generally occupied by those who carry night soil and the highest by those who have given up scavenging.

Scope of Study:

The proposed study is also designed to be a perspective in so far it makes tentative suggestions. The scope of this study is very extensive as it attempts to deal with issues such as socio-economic conditions of Pourakarmikas' and also welfare programmes for their family members.

Objectives of the Study:

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To study the socio-economic background and educational conditions of 'Pourakarmikas'
2. To study the extent and types of deprivation they experience
3. To know the extent of awareness about different welfare programmes initiated by the government.
4. To know the extent of utilization of Government schemes.
5. To suggest ways and means to improve the socio-economic conditions of 'Pourakarmikas'
6. To evolve future plans for empowerment of 'Pourakarmikas' based on the study data

Research Design:

A descriptive design would be adopted in carrying out the proposed study. The Socio- Economic Conditions of 'Pourakarmikas' population are not clearly and adequately identified through any means of Investigation.

Sample Design:

The researcher would adopt sampling in selecting the sample of families required for the study and decided to treat the entire households as the unit of enquiry. The following inclusive criteria would be adopted in choosing the families. Total No. of 'Pourakarmikas' family is 5000

1. The family is the unit and members who are living within the family.
2. All those families living in and around city corporation Limit
3. All those families which are willing to participate in the data collection process.

Tools of the Study:

The following are the tools to be used for the study:

An Interview Schedule will be prepared by the researcher to collect the details pertaining to the Socio-Economic conditions of the 'Pourakarmikas'. [This schedule will be used to seek information from those who were earliest involved in manual scavenging or presently working with urban local bodies. The information sought to contact socio economic profile of dwelling, house hold, literacy level, income, occupation, changing occupation, awareness about rehabilitative package, assistance received from the government, problem in securing assistant, alternative arrangement, adoption of hygienic in improvement quality of life]

Method of Data Collection:

The required data will be collected by administering the above mentioned tools. The interviews will be conducted during an appropriate time.

Family is considered as the unit of study. The head of the family will be the subject of the study. With the help of an interview schedule, questionnaire data will be collecting on various aspects of the 'Pourakarmikas' and their family members.

The researcher will inform the head of the household and their family members about the objective of the study and establish a good rapport with them to collect the required and relevant data. The interview will be held in privacy.

In addition to the above, a separate proforma will be used for getting data from government / Non-Government agencies working under the 'Pourakarmikas'. The data would pertain to initiation and implementation of welfare programmes. The above data would be obtained primarily from the records or the documents maintained by these agencies.

The secondary data will be collected through the books, journals, research papers and reports of the committees and official data published by Government department.

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