



Socio-Economic Transitions of the Besta Community: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

This empirical study investigates the socio-economic, cultural, and educational transitions of the marginalized Besta community in Kampli, Karnataka. Historically a semi-nomadic, river-dependent tribal group engaged in inland fishing and boating, the Bestas are currently facing severe occupational displacement due to modernization, commercialization of water bodies, and shifting ecological constraints. Utilizing a descriptive research design with simple random sampling of 30 respondents, primary data was collected via structured interviews to analyze their contemporary realities. The findings reveal a profound structural shift: the loss of traditional livelihoods has forced the community into unorganized agricultural and daily wage labor, triggering economic vulnerability, distress migration, and the fragmentation of traditional joint families into nuclear units. Despite these systemic challenges, the community demonstrates remarkable resilience. A positive paradigm shift is evident in their growing commitment to formal education and the increasing socio-economic empowerment of women, facilitated by active participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Furthermore, the community successfully preserves its indigenous cultural rituals. The structural transition of the Bestas from an autonomous tribal entity to a marginalized caste highlights the complex dynamics of social stratification in rural economies. Moreover, their profound political underrepresentation exacerbates their exclusion from mainstream developmental narratives, leaving them caught between their indigenous knowledge systems and the demands of a capitalist labor market. Ultimately, this micro-level analysis of Kampli serves as a sociological mirror reflecting the macro-level vulnerabilities of water-dependent artisanal communities across a rapidly globalizing India. The study concludes that while the Bestas are gradually assimilating into the modern economy, targeted state interventions—specifically vocational training, proportional reservation, and enhanced welfare awareness—are urgently required to ensure their sustainable socio-economic integration.

Keywords: Besta Community, Socio-economic Transition, Occupational Displacement, Marginalization, Women's Empowerment, Social Stratification, Traditional Livelihoods.

1. Introduction

In the social sciences, the multifaceted dimensions of marginalized and backward communities represent a critical area of inquiry. In the heavily stratified society of Karnataka, while certain agrarian and dominant caste groups have achieved significant socio-political consolidation, numerous other communities have been relegated to the peripheries. Currently, there are over 150 recognized backward and nomadic communities in the state whose populations and socio-economic statuses remain ambiguous. Caught in a state of cultural liminality—unable to entirely preserve their indigenous heritage yet struggling to integrate seamlessly into modern socio-economic frameworks—these marginalized groups face an ongoing crisis of identity and survival. A prominent example of such an alienated demographic is the Besta community. Historically, the Bestas were a water-dependent demographic, sustaining

themselves autonomously through fishing and boating along the banks of Karnataka's major rivers, including the Kaveri, Tunga, Bhadra, Sharavathi, Krishna, and Netravati. From an anthropological perspective, while mainstream human occupational evolution progressed rapidly from hunting to animal husbandry and agriculture, the Besta community remained isolated from this agrarian transition. Exhibiting quintessential tribal characteristics, they maintained a nomadic lifestyle, migrating across states in search of riverines and coastlines without a structural concept of private property or wealth accumulation. However, in the contemporary era, the Besta community is experiencing a profound socio-economic upheaval. The advent of globalization, mechanized fishing, and stringent state regulations regarding water bodies have systematically alienated them from their traditional riverine ecosystems. Consequently, independent fishers and boatmen have been reduced to wage laborers working under licensed contractors. This occupational displacement has forced the community to diversify into agriculture, daily wage labor, and various roles within the private and public sectors. While a negligible fraction has achieved economic stability, the vast majority continue to face severe economic deprivation. Furthermore, the structural transformation of the Bestas from a historically tribal entity into a caste group within the broader social hierarchy has been fraught with challenges. The community suffers from a distinct lack of formal education, social awareness, and political representation. Their fragmentation under various regional nomenclatures across different social strata is a significant tragedy, as it has severely hindered their ability to organize as a unified entity, thereby depriving them of essential state-sponsored welfare benefits. Displaced from their ancestral occupations and orphaned by rigid administrative policies, the Besta community cannot be understood through a singular analytical lens. Therefore, this paper seeks to provide an objective, multidisciplinary sociological analysis of the Besta community. By examining their traditional beliefs, migration patterns, rituals, and current occupational shifts, this study aims to critically analyze the profound socio-economic transitions and the deepening marginalization of this community in the wake of modernity.

Specifically, the Kampli region in the Ballari district, situated along the Tungabhadra river basin, serves as a poignant microcosm of these sweeping structural changes. In this localized context, the Bestas have historically thrived on the river's bounty, yet rapid urbanization and ecological degradation have severely disrupted their traditional socio-ecological harmony. Furthermore, this transition deeply impacts the community's internal dynamics, particularly altering gender roles as Besta women increasingly shoulder the dual burdens of unorganized wage-earning and domestic management. While broader sociological studies frequently focus on coastal and marine fishing demographics, the unique socio-economic struggles of inland riverine populations like those in Kampli remain critically underrepresented in mainstream academic discourse. Therefore, grounding this research in the specific socio-spatial realities of Kampli provides a vital localized perspective on how macro-level economic policies dictate micro-level survival strategies. Ultimately, this targeted geographical focus not only illuminates the everyday vulnerabilities of the Besta community but also enriches the broader sociological literature on the systemic marginalization of traditional artisanal groups in transitioning rural economies.

2. Statement of the Problem

The Besta community of the Kampli region, historically a self-sustaining tribal group, is currently confronting a severe existential and socio-economic crisis. For generations, their livelihood and unique cultural identity were deeply intertwined with inland fishing and boating along the Tungabhadra river basin. However, rapid modernization, stringent state regulations, and the commercialization of water bodies have systematically alienated them from their ancestral environment. Unable to compete with mechanized fishing and capitalist contract systems, they have suffered massive occupational displacement. Consequently, once-independent artisans and fishers have been rapidly reduced to marginalized, unorganized daily wage laborers and landless agricultural workers. This forced economic transition has trapped the community in a vicious cycle of extreme poverty, economic vulnerability, and distress urban migration. Socially, this occupational instability has triggered the breakdown of their traditional joint family structures and placed a disproportionate survival burden on Besta women. Furthermore, a historical lack of formal education and socio-political awareness continues to severely hinder their upward social mobility. Despite their inclusion in the state's backward classes category, the community remains largely excluded from the benefits of developmental welfare programs due to systemic illiteracy and a lack of organized political representation. Their fragmentation under various regional sub-caste names has further weakened their collective bargaining power for their constitutional rights. While existing sociological literature extensively covers coastal and marine fishing groups, there is a glaring research gap regarding

the unique, contemporary struggles of inland riverine demographics like the Bestas of Kampli. Therefore, the core problem this study addresses is how the rapid destruction of traditional livelihoods is driving the profound socio-economic and cultural marginalization of the Besta community, thereby necessitating urgent empirical inquiry and targeted policy interventions.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the social structure and structural transformations occurring within the Besta community.
2. To document their cultural heritage, traditions, and the impact of modernity on their customary practices.
3. To investigate their economic realities, focusing on occupational shifts and livelihood strategies.
4. To understand the religious beliefs, rituals, and institutional practices that shape the community's daily life.
5. To critically analyze the socio-economic conditions, empowerment, and lived experiences of Besta women.
6. To assess the educational status and awareness of state-sponsored welfare programs among the community members.
7. To suggest practical recommendations and policy interventions for their sustainable socio-economic development.

4. Hypotheses of the Study

1. The traditional joint family structure of the Besta community **may be** breaking down into nuclear families due to modern economic pressures and urban migration.
2. The unique cultural heritage and customary practices of the community may be slowly disappearing because of the strong impact of modernization.
3. The loss of ancestral fishing opportunities may be forcing the community members to shift towards unstable and unorganized daily wage labor.
4. Traditional religious beliefs and local rituals may be continuing to play a vital role in keeping the community united despite their ongoing economic struggles.
5. The overall socio-economic status of Besta women may be gradually improving through their active participation in the modern workforce and Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
6. A historical lack of formal education may be the primary reason why the community remains largely unaware of and unable to access government welfare programs.
7. Implementing targeted vocational training and awareness programs may be highly effective in ensuring their sustainable socio-economic development.

5. Scope of the Study

This research, conducted in the year 2025, outlines specific geographical, thematic, and methodological boundaries to provide a focused sociological analysis of the Besta community. The scope of the present study is defined by the following parameters:

- **Geographical Scope:** The study is geographically confined to the Kampli Town Municipal Council (TMC) limits and its adjoining river basin areas, located in Kampli Taluk of Ballari District, Karnataka.
- **Thematic Scope:** The research is strictly focused on examining the socio-economic transitions of the marginalized Besta community. It comprehensively covers their occupational shifts, current social standing, economic stability, and the everyday struggles they encounter in sustaining their livelihoods.
- **Target Population:** The scope of inquiry is limited exclusively to the individuals belonging to the Besta community residing within the specified Kampli municipal and riverine regions.
- **Methodological Scope and Sample Size:** The primary data collection is restricted to a sample size of 30 respondents selected from the study area.
- **Data Collection Medium:** The analytical scope relies on primary data gathered through direct, face-to-face interviews with these 30 respondents, aiming to capture authentic, lived experiences regarding their socio-economic transformations.

6. Significance and Need of the Study

The Besta community is currently undergoing rapid socio-economic changes. Studying this transition is sociologically significant for the following reasons:

- **Documenting Cultural Heritage:** The Bestas in Kampli possess unique social and religious traditions. This study documents their indigenous rituals and beliefs before modernization erases them.
- **Impact of Modernization:** Bestas historically depended on river ecosystems for survival. This research analyzes how globalization has displaced them from their traditional habitats.
- **Economic Shifts:** Many Bestas still rely on low-income jobs like net weaving. This study explores their current economic realities and shifts toward new livelihoods.
- **Educational Status:** Education is key to social mobility. This study assesses the community's literacy rates and their changing attitudes toward higher education.
- **Changing Gender Roles:** Besta women historically managed households alone during fishing expeditions. This research examines how modern occupational shifts have redefined their roles and status.
- **Rural-Urban Differences:** Urban and rural Bestas live differently today. This study compares how urbanization and modern transport are changing their traditional social frameworks.
- **Policy Interventions:** The community often misses out on government welfare schemes due to a lack of awareness. This study provides necessary data to help policymakers design better and more reachable support programs for them.
- **Political Awareness:** Historically, the Besta community has lacked a strong political voice. This research highlights their growing political consciousness and their increasing participation in local governance.
- **Social Relations and Equality:** Their position in the local social hierarchy is slowly changing. This study observes how they interact with other communities today and their ongoing journey toward social equality.
- **Overall, this research provides key insights into a marginalized community.** It highlights how the Bestas are adapting to the sweeping forces of modern societal transition.

7. Research Design and Methodology

Sampling Design

- **Study Area:** The study is confined to Kampli town and the Tungabhadra river basin.
- **Sample Size:** A total of 30 respondents from the Besta community were selected.
- **Sampling Technique:** Simple Random Sampling was used for unbiased selection.

Data Collection Methods

- **Primary Data:** Collected directly from the field using a structured questionnaire.
- **Interviews:** Face-to-face interviews were conducted for illiterate respondents.
- **Secondary Data:** Gathered from government records, books, journals, and websites.

Data Analysis

- **Data Processing:** The collected raw data was edited, classified, and tabulated.
- **Statistical Tools:** Data was analyzed using basic statistical techniques like percentages and frequency distributions.

8. Limitations of the Study

Despite the careful design and execution of this research conducted in 2025, the study has certain inherent limitations, which are outlined below:

- **Geographical Constraint:** The study is strictly confined to the Kampli Town Municipal Council and its surrounding river basin. Therefore, the findings may not be universally generalizable to Besta communities living in coastal or other geographically distinct regions.
- **Small Sample Size:** Due to time and resource constraints, the primary data collection is limited to a small sample size of only 30 respondents, which may not fully represent the macro-level realities of the entire population.
- **Thematic Focus:** The research is specifically limited to analyzing the socio-economic and cultural transitions of the community, deliberately excluding deeper macro-political or historical investigations.

- **Subjectivity of Responses:** The primary data heavily relies on the personal opinions, memories, and self-reported answers of the respondents, which may carry inherent subjective biases.
- **Time Constraint:** This is a cross-sectional study conducted over a limited period during 2025. It captures the community's socio-economic status at a specific point in time rather than tracking long-term (longitudinal) changes.

9. Review of Literature

A review of the key literature relevant to the socio-economic transitions of marginalized groups like the Bestas is presented below:

- **M.N. Srinivas (1962) – *Caste in Modern India*:** Srinivas analyzes the power dynamics of the Indian caste system based on his field research. He explains how dominant groups structurally deny power to socially and economically backward castes. His concept of 'Sanskritization' shows how traditional authority is maintained. This framework helps in understanding the historical marginalization of the Besta community.
- **H.C. Boralingaiah (2001) – *Vismruthi Mattu Samskruthi*:** This book explores the lives of fishing communities along the Sharavathi and Aghanashini rivers. It highlights how these indigenous groups live in close harmony with nature. The author stresses that respecting their unique culture is essential to build their self-confidence. This work emphasizes the need to protect tribal identities from modern changes.
- **K.M. Maithri (2002) – *Budakattu Kulakasubugalu*:** Maithri studies the traditional occupations of 49 tribal groups in Karnataka. The book explains how caste-based jobs created deep social and economic inequalities over time. It shows how modern changes and state policies are destroying traditional livelihoods. This perfectly explains the economic displacement faced by artisanal communities like the Bestas.
- **K. Keshavan Prasad (2010) – *Bunde Bestaru*:** This study criticizes how the caste system divides a single community into multiple sub-groups, making them politically weak. Focusing on the semi-nomadic 'Bunde Besta', it documents their daily life, food, and social rules. The author strongly advocates for government recognition of these groups. Providing them with permanent settlements is shown as crucial for their development.
- **S.K. Melakara et al. (2012) – *Ambigara Samudaya Mattu Samskruthi*:** This book is a valuable cultural record of the Besta community and its regional sub-groups like Koli and Mogaveera. It documents their ancient festivals, traditional jobs, and migration patterns. The authors warn that globalization is rapidly erasing these rare cultural practices. Therefore, it serves as a crucial historical baseline for studying the community's past.

Research Gap: Past studies mainly focus on the history, basic culture, and ethnography of these communities. There is a lack of deep sociological research on their present-day challenges. Very few studies examine their current educational struggles, political status, and the changing roles of their women. This paper aims to fill this specific gap by focusing purely on their modern socio-economic transitions.

10. Profile of the Study Area (Kampli, Ballari District)

The present study is geographically confined to Kampli, a Town Municipal Council (TMC) situated along the river basin in the Ballari district of Karnataka. A brief demographic and socio-economic profile of the study area is outlined below:

- **Administrative & Geographical Setup:** Kampli is a structured TMC divided into 23 administrative wards, encompassing approximately 8,410 households. Its location along a riverine ecosystem has historically shaped the socio-cultural and economic lives of its inhabitants.
- **General Demographics:** According to the 2011 Census, Kampli has a population of 39,307 (estimated to be around 53,000 in 2023). The town boasts a positive sex ratio of 1018 females per 1000 males, which is higher than the state average. However, the overall literacy rate stands at 72.44% (Male: 81.32%, Female: 63.84%), slightly below the state average.
- **Social, Religious & Workforce Composition:** The town is socially diverse, with Hindus forming the majority (78.76%), followed by Muslims (20.21%). Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) constitute 20.62% and 8.38% of the population, respectively. Out of the total population, 15,674 individuals are part of the active workforce, primarily engaged in business, agriculture, and daily wage labor.

- **Demography of the Besta Community in Kampli:** The primary subjects of this study, the Besta community (also locally referred to as Ambiga, Gangamatastha, Koli, etc.), have a population of approximately 5,000 individuals distributed across 850 households. They predominantly reside in the Kampli Fort area, Kampli Town, Muddapura, and the Kampli Sugar Factory region.
- **Historical Background & Occupational Transition:** Historically a semi-nomadic, river-dependent tribal group, the Bestas of Kampli traditionally relied on fishing, boating, and riverine trade. However, due to modernization and shifting geographical constraints, the community is undergoing a rapid occupational transition. Many members have now shifted to daily wage labor, masonry, agriculture, and minor trades like net weaving and lime selling.
- **Current Socio-Economic Reality:** Despite residing in an urbanizing TMC, the Besta community remains socially, educationally, and politically marginalized. Women play a crucial role in the community's economy, actively engaging in fish vending to support their families. While historical illiteracy remains a challenge, there is a recent and gradual awareness within the community regarding the importance of formal education for their children.

11. Socio-Economic Background of the Besta Community

- **Historical Background & Habitation:** Historically a semi-nomadic, river-dependent tribal group, the Bestas are now increasingly migrating to urban slums and fringes due to the loss of traditional riverine livelihoods.
- **Demographics & Family Structure:** They primarily speak Kannada and Telugu. Their traditional matriarchal joint families have rapidly transitioned into patriarchal nuclear families. Additionally, life expectancy is noticeably low due to historical occupational physical hardships.
- **Occupational Shift:** Once independent fishermen and net-weavers, they are now one of the most landless communities, having shifted primarily to unorganized daily wage labor, agriculture, and petty trades.
- **Economic Condition & Migration:** This occupational displacement has led to extremely low average incomes, minimal savings, and high distress migration. Many practice animal husbandry to supplement their livelihoods.
- **Educational Transition:** While the older generation faces severe illiteracy due to historical poverty, the current generation is actively encouraging their children to pursue formal education for upward social mobility.
- **Marriage & Culture:** Marriage is deeply valued as a mandatory and sacred institution. Their religious life revolves around Hindu and clan-deity festivals, which act as vital stress relievers and foster community unity.
- **Beliefs & Traditions:** The community relies on traditional indigenous medicine and local justice systems (Nyaya Panchayat) to resolve disputes. While older superstitions persist, educated youth are gradually abandoning them.
- **Status of Women:** Women play a crucial role as equal wage earners and custodians of household traditions. Their growing participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is significantly boosting their financial independence and socio-economic empowerment, despite lingering patriarchal constraints.
- **Political Awareness & Participation:** Historically, the community had a very weak political voice. However, recently there is a growing awareness, and members are starting to actively participate in local Panchayat elections to demand their rights and better infrastructure.
- **Health and Sanitation:** Living in crowded urban slums or on the fringes of towns often results in poor sanitation and limited access to clean drinking water. This makes the community highly vulnerable to seasonal and waterborne diseases, further increasing their medical expenses.
- **Youth Aspirations & Employment:** The younger generation is completely moving away from traditional fishing. Instead, they are migrating to larger cities to work in the informal service sector, such as retail, driving, or delivery jobs, seeking a more stable income.
- **Social Interactions & Equality:** Their position in the local social hierarchy is slowly improving. While they still face subtle social barriers, increasing literacy and economic diversification are helping them interact more confidently and equally with dominant communities.
- **Access to Government Schemes:** Despite being eligible for various backward class benefits, many families struggle to navigate the bureaucracy to get proper caste certificates. There is a widespread lack of awareness about specific housing, educational, or financial schemes provided by the government.

- **Housing and Property Rights:** Many families still lack permanent, legally registered homes. They often live in temporary structures, rented houses, or government-allotted low-cost housing (like the Ashraya scheme) that lack basic structural stability.
- **Impact of Technology and Media:** The rapid spread of smartphones and the internet has deeply influenced the youth. While it provides them with better awareness of the outside world and educational resources, it is also causing a gradual disconnect from their indigenous roots and traditional storytelling.
- **Dietary Changes and Nutrition:** Traditionally, their daily diet heavily depended on the fresh fish they caught. Now, due to the loss of their fishing livelihood and the high cost of goods in urban areas, their food habits have changed, sometimes leading to nutritional challenges.

12. Data Representation and Analysis

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the primary data collected through structured questionnaires and field interviews with 30 respondents from the Besta community in the Kampli region. The data has been systematically tabulated and subjected to statistical analysis to understand the community's socio-economic and cultural transitions.

Table-1: Age Composition

Sl. No.	Age Group (Years)	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	21 - 30	5	16.67
2	31 - 40	12	40.00
3	41 - 50	8	26.67
4	Above 50	5	16.67
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: The highest concentration of respondents (40%) falls within the active working-age group of 31-40 years. Notably, only 16.67% of the respondents are above 50 years of age. Sociologically, this indicates a lower life expectancy within the community, primarily due to the severe physical hardships and health hazards associated with their traditional fishing and wage-labor occupations.

Table-2: Educational Status

Sl. No.	Educational Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Illiterate	18	60.00
2	Primary Education	7	23.33
3	High School	3	10.00
4	Pre-University (PUC)	1	3.33
5	Degree	1	3.33
6	Higher Education	0	0.00
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: Educational backwardness is a severe issue within the community, with 60% of the respondents being illiterate. The dropout rate increases drastically at higher levels, with zero representation in higher education. This lack of formal education is a primary barrier to their upward social and economic mobility.

Table-3: Occupational Distribution

Sl. No.	Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Fishing (Traditional)	15	50.00
2	Agriculture Labor	10	33.33
3	Daily Wage Labor	2	6.67
4	Petty Business	1	3.33
5	Government Service	1	3.33
6	Private Sector	1	3.33
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: While 50% still engage in their traditional occupation of fishing, a massive structural shift is evident. Driven by the decline in profitable fishing opportunities, 33.33% have transitioned into landless agricultural labor. The negligible presence in government and private sectors highlights their inability to secure formal, organized employment.

Table-4: Family Structure

Sl. No.	Type of Family	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Joint Family	8	26.67
2	Nuclear Family	22	73.33
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: The data reveals a significant transformation in social institutions, with 73.33% living in nuclear families. Modernization, occupational distress, and urban migration have caused the rapid disintegration of the traditional Besta joint family system.

Table-5: Residential Background / Environment

Sl. No.	Topography / Area	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Semi-Urban Fringes	12	40.00
2	Plains (Bayalu Seeme)	6	20.00
3	Riverine Areas	4	13.33
4	Slums	4	13.33
5	Hilly Areas	2	6.67
6	Urban Centers	2	6.67
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: Historically dwelling exclusively near rivers, the community is now scattered. A large segment (40%) lives in semi-urban fringes, and 13.33% are forced into slums. This indicates spatial displacement and a struggle to secure stable housing with basic civic amenities.

Table-6: Housing Structure

Sl. No.	Type of House	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Tiled Roof House	14	46.67
2	Government Scheme (Ashraya)	8	26.67
3	Hut / Temporary	6	20.00
4	RCC (Concrete)	2	6.67
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: The housing conditions reflect severe economic marginalization. Only 6.67% own concrete houses, while 20% still live in vulnerable huts prone to health and hygiene hazards. Only a quarter of the population has successfully accessed government housing schemes (Ashraya).

Table-7: Annual Income

Sl. No.	Income Bracket (INR)	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	10,000 - 20,000	12	40.00
2	20,001 - 30,000	8	26.67
3	30,001 - 40,000	6	20.00
4	40,001 - 50,000	4	13.33
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: The economic vulnerability of the community is starkly visible. 40% of the families survive on a meager annual income of 10,000 to 20,000 INR. This extreme poverty prevents savings and traps the community in a cycle of socio-economic backwardness.

Table-8: Head of the Household / Primary Responsibility

Sl. No.	Gender managing the family	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Male	25	83.33
2	Female	5	16.67
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: The contemporary Besta community is overwhelmingly patriarchal, with 83.33% of households managed by men. The 16.67% of female-led households primarily consist of widows or separated women, highlighting a shift from their historical matriarchal tendencies.

Table-9: Acknowledgment of Traditional Occupation

Sl. No.	Is Fishing your ancestral occupation?	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	26	86.67
2	No	4	13.33
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: A vast majority (86.67%) strongly identify fishing as their ancestral root. Even those who have shifted to agriculture or wage labor maintain an emotional and cultural connection to their indigenous occupation.

Table-10: Perceived Standard of Living

Sl. No.	Standard of Living	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Medium	11	36.66
2	Good	8	26.66
3	Average	7	23.33
4	Difficult / Hard	4	13.33
Total		30	100.00

Interpretation: When asked to evaluate their own living conditions, the highest percentage (36.66%) categorized their life as 'Medium', while 36.66% combined perceive their lives as either 'Average' or 'Difficult'. This self-assessment aligns with the objective data reflecting their ongoing struggle with poverty, occupational instability, and marginalization.

Table-11: Impact of Modernization on Cultural Practices

Status of Traditional Customs	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Disappearing / Fading	18	60.00
Partially Maintained	8	26.67
Fully Preserved	4	13.33
Total	30	100.00

Interpretation: Modernization is heavily affecting the community's culture. 60% of the respondents feel that their unique cultural heritage and traditional practices are slowly disappearing. The younger generation is moving away from ancestral customs as they adopt modern and urban lifestyles.

Table-12: Role of Rituals in Community Unity

Importance of Local Rituals	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Important	24	80.00
Somewhat Important	5	16.67
Not Important	1	3.33
Total	30	100.00

Interpretation: Despite their severe economic problems, 80% of the respondents strongly believe that traditional religious beliefs and local festivals are very important. These cultural events act as a strong binding force, keeping the community united and providing mental strength.

Table-13: Improvement in Women's Socio-Economic Status

Impact of Work and SHGs on Women	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Moderate Improvement	15	50.00
Significant Improvement	12	40.00
No Change	3	10.00
Total	30	100.00

Interpretation: A combined 90% of the respondents report that the status of Besta women is improving. By actively working and participating in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women are gaining financial independence and a stronger decision-making role within their families.

Table-14: Awareness of Government Welfare Programs

Level of Awareness	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Unaware / Unable to Access	19	63.33
Partially Aware	9	30.00
Fully Aware and Benefitting	2	6.67
Total	30	100.00

Interpretation: A lack of formal education is a major barrier for the community. About 63.33% of the respondents are completely unaware of government welfare programs or unable to access them because they lack the required education to handle government documents and procedures.

Table-15: Willingness for Vocational Training

Interest in Skill/Vocational Training	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Highly Interested	21	70.00
Interested with Financial Support	7	23.33
Not Interested	2	6.67
Total	30	100.00

Interpretation: The community is highly eager for development. A vast majority (93.33%) are ready to take up new vocational and skill training programs. This proves that providing targeted training would be highly effective in helping them secure stable jobs and achieve sustainable socio-economic growth.

13. Major Findings (Results)

Based on the empirical investigation and data analysis of the Besta community in the Kampli region (categorized under Category-1 Backward Classes), the study reveals significant socio-economic, educational, and cultural transitions. The major findings are summarized below:

- **Nomenclature and Spatial Settlement:** Historically a river-dependent community, the Bestas are identified by numerous occupational synonyms across Karnataka. Currently, spatial displacement is highly evident; empirical data shows that a significant portion of the respondents now reside in semi-urban fringes, while a smaller segment is forced into slums. Across these settlements, Kannada functions as their primary mother tongue.
- **Demographics and Health Vulnerability:** The age composition reveals a concerning demographic trend. While a large segment of the population falls in the active working-age group, a notably small fraction constitutes the elderly population. Sociologically, this indicates a significantly lower life expectancy within the community, primarily driven by the severe physical hardships and health hazards associated with their traditional and modern labor.
- **Occupational Displacement and Transition:** There is a drastic shift in their daily economic life. Due to the commercialization of inland fishing, they are increasingly abandoning their traditional occupations. The data reveals that only a portion of the community still engages in traditional fishing, while a massive segment has transitioned into landless agricultural and daily wage labor. The presence of the community in the formal government and private sectors is negligible. Yet, remarkably, a vast majority still emotionally identify fishing as their true ancestral occupation.
- **Severe Economic Vulnerability:** The occupational shift has led to extreme financial distress. The study found that a major section of the families survives on a meager annual income. This extreme poverty traps them in a cycle of backwardness, leading a considerable number of respondents to perceive their standard of living as highly difficult or barely average.
- **Educational Upward Mobility and Illiteracy:** Educational backwardness remains a severe barrier, with a majority of the respondents currently being completely illiterate, and virtually none having reached higher or university education. However, despite this historical deprivation, parents today show a profound commitment to educating their children, viewing formal education as the essential escape from poverty.
- **Transformation of Family Structure:** Modernization, economic pressure, and the necessity to migrate for daily wage employment have structurally transformed the community. The data highlights the rapid disintegration of the traditional joint family system, with a dominant majority now living in nuclear families. Furthermore, the community is overwhelmingly patriarchal, with most households being male-headed.

- **Status and Empowerment of Women:** Sociologically, the status of Besta women is witnessing a positive shift. An overwhelming majority of respondents acknowledged moderate to significant improvements in women's socio-economic status. Despite the patriarchal setup, women are actively participating in the modern workforce and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), leading to greater financial independence and decision-making power.
- **Cultural and Religious Continuity vs. Modernization:** The community is caught in a cultural paradox. While a considerable portion of respondents fears that their broader traditional customs are slowly fading due to urbanization, they have successfully preserved their core cultural identity. A massive majority stated that local life-cycle rituals and collective festivals (most notably the *Gangamma Pooja*) remain highly important, acting as a vital force for community unity and psychological resilience.
- **Poor Housing and Infrastructure:** The physical living conditions of the community remain substandard. Only a minuscule fraction of respondents own permanent concrete houses, while a notable portion still lives in vulnerable temporary huts. Although some families have benefited from government housing schemes (*Ashraya*), the majority still lack basic civic amenities like proper drainage and sanitation.
- **Deprivation from State Welfare:** The community remains largely excluded from the full benefits of government developmental programs. A staggering majority of the respondents are either completely unaware of government welfare schemes or unable to access them due to bureaucratic hurdles and systemic illiteracy.
- **High Readiness for Skill Development (Vocational Training):** A highly optimistic finding of the study is the community's eagerness for economic rehabilitation. An overwhelming majority of the respondents expressed a strong willingness to undergo targeted vocational and skill development training, viewing it as a necessary step for securing stable employment and sustainable socio-economic survival.
- **Emerging Political Consciousness:** Historically politically marginalized and unorganized, the community is now experiencing a shift. Recent improvements in social exposure are fostering a new political awareness, with community members showing a growing interest in active political participation at the local Panchayat levels to demand their rights.

Conclusion of Findings: The Besta community, essentially tribal in its historical roots, is caught in a complex web of transition. While they heavily struggle with extreme poverty, poor infrastructure, and massive occupational displacement, their gradual embrace of formal education, the empowerment of their women through SHGs, and a high willingness to adopt new vocational skills highlight a positive trajectory toward structural socio-economic assimilation.

14. Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to support the socio-economic development of the Besta community while preserving their cultural heritage:

- **Promote Vocational Education:** The government must provide targeted vocational and technical training to the youth. This will empower the educationally deprived members to secure sustainable self-employment.
- **Enhance Modern Skill Development:** Both rural and urban Besta youth need access to high-quality education and modern skill-building programs. This will prepare them to compete for professional jobs at national and international levels.
- **Rationalize Reservation Policies:** State reservation benefits should be distributed proportionally based on population size and the actual severity of backwardness. This ensures equitable opportunities and prevents a few dominant backward classes from monopolizing welfare schemes.
- **Increase Welfare Awareness:** There is a severe lack of awareness regarding government schemes. The state should publish and distribute simple, regional-language manuals at local offices to educate the community about their legal rights and available welfare facilities.
- **Revitalize Traditional Livelihoods through Cooperatives:** To address massive occupational displacement, the government should grant exclusive and subsidized inland water leases to Besta community cooperatives. Providing financial assistance for modern aquaculture and subsidized fishing equipment will help make their ancestral occupation economically viable once again.

- **Strengthen Women's Micro-Enterprises:** Acknowledging the positive impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on Besta women, financial institutions should offer collateral-free micro-loans specifically tailored for them. Establishing exclusive women-led cooperative societies for fish processing, vending, and small-scale industries will further solidify their financial independence.
- **Prioritize Housing and Basic Infrastructure:** Given their substandard living conditions and high spatial displacement, local municipalities must urgently prioritize the Besta community under state housing initiatives like the *Ashraya* scheme. Ensuring these new settlements are equipped with basic civic amenities—such as clean drinking water, proper drainage, and sanitation—is absolutely critical to improving their overall health and life expectancy.
- **Facilitate Access to Higher Education:** To bridge the severe gap in university-level education, the state should introduce exclusive scholarships, free hostel facilities, and career counseling centers specifically for Besta youth. This is crucial to encourage their transition from high school to degree and professional programs.
- **Implement Targeted Healthcare Initiatives:** Given the community's lower life expectancy and vulnerability to occupational health hazards, the government should conduct regular free health camps in their settlements. Ensuring mandatory enrollment of all Besta families in state health insurance schemes (like Ayushman Bharat) is essential.
- **Support Cultural Preservation and Community Spaces:** To prevent the erosion of their unique indigenous heritage, the local administration should allocate funds and land for the construction of a dedicated 'Besta Samudaya Bhavana' (Community Hall). This will provide a secure space for their traditional gatherings, Nyaya Panchayats, and cultural festivals like the *Gangamma Pooja*.
- **Encourage Political Leadership and Representation:** To translate their emerging political consciousness into actual policy influence, NGOs and civil society groups should conduct leadership training programs. Furthermore, ensuring adequate representation of the Besta community in local self-government bodies (Panchayats and TMCs) is vital for their long-term structural empowerment.

15. Conclusion

This study highlights the profound socio-economic and cultural transitions of the Besta community in the Kampli region. Historically a river-dependent group, they are currently facing severe occupational displacement due to modernization and ecological changes. This has forced a shift from traditional fishing to unorganized daily wage labor, leading to economic vulnerability, distress migration, and the fragmentation of traditional joint families into nuclear units. Despite these structural challenges, the community demonstrates remarkable resilience. There is a highly positive shift toward formal education for their children. Additionally, the active involvement of women in the workforce and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) reflects growing socio-economic empowerment, all while the community successfully preserves its indigenous cultural rituals. Ultimately, to ensure their sustainable development and complete integration into the modern economy, targeted state interventions—specifically vocational training, equitable reservation distribution, and increased welfare awareness—are urgently required. The survival of their unique cultural identity now heavily depends on creating a balance between modern economic assimilation and preserving their ancestral roots. Local administrative bodies must actively bridge the gap between policy formulation and grass-root implementation to truly benefit these marginalized populations. Furthermore, fostering political leadership within the community will empower them to collectively negotiate their constitutional rights and demand better civic infrastructure. Only through such inclusive and comprehensive development strategies can the Besta community transition from a state of historical vulnerability to one of sustainable self-reliance and social dignity.

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