Caste and Emerging New Social Classes: A View from Fieldwork

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Abstract

This paper as entitled "Caste and Emerging New Social Classes" talks about the factors and processes that force to work on the changing dynamics of caste to class formation in Indian rural society. In this research paper I have dealt with the overlapping congruence between caste and class in the terms of occupational shift, access to housing pattern, access to agricultural resources, access to education, and access to skills and professions among Dalits. The discourse on caste and class gain momentum in post independent Indian society. This is a dichotomous debate on the traditional caste and modern emerging new classes. The traditional salient features of caste such as hereditary occupation or division of labour based on religious qualities, hereditary membership and ascribed status, closed groups, segmental division of society, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections and restrictions on marriage are the basic components of the caste system. After independence, modernization of Indian economy based on mixed economy (agriculture plus industrialization) and democratization of its political institutions (elections, adult franchise, political parties, reservation and affirmative action) have released new economic and political power in the society. The hierarchical, stratified order of castes now functions as horizontal groups, competing for control over economic resources and power in the society. Thus, these new processes began to start and the stratification based on traditional caste changed and a new type of stratificatory system (class) is emerging in Indian .

Keywords: Caste, Class, Dalits, Stratification, Income and Occupation.

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Introduction

The grouping of people in Indian social system is stratified mainly on the basis of caste and class. In Indian rural society caste and class is a principal type of social stratification.If caste system is found to be unique in India, the class system is universal in nature, found in every society in the world. Sometimes, the word class is used to represent the group of professors,

scientists, doctors, engineers, artists, executives, technicians, students and other professionals. The word class is also used to refer the qualities of things whether these are good, better and best. But sociologically speaking, the concept of class is more used in representing a kind of social stratification than anything else. The existence of any open social group which shares the same socio-economic position/status in the society is termed as social class. Let me first, tell that caste and class are the two most salience features of the Indian social system. When we talk of caste and class certain ideal typical features come in the mind. According to Maciver and Page "When status is wholly predetermined so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it then the class takes the extreme form of caste". According to C.H. Cooley "When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary we may call it a caste." G. S. Ghurye has given six features of the caste system which are segmental division of society, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and restrictions on marriage. Although there is no uniformity among scholars while defining social class. However, according to Karl Marx, 'A class is any social group of people in the society those who won the means of production in the capitalist mode of production.' In this definition of social class he has given more focus on economic aspect of caste system. The economic aspect of caste includes mainly on the pattern of economic status of the hierarchically rankedhereditary caste groups, in terms of type of residence, occupation or economic division oflabor,ownership of land, otherdurableassets, main source of income,etc. According to Max Weber, A class refers to the social group who shares the common life-styles. In the words of Max Weber life-styles or mode of living include such matters as the mode of dress, the kind of housing pattern, food habits and etc,.

The radical changes in the system of division of labour of different castes especially in rural areas have loosened the roots of the caste system. There has been a paradigm shift in the public and intellectual discourse of Social stratification in the form of caste system which is also considered as hereditary in occupation, membership and ascribed status to class which is based on open universal, secular, achieved status system of stratification. Caste has assumed a different form in modern times. Now, the caste system is not very much associated with

hereditary occupation or there does not exist traditional division of labour based on religious qualities instead, in modern secular and democratic Indian people of different castes are free to do their own choice occupations. The historical and contemporary processes like the Influence of the Indian Constitution, Universal Adult Franchise, The new legal system, Decentralization and Panchayati Raj Institutions, Moderneducation, Modern means of transport and communication,Green Revolution, Industrialization, Urbanization, Social movements, Sanskritization, Westernization, Secularization, Modernization, Globalization, Monetization/Increasingimportanceofwealth, LPG Policies and agriculture and etc., have been importantfactors leading to change in the traditional caste system to rise of new social classes in Indian rural societies. Now, caste no longer determines the occupational career of an individual. Occupations are becoming more and more caste free.

Significance of the Study- In the studies of eminent scholars in the field of sociology of caste (A. R. Desai, 1966, Y. Singh, 1977, K.L. Sharma, 2004, D.N. Dhanagre, 1974, A. Beteille, 1965, R.K. Mukharjee, 1957 and so many others) it has been held that caste has taken its 'Modern Avatar' in contemporary India as reflected emerging formation of class and class consciousness. Hence, there is a need to evaluate and examine these factors and processes which facilitate to change of caste into class formation and caste class congruence.

Research Objectives-

- To know the salient features of caste and class in Indian rural society;
- To examine the association between caste and class and
- To find out the factors and processes related to emerging class among castes in Indian rural setting.

Research Methodology- I have used descriptive and diagnostic research design in analysis. I have used Mixed Method Approach in my study which includes both quantitative and qualitative method. Both primary and secondary sources of data I have used. Primary sources of data include direct observation and questionnaire and secondary sources of data includes Articles in newspapers, books and other government documents.

The concept of Dalit caste/class- In the late 1880's the Marathi word Dalit was used by Mahatma JotibaPhule for the untouchables castes who were oppressed and broken in the Hindu society. Dalit or oppressed is not a new word. Apparently it was used in 1930's as Hindi and Marathi translation of depressed classes. Then the term Britishers used in 1935 as in

Government of India Act for what are now called the Scheduled castes/classes. The word was also used by B.R. Ambedkar in his Marathi speech, in 'the Untouchables' published in 1948. For him Dalit means 'Broken man' in English translation. In the early 1930's M.K. Gandhi used a word for untouchable/depressed castes called 'Harijans'.

Dalits a particular segment of the society are viewed into two ways. Those using a class analysis of Indian society subsume Dalits within such class or occupational categories as peasants, agricultural labourers, factory workers, students and the like. To those using a communal analysis of caste, Dalits are the people within the Hindu society who belong to those castes which Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary occupations.

Dalits (Scheduled castes) and Social Stratification- The institutionalized inequality of caste stratification manifests its extreme form in the growth of completely segregated set of untouchables castes (Dalits) in each region. Imputed with maximum degree of ritual and social impurity, the occupations of these depressed/exterior castes were held to be lowest in normative hierarchy (Singh, 1977). These Scheduled/untouchable castes do not constitute a homogenous stratum in the system of stratification in rural village communities.

Rise of New Social Classes among Dalits: With the growth of capitalism, modern education andorganization, new class structure has emerged which includes the capitalists, white-collarmiddle class and wage labour based working class that has dented the caste system.Whitecollar jobs in industry, business and also in public sector employment has given rise to theemergence of new social classes. People engaged/working in factory, business, offices arenot able to behave and interact with others in caste- like manner at their work place. Manypeople living in cities and towns are not familiar with their neighbors caste. An increase inclassconsciousnessalso leadstoadecrease incasteconsciousness.

Empirical Findings- In this article I have dealt with the overlapping congruence between caste and class in the terms of access to housing pattern, access to agricultural resources, access to education, and access to skills and professions.Itisbased on thedatacollectedfrom therespondentsofthestudypertainingto itseconomic status.

Table1:caste-wise improvement in economic status of respondents' Families compared with earlier generations

S. No.	Castes	Improvement in Economic Status		Total Respondents
		Yes	No	
1.	Dhobi	14 (90%)	01 (10%)	15
2.	Chamar	17 (85%)	03 (15%)	20
3.	Balmiki	31 (77%)	09 (23%)	40
4.	Jatava	22 (90%)	3 (10%)	25
Total		84 (84%)	16 (16%)	100

The above Table 1 reflects that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (84%) consider that there is an improvement in the economic status of families as compared with earlier generation.Only a marginal percentage of respondents irrespective of castes within the SCs communities (16%) opine that there has not been an improvement in the economic status of their families as compared to earlier generations. Hence, it has been found that SC have improved their economic status over the generations due to various reasons likeample opportunities of employment in various sectors, migration, educational attainment,circulationofmonetarysystem, preferencesof doingbusinessand etc.

Table2:Caste-wise type of houses of respondents

S. No.	Castes	Type of housing			Total Respondents
		Kachcha	Pakka	Mixed	
1.	Dhobi	04 (24%)	10 (69%)	01(07%)	15
2.	Chamar	03 (14%)	10 (53%)	07 (33%)	20
3.	Balmiki	07 (20%)	23 (55%)	10 (25%)	40
4.	Jatava	02 (07%)	20 (83%)	03 (10%)	25
Total		16 (16%)	63 (63%)	21 (21%)	100

The above Table 2 demonstrates that more than half of the respondents (63%) said that they have pakka houses in their village which is built from concrete materials such as bricks, iron rod, cement, sand, stone and etc. whereas, a marginal percentage of respondents (16%) said that they are still force to live in Kachcha houses from decades. Only 21% of the respondents told me that they are living in mixed type of housed which is made of both clay and concrete materials. Hence, it has been found that SC have improved their housing pattern over the generations due to various reasons likeample opportunities of employment in various sectors, availing the benefits of government programmes such as Indira Awash Yojana,GaribKalyanYojana, Pradhan Mantri Awash Yojana and etc.

Main family occupation pattern- A fundamental characteristics feature of the caste system in Indian society is that a specific occupation was associated hereditarily with each caste in past. Butdue to effect of modernization many people (castes) have abandoned their traditional occupation and now theyare engaged in other occupations.

Table 3: Caste-wise main family occupational pattern of the respondents at   present

S. No.	Castes	Mainfamilyoccupation				Total Respondents
		Agriculture	Business	Service	Labour	
1.	Dhobi	04 (22%)	05 (33%)	03 (20%)	03 (20%)	**15**
2.	Chamar	05 (20%)	04 (25%)	03 (15%)	08 (40%)	**20**
3.	Balmiki	07 (18%)	15 (37%)	02 (05%)	16 (40%)	**40**
4.	Jatava	02 (08%)	13 (52%)	05 (20%)	05 (20%)	**25**
Total		**18 (18%)**	**37 (37%)**	**13 (13%)**	**32 (32%)**	**100**

It is clear from Table 3 that earlier the Scheduled caste were engaged in manual scavenging and menial labour force, but now, caste specific division of labour or caste based hereditary occupation has disappeared instead people of different castes prefer to do business (37%), agriculture (18%), Government services in (13%) and rest of the people are engaged in different other professions like labour force in construction sites, working as manpower in different industrial setup, working in offices and like others.Hence, it has been found that SC have change their traditional hereditary occupation due to various reasons like   modern

education, availability of skilled based jobs in capitalist mode of production, access to land through ceiling Act, and etc.

Table4:Caste-wise reasons behind change in main family occupation of   respondent's over generations

S. No.	Castes	Reasonsbehindchangeinmainfamily occupation				Total Respondents
		Education	Increase in Income	Business	Others	
1.	Dhobi	02 (13%)	06 (40%)	03 (20%)	04 (27%)	15
2.	Chamar	07 (35%)	06 (30%)	05 (25%)	02 (10%)	20
3.	Balmiki	07 (15%)	15 (38%)	15 (38%)	03 (08%)	40
4.	Jatava	06 (23%)	11 (45%)	05 (20%)	03 (12%)	25
Total		22 (22%)	38 (38%)	28 (28%)	12 (12%)	100

Table 4 show that out of total 100 respondents around 22% respondents consider education as main reason behind change in main family occupation over generations 38% consider increase in income as main reason behind change in main family occupation over generations. Now, people are getting moregovernment jobs indifferent sectors and due to industrialization and modernization a verities of employment attract youths to earn more than their traditional occupations. 28% consider change ofbusiness which gives more profit than their traditional occupation, and rest of the 12% consider other factors like payment of cash mode for labor, fragmentation of land overgenerations, no scope for doing traditional occupation, migration of castes to town and citiesfor better earning because there is no chance to uplift socio-economic position of their ownby practicing their traditional occupation which make them to earn more instead of doing their traditional occupation.

Table5:Caste-wisetotalannualincomeofrespondent'sfamily fromallsources

S. No.	Castes	Totalannualincome				Total Respondents
		1-50,000	50000-1 lakh	1-5 Lakh	5-20 Lakh	
1.	Dhobi	04 (27%)	06 (40%)	03 (20%)	02 (13%)	15
2.	Chamar	05 (25%)	12 (60%)	03 (15%)	--	20
3.	Balmiki	24 (60%)	08 (20%)	5 (12%)	0 2 (08%)	40
4.	Jatava	04 (17%)	12 (50%)	07 (27%)	03 (06%)	25
Total		**37 (37%)**	**38 (38%)**	**18 (18%)**	**07 (07%)**	**100**

Table 5 reflects that there is no uniformity among all the caste regarding total annual family income of respondents from all sources. Out of total 100 respondents 37% respondents earn upto50,000, 38% respondents earn 50000 to 1 (one) lakh and 18% of the respondents earn 1, 00,000 to 5 lakh as their annual family income from all sources in rupees. SCs community those who have not secured a minimum landholding size and mainly dependent on agricultural labour-forces are now earning much better compared to past. 07% respondents of the total earn 5-20 lakh, as their total annual family income from allsources in rupees. Hence, it is found that SCs have higher annual family income in recent decades.

Conclusion- In the villages, caste system has taken a new 'Avatar' as witnessed with the class division which can be differentiated on the basis of income, consumption patterns, life style, education and professional attitude,ability to shape economy. The Scheduled Castes (Dalits) aremigrating to nearby towns and cities to increase their income, attaining quality education through government provisions for them. Most of the SCs are engaged in some kind of activities in income generation process and no one is bonded labourers. Some amount of socialmobility has taken place as is evident from the progress made by the jatavs in Western Uttar Pradesh.

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