SOCIAL DISTANCE AMONG SCHEDULED CASTE STUDENTS —
A CASE STUDY*

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The present investigation is an attempt to study the social distance of the scheduled castes towards other caste groups — and within their sub-castes. A modified form of Bogardus Social Distance Scale by Kuppuswamy, was administered to 104 randomly selected first degree learning Scheduled Caste students from six general colleges in the city of Tirunelveli. Seven well-known castes of Tamil Nadu and seven sub-castes of SCs were included to study social distance as expressed by the respondents. Important findings are as follows: (i) The respondents exhibit closer proximity with their own caste groups. (ii) The Maravas are the most excluded caste group, (iii) Religious affinity predominates over the caste affinity, (iv) Within the SCs, the respondents would like to have closer proximity with Adi Dravida and Valluvan who are educationally and socially advanced sub-castes.

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Caste as an institution, has drawn the attention of social psychologists in India because our society by and large, is articulated by a number of castes and subcastes. Social psychologists have endeavoured to study objectively the functional relationship between different castes in our society. Viewed from the 'Varna' system of Hindu social organisation, at one end we have the "Brahmins" occupying the highest position and at the other end the socially deprived untouchables, namely "Sudras". In such a stratified society, norms have been specified for correct and appropriate behaviour of its members when they encounter each other. Norms of appropriate behaviour have resulted in avoidance, an expression of prejudice, among groups having varied Socio-cultural background.

Prejudice is an unfavourable attitude — a predisposition to perceive, act, think and feel in ways that are "against" rather than "for" another group, whether it is a caste, religious, regional or linguistic group. It is measured in terms of social distance. Social distance, it appears, is a natural trend in every society, more so in case of the communities which are traditionally based on social hierarchy. In such communities, the dominant group may not allow the subservient groups equal opportunities. Despite rapid changes in social set-up, the dominant group may try to retain the built-in prejudices, which are likely to be revealed in social distance. Park (1923) defines, 'Social distance' as grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterise pre-social and social relations generally. According to Bogardus (1925) social distance, refers to the degrees and grades of understanding and feeling that persons experience regarding each other. The degree to which individuals are willing to accept people who differ from themselves into their own social group may be considered as a measure of their "social distance" from these outgroup persons (Triandis and Triandis, 1960). Simmel (1923) defines social distance as the degrees of sympathetic understanding that exist between persons, a person and his social groups and between social groups. Dutt (1931) describes social distance as the feeling that our own group is set off from another. In short, social distance is the distance at which the members of the prejudiced group hold another group and its members. Indeed it is a serious threat in India to national integration which is so essen-

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tial at the present juncture. An attempt to study the direction and intensity of social distance among different social groups in our society, would help in reducing prejudices within themselves and promote national integration.

Social scientists like Park (1923) and Bogardus (1925) used the concept of social distance to study the processes of interracial and inter-ethnic relations, attitudes and prejudices. The Bogardus social distance scale (1925) was the first of its kind to be used to measure attitudes and prejudices. It consists of an arrangement of items in such an order that they range in implication from willingness to accept individuals in most intimate relationship to unwillingness to accept them at all. This scale has been employed by social psychologists to study group prejudices.

Representative Studies in India

Modified forms of Bogardus Scale have been used invariably by all researchers in India to study social distance among various religious, linguistic and caste groups.

Adinarayanan (1950) studied the social attitudes of Indian students and professionals towards the British and other ethnic groups before and after independence. The study clearly indicated the appreciable change in the prejudicial attitude of both the groups.

Agarwal (1965) investigated the social distance existing between caste groups. He concluded that intercaste reservations however, did exist particularly in the matters of interdining, acceptance of food, choice of friends etc., among children.

Anant (1968 and 1972) studied the change of attitude of caste Hindus and Harijans of Agra, after an interval of four years. Some increase was found in the percentage of caste Hindus, showing liberal attitude towards physical contact with the Harijans.

Jai Prakash and Reddy (1967) measured the social attitude of university students towards caste and religious groups. Brahmins and Harijans were the most and least preferred caste groups respectively. One interesting finding here is that caste prejudice predominated religious prejudice.

Kuppuswamy (1951) studied the social relationship of college students towards various religious and communal groups. High caste non-brahmins were preferred for closer proximity such as matrimonial relationship, interdining etc. Muslims and Sikhs were the least preferred groups.

Muttagi (1975) measured the social distance of Bombay University students towards religious and linguistic groups. He concluded that in-group feelings of religious groups were stronger than those of linguistic groups.

Nataraj (1963) studied the social relations of college girls towards caste and religious groups. The study revealed that all caste groups except Harijans, had expressed no social distance towards their own groups. Greater distance among religious groups was exhibited than among caste groups.

Parameswaran and Rao (1965) studied the effect of hostel stay on social distance pattern of college students and arrived at the conclusion that longer the stay in the hostel, lesser the social distance and girls were found to be less susceptible to change than boys.

Ramdas Porude (1966) measured social attitude of the college students towards various linguistic groups of India and foreign nationalities. His study highlighted the hostility of the respondents towards the Chinese for obvious political reasons and admittance of the Americans and the Russians to our country. Further, each linguistic group had disinclination to establish matrimonial relationship with other groups.

Sinha and Upadhyaya (1961) investigated into the reaction of university students
towards Indian and ten ethnic groups from other countries. The maximum apathy was found to be towards the Chinese. The Pakistani came next to the Chinese.

Subramanian et al. (1973) studied the relationship existing among four caste groups in Gandhigram. The minority caste group wanted to move towards the majority caste more closely and tried to emulate their way of life which is a clear indication of the process of sanskritisation to attain higher status in the hierarchical scale.

Swaminathan (1963) made an investigation into the social attitude of African students in India towards various nationalities including Indians in India and Africa. The study highlighted the desire of the respondents to have closer social proximity with the Japanese.

The present investigation is an attempt to study the social distance of the scheduled castes towards other caste groups and within their sub-castes.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were formulated as,

(i) To study the social distance of the scheduled castes towards other caste groups.

(ii) To study the social distance of the scheduled castes within their sub-castes.

Methodology

Tool: A modified form of Bogardus Social Distance Scale by Prof. Kuppuswamy, was used in this study. The caste groups studied for objective (i) were Brahmins, Vellalas, Maravas, Nadars, Yadavas, Hindu and Christian Harijans. Here Brahmins and Vellalas belong to upper caste, Maravas, Nadars and Yadavas belong to backward caste, and Hindu and Christian Harijans belong to the scheduled castes. Just to see whether religion had any influence on Harijans, two religious groups of Harijans were included in the study namely Hindu and Christian Harijans. These are the prominent groups which come in contact with the respondents. Six categories of social relationship were used to measure social distance; namely

1. would like to establish kinship by marriage.
2. would like to take food with them in my dining room.
3. would like to cultivate intimate friendship.
4. would like to take them as guest in my house.
5. would accept as neighbour.
6. would like to have casual acquaintance.

Seven prominent sub-castes within the scheduled castes in Tirnelveli district of Tamil Nadu—Pagadai, Puthirai Vannan, Valluvan, Adi-Dravida, Kadaiyam, Semman, Kuravan were included, to study the social distance within the scheduled castes.

Sample: The study was conducted on a group of 104 randomly selected scheduled caste students studying in first degree course in six colleges in the city of Tirnelveli. The sample consisted of 76 Kadaiyam, 24 Adi-Dravida, 2 Valluvan, and 2 Pagadai.

Administration: Each subject was individually approached and given a copy of the social distance scales. After proper instruction the subjects were requested to give their reactions on the scales.

Scoring: The different categories of rela-
tionship reflect degrees of intimacy varying in linear continuum from small social distance to large social distance. On the basis of this, weights were given for each choice ranging from one to six. This type of scoring actually measured social proximity. The lower the score, less the distance between the two groups.

Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results

TABLE 1
SOCIAL DISTANCE OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES TOWARDS OTHER CASTE GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Caste Groups</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Order of Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Hindu Harijan</td>
<td>1.932</td>
<td>1.725</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Christian Harijan</td>
<td>2.307</td>
<td>2.307</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Nadars</td>
<td>3.288</td>
<td>3.288</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Yadavas</td>
<td>3.808</td>
<td>3.808</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Maravas</td>
<td>4.308</td>
<td>4.308</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table indicates mean social distance score and order of preference of the respondents towards seven caste groups. The subjects indicated to have closer proximity with their own caste groups. Here we can observe the influence of religion over caste. (Ninety two per cent of the subjects were the Hindus). The subsequent priorities fall on the Brahmins, Nadars and Yadavas. Their choice of Brahmins has got some historical relevance. Age long social indignities heaped on the scheduled castes by the higher castes, especially the Brahmins might have prompted them to move nearer the status of the Brahmins and other upper castes. In addition, their present level of education and the constitutional provisions for their upliftment could explain their standpoint. Since Nadars and Yadavas occupy a better position in the scale of social hierarchy, it is natural on the part of the respondents to develop closer proximity with these groups. The excluded groups are the Vellalas and Maravas. Prolonged communal disharmony existing between the Maravas and the Harijans could be the reason for exclusion of Maravas from any type of relationship. The slightly less rejection of the Vellalas — an upper caste, may be due to the social regard of the respondents towards them.

TABLE 2
RANKING THE CASTE GROUPS WITH RESPECT TO TYPES OF RELATIONSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Relationship</th>
<th>Hindu Harijan</th>
<th>Christian Harijan</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Maravas</th>
<th>Nadars</th>
<th>Vellalas</th>
<th>Yadavas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdining</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate Friendship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table indicates the ranking of the caste groups with respect to types of relationship as mentioned in the first column. The first choice towards marriage expresses their endogamous attitude. Consecutive preferences fall on the Brahmins and Christian Harijans. Religious affinity of the subjects is disclosed herein. Willingness to have matrimonial relationship with the Brahmins reveals their attitudinal changes. They would like to come up in the class hierarchical scale by sanskritisation which, in other words, removes obnoxious features of their caste. The caste groups with whom they do not like to have matrimonial relationship are the Maravas and Yadavas. For interdining and friendship, the respondents prefer the Nadars and Yadavas respectively. Maravas are the most excluded group from all types of relationship except for acquaintance. This indicates their unwillingness or even hostility towards Maravas. The respondents are willing to accept Vellalas as their guest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
<th>SOCIAL DISTANCE WITHIN THE SCHEDULED CASTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/ No.</td>
<td>Sub-Castes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Adi-Dravida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Valluvan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Kuravan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pagadai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Kadaiyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Puthiraivannan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Chemman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here attitude of the subjects towards sub-castes is studied. The first and second preference of the respondents fall on the Adi-Dravida and Valluvan respectively. High literacy of Adi-Dravida (44.89%) and occupation of Valluvan—seeing horoscope, might have prompted the respondents to develop closer proximity with these sub-castes. The Chemman and Puthiraivannan are the least preferred groups, perhaps due to their traditional occupations such as tanning and washing clothes respectively. The Kuravan, Pagadai, and Kadaian lie at the intermediate stage. Though majority of the subject (73%) belong to the sub-caste Kadaian, they would like to have closer proximity with Adi-Dravida, a well advanced sub-caste of the scheduled castes.

Ranking of the sub-castes of the scheduled castes with regard to types of relationship as mentioned in column No. 1, is presented in the above table. Regarding matrimonial relationship, the respondents' preference is on the Adi-Dravida for obvious reasons. Chemman and Puthiraivannan are the most rejected groups from the marriage standpoint. Puthiraivannan and Chemman are preferred for casual acquaintance and neighbourhood relationship. The sub-caste — Valluvan, is preferred for interdining. Majority of the subjects, even though belong to the sub-caste — Kadaian, would like to have only friendship with their own caste. They are leaning towards the well advanced sub-castes. Kuravan is ad-
mitted as a guest by the raters. Some inconsistancy prevails in the respondents regarding placement of the sub-caste, pagadai.

**Findings**

1. The respondents exhibit closer proximity with their own caste groups. One interesting observation here is, even among their caste, preference goes to their own religious group which reaffirms their religious affinity.

2. Second preference of the subjects goes to the Brahmins. Perhaps their present education and sanskritisation would have prompted them to react on this line.

3. Maravas are the most excluded caste group among the all.

4. Within the scheduled castes, the sub-castes with whom the subjects would like to have closer proximity are Adi-Dravida and Valluvan, who are educationally and socially advanced sub-groups.

5. Excluded or distant groups among the sub-castes are the Puthiraivannan and Chemman.

6. Social distance within the scheduled castes is lesser in extent than social distance among the caste groups.

Only healthy relations among all social groups in a country would pave the way for social harmony, the most essential component of national integration. Efforts to promote social relations is an urgent task of all concerned.

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