Introduction

In this thesis I argue that the migrant identities ascribed to the scavenging castes are not merely due to the languages they speak, but it is the caste system which places them as migrants within the larger hierarchical structure. Annamalai (2001) explains how India is a multilingual country with over 1,600 mother tongues about 200 languages for a population of about 940 million people. The populations of many linguistic minorities in India are larger than the population of entire European countries. “It is different in function from the demographically multilingual but functionally monolingual countries” (35). Functionally it is multilingual with forty seven languages used in education, eighty-seven in press, seventy-one in radio, thirteen in cinema and thirteen in state-level administration (35). Linguistic minorities exceed 20 percent of the population in more than half of the districts in the country (35).

In a multilingual country like India, the selection of language is influenced by the speaker’s needs of earning and living. It is natural for a person to switch from one language to another when he/she moves to a different domain or to a different topic within the same domain. One language is maintained for ethnic identity, such as regional languages, while others are acquired for business transactions, official dealings, entertainment, such as English. Annamalai argues that the sociolinguistic research shows that the role of different languages is changing in India’s multilingual scene (37). The fundamental change is in the role of language for political control and social mobility in independent India. In the last century regional language movements have started asserting their identity and demarcating boundaries based on languages; in the wake of such assertions, the minority languages also started seeking protection from the majority in respective states (37). Such movements led
to the states being reorganized, based on major regional languages. In such cases the scavenging castes, like several other communities which spoke a different language, have become a minority in these regional states. In other words the reorganization of states along linguistic lines further marginalized the scavenging communities.

Article 29 of the Indian Constitution gives the right for all linguistic minorities to preserve their language and script and stipulates that no language should be discriminated against and that all languages should be treated equally. However, the linguistic division paved the way for some of the numerically strong languages to dominate the numerically weaker ones as the former got some official recognition. The new relation is more hierarchical functionally since the use of language in domains like administration and education provides greater access to power and status than others. It should be noted that although the right to have access to primary education through the mother tongue was granted by the Article 350A of the Indian Constitution, no specific mention is made about the question of including minority languages in the administrative processes of the state. Thus, although the opportunities for education and employment have been made open to all segments of the society, not everyone has equal opportunity when it comes to participating in the administrative processes.

Language is also used to discriminate groups, and to restrict their participation in power structure (Annamalai 37). As Annamalai argues discrimination is not based on language competence, because it is a matter of achievement, but it is due to ascribing particular language speaking group to an identity [caste], which is not the dominant language identity by birth (37). Language became a tool in the process of acquiring power, social mobility and getting employment in Government sectors. In Tamil Nadu, this led to anti-
Hindi sentiments, Tamil nationalism, and also Andhra nationalism as well. For example for a separate Telugu speaking State, Potti Sriramulu went on fast un-to-death. On December 15th 1952 fifty days of fast he died, and the Telugu language movement for a separate state spread, as a result of which, in 1953 the Central Government formed a commission to recommend the reorganization of state boundaries. K.V. Narayana Rao argues that

"it was the prospective political and economic advantages that might accrue to each region and, sometimes, to a predominant caste in that region, which really influenced the attitude of that region towards the formation of an Andhra province (or state) rather than an emotional or sentimental commitment to the Andhra identity" (qtd. in Mitchel 26).

Indian society has always remained stratified by caste – an institution that ascribes a hierarchical status determined by birth, and which cannot be changed by substantially acquiring the language of power or by increasing the standard of living. In fact, the Indian society, shaped by the brahmanical order of hindu religion, is founded on a system of caste hierarchy. Caste divides the Indian society into four layers: the brahmans are at the top, followed by the kshatriyas, then the vaishyas and the shudras at the bottom. Outside this caste system there are communities that are treated as untouchables, i.e. the outcastes. Since the caste hierarchy is divided in such a way that one particular community dominates the other community which is below that, the discrimination can be seen within different untouchable castes too. Due to the pervasive nature of caste ideology, and its entrenched influence in social, economic and political realms of the individual language speaker, it is imperative to be attentive towards the caste of a community while analyzing the language spoken by it.
Caste plays a major role in deciding one’s status in a given society, while at the same time governing the speech of a particular caste. Gumperz (1958), while researching the village dialects of Khalpur, found that untouchable castes use a particular phoneme in their speech, which was largely decided by their hierarchical position in society. Though caste is an important factor in linguistic variance, most sociolinguists like Annamalai (1990), (2001), DP Pattanayak (1975) and Khubchandani (1991), have constantly undermined the role of caste in language studies. Khubchandani mentions how “brahmin and non-brahmin varieties of speech are used in Dravidian languages”, severely ignoring the linguistic variations existing among “non-brahmin” castes in South India (44). He also views the welfare policies of the Indian state as a reaction to “representatives of narrow loyalties” (105). In relation to the anti-caste movements, he claims these sections of the society looks to the state as the “sole guardian or as a manipulator” (105). Such biased understanding over the anti-caste movement is widespread among Indian sociolinguists. Shailendra Kumar Singh (1997) has been similarly dismissive of caste-based movements in India.

This trend [caste based slogans] started when the Janta Dal emerged as an alternative to the congress-I... To grab the votes in the election by articulating the issuing appeals to particular castes has become a fashion. ..That is why during the elections in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and in some other North Indian states, the public speeches delivered by Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mayawati, Kanshi Ram and likes were based upon attempt to divide and/or incite particular castes in order to wrench power or to remain in power (74).

All the names referred by Singh, belong to dalit and backward castes. Singh’s opinions voice an apprehension felt by upper caste social scientists following the political
assertiveness of backward and untouchable castes in post-Mandal India. His arguments are based on the logic of purity and merit, as against the raucous divisiveness which he ascribes to such political movements. As G. Aloysius (2005) rightly points out:

The puritans among the social scientists would still not be convinced. They would point out the fact that in several of these so-called anti-inequality movements [of those whom Singh refers above] the aspirants tried hard to become equal with those above them while rejecting similar attempts from those below them. Puritanism appears more as a criterion to judge the polluted and it is rarely used as a yardstick to measure oneself (83).

Sociolinguists like G.K. Panikkar (1985) and Khubchandani(1991) in India have identified how scavenging castes are largely bilingual in nature. Most of these communities speak one language at home, while adopting the regional language for everyday communication. Most sociolinguists have reduced the bilingual conditions of scavenging castes by assuming that that they were historically migrant communities. Such reductionary presumptions evade the complexity of linguistic variation and caste discrimination scavenging communities are subjected to. Sweeper castes remain doubly discriminated – as they belong to the lowest of castes, and because they speak a language other than the majority language in linguistically divided states.

The present thesis attempts to analyze the linguistic position of these scavenging castes, with clear understanding of the social and linguistic marginalization that these communities have been subjected to. We aim to argue that the scavenging caste’s dialect is an outcome of the caste Indian society, in which they are situated.
The linguistic peculiarity of various scavenging castes is largely due to the society's isolation they have been subjected to as a community. Scavenging castes have, for long, been ostracized due to their denigrated position within the caste hierarchy and the association of their profession with filth and impurity. The condition of scavenging castes is often reduced to a question of profession, while neglecting the role of caste in retaining these communities in their state of deprivation. This fact has been largely ignored by social scientists and linguists. Indian linguists have constantly ignored caste as a factor in creating linguistic variance. Hence, any sociolinguistic work on these communities should be clearly informed by and sensitive towards the continued societal discrimination they have been subjected to.

For the present research, I have analyzed the scavenging caste in two dimensions. (i) Scavenging as a caste occupation (ii) Languages of scavenging castes.

Scavenging as a caste occupation

Firstly, I explore the caste system in India and the place ascribed to scavenging as a profession within the system. For this, I compare Ambedkar's and Gandhi's views on caste system. Gandhi understood caste to be a fundamental element in Indian society and attempted to merely detach the stigma attached to caste professions, while not disturbing the structure of caste society. Ambedkar, however, wanted to radically transform and uproot the existing caste society and work towards an egalitarian social order. I then analyze how the post-independence Indian government adopted the Gandhian view on caste and executed these through various governmental schemes and policies. In this part, I also scrutinize the various government policies directed towards scavenging castes. Moreover, most non-governmental organizations and literature dealing with the scavenging castes also indirectly adopted Gandhi's view. They did not demand the eradication of the caste system, but rather
argued for the eradication of the scavenging occupation. In other words these books and NGO's

served as the ideological supplement for the governmental programmes on the ground, which were driven mainly by a need to manage the population without questioning or upsetting the larger ideological and structural problems in which the community was enmeshed (Ravichandran 2011 23).

Through these studies, I attempt to illustrate that within governmental and popular discourse, scavenging as a profession remained in the limelight, while the aspect of scavenging as a caste occupation was severely neglected.

Languages of Scavenging Castes

For my research, I have examined the languages of various scavenging castes in the four South Indian states. These scavenging castes include arunthathiyars, rellis, mehtars, pakis, bhangis and others. However, I have limited my data to two castes – the arunthathiyars (of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka) and rellis (of Andhra Pradesh).

I have chosen these two castes due to the peculiarity of their linguistic and regional identity. Arunthathiyars in both Kerala and Karnataka trace their origin back to Tamil Nadu. The majority of them speak a language allegedly similar to Telugu, and they all exhibit bilingual characteristics. Within Kerala and Karnataka, these communities are multilingual and considered to be migrants. However, even in Tamil Nadu, from where they were originally from, these communities are considered to be outsiders due to their linguistic variance. Nonetheless, these communities are considered to be “migrants” in all the milieus. Arunthathiyars in Tamil Nadu are considered “migrants” because they speak Telugu.
But even in Andhra Pradesh they are considered to be migrants as they do not speak the local Telugu. This purported migrant identity is further substantiated by presumptive historical research (such as Edgar Thurston’s Volumes on “Caste and Tribes of Southern India”).

The rellis of Andhra Pradesh are located near Vishakhapatnam. They speak a language assumed to be closer to Odiya than Telugu. This community originally belonged to the Ganjam province of Madras Presidency, which had a considerable Odiya population before the linguistic demarcation of states. The linguistic affiliation of communities, within linguistically formed states, act as markers of their cultural and regional identity. Due to the linguistic variance of scavenging castes, they are continually subjected to exclusion and discrimination – due to both their caste and their language.

Within this section, I have attempted to create a historically and socially informed study of the scavenging castes through archival materials, references to these communities in books, articles, and other sources. I have also used the comprehensive set of data I had collected during my field study. This information has been tabulated, linguistically analyzed (the pronouns, adjectives, numerals, kinship terms, question words, quantifiers, verbs, verbless sentences, plural merging, subject agreement and gender markers) and compared with other regional languages.

Overview

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter lays out the various discourses on the caste system and sociolinguistic work dealing with caste in India. I begin by exploring the disjunction between caste and class, and the permeation of caste within urban spaces. I later examine Ambedkar and Gandhi’s debates on caste. Finally, I also
present an overview of the prominent linguistic analysis of caste and language (drawing from Gumperz (1958), Annamalai (2001),(1990), Pattanayak (1986) 1981), Susan Bean (1974), William Bright (1966), Panikkar (1985), and others) and how caste dialect is a reflex of social stratification.

The second chapter examines the position of scavenging castes within the social hierarchy, and their estranged relationship with the post-independence Indian state. I examine how the scavenging community is marginalized on two grounds – by their entrapment in a filthy profession, and by their continued discrimination within the Scheduled Caste category. I shall explain how the scavenging as a caste profession has been further entrenched by the Gandhian ideology implemented through governmental policies, and how the existing reservation policy has not helped the scavenging caste in any way.

The third chapter examines the development of Hindi as the official language of the Indian state and the emergence of various language movements in India which rose in opposition to this. I also further discuss how the reorganization of Indian states on linguistic basis led to the marginalization of scavenging castes as linguistic minorities and a migrant communities in South Indian States. In this context, I also look into the growing assertion of arunthathiyars as “native” Tamils.

The final chapter compares the languages spoken by relli and arunthithiyar communities with prominent regional languages. While a preliminary linguistic analysis is conducted, my research interest lies in the sociopolitical factors which have led to the isolation of these communities and the resultant variation in linguistic features. This
awareness would shed more light on the alleged migrant identity of scavenging communities and their continued exclusion from popular linguistic movements.
Bengali is an Indo-Aryan language mostly spoken in South Asia. It is the foremost language in most of the states in the northeastern regions of India, including Andaman and Nicobar Island. Bengali was initially a secular language of old Indo-Aryan and was influenced by Persian and Arabic. The language varies in different states especially in the use, accent, words, and phonetics. Bengali is the second most spoken language in India with over 83,369,769 people speaking it in the country. The Bengali language is part of the program offered by the University of Karachi. India’s national anthem was written in the Bengali language. 4. Telugu - 84 Million Speakers. Telugu is a Dravidian language spoken widely in India and dominates a number of states in the country. Cleaning Human Waste. "Manual Scavenging," Caste, and Discrimination in India. Languages. Available In. English. Manual scavenging communities in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh were identified with support from the Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan (a coalition of 30 civil society organizations from 13 Indian states dedicated to ending manual scavenging). According to Government of India statistics, the states chosen have had the highest number of people engaged in manual scavenging.[1] They were also selected to provide a more complete picture of the various ways in which manual scavenging is practiced in India. Our focus in this paper is on the Indian caste system which has long been the archetype of a rigid and unchanging social institution that traps individuals within a hierarchical, hereditary structure which determines their economic and social status. Srinivas called this process Sanskritization since Brahmins are distinguished from other caste by the extent of their access to the Sanskrit language and the sacred texts written in it. The shape of these territories closely reflected their historical antecedents. In Southern India, the state of Hyderabad was ruled by a Nizam the first of whom was a Mughal governor who had extracted control from his erstwhile suzerains over a large portion of the empire's territory in the Deccan plateau.