

FORMATION OF CASTE IDENTITY IN COLONIAL BIHAR

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "FORMATION OF CASTE IDENTITY IN COLONIAL BIHAR." submitted by Sanjay Kumar is an original work and has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university. We recommend that this dissertation be presented before the examiners for consideration of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

I

Caste has been widely studied by anthropologists, sociologists and historians. Various conceptual frames have been offered to understand the working of the caste system. Can caste be seen as a structure? How important is the notion of caste hierarchy? How far is change possible within the caste system? What forms do social mobility take?

Dumont sees caste as a structure.¹ This is reflected in his concept of hierarchy. To him the concept of purity and pollution forms the crux of hierarchy. Dumont takes recourse to Bougle's concept to suggest that Brahmnical form of hierarchy is the dominant form of hierarchy. This implies superiority of the pure over the impure. If a vertical line is drawn Brahmans will occupy the upper most part of the line while the untouchables will be on the lower side. The other intermediary caste will be placed in between these two extremes. Their position on the line will determine their status in society. He links the argument of pure and impure to the question of occupational skill. "We shall see that it is specialization in impure tasks in practice or in

1. Louis Dumont, Homohierarchus (London, 1972).

theory, which leads to attribution of a massive and permanent impurity to some categories of people."²

Hierarchy and structure have been conceived of in other ways also. Dipankar Gupta rejects Dumont's conception of hierarchy and tries to outline a different structural framework. Instead of looking at vertical stratification, he looks at the horizontal one. "Caste can not be looked at in terms of hierarchies but in terms of discrete categories or classes."³ According to him if the hierarchical concept of purity and impurity was removed and focus was concentrated upon the ideological concept of purity and impurity, then caste could have been separated according to distinct identities, with each of them having its own ideology. But according to Gupta, it is not so and a subaltern caste is made to serve the higher caste, if purity is related to superiority, then certain extrinsic secular factors such as political milieu, economic status etc. becomes important, which in turn breeds power. Thus vertical hierarchy can be said to be related to power.

2. ibid., p.85.

3. Dipankar Gupta, 'Continuous Hierarchies and Discrete castes' in Dipankar Gupta(ed.) Social Stratification (Oxford University Press, 1992).

Another argument emerges from Dumont's account. This is the notion of static society.⁴ According to Dumont the overall framework of society has not changed, "there has been change in the society and not of the society."⁵ Talking of the changes which have been going on within castes, Dumont says that they were restricted to a social sign and not to the feature.⁶ The changes within the system are not actually structural changes. They become a super imposition of features.

From the point of view of culture, imitation, or rather extrinsic borrowing, that is borrowing from superiors of certain features as social signs and not as functional features, gives rise in the simplest cases to a super-imposition of features. But if intellectual phenomenon are in question, this extrinsic borrowing certainly entails some intrinsic modification.⁷

M.N.Srinivas provides an alternative model. He focusses on the concept of mobile caste. Where as Dumont says that there are no positional shifts within the caste order, M.N.Srinivas in his model gives a place to such positional shifts. This we can infer from his concept of Sanskritiza-

4. Louis Dumont, op.cit.

5. ibid. p.218.

6. ibid. 238.

7. ibid. p.240.

tion. Though M.N.Srinivas emphasises the fact of mobility, he claims that the mobility is within the structure. If a particular frame is given, the changes occurs within that framework and not outside that. According to him a particular system is not in the whole replaced by any other system. "That is a caste moves up and down, but all this takes place in an essentially stable hierarchical order. The system does not change."⁸ Thus the differences between Dumont's conception and Srinivas's conception can be said to be the following : for Dumont caste order remains static. The social signs become variable. For Srinivas castes are mobile. This mobility is made possible only by a borrowing of social signs. Thus castes and social signs both become variable for Srinivas.

Another concept of mobility can be inferred from the arguments of Andre Beteille about the relationship between caste and class. For Beteille "classes are categories rather than groups."⁹ A class, he says, is a category of person occupying a specific position in the system of pro-

8. M.N.Srinivas, Social change in Modern India (California, 1966), p.7.

9. Andre Beteille, Caste, Class and Power, (Berkeley, 1965), p.4.

duction. In the traditional society there was a correspondence between caste and class. If Brahmins were considered a ritually higher caste then they were also economically well placed. Brahmins had a good hold over landholding which was considered basic to economic status. Lower castes generally had little control over land. But this is not the case in present society. Quoting the example of Adi-Dravidas he says, "With the purchase of land by Adi-Dravidas the class system has further dissociated itself from the rigidity of the caste structure. The term "Adi-Dravid" is no longer synonymous with "non-owners of land" as it was decades ago."¹⁰ Thus what is witnessed is a divergence between caste and class. If caste and class are both considered structures, then in relation to each other they have moved apart. If that was not the case, caste and class would have still been congruent as they were in the traditional society. Since they have moved away from each other, it can also be said that caste and class as structure have both shown their tendency to change. Thus Beteille's argument about mobility of caste and change in the structure becomes different from that of Dumont and Srinivas.

10. ibid. p.198.

Linked to the concept of mobility of caste and class is often a notion of external agency. If there was a correspondence between caste and class, if they were more or less congruent structures at some point of time, how is it that this congruency was displaced? Many sociologists refer to an external agency when explaining this displacement. Gail Omvedt brings in the concept of external agency in the form of British intrusion. "British allowed pre-existing purely caste-based access to land and imposed legal relationship of landownership and tenancy backed up by courts operating on a definition of legal property. Alongwith this, new factories, mines and plantation as well as the new schools and bureaucracy recruited their workers, students and employees on a basis of formal equality in which caste membership did not bar from entry any of the sections."¹¹ Srinivas, focus is not on external agency. Internal forces, economic prosperity i.e., wealth, gain in political power and also the organisation of caste association provided the impetus for change.

11. Gail Omvedt (ed.), Land, Power and Politics in Indian States pp. 19-20.

II

In the first section we tried to understand the various themes around which discussion on caste has revolved. The issues raised there open up the possibility of ~~the path~~ for further discussions. This dissertation is an effort in that direction. This dissertation attempts to understand the nature of mobility among different castes in Bihar in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The study of mobility would also mean a study of the re-definition of their identities. Caste sabhas could be seen as a platform which were being used by different castes to assert their new identities. This thesis is an effort to understand the ways in which different castes attempted to establish their new identities, the complexities involved in the process and the limits of change.

The first chapter seeks to understand the structure of caste. I attempt to analyse the various kinds of stratification in caste society and the operation of notions like purity and pollution. An attempt has been made to understand some of the myths through which hierarchies were structured and the distance between purity and pollution, represented by high and low castes, was maintained.

In the second chapter the basic focus is upon the occupational structure of different castes in early twentieth century in Bihar. The attempt is to analyse the extent to which traditional notions of caste and occupation were still existent in early twentieth century. The general pattern of change in Bihar will be studied through a focus upon certain selected castes. I will seek to understand the general pattern of change as well as the specificities of each level. The chapter ends with a discussion of the economic status of some Goala families.

The third chapter discusses in detail the social mobility among different castes of Bihar in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It discusses the mobility within backward and lower castes as well as amongst higher castes. The term 'Sanskritization' cannot adequately capture this process. 'Sanskritization' indicates people's attempts to appropriate the social insignias linked with the higher castes. But the actual changes were of a wider nature.

The fourth chapter will study the temple entry movement of the untouchable castes. There will be an attempt to explore the social world of the lower as well as the higher castes during the period concerned. It will discuss the extent to which the social conditions of untouchables changed in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER I

CASTE ORDER IN BIHAR: STRUCTURE AND CHANGE

In this Chapter an effort will be made to understand some of the issues related to the structure of caste within Bihar society. The nature of caste relations does not remain static. It changes over time and acquires a specific form in each region. The attempt in this chapter is to understand the caste structure of Bihar as a whole, with a special emphasis on Gaya. Gaya is a highly fertile region, with dense population and a great diversity in its caste composition. Hence a focus on Gaya will help us understand the complex structure of caste in Bihar.

I will discuss the nature of stratification of caste in Gaya in the early nineteenth century and the hierarchy within it. An attempt will be made on analysis of myths that were used to institutionalise the hierarchical structure and to change it. I will look at the development of caste consciousness among the people by early twentieth century, and their attempts to assert new identities.

I

What were the orders into which the society was divided? Here an attempt will be made to see the divisions by borrowing A.M. Shah's analytic model for Gujarat.¹ In the 'Caste division of first order' can be placed what constitute the Varna like order. It includes Brahmans, Rajputs, Banias (Mercantile tribes), pure Sudras, impure Sudras.² The first three divisions are regarded as part of the sacred order while the last two categories are regarded as impure.³ Within this structure Brahmans occupied the top and impure Sudras the lowest positions.

Each category within the first order can be further divided into various second order divisions. These divisions were important in restricting marriage relations amongst groups who otherwise had commensal relations. Take the example of Brahmans. Brahmans were divided into various

-
1. A.M. Shah, 'Division and Hierarchy: an overview of caste in Gujarat', Contribution to Indian Sociology, Vol. 16, No.1., 1982. A.M. Shah does not bring Varna into his analysis of caste order of divisions. I have included it here because Varna model can be considered to be the wider form of divisions.
 2. Discussion is based largely upon Buchanan's report. Francis Buchanan, An Account of District of Patna and Bihar.
 3. Ibid..

groups. These included Sakadwipi Brahmans, Kanoj Brahmans, Dhamin, Dhanushka or Pretiya Brahmans, Kraungchadwipi Brahmans. It is interesting to note here that many of the names of the Brahmans were based on the names of places. Perhaps this is indicative of their original home from where they migrated, a point which becomes clear when one studies the myths of their migrations. A notion of hierarchy can be seen even in this group of divisions. Sakadwipi Brahmans were considered the purest while Dhanushka or Pretiya Brahmans were considered the impurest ones.

Among other caste groups, for example, the Banias, similar kind of divisions can be seen. They were subdivided into such caste-groups as Aggarwals, Maheshwari, Purawar, Barnwar, Luniyar, or Runiyar Banias, Rastakis, Mahuri, Kasarnis, Kasodhans, Ayodhyavasis etc. Like the Brahmans, names of these groups can also be seen to be related to names of certain places. The notion of hierarchy can again be seen among these groups. "Aggarwals are reckoned highest"⁴ among this group of second order. Other groups, such as Joanpuris, Kamalkalas, Kath-Banias occupy the lowest categories among the mercantile castes.⁵

4. Buchanan, op.cit, p.328.

5. Ibid.

However it is not always true that divisions in the second order are hierarchical in nature. Malis are subdivided into such groups as Magahi, Sirmaur, Banarsi, Kanoj, Baghel, Kahauliya, Desi etc. But the notion of hierarchy does not seem to be effectively functioning. Their names, it can be seen, were also based upon the names of regions.

A third order of divisions can also be seen among some castes. Take for example the Sakadwipi Brahmans. They are further divided into Gotras and Kuls, and into Townships (Pur). A man could neither marry a woman of the same gotra nor of the same township.⁶

A fourth order of division can also be seen among the Sakadwipi Brahmans. The Townships in which they are divided, are further divided into various distinctions and they in their turn again restrict marriage relationship among them. For example a Khantawar township is divided into Durabdiha, Labondiha, Kantaipur etc.⁷ They restrict marriage relationships with each other.

It can be pointed out here, that every first order division was divided into second order divisions. But every

6. Ibid..

7. Ibid..

second order was not necessarily divided into third order or fourth order of divisions. Thus at one end there were caste groups which ran up their divisions upto fourth order, on the other there were caste groups in which divisions stopped at the second order.

II

In this section we will have a look at the divisions within the lower caste groups. As we have already mentioned, the first order of caste divisions at the lower level was that between pure Sudras and impure Sudras. Both these categories had innumerable second order divisions. The pure Sudras could be divided into castes such as Kayasthas,⁸ Sonars, Barais, Tambulis, Koeris, Kurmis, Dhanuks, Goyalas, Khattiks etc. In sociological term they can be said to be different jatis. All these castes were exclusive groups.

A third order of division can be seen within this section. Kayasthas, for instance, were further divided into Ambasthas (who were considered the original penmen of Magadha),⁹ Sribastav, Karan, Bhatnagar, Mathur, Saksena, and Khara Kayasthas.

8. Buchanan includes Kayastha as pure Sudra.

9. Montgomery Martin, Eastern India, p.162.

Let us now look at the impure Sudras. There were two categories even among the impure Sudras. One was constituted by those whose touch was considered polluting to pure Brahmans; and thus pure Brahmans did not drink water touched by them. In this group, the 'second order of caste division', included such castes as Kumbhars, Lohars, Tiwaris, Barhais, Nais etc. However, there is no mention of any 'fourth order of division' among these groups.

In the second group among impure Sudras were those whose touch was considered polluting to all caste groups which considered themselves sacred. This group could be subdivided into several castes : Pasis, Beldars, Binds, Dabgars etc. They were again exclusive groups. A third order of division can be seen among some of these groups. For example, Pasis were further divided into Tirshuliyas and Byadhas who seldom had marriage relations with each other.

III

Hierarchy in sub-groups was expressed in many ways. This is clear from Buchanan's report. The position of different categories of priests mirrored the hierarchical divisions within the castes. Thus higher sub-castes among Brahmans presided over the functions of higher sub-castes

among other caste groups. For example, Sakadwipi, Kanoj, Srotriya Brahmans were considered the highest among the Brahman castes. Similarly Aggarwal, Maheshwari, Luniyar were the better-off sub-groups among Banias. Thus the social functions of Aggarwalas, Maheshwari, Luniyar Bania were presided over by Sakadwipis, Kanoj, Srotriya Brahmans etc. "A very few Sakadwipi act as Purohits for low tribes, and explain to them the decrees of fate by means of almanac."¹⁰

Kraungchadwipi, or Pretiya Brahmans occupied the lower positions within the social hierarchy of Brahmans. Joanpuris, Kamalkalas, Kath-Banias etc were considered the lowest among mercantile groups. Thus the social functions of these mercantile groups were generally presided over by Kraungchadwipi or Pretiya Brahmans.

Among the impure Sudras, there was one group for whom no Brahmans would act as priest. This group (which includes Bhungiyas, Rajwars etc.) was considered the meanest of all castes and their touch was highly polluting. As Mary Douglas says, "the sacred must always be treated as contagious because relations with it are bound to be expressed by rituals of separation and demarcation."¹¹ This seems to be

10. Montgomery Martin, op.cit., p.152.

11. M. Douglas, Purity and Pollution, (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1970), p.33.

the principle for deciding the relation between the different categories within the sacred/non-sacred social world.

IV

We saw in the above sections various forms of divisions and hierarchy, multiple levels of segmentation which existed within Bihar society. In the following sections we will try to analyse how the question of purity and pollution remains important in defining changes of social status of groups. For the purpose of this analysis we will depend upon caste myths. These myths are taken from Buchanan's report who in turn had depended upon caste Puranas and local Brahmans for this information. The myths considered here are about Sakadwipi Brahmans.

Myths 1 : According to Rudrayamal, they (Sakadwipi Brahman) were brought into this region in the iron age. The main reason why these Brahmans were brought into this region was because of their degeneration. Nothing is mentioned about the place of their origin.

Myths 2 : According to Samba Puran, they were brought to officiate as priests of sun by Samba, the son of Krishna. They were brought into this region be-

cause the original Brahmans inhabiting this region had become impure. However, this myth does not mention anything about the time frame when all this happened. But it was popularly believed that Samba flourished at the beginning of iron age(Kaliyug). It is further stated that 18 families or tribes (Kul) were brought by Samba and these divisions still continue among the Sakadwipis.¹²

Myths 3 : According to Prasarasanghita when the Brahmans of Jambudwip became impure by instructing the low castes, pure men were brought from Sakadwipi by Garur. The local Pandits believe in this myth that all the pure Brahmans were descendant of this colony.¹³

Myths 4 : According to Skandha Puran, it is stated that Dasarath Raja, the father of Rama, who flourished in the Treta yug, brought these Brahmans from Sakadwip to a great feast, where many Munis and persons of the sacred order were assembled. After the feast, the Brahmans of Saka were loaded with presents and sent home.

12. Ibid., p.316.

13. Ibid. p.317.

It further mentions that a certain Gaya who had been king of the whole world offended Surya by applying to the Brahman who studied Vedas and for neglecting the Brahmans of Surya. On this account the king and all his Brahmans were afflicted with leprosy. They were told by Surya that they could only be cured by drinking the water in which the Brahmans of Sakadwipis had washed their feet. According to this account the king and his Brahmans went to the banks of milky sea and were cured. Krishna afterwards brought 18 families into Jambudwip in order to cure his son Samba of leprosy.¹⁴

Gyan Prakash trying to relate the history of Bhuinya castes in Bihar points out that "Gods, Kings, warriors, and servants, rather than capitalists, proletariats, landlords or labourers, inhabit the pre-colonial world represented in oral texts."¹⁵ This fact can actually be seen in the myths we have related above. Myths relate to the real world. And thus we are compelled to analyse these myths.

Let us now try to analyse the myths we have related above. According to the first myth Sakadwipi Brahman were

14. Ibid. p.317.

15. Gyan Prakash, Bonded Histories : Geneologies of labor servitude in Colonial India, (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.34.

brought into this region in the iron age. It means that these Brahmans were not the original inhabitants of this region. Second, there were some compelling reasons for bringing these Brahmans into the region. This myth, however, does not mention why these Brahmans were brought into the region.

The second and third myths give us an answer to the questions raised in the first myth. Both mention that Brahmans in this region had become impure, and hence there was a need to procure the pure Brahmans. In other words, it can be said that there was a necessity for ritually sanctified pure Brahmans during that period.

The fourth myth strongly emphasizes the superiority of Sakadwipi Brahmans. The myth mentions that Gaya, a mythical king, offended the Brahmans of Surya. These Brahmans of Surya were the Sakadwipi Brahmans. Surya mentions that the people could be cured of leprosy only when they drunk the water in which 'His Brahmans' the 'Sakadwipis' had washed their feet.

What do these myths tell us about the hierarchy within castes and their inter-relations? It suggests that the region at a certain ancient time had been inhabited by Brahmans. Having acted as priests and teachers for the lower caste, these Brahmans lost their status and purity. In-

structing the lower caste was considered demeaning. It was necessary to persuade pure Brahmans to come into the region. Hence Sakadwipis were brought in.

The myths seek to establish the supremacy of Sakadwipi Brahmans. First, it seems that a great effort was made to bring Sakadwipis to this region. Sakadwipis did not come on their own. They had to be persuaded to come. Lord Krishna himself was in these negotiations with Sakadwipis.

Secondly, the second myth says that these Brahmans were brought by Garur. Garur occupies a high place in Hindu mythology since it is considered the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. This again emphasizes the status of the Brahmans.

Thirdly, as it is said in the fourth myth that those, like the mythical king Gaya along with all his Brahmans, who showed disrespect to the Sakadwipis, were all afflicted with leprosy. It was only when king Gaya and his Brahmans drunk the water in which Sakadwipi and his Brahmans had washed their feet that their leprosy could be cured. This story again is significant. Every part of the body is regarded as possessing a symbolic value; feet are considered to signify a lower value. But since Sakadwipis were pure, even the water in which they washed their feet was said to have healing power.

Thus we find that the local Brahmans had lost their purity with the passage of time. This is true of other castes too. Goalas, for example, once considered to be belonging to vaishya category were relegated to the category of pure Shudras.¹⁶ So the question arises as to the reasons that led to such loss of status. Mary Douglas says, "Primitive rules of uncleanliness pay attention to the material circumstances of an act and judge it good or bad accordingly."¹⁷

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 It decides what is pure and what is impure. Social status changes with the involvement of person, group, object with different classes of work. Thus the Brahmans lost their purity because they involved themselves in such jobs as instructing the lower castes and also for holding ploughs. Goalas lost their status because of their involvement in jobs considered demeaning. They took up the job of castrat-

16. Buchanan, op.cit., p.337. "It is contended by the Pandits that in the time of Krishna the Goyalas were of the Vaisya caste...."

17. Douglas, op.cit., p.21.



ing the herds.¹⁸ A job in itself is not good or bad, pure or impure, rather the value added to that job makes it good or bad. Goala's job of castrating the herd might be an outcome of certain economic necessity. Their original work was tending of cattle and milching the cows. When they took up the job of castrating the herds due to circumstantial need they lost status.

To take a further example Rawani Kahars were considered low because they carried loads on their shoulders. There was a prevalent notion that carrying loads on shoulders was more demeaning than carrying it on the head.¹⁹ Kumbhars, another caste of artisan class, too were considered low in social hierarchy. Their lower status was said to be because they cut "throats of vessels they made."²⁰

Mary Douglas argues :

The work performed by each caste carries a symbolic load : it says something about the relatively pure status of the caste in question. Some kinds of labour correspond with the excretory function of the body, for example that of washermen, labourers, sweepers. Some professions are involved with bloodshed or alcoholic liquor, such as tan-

18. Buchanan, op.cit. p.337, "The Goyalas have been reduced to their present low rank by having introduced castrating into their herds."

19. Ibid. p.335.

20. Ibid., p.339.

ners, warriors, toddy- tappers. So they are low in the scale of purity in so far as their occupation are at variance with Brahmanic ideas.²¹

So involvement in different types of work defined the levels of purity of a caste, and its social position in the caste order.

VI

Pocock argues that a reduced emphasis upon hierarchy and increasing emphasis upon difference are features of caste in modern India. "There is a shift from caste system to individual castes and this reflects the change that is taking place in India."²² We saw in the above sections the Brahmanical form of hierarchy which ordered Bihar society. But as we move from the early nineteenth century towards early twentieth century this notion of 'separation' tends to become more important. Documents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century go on to relate stories which indicate that most of the castes were trying to claim a superior status. District Gazetteers, Census Reports etc. are all full of stories which show how different castes, however low

21. M. Douglas. op.cit. p.151.

22. Cited in A. M. Shah, 'Division and Hierarchy : an overview of caste in Gujarat', Contributions to Indian Sociology Vol.16, No.1, 1982.

within the traditional hierarchy, glorified their past and came to enjoy a new status.

Let us first consider the oral traditions which talk of the origins of Babhans. One of these traditions link them to Brahmans who took to agricultural pursuits.²³ Another tradition prevalent among them was that in the war between Parsu Ram and the Kshatriyas the latter pretended to be Brahmans and so saved their lives, as it is sin to kill a Brahman.²⁴ According to another local legend when Jarasandha, a great King of Magadha was performing a great sacrifice, a sufficient number of Brahmans could not be procured, and so the Diwan palmed off some men of lower castes as genuine Brahmans. The Brahmans thus created could not gain admission into their supposed caste. So a new caste had to be created. Thus Babhans, popularly supposed to mean Sham Brahman, were created.²⁵

O'Malley relates another story of how the Babhans came to be recognised as a separate caste. Babhan apparently is the Pali form of Brahman, and this word is often found in Ashoka's edicts. According to this story, those now known as

23. L.S.S. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Gaya 1901-2, p.92.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

Babhan remained Buddhists after the Brahmans around them had reverted back to Hinduism. So the Pali name continued to be applied to those Brahmans who professed Buddhism. The synonym Bhumihar or Bhumiharaka refers to their having seized the lands attached to the old Buddhist monasteries. This theory is further borne out by the Brahmnic titles of Misr, Panre, Tewari etc.²⁶

Whatever be the truth behind the stories seen above, it becomes clear that all the stories seek to establish a relationship with Brahmans. It can be borne in mind here that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period when the Sanskritizing tendency among different castes was clearly in evidence - this is a theme we will discuss in detail in the third chapter.

VII

Bhuinyas, as we saw earlier were regarded as belonging to a menial caste. Though placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy, despised by all, and considered untouchable, by the early twentieth century, they too seemed to be developing a new identity. Through this identity they tried to

26. O'Malley relates this story even in the Census Report of India, 1911, p.444.

assign to themselves a glorious past when they were not considered untouchables.²⁷ It was because of the treacherous acts of certain people that they were forced to occupy their present status.

In Gaya region, they claim their descent from Rikhiasan or Rukhminia.²⁸ There are certain legends which explain the name of their castes. One such legend relates that Rukhminia brought the land (bhumi) under the plough near the Dhoulagiri mountain, and that he and his descendants were consequentially called Bhuinyas.²⁹ The other legend is that there was an embankment which had been breached by a flood, no one was able to repair it and save the crops from destruction.

It was only when Rukhminia alongwith his brother came that the embankment was built in a single night. This act awarded him the name of Bhuinya or Saviour of the land.³⁰ Infact since that mythical time, Bhuinya was not considered a despised section of the population. They fell from this position because of a treacherous act of a river god. The river god did not like the repair of the embankment and thus somehow managed to get the Bhuinya to eat the flesh of an

27. See for detail, Gyan Prakash, op.cit.

28. O'Malley, op.cit., p.93.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

unclean beast.³¹ This robbed Bhuinyas of their ritual sanctity. Thus Bhuinyas asserted the identity of their own caste by projecting a glorifying past.

In this chapter we tried to analyse the sociological dimension of castes. We saw how highly stratified and hierarchised the society of Gaya was in the early nineteenth century. We could also realise the myths when interpreted, do have something to say. Here we saw how myths had been used to give ritual sanctity to the claims of superior status. Further, when we travelled from the early nineteenth to early twentieth century, we saw an erosion of old caste identities and the formation of new ones, a theme we will discuss in chapter third.

31. Ibid..

CHAPTER II

CASTE AND OCCUPATION : CHANGES AND DISTRIBUTION.

Writing about Punjab Van Den Dungen says, "the status of any social group depended to some extent on its hereditary and present occupation".¹ A study of changes in occupation and thus in status can help us understand a society. A study of caste and occupation inevitably leads to the study of the 'Jajmani System'. As Jan Breman says, "in studies of 'Jajmani System', emphasis is usually placed on the caste structure as a system of social stratification and of division of labour founded on the distinction between purity and impurity."² He further says, "in the past, every caste performed specific tasks, and in principle it enjoyed the monopoly in the region of carrying out the economic function allotted to it".³ In this chapter, some aspects of the 'Jajmani' system will be referred to. The effort will be to see how far different castes were linked to specific occupa-

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1. P.H.M. Van den Dungen, 'Changes in status and Occupation in nineteenth Century Punjab,' in D.A. Low (ed), Sounding in Modern South Asian History, P. 63.
 2. Jan Breman, Patronage and Exploitation, (Manohar, New Delhi, 1979) p. 13.
 3. Ibid.,

tions. Was there any change in the structure of castes. How did the changes influence the economic status of castes? An overall comprehensive study of all the castes will not be undertaken. Rather, the focus will be on a few specific castes. The regional focus of my study for this chapter is Bihar as a whole and the period is the early twentieth century.

I

A lot has been written about the landlord-labourer relations. Jan Breman in his study on Gujarat discusses the relations between Hari labourers and Anavil Brahmans.⁴ Similarly Gyan Prakash, focussing on Bihar, has talked specifically of Kamia-malik relationships.⁵ There are some similarities in the works of these two authors. Both have chosen two castes at two ends of the social hierarchy and tried to study the kind of employer and employee relationship existing in society. In both, the employer and the employee, belong to different classes, and also to different

4. See for detail Jan Breman (1979), op. cit.

5. See for detail Gyan Prakash, Bonded Histories: Geneologies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India, (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

castes. Both see these relationships as that of patrons and clients, a relationship in which both groups have a need for each other. However, this relationship is not always the same and changes with the passage of time and with economic changes affecting the society.

Since both Breman and Prakash focus on castes at the two ends of the hierarchy, caste-class status coincide in their studies. High castes, such as the Anavils in the case of Gujarat, are representative of a high class position. Low castes, such as Dublas in Gujarat and Bhuinyas in Bihar, are representative of lower classes. How far did this correspondence between caste and class persist in Bihar during early twentieth century? This will be one of the themes studied in this chapter.

Manu's classification with regard to occupations was rigid. He said:

A Brahman falls at once through selling meat, lac and salt, he becomes Sudra in the course of three days through selling milk. If a low-born man should, through greed, live by the occupations of the exalted, the king should banish him at once, after depriving him of his property.⁶

6. L. S. S. O'Malley, 1913, Census of India, 1911 Vol. 5 : Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim, p. 450. Information is based on this source.

With the passage of time this rigidity weakened. So, another question which is to be analysed is: how far this rigidity still held sway during the early twentieth century in Bihar?

Occupational divisions of castes may help in providing the answer to the question raised above. Hence this chapter is basically an attempt to study the caste-occupation pattern. P. C. Tallents in the census report of 1921, while talking of 'unspecified' labourers says, "in Bihar the castes in most demand for earth-work are Nuniyas and Beldars or in some places Binds, though all usual castes such as Goalas, Koiris, Chamars, Dosadhs and even Brahmans and Rajputs are mentioned."⁷

An Annual Survey and Settlement Report of Hazaribagh emphasises: "The older inhabitants of the district, such as Ghatwals and Kolhs, are to a great extent submerged and working as Kamins (day-labourers)".⁸ Stevenson-Moore who had undertaken a study of material conditions of rural people inhabiting the district of Gaya in very late nine-

7. P. C. Tallents, Census of India, 1921, Vol. VII, Part I, p.268.

8. Annual Reports on Survey and Settlement Operations by the Director of Survey, Bihar & Orissa , 30th September 1912, p.8.

teenth century indicates that "the principal castes of landless labourers of the district are (1) Chamar (2) Dusadh (3) Kuhar, (4) Musher (5) Rajwar."⁹ From all these reports a broad polarisation appears to have existed in the society: lower castes agglomerated towards the lower class pole. However, this pattern of classification was not always neat: some of the high caste people flocked to the lower class category while some lower caste people achieved high class status.

L. S. S. O'Malley, in the Census Report of 1911, gives an idea of the changes taking place in the traditional occupations of different castes. He says, "the returns for Indian tribes and castes are chiefly of value as illustrating the fact that functional and other castes have to a very large extent abandoned their traditional occupation."¹⁰ W. G. Lacey in the Census Report of India, 1931 reasons out this process by quoting an Oriya correspondent, "with the advancement of education and growth of cosmopolitan views the tendency to stick to traditional occupation has totally

9. C. J. Stevenson Moore, Report on the Material Condition of Small Agriculturists and laborers in Gaya (1898), p.29.

10. L. S. S. O'Malley, op.cit. p.553.

disappeared in towns."¹¹ Here the emphasis is laid upon the changes which are taking place in the urban areas. Thus we are able to get an answer to the two questions which we had raised, that of caste-class correspondence and the rigidity in the occupational structure of caste. The correspondence between caste and class did not disappear altogether, it became more complex and blurred. But it is clear that traditional occupations were not being followed. To have a more detailed understanding, let us take some castes individually and study the changes in their pattern.

II

Brahmans as we saw in the first chapter, were considered the purest of all the castes. We had also seen that occupation defined their social status. Their status varied with the type of occupations which they undertook and this imposed a restriction upon their choice of occupations. To what extent did this pattern change in the twentieth century? W. G. Lacey, in the Census Report of India, 1931 mentions that "among Brahmans, about one worker in ten

11. W. G. Lacey, Census of India, 1931, Bihar & Orissa, Part I, Vol. VII, p.191.

follows some priestly vocation as his main business in life... Agriculture in some shape or form is the principal means of support of three Brahmans out of four."¹² A fair idea of their occupational pattern is made available by the census data. The Census of 1921 and 1931 both mention the 'number per 1000 workers engaged in each occupation'. According to the 1921 data, out of every 1000 Brahman workers, 106 were priests, those having an income from rent of land numbered 39. The largest number (739) were recorded under the category of 'cultivators of all kinds.' Those involved in trade numbered 11, those under the category of 'Arts and Professions' numbered 16. There were 26 domestic servants and 17 beggars; and those having certain other kinds of jobs numbered 46.¹³ Similarly the data of 1931 shows that out of every 1000 ~~was~~ Brahmans involved in occupations - 108 acted as priests, 45 had their income from land rent, 755 acted as cultivators of all kinds, 24 acted as field labourers and wood-cutters, 11 were employed in the occupation of 'Arts and Profession', 13 involved themselves in domestic services and as contractors, clerks etc.¹⁴

12. Ibid., p.247.

13. P. C. Tallents, op.cit. p.294. The data is borrowed from this report which is provided in Subsidiary Table VIII.

14. W, G. Lacey. Op.cit. p.210.

TABLE II: 1

DISTRIBUTION IN OCCUPATIONS OF BRAHMANS: 1921

Occupation	Number per thousand workers engaged in each occupation.
Priest	106
Income from rent of land	39
Cultivators of all kinds	739
Trade	11
Arts and Professions	16
Domestic service	26
Beggars	17
Others	46
Total	1000

Source : P.C.Tallents, Census of India, 1921, Bihar & Oriss, vol.VII, Part I, p.294.

TABLE II: 2

DISTRIBUTION IN OCCUPATIONS OF BRAHMANS : 1931

Occupation	Number per thousand earners in each occupations as principal means of livelihood
Priest	108
Income from rent of land	45
Cultivators of all kinds	755
Field-Labourers, Wood-cutters	24
Arts and Profession	11
Domestic service, Contractors, Clerks etc.	13
Unspecified	12
Others	32
Total	1000

Source : W.G.Lacey, Census of India, 1931, Bihar & Orissa, Part II, p.210.

Whereas, in 1921 the total number of Brahmans involved in agriculture as field labourers and wood cutter numbered around 4470 (0.24 per cent), it increased to 16,166 (0.77 per cent) in 1931. Those who were employed in mines as labourers numbered about 1312 (0.07 per cent) in 1921 and 2077 (0.10 per cent) in 1931. Those who were employed in industries as artisans and other workmen in 1921 numbered about 3024 (0.16 per cent) and 3204 (0.15 per cent) in 1931. Those Brahmans who were involved in transport as labourers, boatmen carters, palki-bearers numbered about 899 (0.05 per cent) in 1921; the number increased to 1714 (0.08 per cent) by 1931. The unspecified labourers were around 3793 (0.20 per cent) in 1921 and 3820 (0.18 per cent) in 1931.

TABLE II: 3

INVOLVEMENT OF BRAHMANS AS MANUAL LABOURERS IN 1921 AND 1931.

		Agriculture Field Laborers wood-cutter etc.	Mines Laborers	Industries, Artisans and other workers	Transport Laborers, boatmen, carters palki-bearers etc	Unspecified Laborers
Brahmans	1931	16166(0.77%)	2077(0.10%)	3204(0.15%)	1714(0.08%)	3820(.18%)
	1921	4470(0.24%)	1312(0.07%)	3024(0.16%)	899(0.05%)	3793(.20%)

[Source : W. G. Lacey, Census of India, 1931, p. 192.]

Clearly Brahmans were engaged in diverse occupations. Infact, the traditional occupation, priesthood, did not remain as important as it used to be in earlier periods. As we have already seen, the data of 1931 shows that out of 1000, only 106 people engaged themselves in priestly activities. Whereas those involved as cultivators numbered around 755. The Census data of 1921 too reflects a similar pattern of distribution.

Now let us look at some other castes. The Kayasthas were recorded by Buchanan as pure Sudras. Their traditional occupation was regarded as writing. Buchanan, talking of Kayasthas of Magadha region, specially for the district of Gaya, had said that "all the Kayasthas here apply to the duties of their profession."¹⁵ Talking about their occupational pattern he further said, "a great part however live by farming lands, which they cultivate by their servants hands, as they never work; but they have in their management the collection of almost the whole of rents."¹⁶ From such statements it becomes clear that Kayasthas, though regarded as pure Shudras, had their own notion of what to do and what

15. Francis Buchanan, An Account of the District of Bihar and Patna in 1811-12, p. 330.

16. Ibid.

not to do. Let us now see how far those inhibitions were still in operation in early twentieth century.

When we study the occupational distribution of Kayasthas in the early twentieth century, we find that they were involved in a range of occupations. They did not restrict themselves to their traditional occupation of writing only. Although, a substantial portion of their fellow castes still adhered to that occupation. Census data again gives a fair idea of their occupational distribution. According to the 1921 data, out of every 1000 Kayastha workers 313 persons worked as 'writers'. The largest number of them were recorded in the category 'cultivators of all kinds' and this numbered around 519. 73 persons had their income from rent of land, 11 persons were involved in trade, 6 persons fell under the category 'Arts and Professions,' 76 persons engaged themselves in other kinds of works.¹⁷ Similarly, the 1931 data shows that out of every 1000 Kayasthas, those who acted as writers were around 220. Those who had their income from rent of land numbered 70. The largest chunk of population came under the category of 'cultivators of all kinds' which numbered around 487. Those acting as agents and

17. P.C. Tallents op.cit. p.294.

managers of landed estates etc, amounted to 16 persons, field labourers and wood-cutters numbered around 19. About 13 persons involved themselves in trade. Those employed in public administration were 11 in number. Persons involved in 'Arts and Profession' category numbered 42. Those providing domestic services were 19 in number and those who acted as contractors, clerks and unspecified category, numbered 73.

TABLE II: 4

DISTRIBUTION IN OCCUPATIONS OF KAYASTHAS: 1921.

Occupations	Number per thousand workers engaged in each occupation.
Writers	313
Income from rent of land	73
Cultivators of all kinds	519
Trade	11
Arts and Professions	6
Persons living on their income	2
Others	76
Total	1000

[Source : P.C. Tallents, Census of India, 1921, Bihar & Orissa, vol. VII, part I, p.294].

TABLE II:5

DISTRIBUTION IN OCCUPATIONS OF KAYASTHAS: 1931.

Occupations	Number per thousand earners engaged in each occupation as principal means of livelihood.
Writers	220
Income from rent of land	70
Cultivators of all kinds	487
Agents and Managers of landed estates etc.	16
Field labourers, wood cutters etc.	19
Trade	13
Public Administration	11
Arts and Professions	42
Domestic Service	19
Contractors, Clerks etc, unspecified	73
Others	30
Total	1000

[Source : W.G. Lacey, Census of India, 1931, Bihar & Orissa, Part I, p.210.

Let us now see specifically those Kayasthas who involved themselves as manual labourers in different spheres. Kayasthas who involved themselves in agricultural services as field-labourers and wood-cutters numbered 716 (0.20 per cent). This number drastically increased to 1749 (0.45 per cent) in 1931. Those who acted as labourers in mines numbered around 13 (0.003 per cent in 1921 which again

drastically increased to 119 (0.03 per cent) by 1931. Those who were employed as artisans and other workmen in industries numbered about 367 (0.10 per cent) in 1921 and it was 410 (0.10 per cent) in 1931. Those who involved themselves in transport as labourers, boatmen, carters, palki-bearers, numbered around 105 (0.03 per cent) in 1921 and it was 127 (0.03 per cent) in 1931. The unspecified types of labourers increased from 318 (0.09 per cent) in 1921 to 749 (0.19 per cent) in 1931.

Table II : 6

INVOLVEMENT OF KAYASTHAS AS MANUAL LABOURERS IN 1921 AND 1931

		Agriculture Field Labourers wood-cutter etc.	Mines Labourers	Industries, Artisans and other workers	Transport Labourers, boatmen, carters palki-bearers etc	Unspecified Labourers
Kayasthas	1931	1749(0.45%)	119(0.03%)	410(0.10%)	127(0.03%)	749(.19%)
	1921	716(0.20%)	13(0.003%)	367(0.10%)	105(0.03%)	318(.09%)

[Source : W. G. Lacey, Census of India, 1931, p. 192.]

Thus, in the case of Kayasthas too, we find a displacement of people away from their traditional occupation. No doubt, as late as 1931, a fair number of Kayasthas was engaged as writers, 220 out of 1000. But as we saw in the

case of Brahmans, Kayasthas recorded in the category of 'cultivators of all kinds' were much larger than those who persisted with their traditional occupation (487 out of 1000). If we recapitulate Buchanan's statement, we will see how the situation changed within a century. Kayasthas, who did not perform servile labour themselves and were largely engaged in the profession of writing, were now to be seen working as menial labourers in the twentieth century. Occupational diversity was developing.

III

Let us now turn to the lower caste population and see what kind of changes were occurring among them. Chamars were considered as belonging to one of the meanest categories. Buchanan included them among the "lowest and vilest of the artificiers."¹⁸ Also known as Muchi they were, "the men who prepared hides worked in leather."¹⁹ "The skin of every cow dying within the village is their prerequisite."²⁰ This was

18. Francis Buchanan, op.cit. p.345.

19. W. W. Hunter, Statistical Account of Bengal Districts of Patna, p. 50.

20. W. W. Hunter, Statistical Account of Bengal (Vol. XII) Districts of Gaya and Shahabad, p. 200.

the statement Hunter made about Chamars while giving the statistical account of Shahabad. This was their socio-economic condition in the society as early as the beginning of nineteenth century.

The census of 1931 mentions the total strength of Chamars in Bihar to be around 12,96,001. Out of this total population, 6,17,264 (47.63 per cent) were the male.²¹ Out of the whole male Chamar population, 1,04,645 (16.95 per cent) persons came under the category of 'cultivators of all kinds'; 1,32,747 (21.50 per cent) persons came in the category of 'field labourers and wood-cutters. 323 (0.05 per cent) had their income from rent; 935 (0.15 per cent) people were recorded as 'Agents of managers of landed estates', planters, forest officers and their clerks, rent collectors etc.; 1932 (0.31 per cent) males involved themselves as raisers of livestock, milkmen and herdsmen; 7 males were engaged in fishing and hunting. Only 1 person came under the category of 'owners, managers clerks etc', 2768 (0.49 per cent) people were involved as labourers, and in exploitation of minerals. In industries, 28 people were recorded in the category of 'owners, managers and clerks' while 507 (0.08

21. W. G. Lacey, op.cit. p. 136.

per cent) males acted as artisans and other kinds of workers.²²

Census of 1921 recorded that out of 1000 chamar workers, those engaged in their traditional occupation of Hide dressers numbered around 92 persons. Those recorded under the category of 'cultivators of all kinds' numbered 363; 352 persons were classed 'Field-labourers, wood-cutters etc.', 10 as Raisers of livestock; 22 were involved in the extraction of minerals, 11 persons provided domestic services, 129 were recorded as unspecified labourers and 13 persons followed other kinds of occupations.²³ Turning to the 1931 census, we can find that the number of persons following their traditional occupation as hide dressers further declined. From 92 in 1921, it came down to 84 in 1931.²⁴ Those recorded under the category of 'cultivators of all kinds', declined to 297, and the number recorded as field-labourers, wood-cutters etc went up to 468. In addition, unspecified labourers numbered around 115.

22. This data is taken from W. G. Lacey's Census of India, 1931, Table XI p. 98. The whole emphasis, again, is not to provide a comprehensive numerical data of each people engaged in various occupation. Idea is, rather, to give the pattern of occupation of chamar population in which they were engaged as late as around 1931.

23. P. C. Tallents, op.cit. p. 294.

24. W. G. Lacey, op.cit. p.210.

TABLE II : 7

DISTRIBUTION IN OCCUPATIONS OF CHAMARS : 1921

Occupations	Number per thousand workers engaged in each occupation
Hide Dressers	92
Cultivators of all Kinds	363
Field-labourers, wood-cutters etc.	352
Raisers of live-stock	10
Extraction of minerals	22
Arts and Professions	8
Domestic Service	11
Labourers Unspecified	129
Others	13
Total	1000

[Source : P.C.Tallents, Census of India, 1921, Bihar & Orissa, Vol. VII, Part-I, p.294].

TABLE II : 8

DISTRIBUTION IN OCCUPATIONS OF CHAMARS : 1931

Occupations	Number per thousand earners engaged in each occupation as principal means of livelihood
Hide Dressers	84
Cultivators of all kinds	297
Field-labourers, wood-cutters etc.	468
Exploitation of minerals	9
labourers unspecified	115
Others	27
Total	1000

[Source : W.G.Lacey, Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa, Part I p.210].

TABLE II : 9

Profession	Number per 1000 earners engaged in each occupation as principal means of livelihood in 1931.		
	Brahman	Kayastha	Chamars
Writers	--	220	--
Priests	108	--	--
Hide Dressers	--	--	84
Income from rent of land	45	70	--
Cultivations of all kinds	755	487	297
Field labourers, wood cutters	24	19	468
Trade	--	13	--
Arts and Professions	11	42	--
Domestic Service	13	19	--
Contractors, clerks etc. unspecified	12	73	--
Agents and managers of landed estates	--	16	--
Public Administration	--	11	--
Exploitation of minerals	--	--	9
Labourers unspecified	--	--	115
Others	32	30	27

[Source : Based on Census Report of 1931 by W. G. Lacey].

Going through the data presented above, some broad generalisations can be made. Traditional occupation did not remain confined to the original castes. Only around 22 per cent of Kayastha population, 10.8 per cent of Brahman population and 8.4 per cent of Chamar population persisted with their traditional occupation as the principal means of livelihood in 1931. All castes tried to move to other occu-

pations. However, the traditional occupation did not lose its significance. In some ways it guided the choice of occupation. When Brahmans and Kayasthas shifted from their traditional occupation they opted for new occupations which they thought were lucrative and financially paying. When they shifted to the agrarian sector they engaged themselves as cultivators of different kinds and not as labourers. On the other hand when Chamars left their traditional occupation, they found work only as labourers. Their choices were limited. That is why in the category of 'cultivators of all kinds', where as Brahmans and Kayasthas numbered around 755 and 487 respectively, Chamars numbered just 297. On the other hand, in the category of field-labourers and woodcutters, chamars numbered around 468, while Brahmans and Kayasthas numbered just 24 and 19 respectively.

This pattern was found in the industrial sector also. The Census of 1921 while talking about the people involved in the functioning of industries in Jamshedpur pointed out, "in the works as a whole the castes that provide most of the skilled workers are Muhammedans (1926), Rajputs (1008), Brahmans (897), Kayasthas (729), Kamars (397), Sikhs (336) and Goalas (311) and amongst the unskilled Telis (1826),

Mundas (1329), Mohammedan (1070), Goalas (657), Santals (589), Rajputs (428), Bhumiij (397), Hos (313), and Tantis (367)."²⁵ In skilled professions such as medicine, Brahmans dominated: "amongst the Doctors the Brahmans are by far the most numerous caste."²⁶ Thus it is clear that the high caste population was involved in skilled work. The unskilled works, on the other hand, were mostly performed either by the low caste people or the aboriginal tribes. Nonetheless, this demarcation can not be made watertight since crossing of boundaries did certainly take place.

IV

Studies of agrarian system in Bihar show the condition of poverty of the small producers and landowners.²⁷ They were subject to various forms of bondage. But all small producers were not tied to a general cycle of downward

25. P. C. Tallents, op.cit., p.260.

26. Ibid. p. 267.

27. Arvind N. Das , Agrarian Unrest and Socio-economic change in Bihar , 1900-198 (Manohar, New Delhi, 1983); Arvind N.Das(ed), Agrarian Movements in India: Studies on twentieth century Bihar (London, Frank Crass,1982); Rakesh Gupta , Peasant Struggle : A case study of Bihar (New Delhi,1978); Sudipto Mundle, Backwardness and Bondage : Agrarian Relations in a South Bihar District (New Delhi, Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1979); Gyan Prakash, Bonded Histories: Geneologies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India; (Cambridge University Press,1990); A A Yang, The Limited Raj : Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920 (Delhi, Oxford University Press,1989).

mobility. Some occasionally moved the social hierarchy. In a report published on the material conditions of small agriculturists and labourers in 1898, Stevenson Moore gives a detailed description of the changing conditions of people.²⁸ It shows how the economic strength and the status of castes were changing. The following description of a group of families gives an idea of such changes.

Bansraj Gop belonging to Kusapi village in the Gaya region, was a cultivating labourer who owned about 5 bighas of land. His son, Srikishan Gop, got an order from the local thikadar to clear 25 bighas of jungle and to cultivate the land for two years without paying rent. For the third and fourth years he was allowed to receive three-fourth of the produce, and in the fifth year two-thirds of the produce. Srikishan Gop then made a good bargain. He was made 'mahton' and any 'hukumat' in the shape of milk, ghi etc was not taken from him. In his old age he received 10 bighas of good land on payment of a 'Salami' of Rs. 10 per bigha. He thus totalled his land possession to around 40 bighas. His son, Buddhu Gop got the whole of this land settled at 4 annas, 6 annas, and 8 annas per bigha. He cleared another 25 bighas of jungle to cultivate the lands on the above conditions. He

28. C. J. Stevenson Moore, Report on the Material Condition of Small Agriculturists and Labourers in Gaya (1898).

was thus in possession of 65 bighas of land. His son Chuman Gop, made no improvement. Dukhi Gop, son of Chuman Gop, purchased 5 bighas of land for Rs. 375. He thus became the owner of 70 bighas of land and secured the status of 'pure cultivator'.

In this genealogical history of one particular family, we can see how a family of just 5 bighas sometimes could become the owner of 70 bighas. From simple labourers, this family of Gops became 'pure cultivators', securing a much higher status in the society. Their success in building social connections and securing support from proprietors or thikadars helped them change their status. It should be kept in mind that at the time the value of land was increasing rapidly.²⁹ Control over land, thus, strengthened their economic as well as social position.

The above example of social change is not an isolated one. Bhaunr Gop was a cultivating labourer. He was in possession of only 10 bighas of land. His son, Rohi Gop took about 30 bighas of waste land and was allowed to cultivate them for the first and second years without paying rent, either in cash or kind. For the third and fourth years, he was allowed to receive three-fourths of the produce and for

29. This information is based upon Village Notes, (Gaya, 1915-16).

the fifth year two-thirds of the produce. The land was then settled with him at cash rent at ordinary rates to encourage him. His son Dhonta Gop was the occupant of 40 bighas of land and was considered a well-to do pure cultivator.

Gardauri Gop was a cultivating labourer holding about 5 bighas of land. His son, Bandhu, cleared about 20 bighas of jungle and cultivated the land. His grandson, Bhagwat Gop, was the owner of 23 bighas of land.

In another family, Lalli Gop was a cultivating labourer holding about 10 bighas of land. His son, Satan, brought 30 bighas of waste land under cultivation. Satan's son, Bandhu Gop in turn, purchased 3 bighas of land for Rs. 95. Bandhu's son, Durbijai, had 43 bighas of land in his possession.

Naku Gop was a cultivating labourer holding about 5 bighas of land. His son, Lachman, brought 16 bighas of waste land under cultivation and thus came to be regarded as pure cultivator.³⁰

From the examples given above, it becomes clear that even in the agrarian sector, with the development of land market and the rising value of land, there opened up an opportunity for the people to change their status. Stevenson Moore specifically notes in his report, "I should not omit

30. Stevenson Moore, op.cit. p.27,

to note that in the course of our inquiry instances came to light of pure cultivators who originally started life as half-cultivators and half labourers."³¹

Economic and social status could, thus, change by bringing more land under cultivation. This helped in displacing the caste-class correspondence. In the above examples we saw how certain Goalas who were once being considered pure labourers gained in economic position and became pure cultivators. This phenomenon is reflective of a broad scenario which was existing in the society during the period under purview.

However, changes occurred in other ways. One such way was migration of people to distant places in search of employment. The weakening of the traditional economic dependence in villages, difficulties of earning a living within the agricultural sector, the necessity of survival compelled the poor to migrate. This venture was further facilitated by the improvement in transport facilities. Some people went to near by places while the more adventurous ones opted for inter-state migration. In 1891, we are informed, " 2,00,000 persons born in Gaya, were found in other parts of Bengal". In 1901, " nearly 59000 or 2.8% of the

31. Ibid.

entire population were residing in Bengal proper."³² Talking of the capacity of certain sections of the population to pay more to get a bride O'Malley shows elsewhere how migration enriched people. "In Hazaribagh, for example, a bridegroom, who a few years ago paid Rs. 3 for a wife, now has to pay Rs. 4. The increase is due to the number of men who have migrated to Burma or elsewhere, and coming home with pockets full, are readily ready to pay a rupee more for a handsome bride."³³ People thus migrated to such distant places as Burma in search of occupation.

Education could change the social position and power of groups in important ways. The following statement by Ganesh Datt Singh (an M.L.C. in Bihar) in the Legislative Council Proceedings is revealing:

At present when a municipality makes arrangement for the education of the depressed classes, I am told by a very reliable man that the municipal jamadars frighten them by saying that they should not send their boys to school because the moment the boys are educated they will be taken somewhere for service.³⁴

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32. L. S. S. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Gaya (1901-02); pp 83-84.
 33. L. S. S. O'Malley, Census of India, 1911, Vol.5 : Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim Part I (Calcutta : Bengal Secretariat Book Depot). pp. 318-19.
 34. Legislative Council Proceedings, Bihar and Orissa, Tuesday, 31 January, 1922, vol iv, No.6

He further says, " Many people came forward with all kinds of arguments that they would not get servants etc. and therefore they (the low caste people) should not get education."³⁵ Such statements reveal the ideas prevalent in society. When lower castes sought education, upper castes were unhappy. The level of education among the lower castes, however, was still very low. We are informed by O'Malley:

Taking all Depressed castes together, out of every thousand male aged 7 and above, only 15 were literate. The corresponding proportions for the provincial population as a whole are 52 literate males per mille and 8 literate females.³⁶

Government intervention were important in re-defining social relations. The Bihar and Orissa Kamiyauti Agreement Act of 1920, for instance, abolished the Kamiyauti or bonded labour system. Before the passing of this Act it was quite common for landlords, to maintain kamias or tied laborers. Usually only a small sum was advanced as loans and the interest was paid in the form of labor. Bondage continued over centuries. This Act by doing away the prevalent strictures freed, at least in theory, the Kamias.³⁷

35. Ibid.

36. L.S.S. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Gaya (1901-10). p. 285.

37. P.C. Roy Choudhary, Bihar District Gazetteers, Monghyr (1960). p. 82.

We are now in a position to have a somewhat clear picture of the economic functioning of the society, specially the relationship between caste and occupation. The rigidity in the caste based occupation was breaking down. Different castes were opting for different occupation irrespective of their traditional base. In the process, their economic status was also changing in some ways. This change in economic status, thus, displaced the caste-class correspondence. New opportunities with the coming of British, extension of cultivating land by cutting the jungles, migration of the people to distant places in search of job, were some of the reasons for the change. These changes however, did not improve the well being of all sections, as Peter Robb also says, "the opportunities were not evenly distributed."³⁸ Infact researches of Peter Robb, A. A. Yang etc. shows the extent to which pre-British local controllers persisted in power. A. A. Yang, focussing his studies upon Saran district of Bihar, says that "the first reassessment of this situation suggest more continuities than changes in the agrarian structure of control."³⁹

38. P. Robb, 'State, Peasant and Moneylender in late Nineteenth Century Bihar : Some Colonial Inputs', in P. Robb (ed.), Rural India p.142.

39. Anand A. Yang, The limited Raj, (Oxford University Press, 1989) p.228.

CHAPTER III

MECHANISMS OF MOBILITY

The beginning of the twentieth century saw an unprecedented spurt of a kind of caste movement in Bihar. Disaffected by the traditionally imposed status in the hierarchised caste structure, different castes which were trying to bring a change in their traditional status. The caste hierarchy made society unequal. Inequality often breeds an aspiration to acquire the 'unavailable'. Various mechanisms were evolved to realize such aspirations. The tendency was most apparent among the backward castes such as Goalas, Kurmis, Koeris, Kahars, Telis and untouchable like Dosadhs, Chamars, Domes etc.. However such aspiration for higher status was not just limited to those sections of the population only. Higher castes too showed this tendency. The most active being Bhumihars and Kayasthas. The typical mode was to form a caste sabha, and appropriate social insignias particularly linked with the higher caste population. Those social insignias included the sacred thread, high marriageable age of children, giving up of intoxicating drinks and non-vegetarian food items, prohibition of widow remarriage, withdrawal of women from economic work. In this chapter an

attempt will be made to understand this movement. In the previous chapter we have already seen how the castes were changing their traditional occupation and claiming an economic status hitherto unavailable to them. Let us now see in a little detail how the social status of the different castes changed.

I

Census operations provided an opportunity to the aggrieved castes to express their aspirations. In every Census operation, officials were flooded with applications for a re-classification of caste status. Each application sought a status high in caste hierarchy.

At each succeeding census the provincial Superintendents are overwhelmed with petitions from various upstart communities praying to be entered in the schedules under some new name, which is usually designed to connote a higher status.¹

British intentions of undertaking census operations itself have been variously interpreted. Some focus on their evil intentions of dividing the society in as many fractions as possible. For others, British measures arose out of

1. Census of India, 1911, p.379.

administrative necessity. To administer and provide good governance it was necessary to understand the society well. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay looks at the divisive intention of the British. He writes : "As a divisive force in Indian society, the potentiality of caste, along with religion, was being gradually perceived by the colonial government since the revolt of 1857."² However, he acknowledges that such census operation were also undertaken "to have a clear knowledge about the customs and beliefs of the different groups of people that shaped the Indian milieu".³ Bernard Cohn sees census operations as a means through which the colonial government sought to understand the native society so that they could provide good administration.

It was felt by many British officials in the middle of the nineteenth century that caste and religion were the sociological keys to understanding the Indian people. If they were to be governed well, then it was natural that information should be systematically collected about caste and religion.⁴

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2. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay, Caste, Politics and the Raj, (K.P.Bangchi & Company, 1990) p.29.
 3. ibid. p.30.
 4. Bernard Cohn, An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays, (Oxford University Press, 1992), p.242.

Whatever be the actual intentions behind colonial census operations, it can not be denied that they deepened caste-feelings. Since documentation of caste, at least in the initial phase, endorsed hierarchy people saw that enrollment at the higher level would perhaps impart a high social status. Hence an effort was made by different castes to enroll at an upper level of the hierarchy, most often by taking up a new name. J. T. Marten thus says in his census report of 1921, "The opportunity of the census was therefore seized by all but the highest castes to press for recognition of social claims and to secure, if possible, a step upwards in the social ladder."⁵

Caste mobility was nothing new in Indian history.⁶ It had been occurring in earlier periods too and in different regions. In this chapter, we will now proceed to see the mode of caste mobility in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among different castes.

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5. J. T. Marten, Census of India 1921, Vol.1, Part 1, p.223.
 6. Romila Thapar, 'Social Mobility in Ancient India with special refernce to Elite Groups', R. S. Sharma (ed.), Indian Society : Historical Probings, (PPH, N. Delhi, 1974).

II

<u>Caste or Sub-caste</u>	<u>Designation claimed</u>
Babhan	Bhumihar Brahman
Barhi	Vishwakarma Brahman
Kamar (lohars)	
Bhat	Brahma Bhat
Hajjam	Nai Brahman, Kulin Brahman
Dosadh	Gahlot Rajput
Goala (Ahir, Gope)	Yadava, Jadubansi Kshatriya
Koiri	Dangi, Kushwaha Kshatriya
Kurmi	Kurmi Kshatriya

[Source : Census of India, 1931, Bihar & Orissa by W. G. Lacey p.273].

To begin with let us first concentrate on Bhumihars who were also variously known as Bhumihars, Babhans, military Brahmans etc. From the earlier reports, such as the reports by Buchanan Hamilton or the statistical account by W. W. Hunter, we can get an idea of their location in caste hierarchy. Though Bhumihars were not identified with the lower castes population, these accounts place the Bhumihars below the Brahmans and Rajputs. W. W. Hunter in his Statistical Account of Patna and Gaya says that Bhumihars though

not ranking with Brahmans and Rajputs, still enjoy a position second only to those two castes."⁷

We have already seen in our first chapter various mythologic interpretation in which Bhumihars tried to produce a link with Brahmans. They wanted to be regarded as Brahmans and seen as their constituent part. They called themselves sometimes as Bhumihar Brahman, sometimes as Ajachak Brahman.⁸

Some Bhumihars aspired to be called Rajput. "Mr. Forbes in his chapter on the castes of Palamau, says that they claim to be Rajputs, and they certainly resemble Rajputs much more than Brahmans."⁹ They did not intermarry with Rajputs, nevertheless they had a kind of dinning and drinking relationship with them.

Mr. Magrath thinks that they were a low Aryan race, who brought into close contact with the Rajputs, probably in some of their struggles for supremacy, and not being allowed to intermarry or form one people with them, have acquired a pseudo-respectability by pretending that they are Brahmans.¹⁰

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7. Hunter, Statistical Account of Patna and Gaya District (1877), p.43.
 8. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers : Gaya (1901-10), p. 42; Ajachak were those who did not take alms.
 9. Hunter, op.cit., p. 43.
 10. ibid..

It is clear that Bhumihars were not satisfied with their original caste status. Data relating to caste population of Bhumihars and Brahmans show how there was a decrease in Bhumihar population and a corresponding increase in Brahman population. The Babhan decreased from 11,29,375 to 9,79,369, i.e. there was a decrease by almost 13 percent in ten years between 1911 and 1921. Most of the districts, e.g. Monghyr, Shahabad, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga etc. showed decrease in their strength. The only district which showed an increase in their population was Santhal Parganas.¹¹

TABLE III : 1
Change in the Population of Babhans and Brahmans
between 1911 and 1921.

	(000 ^s omitted)	
<u>North Bihar</u>	<u>Babhan</u>	<u>Brahmans</u>
Saran	-8	+6
Champanan	-1	-3
Muzaffarpur	-18	+3
Darbhangha	-80	+76
Bhagalpur	-4	+7
Purnea	-2	+5
<u>South Bihar</u>		
Patna	-4	+2
Gaya	-4	+1
Shahabad	-18	+8
Monghyr	-13	+21

[Source : P. C. Tallents, Census Report of India, 1921, p.241].

11. Tallents, Census of India, 1921, Bihar & Orissa, Vol. VII, Part I, p. 241.

Speculating upon this evidence P.C. Tallents in his Census Report of 1921 says: "Although it is highly probable that the Babhans or Bhumihaar Brahmans lost population like other castes in the influenza epidemic it must be admitted that a considerable part of the decrease in this caste is probably due to their accession to the Brahmans."¹² Thus it can be said that since Bhumihaars wanted to see themselves as Brahmans they enrolled in the Census as Brahmans. Natural calamities, and disease might have helped in reducing their numerical strength, but that affected Brahmans too and not Bhumihaars alone.

Apart from this effort to gain a new name for themselves and enrolling high in census data, Bhumihaar tried to adopt other Brahman characteristics. Brahmans considered it demeaning to hold ploughs and perform agricultural services. This was one reason why some of their fellow castes had lost their social status. Now Bhumihaars too followed the Brahmans. L.S.S. O'Malley says in his Gazetteer of district of Gaya, "Like many Brahmans they will not hold plough but employ labour for that purposes."¹³

12. Ibid.

13. O'Malley, op.cit. 92.

Hypergamy was another means through which Bhumihars could establish their Brahman status. Infact hypergamy was in general adopted as a means for rising in the social scale. When a group or a sub-group of a particular caste, gained in economic status, it tried to establish its link with those who were upwards in social scale. Highlighting this particular phenomenon, an Oriya correspondent to the Census operations wrote, "If a member of a lower sub-caste acquires money, power or authority, he marries into the immediately high sub-caste and gradually becomes amalgamated into it."¹⁴ This relationship can be seen functioning clearly among the Bhumihars and Maithil Brahmans. P.C. Tallents in the Census Report of 1921 observes the same phenomenon : "in Bhagalpur some Babhan have recently been able to secure Maithil girls as wives and they now insist on calling themselves Brahmans."¹⁵ This new born relationship, as Tallents says, was not just limited to Bhagalpur alone. Various other parts of Bihar too witnessed such developments. This becomes clear from Sahajanand's autobiography Mera Jeevan Sangharsh. Sahajanand was keen on knowing the extent to which hypergamy had spread. It says: "I myself

14. Lacey, Census of India, 1931, Bihar & Orissa, p. 266.

15. Tallents, op.cit., p. 237.

went to such districts as Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, Monghyr etc. I was quite elated when I saw not one but thousand such relationships existing."¹⁶

It was not Bhumihars alone who wanted to enter into such relationships. Many Maithil Brahmans too opted for such relationships. Bhumihars had money to offer, and Maithil Brahmans needed money. Wherever the desires of both parties met, they established marriage ties.

Economic ambitions of the Maithil Brahmans gave birth to a class of professional marriage makers. They married themselves or their children just in the hope of securing money. Though these Maithil Brahmans did secure monetary gains, it was at the cost of their social prestige. Such practices led to a fall of their social esteem among fellow Brahmans. L.S.S. O'Malley gives a clear picture of how this process was going on.

Among them (Maithil Brahmans), there is a class of men known as Bikauwas or venders because they sell themselves, or their sons in marriage to girls of lower groups for an agreed price. Some make a living in this way and have been known to have forty or fifty wives, who live with their parents and are not supported by their husbands. The latter have to pocket their pride for the sake of the money they make, for they are not received

16. Sahajanand Saraswati, Mera Jeewan Sangharsh, p. 102.

equal terms by fellow Brahmans and family of which the men habitually marry girls of a lower group sinks to its own level.¹⁷

'Purohiti' was considered a special privilege of the Brahman. Brahmans alone could preside over the ritual functions of the different sections of population. To equate themselves with Brahmans, Bhumihars began to operate as purohitis. Sahajanand Saraswati actively advocated this move. Sahajanand, who had begun his career as a caste leader of Bhumihars, always equated Bhumihars with Brahmans. He did not want to see the two as different castes. This is why when he saw an inequality operating between Bhumihars and Brahmans, he tried his heart and soul to remove it. Though some sections of Bhumihar population despised purohiti, Sahajanand succeeded in his effort to mobilise many behind his move. As he mentions in his Mera Jeewan Sangharsh, he succeeded in his effort at the Bhumihar Mahasabha in Khali-labad in 1926.

Bhumihars established caste sabhas to give an organized form to their movement. They had organizations such as Bhumihar Brahman Mahasabha, Bihar Provincial Brahman Conference etc. The latter was formed mainly with a view to prove

17. O'Malley, Indian Caste Customs, pp. 10-11.

that Bhumihars were the real Brahmans. In the Parsee Ripon Theater Hall in Patna a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Brahman Conference was held. A police report informs: "This meeting which called itself by the name of "Brahman" conference was not actually a conference of the "Brahmans" but it was meeting of Bhumihar Babhans."¹⁸

Brahmans reacted to the meeting. "On the day this Brahman Conference had to commence its first sitting, anonymous notices were stuck up on the walls at different places announcing that this conference was not a Brahman conference and that it was a conference organised by Bhumihar Brahmans."¹⁹ When the conference actually started Bhumihars had to bear the brunt of Brahman's wrath. A police official reported,

It was noticed that while the conference was being held, bricks were thrown on the roofing of the hall in which the conference was sitting with a view to disturb the meeting. This was probably the work of the men who had pasted the anonymous notices on the first day protesting against this conference.²⁰

18. Home Special (Patna), F.No. 54/1918. This information is based upon report from the D.I.G. regarding the sittings of the Bihar Provincial Brahman Conference in Patna .

19. Ibid..

20. Ibid..

Meetings were arranged to improve the general living pattern of caste fellows. The sabhas wanted to settle all kinds of cases arising out of disputes among them through panchayats. They raised the marriageable age of children. They vowed not to take any money while marrying their girls. To enlighten the caste fellows and develop solidarity among them, they planned to bring out caste newspapers and start schools to impart education.²¹ They even attempted to press for adequate representation of their caste fellows in the provincial and imperial councils as well as in the Municipal and Local Boards, and demanded that government appointments be granted in proportion to their numbers.²²

III

In this section we will study caste mobility among Kayasthas. Kayasthas were recorded as belonging to the category of pure Shudras in the report by Buchanan Hamilton. W.W.Hunter in his statistical account of Gaya had recorded them as belonging to the category of 'intermediate castes',

21. Bihar & Orissa, Police Abstract of Intelligence, March, 25, 1918, No. 21.

22. Ibid, January 17, 1914, No. 2.

below the category of 'Superior Castes'.²³ Their low social position was in contrast to their well placed economic location - a fact which we examined in the earlier chapter. This contradiction led to their urge to change their social position too so as to make it correspond to their economic position.

Since they were considered to be pure Shudras, one major effort on their part was to prove this false. They intended to prove that they did not belong to the Shudra category, rather they had a high caste origin. To claim a high background, they tried to project themselves as Upa-Kshatriya. "Kayasthas are not shudras. Shudras were produced from the feet of Brahma. Chitragupta, the progenitor of Kayasthas was produced from the whole body of Brahma."²⁴ To find their roots Kayasthas tried to interpret and reinterpret the ancient texts: "According to Parsuram's direction the son of the Kshatriya was deprived of his military occupation and was designated as kayastha. It is so related in Puranas."²⁵

23. Hunter, Statistical Account of Bengal (Vol.XII) Districts of Gaya and Shahabad (1877).

24. Munshi Kali Prasad, The Kayastha Ethnology (Lucknow, American Methodist Mission Press, 1877), pp. 27-28.

25. Ibid.

In both these mythic representations, there is an attempt to dissociate from shudras and establish links with Kshatriyas. We saw in the first chapter that every part of the body has a symbolic value. The head is considered superior to all other part of the body and feet are the most inferior. The fact that Sakadwipi Brahman's feet were to be washed by others was a mark of their high status. Since shudras were born from the feet of Brahma they were low in ranking. Thus, if Kayasthas could prove that they were not born from the feet of Brahma but from certain other parts of the body which had symbolic superiority, they could prove their distance from Shudras. So they tried to show that they were descendants of Chitrugupta who in turn was born out of the whole body of Brahma and not his feet. Since Chitrugupta was born of the whole body of Brahma, Kayastha had a ritually superior status.

In the second story, the attempts of Kayastha to prove their kshatriya origin is clearly reflected. According to the story those Kshatriyas who were deprived of military occupation were designated as Kayastha. It should be kept in mind here that Kayasthas were traditionally writers and not warriors. So their story served two purposes. It showed that they were Kshatriya by heredity. Secondly :

they were those Kshatriyas who were not warriors. Thus, they could show any profession to be their traditional occupation excepting that of warriors. Their profession of writing is thus being legitimised.

Various other mechanisms too were used to prove their Kashatriya status. They pointed out the cultural differences existing between them and the Shudras and tried to link their cultural styles with that of the upper ranking castes. We can see here the arguments which were put forth to support their claim. Kayasthas, like many other castes, were in the habit of taking non-vegetarian food items. Since non-vegetarianism was associated with the lower castes, when trying to Sanskritise themselves. Kayasthas opposed the consumption of meat and liquor. But Kayasthas, instead, legitimated non-vegetarianism by claiming it to be a Kshatriya habit. Let us see the arguments which they used to legitimise their claims: "the members of Kayastha tribe are generally addicted to taking meat. But there are thousands of this caste who excel even the Brahmans in abstinence, and who are scrupulous lovers of learning and pious. They shun the society of persons given to eating flesh." It further says, "the reason why taking meat is so common among them is because this is a practice of the Kshatriyas. The

Kayasthas also are a kind of Upa-Kshatriya, i.e. secondary Kshatriyas."²⁶

There was a custom specially prevalent among the Shudras. According to this custom, a man could marry the widow of his deceased brother, and such marriage did not lead to exclusion from the caste. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries widows were seen with contempt in the society. Widow remarriage was strictly prohibited among the better off section of the society. Now Kayasthas too sought to prohibit such relationships. This prohibition was claimed as another evidence of them not belonging to the Shudra category.

The formation of Kayastha Sabhas was another means which they used to channelise their efforts. They developed an elaborate structure of caste conferences from the local to the national level. In Bihar the most important one was Bihar Kayastha Provincial Sabha, launched in 1889. To propagate their ideas further, they published various newspapers and periodicals. As early as 1891, they were publishing no less than nine journals, which included Kayastha Gazette

26. Munshi Kail Prasad, op.cit. pp. 27-28. (This information was published as the translation of a passage from a Hindi Commentary on the Mitakshara by Pandit Durga Prasad Shukla, a teacher of Yajurveda.)

published from Bankipore and the Kayastha Hitaishi published from Darbhanga. The necessity of Kayastha conferences and the publication of newspapers was emphasized by the Kayastha Gazette of March 6, 1889.

The Kayastha Gazette is a child of necessity commanded into existence by the voice of the Kayastha Community assembled in deliberate conference to discuss their social and economic affairs. As a matter of necessity to assist in the work of reform and to clear the path of progress; it has been inherited into life and it will continue so long as that necessity exists or at any rate till the community does not withdraw itself from it both its confidence and importance.²⁷

The organisation of Kayastha Sabhas was also used as an opportunity to promote solidarity among the caste people. An attempt was made to tide over the differences existing at the sub-caste and at the regional level. For example, a Kayastha Sabha was held on 8 February 1915 in Monghyr. About 30 Kayasthas had participated in that meeting which included some Bengali as well as some Bihari Kayasthas. People participating in that meeting ranged from Deputy Magistrate to Public Prosecutors. The speeches delivered there "were to the effect that all Kayasthas of different kinds and

27. Quoted in The Searchlight, September 19, 1920.

places should join together as members of the same community and should intermarry."²⁸

IV

In the above sections we saw the pattern of mobility amongst castes which, at least in the present context, are regarded as belonging to the high caste section. We will now proceed to see the caste mobility among lower castes. In this section the focus will be on Goalas, also known as Ahirs.

Buchanan had recorded Goalas as pure Shudras.²⁹ W.W. Hunter in his statistical account for the district of Gaya had recorded them under the category of 'pastoral castes'.³⁰ Thus it can be said with certainty that Goalas occupied a fairly low position on social hierarchy. Numerically, they accounted for the largest chunk of population in Bihar.

Their traditional occupation had been pastoralism but many of them had opted for agricultural services. They were

28. Buchanan, op.cit., p. 337.

29. Hunter. op.cit., p. 337.

30. Bihar & Orissa, Police Abstract of Intelligence, (February 20, 1915, no. 7).

reputed to be cattle-lifters and grain-thieves. Hunter says that 0.57 per cent of Goalas were criminals. As compared to them, 0.67 per cent of Bhumi-hars were classed as criminals. However, the Domes dominated the list. About 2.1 per cent of their population was considered criminal.³¹

Grierson found that in the villages a clear distinction was made in the treatment of high-caste and low-caste tenants.³² Tenants of high and low castes were referred to by different generic names, lived in separate quarters of the village and were granted unequal terms of tenure. Commonly, high-caste tenants were assessed at a lesser rate, or received remission of part of the rent favourably. For example, in such customary concessions as 'Charseri' or 'Duseri', the high caste tenants got a concession of four seers in a mound whereas the lower castes tenants got the concessions of just 2 seers in a mound.³³ Moreover, cultivators of high castes were not required to do begari or unpaid labour on the landlord's field although they were expected

31. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Districts of Gaya and Shahabad (vol. XII, 1877), pp. 130-31. The data are based on this source.

32. Grierson, Notes on the District of Gaya, (Calcutta, Printed at Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893).

33. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Gaya (1906), p. 142.

to send their own field labourers for such work; low caste ryots customarily performed begari and were much more subservient. A local proverb visualised how the landlords, treated their clients differently depending on their caste - "A Kayastha does what you want on payment, a Brahman on being fed, paddy and betel on being watered but a low caste man on being kicked."³⁴

Since Goalas were considered low caste, they too were subjected to such exactions. It was reported, "Mohammedan Zamindars were in the habit of taking ghee, curd etc. from the Goalas at rates lower than those which prevailed in the market."³⁵ Since they habitually provided the landlords with ghee and milk, they were rewarded certain allowances in return. "In some villages, Goalas, who supply milk and ghee, are charged a lower rate."³⁶ However these concessions in landlord's demands did not provide adequate compensation. Hence it aroused ill-feeling among them. Further, since they were reputed for their criminal activities, they organised themselves into caste sabhas to improve their social status.

34. Grierson, Notes on Districts of Gaya, p. 326.

35. Political Special, (Patna), F.No. 171 of 1925.

36. O'Malley op.cit, p. 140.

The movement launched by Goalas as it spread across the whole of North India from Punjab to Bengal came to be known as "pan Ahir Movement." To carry out their movement in a well organised manner they formed caste sabhas. Gope Jatiya Maha Sabha founded in 1912 constituted the most important and effective sabha in the province. The Goala movement in Bihar saw its peak during the 1920s. "Signs of Goala movement in Bihar subdivision were first prominent in February, 1921, in connection with some cases which were instituted against the Goalas by the Mohammedan Zamindars."³⁷ However, since 1910 they were organising caste sabhas in different parts of Bihar to carry out their programmes.

Reacting to economic grievances, and keen interest to change their social outlook, Goalas opted for Sanskritisation. Focussing upon the economic grievances of the Goalas as reason for their Sanskritising tendency Hetukar Jha says, "the real motive behind the attempts of the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris at Sanskritising themselves was to get rid of this socio-economic oppression."³⁸ The resolutions which

37. O'Malley op.cit. p.140.

38. Hetukar Jha, 'Lower Caste Peasants and Upper-Caste Zamindars in Bihar (1921-25): An analysis of Sanskritization and contradiction between the Two Groups', IESHR (Vol. xiv, No.11).

Goalas adopted at the end of every caste sabha meetings tend to support the theory. Through their resolutions Goalas often vowed not to serve as servile labour for the upper caste. For example, in a meeting held on 3 March 1913 in Darbhanga "with the object of placing the caste on a higher plan", they "resolved not to do menial work such as plough and carry loads for Brahmans and Rajputs."³⁹ Similarly, in a meeting held on 12 April 1913, again in Darbhanga, the goalas resolved: "to refuse to work as ploughmen except for cash payment" and "to refuse to carry "Bhars" for hire." If the fellow caste brethren did not agree to obey the resolutions, they were often assaulted. "A Goala of Lamotha, in Dalsing Sarai Police station, was beaten and fined for carrying a "bhar" for his "malek".⁴⁰

Let us now see what measures Goalas adopted to change their social status. First of all they tried to link their genealogy to Kshatriyas. P.C.Tallents in the Census of 1921 wrote "nothing less than Kshatriya position will satisfy it (the community)."⁴¹ To legitimise their claim they appropri-

39. Bihar & Orissa, Police Abstract of Intelligence, (March 29, 1913, No.11).

40. Ibid.

41. Tallents, op.cit. p.236.

ated the symbols particularly linked with the high caste population. They took up sacred thread. They exhorted against taking any liquor and the consumption of goat meat killed by Mohammedan butchers. Widow remarriage was prohibited, and their birth and death rituals were changed. They reduced the thirty days Sraddh or funeral ceremony prescribed for Shudras to the twelve days of the twice-born.⁴²

When their caste sabha activities are analysed, it is clear that Goalas were not just trying to take over the social symbols of higher castes. Through caste sabhas they were also trying to achieve certain other secular gains. One constant emphasis in the caste sabhas was the education of caste fellows. Through the caste Sabhas, Goalas approached the government to grant them scholarships to improve their education. They also emphasised the need to educate their women. To provide education, they attempted to establish schools. Their caste meetings also opposed dowry. They prohibited their women-folk from performing economic services, such as selling chipris milk, ghee etc. Since they were badly reputed as being cattle lifters and of committing crimes, their meetings urged the caste fellows to

42. ibid.

abstain from such activities.⁴³ They also asked for representation of their caste people in the Councils. To assert their own identity and to show their distance from Babhans they refused to take food cooked by Babhans. All these efforts on the part of Goalas aroused great antipathy among the high castes which often led to violent clashes.

V

In this section an attempt will be made to analyse the movements going on in various other lower caste population. Kurmis were recorded by Buchanan in his report as belonging to the category of pure shudras. However, they too like other caste were not happy with this status. They wanted to be returned as Kurmi Kshatriya. To support their claims, they too tried to interpret and re-interpret the ancient texts and developed a caste history. Supporting their claims, they tried to relate themselves to Lord Ram and Lord Krishna who were the established symbols of Kshatriyas. They maintained that their sub-castes were affiliated to one of the five old Kshatriya dynasties - Surya, Chandra, Yadu, sesha etc.

43. Bihar & Orissa, Police Abstracts of Intelligence (Nov. 10, 1917).

To give effect to their claims, they too formed caste sabhas, held meetings and laid claim to the high symbols. They took up the sacred thread, and appropriated such high sounding titles as 'Singh'. 'Rai' etc. For example at a meeting held in Gaya on 10 January, 1915, they passed a resolution stating that "all Kurmis should wear the sacred thread", and "no Kurmi should drink wine or toddy or eat flesh." "No Kurmi should sell girls into marriage".⁴⁴

These efforts of Kurmis too were not appreciated by the high caste people and this resulted in violent clashes. I refer to one such incident. It was reported in 1925.

A crowd of about 1000 Rajputs collected at village Jahangirpur, Police Station Sheoha and damaged the crops belonging to Kurmis. The Kurmis who were in minority did not venture to retaliate, but they attacked a small detached crowd of 40 to 50 Rajputs in which the Rajputs suffered, one being killed and other injured.⁴⁵

Telis were a trading caste. They too held various meetings to discuss their social outlook. In their meetings they discussed how their educational standard could be improved. They prevented their women-folk from working as

44. Bihar & Orissa, Police Abstracts of Intelligence, (January, 23, 1915, No.3).

45. Political special, (Patna), F.No. 171, 1925.

hawkers of oil and paddy. They also took measures to curtail marriage expenses and prevent infant marriages.

These measures which Telis undertook do not necessarily indicate only their sanskritising tendencies. Other steps which they undertook were certainly reflective of their sanskritising intentions. There is a case of conflict where Telis were on one side and Brahmans and Hajjams on the other. This conflict arose because Brahmans and Hajjams did not take food from Telis. "The cause of ill-feeling is due to the Telis wanting that the Brahmans and Hajjams either eat food touched by them or should altogether have no concern with them."⁴⁶

The important thing to note here is that Hajjams, who themselves belonged to a lower caste section, also did not take food with the Telis. Further, Telis wanted an equal treatment with Brahmans, together with Hajjams, by asking them to dine with them. The refusal of Brahmans and Hajjams to eat the food polluted by Telis reflected the symbolic inferiority of Telis. To remove that symbolic inferiority, they wanted that Brahmans and Hajjams should dine with them. So the Telis declared that if Brahmans and Hajjams can not have dining relation with them, then it was better not to

46. Bihar & Orissa, Police Abstracts of Intelligence, (Feb. 15, 1913, No.6).

have any kind of relations with them. At a panchayat they decided "not to invite Brahmans to perform religious ceremonies in their house and not to have the Hajjams attend on them."⁴⁷ All these movements among Telis, thus, can be said to be showing their Sanskritizing tendency.

Dusadhs, another low caste, show similar Sanskritizing tendencies. They wanted to gain the status of Gahlot Rajputs. To give a legal sanction to their claim, they produced a story which linked their antecedents to the Rajputs. According to that mythic story, "When Kshatriyas were being massacred by Parsu Ram some of them fled into a jungle to save their lives and being discovered by the enemy they explained that they were not K^ush^hatriyas but "Dusra Jat". When they returned to their fellow castemen the latter refused to acknowledge them because they had said that they belonged to a "Dusra Jat". This name in due course changed into Dusadh jat by which caste is known to this day".⁴⁸ The story shows the efforts of Dusadhs to link themselves to the Kshatriya status.

Dusadhs too formed a caste organisation named "Dushashan Bansiya Kshatriya Mahasabha" which was founded in 1897.

47. Bihar & Orissa, Policy Abstracts of Intellegence, (Feb 15, 1913, No.5).

48. Tallents,op.cit. p.235.

It was elaborately organised with managing committees in various districts consisting of a president, a secretary and members. The organisation mainly emphasised on the spread of education among its caste members. It campaigned against evil practices' like the consumption of meat, chicken, drinking of wine etc. They disallowed 'Sagai' form of marriage and widow remarriage. Changes were brought in the marriageable age of their children. Boys were to be married only at the age of 15 years and girls at the age of 10 years."⁴⁹

Koeris, an agricultural caste, wanted to be named 'Dangi' or 'Dani' chhatries. To legitimise their claims, they too "started using sacred thread and started wearing churi-bracelets instead of battisi or belt metal bracelets of the lowest castes.⁵⁰ A persistent effort was being made by Rawani Kahars to be called as "Chandravanshiya Kshatriyas'. To carry out their activities in an organized manner they formed the all India Chandravanshiya Kshatriya Mahasabha. This association was registered in 1912 under the Indian Companies Act.⁵¹ They too accepted the sacred thread.

49. ibid. p.236.

50. Lacey, Census of India 1931, Bihar and Orissa, (vol. 1. part I). p.268.

51. Tallents, op.cit. p.235.

They gave up the use of their old epithets of 'Ram' and replaced it by 'Singh', a title frequently associated with higher castes. Domes were also active in this general movement of social mobility. They resolved not to take wine and to give up stealing. They did not wish to associate with any kind of menial activities. Anybody not following these instructions were to be ostracised and no marital or social relations were to be maintained with them.⁵²

We have seen that caste mobility was in evidence within the high and the low caste population. It can be noticed, however, that the pattern of mobility was not always uniform and their means and ends were not always the same. We can locate these differences at different levels. Bhumihars and Kayasthas had taken the initiative as early as late nineteenth century, the lower castes, ranging from Goalas to Domes were active in the early twentieth century. Since Bhumihars had already a legitimate claim to wearing a sacred thread, their emphasis was not upon wearing of these threads. They rather laid a claim to perform 'Purohiti' and decided to abstain from performing agricultural services. They never sought to change their food habits.

52. Lacey, op.cit. p.268.

The lower castes, on the other hand, always laid their claims to wearing sacred thread, changing their food habits, prohibiting widow-remarriage. To get rid of economic exploitation, such castes as Goalas and Kurmis specially, refused to provide their labour services. What was common amongst all castes was a claim upon the 'unavailable'. The nature of what was 'unavailable' differed with different caste groups.

Certain other features were common to all levels of society. All aspired to improve their educational standard. However, as M.N.Srinivas too points out, "they were ordinarily more accessible to the high castes with a tradition of learning, employment in the government and urban residence."⁵³ All groups attempted to change the marriageable age of the children. To carry out their activities, almost all castes developed their own caste sabhas. Whatever may be the difference and commonness in the nature of reform among different castes, it is clear that castes had an aspiration for a change in their status, and in their social outlook.

53. M.N.Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, (Orient Longman Limited, N.Delhi, 1992) p.90.

CHAPTER IV

TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT

The 1930s witnessed a social movement among the untouchables of Bihar. This movement was not autonomous. It formed a part of a wider movement all over India. We have seen in our previous chapters various changes affecting the caste structure of Bihar society. But how far did these socio-economic changes affect the life of the lower orders? The temple entry movement allows us to study such changes in their everyday life. Temples were considered sacred, and various measures were taken by the upper castes to maintain its sanctity and purity. One such measure was the ban on the entry of lower caste people. 1930s witnessed a movement against this imposition. In this chapter, I will attempt to analyse the temple entry movement by the lower caste people and the reactions of the caste Hindus.

I

In this section I will study the social strictures to which the lower castes were subject in early twentieth century-Bihar. The social strictures could be divided into two categories. The first would include bans on the use of

public utilities, such as tanks and roads.¹ The second category would include religious restrictions.² The lower castes were barred access to temples, burning grounds, 'mats' and certain other institutions.³ In addition to these two groups of disabilities imposed upon lower castes, there were certain other strictures. These included the norms regulating the access to the services of barbers and to tea-shops, hotels or theatres owned by private individuals.⁴

The fact that a sweeper may sit beside a high class Hindu in a railway carriage or a motor-lorry without any question of his right to do so has not yet made it any more easy in the interior for a touring officer to persuade cartman of some castes to carry his sweeper from camp to camp. Infact in certain districts it is always essential to employ at least one cartman of humble caste for this purpose.⁵

From the above quoted statement it becomes clear that the strictures against lower castes varied according to time and place. There was a difference between places, institutions, and things which were part of traditional and those which were not, those which were 'modern'. In public places like railways, the concept of maintaining a distance between

-
1. Hutton, Census of India, 1931, Vol.I, Part I p.482.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.

pure and impure represented by high and low caste respectively, were generally by-passed. "At railway stations no questions are asked with regard to the caste of one's fellow passengers or the railway porters who handle ones baggage."⁶ Similarly in industrial areas where people of all castes were to work together perforcedly, caste inhibitions were weaker. It was reflected: "In places like Jamshedpur where work is done under modern conditions men of all castes and races work side by side in mill without any misgivings regarding the caste of their neighbours."⁷

But then this represented just one side of the coin. Differences in attitude could clearly be seen when encounters took place in private. These were reflected in small symbolic gestures: what to touch and what not to, where to occupy a seat when encountering higher castes etc. "A high caste Hindu would not allow an "untouchable" to sit on the same seat or smoke the same hookah or touch his person, his seat, his food or the water he drinks : for a breach of this rule a bath in cold water is the minimum purification prescribed."⁸ These norms were seen functioning even in schools

6. Tallents, Census of India, 1921, Bihar and Orissa, Vol.-VII, Part-I p.234.

7. Ibid. p. 232.

8. Ibid. p.234.

and children belonging to lower castes were not permitted equal treatment. P. C. Tallents in Census of India, 1921, says that "within the last ten years the children of the untouchable classes attending one of the zilla schools in the province were made to sit in the verandahs."⁹ This unequal treatment to lower caste children was mainly to show their ritually low status.

Restrictions imposed upon the dining relation between high castes and low castes continued through the period under study. "A learned twice-born was not to eat the cooked food of Sudras who did not perform Sradhas, but if he was without means of subsistence, he might take raw food in quantity sufficient to last him for one night."¹⁰ With certain exceptions, higher castes in general consumed raw food touched by lower castes but not cooked food. Interpreting the difference between cooked and uncooked food, Mary Douglas writes:

a distinction is made between cooked and uncooked food as carriers of pollution. Cooked food is liable to pass on pollution, while uncooked food is not. So uncooked foods may be received from or handled by members of any caste - a necessary rule from the practical point of view in a society

9. Ibid.

10. O'Malley, Census of India, 1911, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim, (Part I, Volume V) p.450.

where the division of labour is correlated with degrees of inherited purity.¹¹

However, when we have a close look at the sources We find certain changes in the overall relations between castes. In the context of norms regulating commensality, we see additional provisions being invented: "the twice-born was not to eat the cooked food of Sudras who did not perform Sradhas." It means they could have taken even the cooked food from the Sudras who performed Sradhas. Sradha was a ceremony which was performed almost by all castes whether low or high, except those who were in dire economic condition. Thus commensal relations between the high and low castes were sought to be legitimated. Earlier, this relation was strictly prohibited.

Civil codes were maintained in the use of wells too. In most cases high and low castes had different wells for their use. Generally wells which were to be used by the lower castes were located at a distance from the normal inhabited area. Lower castes were strictly prohibited the use of wells which were generally used by high caste people. A movement gradually developed against this stricture. Such movements often resulted in violent clashes. In one such case, "in

11. Douglas, op. cit., (Penguin, 1966), p.45.

Darbhanga district, one well at Mirzapore, Police Station of Madhubani, was thrown open to the untouchables, but when they attempted to approach another well, objections were raised which necessitated the posting of police to maintain the peace."¹² The lower caste people were thus trying to do away with such restrictions which symbolized their servility.

II

In this section we will concentrate upon the norms regulating religious practices with special reference to the temple entry movement of the lower caste population. Many of these were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. "The agitation began under the cover of saving the life of the great Congress leader Shriyut M. K. Gandhi, from his self imposed fast in the matter of joint electorates and has been intensified after the well known Poona Pact regarding joint electorates for the depressed classes..."¹³ Gandhi was opposed to Macdonald's communal Award, published on 17 August 1932. The Communal Award instituted a provision for a separate elec-

12. Political (Special), Patna, F. No. 282 of 1932; Commissioner's office, Muzaffarpur, 5th October, 1932.

13. Home Political, F.No. 50/VII/33 (National. Archives, N.Delhi).

torate for the Depressed classes. Gandhi felt that a separate electorate was not going to improve the conditions of depressed classes : "if they had a separate electorate, their lives would be miserable in villages which are the strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy."¹⁴ Separate electorates he thought, would intensify rural tensions and break the relations of trust between upper and lower castes: "by giving them separate electorates you will throw the apple of discord between the untouchables and the orthodox."¹⁵ It would also constitute the lower castes as a separate entity, it would "perpetuate the stigma,"¹⁶ Lower castes then will never cease to be untouchables. Other leaders like Tej Bahadur Sapru, N.M. Joshi were supporting the notion of separate electorates for the Depressed classes.¹⁷

Gandhi felt that high caste people had the responsibility of removing untouchability. Upper castes had to support

14. The Collected Works of Gandhi: Vol. XLVIII, sept. 1931 - Jan 1932, p. 223.

15. Ibid..

16. Ibid..

17. N.N., Mitra (ed.), The Indian Annual Register, Jan-June 1932, vol-I, (The Annual Register Office, Calcutta) p. 329. Countering the view of Gandhi, N.M. Joshi said, "I was very sorry to hear from Mahatma Gandhi that though he was willing to recognise the claims of the Muslims and the Sikhs for special constituencies, he was not willing to concede that facility to the Depressed classes." Similarly T.B. Sapru too pointed out the necessity for safeguarding the interests of Depressed classes.

temple entry: "Temple entry satyagraha is a penance on the part of the touchable Hindu. He is the sinner and has therefore, to do the penance by inviting punishment on himself for endeavouring to take these untouchable co-religionists with him to the temple."¹⁸

With the momentum provided by Gandhi, different political parties took up the campaign for the removal of untouchability. The Congress was the most active in this movement. The Hindu Mahasabha too was showing its interests on the issue. "In 1928 Hindu Mahasabha itself passed a resolution declaring that the so called untouchables had equal rights with other Hindus to study in schools, and to wells and roads and temples, and the same resolution called in priests barbers and washermen to afford their services to untouchables."¹⁹ Several other groups and sections were involved in this movement against untouchability. After Gandhi broke his fast on 30 September 1932, an All India Anti-Untouchability League was started in Bombay with Seth Ganshyamdas Birla as its president. The name of the League was later changed to "Servants of Untouchable Society." A provincial branch of this society was set up in Bihar also. It was named 'Aspri-

18. The Collected Works of Gandhi, op.cit. p. 43.

19. Hutton, op.cit., p. 488.

shya Sewak Madal, Bihar Sakha'.²⁰ The society had several objects. First, it wished to bring about a complete transformation in the mental attitude of the caste Hindus so that differences between touchables and untouchables would die out.²¹ Second, it sought to improve the economic condition of depressed classes.²² With these objects in mind a meeting was arranged in Patna on 6 November 1932 which was presided over by Radhika Raman Prasad Sinha of Surajpura. On that very day a Provincial Board was constituted with Raja Radhika Raman Prasad Sinha, Rai Bahadur Ram Ran Vijaya Sinha, Rai Braj Raj Krishna and Pt. Brajbehari Chaube as Vice-President. Bindeshwari Prasad Verma was appointed the Secretary. For carrying out the activities of the society the entire province was divided into fourteen centres. A special centre was opened in Baidyanathdham where the differences over the question of removal of untouchability loomed large. The society carried out various activities to improve the conditions of the untouchables. It set up various day and night schools, scholarships were provided to the needy. Prizes were distributed among the Harijan boys and girls. Measures were taken to improve their economic and hygienic condi-

20. The Searchlight, Jan. 11, 1933.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

tions. A meeting was held at Patna on 8 January 1933 to give effect to the question of Temple Entry Bill to be introduced in Madras Council and Legislative Assembly by Subbarayan and Ranga Iyer respectively.²³ Bindeshwari Prasad Verma, Secretary of the Asprishya Sewak Mandal, who supported the Temple entry endeavour, proposed, "this meeting of the citizens of Patna believes that the social and religious disabilities of the Harijans are opposed to the principles of Sanatana Dharma and are injurious in the best interests of the human society."²⁴ He further proposed that the Government should not delay in giving assent to the introduction of the bill.

The Harijan Sewak Sangh which was started by Gandhi, was also active in Bihar. They undertook various measures in their movement against untouchability. They found a "Depressed classes League in the province."²⁵ A propaganda party consisting of the people from all castes was set up.²⁶ The members travelled on foot through the villages of different parts of the province exhorting the villagers to grant the same social status to the untouchables as was available to

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. 'Rajendra Prasad Private Papers', F. No. II/35, Consultation Collection - 2.

26. Ibid.

caste Hindus.²⁷ They organised several Harijan conferences in different districts and different thanas of the province. Extensive surveys were done by them to remove the difficulties of water supply. They also started a number of schools. They set up around 256 schools between 1934 and 1935.²⁸ In the same period around 25 wells were repaired and opened for the untouchable castes;²⁹ and around 11 temples were opened to the untouchables by the Sangh.³⁰ During the Census of 1931 political parties sought to persuade the lower castes to deny their low caste status: "At this census, however, political consideration probably overweighed all else and many efforts were made to induce untouchables to record themselves as 'Hindus' and nothing else."³¹

Hindu temples for public worship were founded by caste Hindus in the pious belief that the founders would thereby acquire religious merit. The relationship between these

27. Ibid...

28. Ibid...

29. Ibid...

30. Ibid...

31. Ibid...

temples and the society was to be regulated by the rules laid down in sacred books.

It is laid down in those books that only the caste Hindus should be permitted to enter temples for worship, and that the different castes are to be allowed access to different parts of the temple, at different distances from the sanctum, according to the respective ranks of the castes. Those who are beyond the pale of the four castes, like the depressed castes, are permitted only a sight of the Gopuram.³²

These sacred books promulgated the ideas of ceremonial purity in matters of worship. Temples were defiled by the breach of the norms of ceremonial purity by any of the depressed classes entering the temples. However, there were certain occasions which were regarded as exceptional and at those times restrictions were not strictly imposed. People of any caste and creed could worship on these rare occasions. It is not that in those exceptional situation the concept of defilement did not work. Infact, to purify the sanctum special ceremonies were observed. We can get a clear idea from the following statement.

The only exception recognised by Hindu scriptural authority and usage is during festival occasions,

32. Political (special), F. No. 30 of 1933, (State Archives, Patna), Temple Entry Bill: Opinion of the Emergency Committee, All India Varnasrama Swarajya Sangha.

and the defilement occasioned by mixing up, of different sections of the Hindu community on those occasions, is effaced soon after by a special ceremonial observance which is believed to restore purity in worship.³³

Temples had an important place in the social life of the people. They served as village hall or town hall for the public in general and was a place for social gathering. They sometimes accommodated schools. Thus if prohibition was imposed upon temple entry, it also denied the lower caste people a right to attend schools. This feature was, however, more common in South India than in Bihar. Writing about the importance of temple in the society J.H., Hutton, in Census of India 1931, says: "A temple... is more than a purely religious institution and the right of temple entry is by some regarded as the key position with regard to the removal of untouchability."³⁴ In the 1930 the temple entry movement gained ground.

In the temple entry movement we often hear of members of high castes actively participating and leading the way. "In Sitamarhi there was a small meeting of Hindus who took a few untouchables to a temple."³⁵ In certain cases when

33. Ibid.

34. Hutton, op. cit. p. 484.

35. Political (special), F No. 282 of 1932; Letter from D.M. Muzaffarpur No. - 282-C. Dated 22nd September 1932.

objections were raised to the entry of lower castes into temples, the caste Hindu population who were supporting the movement, tried to help the entry. In Hajipur local pleaders took a small gathering of untouchables to a temple where they were allowed to do Puja..."³⁶ Similarly in Chapra too, with certain restrictions, lower castes were allowed entry into the temples. "Several of the important temples in Chapra have been thrown open to the untouchables with certain restrictions, e.g., the idols must not be touched by them."³⁷ On 20 September, 1932, in the morning about 150 Hindus and untouchables attended the Puja in Radu Babu's temple at Bettiah. At Motihari and Raxoul also some members of the depressed classes did Darshan of the idol.³⁸ Sometimes, this temple entry movement was facilitated by Hindu Mahasabha too. Jamuna Prasad Singh, secretary, Hindu Sabha Gaya, invited the Brahmans, gentries and the depressed classes of the town and "impressed on them to remove untouchability and allow the untouchables to enter and worship in the temples. None raised any objection. Later on the untouchables were taken to Bageshwari temple, Pitamaheshwar

36. Ibid..

37. Extract from Saran Diary, 22.9.32. Ibid..

38. Extract from Champaran Diary - 23.9.32. Ibid..

temple, Sirahia Ghat temple and also the Thakurbaris of Rai Prasad and Mannoo Lal without any objection."³⁹ Sometimes owners of the temples themselves convened the meeting of lower caste people and declared their sympathy for the temple entry efforts. On the 25 September 1932 a very large meeting of over a thousand men, mainly of the lower classes, was held under the presidentship of Mahanth Dhansraj Puri of Sikta. After the usual pious resolution, the President announced that he had "no objection to the untouchables worshipping in his temple."⁴⁰

Some sections of upper castes thus supported the temple entry movement. However access to the temples was not easy. Various objections were raised to oppose the movement. While some temples were opened for worship to the low caste people, even these temples were not continuously open for them. In many cases after the low caste people left the temple an elaborate arrangement was made to purify it. "In Muzzaffarpur,... the owner of the temple, where untouchables had worshipped, has spent three days in purification ceremonies."⁴¹ Another case in point which reflected a

39. Extract from the Confidential diary of the S.P. Gaya, dated 10.3.32. Ibid.

40. Commissioner's office, Muzaffarpur, dated 5. October, 1932. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

similar kind of attitude took place in Champaran. "11 Domes and Chamars were taken to Shahu's temple and Panchmandil. They were allowed to go upto a point where the caste Hindus were permitted. It is however interesting to note that Praschit was done after they left the Mandir."⁴² Similarly in Darbhanga, "in at least one temple the admission of the untouchables was immediately followed by atonement ceremony and the purification of the temple."⁴³

Among the high caste people, we can thus see two reactions to the temple entry movement. The conservative and orthodox section resisted the movement; the liberal section supported it. However, two groups were operating even among the high caste reformers. It was reported :

Among the reformers there are two sections, i) those desiring to do away with caste and all religious institutions but they have a poor following ii) those desiring to make changes in the institution of Hindus, without desiring to do away with caste, such as they think are called for by exigencies or requirements of modern times. The second class have some following.⁴⁴

British records usually suggest that the leadership of the movement was in the hands of upper castes. It is true

42. Extract from Champaran Dairy, dated - 23.9.32. Ibid..

43. Commissioner's office, Muzaffarpur. Ibid..

44. Political (special), F. No. 30 of 1933 (State Archives, Patna), Temple Entry Bill. Opinion of the Emergency Committee, All India Varnasrama Swarajya Sangha.

that many of the leaders came from high caste background, but not all upper caste members supported the movement. To understand the nature of leadership we need to look at the influence of Congress politics. The leaders were, after all, Congressmen. Writing about the pattern of consciousness and mixed reaction of people in Bhagalpur one report gave the following illustration of the movement,

the slight excitement noticeable is among the followers of Mr. Gandhi and the advance section of Hindu public. Meetings have been held in a few places to discuss the removal of untouchability and the redress of other grievances of the depressed classes, but they have not been well attended and little enthusiasm has been shown except organisers themselves.... Processions were formed in some places and the depressed classes were allowed entry in a few temples.⁴⁵

From this report again it can be inferred that only some high caste people, only those who were Gandhi's followers, were showing their sympathy to the untouchables movement. Most other high caste men were opposed to the endeavour.

In fact, in many cases upper caste members aggressively opposed the movement of lower castes. We are informed : "The

45. Political (special), F.No.282 of 1932 (State Archives, Patna; Magistrate office Bhagalpur, dated, 21, st Setem-ber, 1932.

high class Hindu i.e. Brahmans and Rajputs etc. are opposed to the abolition of untouchability."⁴⁶ They saw Gandhi's endeavours for the removal of untouchability as coercive. High caste people complained of being pressurised to support Gandhi's cause. They thought that various political leaders were championing this movement mainly because Gandhi had plunged into action. Madan Mohan Malviya sent a letter addressed to the public of Saran in which he appealed to the caste Hindus to "remove untouchability in order to save the life of Mahatma Gandhi."⁴⁷ Such actions were seen as coercion. And we are told: "The opinion is that compromise which is brought about by coercion is not likely to last long and would in the end result in a class warfare."⁴⁸ In Motihari, in September 1932, there was a meeting to discuss this question of untouchability. After the meeting held in Motihari "some of the influential Hindus were heard whispering that it was impossible for them to sit and dine with chamars and Dusadhs."⁴⁹ A similar opinion was current in Monghyr too and a contemporary report said that "generally speaking the

46. Extract from Champaran Dairy, dated 23.9.32. Ibid.

47. Extract from Saran Dairy, dated 22.9.32. Ibid.

48. Extract from Champaran Dairy, dated 23.9.32. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

Brahmans and Marwaris are opposed to this new movement."⁵⁰
In a letter addressed to the Governor of Bihar and Orissa, Varnasrama Swarajyasangha Sakhasabha of Baidyanathdham showed its bitter antipathy to the Bill which was to be introduced in the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council of Bihar concerning the access of lower castes to the temples. The letter said :

we strongly oppose the entry in our sacred temples by the untouchables and we earnestly hope that His Excellency the viceroy of India and their Excellencies, the Provincial Governors would be so generous as to refrain from giving their consent to the Bills which are to be moved by Dr. Subbaranjan, Mr. M.C. Raja and Ranga Iyer in Legislative Councils and Legislative Assembly concerning the entry of untouchability in our sacred temples.⁵¹

High caste people, specially the orthodox section among them, saw this movement as a threat to the fundamental puritanical aspect of Sanatan Dharma and the ritualistic purity of the temples. "This agitation is against the fundamental principles of purity of Hinduism, is against specific shastric injunctions for preserving the purity and sanctity

50. Extract from Monghyr Diary, dated. - 24.9.32. Ibid..

51. Political (Special), F No. 30 of 1933 (State Archives, Patna).

of temples, and against the time proved notion of hereditary, physical and social purity according to Hinduism."⁵²

This section of caste Hindus were still not able to appreciate the idea of removing untouchability. To them the institution of untouchability which survived on the basis of the norms of purity and impurity was the fundamental basis of Hinduism. Sanatana Varnashrama Dharma Sanraskshak Sabha expressed :

It is not for us to point out here that the influences of contact or touch on the individual and heredity have been recognised by sanitation and science and this attack upon untouchability has implication and repercussions against our whole social fabric and against regulations for social and individual purity, in its various ramification in the homes, castes and social relationships. There is certainly bound to be in every society, men or groups, different levels or standards in purity, morals and culture. Hindu society has systematised these social orders or groups, which we believe to be in its glory and strength rather than weakness.⁵³

This statement reflects the general notion of the orthodox section of the high caste population. Since they could not visualise any problem with the general institution of caste, they tried to preserve it.

52. Home Political, F No. 50/III/ 1933 POLL (National Archives, N. Delhi).

53. Ibid..

III

If the higher castes and specially its orthodox section opposed the temple entry movement, the lower castes were themselves not always very sympathetic. They were suspicious of the movement. Sometimes, they were not even clear about the objectives of the movement. Officials reported: "The depressed classes, with the exception of very few, have no idea of the matter."⁵⁴ Those who knew of the movement, even among them there was a section of the population who saw temple entry as an effort which was not in tune with dharmic specifics. "Sanatani Avarnas (untouchables) do not claim temple entry as it is in violation of religious injunctions."⁵⁵ They had a fear of arousing the wrath of God against them. They thought that if they entered temples, they would arouse divine displeasure. They still could not visualise their right to enter temples as a possibility. A Dome said that "neither he nor his castemen would enter the temple if allowed. He gave as his reasons the long tradition

54. Political (special), F. No. 282 of 1933 (State Archives, Patna); Magistrate Office Bhagalpur, dated 21st September, 1932.

55. Political (Special), F.No. 30 of 1933 (State Archives, Patna).

and fear of divine displeasure."⁵⁶ In certain cases, lower castes did try to project temple entry movement as an enforced act which they desisted. "The sweepers of Motihari have actually filed a petition before the District Officers, stating that they were being compelled against their will to enter and worship in temples."⁵⁷ Justice, which was an organ of anti-Brahman Party, and was quite politically conscious, reflects upon the general lower caste attitudes :

for many centuries these peoples, most of whom until recently were Animists, were content to worship at their own shrines, and to try to force themselves into Hindu temples is not... to make themselves popular. Nor can we think that any grave wrong is done by their continued exclusion... they would be better occupied in improving their own condition than in a violent attempt to assert rights which no one had heard of till a few years ago.⁵⁸

Though this statement was made in the context of anti Brahman movement active in Poona, it also reflects the condition current in Bihar. This reflects the mental constraints within which the lower caste people were still bound.

56. Political (Special), F. No. 282 of 1933; Commissioner's Office Muzaffarpur.

57. Ibid.

58. Hutton, op. cit, p. 484.

This chapter has tried ^{to} discuss the kinds of civil disabilities the lower castes were subject to, and the levels at which changes were taking place. The temple entry movement shows how both the high and the low castes were constrained by their traditional thinking and wanted to continue with caste specific relations. On the one hand the high caste people, specially its orthodox sections, saw temple entry as an attack on Hindu religion, on the other hand the lower castes saw it with suspicion. However the wider political movement had its influence. Under the inspiration of Gandhi the temple entry movement created a stir in the caste society of Bihar.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discussion we saw various dimensions of caste. We saw the structure of caste, the norms of caste interaction, and the patterns of mobility within castes. We discussed the gradual changes that could be observed in twentieth century Bihar.

Different castes aspired to new status. They emulated the social insignias and life styles of the higher castes. But at the same time they wanted to maintain a distinct identity for themselves. That is why when Bhumihars wanted to become Brahmans, they claimed to be Bhumihar-Brahman or Ajachak-Brahman. As we have already seen Ajachak-Brahmans were those Brahmans who did not take alms. They were trying to distance themselves from other Brahmans. Similarly Kurmis wanted to be returned as Kurmi-Kshatriyas, Goalas claimed to be Jadubansi-Kshatriyas; Koeris saw themselves as Kushwaha-Kshatriya. In all these claims, the intention was to acquire kshatriya status. But at the same time they were defining a distinct identity. They were not dissolving their difference with others.

Not only were they trying to maintain their individual identity, they were organizing themselves in many ways. Caste sabhas were formed and frequent meetings were held. In

the meetings that were held the social and material well-being of the castes were discussed. The caste sabhas wanted to spread education among caste members. Schools were established for caste members. There was an effort to eliminate conflict and segregation amongst sub-castes. Commensal and marriage relations were established among the members of the sub-castes. Thus rigidities were breaking down and there was a process of unification of sub-castes within each caste.

Another objective of the caste sabhas was to prepare their castemates for government jobs and other professions. However, questions of social and religious reforms which could affect the society as a whole was never seriously discussed by the caste sabhas. Controversial issues like inter-dining and intermarriage between different castes were also rarely discussed. Widow re-marriage was never supported since its prohibition was a symbol of status. Caste sabhas deepened caste exclusiveness and conflict among different castes. Where as in the traditional society, it was the concept of ritual status and the concept of purity and impurity which restricted free social interaction, now it was the organized institutional conflict among different castes which limited caste interaction.

Various developments were taking place in Bihar society during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There

was an improvement in transport and communication facilities. The expansion of the market economy and colonial state interventions were bringing about changes in the caste society. Despite the fact that traditional economic dependence of different castes upon each other was weakening, the traditional caste position remained important in the changing society. Accessibility to new opportunities depended upon the status and position in traditional society. This is the reason why higher castes could take advantage of new opportunities, while lower castes still engaged themselves mainly as servile laborers or factory workers.

Crystallization of caste identities and the generalized pattern of upward social mobility led to conflict and competition. Twentieth century Bihar thus witnessed various caste conflicts. Politics was becoming a means of social mobility. Caste being an effective mobilizer, ambitious groupings started using it for their political ends.

The concept of purity and pollution underwent changes. At public places where necessities of life compelled collective work and inter-action, norms of purity-pollution were generally not observed. In private places the norms continued to be widely maintained.

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