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C H A P T E R - VI

Caste System :

Changing Attitudes and Practices

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After the study of the occupational mobility we shall now turn to other changes having bearing upon various characteristics of the caste system. To make the analysis sensible we have made 5 categories of the respondents according to their presumed position in the caste hierarchy. They are 1) Upper castes: Brahmin, Maratha and Vani.

2) Artisans and Craftmen : Kumbhar and Lohar.

3) Service Castes : Mali, Teli, Gurav, Nhavi and Jangam.

4) Lower Castes : Sangar, Dhanagar, Kaikadi and Khatik.

5) Schedule^d Castes : Chambhar, Dhor, Mang and Buddh^si^t
(Former Mahar).[^]

Indian caste system is special form of social stratification. Economic inequality is one of the basis of social stratification. In the Indian caste system this inequality was more or less structured because the individuals birth in a particular caste used to determine his relative economic status also. The natural resources were unequally distributed. In our survey of village Male this can be easily seen from the position of landholdings given in Table No.1 Chapter-V. We have not attempted to make a study of change in the land-

holdings in a specific period. Our intention is only to point out that generally speaking, some caste groups are basically better placed in the economic hierarchy which gives them further opportunity to economic progress. This again enhances their social status, and endogamous caste groups to ~~which~~ which they belong to maintain their (caste groups) relative status.

It is true that since the advent of British rule and especially after independence, the principle of equal opportunity to all is being practised. Moreover, deliberate measure to improve the economic conditions of the people in the lower strata of our society are also being undertaken.

The result of these forces is seen in the fact that people belonging to different caste groups are getting opportunities in different walks of life. Table No.1 gives an idea of those people from our village who are working elsewhere in different fields. This will throw light on migration and occupational mobility.

The size and nature of the household, dress, ornaments etc. were the outward signs on the basis of which the social status and even sometimes the caste used to be recognised. Due to the modernizing process these outward differences are speedily vanishing. It was noticed that the entire young generation has shifted over to the new fashions in dress material. The Dhoti and turban are rarely seen.

Along with the dress and ornaments the villagers have been able to use a number of things symbolic of modern way of life. A list of such items owned and used by different caste groups is given on the next page.

TABLE NO.2 - Use of modern household equipments
and other things-

| Type of Household things | Upper castes | Artisans | Service castes | Lower castes | Scheduled castes |
|-------------------------------|--------------|----------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| <u>I - MODERN FURNITURE :</u> | | | | | |
| 1) Sofas | - | - | - | - | - |
| 2) Divan | - | - | - | - | - |
| 3) Table and chair | 17 | - | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| <u>II - VEHICLE :</u> | | | | | |
| 1) Bicycle | 37 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2) Motor cycle | 6 | - | - | 1 | - |
| 3) Scooter | - | - | - | - | - |
| 4) Rickshaw | - | - | - | - | - |
| 5) Car | - | - | - | - | - |
| 6) Jeep | - | - | - | - | - |
| 7) Truck | - | - | - | - | - |
| 8) Tractor | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| 9) Tempo | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| 10) Moped | - | - | - | - | - |
| 11) Metador | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| <u>III - VESSELS :</u> | | | | | |
| 1) Stainless Steel | 42 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 10 |
| 2) Brass | 44 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 12 |
| 3) Copper | 44 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 12 |
| 4) Aluminium ware | 43 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 13 |
| 5) Earthen ware | 41 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 13 |
| 6) Plastic ware | 30 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 9 |

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/Table No.2 contd./

| Type of Household things | Upper castes | Artisans | Service castes | Lower castes | Schedule castes |
|--------------------------|--------------|----------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
|--------------------------|--------------|----------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|

IV - MEANS OF COMMUNICATION :

| | | | | | |
|--------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Telephone | - | - | - | - | - |
| 2) Radio | 32 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 7 |
| 3) T.V. | - | - | - | - | - |

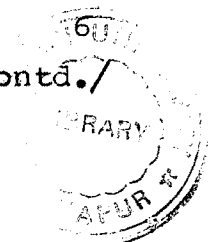
V-MEANS OF RECREATION :

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Tape-recorder | 4 | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| 2) Video | - | - | - | - | - |

VI-LUXURIOUS THINGS :

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Fan | 4 | - | - | 3 | 2 |
| 2) Steel Safe | 5 | - | - | 1 | - |
| 3) Wall Clock | 14 | - | - | 3 | 1 |
| 4) Sewing Machine | 4 | - | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| 5) Cooking Gas | 3 | - | - | - | - |
| 6) Mixer | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| 7) Washing Machine | - | - | - | - | - |
| 8) Fridge | - | - | - | - | - |
| 9) Geyser | - | - | - | - | - |
| 10) Kitchen table | - | - | - | - | - |
| 11) Dining Table | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| 12) Iron | 15 | - | 1 | 5 | 4 |
| 13) Water heater | 1 | - | - | 1 | - |
| 14) Steel Cot | 32 | 1 | 3 | 4 | - |

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/Table No.2 contd./

| Type of Household things | Upper castes | Artisans | Service castes | Lower castes | Scheduled castes |
|--------------------------|--------------|----------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
|--------------------------|--------------|----------|----------------|--------------|------------------|

VII. AGRICULTURAL INSTRUMENTS :

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Threshing Machine | 2 | 1 | - | - | - |
| 2) Mowing Machine | - | - | - | - | - |
| 3) Oil Engine | 15 | - | - | - | 1 |
| 4) Electrical Motor pump. | 23 | - | 2 | 2 | - |
| 5) Chap Cutter | 5 | 1 | - | - | - |

VIII. OTHER MACHINERY :

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Flour Mill | 1 | - | - | 2 | 2 |
| 2) Oil Seeds crushing Machine | 1 | - | - | - | 2 |
| 3) Chilli powdering machine. | - | - | - | 3 | - |

Spread of modern education is another modernizing force. caste groupwise rate of literacy would have given us a fairly good idea about the impact of literacy drive on the said groups. But we did not think it very essential in our study because it was thought that mere education would not make any substantial change in the notions of superiority or inferiority of different castes. However, we shall give below the changing rate of literacy in the village as a whole during the decade 1961-71. (figures for 1981 are not available with the statistics department.)

TABLE NO.3 - Spread of Education in the Village Male.

| Year | Male | | | Female | | | | | |
|------|-------|---------------|-----------------|--------|---------------|-----------------|-------|---------------|-----------------|
| | Total | Lite- rate | Perce- ntage | Total | Lite- rate | Perce- ntage | Total | Lite- rate | Perce- ntage |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 1961 | 1542 | 617 | 40.01 | 1466 | 114 | 7.78 | 3008 | 731 | 24.30 |
| | | (20.50) | | | (3.79) | | | | |
| 1971 | 1831 | 861 | 47.02 | 1630 | 211 | 12.94 | 3461 | 1072 | 30.97 |
| | | (24.88) | | | (6.09) | | | | |

/Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages to total population.. /

The Table is self explanatory and gives the increase in the literacy rate. Table No.4 also gives the educational status of the heads in our sampled families.

TABLE NO.4 - Education of the Heads of the families in selected sample.

| Caste groups | Total | Literate | | | Total |
|------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | | Primary | Secondary | Higher Education. | |
| Upper castes | 44 | 15 (34.09 %) | 12 (27.27 %) | 3 (6.82 %) | 30 (68.18 %) |
| Artisans and Craftsmen | 2 | - (-) | 1 (50 %) | - (-) | 1 (50 %) |
| Service Castes | 6 | 4 (66.67 %) | 2 (33.33 %) | - (-) | 6 (100%) |
| Lower Castes | 10 | 4 (40 %) | 3 (30 %) | - (-) | 7 (70 %) |
| Scheduled Castes | 13 | 7 (53.85 %) | 1 (7.69 %) | 1 (7.69 %) | 9 (69.23 %) |
| Total | 75 | 30 (40 %) | 19 (25.33 %) | 4 (5.33 %) | 53 (70.67 %) |

/Note: The figures in the parentheses indicate the percentages to the total./

Both the tables 3 and 4 show quite convincingly that there is a change as far as education of the people is concerned. But again, the different caste groups are not on par in this context. The spread of education is not even. The upper castes are relatively more educated. This, naturally, gives them relatively greater opportunity for upward mobility.

In the measurement or understanding of such an all-pervading process of social change with the help of complex concept of modernization, occupational mobility is but only one of numerous criteria. On the background of our analysis of the actual situation we shall now attempt to analyse the outlook and some practices of the same people which have direct bearing on the change. Our concentration will of course be on the 'caste' and those aspects of life directly concerned with the caste. While analysing this aspect we shall bear in mind that there always happens to be a gap between thoughts and actions of the people.

Various questions (See Interview Schedule in Appendix 'A') were asked to the respondents to elicit their reactions about the caste system. We shall deal with these aspects one by one.

The first question was about the very consciousness and acceptance of the caste system.

The caste is an accepted fact by all the villagers. The main reason behind the acceptance and remaining conscious of the caste system is the rule of endogamy. It was pointed out by the respondents that caste plays vital role in the selection of mate. However, the degree of acceptance is not same for different caste groups. The heads of the families belonging to the scheduled castes including Buddhists complained that particular caste, and hence the particular social status, is thrust upon them; because of the traditional caste system they have become the subjects of hatred. Hence they opined that caste system should be eradicated. However, this is response of the "have not" sections of the community and hence can be taken as a change in values only partially. An interesting response was about the desirability of the caste system. This was a direct question asked to the respondents. As many as 38 (49.35 %) of them frankly accepted that the caste system should continue to exist. However, this opinion was not uniformly expressed by different caste groups. The positive response prominently came from the Artisans (100 %) and Service Castes (66.67 %). The main reasons they put forth were (1) Socio-Economic security and (2) easy access to traditional occupational education. On the other hand, the response of the people belonging to scheduled caste, including Buddhist, was quite negative. A large majority (84.61 %) of them strongly opposed the continuance of the caste system.

The process of modernization is obstructed by number of forces: Ignorance, irrational outlook or blind faith in tradition are noteworthy in the present context. While probing into the attitudes towards caste we asked a significant question. The question was, whether the caste system has its base in religion. This question proved to be useful in understanding the general intellectual level and the degree of rationality of the respondents. Again a large majority from the artisans and Service Castes (87.50%) were of the belief that caste is a part of religion. But from amongst the other group, including scheduled caste, a majority (41 out of 77 that is 53.25 %)did not accept any religious base for the caste system. They also expressed the view that the caste differences have been created by human beings only and not by the God. This awareness, atleast in thought, is significant.

We have pointed out earlier that the caste system is a special form of social stratification. Due to the caste system the society persists to be divided. From that point of view, the caste is disintegrating element or divisive element. A pertinent question, therefore, was asked in this context; The specific question was whether the caste system is proving to be detrimental to the social unity in the village. The response is quite interesting; only 28 (36.36 %)respondents agreed that caste is harmful to social unity. Here too, the

Percentage of the respondents from the high castes subscribing to this view was very low (27.27 %). The harmful elements pointed out were (1) Sense of superiority, (2) Caste based localities and (3) Caste based politics.

Thus, the above mentioned mutually related questions elicited illuminating responses.

- 1) All the people are conscious about the caste.
- 2) The majority of the upper caste and socially secured class wanted the continuation of caste system.
- 3) A majority of the respondents thinks that the caste has no religious base.
- 4) A majority of the respondents also thinks that caste is not harmful to social unity.
- 5) The persons who are strongly opposed to the caste, and especially to the inequality of the social status, are mostly from amongst the scheduled castes including Buddhists.

Social and religious hierarchy is a distinctive feature of caste in India.

In this context it was necessary to know about the changing attitude, if any. The egalitarian ideals have spread everywhere. Hence, our question was, whether any section of

our rural community accepts this principle, and if so which section. It was but obvious that 36 out of 44 (81.82 %) Respondents belonging to high caste defended the principle of hierarchy and opposed the total equality of the status. Their argument was the social status depends upon the nature of occupation and differentiation in the social status is a necessary to differentiate the varying utility of the occupations. However, a large majority (30 out of 33 i.e. 90.91%) spoke against the caste hierarchy. Their argument was that the superiority or inferiority of status creates tensions and hence harmful to the integrity of the society.

A related question was about the treatment given to the people belonging to other castes. The response was almost positive; 94.81 % of the respondents expressed that they treated the members of the other castes as equal to them. We may point out here that this was a vague response. The ambivalence in the context of the principles of hierarchy and equality is quite clear and hence this response can not be accepted on its face value.

Caste was supposed to be a closed group and hence their internal and external relations were controlled by caste councils. We were interested to know whether such councils are still in existence and if so, what is the extent of their control. Even after a thorough probing in this matter we did not trace the remnants of the age-old institution of caste

panchayat. Except in the case of the Dhangars, there are 26 Dhangar families in the village and they have their own caste council which discusses the petty problems and passes judgments. But generally speaking, this institution has become a thing of the past.

Intercaste relations have been always marked by tensions. The outlook towards the other caste is seen through the nature of social contacts between various castes. The extreme end of this phenomenon is the total ban on contacts with the same castes. This was found in the practice of untouchability.

An important clue to know whether the practice of untouchability is annihilated, is the common use of wells. It was reported that the actual practice of "untouchability" is no more in existence. Moreover, the people belonging to all the lower castes are freely allowed to fetch water from the common as well as the private wells by the upper caste people. Even the respondents from the scheduled castes accepted this fact. In the personal observation also we noticed the same thing. Thus the notions of pollution or contamination have totally become outdated. Hence, atleast the external form of untouchability can be regarded as totally eradicated.

Another significant change noticed in the field observation was that people belonging to all castes, including the

Scheduled caste, freely enter the local temples. At the time of " Mahashivaratri " festival, there is a traditional practice of preparing common food, the people belonging to different castes come together to take the meals.

Another form of restricting contacts is the ban on interdining. It is a characteristic of the caste hierarchy that people belonging to upper caste do not accept food from those of the lower caste, but here also as many as 41 (93.18 %) respondents belonging to the high caste told that they accept food from all other castes. Thus, restrictions on interdining have almost disappeared.

The social distance can be measured on the basis of readiness or otherwise to live in the residential areas of the lower castes. In this context, however, the response was somewhat negative, even though 90.91 % respondents from the High castes were prepared to construct the houses in the Scheduled caste locality, the percentage of such persons in the caste group of Artisans and Muslims is comparatively low (50 %). Here, it may be noted that the mere readiness to construct a house and stay in the scheduled caste locality does not itself prove any substantive change in the attitude towards lower caste. It is impossible to know the reality in this context because such an eventuality is hypothetical. This point will become more clear in view of the fact that not single family

belonging to a High caste is actually staying in the Scheduled caste locality.

The attitude of the higher castes towards the lower and scheduled castes is of a complex nature. On the one hand, it is accepted in principle that there should not be any inequality in various fields of life. The age-old under-privileged position of some caste is accepted. But it is interesting to know the opinions about the policy of the reservation of posts. The responses in this context were unexpected but interesting. The details are summarized in the following Table No.5.

TABLE NO.5 - Attitude towards the 'Reservation' Policy-

| Sr. No. | Caste Groups | Total No. of Respondents. | Policy should continue | Policy should be changed |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) | High Castes | 44 | 11 | 33 |
| 2) | Artisans and craftsmen | 2 | 2 | - |
| 3) | Service Castes | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| 4) | Lower Castes | 10 | 4 | 6 |
| 5) | Scheduled Castes | 13 | 8 | 5 |
| 6) | Muslims | 2 | - | 2 |
| T O T A L : | | 77 | 30 | 47 |
| | | (100 %) | (38.96 %) | (61.04 %) |

/Note : The figures in the parentheses indicate the percentages to the total./

The reasons put forth in defence of the reservation policy in order of their preferences were (1) improvement of the economic conditions, (2) raising the standard of living (3) to bring about social equality and (4) to remove the inferiority complex and to built up self-confidence.

It is clear from Table No.5. that majority of the High Castes was against the reservation policy. Their arguments were (1) qualified and efficient persons from other castes are at loss (2) unqualified and inefficient persons occupy important positions, (3) the extent of economic backwardness remain as it is and (4) the reservation policy is misused.

The most important and sustaining feature of the Indian castes is the practice of endogamy. In reality we did not notice~~any~~ even a single instance of the intercaste marriage. Hence the question of the extent of change in actual practice does not arise. However, attitude towards intercaste marriage is not^e worthy. Table No.6 gives the details of responses.

TABLE NO.6 - Attitude towards the 'Inter caste marriage'

| Sr.No. | Caste Groups | Total No. of Respon- dents. | INTERCASTE MARRIAGE OF THE CHILDREN | |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| | | | Acceptable | Not acceptable |
| 1) | Upper Castes | 44 | 11 | 33 |
| 2) | Artisans and craftsmen. | 2 | - | 2 |
| 3) | Service Castes | 6 | - | 6 |
| 4) | Lower Castes | 10 | 2 | 8 |
| 5) | Scheduled Castes | 13 | 12 | 1 |
| 6) | Muslims | 2 | - | 2 |
| T O T A L : | | 77 | 25 | 52 |
| | | (100 %) | (32.47 %) | (67.53 %) |

/Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate the percentage to the total./

The general picture emerging from the responses is the lower the status of the respondents in the caste hierarchy, the more positive response to the intercaste marriage. Again, in general, only 32.47 % respondents are prepared for inter-caste marriage of their children. This clearly shows that even under the influence of modernizing forces people are not prepared to lose whatever social status they get on the principles of ascription on the ladder of social hierarchy.

A very useful criterion to judge the existence of the caste-consciousness is the nature, membership and solidarity of various caste associations that are coming up recently. However, in our survey we did not notice the influence of various caste associations which we see taking roots in the urban areas. Thus, the movement of consolidation of the caste with the help of the caste associations has not reached the rural life yet.

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/ Note : Hiramani A.E. has given 7 categories of castes in his book " Social change in Rural India". But we have not treated Buddhists and Muslims as separate groups as in the present context it was felt that the five categories are enough for our proposed analysis. /