

Social Relationships Among Scheduled Castes: A Sociological Study in Selected Villages of Tamil Nadu



Sociology

KEYWORDS : Caste, social relationships, scheduled castes

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ABSTRACT

Every society has a unique system to stratify their members. The statuses are accorded based on their rank in the social ladder. Caste is a typical social system which divides the groups and restricts their social relationships. It manifests in numerous ways. The present study examines the social relationship between the sub groups of scheduled castes.

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Introduction

The concept of Social equality is a myth. Indian society has been divided into various fragments, castes or Jati since time immemorial. The caste, the unique social stratification system, is being practiced in rural and urban India. It decides the occupation, status, marriage and other privileges. Jati in India refers to interdependent, hierarchically ranked, birth-ascribed groups. The ranking is manifested in public esteem accorded to the members of the various groups, in the rewards available to them, in the power they wield and in the nature and mode of their interaction with others. The purity and pollution, the very salient feature of caste system play a vital role. It clearly demarcates the social relations and day-to-day life of the individuals. However, there is vertical and economic interdependence among the various castes which is known as Jajmani System. This system facilitates the smooth functioning of society by division of labour. In the social ladder, Shudras or the Scheduled Castes or Dalits occupy the last tier which has the less privileges when compare to the other castes. The SCs or Dalits are being subjugated to various untold sufferings. The numerous disabilities are being experienced by these people under the clutches of caste Hindus. In 1935 the government of India prepared a list of castes to provide special facilities to the untouchable castes. The list has included 429 castes as scheduled caste by the virtue of their inclusion in the list. Untouchable castes constitute 16.2 per cent of the country's total population. They spread over in the various states in varying numbers. Members of the SCs earn their livelihood through their own labour, either on land belonging to others or in occupations like scavenging, flaying and tanning leather. It is a known fact that the social relations of SCs with other caste Hindus are strained and restricted in all walks of life. Interestingly, if we examine the arena of SCs, within the fold the social relations are structured and restricted.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted on two villages of Salem district of Tamil Nadu. The two villages namely Oonjakkadu of Panchukallipatti Panchayat and Komaliur of Palpakky panchayat were purposefully selected. These two villages are located very adjacent to each other. The Parayan and Chakkilayans of Scheduled caste are dwelling in these villages respectively. The observation method especially non-participant observation was adopted to describe the prevailing social relations among these scheduled castes. Besides, interaction was held with the respective group members with the help of interview schedule. There was also a focus group discussion with respondents to elicit the necessary information pertaining to the study. The main objectives of this study were to know the social relations between the two groups of scheduled caste. This study has its own limitations also. This study is applicable only to this selected area and study period. It is not possible to understand the relationships without mentioning the caste names. In this study, the caste name was used to mention the group only, not an individual. The caste names were used here for the research purpose only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The social structure of the Indian villages is well structured on caste lines. Even the settlements of the groups in the villages

are also based on the caste. The Parayan and Chakkilayan are part of scheduled caste. The term parayan is derived from the Tamil word, parai which means drum, a musical instruments played during the occasions of marriage, funerals and village festivals and on occasions when government or commercial announcement are proclaimed. The persons or a group who play that parai is called as parayan. Their traditional occupation is cultivation and extending labour force to manual work. On the other hand, the word, chakkilayan is derived from Sanskrit word shatkuli, which means flesh eaters. Their mainstay occupation is related to leather. They do the manual jobs as well as scavenging work in villages. They are also referred as Pagadai, Arundhatiyar, Madari, Toti etc. Among the SCs the Parayan's social status is somewhat greater than the chakkilayan. In this backdrop the social relations between these two castes are discussed below.

- (i) Occupational relations: The caste system facilitated the division of the labour in the society. Every caste groups have their own kulla (traditional) occupations which were traditionally practiced by their caste people. The functional theory of caste system observed that the occupation decides the status of the group in the society. As far as this study was concerned, weaving, agricultural coolie work and some other petty jobs were the main callings for Chakkilayan whereas Parayans practices agriculture and other manual jobs. There was a denial on the part of Chakkilayans when parayans approach to hire the labour force. Even they never touch the belongings of parayan like spade, sickle, hammer etc., On the other hand, parayans were ready to lend their labour services even their counterpart engage them. According to social hierarchy, the parayans occupy the highest position to chakkilayan. But in this study, chakkilayans try to keep them self aloof by which they would like to claim the higher social status. The economic affluence also plays a grave role. The chakkilayans are in well off position since weaving fetches a good remuneration compare to cultivation work. It is highly worthy to mention the work of celebrated sociologists M.N.Srinivas. In his work sankritization, he clearly mentioned that the lower caste people relinquish certain behaviour by which they claim the higher social status.
- (ii) Festival and Ritual relations: The festivals and rituals have a distinct significance in rural society. They were the major avenues of recreation and revelry. These festivals and rituals are conducted with varying participation of all caste people. This is a unifying nucleus force of common rural populace. It also highlights the status of the groups through their role. In each village there is a common village deity. All the groups throng together and observe festivity with a spirit of piety. Similarly each group in the villages have their own special and unique deity. Separate celebration will be conducted to appease their respective deities. The caste Hindus will attend the festivals organized by the parayans but will not take food and other prasatham like banana, holy coconut etc owing to their social status. On the other hand, the chakkilayans totally neglect the festivals of parayans. Even they will not take part to view drama/film except the therukkottu, a traditional indigenous fine art performed in the street without any modernity. They felt that the parayans are impure and they look down on them.

(iii) Marriage and funeral relations: It was observed that the Chakkilaiyans maintain their pride and status by cutting off themselves with paryans. Their certain deeds and actions indicate that they are greater to paryans in various aspects. For instance, generally they never accept any food in a cooked manner offered to them. They deny drinking water in the houses of paryans even though they felt thirsty. But on the part of the parayans drink and eat in the houses of chakkilaiyans. There are some great and auspicious occasions in life time like marriages. Very interestingly it was found that chakkilaiyans have never participated the marriage functions of parayans though they were an invited. Similarly, the inter caste marriages are given cold response since it violates and confutes the caste norms. The other side of the life is very dark and sorrow. Loss of life is very painful. The participation of members of the society will solace the grieved family. It was noted that chakkilaiyans took part in the funeral ceremony of paryans but they never get into the houses. They felt that their entry into parayans' house pollute them. The society exhibits its ugly face by finding caste discrimination even in the burial grounds. It is the sorry state of affairs on the part of the civilized society. In this study it was noted that there was a separate burial grounds for these two groups which located in the respective villages.

The winds of social change:

Social change is unavoidable and inevitable for the survival of the society. The traditional society like our rural India also travels towards modernity by adopting and updating leading technocrafts. However, the age old caste system is still vibrant in rural India but certain features are getting diluted. The waves of modernity brought some notable changes in the rural villages. The reach of education, modern technology shrunk and changed the life style of the people especially among the present generation. The younger generation has realized the concept of integrity and wanted to wibe with felt very comfortable to move with other caste groups. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, the caste associations gains currency and play a significant role in politics too. There was a strong urge among the caste members to organize themselves a confederation in order to protect their welfare and maintain unison among them.

CONCLUSION

Caste is the unique and quintessential social stratification system which ranks the individual and provides various privileges according to his ascribed status. It is embedded in the concept of purity and pollution which distinguishes the groups from other groups. It is basically understood that the strained relations have been prevailing between caste Hindus and SCs. On the other hand, the sub groups of SCs also practice the same hierarchical system among them to claim the higher order in the social ladder. The present study has revealed that there has been clear demarcation process which is being practiced by the chakkilaiyans and parayan since long in the study area.

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