

CHAPTER - V

INTER - CASTE RELATIONS AND CHANGE

1. CONFLICT AND CHANGE:

In the previous chapter we have summarised various aspects of the protracted conflict between Mahars and upper castes. In Malikwad conflict can be looked upon as bringing out change in social relationships; and in case of Malikwad also it holds good. But other factors like diffusion of new values and others also must be taken into consideration. The favourable things in case of the Mahars of Malikwad were: 1) The sizable population of the Mahars. 2) The spread of modern education among the Mahar youths and the inculcation of modern values in their minds, 3) The support of the progressive minded youth - leadership of the nearby towns, 4) The timely help from the concerned governmentary and other authority, and 5) The strong will and perseverance of the mahar youth leadership. Due to all the Mahars in Malikwad have been giving a continuous struggle against the upper castes for achieving their rightful status. This is note worthy because in this endeavour, other untouchables did not join hands with them.

The struggle made by the Mahars of Malikwad was mainly for the improvement of their social status. Scarcity of water provided them an opportunity to express their suppressed feelings accepting the significance of the role played by the external agencies. We can maintain that the Mahar youths themselves came forward to make legitimate demands and remained united even under tremendous pressure and miseries for so many years. This must be seen as due to the growth of modern Education and the awareness of their legitimate rights. There are about 75 males and 44 females in the age group of 20 - 40. These are the people born and grown in the first 20 years of independence. The percentage of literacy among these people shown in the following table. Speaks for their awareness of the modern trends.

TABLE - 1

MAHAR ADULTS IN THE AGE GROUP 20 - 40

	Male	Female	Total
1	2	3	4
Illiterate	2	19	21
Literate	73	25	98
Those having Primary- Education	22	15	
Those having Secondary Education	34	10	
Those having Higher - Education.	17	Nil	
	75	44	119

Source : Information collected from the reliable informants in the community.

This spread of Education created a sense of awareness and neglecting the opposition of the elders in the community. The youths gave a stubborn fight to achieve their demands.

The actual conflict has now become a past even. But it is now interesting to see the nature of social change, especially the change in the Mahar's relations with the upper castes and in their (Mahars) participations in the total social life of the village.

2. ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES:

In the traditional village economy the Mahars were to carry out certain services for the remaining people in the village, and, in return, were given the necessities of life by them. Thus as in case of all other castes are Balutedars, the Mahars were also an integral part of the village community as a whole. However their position was very much degraded as compared to all other sections. After the conflict narrated in the previous chapter and due to various factors of change described earlier, the Mahars en-block decided to not do any of the traditional duties, especially those which were regarded by the upper castes as their age-old, 'right', thus they stopped carrying away the dead animals, digging pits for burying dead persons, Sweeping the roads and houses, passing messages etc. They even declined to work in the land of the upper caste landlords. The

traditional 'Baluta' duties were thus totally abandoned.

The above decision could not have been taken without determination to face its consequences. The Mahars had to suffer very hard. It was reported that many poor families had to remain without proper or sufficient food for days together. Some of the Mahars had to go outside the village for seeking new jobs. But the community as a whole did not surrender.

The position has now changed considerably. We have already seen that in 1979 the Mahars were distributed with 104 acres of cultivated land. Since then the financial institutions have also come forward to meet their financial needs.

The Mahar-Savarna conflict in Malikwad also helped the educated Mahars in creating an urged in them to seek employment outside the village. The industrially developed town of Ichalkaranji is 10 Kms. from Malikwad those Mahar youths who were earlier working as a Balutedars or agriculture labours have now turned to the industries in Ichalkaranji. There are about 40 workers who commute daily between Malikwad and Ichalkaranji. Besides the educated Mahars are serving in different government and semi-government departments, the details are 1) Primary Schools - 6, 2) Junior College -1, 3) Armed forces - 6, 4) Banks - 3, 5) Revenue department -2, 6) L.I.C. -1.

This shows that atleast one member from every Mahar family is gainfully employed and has become economically - independent.

One significant change in this context is that recently some of the landlords are inviting the Mahar labours to work on their land on contractual or daily wages basis. 'Baluta' system is totally abolished as far as Mahars are concerned. This is a basic change in the social relationships. The workers have become free to work on the land of any landlord who is prepared to give the required wages in cash. In fact the Mahars in Malikwad is a good - example of the idea that economic independence can bring about changes in the inter-caste relations in the context of means of livelihood.

3. PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES:

In the third chapter we have described two important religio-cultural events in the village, namely Dasara and the annual fair. All the Asavarna people including Mahars were participating in this even. This participation was not on the basis of equality. But eventhen the tradition continued for centuries together. Since the intercaste conflict described earlier took place, there has been a gradual change in the attitude of the Mahars towards these cultural events.

The Mahars have completely stopped participating in the Dasara festival. They do not come for the common loot of 'Shami' leaves. This is because they had to keep the palanquin at the foot of the Vyankatesh temple hill. Even before 1977 they had to follow this practise and they were not allowed to mix the upper caste people in looting the leaves. After their determined struggle their self-respect has made them aware and hence they are not joining the Dasara procession. They have also stopped celebrating this particular event.

In case of annual fair the position is some what different. Due to the religious feeling they do celebrate the 'Mahasnana' rite. However, they do not join with the procession of the remaining villagers. They take the palanquins of their deity to the river in an independent procession. The Mahasnana rite is performed independently. The Mahars have also stopped taking food in the common feast obviously because the Asavarnas are served the food at a seperate place away from main ground. Thus the Mahars, as a community, are almost remaining aloof from the other villagers as far as the religious and cultural events are concerned.

4. THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE:

In traditional Hindu Society the Brahmin priests perform the religious rites and rituals for the upper caste

people. Among the Lingayats there are independent families of priests called as Swamis or Jangams. Jangams were regarded as one of the traditional Alutedars. In Malikwad also there are Jangam families. Lingayat is a reformist religious sect founded by Basaveshwar who propogated equality of all human beings. Jangams used to perform the marriage and other rites of the Mahars in the village. But this practice also discontinued with the inter-caste conflict in Malikwad. Now a days some of the Mahars elderly people themselves perform the rites and consecrate the marriage of the Mahar couples. The specific situation and necessity has changed the nature of marriage rites.

5. THE PRACTICE OF UNTOUCHABILITY:

The Constitution of India has abolished the age old practice of untouchability. The practice of this heinous custom is prohibited at all public places and the violators of law are punished. In Malikwad we have seen that the untouchability prevailed at all the social and public events, such as festivals, fairs, marriage ceremonies etc. Even at the collective "Bhajanas" (devotional songs) the Mahar and other low caste participants were required to sit seperately for the main group.

After the inter-caste conflict the social contacts between the Mahars and the remaining section have almost come to an end. The Mahars do not tolerate the earlier

insulting practices like serving the food in separate utensils, pouring water without touching the posts, restriction on the entry of them in the houses of the caste Hindus and such others. On the other hand the upper caste people are not prepared to give up their traditional superior status. This itself shows that the 'Spirit' behind the practice of untouchability is very much there. The upper castes are not prepared to accept the Mahars as their equals and this itself is the crux of the entire problem of Mahar-Savarna relations in Malikwad.

6. DAY-TO-DAY CONTACTS:

The rift between the Mahars and Savarnas is so wide that the Mahars have almost totally stopped contacts with the land-lords, shop keepers, political leaders and even all other common people among the Savarna castes. A number of instances can be given indicating of this situation. (1) The Mahars get all the daily necessities of life from the nearby town of Chikodi. They do not go to buy the things to the village shops. (2) They do not attend any meeting invited by the Savarnas. (3) A Mahar usually avoids conversation with the Savarnas and vice a versa. (4) The Mahar cultivators do not receive any *baluta* services from the traditional craftsmen like balck-smith, potter, carpenter, tailor, and others. (5) The two other untouchable castes , viz. Mang and Chambhar, have also almost discontinued their contacts

with the Mahars. (6) Usually the Mahar labourers do not work on the fields of the Savarnas. Only in exceptional cases a few of them go to work but take wages in cash. (7) The Mahars fetch water from both the bore-well as well as the earlier public well in the village. The savarnas have stopped fetching water from the public well thinking that it is polluted by the Mahars. They have dug a separate well for them. Recently majority of the people from all sections are using the newly constructed water tank.

7. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND AWARENESS:

In the initial years since independence, it was a well known fact that the Scheduled caste voters used to vote on block in favour of the ruling party. In Malikwad also there was no exception. Moreover it was an unwritten rule that the word of the local Jahagirdar was almost an order and Mahars used to comply it since 1970 the situation gradually changed. The conflict created a clearcut division and Mahars as a group always opposed the candidates supported by the Savarnas. It is however not possible to give the exact pattern of voting in the village but the general trend can be pointed out.

It has been noted earlier that Shri. P.P. Hegare the then M.L.A. from Sadalga constituency extended every help to the Mahars. He was then belonging to congress party. Later on he joined the Janata party and became a Minister.

With him the Mahars also became supporters of the Janata Party. Among the Savarnas there are two groups at present, one belonging to Congress and another to the Janata Party. It was found of that Mahars take an independent decision about voting at the time of elections. The local leaders, whether belonging to Janata or Congress, can not influence the Mahars. The very fact that the Mahars are united and take an independent decisions regarding voting indicates a change as far as the political behaviour is concerned. As long as the two conflicting groups are there this situation is bound to continue. It is true that the decision taken by a group and imposed upon its members violates the principle of individual freedom. But this is a transitory phase and alongwith the increasing aspirations of individuals the situation is bound to change.