

## **ROLE OF CASTE ASSOCIATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In Independent India, the factors like industrialization and urbanization, enactment of several laws, spread of education, socio-religious reform movements, westernization etc affected the caste system and brought various changes in its traditional features. One such visible change in the attitude of different castes is to rise in caste hierarchy and improve social status through forming caste associations. Thus in present India each caste is trying to undergo a process of development and empowerment through the establishment of associations. As noted by G.S.Ghurye (1969, p.299) the feature of Hindu society during contemporary century has been the marked tendency for every caste to form its own association comprising all members of the caste speaking the same language. Therefore to trace out the role played by such caste associations in the development of Other Backward Classes, the present study has undertaken with reference to one of the important Other Backward Castes of Karnataka state namely “**Billawa**”, which form a major segment of backward class population of the region.

**Keywords:** Billawa, Caste, Caste Associations, Development, Other Backward Classes.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The caste system is embedded in the Indian social system. As opined by G.S. Ghurye, foreign visitor to India may not understand the full working of the caste system but he/she is aware of the fact that Hindu society is divided into groups, known as castes with varying degrees of respectability and circles of social intercourse. In independent India, the factors like industrialization and urbanization, enactment of several laws, spread of education, socio-religious reform movements, westernization etc affected the caste system and brought various changes in its traditional features and its functioning. But with these changes it has not weakened, its resilience is very famous as Max Muller said “Caste cannot be abolished in India and to attempt it would be one of the most hazardous operations that were ever performed in a

political body. As a religious institution caste will die: but as a social institution, it will live and improve” (Max Muller 1869:353).

The caste system is strengthening in present India, identifying itself in various new roles. One such change is that some sort of caste consciousness has crept into different castes. Each caste tried to organize itself for social, economic, and political purposes. Nowadays one of the visible changes in the attitude of different castes is to rise in caste hierarchy and improve social status; thus in present India each caste is trying to undergo a process of social mobility to bring about changes in its ritual status through the establishment of Caste associations. G.S. Ghurye (1969, p.299) notes that the feature of Hindu society during contemporary century has been the marked tendency for every caste to form its own association comprising all members of the caste speaking the same language. As opined by Kolenda Pauline (1997, p.121) the caste association is a voluntary organization, composed of members from a single caste and it first emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century linking members of a caste within a region.

Development is an integral aspect of modern Indian society. It is an indicator for change in the society. The development as a concept is not limited to economic development, but it is a process that affects each and every area of a society.

Nowadays each caste tried to organize itself for social, economic, and political development. To compete with one another and dominate over other castes, to get identification in the society, and to get more benefits from the Government, castes found the necessity of organizing its members. Numerically the backward classes in India in general and Karnataka in particular, constitute very large section of population. The Constitution of India recognized the groups other than SC and ST, who suffer from social and economic disadvantages as Other Backward Classes. The trend of establishing caste- associations had increased among the castes belonged to this category. Therefore to trace out the role played by such caste associations in the development of Other Backward Classes, the present study has undertaken with reference to one of the important Other Backward Castes of Karnataka state namely “Billawa”, which form a major segment of backward class population of the State.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Backward classes are trying to involve itself in the process of development and tried to improve their social and economic status in the society through organizing themselves through their own caste association. This research paper focused on the issue of role of this caste association in the development of Other Backward Caste like Billawa caste of Karnataka state.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study has taken up with following objectives-

1. To portray participation of Other Backward Classes in the process of development
2. To grasp the attitudes of Billawa caste as an Other Backward Class towards associational activities.
3. To delineate the role of caste-associations in the development of Other Backward Classes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **1. Universe of the study**

Billawas as a caste community is dispersed throughout the Karnataka state. In different parts of Karnataka they are known by different names- *Billawas, Idigas, Belchada, Deevuru, Halepaikas, Namdaris, Tiyas, Guttedars*, etc. But the major concentration of Billawas is found in Karnataka State. Therefore the universe chosen for the present study is Karnataka State.

**2. Method of Data Collection:** This paper is based on a study conducted through **Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**. Data has been collected through group discussion with executive members and beneficiaries of '05' Billawa caste associations of Dakshina Kannada District, Udupi district Bangalore and also Caste Association of Mumbai. /

**3. Tools of data collection:** Primary data are collected through group Discussion. Secondary data was gathered from various sources such as books, internet, souvenirs of various Billawa associations, magazines and news papers published by Billawa associations, community web sites etc.

## **GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF THE STUDY AREA**

Karnataka, a South Indian State located along the Arabian Sea in its West, consists of Deccan Plateau and the coastal Plain. It has made a tremendous progress in the fields of education, industry, agriculture, literature and tourism. Karnataka is the Seventh largest state in India in terms of area and ranks ninth in terms of Population in India. The major concentration of Billawas is found in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. Before 1860, Dakshina Kannada was part of a greater district called Canara, which was under a single administration in the Madras Presidency. Before 1997 Dakshina Kannada was vast district with eight Taluks. On August 1997, it was bifurcated into Dakshina Kannada (D.K.) and Udupi district

## **IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

The present investigation is justifiable from different point of views. At the present situation there is a necessity of understanding the factors, which are responsible for the development of various backward castes. This study is very useful to delineate the impact of caste associations on the development of Other Backward Classes. It also verifies about social changes and social mobility in the caste, which helps to grasp its present position in the region. The study would also examine the cumulative impact of an associational activity on the cultural, educational and economic development of one of the important backward communities of Karnataka. This study gains importance as it gives information about what are the developmental activities in which caste associations are involved. At the practical level the present research-study would help in understanding the Billawas' expectations, aspirations, and ambitions about modern life. As Billawas belong to the category of Other Backward Classes the study definitely provide the basis for Government policies and also other developmental activities.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The present in spite of researcher's efforts to make it complete objective study, had some limitations. There is a limitation of getting complete valid information about certain associational activities, this is because nowadays most of Billawas involved in public activities and they are trying to exaggerate their opinions about such things. Moreover the present study depends on the Focussed Group Discussion of only five associations and its beneficiaries.

## **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The focused issues related to role of the caste associations in the development of Other Backward Classes were discussed in depth and the outcomes of the discussion has been analysed in this research paper in the following way -

**a). The emergence of caste associations in Billawa caste:** The question asked for the Focussed Group was that when and how did the emergence of associations started? The answer given by the five Focussed groups is given below-

1. During the British rule in India itself, that is, before independence the members of Billawa community began to organize through the formation of various regional associations.
2. The members of the Billawa community started to organize themselves through the formation of associations with the religious objective of spreading the divine message of **Shri Narayana Guru**, the great social and religious reformer who believed to be played main role in its organization.

3. Shri Venkatesha Shiva Bhakthi Yoga Sangha, Kudroli, one of the oldest associations was formed in the year of 1908;
4. In about 1920 'Billawara Union', Kudroli, came into existence, which later on in 1990 named as 'Akhila Bharatha Billawa Union.
5. Another active association is '**Billawa Maha Mandala**', **Mulki**, the federation of Billawa associations, which brought various regional associations under a common umbrella.
6. Gradually many associations at the regional level were established to organize the community people and fight against exploitation.
7. The organization of Billawas is not limited to Karnataka . Billawas, who migrated to various cities, established their caste- association there also. The important and one of the active associations of the Billawa community at present is one, which was established at Bombay, Poone (1952) and Pimpri (1984); at Delhi (1985), Dubai etc.
8. There are also separate region-wise associations for 'women'.
9. Further there are separate associations for Billawa youths like 'Yuva vahini', 'Seva Dal' etc. with a aim of organizing Billawa youth for the purpose of social, educational, religious, political and economical development.

**b). Activities of the Associations Favouring Social and cultural Development:**

The Billawa Associations, which came into existence in different places, entered into the field of social and cultural development and they spread their activities to the social, educational, economic, and religious life of the Billawa community. Billawas who migrated to Bombay in order to unite all Billawas and to derive social and cultural improvement formed association in 1932, with a slogan "Progress through unity". It is opined that this association "symbolized the hopes and aspirations of the community which had suffered social and economic injustice for long and was trying to assert itself with the dream of India's independence" (mentioned in Viswanath Karnad, 1994, p.224).

The present study had recognized various activities of the Billawa associations and '250' respondents of the study had identified some programmes taken up by the Associations, and also expressed their appreciation towards some of its activities, which is shown in the table -1.

**Table 1: Appreciation of the type of developmental Activities of the Associations**

Sl. No.	The type of work	Total	%
1	Helping Poor	65	26.00
2	Educational purpose	49	19.60
3	Honouring the meritorious Billawas	20	8.00
4	Religious works	10	4.00
5	Social Service	59	23.60
6	Organization of conferences	8	3.20
7	All	91	36.40
8	Other	16	6.40
9	Not responded	8	3.20

(Source: Primary Data )

The data of the table- 1 portrays the various fields of activities of Billawa associations, which in order of preference of appreciation of the respondents are discussed below:

**1. Educational development:**

About 56% respondents Focussed groups expressed much appreciation towards educational activities. The present study observed that almost all associations are engaged in various activities, which can eradicate educational backwardness of the community. They recognized the importance of educational advancement to move up in the status hierarchy. Therefore in this direction they incorporated different programmes.

- i) Financial help to take up higher education and supply of text books were made.
- ii) Established their own educational institutions
- iii) Honouring of Meritorious students, giving scholarship and hostel facilities

- iv) Establishment of night schools like Guru Narayana night school (1961), Jawaharlal night school (1963). These night schools helped those Billawas who came to Bombay in search of livelihood without any educational qualification. Further it also sponsored Kannada Billawara society for conducting day school for Kannadigas. Another significant work was establishment of Industrial Training School of women in early 1951, to carve a niche for their self-employment.

## **2. Social Service**

23.60% of the respondent appreciated the social service activities of their community associations, as it would improve status of the community in the society. The present study traced various this kinds of activities like having Public library, establishment of Marriage-halls to help the poor people to conduct their marriage-or other functions with less expenditure, giving training in tailoring, conducting programmes of social reform, rural reconstruction works etc.

## **3. Religious works**

40.4% opined that Billawa associations has involved more in religious works. It is because nowadays enhancement of ritual status is also very important to reach the higher status in the society. Most of the associations through their regional temples organizing various religious functions as one of the main means to exhibit their improved ritual status.

## **4. Organizing Conferences**

Nowadays the trend of organizing conferences or such other programmes by caste associations to exhibit their power and unity is increasing. The present study found out the emergence of the same trend in the Billawa community also. Some important Billawa Associations organized some regional, state-level, all-India level even International level Billawa Conferences in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts to expose the organizational power to the society and also to unite Billawas.

**5. Other activities:** In spite of above mentioned fields of activity, the associations have also involved in some other social developmental activities .Some of the identified such works like having 'Nyaya Samithi' to solve the disputes and establishment of family of needs of the community, establishment of matrimonial bureau, conducting women self- employment, and personality development training programmes etc.

## **c). Activities of the Associations Favouring Economic development**

### **1. Helping the poor**

Most of the Billawa associations are doing work of helping the poor members of its community. It means giving financial help to such families in the time of its distress, for the marriage of its daughter, education of children, conducting coaching classes for competitive examinations etc.

1. **Enhancement of job opportunities-** Another remarkable achievement, which made Billawa community to get identification in the economic field, is the establishment of Bharath Co-operative Bank Ltd., Gokarnanatha Co-operative Bank Ltd. and educational institutions in order to help community members to be employable . The Banks and colleges progressed very past with the expansion of branches in Maharastra and also in Dakshina Kannada and deposit mobilization. It has provided job opportunities for many members of Billawa community.
2. It was noted in Directory of Karnataka Business Houses, Kannada Organisations and Kannadigas in Greater Bombay and Suburbs (1961) that the association was established with main objectives such as promotion of education by establishing schools, hostels, free reading room, library, and awarding scholarships to poor and deserving students, help for the destitute men and women and wherever possible rehabilitate them.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The findings of the present study can be summarized as

- Among Other Backward Classes, there are many caste associations and they are very actively involving their people in the process of modern development.
- The impact of caste associations on its social and cultural development is very remarkable
- Caste associations are striving hard for educational advancement of Other Backward Classes
- Caste associations have taken up many steps for the employability of their caste members.
- Some works like helping poor Billawas, doing social service works, helping for the educational advancement are appreciated by the beneficiaries
- A very less appreciation is given to religious works and Organization of conferences. It is because, according to majority respondents they merely led to wastage of money, and practically they will not lead to socio-economic advancement of the community as such.
- The formation and activities of the caste- associations did not reach some remote areas and more or less its active activities limited only to cities and some nearby villages.
- There is a scope for politicisation of associational activities.



## CONCLUSION

In this way the data gathered from present study undertaken with reference to one of the important Other Backward Castes of Undivided Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka state namely "Billawa", shows that caste associations are playing a remarkable role in the development of Other Backward Classes. Moreover they are more effective in social and economic development of the backward castes. They are working for enhancing the status of its community in the caste-hierarchy and up-lift downtrodden Billawas, who were exploited for the centuries by the upper castes and dominant castes.

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