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Krishna Raj Summer Fellowship

A report on

Untouchability and the Market Economy

(An Ethnographic study of Antkadih Village, District Giridih, Jharkhand)

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Untouchability and market economy

Abstract

There is a common belief that market economy and especially consumerism will lead to the emancipation of untouchability. Market economy as a force is supposed to break or dilute the old social relations and creates new identities which are free from old socio- political constraints. This work will investigate the above hypothesis with the help of an ethnographic study of a village 'Antkadih' in Jharkhand.

Introduction

Caste discrimination is still haunting us in an era when we are working vigorously as a nation to become next superpower. Caste discrimination is a social reality and we cannot escape this question if we want an inclusive model of growth. Scholars have tried to understand this reality in historical context and it benefited a lot to restructure the idea of development. But after liberalization we were introduced to a different kind of socio-economic force i.e. market economy. Western countries have already witnessed its effect on their traditional society- good or bad is however a matter of debate. India has not been an exception to these market forces that have been proven contagious to old social relations.

Different school of thoughts emerged that tried to understand the relationship between market forces and changes in caste relations. When we are talking about these changes, there are broadly two schools of thoughts. One school of thought thinks that caste system has developed an immune system against this contagion and survived these changes. Scholars like Ghanshyam Shah, Harsh Mander, Satish Deshpande's extensive work on forms of untouchability shows that untouchability is still being practiced at a huge scale in India. Their extensive field work was based in 565 villages of 11 states (Punjab, Uttar Pradesh ...Bihar).

However, the second school of thought says that market economy and consumerism in particular creates aspirations, among every Indian irrespective of their caste and class. This aspiration made dalits think beyond the old caste restrictions which were earlier supposed to be obvious “truth” for them. Self-respect and dignity became more important for them than just material well-being (here the term well-being includes wealth and other social indicators like education, health etc.). Market economy has provided them opportunities to assert their identity in a competitive manner. Scholars like Devesh Kapur, Chandra Bhan Prasad, and D Shyambabu have made such kind of assessments based on their field work in Bulandsahar and Azamgarh districts of Uttar Pradesh.

Caste discrimination operates on the basis of different rules of segregation. Different consumption rules for different caste group are one such code of conduct. The whole idea of restrictive consumption was to maintain hierarchy of power. This kind of arrangement offers very limited life choices to people belonging to lower strata of society. It makes them dependent upon the people from upper strata. In this way it has been proved very instrumental to maintain the power structure which perpetuates the idea of disrespect and humiliation towards so called lower caste people. That is why neoliberal scholars like Kapur, Prasad and others focuses too much on the changes in consumption pattern of dalits after economic reforms of 1991. They have the thesis that “social component of consumption has direct relation to social prestige”.

After economic reforms consumer durables became the marker of social prestige. Now market economy, in its more flourished form, is providing opportunities to people to buy all the consumer durables, which are the marker of social prestige, restricted only to upper caste people. Consumption behavior under market economy made lower caste people capable to surpass the old power hierarchy and put them in parallel to upper caste people. This is equality in qualitative terms if not in quantitative terms.

On the other hand scholars like Shah, Mander and Deshpande’s study shows that untouchability, among many aspect of caste discrimination, is still being practiced at huge scale. They have literally documented a whole list of practices of untouchability. Their findings are in a clear contrast to the claims made by Prasad and others.

In this paper our objective would be to find out the different dimensions of the interrelation between consumption behaviour and untouchability. However, this work is situated in a larger framework where all factors like economic, political and social will be taken into account. Locating this study in a larger framework is very necessary as caste is a very complex phenomenon which is fabricated by socio- economic- political forces. This suggests that any change in untouchability could be the result of one or more than one factors. While studying the changes in the practice of untouchability, our focus will be to break it down to the level where the role of these factors would become more evident in contrast to the role of market economy.

Methodology

It is always difficult to decide what kind of method would be suitable to collect any primary data; it depends upon many factors like what is your question, nature of data that question requires, nature of field, time period of field work, sample size etc. Our question was something that required personnel experiences over a period of time; we had 15 days to finish field work etc. So that, by keeping all these things in mind we decided to go for an ethnographic study of a village. Our initial plan was to create an oral history of village through narratives which will come out in interactions with villagers. For this purpose we identified few people like village headman, important members of village for example those who are invited in panchayats for settlements of disputes of villagers etc. We also attended one such panchayat. We talked to members from all castes (from Mehta to Ravidas), class (rich to poor), gender and all age group to avoid any kind of biasness. Sometime talking to women was little difficult particularly with Ravidas women, they were skeptical about us for example who we are? Why we are doing this? But later we realized that identity of a researcher play significant role in the field for example from where you are, why you are doing this, etc. People were continuously asking questions like where is your home, are you married or not etc. So, there is one instance when we were in group interviews with Mehta women, and she asked our castes and we told them *Verma*, then she asked *Verma me kya* (which jati in *Verma*), we told them *kurmi* and she said we are from same caste. After this her behavior became friendlier.

Interviews were planned in such manner that discrepancies could be easily avoided. We had two kind of questionnaire one with open ended questions like what is your opinion of untouchability? And another with close ended questions like does upper caste people eat in your houses or not? It was not always easy to balance these two questions. So, we were meeting people again and again and sometime talking in very informal way. Many times these talks went on for more than 2 hours. We had both personnel and group interviews. Group interviews were more of informal talks. Here we would like to mention one stance where interview started as personnel interview but ended as group interview. People kept coming, talking and even left in the middle. Sometimes we talked about things of their interest, not related to our questions. But through these interviews we came to know many stories that later helped us to understand broader social and political condition of village. In comparison to group interviews conducting personnel interviews were more difficult. To avoid any interruptions we had adopted strategies like sometime not to be specific in our questions for example when we were asking questions like how much do you spend in a month? We also tried to give them more freedom and flexibility to answer questions.

Observation is a very important tool for a researcher in the field. We were observing things like clothes, houses, settlements, markets (especially Saturday and Wednesday market) etcetera. Sometimes what we observed was in contrast to what people told us. For example we were interviewing a Ravidas woman and she was showing her as very poor but it was hard to believe her because what we have seen was totally opposite. She was wearing gold and silver ornament, her house was pucca and a motorcycle was standing there. Later we also came to know that her husband works in Mumbai and earns good money. Things turned out to be unexpected sometimes of which it was difficult to think. So this day while coming from Par Tand, we met Ramesh (changed name). He is a Mandal and teaching in a public school in Dih. We met him on 2nd day of our field work. He invited us to his home and offered us sattv (a local dish made of corn, barley and gram). Inside his house we saw a well, and we tried to find out whether everyone has a well inside his house or it is prevalent only among Mandal. We find that among Ravidas and Paswan, well inside the house is a very uncommon phenomenon. One Ravidas respondent said when his parent shifted to this place they had one well. Since now he and his brother is living separately, they are still using same well.

Writing field notes and keeping a diary helped us a lot. After daylong interviews we wrote all the minor details asked during the interviews. It was not possible for us to write anything when we were in informal interviews. One reason for not taking notes and recording during interviews was that we realized that people become reluctant to say in the matters of caste relations. So after coming to our place we used to write everything. Apart from making regular notes we also discussed the progress of field work. That helped us to check whether we were going in the right direction or not. During the period of field work we changed our questionnaire more than 3 times; with insertion and deletion both happening together simultaneously.

Field of study

Antkadih Poorvi is a panchayat in Bagodar block, Girdih district in Jharkhand. The village is situated beside NH10. The spatial formation of Antkadih is not typical circular model but rather a more of a linear. By circular we mean the core periphery model where upper caste resides in the core and the lower caste at periphery. However, Antkadih does not fit in this category. Here, periphery is very unclear as different caste group including lower castes are situated very near to upper caste Basti. The panchayat was largely segregated in three parts, the oldest part was "Dih" and other two are "Gandhi Tand" and "Par Tand". There is another ecosystem of caste named Budhachach which has a dominant caste group called Rajput but is located far from the main village. It became the part of main village recently just because of administrative conveniences. If we leave Par Tand, the other two Basti have their own ecosystem of caste. As the ecosystem consists of a set of interdependent organisms situated in a physical environment, in the same way ecosystem of caste implies a complete set of interdependent caste group situated in a geographical environment. For example Gandhi Tand has a dominant caste called Mehta, and upper castes like Brahmins and other subordinate castes like Teli, Dhobi (Washer man), Nai (Barber) etc. These subordinate castes are there working as support system of that ecosystem. Similarly, Dih that is the oldest settlement in the village has Mandals as the dominant caste, Kantaha & Tiwari as upper caste

Modi & Baniya as Trading castes, and Paswan & Ravidas as subordinate castes. Irrespective of these two settlements Par tand has only one caste which is Ravidas.

The population of the village is approximately 10,000 with 15 percent of Scheduled Caste of the total. The majority of the population is Mandal (OBC), and then comes Mehta (OBC), Paswan and Ravidas (SC) followed by other castes.

After having sufficient interviews, for our convenience we developed a chronological history of village. That gave us broader idea about the village enabling us to understand the major political and social changes in the village. During 1950s migration among dalit started, they were the first who migrated and later followed by other castes as well. Different stories indicate that initially more Paswan comparison to Ravidas migrated. Most of them got job in Calcutta Corporation (Calcutta Municipal Corporation), where they were doing "menial jobs" like cleaning etc. Few worked as Rickshaw Puller. Except of few Paswan and Ravidas, people from other castes like Mandal migrated to cities like Delhi and Bombay and not Calcutta. As one of our respondents told that he is running a canteen, another said the he has a shop in Lajpat Nagar etc. In recent time when Calcutta Municipal Corporation stopped hiring people from outside the state Paswan and Ravidas also started moving to these cities. One of our Ravidas respondents whose father was in Calcutta Corporation went to Malaysia; there he was employed in a line tower company (electricity tower). Mehta caste with few exceptions did not migrate to any cities. They were mostly involved in agricultural work. In Mehta sense of community was very strong, in our interviews we have found that if someone is in problem others have helped him out.

The period of 1970s saw new changes. A new settlement Par tand far from the Dih (oldest settlement) was formed for Ravidas. Land was provided by the mukhiya at that time; he was not elected by people but was called mukhiya due to his wealth and prestige. There are two stories regarding Ravidas' displacement one says that they migrated due to population explosion. That is quite hard to believe because Paswan instead of increase in population did not migrate. Although we have seen displacement in the case of Mehtas, which was more of a matter of choice, but in the case of Ravidas it was not by choice. Second story tells that they were forced to migrate because of their menial work like lifting dead animal and tanning etc. as told by many non Ravidas people.

In the same time period this village witnessed an event which shows us that how the collective decision of society compels minority to follow the decision. The event was an “invasion” by DugDugi party which is a part of a tribal movement marking territory across the Jharkhand. Stories tell us that dalits joined hands with dominant castes to “protect” the village from DugDugi party.

1980s witnessed the first social movement of Dalits in the village. It brought a major change in the relationship between Ravidas and Brahmins. It created a foundation for the future dalit resistance. That later led to change in the relationship of Ravidas with other castes also. It was social boycott of Brahmins by Ravidas. Ravidas made a collective decision to refuse to do their supposed caste work i.e. lifting dead animal and the work of midwife. Later it got translated into a demand of wage labor for doing their caste work which was till then supposed to be free of cost.

In 1990s there was a massacre in which 10- 11 dominant caste people including the mukhiya got killed by MCC (Maoist Communist Centre). The issue was related to inter caste marriage which divided the village into two opposites. It was Ravidas versus rest of the village including Paswan (indirectly). Before this incident the village was literary transformed into a war zone where the power relations between the two oppositions were not equal. But after massacre this equation changed for a temporary period of time. Here we do not mean that Ravidas became the dominant one. Rather it created a political void which was later filled by Mehta’s.

2010s as reservation came into panchayat elections, villages found its first dalit mukhiya. He was Paswan. However this situation didn’t last long. Due to social political pressures by dominant caste compelled him to flee the village. The up- mukhiya who was a Mehta became the mukhiya.

Findings and Analysis

The forms of untouchability which are practiced in that village are followings:

1. There is zero tolerance against any marriage between Dalits and other caste people.

2. Inter dining among different caste still do not get social acceptance. However, dalits who got prestigious job like teacher or headmaster gets invitation from upper or dominant caste people. Also dalits who have upper caste friends get invited but in their narrative they feel that it does indicate social acceptance. This reflected in the narrative of both the dalits and other caste people, that dalits who are invited in a marriage function by their other caste friends are dined in private space. Even a reputed dalit headmaster, who was very reluctant initially to accept discrimination of any kind, accepted that apart from him the rest of dalits are still being subjected to this kind of social out casting. He was also concerned about the merit of inter dining in marriages, as dinning in a dalits house in daily life is still being stigmatized.
3. Talking about discrimination in public spaces, there is no such places which are prohibited for dalits by physical force. It is rather the case of self-disciplined dalits bodies clearly aware of their territories. There is an abstract social negotiation about the division and distribution of territories. There is one manifestation of such demarcation, where a pond which is used for “chhat puja” is partitioned on the line of dalits versus non-dalits.
4. Priestly services are still not fully available for dalits. However, in the account of Brahmins who were interviewed it came to fore that they actually want to give their services to dalits but have the fear that they could be out casted by their community. According to them there were cases where some Brahmins got out casted by the community. They acknowledged this fact that financial crunch is taking toll to their life and they are in great dilemma.

This is a clear indication that how the chaos created by market economy challenges the old social relations and compel people to look beyond their rigidity to maintain the old status or to survive. In the case of Brahmins the divine positions they were given by the collective consciousness of village is now working against them in the era of market economy. During the in-depth interview of four prominent persons of Brahmin community we came to know that because of the divinity associated with their caste work they are not supposed to do “minimal” works like agriculture by their own. The labor is not cheap due to migration and they are also not allowed to hire labor from dalit community which could be comparatively cheaper, so agriculture does not remain profitable for them. And due to lesser economic capital, which is

result of their complete dependence upon their caste work in earlier times, made their divine position in society a hollow truth. However, they are looking forward to other avenues like teaching profession and government jobs, and their cultural capital is certainly helping them.

5. Discrimination in public distribution system based on their caste identity has come in the narratives of every dalit family.

However, practices of untouchability in daily life are very subtle and in every aspect of life. Whether it is about stake in political spaces or trading spaces or religious event.

On the other hand there were practices which became obsolete over a period of time.

1. Temple entry for dalits is not an issue in this village, but what's peculiar about it, is that the Ravidas want a temple for their own and they have been building one. The importance of this temple could be understood that this community collectively decided to vote for those people in local elections, who were giving bigger donations for the temple. If we think of temple as cultural site of power struggle then there is one more such site i.e. School. We observed two schools situated in Mandal and Ravidas area. The comparative study shows that the quality of education and discipline in Ravidas' area school is better than Mandals'. That school is cultural site of power struggle for Ravidas as the teachers of that school who are Ravidas are politically very aggressive. Even the anganbadi system of that school is very well functioning compare to the anganbadi of mandals' school.
2. No visible discrimination is observed at local tea-shops and hotels.
3. Till around 1970s dalits were used to carry their slippers in their hand while crossing upper caste area.

Social-political relations: Structure and daily life

The two big players of this panchayat are Mehta and Mandal. Both are historically the caste of landowners but Mandal dominated in the socio-economic-political life before 1990s. For instance, the panchayat had the same *mukhia* by the introduction of panchayati system till the time of massacre. However due to massacre, migration and gradual introduction of wage labor Mandals gradually lost their old glory. On the other hand, Mehtas adopted the changes

very well and made full use of the political void created around 1990s. Earlier some Mehtas were involved in robberies at NH10. But now they dominate every aspect of life and they are praised by every caste group. Mandals are still very relevant and dominates in *Dih*. Baniya and Modi have monopoly over most of the commercial and business activity and have good relations with the dominant caste. Teli, Nai and Dhobi have been doing average or below the average in Gandhi Tand.

Now talking about the dalit population, they are divided in two caste groups called Paswan and Ravidas. Paswans are settled in *Dih* very near to the Mandals which is very unusual. Ravidas are settled in the outskirts of the village far from the centre of *Dih*. There are also three Ravidas family are settled along with Paswans. Talking about Brahmins, they are settled in Gandhi Tand and gradually losing their old social relevance. We witnessed it in a panchayat meeting where hearing of a dispute between two Brahmin families was going on. The hearing bench and elected members were mostly Mehtas and their supporters. Initially the Mehtas paid respect to the Brahmins in the meeting. But after a point of time Brahmins were treated in a harsh manner. Both the parties had to give rupees 2000 each to *panchs* which is a part of procedure according to panchayat. The history of the village reveals that Brahmins were imported to that place by the landlord class. It explains this fact that why they have never been the locus of power. However, Kantaha Tiwari who claims that they are also “similar” to Brahmins, are doing good.

If we look at the relationships of dalits to different caste groups, we find that each relation has different power dynamics. Before that we will look at the relationship between Ravidas and Paswan and their different social attitude. Paswan considers themselves higher in social hierarchy compare to Ravidas. They disassociate themselves with work of lifting dead animals and consider it as *ganda kaam* (dirty work). And because Ravidas used to do this work they look down upon them. Ravidas were stigmatized by every other caste for their past association with work like lifting dead animal, the work of a midwife and allegedly eating the dead animals. However male Paswans never acknowledged that “their women” do the work of a midwife. Talking about their social attitudes, Ravidas are politically very expressive and confident. They are mentally ready to bear any consequence of their resistive attitude towards upper caste. When they are asked about any kind of discrimination in public space they replied that “if it happens they will kill the perpetrator”. It was a common response in

every interview with Ravidas people. It is for certain that they do not mean it literally but it shows their attitude towards such issues. The possible originating reasons behind this attitude are the earlier social movements when the Ravidas refused to lift the dead animals and also aborting the work of midwife for Brahmins. They proposed that Brahmins had to give the priestly services in Ravidas community. Once the movement got started they demanded wage labour for this “*dirty work*” from other castes too.

But again this social movement was politically informed. The early migration and permanent jobs in Calcutta Municipal Corporation became the axis of change. We interviewed Ramchandra who won the union election in the corporation in 1970s. According to him they started the early work of politicizing their community back there in the village. He was quite nostalgic about their first experience of democratic culture of urban. He was narrating us that how all staff of corporation irrespective of their class and caste used to eat *jhaal-mudhi* (snacks) from the same plate. They used to organize meetings in their community and tried to mobilize them politically. That is why they demanded wage labor for their people.

Ravidas is at the lowest strata of the society according to collective conscious of “others”. However Ravidas have been fighting a continuous psychological war with this collective conscious of “others”. They do not consider them any less than “others” if not the superior. They have a good diplomatic political relationship with Mehta which is a default consequence of bitter relationship with Mandals. They give their political support to Mehta with whom they were never physically very close. But the Ravidas youth have supported a youth leader who belongs to Mandal community and member of a powerful national party CPI(ML). On the other hand Paswans give support to Mandals. Both Ravidas and Paswan’s relationship with Baniya and Modi has always been based on transaction. However, it proved hard to find out through recollection that what kind of discrimination dalits used to face in the shops before 1990s. This two trading class have been the main money lenders. According to dalits while taking credit from these money lenders, their class identity matters most not their caste identity. But it is very evident that Baniya and Modi look down upon the dalits and stands with dominant caste on the matters of social and political justice. We witnessed so many instances where non-dalit people used derogatory remarks for dalits. We never met a single person who defended or even knew the “social capital” angle of reservation. While interviewing a group of people which consisted of four Mandals, a Modi and one Paswan, we

witnessed the language which is used for dalits in day to day life. Harish a Mandal boy made fun of the Paswan boy named Manoj for not having a job with his B.Ed degree. Harish and others humiliated him for not having any success even after reservation in jobs. Satish, a 45 year old from Modi community, was the most offensive with his remarks. He made that Paswan boy accept that how he is wasting the money of government and how reservation system is against the merit. The Paswan boy had no clue whatsoever that how to defend reservation system and himself. He did not speak a single word against them rather he went with them to hangout once the interview got over. This may be because it is the part of the everyday life of that village.

Talking about everyday life of the village, it is full of symbolic resistance intertwined in its daily cultural life. For instance, Ravidas community celebrates "Ravidas Jayanti" every year. It is a big festival from them as every Ravidas feel proud of this festival. It is celebrated like a religious festival. But interestingly this festival has a very short history. It was brought to this village by people who migrated in 1950s. However, it gets popular in last ten years. So basically this is more of a political strategy or device for Ravidas to make a statement against the popular hegemonic culture. That is why none of their houses have picture of saint Ravidas, except of only one house. But again this house belongs to Ravidas person who is ward member in panchayat samiti. Among Ravidas everybody knows Ambedkar but saint Ravidas is more prominent here. Among Paswan these things does not matter much or maybe they cannot afford to be political.

Consumerism and Material culture among the dalits

Consumer as concept has always existed in the society but here we are talking about consumerism in the context of modern market economy. It is a common belief that as income increases people's expenditure also increases. In other words, consumer behaviour is proportionally related to income. When we see consumerism in relation to caste this proportional relation could be changed, as argued by Bhan et al. We have seen many instances where people are spending more which is not in proportion to their increase in income. As we know that caste relations are directly related to consumption. Power dynamics of caste relations is maintained through restrictions over consumption of certain things. Every caste has its own predefined consumption behaviour (which is socially constructed) through

which a body is marked as touchable and untouchable. For example untouchables were not allowed to wear white clothes as we have encountered in the narratives of people in Antkadih. In next few paragraphs we will see how consumerism is working in relation to caste in Antkadih.

Through the narratives of people, we have observed changes in the consumer behaviour in terms of food, clothing and housing among all castes over a period of time. With the oral evidences it is difficult to draw a fault line in the change in consumer behaviour. However it is evident that this gets intensified in recent years. In the narrative of dalits in this village they always mentioned that earlier they used to have *mota anaaz*(coarse grain) and items like rice, peas and wheat flour, which were missing. However, poor non-dalits also used to eat *mota anaaz* . Rice was supposed to be the most valuable and elite food in earlier times. *Madua* was a common grain eaten by every poor person. Fine quality khadi and cotton clothes were worn by upper caste people. Dalits used to wear *mota kapda* which was a coarse version of khadi. Houses of everyone were generally mud houses but quality differs among different castes. In the last decade things have changed significantly. They have shifted to the consumption habit which is seen as part of higher social status. Rice replaced *madua* and green vegetables and peas became important part of diet. Jeans, t-shirt and shirt-trouser is common among all caste. It was difficult for us as outsiders to tell any difference by looking at their cloths. In housing almost all dalits have pakka or semi-pakka houses. While many of the Mandals and Brahmins still have kachha houses. The pattern in this shift is that it is largely influenced by the dominant and upper caste consumption behaviour. So the consumption behaviour among dalits has been going towards one direction and not taking its own discourse. For instance during an interview with a Paswan family one of the key respondent Mahesh, a 50 year old, told us that the *mota anaaz* that they used to have earlier was more nutritious and healthy but still they shifted into this new food habit as this is eaten by “everybody”. Raj kishor who is a Headmaster in government school explained that how good clothing and standard living style is important to get acknowledgement by “other” people. By indicating towards his shirt he said: “This is an expensive shirt. I bought it from Kashmiri Vastralay” (Kashmiri Vastralay is well known shop in Jharkhand because most politicians buy their cloth from that shop). In housing most Dalits are aspired to have a pakka house as it is indicator of modernity in this village.

Above instances are examples of how Dalits have been heading towards a discourse which is already set by the dominant or popular culture of that village. Consumerism and the market economy have given them the opportunity to move easily in this discourse. But there are few anomalies in this obvious looking theory of market economy as emancipator of untouchability. In the next paragraph we will discuss some of these anomalies.

As discussed earlier that in Antkadih Ravidas and Paswan have different social attitude despite having same opportunities provided by market economy. Even it is Paswans who are doing economically better than Ravidas. Our interpretation of this peculiar situation is that it is their different physical closeness with dominant caste people which is working as the key reason here. Paswans who are settled very near to Mandals cannot afford to express their resistance as they have intimate daily life relationship with Mandals. They do not manifest their material advancement as it may offend the Mandals. In all interviews with most middle age or old Paswan people, they never mentioned any kind of displeasure with Mandals and according to them everything is all right. Sarju, a 52 year old Paswan man who is *rajmistri*(house builders), told us that they have a very friendly relation with Mandals. During interview, his wife counters many of his positive statements for Mandals, she was scolded and not allowed to give her opinion. This contradiction also came into the narrative of young Paswan boys, who told us just opposite of what Sarju told us. Talking about the material manifestation by Paswans, Sarju's house which has fully marbled floor from inside had a very ordinary look from outside. There is a curtain at the entry of house which makes it difficult to look inside the house. As very few houses have curtain at the entry of the house, curtain in Sarju's house indicates attempt of hiding. Clothing among Paswan is average compare to Ravidas. Colours of the houses of Ravidas are more expressive and the ambience of their settlement is more calm compare to Paswan settlement or even whole village. The consumption theory gets more complicated by the consumer behaviour of Mandals. They have very less interest to maintain a good life style in daily life. They wear average clothing in their daily lives and their houses are also not so attractive, some of them are really odd. Some of rich Mandals still have mud houses. However, some Mandals have well inside their houses which show that their focus is more on having basic amenities. Now the problem is that if Mandals themselves are not so consumerist then how one can expect from them that they will recognise Dalit's advanced consumer behaviour as an upliftment of their social status. The possible

explanation of advanced consumer behaviour among Dalits, in particular of the Ravidas', is that it is coming from Mehtas. They look up to Mehtas as hard working and self-made men. Mehtas as economically and politically powerful people manifest it through their appearance, their cloth and way of life. In an interview, a dalit school teacher Pradeep, a 40 year old male, told us that "their women", like Mehta's women, do not go to weekly market to sell anything. This statement shows the possibility that Ravidas have been subconsciously reasoning that by matching the standards of Mehtas they can get the recognition from Mandals. It explains that what made them to surpass Mandals in living standards.

The effort of lifting their standard of life is also self-motivated. Because they are stigmatised as unclean and most polluted, they put extra effort to lift their living standards. In many interviews Ravidas people themselves acknowledged and rationalized this fact that their *dirtywork* made "other" people to think "wrong" about them. They said that they were determined to achieve the most standard way of living. This is also the reason of their anger, because even after attaining this way of life they still get the wrong treatment by "others". In interviews with dominant and upper caste people it became very clear that they acknowledged that Ravidas maintains high level of living standards as well as they are more hygienic as compared to the Brahmins. Satish, who also runs a PDS shop and a dabang person, said that "you and me cannot maintain the food, hygiene and cleanliness that Ravidas people maintain in their community". Ram Ji, 60 year old Baniya who runs a big Kirana shop, was describing to us that Ravidas purchases the most expensive rice and other items from his shop. He also said that "you and I cannot give competition to Ravidas people in terms of consumption". With all these acknowledgment they still look down upon the Dalits. This is the anomaly in the consumer theory which means that even Dalits lift their living standard and left all the stigmatized work, they will be remain stigmatised and identified as "Dalit". However one can argue from a different perspective that the reactions of dominant caste people are indication that they are recognizing the new status of dalits consciously or sub-consciously.

Land, occupation and caste in relation to market economy

Occupation is one of the many categories in which manifestation of caste can be seen. Caste works were pre-given and caste groups were not allowed to do any other work. It is believed

that a market oriented economy will take care of these rigidities and will provide equal opportunity to all irrespective of their castes. Antkadih is not untouched from this. In last 40 to 50 years in Antkadih occupation structure has changed a lot. Migration that started in 50s provided ground for these occupational changes. Migration of 1950s had different character and consequences then migration in 1990s. In 1950s Dalits got job in organised sector, specifically in Calcutta Municipal Corporation. These jobs gave them stability, opportunity of understanding and doing politics. As mentioned earlier it helped them to bring social-political change in their village. Although very few Dalits got this job at that time. Migration since 1990s to till date has a different character and consequences. It created jobs in unorganised sector at mass level. But the people who migrated in this era has very little to contribute in their community in the village. The chaos of unorganised sector stripped them off from their every other identity, now the only identity they carries is of “free” labour. However it certainly improved their economic conditions. As economic condition of these people improved they got some freedom in choice making and freedom to refuse. For- example while asking questions regarding agricultural labour many Paswan said that they do not do agricultural work because wages are very low. View of the non-Dalits regarding this were that, they don't come for work because they are getting food at low price from the PDS and also higher wages in cities. Migration in 1990s became the axis of change which led to change in the structure of local occupation. For instance, the shortage of labour created by migration made labor costlier in Antkadih. This made possible the introduction of wage labor. Before that they were working on *three paila* (1.5 to 2kg) paddy for a day. The shortage of cheap labor made agriculture less profitable. These circumstances introduced share cropping. Now dalits do share cropping with dominant caste people. It is an unimaginable situation made possible by migration. Now, many Paswans and Ravidas are doing works like *Rajmistri* also that was earlier assigned to non- Dalit castes. Ravidas also refused to do the work of lifting dead animal and tanning due to stigma associated with it, and later they demanded money for the same work.

As mentioned earlier that after 1990s most of the people who migrated, got jobs in unorganised sector irrespective of their caste identity. But the nature of jobs that dalits and non-dalits got is not similar. This is again perpetuating a kind of fault line in the “work” of dalits and non-dalits.

Dalits have almost no ownership in the main market located at NH10. Dalits from Antkadih have not own any kind of shop. We found only one shop owned by a Ravidas in the village and that was in the Par Tand (Ravidas settlement). It was a small shop and people from other castes never came to buy anything from his shop. In most interviews when we asked that why no dalit owned a shop in main market, no one has an immediate response. It was something as obvious truth which has no obvious explanation. Here, we came to know that although market economy has open market for everyone and made people potential consumer, but it failed to make people owner particularly Dalits in Antkadih.

Weekly market has a very unique character in Antkadih. Most of the buyers and sellers are women. Later when we investigated more we found that market was dominated by women due to absent of men. Most of the women who were selling goods were from Mandal castes. Mandals were proud the fact that their women are going out and making money. When we asked Ravidas families why they don't sell anything in the market, their immediate response was that because we don't produce much, whatever we produce we consume. Later we asked their views on- we have seen only Mandal women selling goods in Saturday market, one of our respondents says we don't allow our women to do such thing. For him sending women to sell product in the market was a demeaning activity. We realized that they were comparing themselves with Mehta's.

One of the important reasons of migration among Dalits was lack of land ownership. Rajesh who migrated to Malaysia has mentioned this. Lack of land ownership was also related to seasonal migration. Majority of the population in Antkadih grows only one crop in a year due to their dependency on rain water. Mehta caste on the other hand that has large number of land grows three crops in a year and also water intensive crops like sugarcane. We have seen almost negligible migration among Mehta community. High productivity, strong sense of community and ownership of modern technology and education plays an important role. We have observed seasonal migration among Mandals, Ravidas and Paswan castes. They have been doing agriculture through old techniques. Assets like tractor, jcb and truck belongs to dominant caste people. Except of Ravidas other two castes lacks the strong sense of community. Most of the caste groups who are doing well and have some kind stability in life have average or more than average land holding. The maximum land holding among dalits is 10 *katha* (720 sq feet) but only few of them possessed this much land. As dominant caste

people were reluctant to reveal about their property we do not have exact data about their land holdings. But it is for sure that large capital extensive agriculture is done by dominant caste only. This indicates that big landholding suitable for commercial agriculture belongs to them. The history of unequal distribution of land in this village is still maintained by some “invisible” force.

Conclusion

If we keep the values aside then migration, which is the part of market economy’s functioning, proved itself as the core of the change in Antkadih. Also, consumerism provided a way for Dalits to become aspirational. Occupation and consumption, these two hinges of caste system definitely get challenged during this whole process of change. If we think untouchability in classical sense where this is treated as visible and physical phenomena then it looks that Antkadih witnessed some significant change. But the way power dynamics of this village has been working in current era, nothing seems to be changed in relations of power. In this village it seems Dalits have two options either remain in a sub-ordinated position or live in isolation. Ravidas have chosen the latter. This requires thinking about untouchability in current context. If caste is understood in terms of binary or opposition or in relation to other, then the mutual relationship of dalit and non-dalit must be mapped in terms of both time and space. Till now our way of understanding untouchability has been based on time axis, so we concentrate on successive change in the visible form of untouchability. But what if it has transformed itself and became invisible. That is why we need to analyze it spatially. By space I mean the peculiarity of local conditions, which can shape anything even the universal concepts like untouchability.

If we understand untouchability as a tool to maintain the unequal power relations in society then it can be said with surety that the old power relations in Antkadih it is still maintained as it is. No caste group has moved a bit from their place in the power relations of 1950s. There is only one exception of it that is Mehta, who swapped position with Mandals.

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