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SEEDS OF EQUITY, HARVEST OF EXCELLENCE: DR. SHANTA B. ASTIGE'S SOCIOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP IN KALYANA KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the professional trajectory and scholarly contributions of Dr. Shanta B. Astige, an Professor of Sociology and the current Principal of Government First Grade College (GFGC), Jewargi. Dr. Astige's work represents a critical nexus between administrative leadership in rural higher education and deep-seated sociological research into Ambedkarite philosophy, gender dynamics, and public health indicators. Through a review of her published works and her role in institutional building, this study highlights her commitment to social justice and the empowerment of marginalized communities in Northern Karnataka. The article concludes that her leadership at GFGC Jewargi serves as a model for integrating academic rigor with social advocacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education in rural India is often shaped by visionary leaders who navigate the complexities of administrative constraints and social expectations. Dr. Shanta B. Astige stands as a prominent figure in this domain. With a career spanning over three decades in the Department of Collegiate Education, Karnataka, she has balanced the demands of academic research with the responsibilities of leading government institutions.

Currently serving as the Principal of Government First Grade College, Jewargi, Dr. Astige is tasked with steering an institution that serves over 1,800 students, many from economically weaker sections. Her background in sociology provides her with a unique lens through which to view these challenges, viewing education not merely as a degree-granting process but as a tool for social engineering and equity.

2. INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE: GOVERNMENT FIRST GRADE COLLEGE, JEWARGI

A. Geographical and Socio-Economic Context

Jewargi is a taluka headquarters in the Kalaburagi district of Karnataka, a region often characterized by its semi-arid climate and agrarian economy. For many students in this "Kalyana Karnataka" region, GFGC Jewargi is not just a college; it is a gateway to social mobility. Under the stewardship of Dr. Shanta B. Astige, the institution has doubled down on its mission to bridge the urban-rural educational divide.

The college serves a diverse demographic, with a significant percentage of students belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Understanding this, Dr. Astige's administration emphasizes Equity and Inclusion, ensuring that government scholarships and welfare schemes reach every eligible student.

a. Academic Infrastructure and Diversification

The college has grown significantly since its inception in 1982. Currently, it offers a wide array of undergraduate programs across Arts, Commerce, and Science streams.

i. Department of Sociology: Given Dr. Astige's expertise, this department has seen a revitalized focus on fieldwork and community-based research, encouraging students to study the local social structures of Jewargi.
ii. Science and Technology: The college is equipped with laboratories for Physics, Chemistry, and Computer Science. Recent efforts have focused on upgrading these labs to meet the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 standards.
iii. Library Resources: The library serves as the intellectual hub of the campus, housing thousands of volumes, including specialized sections on Ambedkarite literature and competitive exam preparation—a move inspired by Dr. Astige's belief in the power of self-study.

B. Strategic Goals under Dr. Shanta B. Astige

Since taking charge as Principal, Dr. Astige has outlined several key pillars for the college's growth:

i. Digital Transformation and ICT

Recognizing that rural students often lag in digital literacy, the college is expanding its ICT (Information and Communication Technology) capabilities. This includes:

a. Increasing the number of smart classrooms.
b. Providing high-speed internet access for research purposes.

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c. Implementing digital administrative systems to streamline student records and admissions.

ii. Vocational Training and Skill Development

To combat unemployment in the region, the college is looking to partner with Karnataka Skill Development Corporation (KSDC). The goal is to provide short-term certificate courses in areas like Tally, Digital Marketing, and Basic Electronics alongside traditional degrees.

iii. Strengthening the NSS and Red Cross Units

Dr. Astige has always been a proponent of the National Service Scheme (NSS). At GFGC Jewargi, the NSS unit is being expanded to include more "Village Adoption" programs. These programs allow students to conduct literacy drives, health camps, and sanitation awareness in nearby villages, directly applying their sociological learning to real-world problems.

iv. Women's Empowerment Cell

A cornerstone of her leadership is the activation of the Women's Empowerment Cell. This cell focuses on:

a. Organizing workshops on legal rights and self-defense.
b. Providing counseling services for female students to prevent dropouts due to early marriage.
c. Encouraging participation in sports, breaking the cultural barriers Dr. Astige identified in her earlier research.

C. NAAC Accreditation and Quality Assurance

One of the most critical "extensions" of the college's profile is its pursuit of higher NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) grades. Dr. Astige is currently leading the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to document and improve institutional processes. This involves:

- Regular feedback loops from students and alumni.
- Faculty Development Programs (FDPs) to keep educators updated on modern teaching methodologies.
- Environmental sustainability initiatives, such as rainwater harvesting and solar lighting on the 14-acre campus.

3. THE PRINCIPAL'S VISION: "EDUCATION FOR ALL"

Dr. Shanta B. Astige views GFGC Jewargi not as a static building, but as a dynamic ecosystem. Her vision is to transform the college into a Center of Excellence for rural education in Karnataka. By combining rigorous academic standards with a compassionate, socially-conscious administrative style, she is ensuring that the students of Jewargi are equipped to compete on a global stage while remaining rooted in their local community values.

4. SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. Astige's research portfolio is diverse, yet consistently grounded in the pursuit of social equality. Her work can be categorized into four primary thematic areas:

a. Ambedkarite Philosophy and State Socialism
A significant portion of Dr. Astige's work involves the critical evaluation of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's theories. She has explored the concept of "State Socialism" as a constitutional method to achieve economic and social justice. Her research emphasizes that without the destruction of the caste system, a true socialist revolution in India remains incomplete.

b. Gender Studies and Psychological Well-being
Dr. Astige has authored papers on the Psychological Problems Faced by Women. This research delves into the dual-role conflict of professional women in India, examining how traditional patriarchal structures clash with modern career aspirations. Her studies on marital satisfaction among professional women provide empirical evidence for the need for systemic support for working mothers.

c. Public Health and Mortality Indicators
In collaboration with other scholars, Dr. Astige has contributed to the field of demography. Her paper, "Estimates of Mortality Indicators: An Overview," provides a meticulous analysis of infant and under-five mortality rates. This work is crucial for public health administration, as it identifies the socio-economic determinants behind death rates in different natural divisions of India.

d. Sociology of Sports and Rural Youth
Focusing on her local context, she co-authored a study on the Challenges and Prospectives of Female Participation in Sports in Kalaburagi District. This research identifies the cultural and structural barriers that prevent young rural women from pursuing athletics, advocating for policy interventions at the grassroots level.

5. SOCIAL ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Beyond the classroom, Dr. Astige is a frequent resource person for social programs. Her involvement with the NSS highlights her belief in "Education through Service." She often addresses topics such as:

- The role of youth in nation-building.
- Legal awareness for rural women.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural social fabrics.

6. CONCLUSION

The professional journey of Dr. Shanta B. Astige serves as a compelling testament to the transformative power of "Scholar-Leadership" within the Indian higher education system. By bridging the gap between rigorous sociological inquiry and the practical demands of institutional administration, Dr. Astige has redefined the role of a Principal from a mere administrator to a social architect. Her tenure at Government First Grade College, Jewargi, is not merely a period of management but a sustained exercise in social engineering, where the classroom serves as a

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laboratory for the egalitarian ideals she champions in her research.

At the heart of Dr. Astige's impact is the seamless integration of Ambedkarite philosophy into the fabric of rural education. Her scholarly focus on "State Socialism" and social justice is not confined to academic journals; it is manifested in the college's robust support systems for SC, ST, and OBC students, and in her unwavering commitment to making higher education an accessible gateway for the marginalized. By prioritizing equity and inclusion, she ensures that the institution functions as a democratic space where socio-economic backgrounds do not dictate intellectual horizons.

Furthermore, her contributions to gender studies and public health reflect a deep-seated empathy for the vulnerabilities of the rural population. Her work on female participation in sports and the psychological well-being of professional women directly informs the initiatives of the college's Women's Empowerment Cell. Under her guidance, female students at GFGC Jewargi are encouraged to break cultural barriers, fostering a new generation of women who are as physically resilient as they are intellectually empowered. This holistic approach to student development—addressing health, psychology, and social standing—is what distinguishes her leadership as truly visionary.

As GFGC Jewargi navigates the complexities of the 21st century, from digital transformation and ICT expansion to the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 standards, Dr. Astige remains the steady anchor of the institution. Her focus on vocational training and the strengthening of community-centric units like the NSS ensures that the college produces graduates who are not only employable but are also socially responsible citizens. Her push for NAAC accreditation and quality assurance demonstrates a refusal to let rural institutions be sidelined, demanding instead that they meet the highest national standards of excellence.

In final analysis, Dr. Shanta B. Astige represents the ideal of the modern academic: a thinker who acts and a leader who theorizes. Her life's work ensures that the legacy of reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is kept alive through active practice, providing a blueprint for how academic leadership can catalyze regional development. Through her stewardship, GFGC Jewargi stands as a beacon of hope in the Kalyana Karnataka region—a "dynamic ecosystem" where education is used as the ultimate tool for liberation, empowerment, and social mobility. Her career serves as a powerful reminder that when scholarship is infused with a mission, it has the capacity to change not just minds, but the very structure of society itself.

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