

CHAPTER-VIII

INTER-GROUP RELATIONSHIPS AMONG
THE MENDHE DHANGARS

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1) Introduction :

It has been noted that although there is unity in the village, caste friction is also prevalent there. Man is gregarious from birth to death. He depends upon the people who live in his society. Similarly the people of a caste-group, without the help of other caste groups cannot live independently. Thus, one caste group is dependent on the people of different caste groups. Keeping this point of view in mind, I shall study the intergroup relations of people and also how they function in an inter-related manner.

In every sphere of life I find a great deal of inter-action and mutual participation in various activities. Agriculture is the main occupation of most of the villagers. For this they require some agricultural implements.

I also find that some sort of compromise and co-operation in the political field. In the two villages, Pattankodoli and Ghunaki, there are Gram Panchayats, sponsored by the Government. In these Gram Panchayats all the villagers participate. In these Gram Panchayats,

all the villagers participate. In these Gram Panchayats, I found that the village officials belonging to different communities meet with some common purpose to adjust themselves for the proper functioning of the Gram Panchayats.

In the religious sphere also I find that a great deal of interaction and participation of the various communities in one another's festivals and worships. On the eve of marriages the Korvis beat drums and play Shehanai.

At the time of birth the other caste women help the people as a midwives (Dai). In this way the various castes in the village are interdependent. This is seen in-day-to-day matters as well and particularly on ritual and other important occasions.

The boys and girls of different castes ages move together without any feeling and caste distinction. They have friendship with the boys and girls of other castes also. Most of them address each other with some kinship term irrespective of caste. Such terms are generally used upto the age of 12, after which girls usually do not like to mix freely with the boys owing to the social norms of the community. From the age of 13 onwards in most of cases, they have friends of their own sex only. It has been further reported that girls are not free to form friendships in their in-law's places. Moreover, they do not get sufficient time to make new friends as they are busy with their domestic

work. Friendship among the boys lasts all their lives. They share each others joys and sorrows.

Most of the members of the Mendhe Dhangars under study, visit one another and mix together in times of joy and sorrow alike, irrespective of their caste affiliations. They sit together during festive and social occasions like Holi, Diwali, Yatra, Ganesh Chaturthi, Marriage, Death rites etc. They show cohesion. Similarly, if there is a marriage in a particular Mendhe Dhangars family, all the members of the other castes extend their possible help to the family concerned.

The Mendhe Dhangars under study do not seem to suffer from any superiority or inferiority complex. They seem to have very cordial relation with each other. They show their regard for elders by calling them as, 'Kaka', 'Mama', 'Kaki', 'Ajoba', 'Aji', 'Vahini', 'Dada/Anna', 'Atya' etc. and show love and affection to youngsters by addressing them as younger brothers, sisters and so on, same as is done all over India in other communities as well.

The Mendhe Dhangars under study have not yet been fully exposed to all the evils of urban society. They are still maintaining to some extent their traditional relationships. Though there is 'caste feeling' among them, as yet it has not disturbed their common feelings of being co-villagers. The exchange of, Bidies, Pan and tobacco without any caste prejudice was widely observed among them.

2) Relations among different Communities :

The members of the Mendhe Dhangars are of the opinion that their relationships with other co-villagers depends on the two factors :

1. Living in the same village,
2. Working at the same place.

Most of the villages are deviating from the traditional residential pattern, yet the villages surveyed during my field work are more or less settled according to the traditional residential pattern. Though, the members of the Mendhe Dhangars are living in the same village develop a sense of solidarity.

Similarly, most of the members of the Mendhe Dhangars living in the villages work as agricultural labourers in the form of the higher caste villagers. They work at the same place and they spend most of the time together normally doing more than one work under the same employer, throughout the year. Most of the Mendhe Dhangars are required to work together to complete such agricultural operations successfully.

Besides, these some other factors are also responsible in maintaining and enhancing the relationships of co-villagers. Their relationships are not based on self

interest but on mutual interest. The professional and caste-minority are two important factors in maintaining and promoting the fellow feeling and co-villagers' relationships.

To the Mendhe Dhangars, the other castes like the Brahmins, the Carpenters, the oilmen, blacksmith etc. also render services through traditional occupations of the villagers without any caste prejudices.

The demographically minor castes always fear a numerically dominant caste. In the villages under study, it was observed that it was the number of the young men which made a caste strong or weak. The Demographically dominant caste dominates in all spheres of the life whereas the weak caste either supports the strongest caste or remains silent.

3) The Relationship between the Higher Castes and the Mendhe Dhangars :

People belonging to the higher castes like the Brahmins, the Jains, the Lingayats do not accept cooked food from the people of the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka. Although people of the higher castes invite the people of the Mendhe Dhangars to ceremonial dinners yet they are served separately. There is no question on their part of inviting the higher caste people for ceremonial dinners. However, the people belonging to the higher castes have been

observed taking into existents today with the people of the Mendhe Dhangars, because they say that intoxicants do not recognise any caste distinctions. The Brahmins who assist the members of the Mendhe Dhangars in performing any ritual, accept only rice, pulses and money as 'Aaxina'. They do not accept any cooked food from the members of the Mendhe Dhangars.

Thus in most cases the relationship between the members of the higher castes and those of the Mendhe Dhangars is that of employer and servant but even then they have very cordial relations.

4) 'Inter se' Relationship among the Mendhe Dhangars :

There is some friction also among the Mendhe Dhangars on the basis of their caste but it is rarely expressed. Most of the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka, are landless and economically backward and, therefore, have common problems for which they raise their voice unitedly. They consider that they have been equally exploited by the landlords.

Most of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka are agricultural labourers through a few of them also have a small plots of land. The Mendhe Dhangar people accept cooked food from other Dhangars like, Zende, Dange etc.

Thus the Mendhe Dhangars have cordial social and professional relations, with the members of the other Dhangars. A family of any particular Dhangar caste may have some friction with another family but it is not between two communities.

5) Changing Relationships :

In a rapidly changing world the relationship between the higher castes and the Mendhe Dhangars themselves are also changing. Now-a-days men belonging to a higher caste may be seen eating in the house of the Mendhe Dhangar. Now, a Brahmin can be seen accepting cooked food from the Mendhe Dhangars.

However, with the increase in industrialisation, education and modern means of communications, the caste system is changing fast. Hence the people of the upper castes are not so antagonistic today to the Mendhe Dhangars as they had been in the past. They are slowly but gradually shedding their irrational and traditional prejudices and inhibitions.

In this way I see that all the people belonging to different cast-groups are directly or indirectly inter-dependent on one another. This inter-group relationship in all spheres - social, economic and political is deep rooted.