

**Research Article**

## **Exclusion-Driven Segregation and Dalits: Evidence from Selected Colonies in Kerala**

**M. Mohamed Anees**

Research Scholar, Department of Economics, University of Calicut, Dr. John Matthai Centre, Thrissur, Kerala, India  
Email id: maneesm1989@gmail.com

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### **ABSTRACT**

Dalit-centred social exclusion largely stems from structures of spatial segregation which is rooted in the Indian caste system. The caste system placed Dalits at the lowest and weakest social stratum; their segregated housing-spaces further marginalised them. The history of Dalits ghetto in Kerala can be traced back to 1936 when the Travancore Government opened a colony for the lower castes at Kottayam. The Government might have had a view of providing cultivable land to Dalits in an isolated locality will provide them with economic freedom and as a result, there will be less violation of caste rules. Over the years, the provided colonies began to be conceived as merely a housing scheme. In particular, it appeared when the Land Reforms Act (1963) is re-amended in 1969. Also, the provided land under the schemes was just 4 or 5 cents. That was meagre and unsuitable for the families to live. Moreover, the land size reduced further because of the intergenerational subdivision and fragmentation of holdings. A study conducted by KILA (2013) found that there are 26,198 Dalit colonies and about 60% of lower castes in Kerala are living. The colonies in the State are so remote either in hilly areas, marshy lands or away from public gaze as it leads to excluding Dalits from the broader social and economic system. The study attempted to explore the position of Dalits in the exclusion-driven segregation by comparing the Dalits who are living in a colony with the non-Dalits living at the outside colony. While doing so, the study found that the surveyed colonies are away from mainstream society. Also, most of them are living without land but with abject poverty when compared to non-colony dwellers. Furthermore, the study emphasised with the evidence that the exclusion of Dalits in the past is continuing with the contemporary differences in their living conditions in colonies.

**Keywords:** Colony, Dalits, Social exclusion, Segregation

## INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion is defined as ‘the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live’ (Annapuranam and Inbanathan, 2017). It includes not only the denial of opportunities but also material deprivations to participate in social and economic life. Amartya Sen attempted to classify the forms of exclusion by making a distinction between active exclusion, where a deliberate action is involved, from that of passive exclusion, where a group is disproportionately hurt due to some policies (Chalam, 2011). So far there is no prescribed norm to measure social exclusion, but academicians have recommended that some indicators can measure it, including low educational attainment, the discrepancy in accessing education, homelessness and sparse environment, lack of social participation, low life expectancy, indignity by keeping them away from certain functions and so on (Annapuranam and Inbanathan, 2017).

In this manner, the idea of social exclusion includes a remarkably wide array of social and economic issues. It is much terrible than merely living in destitution and an unmistakable infringement of human rights. It is a social disadvantage and relegation to the fringe of society, by which the minority or sub-group is methodically barred.

In Kerala, Dalit ghettos often termed as colonies are the places of excluding Dalits from the mainstream. The geographical separation of living spaces between caste groups leads to exclusion and thereby isolating them. In the same context, the article explores the process of exclusion faced by Dalits in Kerala in a segregated space called ‘colony’.

The article is divided into two parts. First part of the article explains the term ‘colony’ and its origin in the socio-political context of both pre-Kerala formation and post-Kerala formation period. Part two tries to capture the ghetto lives of Dalits empirically in Kerala by analysing three colonies in Malappuram District, Kerala by using selected parameters, followed by a few concluding observations.

## COLONIES AND ITS ORIGIN

The first colony in Kerala was started during 1936 when the Travancore Government started a model colony for the SCs, settling 40 families in Kurichi, Kottayam. The inhabitants of these colonies were the labourers attached to paddy and garden cultivation of upper castes (Pramod, 2015). Earlier the dwelling spaces of Dalits were situated at the far end of the paddy field not only for economic but also to maintain vigil over water flows crucial to reclaimed, wetland and keeping them away from the Savarna landlords’ living space (Pramod, 2015). These traditional settlements referred to have been recast as Dalit colonies. Earlier the formation of colonies was considering the natural resources in that locality into account.

Colonies began to conceive as merely housing projects after the formation of Kerala State. Governments various housing ventures like One Lakh Housing Scheme, Nalu Cent Colony and Harijan Colony, to rehabilitate Dalits. The colonisation scheme was said to be an excellent beneficial scheme by the Government but poverty around certain pockets leads to further segregation and abandonment of the area (Nair and Menon, 2007). After reviewing various colonisation programmes, Kerala Commission on SCs and STs 1982 found that the colonies in Kerala have not adequately planned and the material and technical inputs and infrastructural facilities were highly inadequate in these colonies. The colonies in the State are in inaccessible locations lacking even the basic facilities for education and health care. Devika (2013) found that Dalit colonies in Kerala are facing overcrowding and poor living conditions. According to KILA (2013), there are 26,198 Dalit ghettos in Kerala. They are all living in poor conditions. The study also revealed that 64.77% have education below 10th standard and just 0.09% got professional education.

## **COLONY LIVES OF DALITS**

### **Empirical Analysis**

The colonies dealt with in this study are Kapichal Colony, Palakkattukunnu Colony and Pottakkunnu Colony. These colonies have situated in the administrative area of Wandoor Gram Panchayath of Malappuram District, Kerala. To understand the socio-economic status of Dalits in colonies with non-Dalits who are living outside the premises of colony, an empirical study is used by taking ownership of land, level of education and occupational pattern. The subject population of this study (Dalit inhabitants of the colony) occupies the lowest position in the caste hierarchy. Within the colony, the lower caste status, coupled with the low economic condition, is a binding factor. It looks as though there is an invisible wall surrounding the colony; the settlers remain isolated from the rest of the surrounding (Uyl, 1995).

Almost all inhabitants of the colonies studied belong to Dalit communities, especially Cheruma and Kalladi. Among the non-Dalit communities who are settled outside the terrain of the colony, 40.0% are from the Thiyya community and the rest are from Asari and Kollan communities (Table 1).

### **Land Ownership Pattern of Dalits in Colonies**

In all societies where industrialisation has not made its mark, the land is the principal source of production and the prime asset. Besides, in the Indian context, land assigns a special social status to its owners; for any caste or religious group, ownership of land assigns a source of dominance and freedom. The land ownership in India was historically

**Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents (Caste Wise in Percent)**

<b>Caste</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Share of respondents (%)</b>
<b>Dalits</b>		
Cheruma	12	24
Chakkliya	2	4
Kalladi	5	10
Panan	2	4
Parayan	2	4
Mannan	1	2
Kanakkan	1	2
<b>Non-Dalits (outside the colony)</b>		
Thiyya	20	40
Asari	3	6
Kollan	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Observation

highly unequal, and in the post-independence period, equity and efficiency considerations led to land reforms being placed firmly on the policy agenda. States that have a better record of implementation of land reforms, unfortunately, do not necessarily display a better record of access to land ownership to Dalits. This is true when we enquire about the landholding pattern of Dalits who live in colonies. We can clearly understand the inequality of land reforms and inequity in ownership of land. The colony dwellers do not possess any land of their own; they live in the land given by the government. They do not have rights over their property and have no piece of land of their own.

Table 2 indicates that about 36% of the Dalits remain landless in the surveyed colonies. On the contrary, most of the non-Dalits have high ownership of land. Thirty-two percent of non-Dalits have land above 22 cents. The data suggest that non-Dalits would gain significantly in possession of land when we compare their status with Dalits. The significant portion of the land owned by the Dalits is of poor quality and not suitable for cultivation and habitation. This shows that the failure of the Government celebrated land reform measures. The major part of land reforms in Kerala was the assigning of ownership rights to the *kudikidappukars* (hutment dwellers). However, the government considers Dalits as *kudikidappukars* as they do not get anything from the land reforms. Despite all the rhetoric about land reforms, Dalits could acquire only tiny plots of cultivable land but a few Dalits can acquire any land assets. One sees that the historical denial of land to Dalits continues to manifest itself in the form of present-day disparities in land ownership patterns between Dalits and non-Dalits. This lack of ownership of land is a

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in Each Caste Group According to the Land Owned**

Size of holdings (in cents)	Dalits	Non-Dalits
Landless	36	0
1-3	24	0
4-6	40	20
7-9	0	16
10-12	0	16
13-15	0	8
16-18	0	0
19-21	0	8
22 and above	0	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Observation

crucial element for the servitude of Dalits in the colonies. The lack of landed property affects their achievements in other fields like education, employment and health.

### **Educational Attainment of Dalits in Colonies**

The attainment of literacy and education makes a community move towards greater socio-economic freedom. (Sen, 2000) argued that it is more significant to see education as one factor having an intrinsic value that enhances human life, and that also has an instrumental value that can foster material progress in another matter. An increase in overall literacy can also increase the consciousness and subsequent involvement in democratic participation, as in Kerala. The 'accessibility' in terms of the level of education can also bring out mobility for individuals and the community as well, for instance, occupational mobility from the farm to the non-farm sector. The denied opportunity of elementary schooling is not only deprived as a youngster but also handicapped all through life (as a person unable to do certain basic things that rely on reading, writing and arithmetic; Sen, 2000).

Thus education is a socially and economically liberating factor that makes a man complete social animals, which promotes his thinking capacity and intellectual ability. The educational progress of colony dwellers stands beyond such definitions. Their educational indices do not go above a particular level. The education of elders in the colony is up to seventh standard and children are up to 10th standard. Most of the students had their studies at government institutions. The fact that tends them to have education in these schools is financial assistance, availability of noon meals and free books and uniforms. They found that government schools are economically viable. Private schools often

consider the students from the Dalit background as they cannot score higher grade and they had no cultural values. Thus they are marginalised from the so-called mainstream educational system. Lack of education of parents in Dalit families also affects the education of their children. The Dalit identity is a serious problem faced by those students who overcome all other barriers. The perception of a Dalit student has already portrayed in the mindset of teachers and this creates many problems. The status of education in the Dalit colonies with that of non-Dalit families gave us a clear idea of the disparities between them in educational attainment (Table 3).

**Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education**

Level of Education	Dalits		Non-Dalits	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Illiterate	10.9	28.1	1.7	1.6
Pre-primary	1.8	....	1.7	....
Lower primary	7.3	7.8	1.7	1.6
Upper primary	5.5	22.0	22.4	20.6
High school	56.4	25.4	39.7	30.2
Higher secondary	12.7	11.2	18.0	25.4
Degree	3.6	3.7	5.9	12.7
Post-graduation	1.8	....	2.1	3.1
Technical/diploma	....	....	3.4	....
Professional degree	....	1.8	3.4	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Field Observation

We can observe from the table that illiteracy is a problem for all the respondents. However, it is more severe in the case of Dalits than non-Dalits. About 10.9% of Dalit males and 28.1% of Dalit females are illiterates. Males in both communities have literates more than females. This shows higher gender disparities among the Dalit community and the non-Dalit community. But, gender disparity is more visible in the case of Dalits.

When it comes to higher education, the proportion of Dalits in educational attainment reaches a low level. In the category of graduate and above, the total percentage share of Dalit males and females is 3.6% and 3.7% respectively in degree level. When we look at the post-graduate level, only 1.8% of Dalit males are in the higher education sector but no females are in the realm of post-graduation. On the other hand, the attainment level of higher education is higher in the case of non-Dalits. It is also important to look there is a higher dropout rate among Dalits as well, particularly at higher level studies despite the 'many welfare schemes and other State affirmative actions'. This is visible in the low proportion of students from Dalit background at higher levels of education.

Due to poverty and low economic condition students have to stop their studies at high school classes and step out to work and earn; results an end of their desire to learn. Even if some people are educated up to secondary levels, the males outnumber females. Due to the lack of education of females, they lacked the opportunity to interact with the outside world and thereby they locked into the hardship of the colony. This educational backwardness and illiteracy forced them to do jobs like a housemaid and other menial jobs.

The literacy rate of Dalits explains that they are at the peripheries of development in the 'Kerala model of development'. The condition of Dalits concerning the attainment of education provides them with a lower profile to partake successfully in the modern-day job market and economy.

### **Occupational Pattern of Dalits in Colonies**

One of the most important characteristics of the caste system was the strong linkage between caste and occupations, especially in rural India. Occupation is perhaps the essential variable because of two reasons: one, occupational status is the closest indicator of income; two, the assertions about the degree of change in the caste system rest critically on the evidence of the caste-occupation nexus (Deshpande, 2011). The traditional village economy revolved around a hereditary caste hierarchy that prescribed individuals' occupations in advance. Upper castes were landowners, middle-ranked castes were farmers and artisans and the lowest-ranked castes, particularly the Dalits, were the labourers and performers of menial tasks. The position of Dalits in the social hierarchy had a clear relationship with their economic status and well-being, with Dalits mostly clustered in occupations that were the least paid and most degrading in terms of manual labour. While legislation of the Indian government in the form of inclusive policies may have reduced the frequency of worst forms of bonded labour and other coercive practices, the hereditary nature of the link between castes and occupations declined to certain extent.

In most parts of Kerala, there is a high association between economic status and the position of different castes. The reason is that, historically, higher castes had better access to land, occupation, education, income and assets than lower castes. However, as a result of government policies, there has been a significant degree of occupational diversity occurred among the Dalits resulting in a loosening of the caste-occupation linkage. However, a dynamic shift of occupation has not occurred; however, high-paid jobs continue to be in the hands of the upper castes and, now, increasingly, high-income classes. There is a tendency of Dalits to do menial tasks and languish many high-paid jobs due to the caste system. This is clear from Table 4 which depicts that

**Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Respondents according to Major Occupational Groups**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Dalits</b>	<b>Non-Dalits</b>
Agricultural labourers	15.4	6.5
Wage labourers	69.2	15.2
Housemaid	1.9	....
Skilled labourers	7.7	25.1
Government service	....	8.7
Self-employed	....	27.1
Pensioner	1.9	2.2
Sweeper	3.9	....
Gulf migrant	....	15.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

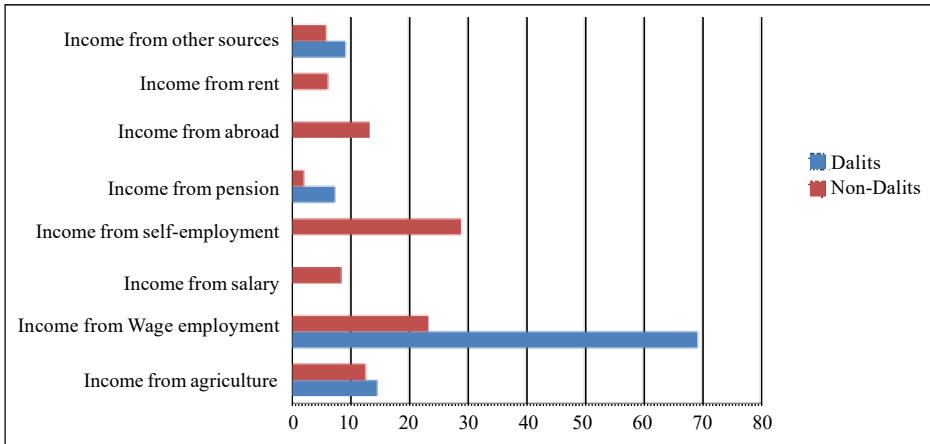
*Source:* Field Observation

there exists a wide gap in occupational status between Dalits and non-Dalits in the surveyed area (Table 4).

The table reveals that the majority of Dalits have been engaged in wage employment for a livelihood. On the contrary, the majority of non-Dalits are self-employed of their own. The share of the agricultural labourer to total employment for Dalits is 15.4%. As far as non-Dalit is concerned, it stands at 6.5%. Even though lower castes are eligible for reservation of jobs, the Dalit inhabitants of the colony are grossly under-represented in government jobs. This is clear from the table that nobody has a Government job in colonies. Around 15.2% of non-Dalits migrated abroad. This kind of trend is not applicable in the case of Dalits may be due to the lack of the social network and the lack of education.

The high dependence of wage labour by the colony dwellers is because of their lack of access to land or better educational opportunities. The lack of a wider social network precludes them from seizing job opportunities from outside the country. The reservation of government jobs for Dalits is a constitutional provision but its access is also limited in the case of the colony, as the survey observes.

Education and ownership of land have a positive role in providing a remunerative job to an individual. While we analyse the data on non-Dalit, we concluded that they have their land and most of them have education up to higher secondary level, and hence they are better employed. Non-educated Dalit families are not in a position to gain better employment because they lack education thereby forced to continue on menial jobs for a living. They can earn only for their daily needs but they cannot afford their children's education and health. There exists a wide disparity between the occupation of Dalits



**Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Major Source of Income**  
*Source: Field Observation*

and non-Dalit groups and this often reflects their level of income and standard of living (Figure 1).

The percentage share of Dalits and non-Dalits across their major sources of income shows that the Dalits have their income mainly from wage employment (69.1%). In the case of non-Dalits, their major source of income comes from self-employment (28.8%). About 14.5% of Dalits are still engaged in agricultural activities for an income. Nevertheless, the corresponding percentage for non-Dalits is 12.5%. Of the non-Dalits, 13.2% have their income from abroad. However, no Dalit families have their income from abroad and none of them has their income from salary and self-employment.

Overall, therefore, as per the data set presented above and the classificatory system used to define occupation, the evidence of inter-caste disparity in occupational attainment is clear and persistent. According to Dalit wage labourers who were respondents, the average days of employment are limited to 2 or 3 days per week. They do not have a job every day, and if there is a job they can earn only up to 300 to 400 rupees per day. Most of them do not have a job during the rainy season. The income they gain would be insufficient for their daily needs and they hardly try to meet the two ends. It is because of this they would not pay attention to the infrastructure of their houses and the education and health of their child. A large percentage of Dalits in colonies constitutes a sizeable chunk of the low-income population with poor human development indicators.

### **Housing Facilities of Dalits in Colonies**

The accessibility of basic amenities, for example, housing facilities, is inevitable for the socio-economic advancement of any society. These are the fundamentals, which is of

great importance to improve the standard of living of the people. Moreover, in Kerala society housing is considered a powerful sign of social worth. Table 5 shows a significant difference between Dalits and non-Dalits in the type of houses. The percentage of Dalit households with Kutcha houses is above 20%.

In contrast, only 8% of non-Dalit households are living in Kutcha houses. Fifty-six percent of non-Dalits are living in Pucca houses but no Dalits have a Pucca house in the surveyed colony. This divulges the fact that instead of different housing schemes introduced for improving the housing conditions of the Dalits has not improved significantly.

**Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to the Type of Houses**

Type of house	Dalits	Non-Dalits
Pucca	....	56
Semi-Pucca	80	36
Kutcha	20	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Field Observation

The housing amenities available for Dalits in the colony have a poor condition. All the houses in colonies contained only two rooms which have more than five inhabitants. When compared to the Dalit situation, the non-Dalit has a well-maintained house with at least two to three bedrooms. The facilities that a house provides are an essential factor in understanding the social freedom enjoyed by an individual.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The article explores the exclusion driven segregation faced by Dalits who are living in colonies of Kerala. This is done by analysing the economic situations of Dalits in the three colonies with non-Dalits who are living outside the terrain of the colony. We have completed a thorough analysis of land, education and occupational pattern, housing facilities of Dalits and non-Dalits. The indicators of socio-economic status show that how far the Dalits are excluded and where they stand is in the periphery of other non-Dalit groups. Analysis of these selected variables shows that the caste is a determinant factor and exclusion based on caste is high in the various segments of the economic life of colony Dalits. Due to the lack of basic amenities, the socio-economic life of the Dalits is in the 'web of segregation' because of their denial of productive resources such as land ownership, illiteracy, low education, being wage labourer and poor housing facilities, the state of being deprived in various aspects often make them fail when they negotiate with the State.

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