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Adaptation and Change: An Anthropological Study on Inter-Caste Relationships in a Tribe-Caste Village of North India

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ABSTRACT

This article is a microcosmic study of tribes and castes living in a village with mixed population of tribal and non-tribal groups. It focuses on the gradual change of attitude and tradition of the tribals towards the unending race of competing with the non-tribals which has led to the partial adaptation of the traditions of non-tribals. The present paper is also an attempt to functionally analyse the solidarity and interdependence between tribals and non tribals and the ways in which they live together harmoniously in one village.

Keywords: Acculturation, De-Tribalization, Commensalism, Hierarchy, Sanskritization.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian village is characterized by caste relations which makes it an important aspect of study. In fact the villages in India demonstrate many elements of structural unity, such as the sentiment of territorial 'political' kinship and economic solidarity. The sense of village identity on many occasions cuts across caste loyalties which usually divide a village. The village as a micro-structure has not only been recognized but has gradually become a vital aspect of National Developmental Planning and politico-cultural consciousness.

Social Anthropology, as a discipline focuses on intense emic data gained inductively from long term association with small communities. It, therefore, has always attached particular importance to village studies. One of the major trends in Social Anthropology during the last two decades or so has been a substantial shift from the study of the more or less isolated tribal people-who are now for many reasons, altering their way of life radically, especially in those aspects, which were once anthropologists' most prized raw material- to the study of peasants, who from the view point of structural relationship rather than occupational, are part society and part culture. Such a change in the academic trend of Social Anthropology had been brought about by American anthropologists, among whom the name of Robert

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Redfield deserves to be mentioned, as he was the first anthropologist, who carried out a systematic village study in Tepoztalan- a Mexican village. Oscar Lewis and McKim Marriott further applied the scientific methodology developed by Redfield and others, in their own studies. Village studies in India historically go back to the year 1861 when Sir Henry James Sumner Maine published his Ancient Law.

Dhanaura village, the subject of our study, is home to people of various castes and a tribe, sharing a similar pattern of life. They feel a consciousness of homogeneity, interdependence and a sense of security borne of living together in a mixed village and sharing opportunities and crises.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the tribe caste relationship in their multiple aspects which regarded as of great importance in village studies.
2. To assess the process of acculturation and mutual influences over to each other, whether it is one sided or both sided.
3. To examine the retention of tribal identity during the course of Acculturation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a theoretical research paper, where both primary and secondary data have been used for the analysis. The primary data are collected by interview, participant observation, schedules. In the selection of Respondents, the simple stratified random sampling has been applied. As Dhanaura is a tribe-caste village, various tribes and different caste group are living together therefore each caste and tribes are distributed in different strata. Then from each strata respondents have been selected on the basis of simple random sampling technique. Besides this, secondary data was collected from research reports, district website and regional tribal office. The secondary data was ratified during field data collections.

STUDY AREA

U.P. is a state situated in North India. It coordinates 26.850N 80.910E latitudinally and longitudinally. It is the most populous state in India as well as the most populous country subdivision in the world. Sonbhadra District is the 2nd largest district in India which borders four states namely M.P, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar. Sonbhadra District is also famous for an Industrial Zone and it is also called as Energy Capital of India. A tribe-caste village has been taken which is situated geographically and ethically on the fringe of district and state.

As per our census done the total population of Dhanaura is 4703 out which there are 2493 males and 2210 females and the total number of households were 673.

The proposed study is done in Dhanaura village of Duddhi block in Dudhi Tehsil of district Sonbhadra, U.P. The Village is situated at the fringe of five states namely U.P., M.P, Chattisgarh and Bihar and Jharkhand.

FINDINGS

Dhanaura village is the main village of study in Duddhi block. Dhanaura sets an example of how tribes and castes live together without deteriorating their identity and culture. Though both have adopted each others cultures, tribes being more comfortable in adopting Hinduism but have still maintained their ethnic identity.

The people of Dhanaura are simple and believe in peace. There is poverty in Dhanaura therefore everyone is busy in running their livelihood. Males and females work with each other specially as labourers and cultivators. They speak Hindi and Bhojpuri. It was seen that despite being poverty stricken they were actively involved in educating their children.

Dhanaura, a symbol of unity and filled with ethnic spirit of oneness is divided into groups Tribal and non tribal. There are 16 castes in Non tribal group and 5 in tribal group. There were various tribes and castes living together in harmony. They have been divided as tribal and non tribal groups.

TRIBES- *Gond (Maajhi), Chero, Panika, Bhuiya, Kharwar.*

CASTES- *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Srivastava, Agrahari, Kalwar, Teli, Naai, Kewat, Lohar, Kumhar, Biyar, Koiri, Chamar, Paasi, and Muslim.*

Tribals are the original inhabitants and non tribals are the one who either migrated from other states or the one who have forcefully detained the lands of tribals and settled on their lands. Maximum population of Dhanaura is Hindu. The tribal population is one fourth of the total population. They had their unique Culture. All their feast and festivals, the rituals related to magic and religion is not performed by a Brahmin but by a *Baiga* (man of Chero Tribe). This tradition is followed till now.

By seeing the present condition of Dhanaura it would be true to say that the tribes have undergone the process of Acculturation due to which the tribals have left their own custom and traditions and have fully adopted the rituals and traditions of Hindus.

Thus the gap between tribals and non tribals was filled. Among the tribals the population *Gonds* is highest. Their population is 826 out of 4703, almost 18% of the total population and among the non tribal population *chamars* have highest population i.e. 800 out of 4703, 17% of total population. Dhanaura is situated differently from the other villages which are situated on plain. The houses here are scattered due to which there is lack of communication between the castes. Dhanaura has been divided into 5 Tola- Dhanaura I, Dhanaura II, Japla, Bagbiyani and Piprahi. In Dhanaura I, there are smaller hamlets which are named after castes such as *Brahmin Tola, Thakur Tola, Ahir Tola.*

The population is almost equal though *Brahmins* are a little more in number, however their social status is almost equal. Economically they are more strong than rest. It is found that both the castes are not so friendly with each other as always there is a fight for headship. In present time also the Gram Pradhan is *Brahmin* since 10 years.

Mythologically the *Kshatriyas* consider themselves lower than Hindus

because Brahmins are priests, few Brahmins are still doing their traditional *Panditai*, rests are involved in agriculture, govt. Job, Business etc.

Table No. 1.1

S.No	Brahmin Occupation	No. of Households	Percentage
1.	Priest	15	23.07%
3.	Govt. Job	11	16.92%
4.	Business	10	15.38%

5.	Maha Brahman	7	10.76%
	Total	65	100%

Kshatriya are the land holders and are economically sound and hold strong position in Dhanaura. They hold important posts in Duddhi Tehsil and also in the Gram Panchayat.

PARTICIPATION OF PANDITS IN CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS

Brahmins have always been perceived as the connecting link between God and humans. *Pandits* (Priests) are the highest officials among the Brahmins therefore they do not enter the house of a lower caste person, neither they take food nor drink water from the members of that house. They behave differently with different caste people. They give respect to respectable person (higher caste people) and neglects or abandons the lower caste people.

They give least time to *Chamar* however the *Pandits* are present in the

marriage of any caste but they do not eat in every caste. *Pandit* also performs *Mundan*, *Chatthi*, *Barahi*, *Yagyopaveet* ceremonies of upper castes. He also performs *Katha* when called from any upper castes. Thus it is clear that the *Pandits* performs the *pooja* in the lower castes also but in temples or any other place but not their home. In some intermediate castes he does not eat food therefore *seedha* is given to him so that he can prepare the food himself with all the raw items.

ACCEPTANCE AND DENIAL OF FOOD AND WATER

There are two types food told by Dhanaura men- *Kaccha* and *Pakka*. *Kaccha Khana* includes *Dal Chawal*, *Roti Sabzi* and *Pakka khana* includes *Poori* made of oil and ghee. It is seen that generally two castes does not have *kaccha khana* with each other. If any lower caste people accepts food only from Brahmin and Thakur then they can only have *poori* made from oil or ghee from any other caste as it is believed that anything made from oil and put on fire is pure. This is seen still in *Gonds* of Dhanaura. Also it is seen that even if any caste eats with other caste, then also the castes generally do not eat *bhaat* (Rice) in any caste, specially a higher caste person. The rule of not eating *bhaatis* so strict that when *Gonds* were asked about this tradition, they told that do not eat rice even in some of their own subcastes. The Hindu caste accepts rice only from *chamar* in lower caste and no scheduled tribe. Similarly *Gond* and *Kharwar* do not accept rice as food from any tribal group and from any caste also not even from Brahmin.

The Brahmin do not accept the *kaccha* food from any caste not even from Kshatriya. The Kshatriya do not accept *Kaccha Khana* from Brahmin in Brahmin home but if served somewhere else can have the food. Brahmins can accept the sweets or any dairy products from Kshatriya. The food pattern or the food intake relation between the Brahmins and the other castes is same as the relation between Kshatriya and the other castes. All the other upper castes follow the food pattern of Kshatriya. The Kalwars, Agrahari, Srivastava, Lohars, Ahir, Kewat and do not have any taboo for *Pakka Khan* but generally it found that they do not accept *Pakka Khana* from Kumhar, Teli, Chero, Panika, Paasi, Chamar and Bhuiya but few exceptions were also seen like Kshatriya do not have *Pakka Khan* with Chero but few castes such as Lohar, Ahir, Kewat, Kumhar, and Teli have *Pakka Khan* with Chero. The tribal

groups *Gond*, *Chero Kharwar* enjoy some hierarchical status but *Gonds* are more respectable firstly they more in members, secondly they are the original inhabitants, though the exchange of food is done among them without any taboo. *Panika* and *Bhuiya* on the other hand are the lower tribal group that can have the *kaccha* and *Pakka Khana* with the other tribal group but the tribe did not accept food in their houses. The lower caste can accept the water from upper castes but the upper castes only accept from the touchables. It is a general notion that those castes from whom water can be taken are suitable for *Pakka Khana*.

The exchange of food between Thakur and other castes.

DISCRIMINATION IN SEATING ARRANGEMENT

The lower caste people cannot sit together with the upper caste people. It is mandatory to sit above the lower caste people for the upper caste however while attending the Panchayat an exception was seen. At the Panchayat Bhawan, Dhanaura it was seen that among the *panches* of the members of the Gram Panchayat, certain low caste people were sitting next to Pradhan and other upper caste people. But it was also seen that whenever a low caste person sees an upper class person, he stands in due respect. It is also evident to say the discrimination is not only decided through the castes but also through education, post, business etc. In the Panchayat Bhawan, there was no such discrimination. In primary school of Dhanaura there were teachers and attendants of lower caste, they sat along with other upper caste teacher and enjoyed equal status of a teacher.

INTERMINGLING DURING FESTIVALS

There is no discrimination among the castes in any festival except *Holi*. The lower caste cannot put colours to the high caste people although they can put *abir gulal* on them. The main reason behind it is that the untouchability lies in water.

INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN CASTES

In spite of strong racism or the casteism seen in the village, the villagers are bonded through strong social relations which fills the gap between the higher caste and lower caste. In this the *Jajmani* system and traditional occupation of the castes plays an important role. Every caste plays an important part in maintaining the integrity of the village. As seen earlier, the Brahmins (Pandits) are in contact with every caste. Lohar and Gonds also do the work of carpentry (*Badhaigiri*). Thus gives service to villagers, he repairs the plough & makes the wooden blocks to be used in marriage. The kumhar on the other hand makes pottery with clay, *dona* and *pattal* made from *Palash* whole year thus serves the people. Irrespective of higher and lower caste, the chamar give their services whenever a child is born, similarly *Naai* (Barber) are also called during birth, mundane, marriage, death etc. *Dhobi* (washerman) are not in Dhanaura, therefore when they are needed, are called from other village. *Cheros* are also an indispensable part of the village they are the *Baiga* of the village, the post of *Baiga* is ancestral and paternal who are generally *Cheros*. The *Baiga* are the traditional healers and practitioners to whom everyone goes either for treatment of any disease, any ghost and witchcraft etc. *Chero* call themselves the owner of the land therefore their presence is mandatory in all the festivals related to land such as sowing, reaping, harvesting in agriculture, while digging out clay for *matkodhwa* (a marriage ritual). In the marriage ceremonies he has vital role irrespective of any caste. In every house when the seeds are sown and harvesting of crops done, *Baiga* is called for sacred performances for high yield. He also performs certain *pooja* for the welfare of village called as *Gaanon Banana* and *Gaanon Gothna*. All the upper castes who are the landowners are heavily dependent upon the lower castes for their help in harvesting, sowing, irrigation, and for the collection of the agriculture yield. Similarly the lower caste and the tribals are dependent on the higher caste for work or part time occupation for their livelihood. Thus due to this interdependency of castes and tribes on each other in day to day life leads to closeness

and solidarity inspite of strict rules of caste. The tribe and caste live together in Dhanaura building a strong bond due to such interdependency. The following diagram shows the interdependency of various castes and tribes.

Marriage of an upper caste Hindu

TRANSITION PHASE

With these above mentioned reasons it is also seen the effect of interaction with other villagers and migrated population people going out to different cities or even countries for work which has turned their strict caste rules into a flexible one. People have become liberal now. The factors included are social interaction, communication sources- Media, television, phones, abolition of *zamindari*, various development schemes launched by the govt., awareness among the lower caste and tribes. All those privileges and power which higher caste people are getting are equally demanded by the lower castes and tribes. They are keeping their opinions strongly, they are no more slaves now. We see that even the rules of acceptance and denial of food are prevalent

but we also come across with one such Brahmin *Mahabir Pandit* who eats in every marriage might be of *Chamar* also. When he was asked that inspite of such rules of purity why he eats in *Chamar* and *Bhuiya* family, he smartly said, "hotel me Jo Khate hain vokaun sa Brahmin Thakur banate hain". The upper castes now have become more tolerant towards the lower caste. Thus these old practices are no doubt getting followed but gradually they are losing grip and the weapon being used is awareness, education, job security. The tribes which are educated they are by no means less than the upper castes. At first sight it became difficult to identify between a tribe.

CONCLUSION

The castes and the tribes were interdependent and the effect of acculturation was seen, the tribes adapted Hinduism and followed all the rituals and festivals of Hindu. Dhanaura witnessed acculturation i.e. the tribes were adopting the cultures and rituals of castes, but presently transculturalism is also seen evident from the fact that all the castes worship *Nanku Baba*, who was the *Gond* and is worshipped by tribes, even the Muslims have profound faith in him. The castes also did not keep the idols of God and Goddess and there was only two temple in Dhanaura which was of Lord Shiva, in which the tribals had faith and worshipped him. No only the tribes follow the rituals of Hindu marriages but the castes also follow these rituals in every Hindu marriage, the *Baiga (Chero)* is called for *Matkodwa*, *Mandap chana*, for *Mehadhar Pooja* which is a tribal ritual and on many occasions the tribes and castes complement each other. The agricultural fields were beside the houses in the villages respectively which is a characteristic tribal feature. Thus the castes also imitate the way of living of tribes.

The commensal relations were mainly evident from the acceptance of food from each other. Earlier the rules were strict and people followed them. The upper castes and intermediate castes did not accept the food and water from lower castes. The *Pandits* did not perform the ceremonies in the lower castes and tribal families but now the *Pandits* go in the marriage of lower castes but do not eat food and generally they do not go to their houses. The *pooja* or any ceremony is kept in temple or anywhere except house. In *Gond* marriage *Dharmacharya* performs the rituals in marriage. The *Gonds* also now eat food and water in other castes unlike their ancestors but they do not eat rice *bhaat* in anyone's house specially in upper and lower castes. The practice of untouchability is diminishing which is gradually strengthening the commensality between the castes and tribes. Beside these the tribe caste interaction can be seen in marriages, birth, worshippings done for the welfare of the village. *Kshatriya* marriage

is a classic example of intercaste relation in present Dhanaura-Brahmin (*Pandit*) for ceremonial rituals, Baiga for matkodwa & Mandap Chana, Lohar brings wooden table and flags for pillars of *Mandap*, *Naai* invites the villagers, Chamars for cleaning purposes, they bring dona, *Dhobi* does the *sindoor* daan, Gonds are among the invitees, Kumhar brings the earthen pots and many castes help each other in this way. Thus they have strong intercaste interaction due to which these heterogeneous population are able to live in harmony with each other.

This tribe caste village was different in a way that regardless of the culture contact with Hindus and going through the process of Acculturation and partial detribalization, the tribal groups have maintained their identity and thus transculturation was more evident than acculturation. However in the world of globalisation and in the society of competitions, the tribals compete with the upper castes and in the process of continuously comparing themselves to them (Hindu), they have undergone partial

detribalization. Their continuous exposure with castes has led to this but it is beneficial to them in many ways. This adoption of Hindu culture has brought them in the stream of progressive development which is good for their multifaceted development. The tribals of other states are lagging behind as they are living in a homogenous population, so they do not have to face competition with the outer world.

The socio economic status of the Dhanaura people has been upgraded due to the castes residing in it. However every time when two cultures come in contact there are some pros and cons. Earlier they were exploited by the castes but now the tribals have passed that transition phase when they were struggling for their identity. The tribals here are the indispensable part of the village. Poverty exists which is the important reason behind their backwardness. They are no more deprived class of the village. Also they are no more exploited by the migrant castes. The migrated castes have adopted themselves according to the atmosphere of the village.

This tribe caste culture of Dhanaura is a partial example of the theory of Assimilation postulated by Anthropologist and sociologist G.S. Ghurye. According to him the tribals are the backward Hindus therefore they should be completely merged with or assimilated into the Hindu and their own ethnicity and cultural identity, complete assimilation will destroy their identity. In response to this Majumdar advocated that it is impossible to completely ignore the entire tribal population, complete assimilation will lead to a chaos. Therefore gradual transformation is the best policy for any tribal population. The tribals should be helped in assimilating in their own way. This fact is evident in Dhanaura, the tribes and castes are living in their own way and have their own choices of what to select and reject from the other culture which is the prime factor in maintaining relationship between tribal and non-tribal group of this village.

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