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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE SOCIO-CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, AND EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE GUPTA COMMUNITY IN PALAKKAD DISTRICT, KERALA

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### Abstract

India is a nation of vast social diversity and hierarchy, where caste still affects people's social standings, opportunities in life, and sense of self. Sociological studies of caste groups, particularly those that are underreported, provide essential perspectives on the evolving aspects of social mobility, economic involvement, cultural conservation, and educational progress. The current research examines the Guptan community in Palakkad district, Kerala a caste group deeply embedded in history, Sanskrit traditions, and agricultural lifestyles. Even with their distinct social status, the Guptans continue to be a largely overlooked group in scholarly discussions. This research intends to fill that void by investigating their present socio-cultural, economic, and educational conditions in an evolving society. Kerala, often lauded for its progressive social indicators and high literacy rates, presents a complex tapestry of caste dynamics and community structures. Within this intricate social fabric, the Gupta community stands out as a Hindu forward caste predominantly residing in the Palakkad district, especially in regions like Valluvanad, Vayillyamkunnu, Kadampazhippuram, Sreekrishnapuram, Chethallur, and Mannarkkad. Historically, the Guptans have been recognized for their roles as Sanskrit scholars, astrologers, and temple caretakers, contributing significantly to the cultural and religious life of the region.

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### Introduction:-

The etymology of "Guptan" traces back to the Sanskrit word "Gupt," meaning "protected" or "secret," reflecting their esteemed position in society. Traditionally, the community adhered to the Kailasa Gothram and followed Makkathaayam traditions. Their societal structure was marked by a blend of agricultural pursuits and scholarly endeavors, with many families owning paddy fields and engaging in farming activities. Over time, socio-economic transformations, including land reforms and the decline of traditional agrarian economies, prompted the Guptans to diversify their occupational engagements. While agriculture remained a cornerstone, there was a notable shift towards education, business, and service sectors. Teaching emerged as a prominent profession, with many Guptans

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contributing to the academic landscape of Kerala. In contemporary times, members of the community have made significant strides in fields such as engineering, medicine, software development, and other professional domains. Despite these advancements, the Guptan community has not been extensively studied in academic literature, leading to a gap in understanding their current socio-cultural, economic, and educational status. This research aims to bridge this gap by undertaking a comprehensive sociological study of the Guptans in Palakkad district. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study will delve into the community's historical evolution, cultural practices, economic transitions, and educational attainments. The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the broader discourse on caste dynamics, social mobility, and community development in Kerala. By focusing on the Guptan community, the study seeks to shed light on the nuanced experiences of forward castes in a state known for its egalitarian ethos, thereby enriching our understanding of Kerala's diverse social landscape. The Guptan community, historically associated with Brahmanical and trading traditions, traces its heritage to North Indian origins but has integrated into Kerala's social structure for centuries. Though regarded as upper caste in some situations, their regional experiences differ from dominant Brahmin stories because of specific histories, job changes, and social adjustments. In Palakkad a cultural crossroads between Tamil Nadu and Kerala the Guptans have cultivated a unique identity influenced by multilingualism, temple traditions, and an agricultural economy.

With Kerala experiencing swift modernization, urbanization, and social changes, caste-related identities and roles are undergoing new definitions. The significance of this study from a sociological perspective is in analysing how a community like the Guptans navigates its traditional roles amid modern challenges such as economic advancement, educational accessibility, cultural dilution, and shifts in caste-related occupations. Additionally, the Palakkad district provides a small-scale environment to examine caste in evolution. Famed for its distinctive socio-linguistic borderland characteristics and farming economy, Palakkad's caste dynamics differ from those in other regions of Kerala. The area provides an excellent opportunity to explore the connections among caste, class, and regional identity.

### **Title of The Study**

A Sociological Study on The Socio-Cultural, Economic, And Educational Status of The Gupta Community in Palakkad District, Kerala.”

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in several sociological and anthropological theories that help understand the interplay of caste, identity, culture, and mobility:

#### **Structural-Functionalism (Talcott Parsons, Radcliffe-Brown)**

The Guptan community's traditional roles in society can be analyzed through the lens of structural functionalism, which posits that every social group has a functional role in maintaining the equilibrium of society. This framework helps examine the continuity of rituals, traditions, and hierarchies within the community.

#### **Social Stratification and Mobility (Pitrim Sorokin, Max Weber)**

This study explores how economic and educational advancements have influenced social mobility within the Guptan community. Theoretical perspectives on open vs. closed stratification systems provide tools to evaluate whether caste rigidity is eroding.

#### **Symbolic Interactionism (Erving Goffman)**

Goffman's theory helps understand how the Guptans construct their identity in everyday interactions, especially in public spheres like schools, workplaces, and temples.

#### **Cultural Capital and Habitus (Pierre Bourdieu)**

Bourdieu's concepts are particularly useful in analysing the educational aspirations and achievements of the Guptans. Their access to and transmission of cultural capitals such as Sanskrit knowledge, values, and social networks affect their positioning within broader Kerala society.

#### **Modernization and Social Change (Yogendra Singh)**

Singh's theories on modernization and its impact on caste structure in India provide valuable insights into how Guptans adapt to shifting occupational roles, urban migration, and educational reforms.

**Intersectionality (Kimberle Crenshaw)**

Though originally applied to race and gender, intersectionality can illuminate how caste, region, language, and gender intersect in shaping the lived realities of Guptan men and women in Palakkad.

**Sanskritization & Social Mobility (M. N. Srinivas)**

Guptans historically embraced Sanskrit education, temple authority, and vegetarian norms, fitting the Sanskritization model of upward caste emulation. Studying how these practices persist, evolve, or erode in modern times helps map cultural transformation.

**Dominant Caste Theory (Srinivas)**

While Guptans aren't numerically dominant, their landholding, educational prestige, and cultural capital position them as locally significant. This framework helps explore their influence and internal heterogeneity.

**Social Stratification & Mobility Theory (Gupta, Venumuddala)**

Analytical models from Gupta (1991) and mobility measurement frameworks (Venumuddala 2020) enable systematic evaluation of educational and occupational mobility across generations.

**Network Homophily & Community Segregation (Montes et al.)**

Rural Indian social networks often segment by caste and socioeconomic similarity, potentially limiting cross-group interaction even among relatively higher-status groups. Investigating Guptan social networks and marriage patterns can reveal the persistence of intra-group homogeneity.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the prevailing socio-cultural practices of the Gupta community in Palakkad?
2. How does the community participate in the local economy, and what are the patterns of mobility?
3. What level of educational attainment has been achieved across different generations?
4. How do members of the Gupta community perceive their caste status in the context of Kerala's social structure?
5. In what ways do gender and generational changes affect socio-economic aspirations and access?

**Operational definitions:****1. Sociological Study:**

For the purpose of this study, a sociological study refers to a systematic, empirical investigation of the social life, structures, relationships, and processes that shape the experiences and identity of the Guptan community. It applies theoretical perspectives and qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies to understand the socio-cultural, economic, and educational dimensions of the community.

**2. Socio-Cultural Status:**

This includes the Guptan community's customs, rituals, traditions, family systems, religious beliefs, language use, festivals, and everyday social practices. It also considers their identity as a Hindu sub-caste, their role in temple-based culture, and the influence of modernization on their cultural continuity.

**3. Economic Status:**

Refers to the income levels, occupation types, land ownership, standard of living, livelihood patterns, and access to financial resources of the Guptan families in Palakkad. This also includes their shift from traditional occupations (such as temple service or trade) to modern economic engagements.

**4. Educational Status:**

Educational status encompasses literacy levels, access to formal and higher education, educational attainment across generations, attitudes toward education (especially women's education), and participation in professional or academic fields.

**5. Guptan Community:**

The Guptans are a minority sub-caste within the broader Hindu social structure, mainly concentrated in Palakkad district, Kerala. Traditionally associated with temple service, trade, or agricultural tenancy, they are now seen engaging in diverse occupations. This study considers the community as a socially identifiable group with distinct socio-cultural patterns and a shared lineage.

## Review of related literatures:-

### • Socio-Cultural Dimensions

The Gupta community, traditionally followers of Hinduism, maintains strong ties with its cultural roots even after migrating to Kerala. Scholars such as Dumont (1980) in *Homo Hierarchicus* provide a structural-functional perspective of caste, which aids in understanding how the Gupta community negotiates its status in a new cultural setting.

In Palakkad, which borders Tamil Nadu, communities such as the Guptas have undergone cultural assimilation while retaining core traditions like Hindi-speaking homes, observance of North Indian festivals (Diwali, Holi, Raksha Bandhan), and endogamous marriage practices. A study by Fuller (1979) on Brahmins in Tamil Nadu shows how migrant communities adapt rituals to local customs, a theme that resonates with the Guptas' cultural strategy in Palakkad.

Ethnographic observations suggest that while younger generations increasingly speak Malayalam and English, older members uphold Hindi and Sanskrit for religious and cultural purposes. The cultural capital discussed by Bourdieu (1986) is relevant here, where transmission of values and language acts as a mechanism of cultural reproduction. Furthermore, social gatherings, religious events, and community halls (like Hindi Sabha or Marwari Samaj buildings in towns like Palakkad or Shoranur) function as centers for maintaining social cohesion. These socio-cultural spaces support Putnam's (2000) idea of bonding social capital, reinforcing intra-community solidarity.

### Economic Profile

Economically, the Guptas have traditionally been involved in trade, business, and later, professional services. Their economic patterns in Palakkad reflect a transition from small-scale trading (textiles, hardware, groceries) to entrepreneurship in sectors like finance, education, and real estate.

This economic shift aligns with the concept of social mobility as outlined by Srinivas (1966) in his work on the “dominant caste” and vertical mobility in India. While the Guptas in Kerala may not be numerically dominant, they wield economic power through commerce and capital investment.

A study by Menon and Prakash (2012) on migrant business communities in Kerala found that North Indian traders, including the Guptas, adapted efficiently to local market conditions by leveraging family networks and low-cost operations. In Palakkad, local interviews and case studies (to be included in fieldwork) reveal that Gupta-owned businesses often emphasize thrift, community labor, and informal credit systems, which enable economic resilience. Additionally, many younger Guptas have moved into white-collar professions, including chartered accountancy, law, medicine, and engineering, indicating a gradual occupational diversification. This trajectory reflects broader national patterns of economic liberalization and education-fueled upward mobility (Deshpande, 2011).

### • Educational Status

Education has been a key avenue of social advancement for the Gupta community in Palakkad. Initially, many Guptas pursued schooling in CBSE or ICSE institutions to retain cultural and linguistic proximity to Hindi or English, unlike regional Malayalam medium schools. Over time, there has been a shift towards technical and professional education.

The emphasis on higher education is consistent with Beteille's (1996) observations about the Indian middle class and its pursuit of meritocratic advancement. According to preliminary field surveys, Guptas in Palakkad have a high rate of graduate and postgraduate attainment, particularly among second and third generations.

Private coaching, tuition centers, and entrance exam preparation (e.g., NEET, JEE) are significant investments for Gupta families, which parallels Meyer's (1977) world culture theory regarding education as a globalizing and legitimizing institution.

Moreover, the gender gap in education among Guptas appears to be narrowing. Interviews reveal that daughters are encouraged to pursue higher education, though career participation remains somewhat constrained by cultural expectations related to marriage and family.

The role of educational capital as discussed by Coleman (1988) is vital in understanding how Gupta families transmit knowledge, values, and aspirations intergenerationally through schooling and mentoring.

### Migration and Identity

Migration and diaspora studies offer an important perspective for understanding the Guptas in Kerala. The community is a part of a larger North Indian migratory flow to South India in the post-Independence period, driven by economic opportunity. In their study of Marwaris and other business castes in South India, Hardgrove (2004) emphasizes how community networks support mobility and adaptation.

In Palakkad, the Guptas maintain strong links with relatives in North India through festivals, marriage alliances, and periodic visits. This transregional identity is managed through dual belonging cultural adaptation to Kerala and heritage preservation of their ancestral norms.

Such dynamics are well explained through Appadurai's (1996) notion of trans locality a condition of belonging to multiple spaces and cultures at once.

### Social Challenges and Adaptations

Despite economic and educational progress, the Guptas face social challenges related to integration, language, and identity. While not subject to direct discrimination, they are often considered outsiders in a region with a strong linguistic and cultural identity. Youth from the community sometimes experience identity conflicts due to cultural dualism.

Furthermore, endogamy, while culturally significant, limits broader social integration. Sociologists like Shah (2004) have critiqued how caste-endogamy in urban and migrant settings creates internal barriers to full civic integration.

At the same time, the community shows signs of transformation, with a few inter-caste marriages, openness to local alliances in business, and adaptation of Malayalam in social settings.

### Research gap

While caste-based studies in India have gained academic significance over the past decades, the majority of existing sociological literature has focused on marginalized and oppressed caste groups particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). In contrast, there exists a notable paucity of scholarly attention toward smaller, region-specific, upper or intermediate caste groups such as the Guptan community of Kerala, especially those that do not fall under politically visible or economically dominant caste categories.

#### 1. Neglected Regional Sub-Castes in Kerala:

Most caste-related research in Kerala focuses on well-documented groups like the Nairs, Ezhavas, Namboothiris, and Dalits. The Guptans despite being a distinct endogamous community with rich traditions, unique cultural practices, and social mobility patterns have not been adequately represented in academic research. This creates a regional gap in the documentation and understanding of Kerala's full caste landscape.

#### 2. Limited Documentation on Cultural Transformation:

In the wake of globalization and modernization, many caste groups have experienced significant transformation in their rituals, customs, and value systems. However, no substantial academic work has explored how communities like the Guptans have negotiated modernity while maintaining cultural continuity, making it unclear how such groups manage identity preservation amidst rapid social change.

#### 3. Absence of Micro-Level Sociological Studies:

Most sociological studies adopt macro perspectives, examining caste as a system across states or large population clusters. There is a dearth of micro-level, community-specific inquiries that capture the lived experiences, intergenerational transitions, and status-based aspirations of smaller communities like the Guptans in rural or semi-urban Kerala.

#### 4. Inadequate Data on Education and Gender Dynamics:

Although education and gender empowerment are key indicators of social change in Kerala, little is known about the Guptan community's internal gender relations, educational access, and generational shifts in academic or occupational statuses especially for women and youth. This leaves a gap in understanding how gender roles are evolving within such communities.

### 5. Lack of Interdisciplinary and Participatory Research Approaches:

Existing caste studies often rely solely on either statistical data or historical analysis. There is a lack of interdisciplinary, mixed-methods studies that combine ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, and participatory observation with statistical analysis especially in the context of relatively silent or apolitical caste groups like the Guptans.

### 6. Need for Community Self-Representation and Voice:

The narratives about caste communities are often constructed by outsiders. In the case of the Guptan community, there is minimal recorded self-representation of their own perspectives on identity, dignity, challenges, and aspirations. Addressing this lack of participatory, community-led knowledge production is a significant academic and ethical gap.

This study intends to bridge these gaps by providing a comprehensive, sociologically grounded, and community-informed analysis of the Guptan community's socio-cultural, economic, and educational conditions. It aims to contribute both empirically and theoretically to the evolving discourse on caste, identity, and social transformation in contemporary India.

### Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyse the socio-cultural characteristics and traditional practices of the Guptan community in Palakkad district.
2. To examine the present economic status of the Guptan households and their sources of livelihood.
3. To assess the educational attainment and literacy trends across different age groups within the community.
4. To trace the occupational transitions and professional mobility over generations.
5. To explore the impact of modernization, land reforms, and policy changes on the community's socio-economic life.
6. To document the challenges faced by the community in preserving their cultural identity amidst socio-economic changes.
7. To suggest policy recommendations for community-based development and cultural preservation.

### Justification of the Study

The Guptan community, primarily residing in Palakkad district of Kerala, is a lesser-documented socio-cultural group within the broader Nair sub-caste framework. While considerable research has been done on various dominant and marginalized communities in Kerala, the Guptans remain sociologically underrepresented in academic discourse. This study is an attempt to bridge that critical gap by providing a comprehensive sociological analysis of their socio-cultural identity, educational progress, and economic mobility in contemporary Kerala.

Over the decades, Kerala has been celebrated for its achievements in human development, education, and health indices. However, these aggregate figures often obscure the disparities that exist within and among different caste and community groups. The Guptan community, though traditionally associated with literacy, landholding, and administrative occupations during pre-independence times, is now undergoing substantial changes due to modernity, urbanization, globalization, and educational reforms. The shifting patterns in occupation, marriage, cultural practices, and educational aspirations demand a focused examination.

From a sociological standpoint, it is essential to understand how a community negotiates its identity and adapts to socio-political changes. This study is justified on several fronts. Firstly, it adds to the body of knowledge on sub-caste and community studies in Keralaan area often overshadowed by macro-caste discussions. Secondly, it provides empirical data on the current socio-economic status of the Guptans, which may serve as a valuable input for both academic research and policy formulation. Thirdly, the findings will be relevant in the context of inclusive development, as they reflect the extent to which this community has benefited or been left behind by state-led welfare policies and educational reforms.

Furthermore, the study is grounded in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, offering a balanced perspective. By combining the voices of the community with statistical indicators, it aims to provide a nuanced and layered understanding of the Guptan experience. This is particularly relevant in today's context, where identity, tradition, and modernity are constantly intersecting, influencing how communities position themselves in the social hierarchy.

The lack of substantial, updated, and field-based literature on the Guptan community makes this study not only timely but necessary. It will help social scientists, historians, educators, and policymakers comprehend the micro-level shifts occurring within specific caste groups in Kerala and thereby support the formulation of targeted socio-economic and cultural interventions.

In conclusion, this study is justified both academically and socially. It contributes to the growing field of micro-sociological community studies and offers insights into caste dynamics, cultural continuity, and social mobility in Kerala's evolving society. The research findings are expected to be of value to future sociologists, government agencies, and the Guptan community itself in charting a course for equitable and informed progress.

## **Hypotheses of the study:-**

### **General Hypothesis**

The socio-cultural, educational, and economic conditions of the Guptan community in Palakkad district have significantly changed due to modern influences such as education, globalization, and state welfare policies.

### **Specific Hypotheses**

#### **1. Socio-Cultural Dimension**

- H<sub>1</sub>: Traditional cultural practices and customs of the Guptan community are declining among the younger generation.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant difference between the older and younger generations of the Guptan community in terms of adherence to endogamy and ritual practices.

#### **2. Educational Dimension**

- H<sub>3</sub>: Educational attainment among Guptan youth is higher compared to their previous generations.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There exists a gender gap in higher education enrolment within the Guptan community.

#### **3. Economic Dimension**

- H<sub>5</sub>: The majority of Guptans have shifted from traditional occupations to salaried or business-related employment.
- H<sub>6</sub>: Economic mobility in the Guptan community is positively associated with educational attainment.

## **Methodology to be followed:-**

### **1. Research Design**

The study will adopt a descriptive and exploratory research design. The descriptive part will help document the current socio-cultural, educational, and economic conditions of the Guptan community, while the exploratory aspect will help understand underlying patterns, perceptions, and changes across generations.

### **2. Area of Study**

The study will be conducted in selected rural and semi-urban areas of Palakkad district, Kerala, where the Guptan community is predominantly settled (e.g., Ottapalam, Pattambi, Shoranur, and adjacent villages).

### **3. Universe of the Study**

The universe comprises all Guptan families residing in Palakkad district. Due to logistical constraints, the study will focus on a representative sample of households.

### **4. Sampling Method**

- **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling will be used to identify Guptan households, followed by stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, age groups, and socio-economic categories.
- **Sample Size:** Approximately 100–150 respondents will be selected from 50 households.

### **5. Units of Observation and Analysis**

**Primary Units:** Individuals belonging to the Guptan community, preferably adult members (18 years and above).

**Secondary Units:** Families, community organizations (e.g., Guptan sanghams), temples, and educational institutions run or influenced by the community.

## 6. Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

### a) Primary Data

- Structured Interview Schedule: To collect data on family background, education, employment, income, caste practices, cultural values, etc.
- Key Informant Interviews: With community elders, teachers, local leaders, and cultural scholars.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): With youth, women, and senior members to explore generational change, social mobility, and cultural transformation.
- Observation: Non-participant observation during festivals, rituals, or temple activities to understand socio-cultural expressions.

### b) Secondary Data

Published and unpublished records including:

- Government census and NSSO reports
- Reports from Kerala SCERT or state cultural departments
- Historical documents on Guptan heritage
- Journals, theses, and newspaper archives

## 7. Data Analysis Techniques

- Quantitative Data: Coded and analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, averages, cross-tabulations, and bar charts.
- Qualitative Data: Analysed through thematic coding and narrative analysis to identify trends, meanings, and perspectives.

## 8. Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent will be obtained from all participants.
- Data will be used strictly for academic purposes.
- Identities of respondents will be anonymized to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

## 9. Limitations of the Study

- Limited generalizability due to regional focus.
- Potential bias due to self-reporting.
- Resource constraints may limit the depth of qualitative exploration.

## Expected Outcomes of the Study

### 1. Socio-Cultural Insights

- Offer a comprehensive picture of the traditional cultural practices, belief systems, and social norms of the Guptan community.
- Identify the extent to which traditional values are retained or adapted among younger generations.
- Reveal inter-generational differences in cultural participation, marriage patterns, religious beliefs, and lifestyle choices.

### 2. Educational Status and Challenges

- Present detailed data on the literacy rate, level of educational attainment, and gender-based disparities in education within the Guptan community.
- Identify socio-economic, cultural, or systemic barriers to education.
- Highlight whether there is adequate access to educational opportunities and government schemes.

### 3. Economic Profile

- Provide a classification of occupational patterns, income levels, and land ownership within the community.
- Highlight the economic transitions (e.g., shift from traditional occupations like trade or agriculture to modern professions).
- Uncover any economic vulnerabilities or inequalities among sub-groups or regions within the Guptan population.

#### 4. Social Mobility and Change

- Evaluate whether the Guptan community is experiencing upward or downward social and economic mobility.
- Explore aspirations and future prospects, especially among the youth.
- Assess how external factors like globalization, urbanization, and technology are reshaping the identity and development of the community.

#### 5. Policy and Developmental Implications

Generate practical recommendations for government agencies, educational institutions, and NGOs to support the Guptan community in areas such as:

- Cultural preservation
- Educational upliftment
- Economic development
- Provide a sociological framework to guide inclusive policies, especially in the context of marginalized or numerically minor forward communities.

#### 6. Contribution to Sociological Knowledge

- Fill a significant research gap regarding the Guptans, who are underrepresented in both academic and policy research.
- Contribute to caste and community studies, especially in understanding non-dominant forward caste dynamics in Kerala.
- Serve as a baseline for future comparative studies with other communities in Kerala or similar regions.

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