

Migration and Caste Mobility in an Indian Village

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The present paper is based on the survey conducted in Makhadumpur village of Fatehpur district of Uttar Pradesh. It has been carried out through participant observation and the interviews with the heads of the families of various castes, with the help of a schedule.

The objectives of the paper are :

- (i) to discuss the emerging trends in caste structure and migration in an Indian village;
- (ii) to study the factors of migration of dominant landowning caste from the village; and
- (iii) to throw light on the factors of selling and buying of land by the rural people;

A study of an Indian village can be made by a survey of its caste structure as it actually functions in the village¹ and one of the main features of the village community is the existence of the dominant landowning castes. In Makhadumpur, the Kayastha has been a dominant caste, for, the Kayasthas held a major part of the land and the majority among various castes.

In the village, a hierarchy of the castes existed in which the Brahmins, the Thakurs and the Kayasthas were treated as higher castes (which are deprived of the Reservation, Policy of the government) and the Nai (Barber), the Kahar (water-carrier) the Kumar (pot-maker), the Lohar (Blacksmith), the Teli (oil-man), the Pasi, the Kori and the Chamar as lower castes among which first five are treated as Backward and the rest three as Scheduled Castes under the Reservation Policy of the State.

Daniel Thorner² identified three prominent categories in the countryside : Malik-----, Kisan-----, and Majdoors. In Makhdumpur there are people

- (i) who cultivate their own land (Kumar, Chamar and Pasi);
- (ii) who do not cultivate their own land wholly depend on labourers (Kayastha).
- (iii) who partially cultivate their own land and partially depend on the labourers (Brahmins and Thakurs);
- (iv) who cultivate their own land as well as rented land (Kumar, Chamar and Pasi);
- (v) who cultivate others land on contract;

- (vi) who work as agricultural labourers (Kumar, Chamar, Pasi and Koro);
- (vii) whose services are required by the landholders permanently on wages (Kumhar, Chamar, Pasi and Kori);
- (viii) who are paid for special kinds of services at the time of the harvests (Nai, Kahar, Kumar and Blacksmith);
- (ix) who are paid for special kind of services at the moment (Bharbhooja);
- (x) who are partially dependent on agriculture (Kayastha);
- (xi) who go to the city daily for earning cash wages;
- (xii) who do not dwell in the village but come to serve the people for special kind of services from surrounding villages (Mali and Bhangi);

In the changing society, everyone desires to lead a decent life and the processes like modernization have given the way in this regard. "It is common sense to assume that people do not like to move downward, preferring to keep their rank or to improve it."³

The ideas of pollution and purity are the main factors which cause the distance between the higher and the lower castes. The lowers could not eat food or marry with the higher, they could not enter into the holy places, they could not take water from the wells or ponds, they could not study or sing sacred literature related to Hindu religion. But the society is never stable. Srinivas says:

"A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by sanskritising its ritual and rites and beliefs of the Brahmins and the adoption of the Brahmanic way of life by a low caste seems to have frequently though theoretically forbidden".⁴

The present study also confirms the above statement. The families as a whole or the majority of the members of the families of the two out of four Kahar, two out of six Kumhar and the only Nai family among the Backward castes and four out of fifteen Pasi and three out of six families among the Scheduled castes have totally left to take non-vegetarian food and liquor.

The caste discipline is also changing. In the past, the higher castes were united against the lower castes. Due to dominance in land, they forced the lower castes to follow their orders but, at present, the Backward and the Scheduled Castes are being more united, they are using their constitutional rights. They are also keenly interested in depriving the higher castes from their traditional right." There are imperatives which prompt men to resist and to reject an inferior status and these imperatives persist regardless of the way in which any given society has legitimated inequality. Srinivas even suggests that the stronger the norms against social mobility, the greater desire for it: "It is possible that the very ban on the lower castes adoption of Brahmanical way of life had an exactly opposite effect"⁵. This is also a reason due to which the higher castes are bound to change their attitude and all the families of the Brahmins, the Thakurs and the Kayasthas have been coming into contact with the lower caste people for last two decades or so. They have been interdining in various social functions though the females do not want to change themselves. It is noteworthy that though the attitudes of higher castes are changing but the nineteen family heads of

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various lower castes out of twenty four told that they and family-members are not ready to interdine with the people of the parallel castes even in the functions though they were ready to interdine with the higher castes.

The investigator also came to know that there are few lower caste people who migrate to the cities and do not like to disclose their caste identities due to inferiority feeling, convert their caste status and behave in the same manner. For example, a Kahar of the village established himself as a priest and 'guru' in Kanpur city who could give the "mantra" of "Ram Nam" to those who were interested in. He also used to guide the rituals. Due to this he was also facilitated by a Brahmin with a quarter free of rent. He also used to wear 'upanayan' (the sacred thread) to show that he was a true and sacred Brahmin.

A significant change is also visualised in the professions of several castes. No Brahmin has adopted the profession of a priest, no Thakur has ever been a village chief or a leader and none of the families of Kumhars, Pasis, Chamars and Telis are doing their traditional occupations.

In the past, the manual occupations were regarded as degrading but now the dignity of manual work is stressed. "In the absence of a simple interest in manual skills and the intricacies of animals and machines, their concern, as Veblen has shown, is with the social prestige and material comfort, and this often overshadows the matter-of-fact aspects of daily living." ⁶

There is an inverse, relationship between the ownership of land and the performance of labour in agrarian societies. This belief is substantially corroborated by the behaviour of certain categories of landowners in India, specially those belonging to highest castes-----whenever such inverse relationships between land and labour prevail, the principal economic inequalities would be mainly between those "who own land but do not work and those who work but own no land" ⁷ or own a very little.

The idea of cash income and sale of the land have motivated for the migration from rural to urban pockets. The study shows that one of the three Brahmin and eight out of the thirty Kayastha families have wholly disconnected their relationship with the natal village after selling their all types of landed properties while a majority of them have, though maintained their part of properties and occasionally go to the village but mainly they reside in the nearby cities - particularly in Fatehpur. The sellers have sold their lands to those who used to work in their farms as agricultural labourers or tenants. Since the dominant caste people have either sold their land or do not reside there and are expected to sell within short time, they have lost their control over lower castes and the labourers have started to bargain with the higher castes. The tenants also want to put their conditions and the landowners are bound to agree with them. There are instances, but limited, that if the conditions of one tenant of any caste were not accepted the others also put the same or more conditions against the landowners and sometimes the farms remained unploughed.

Occasionally, the open revolts against the dominant castes took place which sometimes altered the mode of intercaste relationship. So the people started to migrate from the village.

The investigator found, during the course of the study that, the migration is taking place both in the dominant and other castes but the difference between

the two is that, among the Kayasthas, the all members of the families have permanently migrated while among the other castes, only a few members of the families have temporarily migrated. It was also observed that the reasons behind the migration among the various castes vary the following factors were identified during the course of study:

- (i) lack of social facilities;
- (ii) inavailability of the labours for agricultural purposes;
- (iii) dishonesty of the tenants;
- (iv) mere agricultural production could not meet their needs;
- (v) to live in cities— as a mark of prestige;
- (vi) change in social structure and Jajmani system;
- (viii) the migration of the youths of the families;
- (viii) services or business outside;
- (ix) insecurity feeling;
- (x) tenant's apathy towards their lands;

The investigator interviewed those people also who had purchased the land how they managed the money. They responded as under :—

- (i) income from subsidiary occupations except main occupations;
- (ii) hard manual work by all the family-members, and unity among them;
- (iii) savings due to limited expenses;
- (iv) cheaper rates of migrant's properties;
- (v) support of those family-members who got employment outside;

The Kayastha migrants are not very happy in their new places. Most of them hail from middle class and are in salaried position.

The main findings of the study are :

- (i) The traditional structural distance among various castes—based on pollution and purity – is diminishing. The stronger norms against social mobility have generated greater desire for upward rise and there is a constant strive for upward mobility, specially in lower caste people. They are 'sanskritising' themselves, becoming aware of the constitutional provisions in their favour and depriving higher caste people from their traditional rights;
- (ii) There are two forms of migration :—
 - (a) Migration of the family as a whole (among Kayasthas)
 - (b) Migration of a few members of the family (among other castes);
- (iii) Emerging trends (push and pull factors) in caste structure force the people for migration from the village—mainly to non-manual workers and non-workers while those who devote themselves in manual works are gaining its benefits;
- (iv) The dominant caste migrants are bound to sell their landed property of the village due to several reasons and the people who do not migrate (mainly the lower caste people) are major purchase who are supported in cash by these family-members

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who have got the employment outside.

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- (4) Srinivas, M.N., Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, p.30;
- (5) Lipset, S.M. and Bendix, R.; Social Mobility in Industrial Society, p. 63;
- (6) Ibid, p. 167;
- (7) Betteille, A., Studies in Agrarian Social Structure, p, 121;