



Traditional Occupation In A Global Setting: Problems And Prospects Of Kumbara Community In Karnataka

Kumara H S¹ and
Prof (Dr.) M H Krishnappa²

ABSTRACT

With the advent of modernization, traditional occupations worldwide have undergone radical transformation—structurally and functionally. In the socially hierarchized society in India, transformation has ruined the livelihoods of communities professing occupations whose products lost their market value after industrialization and urbanization. Globalization in the 1990s has caused further harm to many such economic activities and the communities professing them, which are already vulnerable and marginalized at the lower rungs of the stratified rural social structure.

Based on current sociological research work (for a PhD degree), this paper has attempted to shed light upon the problems encountered by the Potter (Kumbara) community in Karnataka. Changes brought in by industrial products (Plastic, Aluminum and Steel) leading to changes in consumer choices on the one hand and depletion of natural resources causing a shortage of needed raw materials in the villages, on the other, have together resulted in devastating effects leading to either discontinuation (or very low-key production) of the only skilled profession that the Kumbaras knew of, as their traditional/caste ascribed occupation - Pottery. The study has shown that poverty and vulnerability have doubled as a result of a fall in demand for their products, and alternative employment opportunities are bleak, considering their low literacy and skill levels. The paper has tried to capture their perceptions and suggestions for improvement, such as a higher quota of reservations for accessing government jobs and other benefits.

¹Research Scholar, Department of Studies and Research in Sociology, Karnataka State Open University, Muktagangotri, Mysuru 570006 & Assistant Professor in Sociology, Government First Grade College, Koppa, Mandya District, Karnataka

²Prof & Head (Rtd.), Department of Research and Studies in Sociology, Karnataka State Open University, Muktagangotri, Mysuru 570006

Key Words: Caste Occupation, Jajmani System, Globalization, Caste-Based Organizations

1. Historical Background and Change

Pottery, or making pots and several other products for household and various occupation-related uses, is one of the important economic activities in rural India. Traditionally, like many other village-level occupations, the potters were also part of the Jajmani System (locally called the "Hadade" system) (Srinivas, 1980). Their work involved extraordinary artfulness and skill; these potters (known as the Kumbaras in Karnataka) supplied varieties of mud products in various forms, shapes, and sizes to the entire village community in their habitation, as well as to patrons from nearby towns and cities. Their services were compensated through barter practice under the Jajmani system, annually during the harvest season, when the various service castes of the village – such as the potter, oilman, barber, washer man, shepherd, cobbler, blacksmith and the like – were a pre-decided quantity of grains. How much each caste received depended upon its status and position/rank in the local social hierarchy and was not based on the economic value of the product (ibid). In the years after cash transactions replaced the barter system, the potters sold their products chiefly near their homes to regular patrons, also in the weekly or bi-monthly village fairs and shandies. The skill of pottery being endogamous and hereditarily transferred to the next generation through self-learning by observation and trial continued in their families for generations. They also believe that their profession is divinely ordained as they supply pots, lamps, and other items needed for temple worship and auspicious occasions in the houses of almost all castes, such as marriage, festivals, and other celebrations. Besides, they also prepare idols of gods and goddesses for homes (Gowri Ganesha festival idols), temples or public worship places, lamps for Deepavali and Pots for Sankranti. Despite such high socio-ritual status that the potter community believes to be held in the social structure of rural societies, it needs to be more economically, educationally, and therefore socio-politically in a comfortable position. As a significant outcome of long-drawn unequal and socially stratification-based economic practices over the castes below, the upper and dominant castes have left the middle and lower castes of the Hindu hierarchy in eternal poverty and backwardness. The Kumbaras are no exception to this.

Analysis of secondary sources of information drawn from earlier studies on caste and social change in India has informed that the Kumbaras suffer from greater poverty. Other government reports of the successive Backward Classes 'Commissions and other documents relate backwardness like many other castes, which are "village functionaries" in the traditional social structure of Karnataka. This 'more backwardness' among the Kumbaras of Karnataka has arisen from a greater extent of impact from the twin processes of modernization in the decades immediately following independence (the 1950s to 1990s) and globalization and its sister processes (of privatization and liberalization) in the post-1990s running into the New Millennium.

The broader study carried out a primary survey upon which this paper bases its arguments, data, and analysis. The study has brought out significant issues about the grassroots realities of the status and problems of the Kumbaras as a lower caste and socio-economically, educationally, and politically backward group in the state of Karnataka.

2. Objectives of the Research Paper

This research paper has the following objectives:

1. To look into the socio-economic and organizational profile of the potter community in Karnataka;
2. To identify the present-day problems and challenges the potter community in Karnataka is facing along with their causes;
3. To delineate the governmental and community-based interventions and their impact to mitigate the problems; and
4. To suggest policy recommendations towards the development of the Potters in Karnataka

3. Methodology, Sampling and Database

The paper is based on recent research carried out for my doctoral thesis. The district of Mysuru formed the universe of this study. Data was collected using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Four taluks from the district (of Mysuru) were selected based on secondary data. These are Krishnarajanagara (abbreviated as K R Nagara), Nanjanagudu, Mysuru and Thiramakudalu Narasipura (abbreviated as T Narasipura) taluks.

The secondary data on the demography of these taluks and the pilot survey/visit to them revealed the presence of substantial pottery-practicing Kumbara households in all of them. Using a stratified random sampling method, 50 Kumbara households from each taluk were selected to form the study's sample, totaling 200 Kumbara households from the four taluks of the Mysuru district.

A detailed and structured interview guide was prepared to be canvassed among the heads of these 200 Kumbara households in their houses in select villages of the four taluks of Mysuru district. Additional information was collected from various representatives of village-level caste-based organizations, Gram Panchayats, Anganwadi Centers, Stree Shakti Groups, village Elders and local officials like the PDO.

The information thus collected was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software, and statistical tables were derived. This paper has used these tables at appropriate junctures to support its arguments and analyses.

4. A Brief Socio-Economic and Organizational Profile

This section of the paper discusses the current economic conditions of the potter community in the study area. Primary data collected from the selected respondents discusses their family size, educational level, age at which they started initiation into pottery as a caste occupation, earnings, and related issues.

4.1 Demographic Details

The researcher interviewed 25 female respondents from the Kumbara households (hereafter HHs) (out of the total sample of 200), while male members were contacted in the remaining 175 HHs. The statistics form essential information from the gender component of the respondents.

Table 1: Sex Composition of the Head of the HH

Taluk	Males		Females		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
K R Nagara	45	90	5	10	50	100
Mysuru	48	96	2	4	50	100
Nanjanagudu	40	80	10	20	50	100
T. Narasipura	42	84	8	16	50	100
Total	175	87.5	25	12.5	50	100

Source: Primary Data

Some HHs offered their younger members the opportunity to answer questions about the mother being a widow. Hence, the age group begins with 20 years, as seen in the following table. However, adults (60+ years) were predominant in our sample (41.5%).

Table 2: Age Composition of the Respondent

Taluks	21 – 40 Years		41 -50 Years		51 – 60 Years		61 and More Years		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
K R Nagara	5	10%	10	20%	10	20%	25	50%	50	100%
Mysuru	16	32%	13	26%	11	22%	10	20%	50	100%
Nanjanaguru	2	4%	13	26%	8	16%	27	54%	50	100%
T.Narasipura	10	20%	10	20%	9	18%	21	42%	50	100%
Total	33	16.5%	46	23.0%	38	19%	83	41.5%	200	100%

Source: Primary Data

Statistics show that the senior members professed pottery as a caste occupation today due to the lack of demand that it used to be during the olden days. It was observed that the adult and younger members have:

- Combined pottery with agricultural and casual labour and
- Migrated to towns and cities professing alternative income-earning activities, mainly construction labour

Moreover, owing to patriarchal standards, where the oldest male members still command authority over HH matters, the father of grown-up sons responded to our questions. The statistics also reflect upon the study's findings on the type of family, joint or Extended (23% and 19%, respectively). However, even in villages, the share of small/divided/nuclear families is 16.5% of our sample, indicating that families prefer to partition their traditional homes as and when sons are married. The Government's housing schemes are also an incentive to do so.

4.2 Housing and Education

The type of housing and availability of amenities form critical components of any village community's socio-economic condition. Thatched huts and houses with zinc sheets for the roof indicate a family's acute poverty status. The dwelling reflecting poverty is also partially true of our respondents. A little more than 20 per cent of potters live in these 'sheet' houses; the majority (46%) dwell in 'Mangalore-tiled' houses. Another 28 per cent reside in RCC houses. While none was found living in a thatched hut. A low percentage (5.5%) were found to reside in houses with country tiles – which also does not indicate the absence of poverty. The Mangalore-Tiled houses were ancestral and built by the respondent's grandfather and father. **"Our present earnings are not enough even to get the house white-washed"**, lamented Rangappa, a potter from K R Nagara's village, Arjunahalli.

All houses are electrified but lack private water connections (only 4.5% have taps). A public bore well is the source of drinking and HH water supply. However, it is gladdening to learn that 97 per cent of respondent HHs have toilet facilities in their houses, while the remaining use community toilets. There is no open defecation.

The above narration of our findings paints a picture of the relatively comfortable residential status of Kumbaras in the study area. However, the same improved status must be visible in the respondents' literacy and educational levels. Despite adult literacy campaigns and Saaksharata Andolans, the percentage of illiteracy among the heads of our sampled HHs is 59.5 per cent. Mysuru taluk (perhaps being close to the City) has the lowest number of illiterate heads of HHs (46%), as compared to the number in T Narasipur taluk (70%), K R Nagara (56%) and Nanjanagudu taluks (66%). Among those who are literate, their educational attainment is limited to SSLC and PUC (16%). Those with middle school and primary school education are high (32.1 % and 44.4% respectively). Parents of 35 per cent of these children have aspired to provide a "college education" to their children, while 8.5 per cent have also aspired to go for post-graduate studies.

Although more than 70 per cent of the respondents have "opted" to send their children to government schools, perceiving that "it is perfect" and "gives good samskara to girls especially," their poverty, on the one hand. Lack of private schools in their villages, on the other, are the chief reasons for doing so. Eighty-four per cent have admitted facing financial constraints for children's education. Mysuru taluk is better in this regard than the other three taluk.

Table 3: Financial Constraints for Children's Education

Financial Constraints for Children's Education	Taluks								Taluks	
	K R NagarÄa		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipur		Number	%
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%		
Yes	6	12.0	10	20.0	9	18.0	7	14.0	32	16.0
No	44	88.0	40	80.0	41	82.0	43	86.0	168	84.0
Total	50	100.0	50	100.0	50	100.0	50	100.0	200	100.0

Source: Field Data

Table 3: Educational Aspirations

Educational Level	Taluks								Total	
	K R NagarÀa		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipur			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Primary	12	54.5	9	33.3	6	35.3	9	60.0	36	44.4
Middle School	5	22.7	12	44.4	4	23.5	5	33.3	26	32.1
High School/PUC	4	18.2	4	14.8	4	23.5	1	6.7	13	16.0
Degree	1	4.5	0	0.0	2	11.8	0	0.0	3	3.7
Post Graduate Degree	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Technical Education	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	5.9	0	0.0	1	1.2
Professional Education	0	0.0	2	7.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	2.5
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	22	100.0	27	100.0	17	100.0	15	100.0	81	100.0

Source: Field Data

About 54 per cent believed that private schools help in building the capacity of children To "achieve something as alternative livelihood in the New Millennium" (Refer to Table 3).

4.3 Economic Conditions

The analysis of the study's findings has revealed a negative picture of the economic life of respondent Kumbaras. 61.5 per cent of them earn a meagre annual income of Rs. one lakh annually. They are living under poor conditions. The annual average expenditure of 67 per cent of the respondents is also Rs—one lakh. There is a slight difference in the income range among the studied taluks: those earning more than two lakhs are at a slightly higher proportion in K R Nagara taluk (22%) than in the other taluks. Likewise, the lowest (3%) proportion was found in Mysuru taluk, where we found a maximum number of Kumbara HHs earning only one lakh p.a from all sources (70%).

Barring owning a television (96%), chairs (98.5%), cot (97%), pressure cooker (98%), Mixer (97%), gas stove (91%), Fan (92%) and mobile phone (74%) (which are common possessions even among people with low incomes because of lifestyle changes), the respondent HHs have not been owning any other assets. Owning gold ornaments and silver articles was confined to about 19 per cent and 27.5 per cent, respectively.

Regarding vehicles, motorcycles are the most commonly and primarily owned vehicle (by 68% of HHs in the study area), followed by bicycle owners (33.5%). We have mentioned migrants from families working in urban areas, of whom 2.5% are cab and auto rickshaw drivers, respectively, owning those vehicles.

Owing agricultural land is the significant and first-rated symbol of economic prosperity in rural life. In this context, 61 per cent of our respondents own agricultural land, among whom there are many more from Mysuru taluk (40 out of 50 respondents) than in other places. T Narasipura Taluk's Kumbara respondents comprise the

majority (29 out of 50) of landless respondents. Despite owning land, 72.5 per cent have no irrigation facility for their lands. For those with some form of irrigation, the limit is up to one acre of irrigated land, which is only for the majority (21.5%). For almost all the land-owning Kumbara HHs in our study area, ownership of agricultural land is the result of ancestral property (98.5%). The staple crops are Ragi and Paddy everywhere, which help sustain the hunger of family members, and nothing goes to the market for sale. Out of 122 HHs owning land, a few grow commercial crops like cotton (16.1%), areca nut and coconut (8.2%), sugarcane (2.5%) and vegetables (6.6%). Only six farmers have taken land on a lease basis, with none from Nanjangudu taluk. Tenancy cultivation is also done on small acreage. A maximum of 1-2 acres of agricultural land is leased from the village's upper castes and on high share-cropping terms. Thus, the HH leased land has not been making any profit. It is a balancing economic activity to substitute for some food grains for HH consumption.

5. Problems and Challenges: A Critical Analysis

As a rural economic activity, pottery once enjoyed the support of all villagers and experienced demand for its products without alternatives. It gradually lost importance with increasing industrialization and factory-made goods and products attracting people from rural and urban areas (Kumudha & Rizwana, 2013). Currently, the potters (Kumbaras in Karnataka) suffer from socio-economic backwardness and live on the fringe of the changing rural economy. This segmentation of the Kumbaras in rural society is also intensified by the treatment of the Government through its policies of encouraging global products that are imported. Thus, pottery faces various challenges in maintaining its sustainable living under the current economic scenario.

The chief challenges that the Kumbaras are encountering today can be described as follows:

(a) Low Productivity

The foremost problem or challenge the Kumbaras encounter is a need for more or low/poor demand for their earthen products. The lack of demand for traditional products began in the 1960s when the use of aluminium, steel and plastic conquered the consumer market. People preferred them to delicate and fragile earthen products for HH use, agriculture, and other sectors. With globalization in the 1990s, this trend for more fashionable products manufactured by branded companies gained further momentum. The casual nature of the traditional pottery system in rural areas and the potter community's low literacy and economic backwardness further lowered their economic gains. As an unorganized production system, it suffers from several handicaps: modern know-how, expertise, space for work (work sheds), storage facilities for finished products, transportation and a good marketing network and facilities.

(b) Informal Production Process and Social Organization of Production

Undertaken as a traditional caste occupation and using family labour, pottery in the rural social structure occupied the place of one of the contributions of "village functionaries" to the overall economic system in the rural areas. However, with the rural areas brought under both directed and non-directed changes over the past seven decades, most of these "village functionaries" have become obsolete in their utility. The village's social and economic organization has undergone several transformations (Srinivas. Adopting an urban way of life and using an urban

lifestyle, products and gadgets became the order of the day. Most of the village's economic functions suffered under the wave of modernization, industrialization, and, later, globalization.

(c) Structural Inequality

Sociologists have argued that structural inequality is an essential factor in the economic, educational, and political stagnation of the lower and middle castes of the Hindu social hierarchy. In other words, the issue is the need to own immovable assets like agricultural land. Caste-based hierarchization has kept several low and middle castes out of stable economic living and pushed them to indebtedness and bonded labour to the upper and dominant castes.

(d) Lack of Education

Low education (as is evident from the table above where nearly 50 per cent of the adults/elders are illiterate) at least in the past (till last two decades) was caused by the need for the whole family as a unit to take part in pottery making as its caste and family occupation and the “only” means of livelihood. Assistance from family women and children, besides adult male members, was typical; children went to school when free from assisting their father, elder brother and grandfather in pottery making. The belief was that formal education did not help provide a decent livelihood at the earliest. Their caste occupation (pottery) was not based on school-based learning or education. The son/s learned the skill of mixing the mud and shaping the product to the required design and size, as well as the skill of burning the products. The process was their schooling/education and life skills. Innovation and updating old methods and designs were not frequent and universal. Cattle grazing and agricultural wage work were the alternate income-earning activities even by children because pottery was a seasonal occupation regarding the product demand.

(e) Socially Controlled Organization of Production

Availability of raw materials for pottery was found to be locally available resources. They were drawn from the village's common property resources, like the ponds, tanks, and canals for water and mud; the forest, open fields, and grazing lands were harnessed for firewood. On the one hand, these are (even to this day) under the control of the local dominant castes who have been the political leaders and heads of local administration for ages. Their approval is needed so the potters can obtain the necessary raw materials. That is why 27.6 per cent of our respondents purchased the soil/mud for pottery and firewood.

Table4: Source of Mud for Pottery

Source of Mud	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Village Tank	13	68.4	22	78.6	11	78.6	31	83.8	77	78.6
River	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Own land	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Government Land	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Purchase Mud	6	31.6	5	17.9	3	21.4	13	35.1	27	27.6
Other Sources	0	0.0	1	3.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.0
Total	19	100	28	100	14	100	37	100	98	100

Source: Field Data

Secondly, they were scarce and depleted even if they needed or were permitted to use the village's common lands and water points to obtain their required raw materials. Due to environmental degradation and encroachment by locally influential segments for profit, these natural resources are in a highly degraded state. Who does not know of the thriving sand mafia or market for stones for quarries and hijacking water from public sources (like tanks, canals, and rivers) to irrigate private lands? These natural sources and their vicinities are misused (like the village tank, left to form silt, neglected and in very unhealthy condition with the village folks sitting there for defecation, gambling and alcoholism, using them as dump yards for garbage and solid waste), encroached by the dominant people who have used them for self-use. Thus, insufficient inputs force the potters to purchase the needed raw materials from the market, paying or bearing huge costs. Because of the lack of demand for pottery products, they are forced to purchase raw materials by raising loans as they need more capital to invest in their business. The potter respondents also felt that the quality of mud available in the usual places in the village is of terrible quality to be used for their divine occupation. They prefer to purchase the same from reliable traders and want to maintain the quality of mud or firewood.

Table 5: Source of Firewood

Source of Firewood	Taluku								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Forest nearby	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	7.1	4	10.8	5	5.1
Government land	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Village CPR	0	0.0	1	3.6	0	0.0	7	18.9	8	8.2
Own land	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Others' Land	4	21.1	6	21.4	3	21.4	5	13.5	18	18.4
Land Owner/Master	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Purchased from market/Sante	15	78.9	25	89.3	11	78.6	27	73.0	78	79.6
Other Sources	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	19	100	28	100	14	100	37	100	98	100

Note: *Multiple Answer (Yes only Considered), so the Total Percentage does not need to be added by 100.

Source: Field Data

(f) Lack of Capital Investment

Due to the lack of external financing support from the Government or cooperatives, they need more working capital and use credit facilities and 'advance' payments. Banks place several restrictions, such as mortgages and high interest rates. Therefore, they refrain from using such sources and continue patronizing private moneylenders, who pay high interest rates. Their indebtedness is high because of these reasons.

Another handicap the potters face is space to prepare the pottery products and later store the finished products. They were used to carrying out their profession near their houses. However, due to housing schemes, the Government has acquired the village's open spaces to convert them into sites to offer to the beneficiaries.

(g) Information Asymmetry

Poor educational standards have forced the traditional potters in the study area to remain cut off from learning about potential new markets for their products. Their comprehension level of the marketing of pottery items and the new designs and types that urban buyers require today as fancy goods are shallow.

(h) Supremacy and Monopoly of Middlemen

Those who produce items such as the oven used by **Bhabha** owners have yet to learn to contact the buyers. They depend upon the agents who squeeze off a significant portion of the price of such earthen commodities. Online marketing skills are unknown to them. They are also unable to use social media to promote their products. **There is a vacuum created between them and the world outside about which the rural potters have no idea.** Intermediaries purchase pottery from the village's traditional potters (items like a dhaba oven, oil lamps for Deepavali, and Idols of Gowri and Ganesha). Later, they sold them for double the purchase price, making a considerable profit. The potters in our study are aware of this but refrain from going to Malls and other places to market their products for fear of being cheated or looted.

Thus, depending upon intermediaries or agents is critical for selling their products today. It is essential because otherwise, the potters are not empowered or knowledgeable enough to learn about potential markets and how to reach them. However, the intermediaries often cheat and abuse the potters by paying a small amount, which is nowhere near the price at which pottery commodities are sold later. Some respondents even felt the Hadade system in the olden days was better (26.5% of respondents).

Presently, 63.3 per cent of the potters from the study area are marketing their pottery products in 1-9 (one to about nine) villages. It does not mean they have to sell them in these villages physically; 96.9 per cent of potters get their customers (old customers for a long time) to their homes and regularly purchase them. About 30 per cent take the products to the nearby market. 37.8 per cent take/collect work orders and supply the products to customers' homes. Those who put the pots and other products into pushcarts and sell them as road hawkers are about 8.2 per cent. About 3 per cent of potters sell pottery items to the Malls in the City. Astonishingly, none goes to the village shandy (santhe/village fair), and no santhe is held these days. Goods, vehicles, and tractors are the more sought-after modes of transportation for pottery products (66.3% and 15.3%, respectively). Regarding the frequency of marketing their products, they gave an intelligent reply: "Sell when there is demand (bike bandage)".

(i) **Absence of Enthusiasm about Pottery among the Youth**

The younger generation among the potters is disinterested in pursuing their parental and caste occupations. They are found to pursue alternative employment either locally by working as agricultural and casual labourers or migrating to cities and towns to build construction sites. They witness their parents' struggle to market/sell the finished products, to fetch raw materials and lack of demand for traditional earthen pots. Secondly, the elementary educational system does not include any knowledge about the significance of handicrafts. With the invention of numerous branded items such as kitchenware, plastic buckets, and big bowls for agricultural and construction purposes, they are losing the market for their goods. About 68.5 percent of parents have expressed that they do not like their children to continue in the same (pottery) profession.

What alternative employment do they prefer for their children? Government employment is the preferred job for 52.6 percent of Kumbara respondent fathers; self-employment and agriculture were preferred by 33.6 percent and 21.9 percent, respectively.

The potters whom we interviewed in the study area have recommended or sought that the Government should give due importance towards:

- ✓ upgrading the pottery industry by financing the potters with loans;
- ✓ subsidies on raw materials;
- ✓ build work sheds;
- ✓ provide identity cards for insurance and social security benefits;
- ✓ They should also be granted agricultural land so that they can also be dependent on income from farming to compensate for poor sales of pottery items and
- ✓ E-commerce activities need to be promoted.

6. Role of Caste-Based Organizations, Local Organizations, and the Government

Here, we should emphasize the role of external interventions and arrangements for renewing the livelihoods of the potter community in Karnataka. It was learnt from our respondents that they have not availed of wage work under the Government's flagship programme, MGNREGA³ which promises, in theory, to arrest the distress migration of people with low incomes from rural homes towards urban areas, seeking wage employment. The programme is under the exclusive control of the local Gram Panchayat, beginning with identifying work, workers, and allotment of work and wages. One hundred days of gainful employment, which, too, in their villages, involves any developmental work for their village, like watershed development, social forestry, and public utility-oriented building construction, is the stated objective of MGNREGA. However, the respondents have denied either themselves or their adult HH members ever being beneficiaries under this wage employment scheme. Statistics reflect that adult male migration has occurred in about 35 per cent of our sampled HHs. Remittances are regularly sent by these migrants, who are the sons, brothers, or brothers-in-law of the male head of the HH. They have also kept regular contact with the parental home in the village.

Our data shows that 41 percent of the respondents expressed optimism about the prevalence of a caste association in their village or the attached town/City. Twenty-three percent have also joined one. By looking at the names of these caste-based organizations, it is better to call them professional associations. We discovered that there are 46 such associations in the four taluks.

Table 6: Benefits Expected from the Government through their Caste/Professional Association

Assistance	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Towards Children's Education	1	100.0	3	100.0	2	66.7	6	100.0	12	92.3
Political Assistance/Help	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	33.3	0	0.0	1	7.7
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	1	100.0	3	100.0	3	100.0	6	100.0	13	100.0

Source: Field Data

Regarding the benefit/s of being in the caste-based Sangha, according to the respondents, it is limited to only one: fighting/working to get reservation benefits for the school-going children of Kumbaras in the study area. 90.3 per cent of the 13 respondents stated that they had received assistance from their Sangha regarding reservation benefits. This is in the form of assistance in obtaining reservation benefits for children's education. While they lamented that the community has to share the benefits along with a total of 102 castes falling under the 2A category of the OBC group, at the same time, they have categorically refused to accept being classified

³Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme, 2006 GoI

as a Scheduled Caste (from the present 2A category). They have opined that the present classification (as 2A) is good enough but demanded a more significant share in the quota (as they share the benefits under 2A with several economically well-off castes like Kuruba, Ediga and Devanga).

7. Conclusions & Policy Suggestions

The above analysis has made it clear that the Kumbara community in Karnataka is undergoing much economic deterioration. As a socially vulnerable caste, it has also not received the support it needs from the Government. Modernization and globalization have changed the market they traditionally commanded, even in the caste-ridden rural social structure. They are unable to cope with the changes due to many other problems. Among them is the non-availability of precious raw materials for making pottery items, viz., mud/soil. The second equally important resource is firewood to burn the pottery items to make them sturdy. Environmental degradation has affected the rural areas. The tanks have dried up, and the soil on their bund is very unclean due to human waste (open defecation), garbage disposal around the tank, and other issues. As a result, the Kumbaras in our study area have reported having to pay for their raw materials, which they used earlier to obtain for free in the same village. **Thus, on the one hand, there is a dearth of capital that can be invested in their profession – pottery- and on the other; there is a profound fall in the demand for their products.**

In this way, the potters are caught in the vicious wheel of extreme poverty and helplessness. As discussed already, their children are not highly educated enough to qualify for jobs in either the Government or private sectors. Ownership or self-employment also demands a lot of capital investment. The caste-based associations of Kumbaras, local self-government – Grama, Taluk and Zilla Panchayats and Nagara Palikas – voluntary organizations have not been of any use. In this situation, more and more young Kumbara youth are leaving native villages and working in hazardous daily wage sectors such as building construction, other forms of casual labour, petty trade (road hawkers) **and others. Neither consistent income nor social security exists for themselves and their dependent family in the city and native village.**

Suggestions

Under the circumstances outlined above, the following suggestions are made⁴:

- (1) The Government of India should give importance to pottery as one of the others in the handicrafts sector. A Pottery Development Corporation should be established in every state with branches in districts and below level. The local self-governing institutions (Panchayats) should be entrusted with the responsibility of:
 - Making timely provision of raw materials like soil/mud and firewood to the local potters at subsidized prices;
 - Providing gainful employment to Potter HHs under MGNREGA and
 - Potter HHs should be identified as beneficiaries under housing and other economic programmes
- (2) The Corporate Sector must provide E-Commerce type of benefits to the Kumbaras under their Corporate Social Responsibilities;

⁴Many of these suggestions evolved during our discussions with the cross-section of respondents in the study area.

- (3) The Government should provide credit to Kumbaras for purposes of capital investment;
- (4) It should set up work sheds to enable community-based collective production and distribution/marketing;
- (5) Customer needs and requirements must be the focus (emphasis) of the training programmes;
- (6) Exposure visits to be organized by the Government of Karnataka for the members of the Kumbara caste to promote learning new designs and types of pottery products on the line of potters from Gujarat and Rajasthan and
- (7) Export channels should be made available to the Kumbara youth. Only this will create a "Paradigm Shift" for the Kumbaras in recognizing new opportunities and business trends and responding to potential shifts in consumer demand for pottery products in the New Millennium.

References

1. Agarwal, B. (1989). Rural Women, Poverty and Natural Resources: Sustenance, Sustainability and Struggle for Change. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(43):46–65.
2. Beteille, A. (1996). Varna and Jati. *Sociological Bulletin*, 45(1):15–27.
3. Jodhka, S S (2012). *Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
4. Kolenda, P. (1985). *Caste in Contemporary India: Beyond Organic Solidarity*. Prospect Heights, Waveland.
5. Kumudha, A and M Rizwana (2013). Problems Faced by Handloom Industry – A Study with Handloom Weavers' Cooperative Societies in Erode District, *International Journal of Management and Development Studies* Vol. 2 No. 3.
6. Sharma, K L (2013). Caste: Continuity and Change. In Singh, Y., editor, *Emerging Concepts Structure and Change*, pages 197–262. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
7. Srinivas, M N (1980). *The Remembered Village*. University of California Press, Berkeley
8. ----- (1995). *Social Change in Modern India*. Orient Black Swan.
9. -----" ----- (2000). *Caste: It is Twentieth Century Avatar*. Penguin Books
10. Government of Karnataka (1976). *Report of the Karnataka Backward Classes Commission (Havanur Commission), Main Report*.