

CHANGE AND STAGNATION IN INDIAN VILLAGE SOCIETY

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I. THE MODERNIZATION OF INDIA AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VILLAGE STUDIES

AS IS WELL KNOWN, Indian society is distinguished most markedly from that of other countries by the fact that the caste system is deeply rooted in India.

In order that Indian society shall advance along the road to modernization it is necessary that this caste system should be done away with. The Constitution promulgated after Indian Independence negated the social distinctions observed among members of the different castes (a characteristic of Indian society which has a long tradition behind it), and in particular announced the aim of liquidating untouchability. We may suppose that these provisions are thought of as being pre-conditions for the modernization of India.

However, although it has been negated in law, social discrimination on the basis of caste still survives. The acceptance of the principle that "all men are essentially equal" is an indispensable condition for the establishment of a modern society, but this principle cannot be said to be in operation in Indian society, for distinctions of status based on birth are still to be found. It seems likely that, so long as this caste society exists in India, the development of India's economy will be baulked at every turn and the country will be unable to make steady economic growth. A society of the kind required by a modern economy is completely incompatible with the caste system.

Social discrimination on the basis of caste (and particularly discrimination against the Scheduled Castes—aboriginal peoples and untouchables) is much more marked in the rural areas than in urbanized localities. When we see the evils of the caste system represented in a concentrated form by the social phenomenon of untouchability as it occurs in village society, we may even be led to despair of ever being able to abolish untouchability at all. The Indian village is still as much a caste society as ever. This means that India as a whole is still a

caste society, for the overwhelming majority of Indians live in agricultural villages. As is well known, India is one of the advanced countries in Asia from the point of view of the development of industry. Yet, in spite of this, India has a large proportion of its population engaged in agriculture and a large proportion of its production is occupied by agricultural products. The modernization of Indian agriculture and the Indian village are therefore indispensable conditions for the future development of the Indian economy, but the caste system is an important factor impeding such a development of Indian agriculture in the direction of modernization.

The examination of the social structure of the Indian village with reference to the caste system is therefore of some importance for the development of the Indian economy as a whole. Apart from its practical significance, this question is a subject of great academic interest, and consequently a large number of surveys and studies dealing with this question have been produced by sociologists and social anthropologists. Not a few of these are notable contributions to knowledge. However, in the majority of these surveys and studies we cannot discern any intention of pressing in the direction of the abolition of the caste system or of finding the way by which the Indian village can be modernized. These studies give detailed descriptions of the social reality of the agricultural village, but they do not attempt to determine the direction in which change is taking place in the village, nor do they discuss the measures which must be adopted in order to liquidate caste society. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that this is a difficult matter in which forecasts can scarcely be made, but it is also due to the fact that these sociologists and social anthropologists use a methodology which ignores "the economic approach."

In contrast to these studies, the surveys and studies which have been written from the point of view of the science of economics do not attach much importance to the caste system and other related social factors. "Agro-economic research" is being intensively pursued in India, and in this field also some excellent pieces of work have been produced, but the majority of these studies do not attempt to arrive at a synthesis of the economic structure and the social structure in a way which can be described as satisfactory. The question of the relation between social factors and economic factors is of greater importance when we are dealing with people living in a pre-modern society separated by some distance in time from the "*homo economicus*" of the economists than when we are dealing with the people of modern

societies. More importance must therefore be attached to a sociological approach in such studies, and a sociological element must be incorporated in the economic interpretation of the subject-matter.

Thus, in future studies of this subject it will be necessary for the studies of sociologists and economists to supplement one another and to be related to one another. As R. Mukherjee has pointed out, "the lack of a balanced view of the dynamics of rural society" has been very noticeable in the studies of this subject which have appeared up to the present.¹ The task facing future students of this subject, therefore, is that of taking account of this unbalance, integrating sociological analysis and economic analysis, and determining the way by which the modernization of Indian rural society may be accomplished.

It is from this point of view that we propose to discuss the topic of change and stagnation in Indian village society, concentrating our attention on the caste system. It need hardly be said that, under the present circumstances in which interdisciplinary studies are still a thing of the future, and considering the present writer's imperfect acquaintance with the subject in question, the following statement of our views can only be in the nature of an essay. In spite of this, however, we think that such an essay may serve some useful purpose, if only because it will provide some degree of orientation for future studies.

II. THE TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE INDIAN VILLAGE

Before we address ourselves to the task of discovering the social changes which have taken place in the Indian village and consider the direction in which these changes tend, we must first give some account of the traditional social structure of the village. As is well known, studies of the Indian village began in the early stages of the establishment of British colonial rule, and arose out of the necessities of fiscal administration. It was inevitable that in these studies the Indian village with its traditional social order should appear to the eyes of the British writers as a "completely self-sufficient, isolated republic." Their studies of "the village community" were concerned with the self-sufficient socio-economic structure of the village, with systems of communal land-ownership and collective responsibility in the payment of taxes, and with the organs of village self-government which supervised these social

¹ R. Mukherjee, "On Village Studies in India," *Indian Journal of Scientific Research*, Vol. IV, No. 2, Dept. of Post-Graduate Studies in Sociology, J.V. College, Baraut U.P., 1963.

mechanisms. The conception of the Indian village which was built up from the study of these aspects of rural society was that of an occluded communal social organism.

The Indian village may certainly be regarded as having maintained a traditional order of society and as having constituted a little isolated universe of its own in the period before the establishment of British rule. We may say with M.N. Srinivas¹ that this isolation was a product of such "factors" as "the absence of roads," the "prevalence of widespread political instability," and the fact that "very little money circulated in the rural areas." Of necessity, this state of society underwent some change under British rule. However, the essential nature of British colonial rule was such that it delayed the modernization of India, barred the way to industrialization, and did not lead to the break-up of the self-sufficient economy of the village.²

Of course, as B. Singh says, the idea that the Indian village was completely self-sufficient and isolated is a mixture of myth and reality.³ M.N. Srinivas and many other writers have pointed out⁴ that, although it is true that little currency was in circulation, there was a certain number of itinerant merchants, and weekly markets were a long-established institution. As we shall show below, the self-sufficient division of labour in the village was indeed supported by the caste system, but it was not the case that members of all the castes whose occupations were necessary for the life of the people were present in every village. This was especially so in North India, where caste endogamy and village exogamy combined to draw the villagers into social relations established by marriage which transcended the individual village. We need not add that caste Panchayats were organized which united members of the different castes living in neighbouring villages.

Further, although it is the practice to speak of "the village community," it is not the case that the village was a communistic community in which all the villagers shared equally in the ownership of the land. No community of the kind which is characteristic of the idyllic classless society of the period of primitive communism has been found in the caste society of the Indian village. The communal

¹ M.N. Srinivas, "The Industrialisation and Urbanisation of Rural Areas" in his *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1962, pp. 77-79.

² On this point, see R. Mukherjee, *The Dynamics of a Rural Society: A Study of the Economic Structure in Bengal Villages*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1957.

³ B. Singh, *Next Step in Village India: A Study of Land Reforms and Group Dynamics*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1961, p. 1.

⁴ M.N. Srinivas, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

ownership of land did not exist in all Indian villages, and even in those areas where the communal ownership of land was found, the institution of communal ownership was in practice much complicated by the caste hierarchy, and distinctions were made between individuals in regard to their enjoyment of communal rights.

Nevertheless, the Indian village does possess certain characteristics in the understanding of which we can well employ the concept of "the village community." Further, these characteristics still survive in the modern village community, even although the traditional structure of the village is now in process of dissolution.

1. *The Internal Organization of the Village*

Among the Indian villages of this period there were some which were inhabited by members of only one caste, but by far the greater part of them were "multi-caste" villages in some degree. The village community was composed of these castes, arranged one above the other in a hierarchy whose rankings were most clearly apparent in the practices observed in regard to commensality.

It was the general rule for the members of the different castes to live in different sections of the village. The first thing which one notices about Indian villages is that the better houses are usually located in the centre of the village, while the ill-kept and roughly-constructed houses are built round them or are located at points on the circumference of the agglomeration or at a slight distance away from it. Since this is so, one can always distinguish two residential areas at least at first glance—the group of houses occupied by the dominant caste and the group of houses occupied by members of the Scheduled Castes.¹ These residential areas are denoted by the word *thola*, to which the name of the caste living in the area is prefixed. The castes which are represented by only a small number of persons live in a residential area occupied by a larger caste of approximately the same social standing. For example, it is usual for the Brahmins to live in the residential area occupied by the dominant caste. At present there is some irregularity in the geographical distribution of the castes within the village, and the castes are mixed together in a greater degree than formerly, but we may suppose that in the traditional village these distinctions in regard to residential areas were carefully observed.

¹ On the concept of the dominant caste, see M.N. Srinivas, "The Dominant Caste in Rampura," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 1959.

The castes living in the different residential areas were arranged in a hierarchy which was self-evidently legitimate in the eyes of the villagers and was accepted by them as axiomatic. This ritual ranking, however, was at the same time related to the economic stratification which characterized the village. That is to say, the dominant caste was also the land-owning caste, while the Scheduled Castes in the lowest stratum of the village community comprised the poorest section of the landless inhabitants of the village. If we divide the Indian castes into three main strata—the upper stratum containing the Brahmins and land-owning dominant castes, the middle stratum containing the merchant and artisan castes, and the lower stratum containing the aboriginal peoples and untouchables—we may say that the representatives of the upper stratum in the Indian village were landlords and rich peasants, while the lower stratum was composed of landless labourers and tenant peasants. The artisan castes in the middle stratum may be regarded as having lived in a state of dependence (economic as well as social) on the castes in the upper stratum.

2. *The Jajmani System as a Traditional Economic System*

As we have stated above, the castes in the Indian village live in separate residential areas and the villagers' consciousness of belonging to a particular caste is strengthened by the social and geographical implications of the contacts which they make in the course of everyday life. As a consequence of this, it would appear that the village was split up into a number of caste groups, but in fact the castes were bound together by the Jajmani system, the traditional occupational organization.¹

In the period during which the Indian village was based on the communal ownership of land to a greater or lesser degree, certain social relations were established under which the dominant castes, who possessed considerable rights over the communally-owned land, assumed a sovereign role in food production and mobilized the labour of members of the lowest stratum of society for this purpose, causing the artisan castes to manufacture and deliver to them goods required for consumption by these agriculturalists as well as agricultural implements to be used by them in production, and paying these artisans in kind with food grains. This was the Jajmani system. This form of economic organization was not operated according to the principle of an

¹ For a field survey of the Jajmani system, see O. Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India: Studies in a Delhi Village*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1958.

exchange of equal values, but took the form of services performed by the members of the artisan castes and the untouchables for the benefit of the dominant castes (who were the sovereign power in agricultural production and the owners of the land used for agriculture), in return for which the dominant castes gave them an assured livelihood by means of payments in kind. For this reason, the payments in kind made to artisans by the landowners, that is, by the sovereign power in agricultural production, remained at a fixed level, but the quantity of the goods manufactured by the artisans—for example, the number of pots which a potter had to produce for his patron—was not fixed but was dependent on the requirements of the patron. In the case of the blacksmiths, too, there was no limit to the number of occasions on which a peasant patron could command the services of the blacksmith for the repair of his agricultural implements. When there were two or more households of potters in the village the agricultural producers who made payments in kind to the potters as patrons were divided into two groups. The amount of the annual payment in kind was not arrived at by negotiation between individual patrons and clients ('client' being used in the Roman sense), but was laid down in the first instance by the caste Panchayats of the persons in question, these decisions later receiving the approval of the village. Similar arrangements were made in the case of the exchange of services between the artisan castes. Among the castes of the lower stratum of society, too, certain persons were granted an assured livelihood by the village. The sweepers, who were allowed to beg the leavings of food from the members of the castes of the upper stratum of village society, are an example of such a case. Their services at marriage ceremonies and funerals were rewarded by fixed payments. The same arrangement was made in remunerating the Brahmins for their officiation at religious ceremonies.¹

The caste system, associated in these ways with certain traditional hereditary occupations, was maintained by the economic power of the landowners, that is, by the agricultural producers. Agriculture, it need hardly be said, was not an occupation confined to any particular caste, but in general it was the main occupation of the dominant castes. These dominant castes were the sovereign power in the economy of

¹ The payments in kind made to the artisan castes are of a different character from the donations given to the Brahmins. See A.C. Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India: A Village and its Region*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, pp. 63 ff, in which this question is discussed with reference to the two categories Kamin and Mangat.

the villages. In these circumstances, agricultural production was never organized as a means of acquiring profit by re-investment in the expansion of the scale of reproduction, but had the function of maintaining the traditional mode of living in the village.

3. The Hereditary Structure of Village Self-Government

The institutions of village self-government which operated under this economic system were run by the dominant castes. The traditional power-structure in village government was headed by a hereditary headman who was a member of one of the dominant castes. In many cases, members of certain families in the dominant castes were recognized as being eligible for the office of headman, and this eligibility was hereditary.

This headman, as need hardly be said, had to assume responsibility for tax-collection and the maintenance of order on behalf of the ruling power. In this way the headman received recognition as the headman of the village from the external political power. He undertook the collection of the Land Revenue with the co-operation of the Patwari, who compiled the land register and calculated the taxes, and the Chaukidars, who served tax notifications and demands. The Patwari may be described as the village accountant, and most of those who fulfilled this function were members of the Brahmin caste. In contrast, the Chaukidars, who may be regarded as village policemen, were usually recruited from the Scheduled Castes in the lower stratum of society. Again, leaving aside serious offences, the headman had the power to inflict punishments on the villagers in the cause of maintaining law and order in the village. He was also, of course, the principal mediator in disputes among the villagers. Disputes within a single caste were settled by the caste Panchayats, but disputes which the caste Panchayats found themselves unable to settle, as well as disputes between castes, were submitted to the mediation of the headman. The headman also presided at many of the religious festivals celebrated in the village.

It goes without saying that the headman's rule over the village was not a dictatorship. His position was strengthened by the support of the dominant castes, and in the background of his administrative power lay influential members of the village community who, like himself, were members of the dominant castes. Between the headman and the villagers lay the leaders of the castes, that is to say, the leaders in the different residential areas of the village. We may be justified in supposing that at this period the actual operation of village self-

government was in the hands of an informal assembly of elders composed of these leaders and dominated by influentials belonging to the dominant castes.

In concrete terms, the situation in regard to this traditional power-structure differed in the Zamindari-type villages and the Ryotwari-type villages. There were also differences between villages in the areas which came under direct British rule and those in the areas in which the princely states retained their independence. In spite of these differences, however, we may accept the view that, up to the beginning of the present century, the village was allowed a comparatively high degree of autonomy under this system of self-government, and that the economy of the village was self-sufficient to a fairly high degree.

III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE

The traditional socio-economic structure of the Indian village which we have briefly described above underwent gradual changes during the period of British rule. In particular, since the beginning of the 20th century the handicrafts which were maintained by the Jajmani system have shown a tendency to disappear under the influence of modern industry. These changes became all the more marked after Indian Independence. Further, the institutional changes in political administration which occurred after Independence had a strong impact on the traditional power-structure of the village. No more than any other social organism could the Indian village—so typical of stagnant Oriental society—be spared the trials of modernization.

1. *Economic Change and Traditional Occupations*

These social changes in the village were brought about, first and foremost, by economic factors. Although it is true that imperialist colonial rule barred the way to industrialization, it was impossible for the economy of the Indian village to remain completely unchanged as the times advanced. Economic development led to the penetration of a money economy into the village, and the villagers came to regard a certain level of monetary income as a necessity to be used in purchasing some at least of the manufactured products of modern industry. Further, modern industrial production could not but have some effect on the traditional occupational structure in the village. Certain of the hereditary occupations associated with the caste system became incapable of maintaining themselves, and even where the traditional occupa-

tional system was not brought to complete dissolution, many of the traditional occupations came to require less workers than in former times. As an example, we may cite the case of the carpenters who had made ox-carts in the past, but who found themselves unable to stand up to the competition from vehicle-building works in the towns. When the carpenters living in a village are employed only in repair work, one carpenter can do the work formerly done by three. The same situation obtained in the case of the blacksmiths. When textile mills were established the village weavers found that there was no work for them to do, and they were obliged to abandon their traditional occupation.

Economic development also led to the appearance of new occupations. As the economy developed, even members of the castes whose principal occupation was agriculture were led to open little shops in the villages and to act as dealers in various commodities. In particular, in areas near the cities an increase took place in the numbers of factory workers and transport workers who commuted from their villages. In such villages as these the members of all the castes began to live in closer relations with the cities, and changes were liable to occur in the socio-economic structure.¹ Even in villages situated at some distance from the cities the Chamars in the lowest stratum of village society found that they could no longer make a living by preparing hides, and the weavers, having lost their traditional occupation, were forced to find some livelihood outside the village and took up the transportation of milk by bicycle or left the village to go to temporary work in brick factories.

On the other side, these changes have resulted in persons who have been deprived of their traditional occupations employing their labour in agricultural production. The monopoly of land held by the dominant castes (the landowners and organizers of agricultural production in the past) has been broken, and increasing numbers of persons in the artisan castes and even in the Scheduled Castes in the lowest stratum of society have come to own land of greater or lesser area and to carry on agriculture as their principal occupation. A discrepancy has appeared between the traditional hereditary occupations of the members of the various castes and their actual occupations, and where this discrepancy has reached great proportions the Jajmani system itself has broken down. When this happens, the annual payments in

¹ On this point, see T.S. Epstein, *Economic Development and Social Change in South India*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1962.

kind which were intended to assure the livelihood of the workers under the Jajmani system change their nature and assume the form of remuneration paid in exchange for labour. Fixed payments in kind are then to be found only among a certain section of the richer peasantry, and cash payments become general. These developments have wrought great changes in the Indian village, which hitherto has been a cosmos of its own in which the castes lived in a state of interdependence by means of a self-sufficient economy in which payments were made in kind.

2. *The Influence of the New Panchayat System*

The second kind of change which has taken place in the Indian village is the change in the realm of political administration. The British colonial administration made some impact on the village through the tax-collection system, but provided that the taxes were paid the colonial authorities did not interfere to any great extent in the running of self-government in the village. About the year 1920 attempts were made to establish the Panchayat System, but this institution was not of such a character as to negate the existing traditional power-structure in the village. However, the New Panchayat System which was introduced after Independence was put into force by the Government with great expectations, since it was associated with the Community Development Programmes. The New Panchayat System was of a character which was incompatible with the existing form of village self-government. The electoral constituencies and the number of members in the New Panchayats were laid down on a population basis. The Panchayats were chosen by election, and seats were usually reserved for members representing women and the Scheduled Castes.

We may describe this change in local self-government in a few words as being a change from the rule of tradition in the direction of the rule of legitimacy. We may draw attention to the following important points in connection with the new institution.

Firstly, the hereditary principle has been negated, and the principle of deciding the choice of leaders by election has been adopted. It is not possible for us to equate this change with the change from "ascribed status" to "achieved status" as S.C. Dube says,¹ but the use of the electoral method in deciding the choice of leaders implies a change in the type of leader which is regarded as ideal. The new institution has at least opened the way to the overthrow of the state

¹ S.C. Dube, *Indian Village*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, p. 222.

of affairs in which the dominant castes monopolized the office of headman. Secondly, the decisions taken in connection with the administration of the village must now be taken on a majority vote and not as a result of unanimity among the members. Formerly decisions had been taken by the leaders of the dominant castes, and a compromise agreement was regarded as the unanimous decision of the whole meeting. It was difficult for any of the members to resist such decisions, but now that the voting procedure has been adopted it has become possible for members to express their opposition. Thirdly, the connections between the Panchayats and the external political power have been strengthened under the new system, and the questions discussed in the village include an increasing number of matters which could not be dealt with within the administrative institutions of the village itself. Even under the old system of local self-government it was not the case that the village was completely closed and isolated, but in former times the village was more independent than it is now, and it was easy to maintain the social order of the village unchanged. However, matters are now different. We may say with D.G. Mandelbaum, "The old councils were arbitrary, conserving agencies whose prime function was to smooth over or settle village friction. The new Panchayats are supposed to be innovating, organising bodies working for changes rather than conserving solidarity."¹ The Panchayat's business brings it into contact with their higher administrative organs of the Government in connection with such matters as the Community Development Programmes, extension work, and the organizing of agricultural co-operative associations. When such activities are undertaken at the initiative of the superior organs of government, there are more chances for changes of leadership to occur at village level and for changes to occur in the form of decision-making.

3. Urbanization and the Weakening of Social Unity

The progress in urbanization which has taken place recently is connected with changes in the structure of the economy and has led to changes in the social attitudes and value systems of the inhabitants of the villages. The deeply-rooted Hindu religious faith is still to be found in the villages in the form of religious celebrations or the rituals associated with them, and these practices are maintained in the tradi-

¹ P.G. Mandelbaum, "Social Organisation and Planned Culture Change in India," in M.N. Srinivas ed., *India's Villages*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 2nd Edition, 1960, p. 19.

tional manner. However, even the religious celebrations no longer play so important a part in the life of the village as they did in former years. Again, with the progress of urbanization, the caste system, deeply imbued as it is with the Hindu view of the world, has become less strict in the social distinctions which it makes. The Government has negated caste discrimination in the Constitution, and it does not allow the traditional commensality rules to be observed at public functions in the village or in schools. Over a long period this will probably have a considerable effect. The changes in the times have also inspired the members of the hitherto-oppressed castes in the middle and lower strata of society with a desire to improve their social position. This desire may be augmented by an increase in the gap between the socio-economic stratification and the ritual rankings of the castes. As M.N. Srinivas says, even today "it is considered proper to follow one's traditional occupation," but "this view does not obtain among many of the younger people who have been to school and who are urban in their outlook."¹

We may thus say that in the modern Indian village both the vertical ties centred chiefly on the dominant castes, that is, village loyalty, and the horizontal links transcending the village which join members of a caste, that is, caste loyalty, have been weakened. M.N. Srinivas, who regards the latter as being more important than the former, takes the village to be the social unit which commands the loyalty of all the villagers, regardless of caste,² but we may consider that the village has been losing its unity. D. Pocock and L. Dumont think that caste is fundamental,³ but that the cohesion of the castes is now generally weaker than before. In recent studies of the Indian village, attention has been paid not only to the village itself but also to problems in the surrounding region, and it would appear that some emphasis is being attached to the fact that the castes have wide horizontal connections. In fact, however, this is not necessarily the case, and the most important point to be noted in this connection is the fact that the village is no longer a small self-sufficient cosmos of its own. That is to say, the social changes which have taken place in the village are of such a

¹ M.N. Srinivas, "The Social Structure of a Mysore Village," in his *India's Villages*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1960, p. 29.

² M.N. Srinivas, "The Social System of a Mysore Village," in M. Marroit ed., *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1955, pp. 34-35.

³ L. Dumont and D. Pocock, "Village Studies" in their *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 1, 1957, p. 29.

character that they require some extension of the scope of village surveys, and an examination of the question of the weakening of unity in the village community and in the castes must be carried out in a wider context.

IV. SOCIAL STAGNATION AND THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

As we have noted above, several aspects of Indian rural society have passed through processes of change. However, if we suppose that these social changes have progressed to a marked degree, this will be an even more grievous error than the mistaken emphasis which is sometimes placed on the static and unchanging nature of the Indian village. At the Decennial Celebration Symposium of the Indian Sociological Society, at which the subject of "The Nature and Extent of Social Change in India" was discussed, one of the participants who reported on the internal condition of the village community could say no more than, "The social facet of Indian rural society is changing, but exceedingly slowly."¹ The Indian village has indeed changed markedly if we measure social change with reference to a small scale of measurement, but if we employ a large scale of measurement we must acknowledge that absence of change predominates over change.

The reason for this situation is the fact that, in spite of the changes which have taken place in certain aspects of village society, the caste hierarchy in the village is still generally in correlation with the economic stratification of rural society based on the ownership of land. The members of the dominant castes still own more land than the members of the other castes.

1. *Sanskritization and De-Sanskritization*

The present situation, therefore, is that although the foundations of the caste system have been shaken it cannot yet be said to have collapsed. It is scarcely to be denied that the status of the Brahmins, who formerly stood at the summit of the hierarchy of ritual ranks among the castes, has shown a tendency to decline in most of the villages. Leaving aside those villages in which the Brahmins constitute the dominant caste, the Brahmins, in their capacity as priests, do indeed hold the highest position in society from the point of view of ritual, but as far as the daily life of the village is concerned they are in a

¹ J.F. Bulsara, "Nature and Extent of Social Change in Rural Society," *Sociological Bulletin*, Bombay, Indian Sociological Society, Vol. XI, Nos. 1 and 2, 1962, p. 169.

state of parasitic dependence on the dominant castes. The authority of the officials in the lowest ranks of the tax-collection system has also declined, and the Brahmins employed in these offices are no longer looked up to as in former days. Yet, in spite of this, the Brahminical way of life still exerts a strong binding force in the village, and it is endowed with great value in the minds of the villagers. Consequently, when a disparity appears between the ritual rankings of the castes and the socio-economic rankings of their members, a movement to improve the status of the caste as a social group appears among the castes in the middle and lower strata of society. In practice this means that efforts are made to raise the status of the caste by acquiring the Brahminical value system and way of life characteristic of the castes in the upper stratum of society. This is the social process to which M.N. Srinivas has given the name "sanskritisation."¹ It may also be described as a reactionary movement back to caste-ism.

In contrast to this movement among the castes in the middle and lower strata of society, the general tendency among the members of the castes in the upper stratum has been in the direction of attaching less value to the superior position of the caste, and the members of these castes may also be said to be more Westernized than the members of the lower castes. In particular, we may say that members of the dominant castes who have received an urban education have become more and more secularized and do not feel themselves so strongly bound by the Brahminical way of life as do the members of the castes in the middle and lower strata who aspire to approximate to the upper stratum of society. We may follow D.N. Majumdar in calling this process "deritualisation" or "de-sanskritisation."² This process is a counter-acting movement antagonistic to the sanskritization process among the castes of the middle and lower strata of society.

If both these processes proceed at a rapid rate, the natural result should be a lessening of the differences between the castes. In fact, however, the dividing walls of caste are scarcely to be broken down. The process of sanskritization among the castes of the middle and lower strata does not in itself negate the cast hierarchy as such, and the

¹ M.N. Srinivas, "A Note on Sanskritisation and Westernisation," in *Caste in Modern India*, pp. 42-62. In a passage written on the occasion of the inclusion of this paper in the above work, the author puts forward the opinion that the concept of sanskritization is complex and heterogeneous, that it is more of a hindrance than a help in making sociological analyses, and that it is better not to use it.

² D.N. Majumdar, *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1958, pp. 334-336.

aspirations of the members of the castes in the middle and lower strata must be directed to the improvement of the status of their castes as social groups. However, this is very difficult to achieve. It is very difficult for all the members of a caste to improve their social and economic position and to raise the ritual status of their caste. Of the two processes which are taking place, it is the de-sanscritization process which has the better chance of making headway. As Majumdar says, "The process of acculturation in India has been more a process of de-sanscritisation (or deritualisation) than that of sanscritisation."¹ Even so, this process is not very much in evidence in the generality of agricultural villages. The caste hierarchy is therefore still in existence, and for this reason limits are imposed on those forms of social change which are connected with the caste system.

2. *The Difficulty of Solving the Problems of Untouchability and Poverty*

In this connection we must especially point out the fact that although the gap between the castes of the upper stratum and those of the middle stratum may be narrowed, it seems probable that the gulf separating the main body of the castes from the Scheduled Castes will continue to exist as in the past. We recognize that the members of the Scheduled Castes can now send representatives to the Panchayats, but these Scheduled Members are members only in name, and their voice carries little weight in the deliberations of these bodies. Again, they can make provision for the future by sending their children to school in the same way as is done by the members of other castes, but there are many among the Scheduled Castes who do not possess the economic resources which would enable them to have their children go to school. Their economic status is altogether too low for it to be possible to liquidate untouchability. Until untouchability is liquidated, the members of the castes in the middle stratum will be inspired with feelings of superiority to the untouchables and will be unable to put aside their caste-ism, and although they may aspire to raise the status of their castes in relation to those of the upper stratum, they will make no attempt to break down the caste system itself. Further, while we acknowledge that it is among the untouchables themselves—among the people who have been oppressed by the caste system and have suffered under it—that we must look for those who will come forward to call for the abolition of the caste system, the untouchables are so poor that it is impossible for them to rise to the undertaking of such a reform

¹ D.N. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

of society. They are so driven by the necessities of self-preservation that such thoughts have no chance of arising in their minds. The poverty of the Scheduled Castes imposes limits on the social changes which can take place in the Indian agricultural village, and it is responsible for the economic stagnation which characterizes the village.

As the first step which should be taken in order to alleviate this poverty we would advocate the democratization of the village economy. If land were given to these poor landless villagers their economic standing would improve. However, this is not to be hoped for. Land Reform was a great pillar of national policy in India after Independence was attained. Each of the states undertook Land Reform in its own territory. However, these Land Reforms were half-hearted. Not only was the ceiling of land-holding very high, but men who held land in excess of the ceiling were able to escape the necessity of giving up their land by distributing its nominal ownership among the members of their joint families. At all events, the population was too great in relation to the available area of agricultural land, and half-hearted measures of Land Reform such as these were incapable of producing much effect. Land Reform did not rescue the Scheduled Castes from their plight, and we may say that they received practically no benefit from it.

Another line of development which could save the Scheduled Castes from foundering is that of pressing forward with industrialization and providing them with new places of work. However, when modern industry is imported from the advanced countries (as is always the case in backward countries), the proportion of organic capital is generally high, and a particularly large amount of labour is not needed. The effect of such industrialization is rather that of destroying the traditional occupations and driving the people formerly employed in these occupations into agriculture, thus leading to increased competition in the acquisition of land. This also causes an increase in the number of persons employed as hired labourers, so that the livelihood of the Scheduled Castes in the lowest stratum of society is threatened. Those who cannot make a living with what they can earn as labourers in their own villages leave the village to go to temporary work elsewhere, but their employment is not of a sufficiently stable character to enable them to leave their villages and settle in the towns near their places of work. Although they may take up temporary employment elsewhere, these people are obliged to keep their economic base located in the village. As a result of the hardships encountered in undertaking tem-

porary work outside the village, some of these people have been impelled to acquire land, but this has only resulted in very small areas of land being acquired by a minority of this class, and their social position has not been improved. No social change of an order sufficient to destroy the correlation between the caste hierarchy and the economic class structure can be expected to result from the employment of labour outside the village in temporary work. Even if these developments lead to some improvement in the economic condition of one or two members of this class, so long as their fellow-members of the untouchable castes continue their despised traditional occupations and are dependent on the charity of the other inhabitants of their villages untouchability will not be liquidated.

3. *The Characteristics of Agricultural Production*

At present the form of agricultural production in which members of the castes in the upper stratum carry on agriculture by employing the labour of members of the castes in the middle and lower strata (especially those in the lower strata), is still in general operation. Since the possibilities of obtaining non-agricultural employment outside the village are limited, there is a large number of these agricultural labourers in the villages. This surplus of labour results in the wages of the labourers being reduced to the minimum. The dominant castes in the upper stratum of society sit on high at their ease, supported by this cheap labour. In other words, the landowners, that is, the rich peasants, are devoid of any positive attitude to the improvement of agricultural production, since they are in a position to exploit this cheap labour. Their livelihood is assured by the existence of these relations of production, and they have no need to be enterprising in introducing new forms of agricultural technology. They can get an ample income without taking the trouble to buy better agricultural implements or to introduce efficient methods of cultivation, and they will still pass for peasants although they never engage in manual labour. Agricultural production is thus carried on under the direction of a peasantry which despises manual labour and has no intention of changing the traditional agricultural practices, and its economic organization goes no further than simple reproduction, for it is unthinkable that it should develop in the direction of re-investment in the expansion of the scale of reproduction.¹ The idea of raising production, increasing their incomes, and going

¹ S.P. Bose, "Peasant Values and Innovation in India," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, Vol. LXVII, No. 5, 1962.

forward to develop agriculture in an enterprising manner is completely foreign to them.

It is, of course, not true that absolutely none of the peasants wishes to improve agricultural production. However, when only one or two peasants have a progressive orientation in economics, any new forms of technology which they may introduce will not be readily adopted on other holdings in the village if the economy of the village as a whole is of a static character. Again, it is not the case that Indian peasants do not want to increase their incomes. However, even when they succeed in earning an income in excess of their immediate needs they show no inclination to invest in the expansion of the scale of reproduction in agriculture. They accumulate savings for the purpose of defraying the exorbitant expenses attendant on marriage ceremonies or for rebuilding or extending their living quarters. Further, although they will spend money in the purchase of status-symbols, they will not buy new and improved agricultural implements.

In order to bring about some change in this situation, the Indian Government, as we have noted above, has been pressing on with the Community Development Programmes and the national extension service. However, these measures have benefited only the rich peasants of the upper stratum of village society, and they are considered to have accelerated the tendency to social stratification, while some writers are of the opinion that they have not only been of no use, but have been positively harmful.¹ Great hopes were placed in the village Panchayats as a means of pushing forward these development programmes, but the financial resources at the disposal of the Panchayats have been altogether too meagre to permit them to come up to these expectations.² Further, the money invested in Indian agriculture under the Five-Year Plans which have succeeded one another since Independence has indeed amounted to no inconsiderable sum, but it is no exaggeration to say that these funds, dispersed over so vast a country as India, have been barely sufficient to equip the agricultural base. No break-through has yet occurred in the stagnation which characterizes the Indian village.

1 A. R. Desai, "Community Development Projects—A Sociological Analysis," in his *Rural Sociology in India*, Bombay, The Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, 3rd Edition, 1961, p. 560.

2 For a first-hand description of the running of the finances of the Village Panchayat, see T. Fukutake, et al., *The Socio-Economic Structure of the Indian Village—Surveys of Indian Villages in Gujarat and West Bengal*, Tokyo, The Institute of Asian Economic Affairs, 1964.

V. TOWARDS THE MODERNIZATION OF VILLAGE SOCIETY

The Indian village's road to modernization is beset by many difficulties. In opening up this difficult road, India, like many of the underdeveloped and developing countries, has sought a solution in industrialization. However, whether this has been successful is by no means indisputable. As we have pointed out, the reason for this is that modern industry does not absorb a large amount of surplus population from the villages. At the same time, efforts are being made to encourage cottage industry as well as modern industry, but there is no sign that cottage industry will be able to bring about modernization in the Indian village.

Our conclusion is that the Indian village will not be modernized unless some strong measures are taken in regard to agriculture itself. Further, Indian industrialization will not be able to proceed along the road of expansion and development unless there is a rise in the productivity of agriculture which will make possible an accumulation of capital and a rise in the purchasing power of the peasants.

The logical consequence of this situation is that first priority must be given to the attainment of the target of equipping the base of agricultural production to the fullest extent. This equipping of the productive base should commence with a great leap forward in the improvement of irrigation facilities. Indian agriculture can exploit the climatic conditions of the country with great profit, provided that water is made available. If matters remain as they are at present, any attempts to encourage the adoption of new agricultural techniques will not be successful beyond certain fixed limits. This may be inferred from the fact that the Japanese type of rice cultivation has not been adopted in spite of the State Government's encouragement. The occurrence of change in the productive base gives rise to the possibility that certain social changes may also be occasioned. A large amount of money will be required in equipping the agricultural base, and in order to do so the surplus population of the villages should be mobilized on a large scale. Overpopulation is the social condition which produces poverty, and in order to overcome poverty, labour which is at present idle because of lack of opportunities of employment, should be used for this purpose. On this point India can well learn from the experience of Communist China.

Together with these measures, it will be necessary to carry out a second Land Reform, and to put into effect a radical land policy. As

we have already noted, land is scarce in relation to population, so that Land Reform can have no great effect, even if the land-holding ceiling is drastically lowered. It is impossible to give land to all the peasants. What must be done is to make a radical alteration in the organization of the unit of management in agriculture and go forward to co-operative farming. At all events, some serious consideration must be given to the production of a drastic policy which will make some change in the system which enables landowners to abstain from labour. The modernization of Indian agriculture and the Indian village will never come about so long as a stratum of landowners belonging to the dominant castes sits at ease, supported by the cheap labour of the untouchables in the lowest stratum of society. Nor will it be possible to destroy the caste system—the cancer of the Indian body politic.

However, the implementation of such drastic reforms while India is in its present condition might result in the strengthening of the inefficient bureaucracy, and in order to prevent matters taking this course it will be necessary to strengthen the Panchayat system in opposition to it. It will be necessary to strengthen the financial backing of the Panchayats, to give the villagers an increased interest in Panchayat affairs, to nourish the villagers' consciousness of the significance of local government by getting them to engage in activities sponsored by the Panchayats, and in this way to develop in them a growing capacity for democratic local self-government. It goes without saying that, in the course of this process some increase in tension between the castes may occur, and this may result in a temporary retreat into caste-ism. However, we must not be afraid of this. The nominal membership of the Panchayats at present enjoyed by the untouchables is devoid of meaning, and it is now the time to go forward from caste antagonisms and caste conflicts to the stage of overcoming caste itself.

Nevertheless, we cannot believe that the caste system will be easily liquidated. It will also be necessary to make a serious examination of policies designed to hasten the reformation of Hinduism. The challenge to the value-system of Hinduism cannot be avoided. No modernization can be looked for in a country where cows are given more consideration than human beings. The power which resides in education must be applied in the systematic destruction of traditional attitudes. In the long run, the spread of education will bring about a transformation of society. On this point India will do well to take a lesson from Japan. Japan's adoption of a thoroughgoing policy of compulsory education was one of the principal reasons for her rapid economic development,

and more positive efforts should be made in this direction in India.

We need not say that such abstract policies as we have outlined above are easy to express in words but difficult to realize in fact, and it is no simple undertaking to embody them in concrete administrative directives. Viewing the problem in the light of the existing state of social reality in the Indian village, we are obliged to say with M.N. Srinivas, "What kind of village community will come to exist in the future can only be a matter for speculation."¹ However, we feel that we should not be satisfied with the present situation, and we look forward to seeing among Indian scholars an upsurge of heightened interest in making scientific forecasts. The majority of Indian students of this subject were born in the higher castes, and although it cannot be denied that they have personal knowledge of the internal contradictions of the caste system and are themselves "de-sanscritized," we must frankly state that most of them have no strong desire to liquidate the caste system. Freedom from the caste system is all too difficult a thing to achieve, but for this very reason is it not all the more necessary to tackle the problem seriously? Is it impolite for us to say this to our Indian friends? We do not think so.

¹ M.N. Srinivas, "The Social Structure of a Mysore Village," in his *India's Villages*, p. 35.