

## Energy Inclusiveness: Exploring How the Affirmative Action Eludes the Real Beneficiaries

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*The social fabric of India is myriad with denial of community rights and individual freedom to the weaker section. The trend mainly beholds the rural areas of India. The social norms prevalent in the community prevent the interaction between the lower castes and mainstream dominant class. The lower caste communities who mainly live in the fringes of the villages are not even allowed to enter into the temples. They are looked down by the mainstream villagers. The absenteeism of lower castes from the community gatherings and participation of children in the village school reflects the graveness of the situation.*

*This paper brings a perspective of Community Inclusiveness of marginalized section to India's ambitious energy mission. The emancipatory power of energy resource to uplift the downtrodden classes to the mainstream development is enormous. The decentralized power solutions open up access to quality education, improved health condition and digital financial inclusion. Through DDUGJY schemes Government is tendering in to deploy the Solar Micro Grid solutions to rural households to bring in a rapid way to meet the committed targets of village electrification. A standard solution of 1 kilo watt hour off grid solution is in the offing. The target driven mission is aided local DISCOMS, who provides the beneficiary list to the implementing firms.*

*The proposed paper tends to criticize the current beneficiary selection involved in the target group selection of intended beneficiaries of Energy Access. Presently, the list of beneficiaries is provided by DISCOM but is not validated by the community members. The list has only the name of the members applied for grid connection or the existing users. Researcher is of the opinion that the list is not comprehensive in nature. The marginalized community is often left out in the beneficiary list provided by DISCOM. An opportunity to empower the weaker section is being missed out through this approach. Through the proposed paper researcher tries to validate whether participatory decision making on energy access leads to social inclusion and empowerment of marginalized community. Analytical methodology would be adopted for the completion of the study. The researcher will resort to judicious mix of primary and secondary source. The primary source is mainly through focused targeted interviews of the SC/ST community from the areas in Karnataka state, India where renewable energy access has taken place massively.*

### **1. Introduction**

In this paper, the perspective of social exclusion is defined as isolation of particular community/members from the decision making process or and from any community gathering. The degree of social exclusionary trends exists in all walks of life. In rural areas, caste identity forms the ideological current to social exclusion. A historical ideology which forms the division of labor for societal needs still rules the roost in Indian scenario.

Though Indian society is poised to become modern industrial society which gives importance to educational credentials and skill sets, the winds of these modernity is contained only to few pockets and eludes the rest.

Max Weber, one of the founders of modern sociology opined that class, status and power as the basis of social stratification in the modern society [1]. But in the Indian scenario, the cultural ethos of caste dynamics holds us back for an inclusivity of development. The relentless quench for power in turn favors occupational division, which has the underpinnings of caste. The paper explores how cheap and modern reliable source of power brings a social change through Weberian socio-lens.

### 1.1 Social Class

Weber defined class as the community of people who possess the following attributes [2]:

1. Possessing a common specific causal component of their life chance,
2. This component is the possession of goods and opportunities for income,
3. Under the conditions of market and labour.

The major distinctive factor for life chance in the market based economy is the possession of necessary resources as credentials. In this context, the possession of land property as a resource, educational qualification as credential are the two major instruments for life chance in the market based economy.

In the Indian rural scenario, the possession of these life instruments are limited to dominant castes in the village. The relative advantage of sizable landholding of dominant class over lower castes possession is reflected in economic advantage. The viciousness of poverty keeps engulfing into the latter section due to the deprivation of a relevant life chance. An example of this, Rammaiah, who belongs to dominant caste owns a flexi cab. He drives this cab during evening hours and earns a livelihood from this flexi cab. When asked how he raised the financial source for buying flexi cab. He smiled and replied that surplus income from the agricultural land has been utilized to purchase this income earning flexi cab. He uses his flexi cab in the morning hours to drop his children at an English Medium school which is 20 kms away from the village. He also possesses a fleet of goats and grazes the goats in his mango orchards during the day time. He also milks the goat and sells milk to nearby villagers through his flexi.

The possession of productive agricultural land is the primary source and it is facilitating the primary holder to have a better position in the society. The benefits accrued from the agricultural land are extended to other facets such as education and alternative source of livelihood.

On the flipside, the marginalized section who are deprived of the possession of land is again deprived of the benefits. The major source of income for them is to get employed as a daily wage labor in the agricultural land of dominant class. The dependency of lower castes on dominant class once again perpetuates the power structure.

### 1.2 Social Status

As per Weber, the social status refers to an aspect of hierarchical location in the social order derived from established cultural conventions (traditional beliefs and popular creeds). The occupants of these positions form status groups characterized by common lifestyles, tastes, social proximity and intermarriage [2].

India's hierarchal caste realm pushes the lower caste rankers to the village boundaries. Researcher has observed the following common attributes among the community.

- An inferior complex has overshadowed the mindset of community. This has been proven by the responses by the community members when asked to share the water from a common pipe (located nearby upper caste). They responded that the very act of taking water from upper case's pipe act would invoke anger against by other.

- They live in close proximity and the dwellings are clustered which occupies the boundaries of village.
- The voice of the community is muted. It is underscored by the lack of any political representation. The Sarpanch, who is from dominant class rarely, entertains the concerns raised by the community. Due to lack of leadership, it has also been observed that the community is deeply divided and missing the unity factor.
- Marriages functions are held at community building located nearby dwellings. Marriage ceremonies are conspicuously famous by the absence of upper caste community members.
- Goods and opportunities for income vary among the group. It is evident from the facilities available at home. The affluent lower caste community have their children studying in the nearby city. The affluence among them is also marked by the flooring of the houses.

### 1.3 Power Division

Max Weber, in *Economy and Society* (1922), that definition characterizes power as “the chance of a [wo]man or a group of [wo]men to realize their own will in a communal [collective] action against the resistance of their who are participating in the action”.

In the village level, the legitimate power source lies with Sarpanch, local panchayat representative. Sarpanch enjoys a considerable influence over the villagers. Researcher has observed that Sarpanch belongs to the dominant caste in the village and an affluent person. His income source is mainly business in the nearby town and enjoys a close proximity with the influential upper caste people in the village.

The lower caste without any political representation even in the three tier panchayat system stays away from the power structures. It in-turn inflicts the existence crisis and would deprive legal entitlements.

### 2. Energy Access as a Social Change Agent

The UN Sustainable Development Goal has pointed out that reliable energy access is the corner stone of development. The progressive change into the path of modernity while discarding the evils of village casteism can be embraced through modern power solutions.

Education’s transcendence effect to overcome poverty and remove the shackles of casteism has been proven [1]. Hence the major thrust for energy access is education and the expected outcome is the progressive inclusiveness of marginalized section into the spheres of socio-cultural and financial independence.

The technological advancement in Power-Electronics and Solar PV technology has made modern means of energy a reality. The solar micro-grid and off-grid solutions gives uninterrupted power to non-grid connected areas. These decentralized power sources has the potential to be an instrument to improve the life chance in the market economy. The uninterrupted power source boost the productive hours of the family, for Instance, students can spend more time in LED light rather than kerosene-lit lamps.

Government is providing cheap reliable solar energy solutions at a subsidized rate and at free of cost to off grid areas. Under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) scheme, Government is expediting its mission of village electrification by providing near 1kwhr solar solutions to off-grid areas. This missionary energy drive unleashes an opportunity to enable human centric inclusive development if adequately implemented.

### 3. Beneficiary Selection: Key to Inclusiveness

Presently power distribution companies (DISCOMs) is the key stakeholder for village electrification. The beneficiary list is provided by DISCOMs from their existing database. The data base is formulated mainly by existing users and whosoever applied for grid connections.

DISCOM select a village from the list electrified villages [3] and the beneficiary list is passed on to the implementing agency and if in case, village is not electrified, a DISCOM personnel mostly a technician visit the un-electrified village and collect the list of households. The present adaptation throws up few gaps which undermines the affirmative goals of human centric inclusiveness.

In the survey, researcher has identified that the beneficiary list provided by DISCOM is not comprehensive in nature and the majority of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who lives in the fringes of village are excluded in list.

After interrogation with DISCOM, it was found that, electrician who was responsible for creating the beneficiary list did not visit lower caste households. On interrogation, he revealed that his caste identity did not allow him to visit their *bastis* as he would be polluted on the religious lines. This reveals how deep-rooted caste identity in the village life thwarts the ambitious programme and reinforces viciousness of deprivation.

#### 4. Social Exclusion

The social exclusion which results from the power variance and ideological caste structures is witnessed in the village in following forms.

- a) Denial of temple entry of main village diety
- b) Ostracization in Village Festivals
- c) Step motherly treatment in schools.

Researcher found out that, the apathy feeling of the dominant class towards the scheduled castes stems from occupational and food& hygiene of lower castes. The fringe society involves in daily wage labor jobs in affluent class's agricultural fields. They also involve in skin rearing of milching animals in the forest vicinities.

Food habits include eating rats and wild pigs. Social consciousness in the village which consider eating non-vegetarian as a taboo, prompts the mainstream villagers to ostracize the latter.

The stereotypical mindset towards lower class is passed to generations. Children in villages are asked not to interact with outcastes by parents and teachers add fuel to these by harijan students to do other jobs in schools.

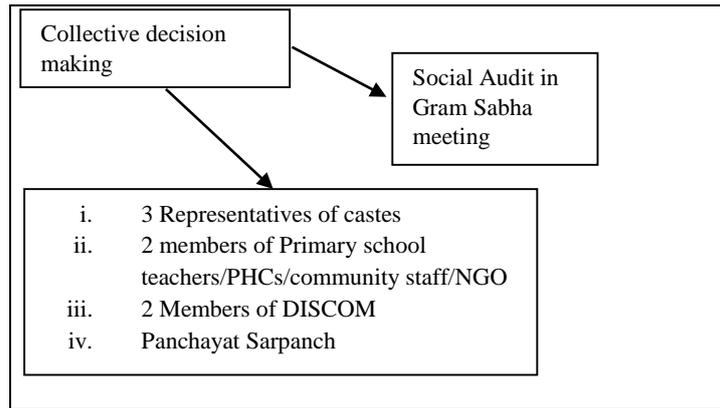
Researcher has found that these students are asked to bring water to clean toilets and to help village maid in cooking lunch. Additionally, lower caste students are asked to come early to school and clean up the compounds. These instances in school inject an inferiority blood during the childhood stage

Eventually, the ostracization students' face in the schools ultimately results in dropout rates. As they are not educated they end up in taking daily wage odd jobs. The viciousness loop of poverty is continued and the emancipatory effect of education is subdued to a failed attempt that cements occupational casteism.

#### 5. Participatory Approach and Collective Decision making

The democratic ethos enshrines decision making as an empowerment tool. The fundamentals of democratic governance need to be adopted for beneficiary selection. The inferior human minds can be empowered by enabling them to raise voice against authorities. The ability to say no against injustice infuses confidence among the downtrodden to fight back with courage.

Researcher proposes the following option of participatory governance to integrate inclusive development to Energy Access [Figure 1]:



The proposed participatory approach in beneficiary selection has the following merits:

- I. A common platform for lower castes to share a platform with upper caste representatives and local authorities. The local platform would enable lower caste to raise voice against injustice. The members can nominate the beneficiary
- II. The common platform allows the marginalized section to interact and raise their concerns

## 6. Social Audit through Gram Panchayat

The validation of beneficiary list by the Gram Sabha meeting will bring in transparency to the process. In meeting, the concerns of the community members will be raised on the beneficiary selection.

The social validation in Gram Sabha meeting would meet the twin objectives of development. Firstly, it brings in credibility to the beneficiary selection and any nepotism can be avoided. Secondly, it gives a larger platform for all the villagers to be present and raise concerns. Thirdly, it would revitalize Gram Sabha meeting, as the meeting is not held regularly [4].

## REFERENCES

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- [3] <https://data.gov.in/catalog/progress-report-village-electrification>
- [4] <http://www.panchayat.gov.in/documents/10198/363038>