



Grassroots Community Terminology

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Abstract:

Dalits, historically referred to as "Untouchables," represent a marginalized community in the Indian subcontinent subjected to systemic discrimination and social exclusion under the traditional caste hierarchy. Despite constitutional safeguards and affirmative action policies aimed at promoting equality, Dalits continue to face widespread social, economic, and political challenges, including caste-based violence, limited access to education, and economic disparities. This document examines the historical context of Dalit oppression, the evolution of Dalit identity, and the rise of movements advocating for social justice and equality, such as those led by Dr.B.R. Ambedkar. It also explores contemporary issues faced by Dalit communities and their ongoing struggle for dignity, representation, and rights in modern society. Through this analysis, the work aims to shed light on both the resilience of Dalit communities and the structural reforms necessary for achieving true social inclusion.

Introduction

The meaning of the word Tala in the Kannada dictionary is-Tala, Thatta, ThattaTala, Tarba, Talabhaga, Kelagade, Talamatta, Talahadi himhaga, Mulanele Kelahanta. This means those who occupy the lowest position in the social system. Community - Group - General Group In the sense of indefinite, informal, vague, ordinary, people who live a very low level of life are the common people who are pushed down and occupy the last position in the class system.

According to the Imperial Gazetteer, "Community is those who have the same name, speak the same language, live in the same place and follow the same clan and marriage



system. Historians and scholars have expressed their own opinions about them.

R.S. Sharma, in his work “Ancient India”, finds the Shudras in the lowest position in the social system in the Chaturvana system. After the 7th century BC, they transitioned from their original occupations and became mainly agriculturalists. Before that, they were found as slaves, indentured servants and agricultural laborers of the above three classes. But during this period, the untouchables and the Chandals were mostly cattle, and they were called to do the work of slaughtering.

Irfan Habib, Vijay Kumar Thakur, in his book “Vedic Age”, discusses the caste system in the society, stating that the caste system is divided into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra in this order, with each subsequent varna indicating a lower status. Also, these communities are generally called Chandals in Sanskrit, „Kamin“ in Urdu and Punjabi, and in English, untouchables or outcastes. Recently, the name given to them has been termed as Harijan (sons of God - Gandhiji) Dalit (oppressed class) or in legal terms, “Scheduled Castes Class”.

M Chidananda Murthy, in his work „A Cultural Study of Kannada Inscriptions“(Kannada Shasanagala Samskrutika Adhyayana), has said about the lower caste that they are the ones who raise the dead cattle of the upper caste of the society. They make leather goods for those people, and they live in huts outside the village as sammagar“s. They are seen as the last and lowest in the Chaturvana system. They are also the ones who perform the service of the superior castes in the areas where they live, hereditary and without fail.

Lakshman Telgavi, in his work „Backward Classes and Dalit Movements“ (Hindulida Vargagalu mattu Dalita Chaluvaligalu), states that the word Dalit can be said to be a word of Karnataka. Dalit means the lowest castes in the social system who have been oppressed by the upper classes and accepted their mastery in subordination. He has expressed the opinion that Dalits are the oppressed people living in lowly conditions, including untouchables, workers, landless people, poor farmers, tribals, and the like.

Vijay Poonachcha Tambada, in his work „From Class to Culture“(Vargadinda Samskrutiyedege), discusses the origin and development of Subaltern Studies and the philosophical background of Antonia Gramsci“s classes.



The term Subaltern was used to identify farmers. Socially marginalized subordinate communities such as workers, farmers, wage workers, artisans are found. Thus, it not only expresses the idea between the farmers who were performing lower-level work and the landowners, but also explains the process of relationship between those who are controlled and those who are controlled, according to Gramsey.

Chinnaswamy Sosale in his work “Dalitar Badhuku-Meluku” writes that Dr.B.R. Ambedkar participated in many meetings and conferences by fully engaging himself in the struggle for the rights of social equality for the Dalit class, and in 1938, at a press conference in Pune, Maharashtra, he said that the Dalit class and the untouchables are words with one meaning. Therefore, although the three letters Dalit are mostly used for the untouchables and the Madiga community, its explanation is different. Instead of using the word Dalit for the lower classes, it would be more meaningful to use the word „untouchable“.

Aravad Malagatti’s in his work „Dalit Sahityayana“, writes about the lower classes as those who have been socially, politically, economically and educationally marginalized in the culture of the people for centuries. They live without any caste discrimination in the areas where they live. But they suffer exploitation in all fields and are backward without freedom and are considered superior locally. They live outside the villages, unable to live with the upper castes. They depend on menial professions for their livelihood and serve the people there, thereby experiencing untouchability.

Gurulingaiah, in his book „The Concept of Social Exclusion“ (Samajika Horatalluvikeya Parikalpane), has argued that Dalits and backward people are the lowest class in the hierarchical social system of India and are marginalized communities. Thus, he has opined that Dalits are the politically backward castes.

In 1927, during the colonial period, Simon, who came to India as an ambassador, referred to the untouchables living at a lower level than the upper classes socially as Scheduled Castes and Tribes in his commission. Since time immemorial, the exploited castes have been identified as the lower class or Depressed Class. In 1935, the British decided to give more self-government to the provinces of India and establish a federal system of



government. As a result, the Government of India Act 1935/7 came into force. The term Scheduled Castes was introduced in accordance with this act. The government on August 16, 1990, suggested using the terms Harijan and Girijan as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe.

Considering the above opinions, “those who are socially, economically, educationally backward and do not have political independence. All those who have all the lower statuses including those who are territorially subordinate to the upper castes can be called lower castes”. The term „Dalit“ is mostly used in current studies instead of the term untouchability. Also, these classes are called by the terms Shudras, Antyaja, Chandala, Panchama, Untouchables, unworthy, and Lower Classes. Thus, tribal people can be seen in the current study along with the communities in the lower class.

Conclusion

In conclusion, grassroots community terminology emphasizes the importance of local, collective action in addressing issues, creating social change, and empowering individuals. Whether through grassroots organizing, community-based organizations, or advocacy efforts, these terms highlight the power of individuals and communities working together from the bottom up to make a meaningful impact. Key elements like community empowerment, coalition building, and mutual aid reinforce the idea that sustainable change often begins at the local level, with individuals and groups driving the movement.

The grassroots approach values participation, collaboration, and inclusive decision-making, acknowledging that true change often arises from the communities most affected. By understanding and utilizing these terms, we can better support and engage in grassroots initiatives, fostering stronger, more resilient communities.

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