

CHAPTER-III

ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE MENDHE DHANGARS

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CHAPTER-III

ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE MENDHE DHANGARS

1) Introduction :

The study of economic condition is as important as that of the political, religious or even social sphere. It is not only the maintainer but also the regulator of different aspects of life and this explains why it is very commonly maintained that to be dependent economically amounts to being dependent in all other respects.

Economic arrangements and explanations are not merely important from the point of view of understanding economic perspective, but equally so for certain areas of social network because there can be diagnosed social fronts of an economic system. For, certain social relations, one or the other aspect of the local economy provides support. The study of the economic system thus is not to be seen in isolation from the total cultural matrix.

As emphasised by Karl Marx the mode of production and economic activities in human societies play a determining role in shaping their social structure, group relations, individual psychological development and the ideologies of the human aggregate.

2) **Traditional Occupation of the
Mendhe Dhangars :**

The Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, do their traditional occupation of guarding the sheep and goats. Most of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, depend on this traditional occupation. Because of this traditional occupation, they are called as Mendhe Dhangars. Most of the Mendhe Dhangars in Pattankodoli and Ghunaki are guarding the sheep and goats. So they are recognised as 'Mendhpals'.

This tempts them to migrate from place to place during certain period. At the time of migration they are accompanied by hourse, dogs and cows. Generally they choose 'Vavar' as their residents and dwell in the tents. Generally Mendhe Dhangars start their migration after Diwali festival i.e. in the month of November. The Mendhe Dhangars of the Hatkanangale Taluka start their migration in the month of November/December.

At the end of May the migration is ended. They return to their original place. In this period they use iron implements for cutting the branches of trees, locally they are called 'Farashi' and 'Koyata'.

The guarding of sheep is considered as the only main source of their income. In other sources of income

are immaterial. The distribution of guarding the sheep and goats among the Mendhe Dhangars is as follows :

TABLE-1

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Total No. of families from my sample.	Total No. of families guarding sheep
1.	Pattankodoli	25	11
2.	Ghunaki	25	14

Above table shows that, in village Pattankodoli and Ghunaki their traditional occupation is guarding the sheep and goat.

3) Other Occupations of the Mendhe Dhangars :

For the Mendhe Dhangars of the Hatkanangale Taluka, other occupations are :

1. Agriculture
2. Agriculture labourer
3. Worker
4. Weaving and spinning workers
5. Service.

(1) Agriculture :

Agriculture is the biggest occupation in Maharashtra. For a large number of village people, agriculture is a way of life. Their whole mode of life, daily routine, habits and attitudes are governed by agriculture. About 70% of the people in Maharashtra depend on agriculture.

About 60% of the people in Hatkanangale Taluka depend on agriculture. The Mendhe Dhangars under study are engaged in different traditional occupations. In the past, the traditional occupation itself was sufficient for family life when the village unit was self-contained and practically self-sufficient.

About Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, it is clear from what I have observed, that although the Mendhe Dhangars own some land, yet the area of the land that they possess is very small.

My survey of the Pattankodoli and Ghunaki villages reveals that among the Mendhe Dhangars 22% people possess land from 1 acres to more than 7 acres. The distribution of agricultural land among the Mendhe Dhangars as follows :

TABLE-2

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Total No.of families from my sample.	Total No.of households possessing agricultural land
1.	Pattankodoli	25	5
2.	Ghunaki	25	6

As mentioned earlier, the Mendhe Dhangars in general are not primarily engaged in cultivation, as most of them are engaged in their traditional occupations. However, those who have sufficient area of land, grow crops which are a profitable source of income for them.

(2) Agricultural Labourer :

Some of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, are agricultural labourers. In Pattankodoli and Ghunaki village, some of them work in the field. They plough the fields, weed the grasses and reap and thresh the crops. For their services, their employers pay them in cash or kind. Among the Mendhe Dhangars men and women alike work as agricultural labourers. They work hard braving the elements without any fixed prescribed hours for work, without any labour laws and what they earn is the barest pittance, miserably and shamefully small.

Table-3

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Total No. of families from my sample.	Total No. of families working as agriculture labourers.
1.	Pattankddoli	25	4
2.	Ghunaki	25	2

Above table shows that, there are only few families working as agricultural labourers. These families depend on this source of income.

(4) Workers :

The workers, as the name itself signifies, are those who work or who remain attached to their employers for a season or a year and receive wage either in cash or in kind or in both, according to the terms of agreement

Some of the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka, are workers. They are dependent on this occupation and increasing the annual income.

TABLE-4

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Total No. of families from my sample.	Total No. of families possessing workers.
1.	Pattankodoli	25	2
2.	Ghunaki	25	3

Above table shows that, there are only few families which possess workers. They fully depend upon this occupation.

(5) Weaving and Spinning Workers :

Generally, the wives of the Mendhe Dhangars are engaged in spinning the yarns. Some Mendhe Dhangars share the sheep and spin the yarns. Then they sell the yarns in the market or to the Sangars. They receive 12 to 15 rupees per kilo. Few Mendhe Dhangar families^{are} dependent on this work.

TABLE-5

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Total No. of families from my sample.	Total No. of families living by spinning and weaving.
1.	Pattankodoli	25	9
2.	Ghunaki	25	6

Above table shows that there are 15 families doing weaving and spinning workers. They are dependent on this occupation.

(6) Service :

A few cases belonging to the Mendhe Dhangars are in service. It is their source of income.

TABLE-6

Sr. No.	Name of the village	Total No. of families from my sample.	Total No. of families in service.
1.	Pattankodoli	25	2
2.	Ghunaki	25	Nil.

4) Division of Labour :

Division of labour is one of the most important factors in the field of economy, because it is based on channelising human power. The utilization of human power and its gains depends upon the working capacity of man. That is why there has been some division of labour in all societies primarily based on the factors of age and sex. This division of labour is also helpful in assigning various

works to one who can do them most efficiently. This also makes it convenient for various persons in society to choose work according to their suitability and convenience.

Man for the field and woman for the hearth, this is natural division of labour and thus among the Mendhe Dhangars also woman is a house wife first, but due to economic pressure, she is labourer next and this makes her an asset. She can earn her bread and in most cases she does.

Among the Mendhe Dhangar families the care of children is no problem. The mother leaves her child in the care of either an old man or some grown-up child while she engages herself in domestic work. In the Mendhe Dhangar family the boys and girls help the elders. Generally, the girls help their mothers in collecting vegetable, fire-wood, regarding children, and in bringing water from the well. The boys on the other hand help their fathers, brothers or any other male members of the family. The adult male members of the Mendhe Dhangar family, are kept busy with their traditional caste-occupations. The adult male members try to draw the attention of their children towards their traditional occupations.

At the same time there are a number of occupations like harvesting, weaving, guarding the sheep and goats etc. which are jointly done by them. Except, ploughing, the woman can do all other work.

Thus, from the persual of the pattern of the division of labour it is obvious that they have the most elementary and natural form of division of labour Based on traditional occupation, sex and age.

5) Income :

For any study of the economic condition of a community some elementary knowledge about its income and expenditure is essential. The Mendhe Dhangars of this Hatkanangale Taluka, are poor and very honest. Their poverty is inevitable. One should know how much they earn and how much they spend. Their annual income is given here :

TABLE-7

Sr. No.	Income Groups (yearly)	Names of the Village	Total No.of families from my sample.	Total No. of fami- lies.
1.	Below Rs. 500 to 2000	Pattankodoli	50	28
2.	Below Rs. 2700 to 4000	and Ghunaki	50	14
3.	Below Rs. 4100 and above		50	8

Thus, it is clear that out of 50 families, 28 families were in the lowest income group i.e. Rs. 500/- to 2000/- yearly. The medium income group i.e. 2,100/- to 4000/- yearly had 14 families and the richest income group i.e. Rs. 4,000/- and above had only 8 families out of 50 families from my sample.

7) Source of Income :

The Mendhe Dhangars under study had different sources of income. Most of them were guarding the sheep and goats. It is really very difficult to present a correct picture of the economic life of such persons as they are out and out agricultural labourers having little or no land at all. They cannot think of tomorrow and are faced by their unfortunate circumstances to think about the future which is always dark. They feel that there is a hopeless struggle for existence. Their main occupation is guarding the sheep and goats.

The next subsidiary source of income is working which includes five families. The third source of income is agriculture which included 11 families out of the 50 families. There are only 6 families out of 50 families which have subsidiary income through agriculture labour, and the remaining source of income, that is service, includes only 2 families out of 50 families.

The next source of income is weaving and spinning the wool. In this work, there are 15 families out of 50 families. This shows their standard of living.

8) Indebtedness among the Mendhe Dhangars :

It has been said that the Indian peasant is born in debt, is brought up in debt and dies in debt. This holds, ideally good in the case of the Mendhe Dhangars under study. The Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka are born in debt and die in debt.

The Mendhe Dhangars are always in need. They try to get loans at whatever exorbitant rate of interest. They rush headlong for the same. The money lenders are very cunning and cruel. They charge a very exorbitant rate of interest. In most of the cases the amount of interest multiplies the principal amount. Most of the Medhe Dhangars take amount for the sheep and goats, from the Banks. It's interest is 10% which is very low.

The distribution of indebtedness families among the Mendhe Dhangars is as follows :

TABLE-8

Sr. No.	Name of the Village	Out of 50 families	Total No. of Indebted families.
1.	Pattankodoli	25	20
2.	Ghunaki	25	23

Above table shows that, 43 families are the indebted families, out of 50 families. Thus, most of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, are brought up in debt.

9) Repayment of Loan :

The people belonging to the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, repay their loans in following ways :

- i) From selling sheep and goats.
- ii) From wages.
- iii) From crops.
- iv) From selling land.
- v) From selling ornaments.

It is evident from the persual of relevant tables that 43 families were in debt out of 50 families. Details regarding the causes of indebtedness are given in relevant table.

Sr.No.	Reasons for Borrowing	Percentage
1.	Social Customs	24%
2.	Medical treatment	15%
3.	Marriage	14%
4.	Agriculture	5%
5.	To fight the drought	20%
6.	Unemployment	4%
7.	Miscellaneous	2%
8.	To buy sheep and goats	16%



Thus, it is evident from the perusal of the figures mentioned above that the poor members from the Medhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka, mostly take loan to fight against drought, to suppliment their daily expenditure and also to celebrate festivals and many other social customs like marriage etc.

10) Family budget of the Mendhe Dhangars :

To see the family budget of the Mendhe Dhangars would be to assess their source of income and also the various heads under which they spend. Human wants are unlimited, and the resources are very, scarce and limited and they have alternative uses as well. How to spend and how much to spend under particular head is not less a problem than how much to earn. And here comes the role of planning in the life of a nation or that of a small family.

The Mendhe Dhangars of the Hatkanangale, are mostly illiterate, hence they do not maintain any written family budget but they gave an oral account of income and expenditure. Their annual income depends upon their nature of work and the number of physically fit and adult members of the family. Their expenditure depends on their habits, nature and circumstances of the jobs they do and also the income they have.

A family budget of a person belonging to the Mendhe Dhangars contains expenditure on food, cloth, medicine, health and sanitation, drink, tobacco, tea, lighting and fuel. This is common type of family budget of the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka.

A common family budget of the Mendhe Dhangars highest expenditure is on food and the second item is cloth. The other items include social and religious functions and festivals and other inescapable occasions. As many of the Mendhe Dhangars, are also indebted their family budget as such includes also repayment of loans.

Excepting a few, all of the Mendhe Dhangars, spend whatever they earn. Although some of them do save money while some others maintain the equilibrium of income and expenditure, most of the Mendhe Dhangars, are in deficit every year.

12) Standard of Living :

The standard of living shows the social status in the basis of economic life. However, wealth is not the only important factor in contributing to high or low standard of living of an individual or of a caste, but other factors are also responsible for it.

It is clear from the perusal of the family budget of any family what type of family life the members lead and

what would be their standard of living. The family budget of the Mendhe Dhangars of the Pattankodoli and Ghunaki villages shows that their standard of living is very poor. Those persons who are educated and whose economic condition is comparatively better have a rather good standard of living; they keep their houses clean and take bath regularly and wear clean clothes, and may have a more varied diet of rice and pulses with vegetable.

Generally, their traditional occupation is known as the main one among the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka. Most of the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka depend upon their traditional occupation. The occupation on which family mostly depends is called its main occupation and the one by which the main occupation is subsidised is called the subsidiary occupation, because no family is likely to be dependent on one occupation alone.

The economic condition of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, is still very deplorable. They pass their whole life right from birth to death, either taking one meal a day or keeping enforced fast, living in houses which are unable to protect and wearing old and torn clothes, which are insufficient to cover their whole body. The insufficient income and the burden of loan make them so weak and emaciated that they become old prematurely. It cannot be raised so long become old as they are dependent and it is also a fact that

Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, cannot be independent as long as they are upto their necks in debts.

13) Household articles and Material Culture :

1) Housing :

The houses of the Mendhe Dhangars of the Hatkanangale Taluka, are built of mud walls and the roofs are of 'Khapra' (tiles) and straw. The size of the houses is very small. Mostly Mendhe Dhangar's 'wada' is situated in one corner of the village. It called 'Dhanagar Wada'. In many house of the Mendhe Dhangars, there is no division of the house into rooms. The same room is used as a 'living room', 'bed room', 'kitchen-room', 'store-room' and is also used partly as a cattle shed. In fact, this one single room is a multi-purpose room. But in some houses there are more than one room. The houses have one or two windows in the walls. The Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka, do their weaving work either in the first room. In many houses the doors are made of wood. In front of the house, there may be a small open space called 'Angan' (Courtyard).

All the houses of the Mendhe Dhangars of this Hatkanangale Taluka, are 'Katcha' and most of the houses are not even plastered.

ii) Furniture :

Most of the Mendhe Dhangars of the Hatkanangale Taluka, are not used to furniture. But in some houses of the Pattankodoli and Ghunaki villages, 'Mancha' or 'Bajale' are used for sitting and sleeping purposes. In educated Mendhe Dhangar's families, chairs cots and tables are found.

iii) Utensils :

All the Mendhe Dhangar families of Hatkanangale Taluka, possess a number of cooking utensils. Among these utensils the earthern ware, chul, tava, pots, aluminium plates, cups and dechaki, moga and cups are mostly commonly found in Mendhe Dhangar's family. The earthern pots are used for bringing water from the well and also for cooking purposes. The Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka are comparatively very poor and they cannot buy costly pots. Recently aluminium plates are being used for various purposes. In addition to these, about 70% of the Mendhe Dhangars use brass utensils also.

Copper or Brass Thalís, cups and lotas are also very common although these utensils are costly. 'Ghagari' is recently found. Buckets and tins are also found in every house. It is used for drawing water from the village well. Very few families of the Mendhe Dhangars use glass for drinking water.

Besides, iron spoon, wooden spoon, are also used. Sometimes, on festival and ceremonial occasions like marriage etc., Mendhe Dhangars use leaf cups for eating and drinking because it is very difficult to manage aluminium or brass plates and cups, for so many persons at a time. Some of the Mendhe Dhangars 'Mogas' are used for washing face, hands and feet and they also use 'Moga' for drinking water.

iv) Agricultural Implements :

The Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, are not cultivators, yet, if they have a few plots of land, they keep a pair of oxen ploughs, yokes and ploughshares in their houses to plough their fields. Some Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, are considered the traditional cultivators and possess land. In fact, the sickle is found in every family and is used for cutting crops and grass. The ploughs are made of wood and ploughshares are made of iron which are manufactured by the village Lohar. The 'Farashi' and 'Koyata' are found in Mendhe Dhangar's family, which are iron implements for cutting the branches of trees.

v) Dress of Mendhe Dhangars :

1) Dress for the Males :

The dress for the male and the female are quite different. The dress of the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale

Taluka, is very typical. Pheta, langota or Dhotar are the main clothes in the dress. It has been observed that, the boys of 10-12 years generally wear a dark-coloured cloth. Educated young Mendhe Dhangar boys like to put full-pants, shirts. Kambli made from woollen is always with the Mendhe Dhangars. It is locally called Ghongadi. Kambli or Ghongadi is used in bed. Most of the Mendhe Dhangar family used 'Vakal', and woollen rugs. Blankets and 'Chadars' are used very rarely in the Mendhe Dhangar's family, for the simple reason that they are poor and cannot afford to buy costly things.

2) Dress of the Females :

The Mendhe Dhangar's women wear 'Sadi', 'Lugadi' measuring 9 yards long and 'Cholis' or 'Zampers' are commonly worn. The young women of the Mendhe Dhangars like to wear coloured sadis and printed blouses. The Mendhe Dhangars girls of 6-8 years age wear frocks or skirts.

Among all the different types of dresses the percentage of rough and coarse cotton cloth is the highest. About 95% of the Mendhe Dhangars in this Hatkanangale Taluka, use rough cotton and khadi clothes.

3) Ornaments :

Most of the Mendhe Dhangars women in Hatkanangale Taluka, cannot afford gold ornaments, due to their poverty. The Mendhe Dhangar women wear kamarpatta, Tikka, Bormal, and nose rings or 'Nath'. They wear the ear-rings or bugadi. Poor women commonly wear the brass-made ornaments like that 'Nath'. The Mendhe Dhangar's women in general, sometimes wear a red coloured leaf in their ear-holes. Bangles are worn in the both hands. 'Mangalsutra', is the main ornament of the Mendhe Dhangar's women. These are special ornaments as such for the Mendhe Dhanagars people in Hatkanangale Taluka.

4) Musical Instrument :

Among the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka, the musical instruments are not only for recreation but are also the sources of income. They keep 'Dhol', 'Zanj', in their temple. When the people of other castes call them on some ceremonial occasion they go and play on their musical instruments and get wages. This wages is used for the caste or their temple. This is the common property of the Mendhe Dhangars.

(4) Food of the Mendhe Dhangars :

1. Non-vegetarian Food :

The Mendhe Dhangars of the Hatkanangale Taluka, are non-vegetarian. The Mendhe Dhangars ordinarily take two meals a day, one in the early morning and one other in the evening. But labourers and others who have to work hard in the open, take a midday meal as well, consisting of cold boiled rice wrapped in a leaf. They are found eating mutton and fowls. They are purely non-vegetarian.

Some of the Mendhe Dhangars do not eat any kind of meat even fish or eggs. They have become pure vegetarians.

2. Vegetarian Food :

Diet of Mendhe Dhangars is typical and popular. Generally they are using maize, butter milk, made from sheep milk, Hulga etc. Rice, bread is the common food for all the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka. Sometimes Mendhe Dhangars also eat 'Kanya' and 'Madga'. Madga is specially given to a woman after her delivery.

(5) Drink :

Rice-beer is the traditional drink not only of the 'Tribal People' but of the Mendhe Dhangars as well. They generally prepare rice-beer in their homes and consume it.

Most of the Mendhe Dhangars of the Hatkanangale Taluka, do not get milk to drink. But they get sometimes the sheep's milk, goat's milk and cow's milk. Among the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka, only few families can arrange milk for the children. The Mendhe Dhangars drink tea at home. In a few families in Pattankodoli and Ghunaki villages, 'Sarbat' is used occasionally only in the summer season by the Mendhe Dhangars. Opium is sometimes used as medicine.

In the Mendhe Dhangars of Hatkanangale Taluka tobacco and pan is very important. Male members generally chew the tobacco. They also smoke Bidis and Chilis. Mendhe Dhangars drink country liquor on the eve of some worship or festival occasion. In Pattankodoli and Ghunaki villages I observed that some Mendhe Dhangars drink country liquor daily. Coming into contact with other castes, a few persons belonging to the Mendhe Dhangars also take 'Ganja'.

6) Language of the Mendhe Dhangars :

Generally Marathi language is used by the Mendhe Dhangars in Hatkanangale Taluka. Some of the Mendhe Dhangars in Pattankodoli village speak Kannada. Rural language is typical and it has particular meaning. For example 'Bhaknuk' i.e. feature of the society, Sumbaranu i.e. the God of Shankar.