

# RURAL SOCIAL CHANGE: CASTE AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

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# The Focus

- Thanks
- Tracing Rural Social Change
- Reflecting on Changes in Caste
- Disclaimers: No last word on either
  - Competing Narratives



# Pattern(s) of Rural Social Change

- ‘Life of a Farmer is a life of Hardship... None desires this life...’ Rajapura farmers in 1978
- Discomfort despite comforts: 2000s.
- Emerging rural livelihood system of most people seemed to be a constant preparation to come out of it!



**An Identifiable 'Meeting Place' in the Town**



**Pressing a Livelihood... in the Marketplace**



**A Foot into the Town... or a City**



**From a Threshing Floor**



**The Road Becomes a Threshing Floor**



**The Change Becomes Complete**



**The Rolling Stone Abandoned**

# Emerging Rural Livelihood System

- Lament over Change
  - Trust, mutual interdependence and predictabilities
  - Happy to be free, but not ‘taken care of’ by the state, MLA, and elected representatives
  - Dedicated to Development – Pandian
  - Subjects of Development, constantly finding a means of overcoming its backward, deficient and inadequate nature – Akhil Gupta

# Enduring Factionalism

- Not a new phenomenon
- More enduring, cutting across caste and other primordial identities
- Decentralisation era – a new launch
  - Rotation of offices
- Deferred settlement of ‘Development’ dues
- Public display of political loyalties: Weddings, festivals...



Private Lives in Public Gaze

## Caste: Why be concerned?

*If we can be more liberal in our judgments of adequacy, we should also be more conscientious in appraising our kit of conceptual tools. All too often concepts come burdened with the connotations and implications of the past contexts that gave rise to them. Hence a periodic review of our stock of ideas is neither an exercise in antiquarian nostalgia, nor a ritual occasion for rattling the bones of our ancestors. (Wolf 1988:753*

# Caste, Change and Social Mobility

- Greater global influences profoundly transforming social realities in India (see, Minna 2009: 91)
- Redundancy of a Definition: the changed features
- **Endogamous** groups that are **localised**, usually with an association with a **hereditary occupation**, and groups that are **hierarchically arranged** based on **notions of purity and pollution**, and with **restrictions on inter-caste dining**.

# Rural Characteristics

- Rural Castes and Urban Characteristics – Shah
- Same pace as in urban areas
- Work and workers
  - Jajmani
  - Family labour
  - Withdrawal of castes from menial / agricultural work
  - ‘People do not work for wages, they work to spend on things... to recharge mobile phones...’!

# Inter-caste Dining

- Hotels, tea shops
- Serving food, and eating food in each other's houses
- Economic standing of households more important than each other's caste
- Serving and accepting food – demonstration of a new brotherhood too!
- Household help: Washing and cleaning,... cooking too is no exception

# Endogamy: The Hard-nut to Crack!

- Preference for ones own caste
- Dowry – to meet the urban ‘Groom Fee’
- Gradual disappearance of cross-cousin preferential marriages
- Widening horizons for matrimonial alliances: Regional preferences given up
- Broad-basing of castes do help
- Greater tolerance of inter-caste marriages: ‘Khap exceptions’

# The Excluded: Dalits

- Another 'defiant' feature of caste 'system'
- Self denial of social change
- Greater 'autonomy' and challenging the hegemony: 'The Keri' as a different village – outward and parallel
  - Policies of 'inclusive growth/ development' leading to separation and autonomous but excluded!
  - Anganwadi, School, Hand pump, etc.
  - Hugo Horringe and Tsunami
  - Thorat, Baviskar on Untouchability
  - Desai and Kulkarni – Higher education gap

# Old and New Identities: Caste in Everyday life

- People as they perceive themselves
  - None of them is exclusive to any caste, instead cuts across different castes
  - The scheme has no hierarchy in it, and
  - The scheme is based more on material basis of everyday life and the link people have with the market
- Self-labeling and State labeling
  - Ethnonyms (Fenton) – present and future expectations
  - Varna or State Categories: BKVS, 'BC, SC, ST, OC' (Pandian)
  - Simplify life (Scott)
  - Broadbasing: Bahujan, Dalit, 'Ahinda' (Nadkarni, Karanth)

# Caste After Hierarchy?

- Horizontal solidarity
- Racing... for prominence, power, and privileges
- Individual entities, for political than 'social'
- Reversal of Patron Clients: Getting things done, the naya netas, Pyraveekars... fixers!
- Search for alternatives to hierarchy?
  - Need for how and where the changes, and the range of changes

06 Km	119 Km	271 Km
ಚಿತ್ತೂರು Chittoor	ಚಿತ್ತೂರು Chittoor	ಚೆನ್ನೈ Chennai
←	↑	↑





**Caste (Identity) on the Move**