

An Analysis of the Continuum in Inter-Caste Relations in India

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Abstract : Historicity of inter-caste relations can be traced in the early stages of evolution of rural community in the Indian society. These have witnessed vicissitudes during long drawn interactions between caste groups. Inter-caste relations evolved in a more organized form in the guise of Jajmani system. This is a system of permanent and hereditary inter-caste relations and gives a kaleidoscopic view of socio-economic relations among various caste groupings. Universality of its prevalence in rural India for centuries is well recognized and documented. But it has been undergoing metamorphic change in some regions and changing at a slower pace in the others during post-independence period. An empirical study was conducted with the objectives to know whether Jajmani system is in vogue in the rural areas and type and intensity of socio-economic ties among different caste categories and to find out the change in inter-caste relations, if any owing to industrialization and modernization. Information was elicited from 225 respondents using interview schedule designed for this purpose. It is discernible that in majority of cases, inter-caste social relations which find better expression on the occasions like marriage, death, birth and festivals etc. among Brahmins and lower castes vis-à-vis other caste categories have grown weak. The data further unearth that economic relations as maintained on the occasions of marriage, sacred thread ceremony, mundan sacrament, birthday, death, yajna, katha, routine hair cut, manufacture and repair of various iron, earthen, wooden and leather articles between members of higher castes (general category) and lower castes (scheduled castes) are moderate but weak in case of Other Backward Classes vis-à-vis all other caste categories. Overwhelming majority of informants believe that decline in hereditary occupations, depreciation of old products and services and their availability from the market being made by industry are main reasons in descending order for change in inter caste relations. Modernization, westernization, industrialization, transportation and communications, growing materialism and consumerism together have brought change in relations among caste groups affecting about a billion population inhabiting rural India.

Keywords : inter-caste, Jajmani, sacrament, Yajna

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