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CHAPTER-I

A) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DHANGARS

1) INTRODUCTION :

Caste system or caste structure is an integral part of Hindu Society. It is based on social stratification, as a result of which the status and role of the individual member of the society is determined. In India the caste system is still an important factor in the rural society. Tracing the origin of the Dhangars, we have to go back to the origins of caste itself. According to the traditional theory members of different castes were born out of different part of the body of the original man-Brahma, the greater of the universe. According to this theory, Brahmins were born out of mouth, Kshatriyas, out of the hands, Vaishyas out of stomach or things while the Sudras out of feet.

Several social thinkers, philosophers and scholars have tried to find out the origin of the caste system in India. Indian caste system is very complicated. Its complicated structure goes to prove that it is not a thing of ten years, twenty years or a century.

In every society there are certain provisions for the regulation of social control and determination of

individual status. In India such provisions have been represented by caste-system. It is one of the principal sources of social stratification and exercise a powerful influence upon the social structure. It has not been peculiar to India but as mentioned by Shri L.K. Anantha Iyer, "it existed in ancient times among the Egyptians, Celchians, Iberians, Medas, Persians and the Etruscans, as also among the Mexicans and Peruvians in the new world. It existed also among the earliest of the Attic tribes and the Spartans whose trades and occupations were almost all hereditary. The laws of caste are said to have prevailed among the Saxons."¹ But in India it reached the climax while in other countries it ceased to exist. As an institution, "caste illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthetic characteristics of the Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration of races and the co-operation of cultures."²

2) The Shepherd Community :

The Shepherd community all over the world is associated with Pastoralism. It has been practised for the last 5,000 years at least. It has become a traditional

1. Iyer, L.K. Anantha Krishna; Lectures on Ethnography, p. 64.

2. Radhakrishnan : The Hindu View of Life, p. 67.

and historic occupation of the community. The shepherd community is a well known in India. It has produced many eminent men and women well versed not only in the arts of peace but have shown their wisdom and statesmanship in ruling kingdoms all over India, and in the field of warfare, literature and as well as in the buildings of empire. Thus, it has a great history.

But today due to poverty, illiteracy, idleness, etc. it has become very weak socially, economically, educationally, politically and above all culturally. Therefore, it is very urgent to study them to find out and solve their burning problems. It is our first moral duty to know and study of our ancestors. It is also learnt that they were not only sheep and cattle keepers but also great rulers, e.g. Hakka-Bakkaru, Krishna Devraya, Pallavas, Kadambaras, Malhar Rao, Ahilyadevi Holkar etc.

Thus, by building empire, they served and protected the community from all evil things. Even it is a most ancient tribe still it has maintained its holy culture. But today due to the impact of industrialisation, sanskritization and modernisation, no tribe is as pure as it was, and Shepherd community is not an exception.

Shepherds were known by different names in different areas e.g.

TABLE-I

<u>Area</u>		<u>Name</u>
1. Tamilnada	-	Indiyor Kurubor
2. Punjab	-	Gaddi, Gadriya
3. Gajarat	-	Bharvadru
4. Rajasthan	-	Pal Kshatriyas
5. Andhra Pradesh	-	Gollas
6. Karnatak	-	Kurubaru
7. Maharashtra	-	Dhangar
8. Madhya Pradesh	-	Dhangar

Since human civilization their main occupation is sheep and cattle rearing. And their secondary occupation is that of traditional agriculture.

3) Origin of Dhangar Caste :

Regarding their origin, the Jativiveka asserts that they are descended from a Shudra father and a Mahishya woman; the Mahishya again, is said to be the offspring of a Kshatriya father and a Vaishya mother.

"According to an old tradition, they were created from the dust of Shiva's body. Another tradition alleges that their original ancestor was the sage Tapa. A third tradition asserts that while Khandoba was once strolling in a forest, he met their progenitor, whom he struck dumb

with awe by the display of his miraculous powers. From that time the Dhangar with his relatives began to worship Khandoba with implicit devotion, and offered his daughter Banai to the God, who accepted her as his wife. Khandoba, being thus propitiated, conferred upon him the boon that he and his descendants would earn a good living by rearing and tending sheep."³

Generally, we can say that in ancient times man was in primitive stage. Cave was the home. Food gathering and hunting were their business. After the search of fire man knew the use of animal. Further, man also knew the use of mutton and milk. The result was that the herding was the main business for all primitive societies to maintain their life. In course of time herding is divided into several categories.

These herders were known as Ahirs, Gavlis, Dhangars etc. They started their life near the banks of rivers (Indus) and sea-shores. In herding, sheep, goats, cows, dogs, buffalos and horses were main animals.

Grahame Clerk is of the opinion that man was content to live as a barbarian from 5,500 B.C.

3. Enthoven, R.E. : The Tribes and Castes of Bombay,
p. 311.

Generally, the shepherd community is settled in hilly region. As per many learned authors and social scientists the origin of herd is Central Asia.

"With the reference of Bible it is clear that Abraham visited the land of Missar. In Missar region, shepherds were the kings in 2080 B.C. The first king was powerful and named Salatis. In the west of Syria there is a hilly region in between Dead sea and Nile River. In this hilly region extensive shepherd community was settled. It is also mentioned in 'Artic Home of Vedas' that herders were originally from Polar region."⁴

Gastov Oppov in his book said that "there is no state without shepherd community."⁵

By studying all old literature we can gather following conclusions about Dhangar tribe :

- i) This is a most ancient tribe.
- ii) The main God of this community is 'Shiva' in the form of 'Biroba'.
- iii) Shepherds migrated in India with Aryans.
- iv) Under the leadership of Sheshnag-II, group of shepherds migrated in the 7th Century B.C. They ruled over Magadha for 300 years. Prasanjit and Poraj kings of Rajputana were Gadriya Shepherds.

4. Charge, S.R. : "Seasonal Migration of Shepherd Community in Central Plateau Maharashtra, pp. 12-13.

5. Gustav Oppov : The Original Inhabitants of Bharata-
 i. 1911 A.D. 217

v) Mr. Tod - a famous historian of Rajasthan said that the Pal Dhargar of South India came from Palestine, some of them moved towards Nepal for the purpose of trade and commerce. Due to the fear of Muslims few shepherds migrated to south India.

vi) The first known records of pastoralism in this part of the country are from the Neolithic period around 1,500 B.C. This civilization is confined to the semi-arid tracts of precipitation.

Finally, we can say that it is not easy to give the origin of any community in India. Because, the sacred books tell us that there were divisions in the Hindu society of the Vedic period 1,500 - 2000 B.C. But nothing is existed to compare it with modern social system as it is seen today with its infinite variety of sects, each separated one from other.

Dhangars have a legend to explain their origin. Years back there was an incarnation of God 'Shiva' in the form of Revansiddeshwar at Kalyan. During this period a Goddess by name 'Mayi' was at Kolhapur district in Maharashtra, she had incarcerated thousands of Lingayat Saints whom Revansiddeshwar liberated. Half of the liberated saints became Lingayat jungams and other half were turned into sheep; and were left in a cave in the field of one

person - 'Padmanna'. One day he accidentally saw these sheep in the cave and started rearing them. In this way 'Padmanna' is said to be the first Dhangar.

There is great controversy about the shepherds that whether they belong to Aryans or Dravidians.

4) Shepherds belong to Aryan race :

i) The great scholar and researcher V.R.Hannumathiah said in his book, "Bharat deshar Kurubar Charitre" that the shepherds belong to Aryan race. For this many evidences were found in the holy-vedas. The Aryans' main occupation was cattle keeping weaving of woolen blankets, agriculture etc. Today we are used to call shepherds by different names in different states, i.e. Dhangars in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and Kurumba in Karnatak. But during Vedic period the Shepherd was known as the Aripal, Ajpal, Meshapal, Gopal etc.

ii) Many references of Shepherd Community were found in Vedas especially in Rigveda and Atharvaveda. The great scholar S.B. Joshi said that, "the term 'Kambal' is found both in Rigveda and Atharvaveda."⁶

6. Joshi S.B. : "Karnatak Veer Kshatriyaru", p. 101.

In the words of Max Muller, a world Sanskrit scholar, "Rigveda is the oldest book in the Library of the world". Moreover, the Rashis like Mesh, Vrasabha, Mithun, etc. tell us about Shepherd Community of past.

iii) Many prayers did by the shepherds to the God, Parmeshwar were found in the Vedas e.g.

- a) Pushan is sun as viewed by Shepherds, in their wonderings in quest of fresh pasture lands.
- b) The hymn to Pushan, therefore, breaths a simplicity which is truly pastoral.
- c) Where the grass is rich and green, where the beautiful sun lead our flocks over such pleasant way.
- d) Grant us Pastures far and near, make us Pushan strong in war.

All these prove that shepherds belong to Aryan race. The early Aryans had no castes, the father was the head and Priest of the family. Each family cultivated its own land, pastored its flocks and every member held the beliefs that a God watches him and his work.

5) Shepherds are Dravidians :

Indeed the shepherds must be regarded as the very old inhabitants of this land, we can contest with their Dravidian Kinshen the priority of occupation of the Indian soil.

The Kurumbas are the modern representative of the ancient Kurumbas of Pallavas who were once, so powerful throughout south India. The first coins found in South India belong to Shepherd community only.

Sir Elliot in his book asserted that, "these coins bear witness to a great maritime traffic in the early centuries of the Cristian era."⁷

In ancient inscription the words like Kurubar Hatti, Kurubar Halli, Kurubar Vishay etc. were found in South India.

Radhakamal Mukharji and P.R. Shesha Iyengar in their books, Indian ^{ca}shipping and Dravidian India said that the trader shepherd frequently became rulers.

Dr. Krishnaswami said that the Yadavas of 2nd Century belong to And Kuruba caste.

7. Sir Elliot : % "Coin's of South India", pp.35-37.

This is the first race which founded its state first in South India, and the state was known as 'Kurumbanadu'. The kings were known as Kurumbrajeru, Kurumb Kahatriyaru.

The Holkar dynasty of Indore also belongs to shepherd community.

Some Anthropologists and Sociologists are of the view that this community is older than the Aryans. Risley says that they belonged to the Dravidian group.

6) Conclusion :

Our country, Bharatvarsha is a very ancient one. Different people have come into it at different times, from different parts of the world. They all speak different languages at different degrees of civilization. Most of them settled themselves here in these far distant ages and inter married. We are their present descendants cannot exactly say to races (Shepherd Community) we belongs.

Thus the shepherds who are scattered all over India are Aryans or Dravidians is a immaterial. However, these shepherds were living in India since 4000-5000 B.C. in various parts of India. Once upon a time this community had reached its prosperous lenth by founding

empires in the country. But in course of time this caste was influenced by various religions like Jainism, Buddhism, Veershaivism and lost its glory. But still today this community is maintaining its own culture and civilization by living in remote areas of the country side.

7) Dhangar Community in Maharashtra :

a) Origin :

As we know in Maharashtra State the term 'Dhangar' generally means a Shepherd. They are indigenous settlers. They are found practically throughout the State except in the coastal areas. They are called Dhangars because their traditional occupation is sheep and cattle rearing. Dhangars are the modern representatives of the ancient inhabitants of India. They become out^{of} real ancestors. Today more than one crore of Dhangars are living in Maharashtra with 22 endogenous groups. Thus, it is next to Maratha community. It has a big history in the Indian continent. This Dhangar community was the ruling family of Indore. These people are very simple in dress honest in behaviour.

The great anthropologist late Dr. Irvati Karve said that Dhangars belong to 'Kandail' tribe (Budakkattu). Since long past they were famous for their courage especially during reign of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

It is said that the people living between the banks of rivers Narmada and Krishna were Dravidian groups. Their impacts were seen on Maharashtrain residences and on Marathi language. And moreover, when they belong to 'Kandnil' tribe it will be clear that it is pre-Aryan race. When it is so then Dhangars belong to Dravidian race. And today most of the historians, scholars are agreed to this point. This community is living in forests, hills, like Katkaris, Thakurs, Mahars, Mangs etc. since long back. That is, they are living in Maharashtra before the arrival of Aryans. That is near round about 700 B.C. or atleast 2665 years ago.

In the words of Prof. Gcharge, "the Dhangar community of Maharashtra is not originally from Maharashtra. It is migrated from various parts of India. In the beginning they were migrated from Bactriya and Gandar to Indus valley. They migrated from Indus valley to Panjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Konkan region. As per many references, shepherd community in Maharashtra is migrated from Gujarat, Punjab and Saurashtra. Today the majority of shepherd community is migrated from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mysore etc."⁸

8. Prof. Gcharge, S.R. : "8

It is also said that Kanad Gavlis lived in Nasik and Khandesh. And even the in the investigators of "Linguistic Survey of India", found that in the district like Chand, Bhandara, Nagpur of Maharashtra, Kurubas were found. All these indicates that Dhanger community of Maharashtra is migrated from above states, especially from Karnatak due to following reasons :

1. The availability of Pasture, Meadow.
2. Natural reasons like - Famines, Floods etc.
3. Favourite grouping/nomadic nature. 'Migration of their religion'.
4. Political conflict, between Aryans and Dravidians.⁹
5. Market and religious centres, e.g. Pali, Jejuri, Pattankodoli, Washi, Solapur.

B) Meaning :

Many scholars, historians were tried their best but till today nobody has given the exact origin and meaning of the said community. The general meaning of the term is -

Dhan = Cattle.

gar = Holder.

9. Crooks, William : "Tribes and castes of W. Zone",
(Vol. II), p. 46, 301.

Dhangar : Cattle holder/keeper/seller. That is, the people who keep cattle, sell cattle are known as Dhangars. The word Dhangar is derived from the Kannada word 'Dangar' or 'Danker'. According to S.N. Londe, the term Dhangar is derived from the term Gandhar.

The word Dhangar might have derived from the term, 'Dhenugar' or 'Dhenukar'. Dhenugar means cattle keeper of Dhenupal. With the evolution of the same term it might have become as Dhangar.

Another opinion about the origin of Dhangar is that, Dhangar is a name of a Pre-Aryan tribe. But in common we can say that 'Dhan' means 'Wealth' or 'Laxmi'. During the barter system of the economy the cattle plays the role of exchange of money. That is why cattle was the main means of exchange, like this one can say that the person who has much cattle is known as Dhangar or 'Laxmidhar'.

Eminent German ethnologists and Ethnographers are of the opinion that Dhangars are country wide Pre-Aryan aboriginal tribe. According to Sir Risley they belong to the Seytho-Dravidian stock.

The term Dhangar is inscribed as 'Dangar' on a stone carvation of Buddhist cave. This cave is said to have carved between the first and third century A.D.

The word so spelt Dangar stands for Dhangar says by Dr. Bhagvantlal Indrajī.

The word is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Dhangad' which means a hill. Therefore, Dhangar may be said to be a man who lives near mountains, hills, i.e. 'Jungalche Raje'.

In course of time this community has left its nomadic nature and settled in one place by accepting cattle keeping as main occupation and agriculture as the subsidiary occupation. But now-a-days Dhangars are doing all sorts of occupations due to the impact ^{of} industrialization and modernisation.

Dhangars stay in a separate place near villages called as Dhangarwadi, where they keep sheep and cattle and do some hill cultivation. The dress like Kunbi Marathas, the men are very strong, sturdy, ignorant, simple, honest and rough. The women are brave and hard working take the milk and butter to the market for sale.

According to R.E. Enthoven, the Dhangars have the following endogenous v divisions:¹⁰

10. Enthoven, R.E. : "The tribes and Castes Bombay",
p. 313.

TABLE-2

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Ahir | 2) Asai or Maratha |
| 3) Banaji | 4) Barga, Bande or Methkari |
| 5) Dange | 6) Gadage |
| 7) Gavli | 8) Ghogattunya |
| 9) Hatkar or Zendevala | 10) Holkar |
| 11) Kangar | 12) Khikai |
| 13) Khilari or Thilari | 14) Khutekar or Khute |
| 15) Lad | 16) Kuktekar |
| 17) Mendhe | 18) Mhaske |
| 19) Sangar | 20) Shegar |
| 21) Shilotya | 22) Utegar |
| 23) Musalman. | |

Most of the above divisions have a sub-division known as Kadu or Bastards, to which the illegitimate or excommunicated members of the divisions are relegated. The origin of the names of most of the divisions is obscure.

The Dhangars of Maharashtra are divided into 21 endogenous groups. Some Dhangars are seminomads, other some are nomads and other few Dhangars are settled. They are scattered all corners of Maharashtra mainly in western ghats.

TABLE-3**Endogenous groups of Dhangers
and their location**

Name of a Group	Main Occupation	Nature of residence	Location
1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Ahir	Sheep rearing	Seminomads	Nasik, Ahamad-nagar, Khandesh
2. Dange	Buffalo rearing, Coolie, Hamali	-,,-	Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, Belgaum, Ratnagiri.
3. Gadhari	Sheep rearing	-,,-	All over Maharashtra.
4. Gadhari, Nikhar	Sheep rearing	-,,-	-,,-
5. Halmat	-,,-	-,,-	-,,-
6. Hande or Bonds	-,,-	-,,-	-,,-
7. Hatkar/Holkar	-,,-	True-nomads	-,,-
8. Hatti-Konkhani	-,,-	Seminomads	-,,-
9. Kannade	Sheep rearing wollen, blanket, wearing.	-,,-	Solapur, other parts of Maharashtra.
10. Khatik	Meat selling	-,,-	Poona, Bombay, Nagpur.
11. Khutekar or Utegors	Sheep rearing, blanket wearing.	-,,-	All over Maharashtra
12. Kurmar	Sheep rearing	-,,-	-,,-

TABLE-3 (Contd...)

1.	2.	3.	4.
13. Ladghe	Sheep rearing	Seminomads	All over Maharashtra
14. Mendhe	Sheep and Goat herders	-,-,-	-,-,-
15. Sangar	Woolen blanket wearing	-,-,-	-,-,-
16. Shegar	Agriculture	Settled	-,-,-
17. Telangi	Sheep rearing	Settled	-,-,-
18. Thellari/ Khillari	-,-,-	True nomads	-,-,-
19. Unnekonkan	-,-,-	-,-,-	-,-,-
20. Varhade	-,-,-	-,-,-	-,-,-
21. Zende	Agriculture	Settled	-,-,-
22. Zade	Agriculture	Settled	-,-,-

Eventhough they are divided into 22 types, they are mainly found in three categories only :

- 1) Mendhe - Sheep rearing.
- 2) Zende - Agriculture.
- 3) Dange - Buffalo Keeper.

Most of the Dhangars are living in a scattered situation. They are living in the remote areas of the country side. The Dange Dhangars at Kolhapur District,

are actually living in the hills. Few other Dhangars, who are working as labourers, hamals in the cities like Bombay, Poona, Nagpur, Ahmednagar, Nasik, Kolhapur etc. are living in slum areas. According to K.C. Malhotra and Madhav Gadgil, "the Dhangars in Maharashtra have the following endogenous divisions, distribution, population size, language and traditional occupation" :

TABLE-4

Dhangar Castes	Estimated Population	Mother tongue	Distribution in Districts	Traditional Occupation
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Ahir	3,00,000	Marathi	Ahmednagar, Akola, Amraoti, Aurangabad, Buldhana, Dhulia, Jalgaon, Nasik.	Sheep-keeping and Wool weaving.
2. Dange	1,00,000	Marathi	Kolaba, Kolahpur, Pune, Ratnagiri, Sangli, Satara.	Buffalo keeping.
3. Gadhari-Dhangar	20,000	Hindi	Akola, Amraoti, Aurangabad, Dhulia, Jalgaon.	Sheep keeping.
4. Gadhari-Nikhar	5,000	Hindi	Akola, Amraoti, Aurangabad, Dhulia, Jalgaon.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.
5. Halmat	8,000	Kannada	Kolhapur, Sangli.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.

TABLE-4 (Contd...)

6. Hande	4,000	Kannada	Sangli, Sholapur	Sheep keeping.
7. Hatkar	5,73,000	Marathi	Ahmednagar, Akola, Amraoti, Dhulia, Aurangabad, Bhir, Buldhana, Jalgaon, Kolhapur, Nanded, Nasik, Osmanabad, Parbhani, Pune, Sangli, Satara, Sholapur, Wardha, Yeotmal.	Sheep keeping.
8. Hatti-kankan	5,000	Marathi	Bhir, Nanded, Osmanabad, Sholapur.	Sheep keeping
9. Kannada	15,000	Marathi	Bhandara, Chanda Nagpur, Wardha.	Sheep keeping
10. Khatik	15,000	Marathi	Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Bhir, Bombay, Kolaba, Nasik, Pune, Satara, Sholapur, Thana.	Meat sellers.
11. Khutekar	5,00,000	Marathi	Ahmednagar, Akola, Amraoti, Aurangabad, Bhir, Buldhana, Jalgaon, Kolaba, Nagpur, Nanded, Nasik, Osmanabad, Parbhani, Pune, Ratnagiri, Satara, Sholapur, Wardha, Yeotmal.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.
12. Kurmar-Hatti-kankan	15,000	Kannada	Bhandara, Chanda.	Sheep keeping
13. Kurmar Unnikankan	5,000	Kannada	Bhandara, Chanda.	Sheep keeping and Wool weaving.
14. Ladha	1,000			

TABLE-4 (CONTD...)

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
14. Ladhse	6,000	Marathi	Amaroti, Bhandara	Sheep keeping and cotton weaving.
15. Mendhe	30,000	Marathi	Kolhapur, Pune, Sangli, Satara, Sholapur.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.
16. Sanger	10,000	Marathi	Ahmednagar, Bhir, Kolhapur, Pune, Ratnagiri, Sangli, Satara, Sholapur.	Wool Weaving.
17. Shegar	40,000	Marathi	Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Bhir, Osmanabad, Pune, Sholapur.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.
18. Telangi	5,000	Telgu	Wanded, Parbhani.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.
19. Thellari	7,000	Marathi	Dhulia, Jalgaon, Nasik.	Sheep and cattle keeping.
20. Unni-kankan	6,000	Marathi	Osmanabad, Sholapur.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.
21. Varhade	1,50,000	Marathi	Akola, Amaroti, Bhandara, Chanda, Nagpur, Wardha, Yeotmal.	Sheep keeping and cotton weaving.
22. Zade	15,000	Marathi	Chanda, Nagpur, Wardha, Yeotmal.	Sheep keeping and wool weaving.
23. Zende	80,000	Marathi	Kolhapur, Sholapur.	Sheep & Horse keeping.
Total : <u>19,54,000</u>				

1) The population estimates for these castes are based on figures provided mostly by the leaders of these castes. The cases where the population sizes are less than 20000 the estimates are highly reliable (over 95%). Most of these castes have their own associations or societies and they could provide reliable figures. But in the case of castes numbering over 1,00,000, the estimates may not always be reliable.

2) Part of the Matkars in Sangli District, locally known as Khellaris have traditionally also kept substantial number of cattle together with the sheep."¹¹

But majority of the Dhangars are keeping sheep and cattle. For that purpose they have to wander from place to place in search of pasture/meadow. Thus, majority of the Dhangars nomadic in nature. These conservative people think of migration as their religion. They migrate not only themselves but alongwith their families.

11. Malhotra, K.C. and Gadgil, Madhav : "The Ecological Basis of the Geographical Distribution of the Dhangars : A Pastoral Caste. Cluster of Maharashtra, p. 50-51.

In fact, the members of the Mendhe Dhangars are more backward in Hatkanangale Taluka. Thus, these economically backward and socially handicapped people of our country deserve the special attention of the Government and of the Anthropologists.

2) Methodology and the Field Work :

Dhangar is a prominent community belonging to the O.B.C. group in Maharashtra. Their main occupation is sheep growing and related work. Because of the very nature of their work they are partly a nomadic community. Although many Sociologists and Anthropologists have made general studies of Dhangars, there are no in depth studies of particular subcastes. I decided to make a detailed study of Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka, based on personal interviews with the help of a schedule and participant observation.

The present work is based on the field-work. I collected information among the Mendhe Dhangars at Hatkanangale Taluka and did field work in this area.

3) The Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka :

Hatkanangale Taluka is famous for the predominant population of the Mendhe Dhangars in Kolhapur District. Specially in two villages e.g. Pattankoḍoli and Ghunaki, the population of Mendhe Dhangars is as per the following table :

TABLE No. 1

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Total Population of Mendhe Dhangars
1.	Pattankodoli	4,000
2.	Ghunaki	2,500

50 families of the Mendhe Dhangars from the Pattankodoli and Ghunaki villages were selected for the detailed study. Thus a sample of 50 families with a population 235 souls was selected for an indepth study. Their break-up is as follows :

TABLE No. 2

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Total No. of families	Total Population of Mendhe Dhangars
1.	Pattankodoli	25	111
2.	Ghunaki	25	125
Total :		50	235

The field work carried out is two different villages, namely, 1) Pattankodoli, 2) Ghunaki. Regarding the selection of 50 families of the Mendhe Dhangars from two villages it will not be out of place to mention that

since there is a very large population of the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka, the selection of families was made on random basis.

All the two villages under survey are introduced briefly in the following paragraphs :

1) Pattankodoli :

Pattankodoli is at a distance of nine miles from Hatkanangale town and 12 miles from Kolhapur. The village has a mixed population of 11003 persons. The Mendhe Dhangars are said to be the first settlers in the village and even today, they are a dominant caste. The Marathas, the Jainas, the Harijans, the Chamars, the Kumbhars and the Lohars are the other castes living in the village. 25 Mendhe Dhangars families from this village with a population of 111 souls have been taken for the present study.

The villagers are mostly cultivators. The Mendhe Dhangars having lands follow the traditional occupation of tending sheep and goats.

There is a primary and high school very close to the village. Among the Mendhe Dhangars, a few students have started going to primary school and high school. In Pattankodoli village, there is a health centre.

2) Ghunaki :

Ghunaki is situated at a distance of 15 miles from Hatkanangale town and 16 miles from Kolhapur. The village is situated on the bank of Warana river.

Ghunaki may be regarded as a mixed village of Hatkanangale Taluka with a total population of 6,500 persons. Since there are Maratha, Harijans, Kumbhars, Hajams, Lohars, Jainas and others castes living in the village and each of them practising its own traditional occupation, economically they present heterogeneous picture. Some of them are cultivators and others are engaged as agricultural labourers and artists. There is a primary school and high school, but a few Mendhe Dhangar boys go to the primary school and high school.

After this brief account of the two villages from where the samples have been drawn, brief ethnographic description of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, is necessary.

The Mendhe Dhangars have the largest population in Hatkanangale Taluka. They are mostly found in the villages of Hatkanangale Taluka. In the District of Kolhapur alone some 60,000 Mendhe Dhangars are found. The Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, are the agricultural labourers, workers tending the sheep and goats. But economically, they

are of low standard. Economically they are very backward because 28% of them are completely landless and 88% of them get their subsistence as agricultural labourers. 46% of them are tending the sheep and goats. 86% of them are indebted to the villagers.

4) Studies on the Dhangar Community :

Although not much systematic study has been done on the Dhangar community. Some fragmentary information on their life and culture is sporadically recorded in official papers, census reports, district gazetteers, monographs, village notes and the reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

To my knowledge, a survey of literature shows that this vital component at Indian Society has hardly rarely been studied. Anthropological investigations were initiated in Maharashtra in 1969 from Deccan College, Pune by late Dr. Irawati Karve and K.C. Malhotra.

Again in 1975-76, a study as a part of forest ecological investigations was undertaken by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore by Madhav Gadgil and K.C. Malhotra. A little work has been published and yet there is a lot to be published.

In brief, we can say that Dhangar community of Maharashtra has been studied by late Dr. Irawati Karve, Dr. K.C. Malhotra and Dr. Madhav Gadgil, Dr. Vartak, V.D., Prof. Gharge, Dhere R.C., Dr. Sarojini Babar etc. from one point of view or the other.

Practically no serious work has so far been done on the economic life of the Mendhe Dhangars.

The present work is also a pointer to the fact that I am out to diagnose the problems of the Mendhe Dhangars and suggest ways and means to eradicate their ailments.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion and suggestions the work is divided in the following Chapters :

1) The first Chapter is devoted to the historical background of the Dhangar community. Here an attempt has been made to discuss the origin and meaning of the Dhangar community.

2) The second Chapter deals with the social life of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka. The hierarchical position of the Mendhe Dhangars, family life, rules of residence and inheritance, different kinship usages, marriage and divorce and caste panchayat are some of the important matters discussed in this Chapter.

3) The third Chapter is devoted to the economic life of the Mendhe Dhangars. Here an attempt has been made not only to discuss their economic problems in general but also to focus attention on their economic inequality in general and landlessness, indebtedness, very low per capita income, very low standard of living, deviation from the traditional occupation, the problem of unemployment leading to their seasonal migration, and very low wages given to agricultural labour, in particular.

4) In the fourth Chapter the political life of the Mendhe Dhangars has been described. Here the traditional caste Panchayat and modern State sponsored Gram Panchayat with their composition, powers and functions have been elaborately discussed. Political consciousness, and the economic limitations of the Mendhe Dhangars leading to a tense relationship with the Upper Caste people have also been dealt with here.

5) The religious life of the Mendhe Dhangars has been discussed in the fifth Chapter. This Chapter begins with description of their belief in various gods and spirits. Thus, the religions heads, their festivals and the impact of Sanskritization on the on the religious life of the Mendhe Dhangars have been analysed. Religious centres of the Mendhe Dhangars, Birth and Taboos, period of pollution have also been dealt with in this very Chapter. Needless to mention, an account of their sacred rites has been given here.

6) Socialisation and education forms the source of materials for the sixth Chapter. Here the role of various voluntary, agencies and social reform movements to elevate the position of the Mendhe Dhangar have been discussed. As evident from the very little of the Chapter, the various problems related to education have also been analysed here in this very Chapter.

7) Chapter seventh has been devoted exclusively to the problems of health and sanitation. Here the common diseases prevalent among them, their prevention and cure have been analysed. The attitude of the Mendhe Dhangar towards family planning, child-birth, have also been discussed here. Government help through Welfare Programmes in relation to their health and sanitation have also been included here in this Chapter. It goes without saying that their concepts of leisure and recreation have also been studied here.

8) Intergroup relations in general have been discussed in the eighth Chapter. Here the social interaction and inter-relations have been analysed, in brief.