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Study of socio-economic change in the Dusadhs

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Abstract

The Dusadh is a sub-caste of the scheduled caste community. In the caste hierarchy the scheduled castes occupy the lower strata in the Hindu traditional caste system. The scheduled castes are divided into different castes and sub-caste. The Dusadh is one of sub-castes of the scheduled caste community in India. They occupy the lowest strata among the scheduled castes, particularly with regard to economic condition.

Keywords: Study of socio-economic scheduled caste community

Introduction

The present study is "Socio-Economic changes in the Dusadhs; a Geographical study of Saran District." The district of Saran with its headquarters and that of the Saran Commissioner at Chapra, contains 20 Community Development Blocks having agrarian characteristics except the Chapra Sadar Community Development Block. The Dusadhs mostly derive their livelihood from physical and menial labour, particularly agricultural labour, and are in a considerable number in this district. A few of them have also migrated from the remote areas of the district and have settled in the town of Chapra. Since ascertaining changes in the social, economic and political sphere of the section of the society in the rural as well as the urban areas is one of the objectives of the present study, the district of Chapra has been selected as the study area because if some changes have taken place it must reflect in the Chapra town area which is the oldest one in the commissioner. The present study will concentrate on the aspects like the social status and economic condition of the Dusadhs and changes in them, if any.

The caste system is the famous character of the traditional Hindu society. The position of the scheduled caste is at the bottom of the Hindu caste system. It is an important segment of our traditional Indian society and constitutes about 32% of the total population of the country. These people are socially degraded, downtrodden, boycotted, exploited, humiliated and economically destitute. This section of our society is still vulnerable.

This section of the society is totally handicapped on each and every footing of life. Their source of income is mainly physical labour and the community is subsisting on a very low income. They are in ill-health, ill-clothed, ill-fed and they live in a dwelling consisting of decrepit and dilapidated houses.

The term scheduled caste is used for a particular community in the constitution of India. It may be mentioned that the Indian population is divided into different religious faiths, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism etc. The largest number are the followers of Hinduism and they are known as Hindu. The Hindu society is again sub-divided into different castes, known as 'JATI' in Hindu literature, such as Brahmin, Bhumihar, Rajput, Chamar, Dusadh, Dom, Nai, Dhobi, Musahar, Ahir, Kamkar, Prajapati etc. It is also to be noted that the Hindu society is broadly divided in different strata in hierarchical order. Some of the castes are considered to be of the higher strata and highly respected in the Hindu society, while others of middle, or the lower strata. The scheduled caste community is at the bottom of the Hindu society; on the other hand castes like Brahmin, Raput, Bhumihar, Kayastha etc. are at the top in the hierarchical order and are known as the 'Caste Hindu'. Castes like Ahir, Swarnakar, Sahu, Koeri, Kurmi etc. are of the middle strata of the Hindu society.

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The Indian society was divided into four classes based on 'Nanusmritik' known as 'Varna'. This division was based on occupation. They were Brahmin (Priest Group with education), Kashtriyas (warrior group), Vaishyas (Related with agriculture, trade and commerce) and Shudra (Mainly known for the service of the above three Varnas). The scheduled caste community belongs to the fourth Varna, that is, Shudra, and includes a number of sub-castes. Tracing the origin of the scheduled castes one has to go back to the origin of caste itself. According to the classical theory of Varna those who sprang from the mouth of the 'BRAHMA' (The God of Creator) were called BRAHMIN, those from the arms were called the Kshastriyas, those from the thighs were called Vaishyas and those from the feet were called the Shudras. The Shudras came from the lowest part of the body and hence held the lowest position in the Varna hierarchy. The so called scheduled castes of today, belong to the Shudras Varna.

The scheduled castes of today have been referred to by the various term in the early history of India. Whereas in the Hindu scriptures, they have been called the 'Chandalas' 'Patita' and 'Shudra', in the census, they have been referred to as 'Unclean castes', 'Depressed classes', 'Exterior castes' and the like. Since the enactment of the government of India Act 1935, they have been consistently referred to as the scheduled castes. Thus many untouchable castes throughout India were listed in a separate schedule in the Act and this practice was continued in the constitution of India 1950. The list of scheduled castes can be altered only by the President of India. The Word - 'Harijan' (the children of God), which was coined by Mahatma Gandhi for the so-called untouchables is almost invariably employed as a synonym for the scheduled castes. In Bihar 23 communities have been declared as the scheduled castes! whose population, according to census of 2001, is 13048608 million which constitutes 16.6% of the total population of the state.

In other words, the scheduled caste are untouchables, and are at the lowest rank (Termed as depressed classes, the IVth Varna). In the year 1901 H. H. Risley, the then census Commissioner of India, attempted for the first time to classify the Hindu castes and accordingly the population was divided into the following seven categories:- (i) Brahmin (ii) Castes other than Brahmin, who rank above the clean Shudra. (iii) Clean Shudra (iv) Clean Castes who served degraded Brahmin (v) Castes other than groups not taken (vi)Unclean shudra (vii) Unclean feeder. In the year 1911 an enquiry was instituted to ascertain the castes and tribes, which has suffered specified religious and social disabilities, although the term, 'Depressed Class' has been mentioned in the census report 1921.

The term 'Depressed class' was used before 1930, but since the enactment of Government of India Act 1935, they have been consistently referred to as the scheduled castes. In the meantime, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar called them the untouchable. The traditional theory, the most prevalent and frequently quoted in all Dharmashastras, Mirities, and Puranas, as the story of origin of the caste system is to be found in RIG-VEDA, Book - X, hymn 90 Verses 11-12, which is known as Purusuktas. According to Prof. Ramson - the first of all the colour differences (white colour for Aryan and black colour for non-Aryans) gave birth to the caste system. After sometime the black skinned non-Aryan were treated as Shudras. These castes have different names in different periods; such as 'Chandala', 'Asur', 'Dasuyu', 'Das', 'Mlecha', 'Auarna' etc. They were at the bottom of traditional caste

hierarchy of the Hindu social system. John Nesfield has classified the caste of India and says "Caste is not a question of blood but of function." The Shudras have been treated as untouchable for thousands of years. They are untouchable because if they touch the person of upper caste the purity of the latter is said to be polluted.

For thousands of years the entire authority and power has remained in the hands of the caste Hindu. The people belonging to lower strata had to lead their lives according to the wishes and desires of the upper caste people. The former were just a prey of exploitation in the hands of the latter. They were debarred from and deprived from all sorts of political, social and other human rights. They were not allowed to take education, visit any public places and pursue any activity of their own choice. They could not be permitted to reside within the jurisdiction of upper caste area; but had to settle outside and in the dirty zone of the main villages. The people of lower strata of Hindu society were bound to accept this system as their way of life. They were so extremely neglected and humiliated that they forgot to be a member of the society and did not believe that they could ever lead a better and prosperous human life.

In the year 1828, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was intended to free the Hindu society from the evil of the caste system. Later on Swami Vivekanand, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, M. G. Ranade made a significant contribution to this cause and in the year 1873 a 'Satyashodhaksamaj' was established by Mahatma Jyotiba Phuley, a great saint and fighter of social justice, equality, liberty of the downtrodden, and thereafter shudra were enlightened by the teachings of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a social reformer, who himself belonged to this community. Dr. Ambedkar fought for each and every right of the scheduled caste community. The British government was highly impressed and responded positively and all untouchable castes were systematically listed in the schedule in the census of 1931. For the same community the word - 'Harijan' was used by the freedom fighter and saint of non-violence, the father of the nation - Mahatma Gandhi. The Simon Commission for the first time, coined the word - 'Scheduled Caste' embodied in the Government of India Act 1935. The term scheduled caste is now used in the all government offices instead of depressed class or Harijan and untouchable. In the present constitution of India, a special mention has been made of the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes for their upliftment and development on each and every footing of life.

In our constitution the Article 341, lays "The President may with respect to any state or union territory and where it is a state after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the centre, races, or tribes, which shall for the purpose of the constitution be deemed to be scheduled castes in relation to that state or union territory as the case may be." The Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs' Notification No. SRO 2477A dated the 29th October 1956 and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act 1976, dated the 18th September 1976 provides a list of 23 castes notified as scheduled castes for the state of Bihar. The Dusadh is the prominent one among the scheduled castes. Thus the number of scheduled castes varies from one state, region or union territory to another. Their traditional occupations and cultures may also vary from one place to another as list of scheduled castes.

There is a large number of ethnic groups, whose religious faiths; languages; dialects and cultural traditions are valuable and are markedly different from one another. The Dusadh among the scheduled caste is an important ethnic

group. The social condition of the Dusadh has been so organised as to justify the social identity, status and privileges prevailing in our society, and the position of Dusadh has been considered as very desirable among the scheduled caste community. The Dusadh is also known as Paswan. It is a specific identity among the scheduled caste community, and they claim their descent from 'Dushasana', a main figure in the epic of Mahabharat. This section of the community is concentrated in eastern Uttar Pradesh, mainly in Varanasi; Mirzapur; Ghazipur; Jounpur; Balia; Gorakhpur and Azamgarh. They are concentrated also in Bihar and are largest in the population of Bihar among the scheduled population; and are also found in West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

The Bihari Dusadhs, described as Watchman' are so situated because of their former soldierly tradition and present propensity towards crimes against property. And as not all of them can maintain themselves by this activity a fairly large section is engaged in portering and day labour. There are so many' scholars in the field of social geography, who have come to the point that the Dusadh is a warrior caste among all the scheduled castes. The Dusadh by its specific work culture were recruited in the armies of Jarasandha and also they were appointed as watchman. The Dusadh is the dominating community among the all scheduled caste section having their specific character. Risley has also considered that the Dusadh is a Dravidian cultivator and servile caste of Bihar.

The Dusadh is wandering culture and knife-grinder, and small cultivator. The position of Dusadh is high among the scheduled caste community in India due to their clean work. But they tamed pigs in north Bihar plains, and it is a means of economic development of that very area.

The difference of opinion of the origin of Dusadh between H. H. Risley and Dalton is not substantial. The distinction between Aryan and Dravidian groups appears to rest solely upon peculiarities of language and is rejected and we look only to physical characteristics; the so-called Dravidian and Aryan can only be regarded as local varieties of one and the same stock." The Dusadh are generally agricultural labourers. They belong to the category of scheduled castes. In the past they were also Palakee (Palagune) bearers. They are divided into the following sub-groups:

(1) Kannaiya (2) Maghaiya (3) Paliwar and (4) Kuri. Their surnames are Manjhi, Das and Paswan. The Dusadhs have a custom of bride-price as among the following castes of Bhuiya, Chero, Dom, Dusadh. The Dusadh claim to be descendants of Arjun Pandava, a great traditional person of the Mahabharat epic. The Dusadh are primarily a North Bihar caste and possibly the original inhabitants of this area; as they have, I believe, a traditional caste of Bihar. The Dusadh by caste; he is the lowest representative of the police. It is his duty to report all happening in or about the village to the police-station. The pigs are usually possessed by 'Dusadh'. The high caste Hindu, who are often vegetarians, have a prejudice against poultry keeping. P The term Dusadh corpse bearer, (Dead body) Dom- 'a type of out-caste' and Kamangar - "Bowmaker-', are unknown to south African Bhojpuri speaking people. Piggery and poultry is traditional occupation of Dusadh.

Conclusion

The present study aims to analyse the socio-economic changes in the Dusadhs of Saran district. Here Dusadhs are

backward socially & economically like other parts of the state. There is a vast gap-between the socio-economic condition of the upper caste and scheduled caste and also between scheduled caste like Musahars, Doms, Mehtras, Nats and Pan Swasis, such type of unbridgeable gap is found among the scheduled caste community. The Dusadhs, the Chamars, the Dhobis and the Pasis are in better condition compared to, Musahars, Doms, Mehtrars, Nats, Banti, Bauri, etc. But on the whole all the scheduled caste population are lagging behind the barof social & econolllic development in the state of Bihar. They have to face problems related to caste, creed, feelings of higher and lower and rigid socio-economic problems and backwardness, and to suggest measure for their amelioration.

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