IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 7, June 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

A Geographical Analysis of Occupational Structure among the Dhangar Community in Atpadi, Kavathemahankal and Jat Tehsils

Birudev Bapu Masal[1] and Prof. (Dr.) S. B. Gaikwad[2]
Research Scholar[1]
Research Guide & HOD, Department of Geography[2]
Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Karad[1]
Loknete Prof. Sharad Patil Mahavidyalaya, Miraj[2]
bmasal99@gmail.com, sbpopatgaikwad1@gmail.com

Abstract: *The Dhangar community of Maharashtra has historically been associated with pastoralism, primarily sheep and goat rearing. Over time, their occupational structure has undergone significant transformation due to changing geographical, environmental, and socio-economic conditions. This study examines the occupational patterns and livelihood transformation of the Dhangar community in 29 selected villages of Atpadi, Kavathemahankal, and Jat tehsils, using a 10% purposive sample of households. A empirical method, combining field surveys, interviews, observations, and secondary sources, was employed to collect and analyze data. Results show that agriculture is the dominant occupation (70.33%), with Padalkarwadi (77.62%), Nangole (77.53%), and Mudhewadi (76.36%) showing the highest dependence, and Ankale (62.56%) and Revnal (66.67%) the lowest. Sheepherding (15.91%) is highest in Ankale (25.17%) and Alkud (23.87%), and lowest in Manewadi (8.38%) and Padalkarwadi (8.56%). The service sector (7.78%) and other occupations (5.98%) are emerging, with the highest participation in Revnal, Karalhetti, Manewadi, and Wakshewadi, and lowest in other villages. Village-level variations indicate that geographical conditions, land availability, and socio-economic factors significantly influence occupational choices. Overall, the study highlights a shift from traditional pastoralism to agriculture-based and diversified livelihoods, reflecting the community's adaptive strategies, resilience, and gradual socio-economic modernization.*

Keywords: Dhangar Community, Occupational Structure, Variations, Pastoralism, Livelyhood Transformation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Dhangar community is one of the oldest pastoral groups in Maharashtra, traditionally associated with livestock rearing, particularly sheep and goats. The term "Dhangar" is believed to have been derived from the Sanskrit word *"Dhenu"* (cow) or *"Dhang"* (wealth), reflecting their close association with animal husbandry. Historically, the Dhangars are considered a omadic or semi-nomadic community that migrated across the Deccan Plateau in search of pasture and water. According to Irawati Karve (1961), "the Dhangars are a pastoral caste widely distributed in the Deccan, traditionally dependent on sheep rearing and seasonal migration." Similarly, G. S. Ghurye (1969) noted that "the Dhangars represent a typical example of a community whose occupational structure is closely linked with ecological conditions." The origin of the community is thus deeply rooted in the semi-arid environment of the Deccan Plateau, where grasslands and dry climatic conditions supported pastoral livelihoods. Over time, the community diversified into several sub-groups such as Hatkar, Sangar, and Gavli, each specializing in different economic activities like shepherding, wool weaving, and dairy production. However, due to changing environmental and socio-economic

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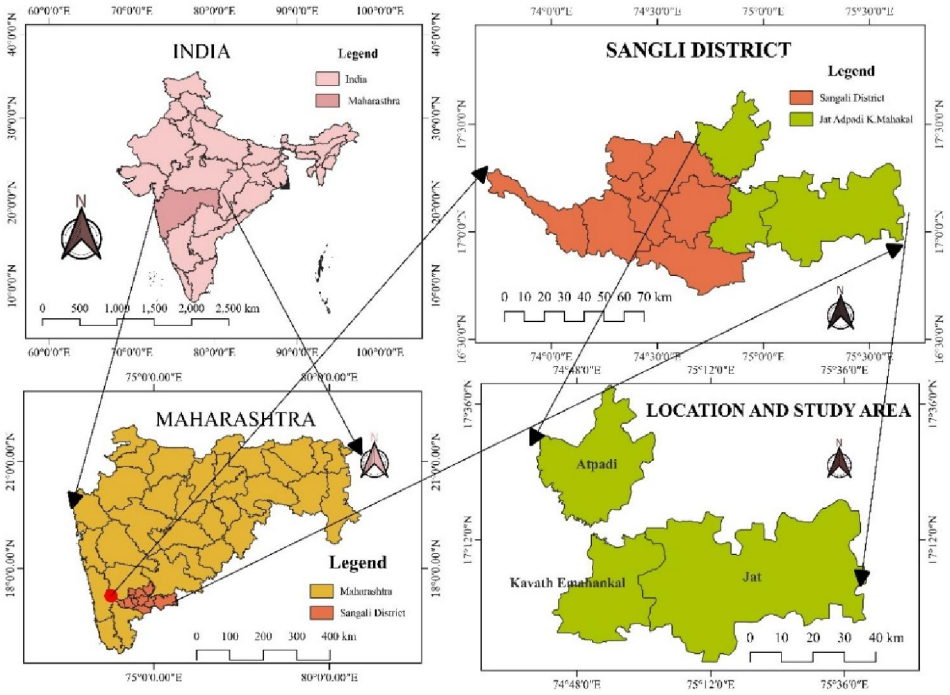
conditions, the Dhangar community is gradually transitioning from its traditional pastoral base to agriculture and other occupations.

According to Ramachandran. R (2002), communities traditionally dependent on pastoralism and agriculture often shift to multiple livelihood strategies to cope with environmental and economic constraints. This pattern is particularly evident in regions with erratic rainfall and limited natural resources, where households combine agriculture, livestock rearing, and non-farm activities to sustain their livelihoods.

II. STUDY AREA

The present study is conducted in three tehsils Atpadi, Kavathemahankal, and Jat located in the south-eastern part of Maharashtra. Geographically, the study area lies between 16°45′ N to 17°30′ N latitudes and 74°15′ E to 75°15′ E longitudes and forms part of the drought-prone Maandesh region. The area is bounded by Khanapur (Vita) and Tasgaon tehsils to the north, Karnataka state to the east, Sangli and Miraj to the west, and Karnataka to the south. The region falls in the rain-shadow zone of the Western Ghats and experiences a semi-arid climate with low and erratic rainfall (300–600 mm annually). Physiographically, it is a part of the Deccan Plateau characterized by undulating terrain, shallow soils, and seasonal drainage systems such as the Maan River and Yerala River. Natural vegetation mainly consists of tropical thorn forests and grasslands, which historically supported pastoral activities. Due to these geographical constraints particularly drought, water scarcity, and shrinking grazing lands the occupational structure of the Dhangar community. Thus, the study area provides an ideal setting to analyze the relationship between geography and livelihood change.

LOCATION MAP OF STUDY AREA



OBJECTIVE:

1. To analyze the occupational structure of the Dhangar community.
2. To study village-level variation in occupational structure.

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III. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a Empirical approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Primary data was collected through field surveys, interviews, and observations in 29 selected villages of Atpadi, Kavathemahankal, and Jat tehsils, while secondary data was obtained from the Census of India and district reports. A purposive sampling method was used, and exactly 10% of households were selected to ensure representation of different occupational groups. Data was analyzed using percentage and tabulation methods, ensuring a reliable understanding of occupational structure and livelihood transformation.

IV. DATA ANALYASIS AND INTERPRETATION

The following section presents a detailed analysis of the collected data, highlighting the occupational structure, village-level variations, and livelihood transformation of the Dhangar community based on primary and secondary sources.

Occupational Structure of Dhangar Community Population in Sample Villages of study region

Table. 1 *(2023-24)*

Sr. No	Name of Village	Agriculture	Sheepherding	Service	Other	Total Population
1	Alkud (S)	67.43	23.87	5.27	3.43	296
2	Ankale	62.56	25.17	6.41	5.86	511
3	Arewadi	69.56	19.78	6.67	3.99	327
4	Bagewadi	73.28	21.32	3.87	1.53	242
5	Baj	68.54	19.67	7.11	4.68	702
6	Chorochi	71.59	14.27	5.89	8.25	294
7	Dorli	74.36	12.54	6.18	6.92	283
8	Dudhebhavi	72.34	14.56	5.41	7.69	277
9	Kamath	69.89	12.33	10.43	7.35	257
10	Kanthi	67.18	20.73	6.48	5.61	296
11	Karalhetti	63.33	20.09	12.22	4.36	260
12	Karewadi (Ko)	71.44	17.36	6.37	4.83	322
13	Khilarwadi	63.86	20.78	11.86	3.5	369
14	Kudnur	68.09	17.32	9.41	5.18	326
15	Lakdewadi	67.68	13.45	11.09	7.78	327
16	Manewadi	76.13	8.38	4.82	10.67	363
17	Masalwadi	74.42	16.98	4.01	4.59	284
18	Mitaki	70.65	16.22	8.97	4.16	244
19	Motewadi (A)	71.33	12.56	9.04	7.07	303
20	Mudhewadi	76.36	10.78	5.39	7.47	235
21	Nangole	77.53	10.86	7.24	4.37	287
22	Padalkarwadi	77.62	8.56	4.98	8.84	312
23	Pandozari	65.58	17.34	8.95	8.13	243
24	Rampurwadi	75.27	13.89	4.65	6.19	251
25	Revnal	66.67	14.67	13.57	5.09	285
26	Singnapur	70.16	12.78	9.23	7.83	230
27	Wakshewadi	73.45	9.67	7.64	9.24	331
28	Washan	68.67	17.84	10.71	2.78	235
29	Yeldari	64.71	17.67	11.76	5.86	255
	Average	70.33	15.91	7.78	5.98	8947

Source: compiled by researchers 2023-24.

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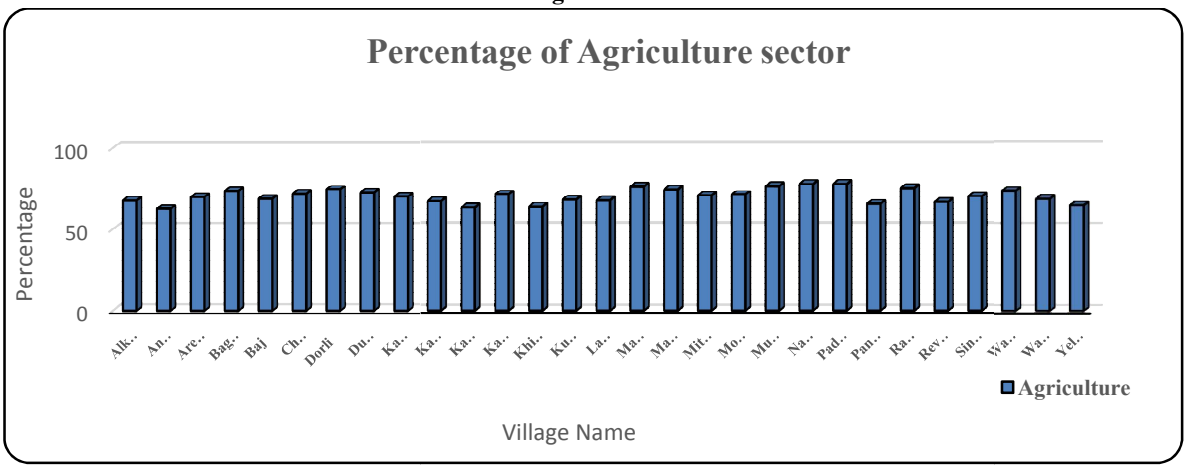
Figure no. 1

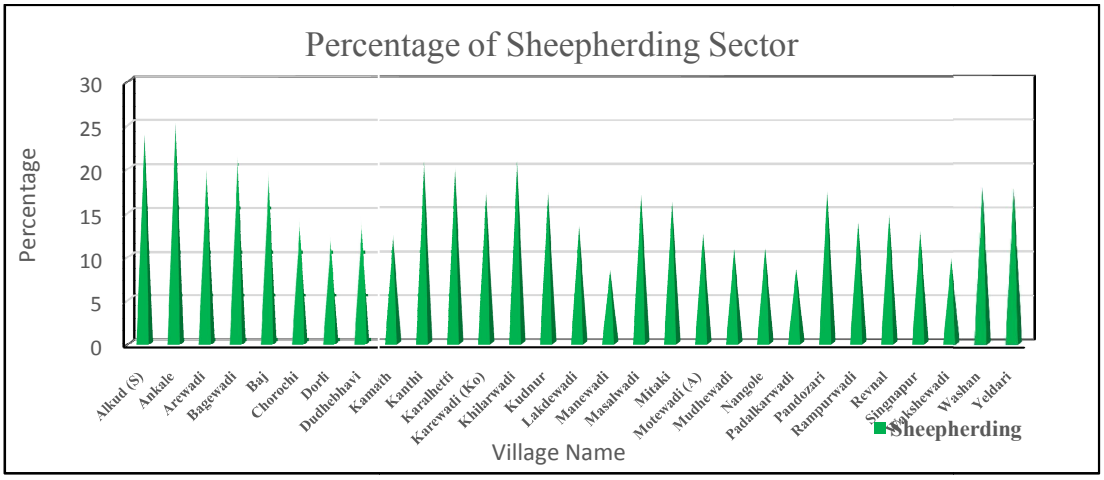


The column graph representing village-wise distribution of agriculture shows that agriculture is the dominant occupation across all 29 villages, with percentages ranging from 62.56% to 77.62%. The overall average of agriculture is 70.33%, indicating a strong dependence on farming activities among the Dhangar community.

Villages such as Nangole (77.53%), Padalkarwadi (77.62%), and Mudhewadi (76.36%) exhibit the highest percentage of population engaged in agriculture. This suggests that these villages have relatively better access to agricultural land and a more settled livelihood pattern. Similarly, villages like Manewadi (76.13%) and Rampurwadi (75.27%) also show high agricultural dominance, indicating stable rural economies. On the other hand, villages such as Ankale (62.56%), Karalhetti (63.33%), and Khilarwadi (63.86%) show comparatively lower percentages of agricultural engagement. This may be due to the presence of alternative occupations such as sheepherding, labour work, or service sector activities. Most of the villages fall within the 65% to 75% range, indicating a moderate to high dependence on agriculture across the study area. The variation among villages reflects differences in geographical factors such as land availability, soil quality, water resources, and irrigation facilities.

Overall, the column graph clearly highlights that agriculture has become the primary occupation, replacing traditional pastoral activities of the Dhangar community. This shift indicates a transition towards a more settled and agriculture-based livelihood system influenced by environmental and socio-economic changes.

Figure no. 2



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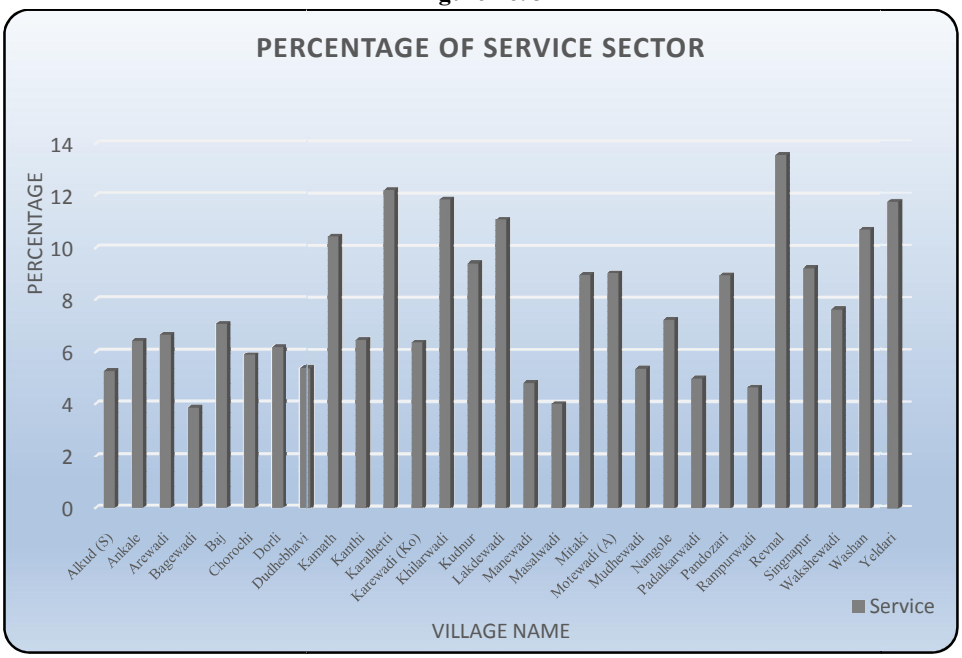
The this graph representing the distribution of sheepherding across 29 villages shows that this traditional occupation still holds importance among the Dhangar community, but its overall share is moderate and declining compared to agriculture. The percentage of population engaged in sheepherding ranges from 8.38% to 25.17%, with an average of 15.91%.

Villages such as Ankale (25.17%), Alkud (23.87%), and Bagewadi (21.32%) exhibit the highest involvement in sheepherding. This indicates that these villages still retain strong traditional pastoral practices and depend significantly on livestock rearing for their livelihood. Similarly, villages like Khilarwadi (20.78%), Kanthi (20.73%), and Karalhetti (20.09%) also show relatively high engagement in sheepherding. On the other hand, villages such as Manewadi (8.38%), Padalkarwadi (8.56%), and Wakshewadi (9.67%) show the lowest percentages. This suggests a reduced dependence on traditional pastoral activities and a shift towards agriculture or other occupations.Most villages fall within the 12% to 20% range, indicating that sheepherding is still practiced but no longer the dominant occupation. The variation across villages reflects differences in availability of grazing land, water resources, and changing socio-economic conditions.

Overall, the bar graph clearly indicates that sheepherding, though traditional, is gradually declining, and the Dhangar community is transitioning towards more stable and diversified livelihood options such as agriculture and service sector activities.

Figure no. 3



The graph depicting the distribution of the service sector across 29 villages shows that this sector is emerging but still limited among the Dhangar community. The percentage of population engaged in service activities ranges from 3.87% to 13.57%, with an overall average of 7.78%. Villages such as Revnal (13.57%), Karalhetti (12.22%), and Khilarwadi (11.86%) show the highest participation in the service sector. Similarly, Yeldari (11.76%), Lakdewadi (11.09%), and Washan (10.71%) also exhibit relatively higher involvement. This indicates that these villages are experiencing occupational diversification and socio-economic advancement, possibly due to better access to education, infrastructure, and urban linkages. On the other hand, villages like Bagewadi (3.87%), Masalwadi (4.01%), Rampurwadi (4.65%), and Manewadi (4.82%) show low participation in service occupations, suggesting continued dependence on traditional sectors such as agriculture and livestock rearing. Most villages fall within the 5% to 10% range, indicating that the service sector is gradually expanding but has not yet become a dominant source of livelihood.

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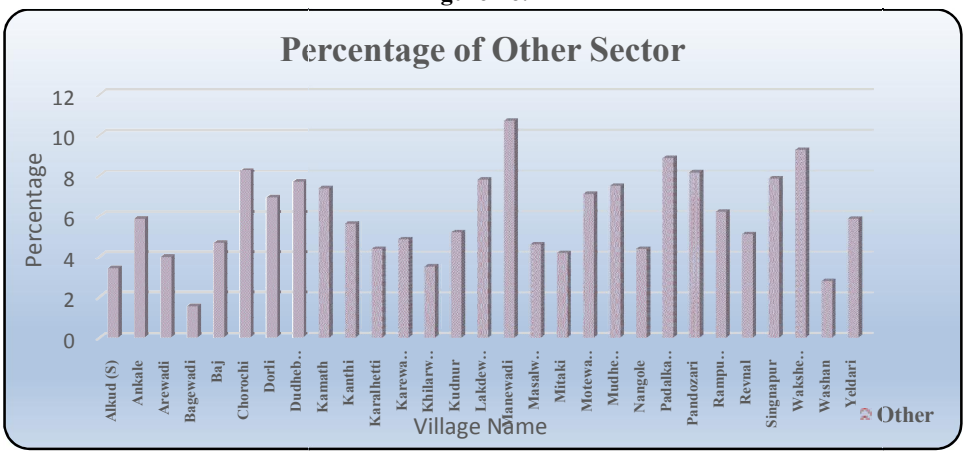
The variation among villages reflects differences in educational attainment, employment opportunities, and connectivity.

Overall, the graph clearly shows that the service sector is an emerging component of the occupational structure, representing a shift towards modernization and diversified livelihoods. However, its relatively low share suggests that the transformation is still in a developing stage.

Figure no. 4



The graph representing the distribution of "other occupations" across 29 villages indicates that this category forms a small but significant component of the occupational structure of the Dhangar community. The percentage ranges from 1.53% to 10.67%, with an overall average of 5.98%. Villages such as Manewadi (10.67%), Wakshewadi (9.24%), and Padalkarwadi (8.84%) show relatively higher percentages under other occupations. Similarly, Chorochi (8.25%) and Pandozari (8.13%) also indicate notable participation. This suggests that in these villages, people are increasingly engaging in alternative livelihood activities such as wage labour, small businesses, transport, and migration-based work. On the other hand, villages like Bagewadi (1.53%), Washan (2.78%), and Khilarwadi (3.50%) show very low percentages, indicating a stronger dependence on traditional occupations like agriculture and sheepherding. Most villages fall within the 4% to 8% range, suggesting that other occupations act as supplementary sources of income rather than primary occupations. The variation across villages reflects differences in employment opportunities, accessibility, and socio-economic conditions.

Overall, the graph highlights that other occupations are gradually increasing, indicating livelihood diversification and adaptation to changing economic conditions. However, their relatively low share shows that they still play a secondary role in the overall occupational structure.

DOI: 10.48175/IJARSCT-36842

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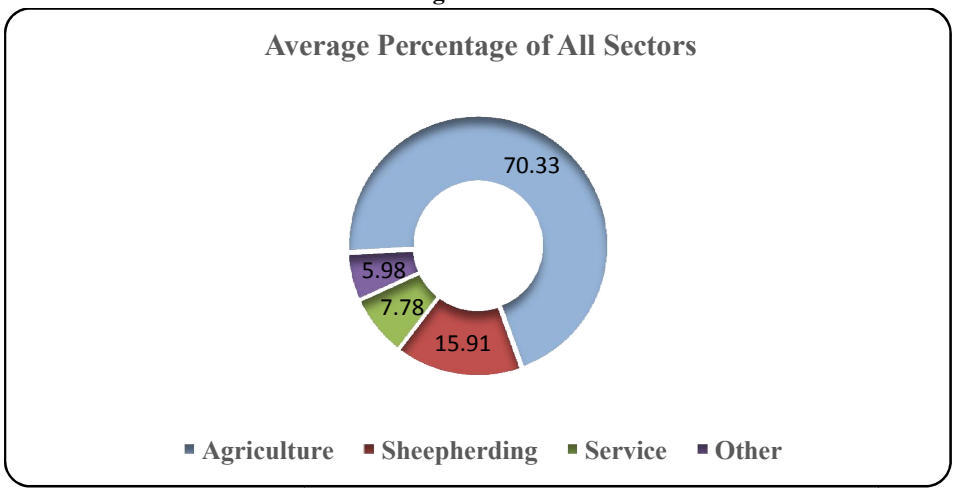
Figure no. 5



The pie chart representing the average occupational structure of the Dhangar community clearly illustrates the dominance of agriculture, followed by sheepherding, service, and other occupations. Agriculture accounts for the largest share at 70.33%, indicating that it is the primary source of livelihood in the study area. This reflects a significant shift from the traditional pastoral base of the community towards a more settled agrarian economy. Sheepherding, which is the traditional occupation of the Dhangar community, constitutes 15.91% of the total occupational structure. Although it still holds importance, its comparatively lower share indicates a gradual decline due to factors such as shrinking grazing land, environmental stress, and changing socio-economic conditions. The service sector contributes 7.78%, representing an emerging trend towards non-traditional and modern occupations. This suggests increasing access to education, employment opportunities, and rural-urban linkages. Similarly, other occupations account for 5.98%, which include wage labour, small businesses, and migration-based activities, reflecting supplementary income sources.

Overall, the pie chart highlights a clear pattern of occupational transformation and livelihood diversification, where the dominance of agriculture, decline of pastoralism, and gradual rise of service and other sectors indicate a transition from a traditional to a more diversified rural economy.

Village level variations in occupational structure

The village-level data reveals significant variation in the occupational structure of the Dhangar community. Although agriculture is the dominant occupation in all villages, its proportion varies considerably, ranging from 62.56% to 77.62%. For instance, villages like Padalkarwadi (77.62%), Nangole (77.53%), and Mudhewadi (76.36%) show a very high dependence on agriculture, whereas Ankale (62.56%), Karalhetti (63.33%), and Khilarwadi (63.86%) show relatively lower dependence.

A similar variation is observed in sheepherding. Villages such as Ankale (25.17%), Alkud (23.87%), and Bagewadi (21.32%) have a higher proportion of population engaged in traditional pastoral activities. In contrast, villages like Manewadi (8.38%), Padalkarwadi (8.56%), and Wakshewadi (9.67%) show a significant decline in sheepherding, indicating a shift away from traditional occupations.

In terms of the service sector, villages such as Karalhetti (12.22%), Khilarwadi (11.86%), Yeldari (11.76%), and Lakdewadi (11.09%) exhibit higher participation. This suggests better access to education, urban linkages, and employment opportunities in these areas.

The “other” category also shows notable variation, with higher proportions in villages like Manewadi (10.67%), Wakshewadi (9.24%), and Padalkarwadi (8.84%), reflecting increasing diversification of livelihood options beyond traditional and primary sectors.

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Overall, the variation in occupational structure at the village level is primarily influenced by geographical factors such as drought conditions, land availability, and grazing resources, as well as socio-economic factors like education, accessibility, and employment opportunities. This clearly indicates a growing trend of livelihood diversification within the Dhangar community.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that the Dhangar community has undergone a significant occupational transformation over time. Agriculture is the dominant occupation (70.33%), with Padalkarwadi (77.62%), Nangole (77.53%), and Mudhewadi (76.36%) having the highest dependence, while Ankale (62.56%) and Revnal (66.67%) show comparatively lower agricultural engagement. Traditional sheepherding has declined to 15.91%, with the highest in Ankale (25.17%) and Alkud (23.87%), and lowest in Manewadi (8.38%) and Padalkarwadi (8.56%). The service sector (7.78%) is highest in Revnal (13.57%) and Karalhetti (12.22%), and lowest in Manewadi (4.82%) and Padalkarwadi (4.98%). Other occupations (5.98%) are highest in Manewadi (10.67%) and Wakshewadi (9.24%), and lowest in Bagewadi (1.53%) and Yeldari (2.78%). These variations highlight that occupational patterns are influenced by local geographical conditions, land availability, and socio-economic factors. Overall, the community has shifted from traditional pastoralism toward agriculture and diversified livelihoods, reflecting adaptive strategies, resilience, and gradual modernization.

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