



# Social Mobility and Social Structure:

## Towards a Conceptual-methodological Re-orientation<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction: in memoriam

My first interaction worth-the-name with Professor Srinivas was in the Vice-Chancellor's office at the Delhi University in late 1971 or early 1972. I sat for an interview for the position of Reader in the country's premiere Advanced Centre of Sociology. My interview was kept a guarded secret from everyone in Patna University where I was a Lecturer, save and except my family. The reason: I did not at all expect to get selected so why advertise! When I sat facing the Vice Chancellor, Professor K. N. Raj, and the formidable array of experts including Professor Srinivas and Professors R. N. Saxena and Victor D'Souza, I found myself surprisingly relaxed. I had nothing to lose and everything to gain, so why worry, was my attitude! The Professor had a stake in the great Department he had founded and so assiduously nurtured, whereas I was an unknown quantity. The grilling I received from him, therefore, was more than justified. The others in the expert panel too demonstrated sufficient curiosity in me. I returned home and docketed the experience in a closed shelf in my memory! When Professor M.S.A. Rao informed me, almost six months later, that I was 'in', it took me some time to recover my senses!

I missed him during my two years in the Department when he was in California writing his *Remembered Village*. My dear friend Professor Panini, one fine evening, when we were colleagues in JNU in the seventies, invited me over to meet his uncle. I truly was at an emotional high when to my – 'How are you Professor Srinivas' – he promptly shot back, 'Call me

Chamu' and shook my hands with a warm and firm clasp, before settling down to an unforgettable intellectual repast. The circle in some strange sense seems to be complete this evening with this invitation to do his memorial lecture. I sincerely thank the Indian Sociological Society and, in particular, the M. N. Srinivas Memorial Lecture Committee for having given me this opportunity to share my Conceptual-Methodological thoughts on Social Mobility and Social Structure. I have always admired Professor Srinivas and remained a critical appreciator of his outstanding contributions.

### Social Mobility: Major Conceptual Orientations

In order to arrive at a rationale of the conceptual-methodological orientation on social mobility and social structure, I will deal with a select few scholars, in consideration of limited space and time. These studies are illustrative, by and large, of the various approaches to social mobility, in particular, with reference to the Indian complexity.<sup>2</sup>

Srinivas left no one in doubt that the system of caste in India was not the ossified 'closed' system of stratification that it was being made out to be by many scholars. It was possible for a low caste 'in a generation or two, to rise by *Sanskritising* its ritual and pantheon' emulating 'as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins', and adopting 'the Brahmanic way of life ... though theoretically forbidden' (1952: 213-14). Cultural in content, the concept

verged on the notion of Brahminisation. His field experience in 1967 prompted him to introduce greater elasticity into this concept by allowing for lower caste emulation of higher castes, including 'all high, and particularly, twice born castes' (Srinivas 2002a: 222)<sup>3</sup>.

The dominant caste, a structural concept, enters his conceptual framework in 1955 to explain the mobility of castes in addition to the phenomenon of Sanskritisation. Unhesitatingly, he engaged in successive adaptations and elaborations of the concept with each instance of a lack of 'goodness-of-fit' between data and theory. Accordingly, his first formulation took into account *numerical strength of the caste wielding 'preponderant economic and political power'*. The dominance of the caste was *facilitated* 'if its position in the local caste hierarchy [was] not too low' (2002b: 57; emphasis added). After a four year gap (1959), he included 'an element' which was 'omitted', namely, the *numerical presence within castes of 'educated persons' and their 'occupations'*. This was the criterion of 'Western and non-traditional education...the means by which such dominance [was] acquired'. Decisive dominance was enjoyed by a caste when 'all the elements of dominance' were present. Such dominance, however, was uncommon, usually 'the different elements of dominance (were) distributed among the castes in a village' (Srinivas 2002c: 75; emphasis added).

What however was to puzzle him soon after, was the behaviour of some of the dominant castes. Instead of acting as guarantors of values and symbolisms provided by Sanskritisation, they were actually themselves providing an immediate model for the local, non-dominant castes to imitate. Some of whom, surprisingly, were higher in ritual status than the dominant caste. In the process 'the *varna* idea was distanced in comparison'. This was 'indeed the process of *de-Sanskritization*' (Srinivas 2002a: 230-231; emphasis added).

By 1987, he added two more disparate elements to his already twice revised concept: (a) '*a tradition of agriculture*', and (b) '*readiness to use violence to promote group ends*'. He found this phenomenon quite widespread and 'a potent source of leadership in rural areas' (Srinivas 2002d: 241; emphasis added). Almost until the very end, *the centrality of the dominant caste and*

*Sanskritisation, however problematic, remained the structural principle configuring the inter-relationships between castes in the local hierarchy.* Srinivas weaved into the cultural mobility of Sanskritisation, the structural mobility gained through caste dominance. One wished that Srinivas had done parallel studies of mobility in villages predominated by Muslims or Sikhs or Jains or even that of a mixed village, and sought counterparts of Sanskritisation and dominant caste for a comparative study. Individual mobility in his framework hardly figures. Caste, overwhelmingly, remains the unit of inquiry.

Class hardly figures in his analysis. As an astute anthropologist, he did not fail to notice the elements of class associated with caste since the very beginning. However, 'institutionalised vertical relationships' in Rampura (1955) between individuals and families – masters and servants, landowner and tenant, creditor and debtor – got subsumed under patron-client caste-wise division of labour relations, which was undergoing steady disintegration (2002b: 65-66). The significance of landownership in a village lay in the conferral on the landowner 'the coveted status of patrons' (Srinivas 2002e: 34).

Nonetheless, he was intrigued by 'the social framework of production' that 'created bonds running counter to caste' wherein, 'castewise division of labour was at the source of contra-caste bonds' (Ibid: 37). By 1987, his data drove him to observe that 'the caste system at the village level [was] locked into the production system ... the *jajmani* system in which specified quantities of grain-with-straw are paid by landowner after harvest to the heads of the artisan, labouring and servicing households who have worked for him during the previous agricultural year' (2002d: 237). Concluding on the future of caste system in India, he admitted his confusion:

All the three systems, *jajmani*, (including *jajmani* in decline), castes in acute conflict with each other, and networks involving individuals from different castes, coexist in the country today, and are likely to coexist in the immediate future. But *jajmani* system will continue to decline, inter-caste conflict will increase in the future, and the character of networks is likely to change. *Class and life-style may assume increasing importance in social relations, especially in urban areas. All this sounds conceptually very messy and far from clear*

*but that is how the immediate future appears to be.*  
(Ibid 250: emphasis added).

In February 2003, he scripted the *obituary* of the system of caste in India days before he breathed his last. He attributed this to the disappearance of '*caste-wise division of labour*' in which '*economic relations were embedded in social relations* sanctioned by custom and morality,' marked by hierarchy 'in the idiom of ritual purity and impurity...with untouchability marking the apex of impurity' (2003: 455; italics added).<sup>4</sup> In other words *class is embedded in caste*. Without actually admitting it, he veered very close to a class position in his explanation of the transformative changes that were taking place. If the dissolution of the hierarchy is to happen, he argued, mere ideological assault (like those of Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity) on its persistence will not suffice, it would need to be 'backed up by creating an *alternative system of production that ignores if not deliberately violates the jati based division of labour*' (Ibid: 458; emphasis added). In effect, this implied *a change in the basic structure of production relations in which caste based division of labour had no place*. If this was his conclusion, then by his own admission, *caste is embedded in class*.

The ambivalence of Srinivas is conspicuous; signing on the obituary he writes, '*while caste as a system is dead, individual castes are flourishing*'. In the same breath, he warns about the resilience of caste: 'A combination of wholly new technologies, institutions, based on new principles, and a new ideology which includes democracy, equality, and the idea of human dignity and self-respect *has to be in operation for a considerable time* in order to uproot the caste system' (Ibid: 459; emphasis added). How, one would ask, if caste system is dead, can it be in operation for a considerable period of time before it can get uprooted?

Very few will agree that the caste *system* is dead. If one tries to explain or understand the 'particular' or the 'specific' in the 'general', caste may be transforming and weakening in many respects, but neither caste nor the system has withered. Macro-generalisations based on microcosmic studies are hazardous unless the universe is uniform to an extent where one single case is enough to represent the whole, or unless the theo-

retical perspective is strong enough to situate the micro reality. Finally, it is necessary to ensure that *native* concepts such as 'Sanskritisation' and 'dominant caste' relate to general theoretical concerns. A concept that is ubiquitous to India and un-generalisable at any level of abstraction is problematic.<sup>5</sup>

A contrary view of stratification is held by Ramkrishna Mukherjee, a contemporary of Srinivas, who adhered strictly to the field survey-oriented scientific method. His studies have a macro perspective, whether empirical or historical. The British, he held, 'stamped' Indian society with the 'impress' of caste at the expense of class. He observed:

The jati division of society was viewed in the realm of 'cultural' relations, viz. inter-dining, inter-marriage, purity-pollution, and such other customary behavior and perceptions. The fact that in British India the landlords, big landowners, wholesale traders, money-lenders, etc belonged essentially to the high castes was overlooked, as was the fact that the bulk of self-sufficient peasants, small-scale, petty traders, etc, belonged to the middle castes in general. And those at the lowest echelon of the growing capitalist class structure (such as the marginal, landless workers, etc) belonged overwhelmingly to the lowest castes and tribes. This is how the caste structure had invaginated itself into class structure evolved in colonial India (Mukherjee 1999: 1759).

He was cognisant of the caste and class overlap which was not total but sufficiently highly correlated. This enabled the ideological position that the caste structure ruled India, to gain ground. The dominant caste of Srinivas, he argued, 'was in appellation and not in content'. All of the six features attributed to it: of sizeable, arable, locally available land; numerical strength; high status in the local hierarchy; western education; jobs in administration; and urban sources of income, 'are secondary or tertiary expressions of the formation of the top stratum of the class structure in rural society' (Ibid: 1761). '[C]aste in class depicts the reality, and not caste per se or caste and class' (Ibid 1761). Power relations in this framework are largely subsumed under class. What is in question is not social mobility, but *how* this is perceived theoretically.

Andre Beteille's theoretic orientation of caste, class and power, unfolds in the study of village Sripuram in Tanjore district in the early sixties. By his own

submission, this classic study of his bears the influence of both Srinivas and K. N. Raj, the eminent economist. '[W]ith some risk of oversimplification', he says, 'the *class system was subsumed under the caste structure in the traditional society*, that is, the ordering of landownership and caste status were more closely associated' (2011 *Caste, Class and Power*: 191; emphasis added). Caste structure not only subsumed class but also power.<sup>6</sup>

The disintegration of village crafts and the emergence of 'caste-free' occupations 'contributed to the dissociation of class relations from the caste structure' (Ibid: 191). Likewise, the new locus of power provided by the democratic institutions such as the panchayat system, parties, political networks, and 'the growth of an elaborate political machinery, linking MLAs, party bosses, and village leaders' (Ibid: 200) had made it possible 'for people to acquire power in ways which were not possible before the introduction of adult franchise and Panchayati Raj' (Ibid: 200).<sup>7</sup> Beteille's framework provided a refreshing break from the caste-centred orientation, inspiring much research. It is significant that in his framework it is *from* caste that the disengagements of class and power take place.

A major critique of the dominant social anthropological tradition in social stratification theorising, K. L. Sharma is critical that 'class' in India had been viewed 'as a consequence of change *in* the caste system and *not* as a concomitant and co-existent system inseparable from caste' (Sharma 2010: 64; emphasis added).

He argued, if caste was simply an all-encompassing ritualistic arrangement, as it has generally been made out to be, 'it would have crumbled down long ago due to its very cumbersome nature'. Alternatively, Indian society can be viewed as a *social formation*, comprising 'class, ethnicity, power, religion and economy along with caste. All of these aspects of the social formation being incorporated into each other... *Indigenisation of the concepts of caste and class must come from the realisation of such a formation and the totality of its historicity*' (Ibid: 68; emphasis added).

Rather than concentrating on Sanskritisation, westernisation, dominant caste and the like, he ob-

serves, 'it is necessary to focus on the study of downward mobility and proletarianisation, upward mobility and embourgeoisment, urban incomes for rural people and the migration of rural rich to towns, and rural non-agricultural income and mobility etc'. For centuries, caste has inhered in class and vice versa; and, '[c]lass-like distinctions within caste and caste-lifestyles within class are part of the people's life situations' (Ibid: 71-72). His own study of six villages in Rajasthan in the 1970s had witnessed the pauperisation of some of the erstwhile (i.e. before land reforms) landlords (Zamindars), comprising members of the Rajput, Brahmin, and Jat upper castes (Sharma 1973: 71).

Sharma's idea of a multi-dimensional approach to social mobility is appealing. Viewing India through the lens of *social formation*, however, creates some conceptual confusion. The term social formation in the Marxist lexicon has got strongly associated with what Maurice Godelier calls 'social and economic formation', meaning the way in which a number of different modes of production of varying nature, in a hierarchical relationship, combine and articulate in a specific societal context<sup>8</sup>.

While class subsumes caste for Mukherjee; caste subsumes class and power for Beteille; and caste is embedded in the social organisation of production for Srinivas; for Sharma it works both ways – class inhering in caste, and vice versa.

## Methodological Orientations and Empirical Studies

Much of the woes in the sociological fraternity lie in our shyness or ineptitude for undertaking quantitative studies of larger sample of villages<sup>9</sup>. Macro-level empirical studies that are at the same time quantifiable and qualitatively rich in insights provide the best mix for more efficient explanations. Sociologists/social anthropologists are not the only players in the field. Some economists have done valuable field surveys or analysis of quantitative data to reveal mobility in the occupational field.

The growth engine of the Indian economy has set in motion the dynamic of social mobility in rural

India. S. Mahendra Dev analyses data available for rural and agricultural employment between two periods with a five year interval [1993-94 to 1999-2000 (period 1); and 1999-2000 to 2004-2005 (period 2)] provides sufficient evidence of this. Between these two periods:

1. Agricultural self-employment has climbed up from a negative growth of -0.53 in period (I) to 2.89 in period (II).
2. Rural non-agricultural employment has done even better, with growth rate moving up from 2.34 to 5.72.
3. Agricultural wage employment has witnessed a major decline, with growth rate plummeting from 1.06 to -3.18.
4. Rural non-agricultural wage employment, in contrast, has registered a steady increase in growth, from 2.68 to 3.79.
5. Total agricultural employment is marked by stagnancy; the growth rate is up from a low of 0.03 to 0.83.
6. Rural total non-agricultural employment, in contrast, gives evidence of robust increase in growth; 2.26 to 5.27.
7. Total non-agricultural employment has grown significantly from 2.53 to 4.66.
8. (Source: S Mahendra Dev, *Inclusive Growth in India* (2008), p. 181.)

The pronounced occupational trend, as we can see, is that of a growing non-farm sector in the rural economy of the country, matched by an overall decline in the agricultural sector. Conspicuously, agricultural wage employment is the worst hit, gradually but surely giving way to non-agricultural wage employment. This is indicative of agricultural labourers increasingly preferring to move over to non-farm employment. The pattern is similar with respect to agricultural self-employment. There is, however, much more in this trend than meets the eye. We need to know to what extent this transition is accompanied by a process of emancipation of deprived social categories from social discrimination, exploitation and

oppression.<sup>10</sup> This sociological deficit is attended by the studies that follow.

The macro analysis by Sanjay Kumar, Anthony Heath and Oliver Heath with the help of the data base provided by the nation-wide sample for the 1996 National Election Study conducted by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS, Delhi)<sup>11</sup>, asks the following questions: (a) 'How much class mobility is there in India?' (b) 'Do sons generally follow in their father's footsteps or are the processes of modernisation leading to greater movement up and down?' (c) 'Does membership of the scheduled caste inhibit one's chances of upward mobility; and does membership of the upper castes protect one from downward mobility?' (d) 'Or are caste and class now essentially unrelated?' The study was restricted to son-father inter-generational mobility (Kumar 2002: 2983).

Some of the findings are noteworthy:

- A decline in the size of the farming sector is accompanied by 'small gains in every single one of the others' (Ibid: 2984).
- '[I]ncreases have been as large in salariat and business classes as in the manual classes' (Ibid: 2984).
- Paradoxically, '[with] the high proportion of farmers and agriculturalists (59.4%), India looks like a developing country; but with its salariat (10.9%) outstripping the manual working classes in size (4.1%), India looks like a highly developed country' (Ibid: 2984).
- Inflow mobility (i.e. where did people come from into their current occupational classes?) measures indicate that: (a) 'farmers (92.8%) and the lower agricultural class (92.4%) are mostly self-recruiting'; (b) there is very little movement between the farmer and lower agricultural classes; (c) in comparison, inflow mobility is highest for the higher and lower salariat classes (63% and 73% respectively); 'coming from widely divergent class backgrounds, the biggest single contingent is from lower agricultural origins (23.1%)' (Ibid: 2984).
- Outflow mobility (which looks at the destinations of people who came from given class origins) gives the other side of the picture. While the largest inflow into the salariat is from the agricultural origins

(23%), this is only a tiny fraction of those born into the agricultural families (5%), from which the out-flow took place (Ibid: 2985). This gives a different picture of very little access to the salariat from agricultural families. Both pictures are correct from the two different perspectives (Ibid: 2985).

- Overall, 67 per cent of the total sample has remained in the same class as their fathers; 19 per cent have been upward mobile; 7 per cent have been downward mobile; and 7 per cent experienced 'sideways movement'. Net upward mobility is high.
- Upper castes are over-represented in the more privileged positions (salariat, business, and farming), whereas *Adivasis* and *Dalits* are over-represented in unskilled manual work.
- There are also significant numbers of upper castes in low level classes (6% in petty business; 5% in unskilled manual classes; conversely, there are some *Dalits* (6.1%) and fewer *Adivasis* (4.4%) in the upper salariat (Ibid: 2986).

The authors reach two significant conclusions. First, that 'for many people there has been long range upward mobility from the lowest ranks of the society to the highest. In that sense, India has been a land of opportunity' (Ibid: 2985). Second, that 'both class origins and community have independent associations with access to the salariat. That is, class origins cannot be reduced to community or vice versa' (Ibid: 2987). In other words, 'even among people from the same caste or community, class origins still make a very substantial difference to their class destinations... *caste is associated with the kind of class origins one found oneself in, but among people of similar class origins, caste has a relatively small part to play in determining one's current occupational attainments.* Nevertheless, as we can see, upper caste membership still gives a statistically significant advantage' (Ibid: 2987; emphasis added).

Kumar and the Heaths, then, argue for a caste *and* class model of analysis. Class remains the main explanatory variable while dealing with class or occupational mobility. This study, given its data base, cannot engage with mobility within the system of caste<sup>12</sup>.

Djurfeldt, Athreya, Jayakumar, Lindberg, Ra-

jagopal and Vidyasagar's panel study of three irrigated and three dry villages of Karur and Tiruchchirapalli districts in Tamil Nadu is one of the very few, if at all, methodologically rigorous and sophisticated studies on social mobility in recent times made by an interdisciplinary team comprising sociologists, economists and others. They go back to their six villages 25 years after they studied it in 1979-80 [i.e. in 2005-2006] and successfully trace 233 of the 238 of their original sampled households of the main sample in 1979. Twenty of these had left agriculture. The study provides fairly precise trends that seem, by and large, to confirm the macro picture presented above, and much more.

The three major drivers of social mobility according to them are: (a) local 'industrialisation' and the 'structural transformation' of the rural economy<sup>13</sup>, 'which is an indirect consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation' (Djurfeldt et al 2008: 50); (b) 'respectable rate of growth of farm income' within the agrarian economy (Ibid: 50); and (c) 'social policy interventions by the union and state governments' (Ibid: 51). These drivers of social mobility 'over the last three decades ... have resulted in improved levels of living in terms of food security, decreasing poverty, improved housing standards, levels of education etc... and [have] been associated with a process where large landowners and the landless have to some extent exited agriculture, giving rise to a less skewed distribution of operational holdings and household incomes, within the agrarian economy' (Ibid: 51-52).

Six conspicuous features of social mobility, among others, as revealed by the study are: (i) increased allocation of household labour to non-farm activities has grown more than 100 per cent, resulting in the non-farm share in the household income rising to 52 per cent; (ii) the non-farm income has been invested in increasing 'well-density' irrigation equipment on the farm, raising farm income; (iii) there has been a net exit from farming either due to increased proletarianisation or as 'an exit from an unrewarding existence as a farmer to a more promising future in the non-farm sector' probably occurring with the next generation transfer. The rate of exit is greater among the poor peasants and agricultural labourers (Ibid: 54,

56); (iv) family farmers buy up lands from both big and small landholders strengthening family farming in agrarian system (Ibid: 56). (v) For those *not exiting the agrarian sector*, 'mobility chances are still in favour of the big farmers and against the agricultural labourers, poor peasants and the scheduled castes'; for the latter, especially the untouchable castes, only by exiting agrarian sector can they 'escape from the discrimination against them' (Ibid: 58). (vi) 'In the *new non-agrarian economy* caste discrimination is much less than in the old agrarian society' (Ibid 59).

Djurfeldt's et al's study is essentially a class analysis in the sense that class is the independent variable that explains social mobility of households across operated area in cultivation, occupations, family size, family type, caste and so on. The study, however, is not designed to take on the mobility within the system of caste and the *specific changes in the pattern* of caste discrimination in the agrarian and non-agrarian sectors.

John Hariss, J. Jeyaranjan and K. Nagraj's study of Iruvelpattu is first of the five villages originally studied by Gilbert Slater in 1916. The studies of these villages have been undertaken time and again.<sup>14</sup> The study, expectedly, aims to reap the advantage of comparative longitudinal study. The social composition of the village comprises a *single*, overwhelmingly dominant landowning Reddiar caste extended family (five families with 18 members); numerically preponderant Vanniyars (239 families with a population of 1003) with a wide spectrum landownership from low-to-no landholdings; and substantial presence of Dalit Paraiyars families (148 families with a population of 697) mostly poor and landless at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Besides these, there were 14 other families belonging to different castes with a population of 51 (Hariss 2010: 49; Table 2).

Akin to Beteille's finding in Sripuram in 1961, caste, class and power were congruent in the traditional village stratification. With the development of productive forces and the introduction of social welfare measures by the State for the weaker sections, the market provided new avenues for mobility, particularly for the lower castes and classes. These resulted in significant changes. Considerable diversification of

occupations had taken place since Mencher's study – from 24 per cent to 40 per cent of all households had moved into non-agricultural occupations. The number of households engaged in cultivation and those engaged in agricultural labour had declined. Literacy and education has shown 'big and important change'.<sup>15</sup> The 'system of customary relationships' (*jajmani*) and payments in kind, still extant in 1982, had completely broken down (Ibid: 56). The 'hierarchical organisation of village society... (had) ceased to be'. *Dalits* no longer participated in village festivals which served to reinforce social hierarchy through pre-defined roles of purity and pollution (Ibid: 57).<sup>16</sup> There was a rise in the real wages. NREGS and other government programmes had positive consequences (Ibid: 59). The shift in the locus of political power from the Congress Party to regional parties signaled at the same time the weakening of the power of the landlord in Iruvelpattu. Congress itself underwent changes in its leadership composition.

Notwithstanding all these changes, the power of the single dominant landowner, still controlling over one-third of the lands in the village, diminished but continued; disabilities of untouchability still persisted. In spite of the revolutionary non-Brahmin leadership of leaders such as Periyar, who championed the cause of social justice, and the powerful non-Brahmin leadership that had taken overpower in Tamil Nadu, 'no great social transformation [was] in evidence' (Ibid: 60).

Many of the findings of Hariss confirm the general trend of mobility and change in evidence in Tamil Nadu as observed by Beteille, Djurfeldt and others. The national trend towards farm to non-farm mobility as indicated by Dev, finds corroboration in Iruvelpattu, Karur and Trichur, all in Tamil Nadu. But insofar as the dominance of a single landlord family for over a century is concerned, this is an aberration from the well-set pattern. This may be due to the uniqueness of the village composition which has no Brahmin or upper castes landlord families. The hierarchical position of the Reddiar extended family is not clear though he seemed to play the role of upholder of the Brahmanic model. This study differs from Djurfeldt's in providing valuable qualitative data on

the changes in the caste hierarchy.

Beteile and Hariss are into the method of intensive fieldwork but their methodologies differ, in as much as the latter is clearly focused on longitudinal data for making comparisons and assessing trends over a century. Djurfeldts's panel study is more sociologically oriented with a number of hypotheses tested by means of a meticulous panel study over a 25 year stretch, from a neatly drawn representative sample and use of relevant statistical tools.

In sharp contrast to caste-class studies, we have a large scale interdisciplinary sample survey done specifically on caste untouchability in rural India by Ghanshyam Shah, Harsh Mander, Sukhdeo Thorat, Satish Deshpande and Amita Baviskar. The sample size of 565 villages in 11 (out of 28) States of India is indeed impressive.<sup>17</sup>

At the stage of designing the study, it was noted that caste-occupational linkage had lost its earlier rigidity with hardly any attendant imposition of religious proscriptions; the correlation between caste and economic status had weakened as the 'rich and the poor were to be found in every caste'; at the macro-level, however, 'the caste-class correlation [was] still remarkably stable' (Shah 2006: 20). Untouchability, in the literal sense of 'avoidance or prohibition of physical contact', was becoming less relevant. The term, therefore, for the study, was extended 'to a much broader set of social sanctions' to include unique forms of exclusion not practised against other caste groups, for example, prohibitions related to drinking water, religious worship, social ceremonies and festivals' (Ibid: 21). The Scheduled Castes listed in the statutory list of the Government of India, operationally, were considered as the untouchable castes or Dalits (Ibid: 13).

An impressively large number of practices of social discrimination that are encountered in real life by Dalits ranging from: all varieties of denials that apply to Dalits e.g. denial of entry into places of worship, into non-Dalit houses, into village shops and police stations; on the use of cremation and burial grounds, access to water facilities, denial of barber and laundry services; denial of the right to sell in the village markets, and a whole host of others, forms the substance

of the study (Ibid: 65-66, Table 2.1). It is undoubtedly a massive survey exercise with a large deployment of researchers and field investigators. However, the strength of the study does not lie in any statistical analysis but on the vivid and lurid details of numerous instances (cases) of the practice of untouchability (presented in boxes in the text) encountered in various parts of the 11 States. Unfortunately, one does not find an analysis of either decline or the increase in the incidence of various forms and practices of untouchability from the data. The study provides an exhaustive inventory of forms and practices of untouchability as defined by them, which is sure to be of immense help to researchers, certainly to me.<sup>18</sup>

One wonders why such an elaborate and complex four-stage sampling design had to be done at all. Only 11 out of the 28 States and seven Union Territories were covered by the sample. These were the very States in which the international NGO the Action Aid had its presence, either by way of having their offices or Action Aid supported NGOs and activists, located in them. The sample was not representative in any sense of the term.

The investigators were drawn from Dalits, non-Dalits and women educated up to the high school or undergraduate level. Teams of two with four to seven days of training in special camps were armed with (a) a list of *observation sites* (village tea shops, local buses or other transport, shops, temples, and so on); (b) a list of specific forms of the practice of untouchability; and (c) a *village level Observation Schedule*. In addition, participatory rural appraisal (PRA), group discussions, case studies and interview with key persons were carried out. It has to be admitted this was a tall order for the teams of two.

Consequently, on their own admission, the data was too uneven for inter-state comparisons. Blanket generalisations are about rural India as a whole. The findings took the form: more than 50 per cent of villages practised i, ii, iii, and iv kinds of discriminations against Dalits; 40-45 per cent villages practiced v-xi kinds of discrimination; 30-40 per cent villages practiced xii-xxii types of discriminations;...till you reached, the less than 10 per cent of villages suffering the other seven of types of discrimination. The

discriminations listed and categorised are all mutually exclusive. The data presented is not provided State-wise, hence inter-State comparisons are not possible. In the absence of such inter-State comparisons, the generalisation encompasses the whole country including those States that are not even in the sample. There are no distinctions between relatively better off States and the worst ones in the practice of social discrimination.

Given that the objective of the study was to depict the presence of social discriminations against Dalits in rural India, there was no need for such an elaborate and flawed sampling procedure. No doubt research by NGOs is essential for exploration of problems for intervention and assessment of their progress and results, but NGOisation of academic research may not necessarily be in the best interests of generating authentic knowledge through rigorous research.

Jules Naudet (2008) using the phenomenological approach conducts 58 semi-guided interviews of members of the Scheduled Castes and tribes (48); Other Backward Castes (6); and upper castes (4). Originally from poor economic background, they were success stories of achievers holding positions in the private sector, central services and the academia. The 50 minute to three hour interviews concentrated 75 per cent of the material on biographical details and the rest on 'reflexive questions about the way mobility was experienced' (Naudet 2008: 413-414).

Naudet draws on Alfred Shcutz's theory of 'strangers' who, after having moved out of their 'home group', felt the need to adjust through acculturation with the 'approached group'. The upward mobile person, in this formulation, 'quits his group of origin, begins a laborious process of deculturation, and attempts to acculturate himself in the new group in which his past does not count. But total amnesia and perfect acculturation remain mere ideal types' (Ibid: 415). Peter Blau theorises in a similar vein, whilst Bourdeau finds this situation that of "double absence" or "double seclusion" meaning the "class renegades... are neither integrated to their group of origin nor to their group of arrival" (cited in Naudet: 416).

These western sociological formulations, according to Naudet, do not fit the reality of Dalit upward

mobility<sup>19</sup>. The 'ethos of mobility', is at the heart of Dalit identity, thanks to the 'Ambedkarite' ideology that exhorts them to 'educate, organise and agitate'. More significantly, it 'dictates how to behave once social success is achieved, notably by fixing a moral imperative of "paying back"' (Ibid 425-26). Significantly, the story is somewhat different for the upward mobile Dalits in the *private sector* who make more of an effort to identify with the dominant culture of their professional class, castigating 'reservations', often hiding their caste backgrounds. Even so, the moral imperative of 'paying back to the community' is not lost (Ibid: 431). The ten interviews with non-Dalits did not reveal any notion of 'paying back' doctrine.

He draws attention to the concept of *Dalitisation* introduced by Kancha Ilaiah and others, counterpoised against Sanskritisation, which 'implies a certain transformation of the self concomitant with an improvement in social prestige' implicitly defined 'by the degree of resistance to "Hindu domination"...[T]here is both a wish to become dominant economically and socially, and a reluctance to become like those who are currently dominant' (Ibid: 434). This leads Naudet to hypothesise 'that *these upward mobile Dalits prefer to be dominant among the dominated than dominated among the dominants...* a luxury that only the most successful dalits can afford' (Ibid: 435-36; emphasis added).

Doubtless social mobility occurs in Indian society, yet, he questions the legitimacy of analytical tools used by the theorists of the West (Ibid: 437). On the one hand, 'caste remains central to the experience of social mobility...it [compels] socially upward mobile *Dalits* to "pay back to society"', on the other, 'it also prevents them from being fully recognised by the members of the "approached group"...[U]pward social mobility brings undeniable and substantive benefits but does not fully liberate these persons from the shackles of caste' (Ibid 437-38).

Notwithstanding these dilemmas, he expresses his anxiety that by essentialising Indian uniqueness it may make it difficult for a dialogue of Indian sociology with the rest of the world, and more crucially, 'it could hamper the efficiency of discussions in the "caste and class" debate by limiting the definition of social status

to caste when social status is also marked by the prestige of the profession” (Ibid: 138).<sup>20</sup>

The thought provoking paper raises important issues of theory. We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that the research is confined to an extremely small sample of members of the *Dalit* castes in the urban elite category. “Paying back to society” requires paying-back capacity. Most mobile *Dalits* are in the intermediate and lower class-occupational categories. They may not even imagine that they have such a moral code to follow. They do, however, feel a strong moral obligation to support their kith and kin from their urban incomes, which they do. This incidentally is not necessarily a unique cultural feature of *Dalits*, but cuts across caste spectrum and class. Finally, *Dalits*, one must remember, do not constitute a single caste.

### Theoretical-methodological Orientation: Domains, Asymmetries and Contradictions

Studies of stratification and mobility in the Western model are mainly concerned with movement of statuses along occupational prestige rankings or income classes or between classes stratified by relations of production or in terms of attributes such as education and health, in a relatively ‘open system of stratification’. The pitch, in India, is queered by the supposedly unique hierarchical institution of caste within a relatively ‘closed system of stratification’, which is supposed to be either encompassing or being encompassed by the more ‘open system of stratification’. Hence, the entire debate and discourse on social mobility revolves around caste and class, and implicitly or explicitly, power.

The studies presented above have many overlaps. The main orientations guiding these studies range from: Sanskritisation, dominant caste and power (Srinivas); caste-in-class (Mukherjee); caste, class and power (Beteille); simultaneous processes of caste-in-class and class-in-caste (Sharma); caste and untouchability (Shah); and caste and class (Djurfeldt, Kumar, Naudet).<sup>21</sup> Gender, curiously enough, hardly figures in any of these. Most studies in India have used the

‘open’ class stratification framework, with occupation, income, health, education, power and such other attributes providing the basis for upward or downward mobility of individuals and groups between different class strata. Generally, either caste or class is posited as the prime independent explanatory variable.

Cultural sources of social mobility such as the processes of *Sanskritisation* or *Dalitisation* do not adequately address *structural* inequalities. Social and cultural institutions in developing countries in South Asia manifest complex social realities that are qualitatively different from those of the West. Hence, the concept of social mobility has to have an indigenous thrust that will capture our complex reality and at the same time provide scope for greater generalisability or universality. Social mobility in this framework is at the same time a causal explanatory variable of phenomena (such as reduction in social discrimination or class exploitation or increased oppression against low caste upward mobility and so forth); and an outcome or dependent variable, to be explained (e.g. how did social mobility of low castes happen?).

Sorokin in his classic work: *Social and Cultural Mobility* defines stratification ‘as the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically superposed classes. It is manifested in the existence of upper and lower social layers. *Its basis and very essence consist in an unequal distribution of rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and privations, social power and influence among the members of a society*’ (1959: 11; emphasis added). Out of the numerous forms of stratification ‘the majority could be reduced to three classes: the *economic, the political and the occupational stratification*. As a general rule, these three are closely *intercorrelated* with each other. Usually, those who occupy the upper strata in one respect happen to be in the upper also in other respects and vice versa...though there are, however, many exceptions to it...This means that the intercorrelation among the three forms of stratification is far from perfect’ (Ibid: 12). By social mobility he meant, “any transition of an individual, or social object, or value from one social position to another’. Such movements are either horizontal or vertical [including upward and downward] (Ibid: 133; emphasis added).

Taking the general discourse on stratification and social mobility and Sorokin's perceptive observation as early as in 1937, it is possible to develop a theoretical-methodological orientation at a level of abstraction that is more comprehensive, and hopefully, more efficient. The problem that needs to be resolved is: how to combine *structural comparability* and *cultural specificity* to enable cross-cultural comparisons and generalisations. There are myriad ways in which social reality can be comprehended, hence the need for conceptual abstractions that help understanding reality or explain societal phenomena<sup>22</sup>.

I introduce the concepts of *asymmetries* and *contradictions* in reorienting the conceptual-theoretical framework for the study of social structure and social mobility. Axiomatically, asymmetries in social relations in society are universal<sup>23</sup>. Theoretically, and logically, we can think in terms of *domains of asymmetries* at two different levels of abstractions: (a) the *conceptual*, and (b) at the level of *issues*.

### Social system, structure and stratification: domains of asymmetries

Five *domains of asymmetries* that are of critical significance at the conceptual level that I identify (there may be any number depending upon the researcher's theoretical proclivities) are: (a) *discrimination*, (b) *exploitation*, (c) *oppression*, (d) *gender*, and (e) asymmetry related to the *eco-environment*. Drawn as they are from general sociological concerns there would be broad agreement that these encapsulate much of social reality. These domains of asymmetries, within which social mobility of individuals and groups takes place in various forms, may be defined as follows<sup>24</sup>. See Table 1.

- *Discrimination* essentially conveys the context of *normatively* legitimated relations of asymmetry that are *internalised* generally from birth through family and childhood socialisation. This is the domain of primordial, *ascriptive* loyalties that provide major cultural anchorages on the basis of language, caste, race, religion, creed, etc. This is the *ethnic* domain.
- *Exploitation* is best applied in the context of un-

equal economic exchanges in the *normatively* defined role of the *market*, and in the *relations of production*. Both Weber and Marx are relevant in identifying the asymmetries. This is the *class* or *economic* domain.

- *Oppression* has to do with the control and exercise of *power*. It defines the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. It also implies deliberate impediments created to obstruct access to power of the less privileged. This is the *power* or *political* domain.
- *Gender discrimination* refers to the iniquitous relationship between male and female in a system of gender relations. This is the *gender* domain. In as much as gender is common to the three preceding forms of asymmetries, it may be argued that this domain is redundant. However, the fact that in spite of their omnipresence, the female gender had largely been missed out in social science discourse; particularly, since the system of gender relations remained obscured until feminist mobilisations drew attention to the dominance of patriarchy that assumed 'men embraced women', it is important that the gender has a domainal presence in social science analysis.<sup>25</sup>
- *Eco-environmental* asymmetry is basically between humankind in its relationship of exploitation with Nature with differential consequences for the stratified and hierarchical population. This is the *eco-environmental* domain, which is at a somewhat different level of abstraction from the preceding four societal domains, and joins them only in specific contexts where society's interface with Nature takes place. Natural disasters (like Tsunami), man-made disasters such as Chernobyl and Bhopal, oil-spills and decimation of marine life, use of genetically modified seeds, etc have serious, and often unanticipated consequences, particularly for vulnerable groups

The *issue-domains*, by and large, are identifiable with the conceptual domains. Thus, the issue-domain of *ethnicity* is, by and large, associated with the conceptual domain of *social discrimination*. Issues related to occupation, wages, employment and unemploy-

ment, relations of production fall in the *class/economic domain* and are centrally located in the *domain of exploitation*. Oppression by dominant castes of deprived castes; or by classes of landlords and big farmers of landless labourers; oppression experienced under totalitarian or radical regimes; coercion by state and non-state actors, etc. would constitute the *power/political domain* and relate to the *domain of oppression*. Issues of gender inequities are located in *gender discrimination*; and, concerns related to environmental and ecological degradation will need to be explained at the conceptual level of *eco-environmental exploitation of Nature* by humankind/society. With the help of such a conceptual schema it may be possible to overcome the essentialism associated with caste and other indigenous institutions. Thus, caste may be unique to India, but *social discrimination* is universal; class may have so many versions and forms, but *exploitation* is inclusive of all of them; the dominant caste may be a powerful *native* concept, but *oppression* encapsulates all varieties of dominance. See Table 1.

The five conceptual cross-cutting domains of asymmetries are *not* mutually exclusive; they are *analytically* differentiated but *interdependent, interpenetrating* and *interfaced*. They, particularly the first four, constitute the abstraction of society or social system

as a *system of asymmetries in social interaction*, given that, the ‘whole’ social system is greater than the sum of its domains and their structures of asymmetries. In this sense, these are *counter-concepts*<sup>26</sup>.

### *Domainal embeddedness of Contradictions*<sup>27</sup>

Mere description of a social system as a system of asymmetries in social interaction is not sufficient. Axiomatically, embedded in these asymmetries are contradictions, defined as: actual or potential opposition, arising out of differences that are socially perceived, sooner or later, and/or ideologically/theoretically constructed, having change/transformation (or resistance to change/transformation) consequences for the social system under reference. ‘Differences’ per se do not lead to contradictions. ‘Differences’ do co-exist on the basis of complementarity of relationships. Such relationships may not be perceived as asymmetrical. A man and woman as husband and wife; or a brother and sister, are ‘different’ as they belong to different genders but they may not be in a relationship of asymmetry. It is only when an asymmetry in the difference is perceived as a social fact that a contradiction registers in a latent or manifest form. In so far as societal asymmetries are universal, and social contradictions

**Table 1:** Domains of asymmetries

Relations of asymmetries	Location of contradictions in the issue domains:	Description
Discrimination	Ethnic/social discrimination	Socialisation and internalization of culture; cultural differentiation; ascriptive identities
Exploitation	Class/economic	Market, social stratification and mobility; achieved status
Oppression	Power/political	Dominance; coercive threat;
Gender	Gender	Patriarchy; Gendered discrimination, exploitation, and oppression
Eco-environmental	Eco-environmental	Eco-environmental degradation, e.g., soil erosion, forest denudation, river and ocean contamination, carbon and green gas emission, etc; natural and man-made disasters; and their differential consequences in a stratified, hierarchic society

embedded in them too are universal; they can and do trigger changes that impact social mobility. For example, the opposition embedded in the asymmetrical relations between upper castes, non-Dalits and Dalits, as we have seen, have had consequences for upward and downward mobility in the caste hierarchy.

Not all contradictions are of the same valence nor are they necessarily always in a relationship of antagonism. To the extent that caste inequality was institutionalised, the contradictions embedded in it remained largely non-antagonistic and dormant. Social reform movements mobilised themselves around this contradiction (embedded in the asymmetry of social discrimination), and sharpened it. The democratic egalitarian ethos spurred this process further. Development and social welfare programmes, stimulated economic processes that expanded the scope for improved life chances through proliferation of new occupations to include large sections of the classes and castes, including those lower in the hierarchy/stratification. In the rural areas, the movement from traditional to non-traditional-non-farm occupations, has been attested by all scholars. However, the pace of inclusion of deprived classes and categories remained far from what is necessary.

The *constellation of contradictions* embedded in the asymmetries can be further classified into *primary* and *secondary*, and arranged in a hierarchical order. Constant reconfigurations of the contradictions over periods of time take place with changes in the objective conditions. Thus at a point of time the primary contradiction may lie in the asymmetry of caste (*social discrimination*), when caste considerations tend to take precedence over any other. Over a period of time,

the contradiction may lose its primariness in the domain of social discrimination and shift to the *class* domain. This is what precisely happened in the State of Bihar. Failure by leadership to recognise this led to the fall of a government.<sup>28</sup> In West Bengal, the Marxist coalition drew its strength from severe class exploitation in the late sixties and early seventies, and established itself in power through pro-poor land reforms. They were decimated after more than three decades of majority rule, as the primary contradiction now had shifted to the domain of oppression, over which the opposition mobilised. The dialectic is *non-deterministic* and therefore not frozen in any single domain, like class or caste or any other. If contradictions arising out of asymmetries are universal, so is the dynamic of *overcoming* perceived asymmetries.

How then is social mobility to be measured or assessed in this theoretical-methodological orientation? With respect to each domain, *individuals/collectivities that are able to undergo reduction in their asymmetrical status will be positively mobile. Those that experience reversals in this respect will be negatively mobile. Those that move within the same hierarchical category will be horizontally mobile. Finally, those that remain more or less stable/stationary/stagnant remain socially immobile.* Theoretically, any individual/group can be in a variety of combinations of being positively/negatively/horizontally/ mobile or immobile, with respect to any of the domains that are interrelated/interfaced/interpenetrating. For example, a *Dalit* may score positive on class mobility, negative on discrimination, positive in power, and negative in gender domains; a non-Dalit may score positive in three and negative in one domain; and so on (Table 2). Methodologically it com-

**Table 2:** Social mobility in the domains of asymmetries

	Nature of social mobility (Individuals or groups)			
	Positively mobile	Negatively mobile	Horizontally mobile	Socially immobile
Discrimination	SC N <sup>1</sup>			
Exploitation	SC N <sup>1</sup>			
Oppression	SC N <sup>1</sup>			
Gender inequity		SC N <sup>1</sup>		
Eco-environmental		SC N <sup>1</sup>		

*Note:* Mobility refers to reduction in the asymmetries. SC N<sup>1</sup> is an illustrative case of an individual member of the Scheduled Caste plotted in the five domains.

pels the researcher or analyst not to dwell within a single domain but engage with as many of the other interconnected, interrelated and interfaced domains that are theoretically relevant with respect to the problematic, identifying the distribution of primary and secondary contradictions over a period of time.

It is possible to locate and identify individuals/groups that are upward/downward/horizontally mobile or immobile, with respect to *each* of these domains, particularly the first four that involves the social system more directly. Individuals, families and groups need to be located at different points in as many of these domainal scales leading to different configurations of status congruence/incongruence of such groups. The mapping of social mobility (Table 2) will give a clearer picture of upward, downward or horizontal mobility within an intergenerational time frame or in a panel study.

## Conclusion

Progressive liberalisation of the world economy has so far not yielded the desired confidence that the enormous production of wealth has been accompanied by its reasonable distribution. Income disparities have widened within and between countries. We have no clear idea to what extent economic development has touched the lives of the poorest, and the socially deprived/discriminated strata in increasing their life chances. Pockets of hunger and immiserisation maintain their dogged persistence. Uncontrollable incidence of farmers' suicides in several parts of the country is a direct consequence of global market penetrations. The fact that the Maoist challenge, which rejects the Constitution and believes in the armed overthrow of the democratic state, is gaining ground in the country's least developed and most affected tribal regions, triggering ripple effects in many other parts of the country, clearly indicates that development process leaves much scope for inclusive growth.<sup>29</sup>

Given the extraordinary rapid pace of transformation that is overtaking us in an increasingly globalising world economy and society, it is appropriate to take stock of how the development efforts and the policy

initiatives of the state, and the economic reforms of the liberalising process of the market, are impacting on the society – rural and urban-industrial – with what consequences, and for whom? Concurrently, it is equally important to know how the faulted service delivery systems are adversely affecting the mobility of deprived strata in many parts of the country. Results from such a study will clearly identify, along with the causal factors, the rates of mobility amongst deprived groups and categories, as also identify zones of stagnation and destitution.

To say that the country is going through a crisis would be an understatement. If there is one area in which the role of the sociologist is of most urgent necessity it is the study of social mobility on a macro scale. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; only serious application of this re-orientation to designing research on social mobility will unfold its scope, limitations, and how it can be further developed.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Srinivas Memorial Lecture, XXXVII All India Sociological Conference, New Delhi, 11 December 2011. A Keynote address on the same theme was delivered at the national seminar on Social Mobility in South India organised by the Department of Sociology, Pondicherry University, 24-25 September 2009. This paper was first published as 'Social Mobility and Social Structure: Towards a Conceptual-Methodological Reorientation' *Sociological Bulletin*, 61 (1), January-April 2012, pp. 26-52.

<sup>2</sup> This is no reflection on so many other scholars, like Kathleen Gough, Scarlet Epstein, Utsa Patnaik etc., who have contributed in this area.

<sup>3</sup> In 1967 Srinivas defines *Sanskritisation*, 'as the process by which a "low" caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, rituals, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a "twice born" (*dwija*) caste. The Sanskritisation of a group usually has the effect of improving its position in the local caste hierarchy. It normally presupposes either an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned or a higher group self consciousness resulting from its contact with a source of the "Great Tradition" of Hinduism such as a pilgrim centre or monastery of a proselytizing sect' (Srinivas 2002a: 222).

<sup>4</sup> Since Srinivas was such a towering figure in the shaping of sociology and social anthropology in India it is recommended that this essay be read in full.

<sup>5</sup> Earlier in his 'A Note on Sanskritisation and Westernisation' (1957), Srinivas made an observation which is difficult to comprehend, 'Increasing westernisation will also mean the greater secularisation of the outlook of the people and this, together with the movement towards a "classless and casteless society" which is the professed aim of the present government, might mean the disappearance of Hinduism altogether... Christianity and Islam are probably better equipped

to withstand westernisation because they have a strong organisation whereas Hinduism lacks all organisation, excluding the caste system. If and when caste disappears, Hinduism may also disappear altogether, and it is hardly necessary to point out that the present climate of influential opinion in the country is extremely hostile to caste' (2002f: 217; emphasis added). This view of Srinivas can be seriously contested. Hinduism as in the Vedantic tradition will stand enriched without a caste *system* structured on the basis of a graded hierarchy of purity and pollution. It is unfortunate that this has not entered into the discourse on caste and untouchability.

<sup>6</sup> In page 199, he says that in Sripuram there was 'little doubt that in traditional society power was largely subsumed by the structure of caste'.

<sup>7</sup> 'Being a part of this elaborate machinery gives to the individual a certain standing, irrespective of caste or class position...the political system itself tends to acquire a weight of its own' (Ibid: 203).

<sup>8</sup> See Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, 1977, pp. 63-69.

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the only one of its kind macro-level sample survey of an entire State was done by Ramkrishna Mukherjee with rare quantitative sophistication providing a number of population estimates of different family types for West Bengal. See his book *West Bengal Family Structures 1944-77*, Sage Publications, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> In his latest book Dipankar Gupta reports data on this aspect of Rural Non-Farm Employment (*The Caged Phoenix: Can India Fly*, New Delhi, Viking Penguin Books India, p.92).

<sup>11</sup> The sample size was 9614 with 64 per cent response rate; sampling design followed the procedure of probability proportionate to size; data was collected from 432 sampling points across 108 parliamentary constituencies across India, excluding Jammu and Kashmir, with a slight under-representation of the agricultural sector.

<sup>12</sup> Thorat, analysing data from Census and National Sample Survey notes the occupational shift of the rural main workers from agricultural to non-agricultural sector which was negligible in 1980s, sharpened in 1990s. The proportion of Scheduled Caste (SC) rural main workers in agriculture declined from 84.49

per cent in 1991 to 72.93 per cent in 2001. The non-Scheduled Castes also experienced a similar shift. The NSS data confirms this finding (Thorat: 2009: 46-47). However, in this shift the SCs were in a relatively more disadvantageous position than the non-SC population.

<sup>13</sup> The structural transformation of the rural economy refers to the 'indirect effects of growth in urban and nearby rural areas and on the growth of other industries, like building and construction, as well as services' brought about by the dynamic of large scale industrialisation' (Djurfeldt et al 2008:50)

<sup>14</sup> A re-survey of all the five villages was done under the direction of P.J. Thomas and K.C. Ramakrishnan of the Department of Economics Madras University in 1936-37. In 1961, some of the Slater villages were studied by the Oxford economist Margaret Haswel. S. Guhan with some of his colleagues in the Madras Institute of Development Studies, later joined by Joan Mencher, the American Anthropologist, studied all the five villages in the early eighties, more or less replicating Slater's design. Hariss undertook the study of all five Slater villages once again in 2008 for a longitudinal study. Iruvelpatti is the one that figures in this paper.

<sup>15</sup> Hariss observes that in 1981, Mencher found that a significant gap existed between caste Hindus and Dalits, after the primary level, this had virtually disappeared by 2008. She did not find a single graduate, whereas now there were 23 with tertiary education, seven of them women, and one Ph.D (2010: 50).

<sup>16</sup> Entering the village street with *chappals* on (leather footwear), or entry into teashop in the presence of a caste Hindu, or to receive water in a cup, was prohibited in 1981 (Ibid: 58).

<sup>17</sup> The sample included: Andhra Pradesh (50 villages distributed in three regions), Tamil Nadu (50 villages distributed in three regions), Karnataka (50 villages distributed in four regions), Kerala (51 villages distributed in three regions), Maharashtra (54 villages distributed in three regions), Rajasthan (50 villages distributed in four regions), Madhya Pradesh (53 villages distributed in six regions), Uttar Pradesh (50 villages distributed in six regions), Bihar (52 villages distributed in four regions), Orissa (54 villages dis-

tributed in three regions) and Punjab (51 villages distributed in three regions) (Shah 2006: 13)

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Sukant Chaudhury was kind enough to provide me with some current data almost on instant request. Barely 250 kms from Delhi, in Ramnagar village, with a population of 752 households, situated in the State of Uttar Pradesh, inhabited predominantly by the dominant castes Yadavs and Lodh Rajpoots, there are, even to this day, 56 katchha latrines, from which women from the scavenger caste clean human dung and carry it on their heads every day for disposal.

<sup>19</sup> He identifies eight sociological mechanisms that 'are in fact structured by the weight of caste identity'. These are (1) *education* that enables 'escape from harsh poverty' is perceived as 'economic emancipation, rather than a corresponding social mobility' (Ibid: 418-19); (2) Being a *successful performer at school and university* – like being a topper in class – acts as a tension-reducing mechanism; (3) Such success is experienced as *familial* fulfillment of parental wishes; (4) Achievers, after having obtained all the accoutrements of upward mobility (car, house, children in public schools) continue to keep close links with their group of origin. Mobility is manifested in financial support to their close relatives, and contributing to their native village development; (5) Success in a socially oriented job gets oriented towards its social utility; (6) Many refuse to acculturate themselves with the dominant norms preferring an alternate style of life of socialising with their kind sharing similar ideological values. Lesser the inclination to acculturate with the new class, fewer is the adjustment problem; (7) Assertion of difference 'shows that acculturation to dominant norms, "Sanskritisation", etc are not the only mechanisms at work in identity adjustment in India'; (8) The last mechanism refers to the 'reinvention of origins or the re-writing of one's life history... group mobility is accompanied by the rewriting of the group's history (Ibid: 419-420).

<sup>20</sup> Some of the earliest studies on the theme of status incongruence or its absence, and mechanisms of adjustment adopted by Dalits when they moved from a low occupational status to a higher one, can be found in the research by Phillips (1990) and Ram (1988).

<sup>21</sup> Dipankar Gupta's theoretical position distinguish-

ing between 'hierarchy' and 'difference' is a novel approach that merits a full discussion on its own. See his article 'Social Stratification: Hierarchy, Difference, and Social Mobility' (2003).

<sup>22</sup> Marx's conceptualisation of class and class conflict, Weber's ideal type methodology and theories related to capitalism, are classic examples.

<sup>23</sup> In the same sense as '[u]nstratified society, with real equality of its members, is a myth which has never been realised in the history of mankind' (Sorokin 1959: 12-13).

<sup>24</sup> This is a slightly revised version of the asymmetries defined by me in my unpublished lecture to the National University of Singapore on: 'Conceptual-theoretical Reorientation in Social Movement Discourse', 25<sup>th</sup> November 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Staffan Lindberg is of the view that the gender is a redundant domain, a view to which I too had strongly subscribed long back. Several of my friends are equally convinced of the need for an analytically separate gender domain. This view was expressed by him after hearing my presentation of the Lecture in person.

<sup>26</sup> The eco-environmental domain does not always directly enter in to the social system configuration.

<sup>27</sup> I have been influenced by Mao Ze Dong's essays *On Contradictions*. Generally, Weberian and Marxist strains intertwine.

<sup>28</sup> Lallu Prasad Yadav's party the Janata Dal (JD) rechristened as the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) was the ruling party in Bihar for 15 years (1990-2005) constantly invoking Backward caste and Muslim community discrimination by upper castes. He was replaced by Nitish Kumar who came to power on the card of economic development, good governance, general empowerment of women, and the poorer classes through panchayati raj (local self-government) with no animosity towards upper castes.

<sup>29</sup> The Prime Minister in a briefing at the DGPs/IGPs conference held in the capital on 16 September 2009, reiterated that 'Left-wing extremism is, perhaps, the gravest internal security threat we face...' He admitted 'we have not achieved as much success as we would have liked in containing it...it is a matter of concern that despite our efforts, the level of violence in the affected states continues to rise'. He reminded

the police brass tack that Left-wing extremism could not be treated as a mere law and order problem considering the support it derives from some tribals and poorest of the poor, and the fact that it still appeals to a section of the civil society intelligentsia and the youth (Economic Times, 16 September 2008: 2).

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