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## Divine Origin And Vulnerable Livelihoods: The Case Of Kumbara Community

(A Study in Karnataka)

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper concerns how the institution of Caste directs and decides the socio-economic and ritualistic life of its members. A notable trait of the caste system is the imprint it makes not only on the economic and social lives of the people belonging to different castes but also on their psyche. For every Caste, be they upper or middle or the low and former untouchable castes, the belief that "their caste is such that they have to be guided by its norms" used to be almost common to all castes.

There are castes which are considered ritually "divine", but by earnings/economic status and asset ownership, they turn out to be "vulnerable, poor and marginalised". The winds of modernisation and globalisation have deepened the latter (economic conditions), and the former (ritual value) has been commercialised. This paradoxical situation, as applicable to the Potter caste, is discussed in this paper, using empirical data elicited for a broader study on the potter community of Karnataka (locally known as the Kumbaras) in perspective. The paper draws heavily from ethnographic and qualitative information based on the respondents' perceptions and opinions about their Caste and its precarious economic condition in the New Millennium.

**Key Words:** Kumbara, Social Hierarchy and Stratification, Jajmani, Divinity, Change and Vulnerability

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## 1. The Setting

Indian social stratification rests on the pillars of Caste and class. Characterising it, both determine the social status and economic conditions of people from various castes and sub-castes. The caste system is characterised by endogamy, which places restrictions and sets norms in choosing one's spouse concerning inter-dining (food) and accepting/giving water. Another significant aspect of endogamy is in the case of occupations professed by various castes and sub-castes. The concepts of "purity" and "pollution" operate at all levels in people's lives, placing conditions in choosing their occupations, among other sectors of life. Each occupational group occupies a particular stratum in the social hierarchy endowed with statuses and roles.

Class is also akin to Caste (Srinivas (1980; Beteille, 1996). Economic activities of every Caste in the traditional Society were ascribed; no upward mobility was possible because of the strict enforcement of the caste-based rules/norms.

Thus, Caste and class—both—determine people's ways of life. Caste determines not only an individual's occupation but the person's whole life in terms of customs, traditions, marriage, food, dress, and channels of social interaction.

## 2. Theme & Objectives of the Paper

The present paper concerns how the institution of Caste directs and decides its members' socio-economic and ritualistic lives. On the one hand, it is believed to be divine in its origin and how it dictates the lives of its members. On the other hand, it is also a highly complex phenomenon that is difficult to define and understand from a single theoretical orientation. However, its impact on every Caste is nothing but hierarchical.

A notable trait of the caste system is the imprint it makes not only on the economic and social lives of the people belonging to different castes but also on their psyche. For every Caste, be they upper or middle or the low and former untouchable castes, the belief that "their caste is such that they have to be guided by its norms" is almost expected of all castes. It is this predicament where by Caste someone is considered as "divine" and by earnings "vulnerable, poor and marginalised" is the paradox that this paper attempts to discuss keeping the potter community of Karnataka (locally known as the Kumbaras) in perspective.

## 3. The paper has the following objectives:

1. To understand the nature of self-identification about their Caste by the Kumbaras in the study area;
2. To examine the link, if any, between their self-identity and socio-economic conditions;
3. To analyse the predicament faced by the Kumbaras in their social mobility aspirations and
4. To suggest a few measures for their improvement

#### 4. Data Source and Methodology

The paper draws data from a recent study on the Kumbaras in Karnataka (Mysuru district) by the author for his Ph.D. Mysuru district was selected for the broader study (for PhD) considering (a) the large number of Kumbaras in its taluks as well as (b) the cultural and historical importance of the district as the centre of the Princely Mysore State/Kingdom till the middle of the last century. Four taluks were selected using secondary sources of information from the district. These four selected taluks are K R Nagara, Nanjanagudu, Mysuru and Thirumakudalu (shortened as T) Narasipura. From each taluk, 50 Kumbara households (HHs hereafter) were selected on a random sampling basis. Thus, the total number of respondents was 200 from the four taluks @ 50 respondents. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to elicit the required data. Informal discussions with the Kumbara family members, including women, were conducted using the qualitative method. A structured interview schedule was prepared, field-tested, and used to collect detailed information on the economic, demographic, socio-cultural, and political associations to draw the respondents' profiles. The data was analysed using the SPSS package and created statistical tables.

#### 5. Conceptual Framework of the Paper

The study is within the conceptual framework of ethnic identity assertion manifested through complex caste-based practices. Caste assertion is based on claiming divine origin by the Kumbaras from the lineage of the "creator" Brahma in Hindu Religion and Mythology, focusing on their distinct cultural traits like making God's idols, unique pots and lamps for worship. It is argued by scholars (Sokolovsky & Tishkov, 2003) that 'ethnicity' is a relatively recent phenomenon of the 1970s when it gained significance in anthropological studies documenting the changes in Indian Society in the post-colonial decades. Several theories about ethnicity are linked to social and political change, identity formation, conflict and nation-building (ibid).

There are two approaches to understanding ethnicity and ethnic identity. One is the constructivist approach, which rests upon the caste-based ascription, where individuals are assigned statuses (Yang, 2004). It argues that social identity is a socially constructed phenomenon and is subject to changing socio-economic dynamics.

The other approach is taken by instrumentalists, who view ethnicity as a tool for strategic political gains (Glazer & Moynihan, 1996). Ethnic identity can be invested in political mobilisation to advance group interests.

The instrumentalists, on the other hand, view ethnicity as an instrument or strategic tool used for political gains. They consider it a source of political mobilisation for a community's advancement. According to Brass, the elites play a crucial role in constructing such an identity for themselves and seek their mobility and development, sometimes distorting reality. He argues that under ethnic mobilisation, the people depend upon their ethnic character, which returns them power and authority to work towards socio-economic and political mobilisation. Thus, Rational Choice Theory applies to understanding ethnicity and social mobility.

### ***Definition of Concept of Caste***

Caste is the omnipresent social institution characterising Indian Society and has been a subject of much attention and debate by Sociologists and other Social Scientists. Jodhka (2012 page 2) has argued that it is a Spanish and Portuguese word '*casta*' meaning race. He also says the term was first used in the Indian context by the Portuguese seafarers who arrived in India in the fifteenth century. Beteille (1996, page 46) has stated that Caste is characterised by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific lifestyle associated with a distinct ritual status in the social hierarchy, bound by the concepts of purity and pollution. Caste is also viewed as a by-product of colonialism by Dirks (2003). According to him, the beliefs, customs, practices and notions result from colonialism. The classical sociologist Max Weber differentiated the Indian caste system from the guilds in the West. He called it an extreme form of 'status groups', which were like closed ethnic communities with a hierarchical order. We have Louis Dumont's seminal work.<sup>3</sup> (1980), based on structuralist theory, explains how the ancient caste system is still all-encompassing in Indian Society. He built his explanation by drawing from Levi Strauss on Structuralism and Weber's theory.

According to Dumont, Caste is a system of ideas and values rooted in the Hindu religion; hence, Caste needs to be identified as an ideology (ibid p 36). Several other later studies, such as those by Joan P Mencher (1974), Pauline Kolenda (1985), Robert Deliège (1999), Declan Quigley (1993), and Sukhdeo Thorat and Katherine S Neuman (2010), highlighted the unequal distribution of economic resources and power as defining social hierarchy and stratification, and purity and pollution. Wisner shed light upon the patron-client system between castes, known as the Jajmani system, and called it a ritual system that led to socio-economic inequalities in the village. His work revealed the existence of 'interdependence' between various castes in the village, but all under the umbrella of 'reciprocity'. He observed that such reciprocity and exchange of services united the hierarchical village community (Wisner, 1969, p. 10).

However, underneath the system, there was an extreme level of exploitation, inclined towards the upper castes and benefiting them as against the exploited and socially marginalised groups. According to Jodhka (2012), it institutionalised the unequal distribution of political and economic resources.

### **6. Self-Identity among the Kumbaras**

The study attempts to look into the Kumbara ethnic identity in light of the changing nature of rural Society and how it has impinged upon them. In the process, it attempts to explore how castes are undergoing changes that lead to changes in inter-caste relations. The changing nature of Caste has been the subject of much debate and review in sociology and social sciences, where it is shown as both resilient and dynamic to external social, economic, cultural, and political changes. As far as Kumbara women are concerned, it is hypothesised that Caste continues to place restrictions and defines their idea of self through patriarchal norms.

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<sup>3</sup>Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications

## 6.1 Uniqueness of Kumbara Caste

The Kumbaras in the study area consider their Caste unique compared to other castes. Calling themselves one of the 18 castes documented by noted traveller Francis Buchanan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a Right-Hand caste, the Kumbaras of Mysuru district claim superiority and exhibit pride in their divine origin.

**Table 1: Uniqueness of Kumbara Caste**

Opinion	Taluku								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	47	94.0	33	66.0	34	68.0	40	80.0	154	77.0
No	3	6.0	17	34.0	16	32.0	10	20.0	46	23.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

They claim to be the sons of or from the lineage of Prajapati Daksha, the son of Brahma, the creator according to Hindu mythology. The majority (29.9%) believe their (Kumbara) caste has been making pottery products for centuries. They traced their profession to times before the great Hindu Epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. They quoted an instance from the latter, Mahabharata, that the Pandavas, who were in exile for one year, spent some of their secret stay in the house of a potter from the kingdom of Drupad, father of Draupadi, who was to become their wife later. Another instance they quoted to prove their divine status was that the great devotee of Shri Panduranga Vittala of Pandarapur, nicknamed Bhakta Kumbara, hailed from the Kumbara caste group.

The table below reflects the firm conviction of our respondents in their divine origin. 28.6 per cent have stated that lord Brahma created them (Kumbaras) from the Brahma Kunda. They claim that just as their birth, their customs are unique. For another 26 per cent of Kumbaras in the study area, only they (Kumbara caste people) produce unique items used in religious and cultural occasions such as idols of Gods and Goddesses (like Gowri and Ganesha), oil lamps from mud for Deepavali, pots of varying size and shape for auspicious and inauspicious occasions and also a large spread of utensils and items used in agriculture, irrigation and transportation of certain commodities. According to them, the earthen pot holds social ritualistic value during weddings and specific festivals like Makara Sankranti.

They also hail the divinity of the Kumbara community. Thirteen per cent of respondents proudly stated that their Caste is very noble in its origin. "Even Lord Shiva danced pleased with their devotion.

**Table 2: Description of Uniqueness of Kumbara Caste**

Uniqueness	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Our Caste Divine: Mythology informs that Lord Shiva danced pleased by our devotion to him	9	19.1	2	6.1	8	23.5	1	2.5	20	13.0
Our Caste has been engaged in this profession for thousands of centuries. During their exile, Pandavas stayed in a potter's house. The greatest devotee of Vittala of Pandarapur is a potter	13	27.7	17	51.5	13	38.2	3	7.5	46	29.9
we are born from Brahma Kunda; our creator is Brahma. We are unique, and our customs and practices are unique.	9	19.1	8	24.2	8	23.5	19	47.5	44	28.6
We make idols of gods and goddesses; we are needed forevery festival.	14	29.8	6	18.2	5	14.7	15	37.5	40	26.0
Hindus must depend on us to carry out their religious practices and rituals according to their Caste and religion	2	4.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.0	4	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

A small number of 4 respondents (2.6%) have even claimed that "all Hindu castes and communities depend upon them if they have to perform whatever religious, caste rituals and practices for worship and weddings. There are inter-taluk differences in their responses (refer to the table below).

**Table 3: Unique Practices followed by Kumbaras**

Unique Practices of Kumbaras	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Shravana Maasada Puje	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	10.0	0	0.0	5	2.5
Siddappaji Puje	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	10.0	0	0.0	5	2.5
Mahanavami/Aayudhapuje/Byalademmananapuje	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Manchamma Puje	0	0.0	2	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.0
Byladevammana Jatra	0	0.0	29	58.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	29	14.5
Gowri Ganesha festival	2	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.0
Mullur Malagarasamma Puje	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	16.0	8	4.0
Sarvagna Jayanthi	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	12	24.0	12	6.0
No Response	48	96.0	19	38.0	40	80.0	30	60.0	137	68.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

## 6.2 A Brief Note on Religious-Cultural Practices of Kumbaras in the Study Area

The following is a brief discussion of the religious and cultural practices of the Kumbaras in the study area. It is drawn to highlight how much they are proud of their caste status and its place in the rural social fabric.

### 6.2.1 Faith and Festivals

All the Kumbara respondents (numbering 200) have reiterated their faith in God and celebrate all Hindu festivals. During specific festivals, they worship all their pottery-making implements and show much devotion. Moreover, almost all (99%) have acknowledged offering animal sacrifice during specific festivals.

**Table 4: Religious Faith**

Faith	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Shaiva	26	52.0	12	24.0	25	50.0	37	74.0	100	50.0
Vaishnava	24	48.0	38	76.0	25	50.0	13	26.0	100	50.0
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

The respondents are divided into Shaivite and Vaishnavite. In K R Nagara taluk, among the 50 sampled Kumbaras, 26 (52%) are Shaivites, and 24 (48%) are Vaishnavites. In Mysuru taluk, Vaishnavites are more (38: 76%); Nanjanagudu taluk has both Vaishnavites and Shaivites in equal numbers, while in T Narasipura taluk, Shaivites are higher (37: 74%) (See table above).

#### 6.2.2 Mixing with Other Upper Castes during Festivals& Marriage Practices/Dowry

Being a caste with divine origin and professing a caste occupation which is considered sacred, the Kumbaras have ruled out any discrimination against them by the upper castes and those in the Savarna category. There is absolutely no barrier to their entry into any temple. During their weddings, like many other upper and middle castes in the hierarchy, they have the habit of conducting engagement prior to marriage. All the 200 respondents have responded to this in the affirmative. Likewise, they said 'yes' to the question about inspecting the gotra of the bride and the groom before fixing a marriage. 192 out of 200 Kumbaras in the sample (96%) practice tying a "Basinga" during marriage. The remaining eight respondents mentioned that it was not practised from their ancestors' time or in their "vamsha" or "sampradaya".

Forty-nine per cent (nearly half of our respondents) replied that their wife was not of legal age when they married her. Mysuru taluk had more such responses (66%) than others (see Table 5).

**Table 5 Ages at Marriage for the Wife**

Age at Marriage of Wife	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Legal Age	29	58.0	17	34.0	30	60.0	26	52.0	102	51.0
Not legal Age	21	42.0	33	66.0	20	40.0	24	48.0	98	49.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

Coming to some of the harmful practices observed by the upper, middle, and even low castes today, viz., giving Dowry when their daughter is married, more than 90 per cent (181 out of 200 Kumbaras) have replied in the affirmative. Table 6 gives the form of Dowry; Gold Ornaments are the most common form in which Dowry is taken (responded so by 99.4%), followed by cash as Dowry by 63% and giving a vehicle to the prospective son-in-law by 12.7% of respondents.

**Table 6: Form of Dowry**

Form of Dowry	Taluku								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Cash	7	26.9	6	20.7	3	15.8	3	21.4	19	21.6
Land	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Vehicle	3	11.5	0	0.0	3	15.8	2	14.3	8	9.1
House	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
House Site	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Livestock	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Golden Ornaments	18	69.2	27	93.1	15	78.9	13	92.9	73	83.0
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Total*</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: \*Multiple Answer (Yes only Considered), so Total Percentage no need to be added 100.

Source: Field Data

Forty-four per cent of the respondents themselves have taken Dowry during their wedding. For 83 per cent of these Kumbaras (who had accepted Dowry), it was in the form of gold ornaments; 21.6 reported taking cash as Dowry; and 9.1 per cent were given a vehicle by their father-in-law as Dowry for marrying their daughter (refer to Table 6).

The responses of those who had yet to take Dowry during their wedding are interesting. Questioned as to why they did not receive any dowry, 43.8 per cent out of the 112 respondents who had responded as not taking Dowry replied that they did not like to place any burden on the bride's family; moreover, they did not like the practice of Dowry at all. For 42 per cent of the respondents, there was no such thing as a dowry when they married. They were not used to it in their family. There is not much inter-taluk differentiation in these two types of responses. 7.1 per cent each responded that they married their niece, so there was no question of demanding a dowry from one's sister. A similar % of respondents have said something interesting: "During our times. Getting married itself was difficult. Who will give one's daughter to a Kumbara like me?".

## 6.2.3 Widow Remarriage, Choice of Groom for Daughter

The Kumbaras in the study area have ruled out remarriage to their daughters or daughters-in-law once they are widowed. Although 10 per cent have said 'yes' to this question, it was realised that it was their "hope and ideology."

Table 6.1: Opinion about Dowry

Opinion about Dowry	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
There was no concept called Dowry in our times	12	50.0	7	33.3	12	38.7	16	44.4	47	42.0
I disliked the idea of burdening the parents of the bride	11	45.8	10	47.6	16	51.6	12	33.3	49	43.8
No dowry as married one's relative	0	0.0	2	9.5	1	3.2	5	13.9	8	7.1
Conducting marriage itself was expensive. It is not easy to get a lady for marriage. If demanded Dowry, there is no chance of marriage itself in our times	1	4.2	2	9.5	2	6.5	3	8.3	8	7.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

Table 7 Pottery being non-profitable

Reasons for non-profitability	Taluks								Total	
	K R Nagara		Mysuru		Nanjanagudu		T Narasipura			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
The profession does not enable leading a prosperous life	8	28.6	2	10.5	2	11.1	15	75.0	27	31.8
It is better to end this profession with our generation; it is impossible to give our daughter to a person depending on Pottery for livelihood	20	71.4	11	57.9	14	77.8	5	25.0	50	58.8
Our daughters being educated, they will not accept a Potter as their husband	0	0.0	1	5.3	1	5.6	0	0.0	2	2.4
Young men engaged in Pottery are very few today; it is challenging to search for such a groom/son-in-law	0	0.0	5	26.3	1	5.6	0	0.0	6	7.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Regarding the type of son-in-law, the respondents would prefer their daughter; 26 per cent consider his employment status the topmost priority. 42.5 per cent are against marrying off their daughter to a groom professing Pottery! They have offered the reasons: 75 per cent considered Pottery a dying occupation. "Better to end with our generation", they said, adding that "there is no benefit to giving our daughter in marriage to a potter in the present times". Even then, about 25 per cent preferred to have a pottery-practicing person as their

son-in-law. 31.8 per cent are pessimistic that this profession (Pottery) lacks scope for enabling a prosperous life.

Two other types of responses are interesting to discuss. One of them is from 7.1 per cent of potter heads of HHs in our study, who opined that "even if wish to have a pottery practising groom for our daughter, it is difficult to get one". It is the belief of 2.4 per cent of potters that "highly educated girls will not agree to marry a potter". Here, highly educated would mean even a graduate.

Next to employment, the quality that the potters HHs look forward to in a bridegroom for their daughter is as follows:

- (a) *Kula* or *pangada* (same Kumbara caste) is an essential consideration, as 68.5 per cent of our respondents opined. This preference cuts across taluks; everywhere, it is the critical determinant while searching for a bridegroom.
- (b) The following factor is considered the most important when searching for a bridegroom: the bridegroom's character and personality. Seventy-three per cent of respondents have voted for this.
- (c) The health and well-being of the boy who must marry their daughter is supreme for 69.5 per cent of respondents.
- (d) The bridegroom's family matters much when giving one's daughter to such a house, as 45 percent opined as the sixth rank and 26 percent as the seventh rank.

## 7. Socio-Economic Status

The study on the Kumbaras, who have a very high opinion and self-identity about their Caste in its ritual and religious functions in the village social structure, shows that they are suffering from economic deprivation and poverty today, obviously owing to the loss of importance of their traditional role and their products in the socio-economic milieu of rural Society.

### 7.1 Annual Income

Economic deprivation is evident when we look at the annual income generated from our study area's data: More than 60 per cent of the sampled 200 Kumbara HHs earn less than or up to Rs. One lakh per annum. Their annual expenditure is also the same for 67 per cent of respondents and up to Rs. 1.5 lakhs for another 23 per cent of respondents.

### 7.2 Ownership of Agricultural Land

Around 61 per cent own agricultural land, but 72 per cent have only dry lands with no irrigation. The source of land ownership is also hereditary (*pitrarjita*) for 98.5 per cent of the Kumbara HHs in the study area.

### 7.3 Bank Account and Savings

It is heartening to learn from the study's findings that 98% of respondents have a savings account in a bank. However, 72.4 per cent have no savings nor have availed of any loan (72.5%) from the bank to meet their economic needs. Of the 27.5 per cent of Kumbaras who have taken a loan from the bank, the purpose is for their occupation. Within that, some have specified that they took the loan for making Ganapathi idols (76%), to purchase a cow (12%), to meet HH expenses (45%), to meet medical expenses and for house

renovation/repair (34%)<sup>4</sup>. Children's education, the marriage of a daughter, and agricultural inputs are other reasons for taking out loans.

Here, a point of caution is that all the above types of loans were not availed of by the respondents, only by a nationalised bank. The sources of loan are:

- (a) Gudi Kaigaarika Sahkaara Sangha
- (b) Gramodyoga and Khadi Mandali
- (c) Praadeshika Bank (Regional Rural Bank-RRB)
- (d) Nationalised Bank
- (e) Private Bankers (Levaadeviyavaru)
- (f) Self Help Group
- (g) Friends
- (h) Relatives and Others

The 27.6 per cent of respondents who replied that they had made some savings were questioned about the type of savings. The majority (19.5%) replied that they had saved in 'other' places. Of the remaining, 19 per cent have been saved in nationalised Banks' Savings Scheme and Life Insurance Corporation policies. 14.5 per cent have purchased some movable property and some gold ornaments. Those who have saved in self-help groups are 12.5 per cent of the respondents, followed by 11.5 per cent who have invested in chit funds. 1.5 per cent each have savings in the Post Office Savings Account and immovable property. The figures reflect the poor economic condition of the respondents, who have high loan amounts and poor savings.

The reasons for not being able to save are topped by the response "low income" (73.5%), "poverty" (73%), and "other reasons" by 60.5 per cent of them. A significant loophole is that none have registered under the wage work programme MGNREGA.

#### 7.4 Migration for Work

The community that claimed divinity in its profession has reached such a vulnerable status today in our study area that more than 24 per cent of our respondent HHs has one or more persons who have migrated from villages to towns and cities for wage work. They are related to the head of the HH as brother (10.4%) and brother-in-law (2.1%) but mainly as the son (83.3%). 89.6 per cent of these emigrants have immigrated to a city (Mysuru in most cases) and are seeking employment there.

The type of work they have been pursuing in the place of migration (the city) is topped by what they have said as "self-employment" by more than 52 per cent. They are a mix of those who drive an auto or cab for hire, those who work as road hawkers and petty traders on footpaths and security guards. Twenty-five per cent of immigrant Kumbaras work in privately owned firms.

The next category, with a significant portion of immigrant Kumbaras, is casual labour for wages (10.4%). More than 90 per cent of immigrants regularly send remittances to the native family in the village. Moreover, they have maintained excellent/cordial relations and regular contact with the family members (97.9%).

### 8. Support from Organisations, Government and Other Sources

We now discuss the role of the Kumbara caste association, other professional organisations set up by the Kumbaras themselves, the government and the Private Sector in ameliorating the socio-economic conditions of the Kumbaras in the study area.

<sup>4</sup>These figures are indicative of multiple answers, so we do not arrive at the total as 100%

### 8.1 Caste and Professional Organisations: Number and Utility

The fact that only about 23 per cent of Kumbaras have identified themselves with any caste-based organisation speaks of their inability to organise or mobilise themselves to bargain for developmental benefits from the government. Forty-one per cent have acknowledged the presence of caste-based organisations in their village, town, and city. There are 46 such caste-based organisations from the four taluks, of which 19 are in Mysuru taluk alone.

Despite many professional organisations and being members, the Kumbaras have stated that they have yet to benefit much from them. In other words, the most essential factor for social mobilisation through their "*Sangha*" is absent in the study area. The absence of association with professional groups does not mean they do not need somebody to lead them to take them out of poverty. The discussion hitherto made has made it clear that the Kumbaras are facing a decline in pursuing their caste occupation, which is failing them in providing sustainable livelihood to themselves and their dependent families. The income they earn on average per year is insufficient to meet the family's food and other basic requirements, let alone provide education to the children in good higher education institutions. Aspirations and hopes about the latter have no dearth; none of the respondents have expressed the option of continuing the caste occupation by their next generation, i.e., by their sons. "***There is no future here***", said Mallanna, a potter from Bandiganahalli of T Narasipur taluk.

The ways the caste-based association in their village/taluk has offered help to the Kumbaras are as follows: while 157 respondents have not reacted at all, of the remaining 43 Kumbaras who have answered positively regarding the benefit from their caste/professional association, 23 respondents (11.5%) felt that the assistance has come from their Sangha towards the development of their community. The remaining 20 respondents expressed that their Sangha has been leading the fight to obtain reservation benefits, particularly for school-going children. Put together, more than 92 per cent have support from their caste association in furthering the economic and educational needs of the community.

### 8.2 Kumbaras and the 2A category of OBCs

While the role of the Sangha towards reservation benefits for Kumbara children's education is one of its two roles, the other, as noted above, is towards providing the Kumbara community socio-economic benefits for all-round growth. However, the respondents were unaware of how and how their Sangha/s are proceeding in this direction. The Caste is among the 102 caste groups in the reservation category of "Other Backward Classes" 2A category. One must note that the same category also includes socio-economically prosperous and politically well-represented Kuruba and Ediga caste groups. As a result, the quota reserved under 2A for castes' educational and employment benefits falls under its jurisdiction (a good 102 of them) (GOK 2002).

Following this issue and claims made by some sections of the community in the state demanding Scheduled Caste (SC) status for the Kumbaras, it was questioned if our respondents in the study would prefer to be categorised as SCs. 28 per cent (56 Kumbaras out of 200) have replied positively, the highest from Mysuru taluk (20 out of 50 total sample there or 40%). Altogether, 81 per cent have preferred to remain as they are (as 2A category).

### 8.3 Political Leadership

It needs no emphasis that political mobilisation of the community, representation in and participation in political activities of local political institutions (like the Panchayats), and self-upliftment of any caste or community are significant today. We have noted earlier that the Kumbaras in our study area have set up 46 different professional and caste-based associations in the jurisdiction of the selected four taluks.

As evidenced by the results of our study, there is no other political activity besides these bodies. Of the 200 respondents, only one from Mysuru taluk and two from Nanjanagodu taluk have contested Grama Panchayat (GP) elections; of them, two—one each from the two taluks—have won to become GP members.

After a detailed analysis of the current economic condition of the Potters in the study area, their self-identity as being 'divine' in origin has been able to keep them psychologically proud of their profession. They have expressed that they are essential to their villages' religious and socio-cultural life. Despite the fall in demand for their products and the rising cost of living, they are still holding on to their caste occupation. There are at least 15 Kumbara HHs in their villages, and the maximum number of Kumbara HHs is also stated to be above 50 in the taluk. Of them, 98 families of Kumbaras are pursuing Pottery today. They can earn some income due to old customers patronising them (60%), based on personal contacts, and offering low prices for commodities (40%). The spread of the market for their products and the nature of marketing is mainly near their house (96.9%).

Transportation is by rented bullock cart (23.5%), goods vehicle (66.3%) also rented just as tractor (15.3%). The selling frequency is "only when there is demand" (Bedike Bandaaga). They know there is much profit if they sell outside the village (59.2%), but 40.8% said they sell near their house as they cannot sell elsewhere.

Thus, the Kumbaras' self-identity as a noble profession continues amidst more profound economic difficulties. They expect the government to protect their profession by modernising it with technological, financial, and institutional support. They also want the government to properly select eligible Kumbaras as beneficiaries of its programmes. They have suggested various measures to uplift the Kumbara caste, including government employment and higher education.

### 9. Conclusions and Suggestions

We have now reached the concluding part of this paper. To sum up, we can say that Caste in India has been resilient and dynamic in response to the changes in the broader Society in its sociocultural, economic, and political realms. The Kumbara caste in Karnataka has consolidated into caste association/s, but its position in the social hierarchy and the inequality imposed is startling even today. Caste identity continues to be an important market of privilege (Kumbaras considering themselves as being divine in origin) as well as deprivation in everyday life (caused by way of an absence of land ownership and other assets, decline in demand for pottery products due to factory-made goods and change in lifestyles of consumers).

The changes in traditional occupations are not only for the Kumbaras but universal in the villages today. There is a steep decline in agricultural practices, causing a threat to demand for Pottery products and

inter-caste relations within a village. Caste continues to be the chief determinant of social stratification in rural Karnataka, and caste dynamics greatly influence its social relations. However, the issues emerging out of such caste identity and discrimination have not been adequately addressed and studied by sociologists and other social scientists.

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