

Socio-Economic Mobility of the Banjaras: A Study on the Evolution of Livelihoods and Educational Access

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Abstract: The socio-economic mobility of the Banjara community in India is analyzed by focusing attention on the shift in traditional livelihoods and education in the present study. Having started with livestock herding and trade, the Banjara tribe experienced radical changes in the economy they engaged in under the demand of the modern occupations they took, from agriculture to small businesses, and then wage labour. This mixed-methods study combines quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, FGDs, and secondary data analysis to study all factors affecting socio-economic mobility, such as educational access, changes in income, and social integration. Secondary data analysis from government sources would involve the Census of India, NSSO reports, and ASER, allowing contextual insights into the socio-economic conditions of the community. The main data gathered through surveys and interviews conducted with members of the Banjara community residing in Telangana and Maharashtra reveal key trends on educational attainment, income levels, and perceptions of mobility. The findings reflect some advancement and persistent barriers to full socio-economic integration such as discrimination, limited education infrastructure, and poverty. The study reveals the necessity for targeted policies and interventions that enhance education opportunities and contribute to the sustainable development of the Banjara community.

Keywords Banjara, Socio-economic mobility, Education, Sustainable Development, Livelihoods

INTRODUCTION

The Banjaras are most commonly categorized as tribals of the semi-nomadic society. Traditional livelihood of these communities involves rearing and trading, which mostly involved seasonal wage employment for all the families in that society. In contrast to all these above, historical barriers to their socio-economic mobility have resulted from aspects of social exclusion, access limitations to resource facilities, and lack of formal education. Recent developments in socio-economic policies, rural

development programs, and education reforms have brought changes in their traditional way of life. This paper explores how the traditional occupations of the Banjaras have evolved and the extent to which access to education has contributed to their economic advancement and integration into mainstream society.

Socio-Economic Mobility of Banjara Tribes

Historically, Banjaras were acknowledged to be convoluted in trade and animal husbandry. Their nomadic lifestyle comprised traveling across regions, trading salt, grains, and cattle, which were of prime importance to the rural areas. According to Kothari and Soni (2015), the Banjaras were an integral part of the rural economy as they connected regions to each other in terms of trade, especially in the pre-modern era. Livestock herding also provided a source of livelihood, as cattle were necessary for farming and an economic asset. However, these traditional occupations have declined with modernization. The rise of mechanized transportation, the change in agricultural practices, and the establishment of formal markets have reduced the reliance on nomadic trading practices. This has made it increasingly difficult for many Banjaras to sustain their traditional occupations

Education has been found as an important element that enhances socio-economic mobility among the oppressed people, including the Banjaras. There was an attempt in recent decades by the Indian government as well as NGOs to enroll the tribal people into formal educational programs. In the case of the Banjaras, these efforts have gradually shifted from traditional occupations to more diversified sources of income, such as agriculture, small-scale business ventures, and wage labor. According to Sharma and Singh (2018), educational access has contributed to the development of new skills, which

has improved the employment prospects for many Banjaras. Many Banjara children are going to school these days, and some even reached college levels. Though quality education is still accessible to very few, numerous challenges still prevail, for example, cultural, economic barriers, and a lack of educational infrastructure in rural settings..

The Banjaras are indeed faced with a plethora of challenges that come along the way towards socio-economic mobility. These include social stigma, a lack of land access, poor healthcare services, and a dearth of jobs in the countryside (Chakraborty & Roy, 2020). Additionally, the shift from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle demands not only economic but also cultural adjustment since many Banjaras suffer from discrimination and social exclusion in mainstream society. Nevertheless, the growth of micro-enterprises, government initiatives for tribal welfare, and increased access to education have provided new opportunities for the community. The establishment of vocational training centers, entrepreneurship programs, and affirmative action policies in education and employment have helped increase the economic participation of Banjaras in the formal sector (Desai & Nambiar, 2017).

OBJECTIVE

Based on the conclusions and scrutiny above, the following objectives were established to guide the study:

- i. To analyze the transformation of traditional livelihoods among the Banjaras and changes in occupations.
- ii. To adjudge the role of education in the socio-economic mobility of the Banjaras in standings of primary, secondary, and higher education.
- ii. To comprehend the encounters and opportunities of upward socio-economic mobility among the Banjaras.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Socio-economic mobility of disadvantaged tribal groups, like Banjaras, has drawn much academic attention. Extensive research has been undertaken to analyze the effect of changes in traditional sources of livelihood and the role that education plays in improving socio-economic status and integration with mainstream society. This literature review synthesizes existing research about the transformation of Banjara livelihoods and their

socio-economic mobility under education, along with the obstacles and opportunities they face within modern society.

One of the major themes identified in examining the socio-economic mobility of the Banjaras includes the change of their livelihoods. The Banjaras were primarily a traditionally nomadic tribe, originally engaged in cattle herding and trade activities (Kothari & Soni, 2015). Their economic life, comprised of seasonal flow of items like salt and grains between regions, acted as the primary link among rural villagers. However, the traditional means of livelihood were gradually replaced as modernization and formal market expansion picked up pace. Kothari and Soni (2015) have illustrated how the arrival of mechanized transport and the rising urban economy reduced the traditional nomadic Banjara's trade activity, therefore drastically changing their socio-economic status

According to Chakraborty and Roy (2020), thus the greater socio-economic problems of tribal communities in India are brought forth. Authors argue that it creates new challenges in life by the transition from nomadic to sedentary lifestyle due to lack of access to land, limited livelihood options, and feelings of dislocation from the traditional community structures. As a community, the Banjaras have experienced loss over time in the form of new ways of living, often involving economic insecurity as traditional sources of income were lost.

Of the factors that influence the socio-economic status of marginalized groups, education is perhaps among the most important. With regards to Banjaras, there has been plenty of interest in how such access to education translates to their mobility. Sharma and Singh (2018) analyzed the role of education in shaping the socio-economic outcomes of tribal populations within India. Their study concludes that success in school does offer an alternative income source and goes on to state how an appropriately relevant curriculum is essential for effective participation by tribal students. They then move on to discussing how vocational education and skills training can help bridge the traditional livelihoods and modern employment fronts.

For example, in diversifying income sources for themselves, the Banjars also call for more empowering education (Desai and Nambiar 2017).

As is observable from school and college enrolments increasing among children belonging to this community, today this entire community slowly turns out into occupations beyond conventional means towards agriculture business as well as wage employments. However, they further mention that access to quality education still remains a problem for many reasons such as economic factors, lack of infrastructure, and socio-cultural factors. They emphasize the need to make greater efforts in education to increase accessibility and relevance to the needs of the Banjara community.

The literature on the socio-economic mobility of the Banjaras also indicates several constraints that prevent them from achieving upward mobility. According to Desai and Nambiar (2017), even with education, Banjaras still suffer social exclusion, which denies them the opportunity to achieve upward mobility. The authors note that caste-based exclusion and exclusion from the mainstream are some of the factors that deny the Banjaras the full benefits of educational and economic opportunities. Further, a scarcity of funds available for higher education and vocational training is among the main formidable constraints (Sharma & Singh, 2018).

On the other perspective, some researchers emphasize the opportunities for upward mobility within Banjara groups. For example, Chakraborty and Roy (2020) indicate that affirmative action programs in education and employment set in motion by the government have opened doors for tribals in general and for Banjaras in particular. The case of successful micro-enterprise programs and vocational training is mentioned that has assisted certain Banjaras in achieving small enterprise businesses and improvement in economic status. According to them, such opportunities and a growing recognition of the value of education provide large avenues for upward socio-economic mobility for Banjaras.

Kothari and Soni (2015) further argue that the Banjara community has been resilient in its ability to adapt to new economic circumstances. They have observed that many Banjaras have successfully transitioned into non-agricultural sectors and have become part of the labor force in urban centers. This has not been easy, but it has opened up new avenues for economic participation and contributed to the community's integration into broader socio-economic frameworks.

Research Design

For the research study on the socio-economic mobility of the Banjaras focusing on the changes in their livelihoods and educational access, a mixed-methods research design is the most feasible. Such design would allow one to have an understanding of the qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions of socio-economic change within the Banjara community. Combining both methods allows the study to capture the comprehensive view of factors influencing community socio-economic mobility, ranging from changes in traditional livelihoods, the role of education, challenges, and opportunities for upward mobility.

It is a descriptive research. Describing the current socio-economic situation of the Banjara community and the role education plays in this process would be the aim. Given that this study explores how multiple variables, like education and livelihood transitions, interplay with each other, this will allow for individual experiences to be probed in-depth while making broad generalizations about community-wide trends.

Data Collection Methods

A significant component of this research will be in incorporating publicly available secondary data concerned with the socio-economic growth of the Banjara community. Data is accrued from government reports, publications by NGOs, data garnered from national census reporting and socio-economic surveys conducted from time to time. They give valuable insights concerning development trends and patterns existing for the Banjara community generally. The following will be emphasized in secondary data collection:

- **Demographic Data:** Data on age, gender, household income, and occupational patterns among the Banjara people will be analyzed to identify changes in livelihood practices and demographic shifts over time. Census of India data both from 2011 and 2021 and reports from organizations like NSSO and NFHS will give a picture of socio-economic indicators, such as literacy rates, income distribution, and employment.
- **Livelihood Changes:** Secondary data will be placed on the changing nature of occupations for the Banjara. This will entail information

from the shift in traditional sources of occupation like livestock rearing and seasonable trading to modern means of sustenance such as agriculture and wage employment in small scale business. Such reports can be obtained from a ministry, such as Ministry of Rural Development, reporting on employment in rural settings, as well as NGOs such as ActionAid India, an NGO engaged with rural development and community services.

- Educational Attainment: Analyze national and state-level educational survey data, such as Annual Status of Education Report, (ASER), along with reports from the Ministry of Education, to obtain evidence of educational access and attainments in the community: enrollment rates, dropout rates, and vocational or higher education access
- Social Integration and Mobility: Statistics on social mobility, poverty levels, and integration into mainstream society will be sourced from publicly available data. This could include government socio-economic surveys, such as the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), or reports by NGOs that focus on social equity and the empowerment of marginalized communities..

Reports and documentations by NGOs, active in empowering the Banjaras: Banjara Seva Samiti and similar agencies, shall be looked through for quality inputs in policies to create socio-economic development. Often these reports entail case studies, interviews, findings, education, and various livelihood programmes, among the community's developmental actions-the depth shall be inquired into these grassroots.

The study will extensively review published data to understand the trends and patterns in socio-economic development. Publicly accessible statistics from national and state surveys, NGO reports, and academic studies will be pooled with the primary data, thereby creating a comprehensive picture of the socio-economic movement of the Banjara community.

- Some of the reports will include the Ministry of Rural Development, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), and the Planning Commission. Other reports would be NGO reports on community development. The reports

offer historical context on how the economic and social structures of the community change over time.

- The 2011 Census of India and its new 2021 series will be used to establish a comparative analysis of Banjara's economic development, educational access, and population changes over the last decade.
- Reference government and NGO reports on education initiatives to include enrollment rates and school dropouts statistics pertaining to marginalized populations to set trends in access and educational achievement within the Banjara community.

ANALYSIS OF STUDY

The Government of India conducts a Census every ten years. Thus the Census data would give rather comprehensive data about demography, literacy, and the economic activity of a district. The 2011 Census data and the 2021 prospective data are going to be extremely valuable in ascertaining population distribution, educational levels, and occupational patterns among other things, for the community of Banjara.

- Literacy rates among Scheduled Tribes such as Banjara remain significantly low than national average in the 2011 Census, thus for instance literacy amongst the Scheduled Tribes within the country stood at a total of 59%, this against the total stand national average at 74%. The 2021 census will therefore have vital statistics on updated literacy access with regard to education around those groups and a feature direction of education advancement.
- Census data also shows changes in the occupation status in the tribal communities. Many traditional Banjara were usually livestock herders and traders. However, there have been changes, where today most of the Banjara people take part in agriculture, wage labor, and small business activities. This data would be very useful in trying to outline the extent at which such traditional livelihoods have been replaced or supplemented by new occupations.

National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Reports

NSSO is an important data collection agency directly under the Ministry of Statistics and

Programme Implementation (MoSPI). NSSO does periodic surveys on employment and income and other socio-economic factors. Reports from round 68 of NSSO that took place during 2011-12 and from round 75 of NSSO carried out during 2017-18 are useful while understanding the trends of their livelihood and income levels at which the Banjara survive.

- The NSSO surveys indicate that the income levels of the tribal populations, including Banjara, are lower than other groups. Income has, however, been slowly increasing with diversification in livelihoods, including greater wage labor and small-scale enterprises.
- The share of tribal households engaged in farm labour has risen, although that engaged in livestock rearing has declined, as per NSSO data. This trend reflects the development of rural economies as the latter increasingly move towards the diversified, if less resilient, forms of livelihood.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

This includes the Annual Status of Education Report, which is conducted by Pratham and consists of a large-scale citizen-led survey that looks into education levels and school enrollment in rural India. From ASER reports, one can see that the marginalised communities, like the Banjara, severely lack educational access in the rural areas.

- According to the ASER 2018 report, even though the enrollment rates for primary education have increased, dropout rates in tribal communities, including the Banjara, are high. This is due to the reasons such as lack of money, poor infrastructure, and children's need to support family livelihoods.
- Data from ASER also points out that despite the increase in Banjara children entering schools, very few of them actually complete studies beyond the primary stage. Higher education still remains quite inaccessible, and there is a massive lag in the enrollment rate among Banjara as well as compared to other social groups.

Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC)

The Socio-Economic Caste Census conducted by the Government of India helps in understanding the economic status and living conditions of the marginalized communities, including the Banjara. In fact, the SECC is a critical tool to understand the barriers to upward mobility as it details the access to basic services, social integration, and socio-economic conditions.

- A large percentage of Banjara households live below the poverty line with very poor access to healthcare, sanitation, and education, SECC. There is an indication that although poverty has decreased in some areas, significant gaps exist in the access to economic opportunities and social mobility.
- The SECC also mirrors some social integration challenges since there are still many members in the Banjara community who are discriminated and excluded socially, especially within urban areas where the cultural practices are more evident.

Government Reports on Rural Development

Gradual shift from traditional to modern livelihoods in tribal areas is reported by reports of the Ministry of Rural Development and other agencies. More and more Banjaras are now involved in wage labor, small-scale enterprise, and agriculture because of the integration of the tribal economy into national and international markets. This, as part of a bigger package, is aimed at bringing development to the peripheries by diversifying sources of income for the marginal ones. Livelihood Transition: Government initiatives like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) and programs for tribal welfare have helped improve economic conditions for Banjara communities. These programs have allowed for the creation of alternative livelihoods, although the shift is still in progress.

CONCLUSION

The mixed-method approach that the current study employs - incorporating both quantitative surveys and interviews, as well as focus group discussions and secondary data analysis - allows for an extensive framework for understanding socio-economic mobility within the Banjara community. Integrating publicly available secondary data from government and NGOs combined with primary data

obtained at the community level in Banjara, this paper gives a multifaceted perspective on changes in the livelihoods of people belonging to the Banjara tribe, the degree to which they are reaching towards educational access, and issues facing them. This concludes that despite having reached improvements in educational achievements and movement of the economy, high hurdles like poverty, discrimination on social grounds, and unavailability of proper schooling exist. These challenges limit the complete integration and upward mobility of the community. The evidence collected from these sources—the Census of India, NSSO, ASER, and SECC—strengthens these socio-economic trends and reflects the need for focused intervention to empower the Banjara community in the modern world.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The mixed-methods design provides comprehensive insights, there are several limitations:

- Reaching remote or isolated Banjara communities may be challenging, particularly in regions with limited infrastructure.
- Given the socio-economic disparities, some respondents may be reluctant to disclose personal or sensitive information regarding their income, educational status, or social experiences.

Although the study aims to capture a diverse sample, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all Banjara communities across India due to regional variations

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