

## CHAPTER-II

### SOCIAL LIFE OF THE MENDHE DHANGARS

1. Hierarchical position of the Castes.
2. Kinships of the Mendhe Dhangars.
3. Rules of Residence.
4. Joking relationships of the Mendhe Dhangars.
5. Avoidance of the Mendhe Dhangars.
6. Family of the Mendhe Dhangars.
7. Marriage System of the Mendhe Dhangars
8. The Caste Panchayat among the Mendhe Dhangars.

## CHAPTER-II

### SOCIAL LIFE OF THE MENDHE DHANGARS

#### 1) Hierarchical Position of the Castes :

Castes have been graded according to their superiority in relation to each other. According to the original scheme of the Varnashrama Dharma, the Varnas have been graded in the following four orders.

The Brahman, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Sudra. Arising out of anthropomorphic beliefs, these Varnas have been likened to various parts of the human body. Brahmans to the head, Kshatriyas to the arms, Vaishyas to the stomach and Sudras to the feet. Now, the people whom we now call Harijans, Scheduled Castes etc.; are covered by the omnibus expression 'Sudra' previously.

The Caste hierarchy is rooted in the notion of superiority arising out of purity and holiness and making out the so-called superior castes which stood in splendid isolation from those castes which were not considered pure. This notion of superiority and inferiority is however, neither rigid nor so well demarcated as people are generally prone to think. There are conflicts and controversies about the order of superiority and different shades

of status inter within some castes. So it is difficult to explain precisely which sub-caste occupies what place in the hierarchy and caste ethnocentrism may be regarded as one of the Chief reasons for the same.

It has been found generally that Mendhe Dhangars claim higher than the others in the relative social scale of the Dhangars. Each Dhangar sub-caste thinks that it is better than the other and, therefore, is not ready to concede superiority by tracing their relationship with some saint or king and elaborating some myths behind the origins of their own caste.

## 2) Kinships of the Mendhe Dhangars :

In all societies people are bound together in groups by various kinds of bonds. The most universal and the most basic of these bonds is that which is based on reproduction, an inherent human drive, and is called kinship.

Among the Mendhe Dhangars both types of Kinships are found, consanguineous kinship and affinal. The kinship relationship is very strong and is essential. On the birth, marriage and death ceremonies they have to be invited. The members of the lineage support one another at times of need and in economic operations.

### 3) Rules of Residence :

Society is patriarchal among the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale area and so the Head of the family is male. He has some privileges. He is the supreme authority. In patriarchal society the son adopts the title of his father or father's ancestors.

A girl after marriage goes to her husband's house, but some very rare examples have been recorded when the husband comes to reside in his wife's house. The reason behind it is that the husband of the girl is either too poor or the wife's father has no male issue.

After the death of the father, she is entitled to inherit the property.

### 4) Joking relationships of the Mendhe Dhangars :

The joking relationship is also found among the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale area. Joking relationships may be indicative of equality and mutual reciprocity. They may also be indicative of potential sexual relationship. Thus is explained the joking between a man and his wife's younger sister, or between a woman and her husband's younger brother. It may be explained under the few following headings :

**1) Nanand (Husband's Sister) and Vahini**

The wife of a person has joking relationship with husband's sisters and the Nanand in return also cuts joke with her Vahini.

**ii) Dever and Vahini**

A younger brother of a man cuts jokes with his sister in law and her younger sister. A sister in law cuts joke with him.

**iii) Wife's younger sister or brother and sister's husband**

Sister's husband has joking relationship with his wife's younger brother and wife's younger sister.

**iv) Maternal Aunt and Husband's sister's son or daughter**

This type of joking relationship is also found among the Mendhe Dhanger people.

A joking relationship, when not mutual, assumes the role of social control. It becomes indicative of correction through ridicule.

**5) Avoidance of the Mendhe Dhangers :**

It has been found that in all societies avoidance of one kind or another is observed in the relations between

a daughter-in-law and her parents-in-law. Lifewise, though less universally and also less rigorously, a son-in-law's relations with his parents-in-law are found to be cramped by certain restrictions. Thus, we have the universal kinship usage of avoidance.

The avoidance relationship is found among the Mendhe Dhangers of Hatkanangale Taluka. It is found between the younger brother's wife and husband's elder brother, daughter-in-law and husband's father or uncle or grand father between wife's father and mother and son-in-law, wife's elder brother's wife and sister and younger sister's husband.

Regarding other types of avoidance they informed me that it was a mark of regard which was paid by the younger members of the household, like son-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law (younger brother's wife), brother-in-law (younger) etc.

#### 6) Size of the family of the Mendhe Dhangers :

Family is the primary institution which controls various aspects of the society. It consist of the father, mother, children and some other members born out of the marriage bond. Family has different forms, the single unit family and the joint family. Single unit family consists of the father, mother and the children, while the joint

family consists of the grand parents, uncles, cousins, nephews etc., in addition to the members of the single unit family already enumerated. It is difficult to lay down a comprehensive and complete definition of the family.

"Family is a group of persons united by <sup>way</sup> of marriage, blood or adoption, consisting, a single household interacting, communicating with each other in respect of social role of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister and creating and maintaining a common culture."<sup>1</sup>

In the Mendhe Dhangars, there are the families under two heads-joint families and extended families.

The joint family consists of the father, mother, the sons, their wives, grand children etc. According to Mrs. Karve - "Joint Family is a group of people, who generally live under one roof, who eat, food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred."

We shall now discuss the family structure of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale area - where we find that all the three types of families are prevalent. Mostly,

---

1. Singh, K. : Rural Sociology, p. 151.

however, nuclear and joint families are found. Extended families are seldom to be seen. During my field work it was found that 40 out of 50 families from my sample were joint and 10 were divided.

The size of the family varies from two to above seven persons. It is clear that among the Mendhe Dhangars the small size and the medium size families have the greatest in numerical strength when there is family partitions, the parental property and ancestral house are generally divided amongst the brothers. If the house is too small, the older brothers set up their separate house and the parental house is given to the youngest brother. There seems to be a perfect understanding among, one brothers of guarding each others portions. Sometimes a bamboo mat is used to mark the boundaries and a wall is also raised.

Yet, even after the partition the families maintain close relations. They help each other in times of need and co-operate during ceremonies, feasts, festivals and funerals. Separation from a joint family makes it incumbent on a man to build a separate house for himself and his families. In this matter he is helped by his relatives, friends and even by his own brothers and parents. The only disadvantage of the splitting of the joint family appears to be the reduction in the size of holdings but as the Mendhe Dhangars are by and large landless labourers, this is not really a serious matter.



7) Duties and the status of the  
members of the family

The father or the eldest male is the head of the family and is in charge of its various activities. He is the whole authority in all family matters. The name and prestige of a family entirely depends on the character of the head of the family. If the father dies the mother in the family manages the family affairs in case the sons are minors but if there is a grown-up. Son, he would control the family.

Though every member of the family has equal rights, the rights of the head of the family are supreme. He maintains the family. It is his duty to control the members of his family. The property of the family, in a real sense, belongs to the head of the family. The woman, specially the wife of the head or the eldest woman of the family, owns all property in the house but it is used by the permission of the head of the family. The head of the family is indisputably the most important figure in the family unit. In his economic pursuits his wife, children and other members of the family help him considerably. During the childhood of the sons the responsibility rests with the father but during the father's old age, it is the son's responsibility to support him. The parents in the family, have the joint responsibility for the care and upbringing of the children.

There is economic co-operation among all members of the family. Every person contributes something towards that upkeep of the family through his labour. The division of labour between the different members of the family on the basis of both age and sex is well distinguished. The old people share the responsibility of taking care of the small children and do sometimes light work also. The women folk take charge of the home-work, look after their children, cook food, fetch water and do other domestic chores. They also sometime help the male members of the family in their jobs. The children share the lighter part of the work of their parents.

#### 8) Marriage System of the Mendhe Dhangars :

Marriage is a religious or contractual arrangement as a result of which sanction is granted to a man or woman to have sexual relations and procreate. This institution determines the relationship between man and woman and gives it a social sanction. In India it is very important institution which has relationship with the aims of life and society.

"Marriage is the complex of social norms that define and control the relations of a mated pair to each other, their kinmen, their off-springs and society."<sup>2</sup>

---

2. Singh, K. : Rural Sociology, p. 188.

From this definition, we find that marriage is related to sex relationship between man and women which is given recognition in the society. If children are born out of this relationship, they are given a place in the society and responsibility for their up keep is fixed. There may be sex relationship between man and woman without marriage but this does not have recognition in the society. According to Hindu Law and systems it has an importance in the life of man and the society.

According to Hindu way of life, there are four aims of marriages -

i) Dharma :

Without marriage, according to Hindu way, man cannot perform certain religious duties. This is true of woman as well. A man is not able to discharge his duty towards his parents and ancestors unless he has produced children and that is not possible without marriage.

ii) Artha :

This is another object of Hindu way of life. It means that man is expected to earn and to the national income and productivity. He discharges this responsibility only when he has entered the marriage life.

iii) Karma :

This is the third aim of life, which forms the basis of the marriage. Satisfaction of the sex desire is necessary for the healthy development of the personality. But it has to be carried out in a way that is sanctioned by the society. As a result of marriage man is able to get physical as well as psychological satisfaction which makes him grow in a balanced manner. In this manner it saves the society from licentiousness and sex anarchy. Marriage is, therefore, an important institution which is useful for the individual as well as the society.

iv) Moksha :

Moksha is said to be the most important and ultimate aim of life. This has no direct relevance to marriage but it is said that a man is entitled to pursue 'Moksha' only when he has discharged his obligations towards the society, which without marriage is not possible.

The Mendhe Dhangers of Hatkanangale area are of the opinion that, marriage is an essential function of life. The majority of them believe that marriage is essential for procreation.

Basically, men and women marry because marriage meets four fundamental needs -

i) The need for the security of love, for companionship, for comradeship, for a sharing of life together.

ii) To satisfy the normal sexual needs within the framework of social, religious and moral sanctions and cultural traditions of the society.

iii) To establish a home and a family through bringing and rearing of children and also to transmit cultural traditions of the society.

iv) To gain economic partnership among the two persons of opposite sex. The economic organisation is found, so much dependent upon co-operation and division of labour between the two sexes that a suitable functioning is possible only when the sexes enter into socially sanctioned and permanent relations with one another through marriage.

9) Marriage Customs and Rites among the Mendhe Dhangers :

The indigenous name for the marriage is 'Mangani' or 'Sagai'. This ceremony is first arranged by the parents. If parents are not alive, it can be done by the relatives.

First of all, the bride is taken by the bridegroom's father or guardian about a week before the marriage and the rituals of marriage are performed in the house of

bridegroom. The day of the marriage is fixed by a Brahmin. On the day of the marriage, the bridegrooms along with some of his relatives, castemen and friends come to the bride's house. When the 'Muhurat' of marriage as suggested by the Brahmin comes, both the bride and bridegroom in new dresses sit on the place where the marriage ceremony is to be performed, it's called a 'Manch'. The musicians begin to play on Shehanais, band, Tasha and Dhol. The Brahmin utters some mantras and then he advises the bridegroom to put some vermilion on the forehead of the bride. The vedic rites of the marriage are not strictly followed by them. Then the Mendhe Dhangars worship their deities and after giving a bhojan, a ritual feast, in which meat and drink are essential, the marriage ceremony comes to the end.

10) Marriage ceremony among the  
Mendhe Dhangars :

The boy's father goes to the girl's and settles the marriage with her father in the presence of some members of the caste. The boy is given a turban, a waist-cloth, a pair of shoes, a brass dining dish and a drinking vessel. A Brahman is called to fix the day most auspicious for the celebration of the marriage. But in case the Brahman is not available, the favourite method of fixing an auspicious time is by means of a young calf. A cow is let out of the hut, and then the calf. If the calf runs directly to the cow to

suck, and in so doing passes by the right hand side of the marrying couple, who are made to sit outside the cottage, the omen is auspicious, and the marriage takes place. But if the calf passes by the left of the couple, the marriage is postponed for an hour or two, the time being considered inauspicious, and the operation is repeated."<sup>3</sup>

The marriage is held for one day a particular ceremony is performed. First of all, 'Haldi Karya' ceremony is held. On this day turmeric is applied the body of the bride and bridegroom. A <sup>Mandwa</sup> Madra (rectangular platform) is erected on the courtyard of the bridegroom's house as well as of the bride. All marriage ceremonies are performed under the 'Mandwa', before starting the marriage procession the bridegroom is seated under the 'Mandwa' and the barber cuts the hair and the nails of the bridegroom.

The marriage procession then goes to the bride's house and is welcomed there by the bride's relatives. At the time of marriage there is a procession of 'Veer'. It is supposed that 'Veer' is the inspiration of God and Shankara and that person i.e. 'Veer' gives some ideas about future, which is called 'Bhaknuk'. At the time of marriage another special programme is called 'Savashini'. In this programme seven married ladies are called upon to bring the matter for

---

3. Enthoven, R.E. : "The Tribes and Castes of Bombay",  
p. 316.

the both of bride and bridegroom. But these ladies must be married and without any issue.

#### 11) Types of Marriage :

Some form of marriage is found in all human societies. For, marriage arise out of the biological needs of human organism. But marriage is not merely the fulfilment of biological needs. In terms of human social life, it means much more than fulfilment of biological needs. In all human societies a number of folk-ways, mores, customs and usages are interwoven with marriage. In every human society of past and present, throughout the world, marriage has been regarded to be such an important social institution for social welfare that it has always been regularised and controlled.

There are different forms of marriage found in rural India. There is only one type of marriage, found among the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale region and that is monogamy widow marriage and re-marriage are permitted.

The term 'Monogamy' means, the man marries one women and similarly one woman can marry one man only. This is said to be the ideal form of marriage.

The practice of Sororate and Levirate marriages is permissible in a few cases. A man can marry his younger sister-in-law after the death of his wife. Similarly, the



younger brother may marry the young widow of the elder brother. Both types of marriages are meant to continue the line.

These types of marriages are performed only in view of inter-familial obligations. If one does not like to break of relations with the family of the deceased then the younger brother or sister of the deceased is married to maintain the family relationships.

12) Widow re-marriage among the  
Mendhe Dhangars :

"In Hindu society, there has been a great restriction on widow remarriage. As a result of the child marriage, sometimes girls in their teens, become widows. They became widows before they actually knew what their marriage was. Because of this, the problem of widow-remarriage crops-up. The customs and traditions, and other superstitions put a restriction on widow-remarriage. Really speaking the di widow re-marriage is not prohibited in Vedas. During Vedic period widow re-marriage was quite prevalent. It was later on that this restriction was imposed."<sup>4</sup>

Among the Mendhe Dhangars widow marriage is permissible. The widow can marry either a widower who has no male child or if a male wants his pregnancy to survive he

---

4. Singh, K. : "Rural Sociology, p. 199.

can also re-marry. If a widower is young, he can marry a young woman. If the widow is the mother of a male child and is old, she generally does not like to remarry and would like to spend her whole life with her son. The widow marriage is not performed in an elaborate manner.

For this type of marriages no formal ceremonies are performed, the widower's father goes to the house of the widow or the divorced woman with his nearest relatives. No musical instruments are played. No Brahmin is required for this marriage. Here Mendhe Dhangars worship some local deities and thus the marriage rituals are completed. All the people belonging to this Mendhe Dhangars were in favour of widow marriage.

Among the Mendhe Dhangars love marriage is not permissible. Today love marriages are permissible but they should not break the rules of Caste Endogamy and Caste Exogamy.

### 13) Divorce among the Mendhe Dhangars :

"Divorce is something alien or foreign to Hindu view point. Hindus consider marriage as a sacrament which is regarded as unbreakable throughout life. In spite of having different and opposite views, the wife and husband

are bound to live together. There is no reference of divorce in the whole of Vedic literature."<sup>5</sup>

Whenever any serious quarrel or conflict arises between the husband and the wife, the woman very often goes to her parent's house and she never returns to her husband's house, if her husband is not eager to take her back. Generally, the divorce takes place due to bad character of either wife or husband and also due to extreme temperamental differences.

Divorce marks the complete dissolution of marriage relationship between two persons. In certain cases the parents of the wife as well as that of the husband, through observation are convinced of the advisability of the course adopted, while in others they are asked, and sometimes even pressed by either the husband or the wife or both for separation, desertion and v divorce.

The causes of divorce suggested by the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka may be grouped under the following categories :

- i) If one of them is unfaithful.
- ii) If the conjugal life is not happy.

---

5. Singh, K. : "Indian Society and Social Institutions",  
p. 95, 96.

Among the Mendhe Dhangars, sex maladjustments are the main cause of divorce. When a man or woman is frustrated and tried for extra-marital sex-relations, the Mendhe Dhangars society regards it as unethical and immoral. Divorce, therefore, follows.

Another reason is unhappy family life. The conjugal quarrels are very important in this context. The following two reasons of the family quarrel were recorded during the interviews :

- i) Behavioural differences.
- ii) Differences in age.

One of the most important causes which has been suggested by people belonging to the Mendhe Dhangars, is difference in age. There are a number of marriages in their society, between couple unmatched from the point of view of age. This age gap not only effects sexual desires but it stands in the way of understanding the sentiments of each other. It is the problem of the generation gap.

It has been recorded that all the Mendhe Dhangars were not in favour of divorce. As a relevant table shows out of 50 families among the Mendhe Dhangars 39 were not in favour of divorce, 6 were in favour of divorce and 5 families were undecided about it. The people who were not in favour of divorce were in the majority. They suggested

two reasons, firstly, it made family life unhappy, secondly, it created several problems.

It means that divorce makes family life unhappy as well as it creates so many social problems and other complications. Due to this fact, the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka do not favour of divorce.

14) Dowry system among the Mendhe Dhangars :

"Dowry system is a very big problem of Hindu marriage. Dowry is very much prevalent amongst Hindus. Certain gifts are made to the bride and the bridegroom at the time of marriage by the members of the bride's family. But amongst Hindus, particularly amongst the members of certain castes, an amount of money which normally runs into thousands is extracted. During Vedic period dowry was offered in order to attract a suitable bridegroom for a bride, in Pauranic period it was treated as Stridhan and the woman exercised right over it. In modern times, it has become necessary for the parents of the bride to offer a price for a particular bridegroom. The amount is determined before the marriage is fixed and the ceremonies are performed."<sup>6</sup>

---

6. Singh, K. : "Rural Sociology", p. 202.

There is a dowry system among the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka. Certain gifts like dress, money, ornaments are made to the bride and the bridegroom at the time of marriage by the members of the bride's family.

15) The Caste-Panchayat among the Mendhe Dhangars :

The term 'Caste' in this context denotes the community and the Panchayat denotes an assembly of the Panchas or five members. It means an institution which is constituted to settle the disputes or to punish a social transgression or wrong doing within a community according to its code of conduct. It is found in the Mendhe Dhangars under study.

Usually the leaders from various families are nominated as its members who have some prestige, some experience or local pull or leverage to settle disputes that may arise in the community. All the elders of the caste are the members of the caste-Panchayat.

The Caste-Panchayat among the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka is well organised. They exist all the same and settle all matters related to marriage, divorce and such other ritual and social affairs important for the Mendhe Dhangars as a whole.

The Head-man of the Caste-Panchayat, is also elected. But this election is not like the popular election system. It is a type of selection.

16) The Qualification for a Headman :

- i) The candidate must be a member of the same caste.
- ii) The candidate should be a respected person.
- iii) The candidate should be an active member.
- iv) The candidate should be a male member.

In the selection of the candidate there is no question of rich and poor strong and weak. Any man can be selected, if he is a respected and is an active man.

The Panchas must be at least five, otherwise the Panchayat cannot be formed. But it is always desired that they should be as numerous as possible. Women are not allowed to be members of the caste-council. They are allowed only to assist, if called as witnesses.

17) Jurisdiction and Function :

It is clear that the Caste-Panchayat is only for the same caste groups. But whenever an intercaste matter arises the matter is settled in village Panchayat. The village Panchayat is composed of a number of caste groups. In the village Panchayat the matters regarding, inter-caste conflicts, illicit sex-relationships and untouchability etc. are solved.

The caste-Panchayat gives the judgement according to the code of conduct, which is drawn up by the community itself and is generally based on tradition. It cannot go beyond this. Because it is for the safeguarding of the rules and regulations of a community.

18) Functions of the Caste-Panchayat :

The Caste-Panchayat occupies the dominating position in the social and religious fields. Its functions can be categorised as follows :

- i) It is a guardian of the community.
- ii) It settles the disputes within the caste.
- iii) It can punish any member who violates the social laws approved by the community.
- iv) It settles inter-caste disputes also.
- v) It also tries to develop the socio-economic conditions of the caste.

The Head of the Caste-Panchayat tries to solve the problems arising within the castes. He tried to effect a compromise between two disputing groups. The decision of the Panchayat Head must be accepted by both the parties. In this way a Caste-Panchayat tries to make them united.

Festivals and village worships are held all the year round among the Mendhe Dhangars. The Caste-Panchayat



settles the date for celebrating the festival and also the nature and extent of worship to be offered to a particular deity.

Thus, we see that through all the Mendhe Dhangars have Caste-Panchayat organised in a systematic manner, the social customs and religious performances of the caste exercise strong influence upon the casteman.