

The OBCs through India's Social History

Dr. Satish Shirsath

Professor,

Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension. savitribai Phule Pune University,Pune.

The social history of India, can be traced through select period. Some periods can be marked in general for the convenience of explanation. Numerous scholars have explained it in different ways.

Key-words- OBCs, India, Social History, Civilization , Chaturvarna.

Garge has stated illustrative it as follows(Garge ,S.M.) ,

A) Pre- Vedic period: The excavation at Harappa and Mohen- daro throws light on Indus valley civilization (period roughly 2500-3000.B.C.). It has been established that, India possessed an advanced civilization at that time.

The living standard, social life and economic situation was advanced. There might be few classes prevailing i.e. protectors ,artisans, skilled workers, tradesmen and workmen. There had a great love for sports and games among the people. The people might be worshipping certain deities and nature.

B)Vedic period: We get the idea about contemporary social life from the vedic literature. The institution of family was powerful and the male head of the family had control over the family. Joint family system was in existence everywhere.

* Inclusion of Chaturvarna-

Chaturvarna was included in social life. Ranking and duties of four varnas were fixed. Some scholars opine that, caste- system existed in this period, whereas some scholars deny the opinion.

However (during this period) due to various circumstances, castes emerged and strengthened. Later the caste differences and number of castes increased. (New castes, sub-castes emerged due

to inter-breeding among males and females of different castes. This practice stopped afterwards. Every caste inclined to maintain independent identity).

The customs and birth became influential rather than qualities and knowledge. It laid the people (born in higher varna) in getting higher and esteemed status. Emphasis of 'Shudras' work was given on service of (people of) other varnas. Ordinary Shudras were at the lowest social and cultural step in society.

Upto 1st and 2nd Century, the social exchanges became uniform everywhere (except local traditions).

C. Historical period (first half) (600 to 1200): It can be divided in two periods. 3.1. 600-900. 3.2. 900-1200. In the first period, most of the people belonged to Hindu religion. Caste-system became more rigid. Many subcastes emerged. In the later period, the condition of shudras became more difficult and critical. Comparatively the condition of Brahmins was very sound. They enjoyed special rights. Several restrictions were laid on females. There were some blind faiths prevalent.

D. Historical period (second half): The incidences of Mohamad (of Gazni)'s first invasion on India (in the year 1000) became the border-line between ancient India and medieval India. It changed the social picture of India. (because all the settled institutions, organisations, cultures and religious ideas were hampered). Muslim invaders forced Hindu for conversion. In political or historical traditions, there was a sense of difference among Hindu and Muslims. However, they had impact on each other in certain aspects. (such as dress, foods, music and sculpture). Changes did not take place in following aspects (in Hindus); caste system, duties of persons from different varnas, unsound condition of shudras, child marriages, custom of Sati, restrictions on women.

At the end of seventeenth century, Marthas were ruling on many parts of India. Many superstitions and beliefs were prevalent. Caste inequality was in existence. The family system was father-oriented.

E. Modern period (period of enlightenment.- 1818 to 1905): Due to British impact, several revolutionary changes took place in Indian society in following aspects; Due to western Education, close relations were seen between India and Western world. New western Education comprising of social justice and political rights impressed the Indian youth. New thoughts hampered traditional social structure. The important influence of western culture on Indians was that, they became rational and curious about ongoing customs and traditions.

The liberal education brought out changes in thinking, which is seen clearly in religious, social, cultural and political fields. The tendency of rational thinking regarding religious and social base emerged in minds of some Indians. The persons (after taking western education) kept traditions, old relationships as well as life patterns.

The western society put all - sided influence on the social life of people of India. New religious cults emerged, alongwith basic changes took place in orthodox Hindu religion. There started a demand for removal of evil social customs and bring about social reforms. Revolutionary changes took place in objectives and methods of Education,Literature and Art.The printing art helped in emergence of modern nationality among Indians. This period was memorable in view of social and thinking awareness among Indians. For understanding present social life of India ,one should review from 18th century. Raychoudhari has described it aptly as follows (Raychoudhari, S.C.) ; The nature of Indian society(i.e. rural society) remained unchanged even in the twentieth century. The villages in which rural society lived, had a sort of republic system. The states didn't interfere in the life of village-affairs mostly. The relationships between landlords and farm labour were harmonious.

Various castes and subcastes existed . Professions bore the name of a caste. There were two stratas in society. The upper one comprised of the wealthy persons, while the illage people. The artisans got a fixed share of each year's produce of each farmer in the village. It was the remuneration of their services through barter system. The village artisans, their dues and duties were different in different parts of a country. Village self- sufficiency helped them to maintain independence; inspire of the political instability at national level. This common phenomenon of Indian society had its roots in rural insecurity. It preserved the joint family system and community- feeling within villages, and hence the individuality of human being did not evolve. Indian society is identified as rural society. Some towns and cities had developed in India(before arrival of British),on following basis,

- a.Religious and pilgrimage centres.
- b.Seats of Government.
- c.Trade Centres.
- d.Educational Centres.
- e.(After Mohammden's arrival)military cantonments.

Urban centres didn't disturb the villagers .On the contrary ,in some cases,they were congenial for the development of Village- life in various aspects. After arrival of British, the urban centres developed mostly due to industries.It shook village structure and village life as follows;

Due to increased mobility of rural people to urban centres for employment, village structure was broken in urban centres. Caste system is important

* characteristic of Indian society:

It is a determinant factor so far social, economic, political situation, imbalance and progress, eliticism and backwardness is concerned. Mandal commission has rightly mentioned it in following words," here the basic question is that of social and educational backwardness and poverty is only consequences of those two crippling caste- based handicaps "(Jain Aklank Kumar). Many scholars (Indian and foreigners)have conceptualized caste-system and its origin differently.

* Theories of the Aryan origin : According to some scholars, caste- system evolved due to attempts of Aryan to maintain the purity of their faith against the idolatrous faith of the aboriginal tribes(Sinha, Sachchidanand).

H.Risley and G.S.Ghurye incline towards racial basis of the castes (Sinha,Sachchidanand).

* The occupational theory-

According to some scholars the caste originated due to division of labour or specialization of various functions in society(Sinha, Sachchidanand). According to Nesfield ,the basis of caste-system is division of occupations and the gradation of castes correspond to the different levels of civilisation at which these traditional occupations originated '(Sinha,Sachchidanand).

* Homo- hierarchicus : According to Dumout,the castes araised from a certain ideological predilection, which is religious in nature(Sinha,Sachchidanand).

* Economic interpretation: Some scholars (such as D.D.Kosambi and R.S.Sharma) assume that, the Aryans tribe disintegrated into classes and it led to division into castes'(Sinha,Sachchidanand).

According to S.V.Ketkar ,castes emerged through various district groups (which prevailed in ancient India), and not through varnas(Abhyankar, R.S.)

Swatanryavir V.D.Savarkar explains some aspects (which differentiate castes)as follows, varnas ,region, cult, occupation,diet,inter-breeding etc(Savarkar, Swatanryavir).' Dr.B.R.Ambedkar having critical analysis of social condition of India, threw light on caste-system as follows,

" thus the superposition of endogamy on exagomy means the division of caste "(Ambedkar Dr.B.R.).

" Endogamy or the closed-door system,was a fashion in Hindu society and as it had originated from the Brahmin caste,it was whole-heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin sub divisions or classes ,who, in their turn,became endogenous castes "(Ambedkar Dr.B.R.). "A caste is an Enclosed class"(Ambedkar Dr.B.R.).

Abhyankar has mentioned some features of caste as follows; (Abhyankar R.S.).

- Prohibition on inter- dining and intermarrying.

- Supreme authority of Jati-Panchayat in social and religious fields.

- Social segregation.
- Hierarchy within castes.
- Restrictions on integrating and social relations.
- Restrictions on occupational independence.
- Endogamy.
- Untouchability.

As,we have discussed that,India possesses one of the oldest civilization ,the Introduction of caste- system,its rigidity ,rural social structure based on self reliance and absence of human individuality, socio-religious sanction to all these ,deeply implemented in the minds of people. People didn't find it proper.On the other hand,they got addicted to the system. In spite of some merits of castecaste-system (such as stability and social order) it created many problems in Indian society such as restrictions on mobility, separate identity,lacking in sense of integrity ,separate identity,

lacking in sense of integrity ,

person of higher verna/ castes got facilitated and monopolised lower castes, females got degraded,stigma of untouchability (Abhyankar R.S.).Some elites prospered. However mass backwardness created miseries in their life. Alike unique caste system, massive backwardness is one peculiarity of Indian society. People of SCs,STs and OBCs constitute about 74.5% of total population in the country(Mane,Laxman.).

* Who are OBCs ?

The term ' Backward Classes' is seen denoted during 19th century.Ealier ,backward classes meant non-Brahmins in Madras in and in Maharashtra.Mahatma Phule used a term - Shudra-Atishudra (Shudras inculcating balutedar communities while tishudras includes untouchables)(Vaidya ,Bhai). Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati (from Kolhapur) clarified 'Backward Classes 'as persons excluding advanced castes(Vaidya Bhai).In Madras ,Dr.Periyar Ramawamy attacked on dominance of Brahmins in the first quarter of 20th century(Patil ,Janardan and others). Marc Galanter has described ten denotations of the term ' Backward Classes as follows ,

- 1.As a synonm for Depressed Classes, untouchable, Scheduled Castes.
- 2.As comprising the untouchables, aboriginals and hilly and criminal tribes etc.
- 3.As comprising all communities deserving special treatment namely those included in (2) above and in addition the lower strata of non untouchable communities.

- 4.As comprising all non- tribal (Hindu) communities deserving special treatment.
- 5.As comprising all communities deserving special treatment except the untouchables.
- 6.As comprising the lower strata of non- untouchable communities.
- 7.As comprising all communities above the untouchables but below the most 'advanced ' communities.
- 8.As comprising the non- untouchable communities who were 'backward 'in comparison to the highest castes.
- 9.As comprising all communities other than the most advanced communities.
- 10.As comprising all persons who meet given non- communal tests of backwardness (e.g.low income).

Thus several attempts were done at various levels (commissions, committees, state governments) to denote as who are Backward Classes (in pre- independence period). The term ' socially and Educationally Backward Classes ' was mentioned in Indian Constitution, alongwith SCs and STs .According to article no.340,the president of India was authorised to appoint a commission to, ' investigate the conditions of (socially and educationally) backward classes and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by union/state government to remove such difficulties and to improve their conditions. "(Air Corporation SC/ ST employees Association).

Accordingly first Backward Classes commission (under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar) was set up in 1953,which submitted its report in 1955. The commission prepared a list of 2399 backward castes or communities for the entire country and 837of these were classified as 'most backward '(Jain, Aklank Kumar(Publisher).

The commission recommended several measures for the Educational, economic, social, cultural and political advancement of these castes or communities. However, the commission could not present an unanimous report (Jain,Aklank Kumar) .Even the chairman (of the commission), Shri Kaka kalelkar took 'equivocal stand' on the issue of linking caste with backwardness '(Jain,Aklank Kumar).

The said report was not accepted by the (Central Government) and the central government shoved the issue of OBCs(SEBCs)to state governments (Vaidya, Bhai). Some state governments appointed commission and committees and enlisted OBCs and determined proportion of reservations for them.Some state governments prepared the lists of OBCs with the help of lists made by Education ministries (Vaidya, Bhai).

In Maharashtra, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Shri. B.D.Deshmukh in 1961.This committee recommended Backward Classes under four categories (i.e.S.C.s and Neo-Buddhas,S.T.s,DT/NT,OBCs) and recommended reservations in services and educational institutions(Jain,Aklank Kumar).

At National level, the second Backward Classes Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Shri.B P.Mandal.This commission submitted it's report to Central government(Vaidya ,Bhai). It enlisted 3743 castes/ communities and said that they constitute 52% of total population in entire country.

These castes - communities consist of Hindus and Non-Hindus (Vaidya, Bhai). The commission recommended certain measures for the uplifting of persons (of SEBCs- i.e.OBCs)as follows (Jain,Aklank Kumar) ;

- Educational assistance.

- Financial assistance.

- Structured Changes.

-Central assistance.

As per the directives of Court,' National Commission for Backward Classes ' has been set up at National level along with state Backward Classes commission has been set up at State level(in Maharashtra).These commissions are set up for thorough consideration of OBCs. Religious, cultural and social rigidity is getting weakening from British rule period. After independence, all these restrictions are prohibited by the constitution and law.Principally heaven is open for everyone in the democratic and welfare state. However this quality (of chance) is unable to bring the backward people .

Mandal Commission has rightly depicted the reality in one chapter (...there is equality only among equals.To treat unequals as equal, is to perpetuate inequality.....")

When we allow weak and strong to compete on equal footing ,we loading the dice in favour of the strong and holding only a mock competition (Jain,Aklank Kumar). It is true that economic backwardness accompanies social and economic backwardness. Social situation has caused for poisoning the scene.

Time to time development processes and incidences such as industrialization, privatisation etc. have affected adversely the conditions of Backward Classes.

Mandal Commission, several committees and commissions and the constitution has brought together the OBCs under one umbrella. However, theses castes are neither organized nor they possess awareness of 'wellbeing '.This reality is result of following obstacles; - Persons of these communities are disintegrated and scattered. -in several castes,subcastes and divisions. - Superiority / inferiority feelings,

-heterogeneity.

- variations in way of living, - - vastness and lack of communication,

-socio-cultural background,
-lack of proper leadership, -direction and awareness, . -numbed minds due to imparting social ranking and structure.

These persons lag in legal struggle. They cannot fight with new economic constraints. They are wearisome while facing day to day problems .They don't admit that they are lagging behind.

References-

1. Garge S.M.& others (Editors): 'Samajik Jeevan ,' in Bhartiya Samaj Vidnyan Kosh,Vol- 5.
- 2 .Raychoudhari, S.C.: Social, Cultural and Economic history of India,(Surjeet Publication, Delhi-7),fourth edition, 1993,pp.29-42.
- 3.Jain Aklank Kumar(Publisher),Reservations for Backward Classes, Mandal Commission Report of the Backward Classes Commission (alongwith Introduction)(Aklank Publications,Delhi-6),p.62.
- 4.Sinha, Sachachinand : Caste system, Myth ,Reality Challenges, (Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi-2), August 1982 , pp.14-15.
5. ibid, pp.17 & 21.
6. ibid,p.23.
7. ibid.p.24.
8. ibid.p.28.
9. ibid.p.42.
10. Abhyankar ,R.S.: ' Jativyavastha ' in Bhartiya Samajvidnyan Kosh,vol-2(Editors- Garge,S.M.& othres),published by Garge S.M.,Director ,Samajvidnyan Mandal, Pune 4), first edition- 1987,(Marathi),p.512.
- 12.Savarkar ,Swatantryavir V.D.: Char Varnachya Char Hajar Jati in Jattyucchedak Nibandh(Publisher -Savarkar ,S.S.,Veer Savarkar Prakashan ,Mumbai 28)- March 1982,(Marathi) p.17.
- 12 .Ambedkar, Dr.B.R.: Castes in India (Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar writing and speeches, vol. 1, Editors-Moon Vasant and others, Publisher- The Education Department of Maharashtra, Bombay -32), reprint- October 10,1989,p.9.
13. ibid. p.18.
14. ibid.p.15.
15. Abhyankar ,R.S.: op.cit.pp.514-516.
16. ibid.,p.516.

17. *ibid.* Mane Laxman: ' Anya Magasvargiya, Bhatkya Va Vimukta Samaj ' in Mandal Ayog : OBCnchya Lokshahi Mukticha Jahirnama'. (Editors- Patil Janardan, Dewre Shrawan and Wagh Madhavrao , Publisher- Patil Janardan, Mumbai-22), first edition, May 11, 1990 (Marathi), p.11.

18. Vaidya Bhai : Mandal Ayog Ani Anya-Magasvargiyansathi Vishesh Sandhi (Janta Party Prakashan , Mumbai-20) , 3rd edition, (Marathi), p.8. 19. *ibid.* p.29.

20. Patil Janardan, Dewre Shrawan & Wagh Madhavrao (editors): Mandal Ayog OBCnchya Lokshahi Multicha Jahirnama (Publisher - Patil , Janardan, Mumbai-22), first edition-May 11, 1990 (Marathi), p.13.

21. Air Corporation SC/ ST Employees Association (Bombay region): Reservation Policy for the Scheduled Castes/ the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (Mumbai), 18.2.1996, p.10.

22. Jain, Aklank Kumar (Publisher): *Op.cit.*: p.6.

23. *ibid.* : ' The members of the commission differed on the view of linking caste with backwardness. '

24. *ibid.*: ' Chairman Mr. Kaka Kalelkar did not record a formal minute of dissent (regarding caste basis). However, he mentioned his views in his forwarding letter to the President (he said, " it is only when the report was being finalized, that I started thinking a new and found that backwardness could be tackled on a basis or number of bases other than that of Caste. "

25. Vaidya, Bhai: *op.cit.* pp.10-11.

26. *ibid.* p.11.

27. Jain, Aklank Kumar (Publisher) *Op.cit.* ' Status of Other Backward Classes in some states' from the Mandal Commission Report, p.14.

28. Vaidya, Bhai, *op.cit.* p.14.

29. *ibid.* p.20.

30. Jain , Aklank Kumar (Publisher): *pp.cit.* .second.

'Recommomdations' from the Report, pp.62-65.

31 *ibid.* : ' Social Justice, Merit and privilege ', from the Mandal Commission Report, p.26.