

Segregated Spaces and Well-Being: Evidence from Selected Dalit Colonies in Kerala

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The study evaluates the impact of geographical segregation on work and well-being of Dalits who live in colonies of Kerala. The principal research questions are: what is the nature and evolution of changes in work spaces in the wake of geographical segregation and how did the geographically segregated work spaces affect Dalits' well-being. To address these questions an ethnographic field work has been employed by way of collecting personal narratives of colony-dwellers. The study found that deliberate segregation is the prime cause of further vulnerability among Dalits and static-negative transformation in work.

I Introduction

Caste is the defining feature of Indian society. Historically, the caste system has formed the social and economic life of the people. It divided the society into hierarchically ordered groups with differential access to resources. Dalit castes which are placed outside the four-fold caste system underwent severe social and economic hardships. Caste is seemingly a major factor of inequality influencing all aspects of social and economic opportunities such as ownership of land, attainment of education, employment and administrative positions (Sivanandan, 1989). Marginalization of Dalits from the fruits of development was pinpointed by social science researchers (Sivanandan 1976, Kurien 1995). In the literature, the persistence of economic deprivation was cited as the main reason for the social and cultural discrimination associated with the institution of caste (Sivanandan 1979, Deshpande 2000). There are several works which criticize this approach and argue that caste will not lose its importance after economic advancement. Anthropologists and Sociologists who have extensively worked on caste focussed mainly on core social differences which enhance our understanding of the role of caste in society, fluidity and rigidity of caste categories, and complex phenomenon such as Sanskritization¹. However, these

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