

CHAPTER-III

MANGAON - A SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS
VILLAGE

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The practice of untouchability is studied on micro level, selecting a medium sized village which is fairly representative suitable for a detailed study. A brief description of the geographical position and socio-economic institutions is presented below. Selecting of Mangaon for empirical observation is due to another important reason. It has witnessed the famous Mangaon Parishad of 1920 which set in motion the movement of the Backward classes against the traditional Hindu hierarchy and atrocities on Harijans.

LOCATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE :

The village Mangaon is situated on the northern bank of Panchaganga river. It is only 6 km. towards west of Ichalkaranji in Kolhapur District. Both Kolhapur and Ichalkaranji are industrially developed cities. Moreover, Kolhapur State and the adjoining areas were the sphere of influence of Rajarshi Shahu, the wellknown social reformer king. Ichalkaranji during the last twenty years rapidly developed in the textile industry. There are four spinning mills and large number of powerlooms in and around the Ichalkaranji including the Mangaon village because of which

Ichalkaranji is known as the Manchester of Maharashtra. In addition to the textile industry, Ichalkaranji has also large co-operative sugar factory. Mangaon is situated in vicinity of this industrially developed town and it was but natural that the forces of this change and modernization would touch-up on the life of Mangaon, both economic and social.

POPULATION :

The total population of Mangaon is nearly about 7000; out of which there are about 3600 males. Thus the sex ratio is about 100:94. The castewise breakup of the population as supplied by Talathi (Village Accountant) of Mangaon is as follows :

Jains	...	55%
Nav-Buddha	...	28%
Dhangar	...	4%
Maratha	...	3%
Lingayat	...	3%
Muslim	...	4%
Others (Kumbhar, Sutar, Nhavi, Chambhar, Vadar and Brahmins)	...	3%

The composition of the population shows, the Jains are the dominating caste in the village. This is a peculiar situation as far as the other villages in the district as well as the entire Maharashtra State is concerned. This situation is also significant in the context of our study.

OCCUPATION :

The main occupation in the village is agriculture. The main source of water supply for agriculture is the river Panchaganga. The total cultivated land is about 1320 hectares, out of which 238 hectares land is used for the cultivation of sugarcane and majority of the farmers supply their sugarcane to the Panchaganga co-operative Sugar Factory, Ganganagar, Ichalkaranji. They are also the share holders of the factory.

The castewise inequality as regards the holding of agriculture land is conspicuous. This will be clear from the following table :

TABLE No.1

Castes	Percentage in Popula- tion	Percentage holding of agricultu- ral land
Jains	55%	60%
Nav-Buddha	28%	5%
Maratha	3%	4%
Dhangar	4%	6%
Lingayat	3%	15%
Muslim	4%	5%
Others (Kumbhar, Sutar, Nhavi, Chambhar, Vadar, Brahmin etc.	3%	5%
Total	100	100

As the table reveals, Lingayats and Jains possess relatively more portion of the agricultural land in comparison to their proportion in the population. The big landlords are only from these two castes. During the field survey, it was observed that, no family from the other caste was holding more than two acres of agriculture of land. In this situation, the textile industry of Ichalkaranji and sugar factory prove to be very helpful to

the marginal farmers and the landless workers. Many of them work on powerlooms and some are employed in the spinning mills and sugar factory. The important point to note here is that, the poor villagers are not required to totally depend upon the agricultural jobs. This has, as we shall see later, an important role in the economic independence of the otherwise backward people.

MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION
AND COMMUNICATION :

The village Mangaon is situated on Kolhapur-Ichalkaranji Road and thus it can be in continuous contacts with both the major cities. The State Transport Buses, to and from these cities run for every half an hour. Moreover, Rukadi a small railway station on the Kolhapur-Bombay broadgauge railway, is only 5 km. from Mangaon. Hence there is no problem of the means of transport and communication.

It was observed that, every household in the village is having radio set, a few rich farmers have also television sets. The Gram Panchayat runs a public library where all the important Marathi daily news-papers and few periodicals have been made available to the villagers. Thus the villagers can keep themselves in touch with district, state and national affairs.

EDUCATION :

The village has both primary school as well as the high school. This has helped in increasing the literacy and education of the villagers. The high-school is run by Swami Vivekanand Shikshan Sanstha.

CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT :

Mangaon is fortunate for one more reason, the co-operative movement which is firmly rooted and well developed through-out the State of Maharashtra has already reached Mangaon and has brought about significant economic development of the village. There are as many as eight co-operative institutions.

The multipurpose co-operative society is named as "Mangaon Vivid Karyakari Vikas Sahakari Seva Society Ltd., Mangaon". The society is carrying out important functions of giving credit and supplying fertilizers, high yielding variety of seeds. It is true that the local revalry in leadership played considerable role in fighting elections and the backward class sections also get vertically divided among the two major political groups. However, the society is playing constructive role in bringing about agricultural development.

The co-operation has also entered the field of water supply to the agricultural land. There are four co-operative water supply schemes namely -

- 1) Mahatma Phule Co-operative Water Supply Scheme Ltd., Mangaon.
- 2) Birdev Co-operative Water Supply Scheme Ltd., Mangaon.
- 3) Vijay Patil Co-operative Water Supply Scheme Ltd., Mangaon.
- 4) Mahaveer Co-operative Water Supply Scheme Ltd., Mangaon.

These four schemes have solved the problem irrigation and a result of these schemes, the land owners are taking crops twice in a year. An important observation in this connection is that the four schemes have been organized by four different major communities scheduled castes, Dhangars, Lingayats and Jains respectively. This shows how the different communities get united and organize to protect their limited economic interests.

After green revolution the State of Maharashtra is also bringing about a 'white revolution'. There are three co-operative milk dairies in Mangaon namely -

- 1) Union Milk Dairy.
- 2) Parvati Milk Dairy.
- 3) Sharda Milk Dairy.

These three milk dairies collect milk from the small and big farmers and send it to Government Milk Schemes. The above milk dairies also give loans for purchasing cows and buffaloes to the needy people in the society. Unlike the communitywise water supply schemes mentioned above the three dairies have been started by different political groups in the village. Thus the three types of co-operative institutions have helped in uniting as well as dividing the village community for different purposes.

SCHEDULED CASTE PEOPLE
OR DALITS ;

Scheduled castes or Dalits are conspicuous in Mangaon by their sizable strength. There are only three scheduled castes namely Mahar, Mang and Chambhar. But their total population is about two thousand i.e. 28% of the total village population. This figure should be compared with the percentage figure in Maharashtra (16.3%) and in India 22.8%.¹ Another significant thing about the Dalits in Mangaon is that the entire Mahar and Mang castes have embraced Buddhism. This conversion appears to have morale boosting effect on two castes. They get united whenever

there are incidents of enmity with the other caste. This however, does not mean that two communities have been united on endogamous group. But they come together to fight against the common enemies. The third scheduled caste namely chambhar has not embraced Buddhism and mostly keep itself aloof from the rivalries between scheduled caste and the other upper caste Jains and Hindus.

MANGAON PARISHAD :

The description of Mangaon village will remain incomplete unless the account of the historically significant event of the Mangaon Parishad is presented. It was big gathering of over 25000 people coming together from distant parts of Kolhapur and Sangli District.² This gathering saw the so-called untouchables coming together awakened to achieve their fundamental human rights and to fight the traditional inequality of Indian caste system. The gathering was presided over by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Rajarshi Shahu was the most important participant speaker. Rajarshi Shahu's crusade against the out-dated caste hierarchy and practice of untouchability had created a sense of self respect among the Harijans and they were becoming conscious about their fundamental human rights. Prominent Dalit leaders from Kolhapur District planned to organize conference at Mangaon under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar and this plan was realized on 20th March, 1920.

Shri Appasaheb Raygonda Patil, although belonging to orthodox Jain community was progressive minded social worker and reformist. He was in close contact with Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati. He was humanitarian individual, having sympathetic attitudes towards the state of Dalits. Naturally, he extended full support and co-operation and helped in making the conference great success. The majority of the Dalits from Mangaon volunteered and worked hard for the organization of this event. For the first time the two great social reformers of the modern Maharashtra, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj and Dr. Ambedkar came together on common platform to fight against castism and untouchability and to bring about an egalitarian Indian Society. In this conference Rajarshi Shahu openly predicted that Dr. Ambedkar was the only person who could remove the sorrows of untouchables and would become a national leader.³

Dr. Ambedkar, highly educated pragmatic young leader; advised the untouchable masses to educate their children and give away the bad habits such as eating the flesh of dead animals.⁴ The firing speech of Dr. Ambedkar continued for two hours and brought about a magical transformation of the attitudes of the large gathering.

A common dinner for all the participants irrespective of caste and religion was arranged after the conference.

However, no person except Appasaheb Patil from amongst upper caste people of the village, joined the dinner. The upper caste people did not tolerate the idea of common dinner. They took decision to put social bycott on Appasaheb Patil alongwith the Dalits. They also decided to punish the Dalits by prohibiting them to enter their localities, to use water from their wells and to refuse them the work of daily-wages. The untouchables had to suffer heavily because of these measures. But their newly aroused self-respect helped them in not surrendering to the upper caste.

The news of social bycott and other measures in the village Mangaon reached Rajarshi Shahu. He immediately reacted upon summoned orthodox upper caste leaders in the Miraj Camp. After a strong warning of dire consequences of the inhuman treatment being given to the untouchables, the upper caste leaders changed their attitude and normalacy prevailed in the village.

As can be seen from the account, the conference, proved to be a epoch-making event in the life of untouchables of Mangaon. They got united and came forward to participate in the succeeding movement led by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Following Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 the two prominent untouchable communities namely Mahar and Mang embraced Buddhism. As a symbol of the action of changing the religion the idols Gods and Goddesses were thrown away in the stream of river. Thus, there was a peaceful psychological revolution brought about among the Dalits of Mangaon by the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar.

UNITED STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY :

The Dalits in Mangaon are economically backward. But this situation did not prove as hindrance in their united stand against the upper caste dominance and atrocities. In this context it is worthwhile to narrate an incident which took place in 1973.

A sheep of an untouchable entered the field of Jain farmer and consumed some grass. The landlord got angry and decided to punish the untouchable, presumably thinking that it is his traditional right to teach a lesson to the out caste person. He caught hold of the said untouchable and beat him in a very inhuman manner. This news suddenly

reached the 'Maharwada', whereupon the infuriated Dalits gathered together and jointly marched towards Jain locality. While the neighbours were helplessly looking, the Jain landlord was dragged out from his house, was brought to the 'takka' (Community gathering place), he was tied to a pillar and mercilessly beaten up. Some upper caste people came with sticks to intervene but they also received similar treatment as to the Jain landlord from the angry Dalits. Ultimately they had no alternative but to run away. This incident was almost like a shock treatment and since then no upper caste person dared to commit any kind of atrocities upon the Dalits.

**ECONOMIC 'INDEPENDENCE'
OF DALITS :**

We have already seen that Mangaon is situated on the outskirts of industrially developed city of Ichalkaranji. This has indirectly helped Dalits in Mangaon to become economically independent. Otherwise the 28% population of the Dalits is in possession of only 5% agricultural land. Previously the only occupation open to Dalits was working in the fields and serving the upper caste in various ways. But due to the rapid growth of textile industry and power-looms they could easily get jobs in Ichalkaranji. As a result of this, dependent on upper caste landlords for livelihood became minimised. The educational facilities

and reservation policy of the Government also helped them in getting gainful employment in various Government and Semi-Government institutions.

Recently in April 1982 some young Dalits have become entrepreneur by establishing their own co-operative society named as 'The Mangaon Backward Class Powerloom Owners Industrial Co-operative Society.' The total investment of the society is about one lakh fifty thousand rupees. They also started cloth shop. The society has made considerable progress in the initial period itself. The society has planned to start three hundred powerlooms, one sizing unit and one processing and printing unit. According to the Chief Promoter, the society would then be in a position to provide employment opportunities to about seven hundred people.

FORCES OF MODERNIZATION :

Mangaon village, the scene of our investigation, is as can be seen from above description undergoing the process of modernization. The villagers are in touch with the urban area of Ichalkaranji and Kolhapur. They are witnessing the impact of industrialization, spread of education, economic development by co-operation and social movement to bring about equality. There are no traces of



traditional 'Balutedari system' in this village. Atleast in the field of economic activities every caste group is adjusting itself with changing environment. This background should be kept in mind in order to understand the phenomenon of untouchability in Mangaon village.

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