



## Representation of weaker sections in Indian knowledge system The view point of C. Parvathamma, the First Dalit woman sociologist in India (The Contribution of C. Parvathamma to Indian knowledge system )

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### Abstract :

C. Parvathamma, the first Dalit Woman sociologist in India, made pioneering contributions to the Indian knowledge system through her ethnographic studies on caste dynamics, rural societies, and subaltern perspectives, challenging Brahmanical dominance in academia.

Parvathamma authored 11 books & 70 research articles focusing on scheduled castes, Tribes & south Indian village structures Critiquing Brahminical misrepresentations of caste & Highlighting oppression by landowning communities. Her PhD from Victoria University under Max Gluckman informed works like those on Lingayat beliefs & Veerasaivism as anti-Brahmanical Movements, emphasizing power relations & Dalit lived realities over narratives.

Parvathamma's oeuvre expanded Indian sociology by centering marginalized voices, critiquing contemporaries like M.N. srinivas & festering understanding of anti-caste movements, thus enriching, the epistemological logical pluralism of the Indian Knowledge system.

In this research the light has been thrown on the contribution of Dr. C. Parvathamma to the Indian knowledge system and the issues raised by her about caste and gender in the domain of sociology.

### Introduction :

Prof. C. Parvathamma was affectionately known as CP, belongs to the genre of sociologists whose life & works live beyond their times C. Parvathamma (1927-2006) was the first generation sociologist in India. C.P. was born in syagali a small village in the chitradurga district in 1927 of the former, Mysore state into a Dalit family. Having received her ph.D. from victoria University Manchester U.N. she joined university of Mysore as lecturer in sociology and retired as Head of Department, Of sociology in the university. At the university as a head of sociology until 1988, she overcame triple discrimination of caste, class and gender. Yet through her grit and determination she made a space for herself in the corridors of academics where Dalits are seldom welcomed. Through her serious academic pursuit, she contributed immensely to our understanding of south Indian village society and social life of Dalits. She founded the centre of Research in Bural and Tribal Development to advance subaltern studies on house hold norms, rituals and policy interventions. Her grounded analyses promoted ethnomethodological insight into Dalit integration versus autonomy debates, earning awards like Rajyotsava (1990), Gargi (1999) and Nadoja (2005)

C. paricathamma developed key sociological theories rooted in subaltern perspectives, emphasizing empirical studies of caste, gender, and rural inequalities to challenge dominant Brahmanical and western Frameworks in Indian sociology.

Parvathamma theorized that upper caste scholars like M.N. shrinivas perpetuated a "Brahmanical Odyssey" by juxtaposing elite values against non-Brahmanical ones, marginalizing Dalit realities and oversimplifying caste dynamics. She advocated ethnomethodological approaches grounded in lived experiences of scheduled castes- to reveal structural oppression by landowning castes, rejecting universal western models that ignored India's caste-religion intersections.

### Research Methodology :

Prof. C. Parvathamm's thoughts and writings covered a wide range of themes that not only addressed contemporary issues but also indicated the turn of events that might emerge in the future. Here the researcher will focus on to capture the essence of C. Parthamma's thoughts and work on caste and gender based inequality, as well as social justice. So the study is based on –



- i) The panorama about class and gender in the world of Indian sociology exposed by C. Parvathamma.
- ii) The caste based discrimination in Indian social structure revealed by C. Parvathamma.
- iii) The manifestation of rural life of Dalit's in the scenery of Indian society as examined by C. Parvathamma.

It's an attempt of a Qualitative study of Prof. C. Parvathamma's work with Explorative research design to revisit and gain a holistic understanding of caste, gender and rural society in India. To reach out the purpose library method will be exercised with secondary sources like books, articles of C. Parvathamma and other published works on her.

#### **Discussion :**

C. Parvathamma linked gender and caste in her research by demonstrating their intersectional impact on Dalit women, portraying them as seeing compounded oppression in rural south Indian contexts through structural inequalities in households, ritual, and socio economic access.

Parvathamma highlighted how Dalit women endured "Double discrimination" as both lower-caste members and females, analyzing village studies where caste hierarchies dictated housing conditions, labor burdens, and ritual exclusions for the rural poor. Her works such as *Housing Rural Poor and Their Living conditions*. revealed gendered caste norms that confined women to subservient roles, amplifying poverty and limiting agency compared to upper caste or male dalit counterparts.

#### **Parvathamma critique male dominated sociological theories on caste and Bias in upper – Caste Frameworks :**

C. Parvathamma critiqued male – dominated sociological theories on caste, particularly those by upper caste scholars like M.N. Shrinivas, for embedding Brahminical biases that marginalized Dalit experiences and perpetuated elite perspective.

Parvathamma argued that Shrinivas's theories, such as Sanskritisation, reflected a "South Indian Brahmin viewpoint, idealizing Brahmin superiority and lacking compassion or brotherhood toward lower castes, thus failing to address untouchability realities. She highlighted how male sociologists prioritized urban Class analyses over caste-religion intersections central to Indian life, oversimplifying hierarchies through western lenses that ignored subaltern voices.

#### **Advocacy for subaltern Sociology :**

Her ethnomethodological approach countered this dominance by centering Dalit women's lived realities household norms, rituals, and economic exclusion exposing structural violence overlooked in male authored works. Parvathamma positioned Veerasaivism as evidence of anti-Brahminical potential for equality, challenging theories that romanticized caste mobility without critiquing its oppressive core.

#### **Institutional and Epistemological challenge :**

Facing double discrimination herself, she exposed academia's upper caste male monopoly, advocating regional – language texts and policy grounded research to democratize sociology beyond elite, English- Centric narratives.

#### **Parvathamma's methodology differ from male sociologists :**

C. Parvathamma's methodology diverged from that of male sociologists like M.N. Shrinivas by prioritizing ethnomethodological, subaltern centered approaches over abstract, elite driven structural functionalism.

#### **Intersectional and Policy Oriented :**

Parvathamma integrated caste – gender intersections with actionable policy insights, studying government interventions for rural poor upliftment, which departed from male theorists, detachment from praxis and failure to address Dalit autonomy debates. She rejected oversimplified Western class frameworks advocating decolonized sociology attuned to India's caste – religion complexities, thus democratizing knowledge production beyond upper caste male dominance.

#### **Policy Evaluation and Archival Analysis :**

She integrated government program assessment evaluating interventions' for scheduled castes with archival reviews of local traditions like veerasaivism, combining quantitative socio-economic data on housing and poverty with qualitative insights from Dalit autonomy debates. Her methods

emphasized lived experiences over theoretical abstraction, producing 11 books and 70 articles grounded in multiyear field engagements.

C. Parvathamma Focused her field work on rural villages in Mysore (now Karnataka), particularly those with mixed caste composition including scheduled castes, Lingayat, and landowning communities.

Her seminal ethnographic work centered on south Indian villages near Mysore, such as those analyzed in “The Remembered village : A Brahminical Odyssey”, where she examined household dynamics, rituals, and caste interactions among Dalits and veerashaiva Lingayats. Studies like “Housing for the Rural Poor and Their Living Conditions” targeted impoverished Dalit humlets in Mysore district, documenting living standards and labor patterns.

C. Parvathamma’s research prominently featured Madigas and Lambanis (also Known as Banjaras) as key Dalit / Scheduled caste communities in her Mysore district studies, alongside broader analyses of scheduled caste facing landowning oppression.

#### **Madiga Communities :**

Parvathamma examined Madiga households in rural Karnataka villages, documenting their ritual exclusions, labour exploitation and living conditions under veerashaiva dominance, as seen in works like “Scheduled castes at the crossroads” Her ethnomethodological focus revealed madiga debates on integration versus autonomy amid caste hierarchies.

#### **Integrated SC – ST Studies :**

Her book “Scheduled castes and Tribes : A socio – Economic survey explicitly examined both groups demographic trends, housing, occupations, financial positions, and political participations in rural Karnataka during the 1970’s, noting STs’ Proximity – based discrimination akin to SCs despite lacking untouchability stigma. Fieldwork addressed their shared dependencies on dominant castes poverty, and government interventions, with STs’ often isolated in forests yet facing plains exploitation.

- i) Surveys and case studies of scheduled castes, tribes and rural poor focusing on housing conditions, festivals and economic activities.
- ii) Direct interviews and household data collection to document inequalities and government intervention impacts.
- iii) Longitudinal tracking of upliftment programs through empirical verification of socioeconomic changes.
- iv) Combination of qualitative narratives with quantitative indicators from regional language sources.

#### **5) Conclusion :**

Parvathamma produced works on scheduled castes, Tribes, anticaste movements and veerashaivism to challenge misrepresentations in Brahminical scholarship. Her 70 articles and 11 books influenced policy, prioritizing subaltern perspective over elite upper caste dominance, she emphasized integrating dalit, lower caste perspectives like her own and Ambedkar’s, countering uppercaste male dominance in citations and curricula.

She demonstrated Brahminism’s operation in academia by contrasting citation rates : Srinivas’s works far outnumber hers despite her contributions. Through leadership roles at universities like Mysore and Mangalore, she built sociology departments emphasizing marginalized voices. Dr C. Parvathamma’s main critiques of M.N. Srinivas focused on his Brahminical bias in sociological writings, particularly regarding caste and sanskritisation. Parvathamma urged that srinivas’s viewpoint stemmed from a south Indian Brahmin lens, influencing his work with an underlying ideal of Brahmin superiority. She emphasized understanding this subjectivism as central to his theories on caste dynamics.

She combined fieldwork on housing, rituals, and government interventions with policy recommendations, influencing state upliftment measures. Parvathamma urged curricula reforms to include regional-language texts and decolonize institutions for inclusive sociology.

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