Caste-Continuity and Change in a Rural Community of Bangladesh

Dr. Abu Ibrahim Mohd. Nurul Huda.[6]

Rubina Huda[7]

Abstract: *Caste as a social and religious system has been undergoing changes over time. As we know caste is nothing but a mental situation of 'Purity and Pollution' which exhibit through different behavioral patterns of the people who have ascribed their status of socio-religious distinction. If we observe their behavioral patterns with intensity and apprehend the mental state behind those patterns, we find that the system still exists in a perishable manner. As ethnography, this study intends to explore the situational context of caste system in a Bangladesh village where both Hindus (Sanatana religion) and Muslims live together in separate residential areas. The study has designed to achieve some objectives through participated observation method in a village which is situated in Badarganj sub-district of Rangpur district. The both authors stayed in the village for fourteen months with two recesses. It was found that the present situation of caste system in the village has changed with the changes of the notions and attitude; the concept of untouchability has gradually weakened, but this can be the prediction that so long Hinduism persists, the concept of untouchability will endure. But, in general, the concept has been confined to the kitchen, and women have been the custodians of the concept. Regarding the changing pattern, we can say that caste, which was prevailing in a rigid form, is turning less rigid, and more flexible and adaptive in nature. It never was open, and never will be open like the class system.*

Introduction

This article, as a part of an ethnography on 'class' and 'caste', in a rural community of Bangladesh, has taken the initiative to share and comprehend the traditional 'caste' system, and to observe the existing changing process of the system in our society. Caste is an ethnic system of this sub-continent which divides the whole Hindu society into different number of hereditary groups; these groups are distinguished from one another and connected together by different characteristics. The system is governed by the twin principles of division and hierarchy. The principles of division refer the notion of 'purity and pollution', which have placed the groups into different stratus. About the system the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences expresses, "The term "caste" has been widely used to describe ranked groups within rigid systems of social stratification and especially those which constitute the society of Hindu India" (Gerald, 1968: 333). Sarkar, a social scientist admits that "Caste in its traditional form was essentially an occupational system, as each caste or *jati* had a hereditary occupation assigned to it by religious sanctions. Since this occupation indicated the position of a caste in the ritual hierarchy and caste membership depended on birth the occupational status of a caste was considered to be inviolable and immutable" (Sarkar, 1994: 65). But we have observed that the traditional caste system have reached at its crossroads in course of

---

[6]Dr. Abu Ibrahim Mohd. Nurul Huda is now serving as Associate Professor in the department of Sociology of Eden Mohila College, Dhaka. He has obtained his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Dhaka.
[7]Rubina Huda is the spouse of Nurul Huda. She has played a major role in the field study.

time and has gone through several changes in the subcontinent. Simultaneously Bangladesh has experienced the same changing process of the system due to different factors, like industrialization, urbanization, westernization, *sanskritization,* education, occupations, abolition of *zamindari* system, reform in land ownership pattern, etc. Modern capitalism and western culture have influenced the process too. Besides, expansion of national politics, adult franchise, decentralization of power, personal freedom, freedom of speech, modern system of communication and transportation, commercial linkage, national and international migration, social mobility, change and reform in some lawful rights, change in hereditary occupation, electrification, giving up superstitions, role of NGOs, expansion of women educational and occupational facilities are bringing about changes in the caste system as well as in our social structure and reducing the gap between the rigid hereditary groups.

The study has observed the existence of caste system among the Hindus of the study village, Rajapur. In this village the Hindus broadly divide themselves into three distinct groups namely, the Upper Caste Hindus, the Lower Caste Hindus and the Vaishnavas. They include the Brahmans, the Kayasthas (so called Kshattriyas), and the Kaibarttas in the Upper Caste group and the Untouchables (the Chamars) in the Lower Caste group. To them the Vaishnavas are Hindus, but out of Hindu caste structure. The Vaishnavas consider themselves as a distinct religious group. They are Hindus by religion but no more the members of Hindu traditional strata. Though the rigidity of Hindu caste system is gradually reducing, nevertheless, caste hierarchy is still a reality among the Hindus of Rajapur. But pragmatically the range of this notion is becoming narrower. Though the Brahmans are at the top of caste hierarchy but we observe that they are at the bottom of class hierarchy in Rajapur. From the economic perspective they are being dominated by the wealthy Kayastha caste. One can see the presence of religious rituals relating to clothes and behavior among some of the older generation. But among the young generation the notion of purity and pollution is not present as it was in the past. Nevertheless exogamy is still prohibited. Exogamy and widow marriage attribute pollution in the context of Rajapur. We have observed that within the same caste group the Hindus residing in different *para*s are communicating and establishing relationships among themselves, but Hindus residing in each *para* have their distinct *dosh* (social de-jure group).

Objectives and Methodology of the Study

The major objective of this anthropological study is to determine the existing nature of this socio-religious hierarchy of caste in the remote villages of Bangladesh. Social stratification on the basis of caste system, which was once the dominating criteria, has gone through changes. Rigidity of caste and the notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' are declining day by day. This study has endeavored to sketch out ethnography of a village with a focus on its social inequality, social cleavages, and the changing process of the stratification. The purview of the study is three dimensional stratification system of our rural communities, namely 'class'; 'caste'; and 'power'. But as this article focuses only on the caste system and its changing process, so here the objectives have been identified as well. Following are the specific objectives of the study:

- to grasp the existing caste situations in Rajapur;
- to determine the dominant group and their sources of power;
- to understand the relations between inter-caste intra-caste;
- to apprehend the changing process of the caste system in the study village
- to observe the situation of women regarding the caste system

- to identify the class situation within the caste situation.

This ethnography has followed the method of participant-observation. Direct participation and observation is the most important method for such a study. Though there are some limitations of this method; the native anthropologist faces some sorts of advantages and disadvantages while he studies his own society. However, indigenous knowledge system has been appreciated in spite of its disadvantages by most of the anthropologists to make an intensive study on any particular community at a time.

The authors have lived in the village, Rajapur, for more than a year. Basically the researchers have been encouraged by some ethnography of some foreign couple ethnographers written on rural Bangladesh perspective. Massive visits with friendly and cordial behavior have made them acceptable to the villagers, though not in equal proportion. However, key informants both male and female have been selected from the target people. The whole village people were the research universe. The research was conducted in three phases. The researchers stayed a period of twelve months in the village, which have been divided into three distinct phases consisting of four months each. During the recess, (within the phases) up to fifteen days each time, they have stayed at Dhaka and Rangpur for secondary sources. After twelve or fourteen months in the field, the law of diminishing returns is apt to set in. For secondary source of information libraries of home and abroad (West Bengal Central Library, Kolkata) were utilized as secondary source for analytical information and went through topic-related books, magazines and journals. Renowned scholars[8] have also shared their views with the researchers regarding the subject matter of this study. Techniques, which have been followed in this study, are: Observation and participant observation; Census; Informal interview or discussion; Genealogical method; Case Study; Key informants Interview; Audio recording and photography; Mapping; Analysis of linguistic variation; Using manuscript; Using dairies and notes; Group discussion, etc.

Review of Relevant Literature and Theoretical Perspective

All the studies reviewed here are of two categories, one is up to 1970 and the other one is after 1970. All these studies have followed participant observation method along with others to grasp the objectives of their investigation. Though most of these studies have not studied the caste system-its continuity and change, but have been reviewed here due to their pattern of anthropological studies**.** Basically, there are no studies on recent caste system and its segmentation. This is obviously a major limitation for generalizing any theories on caste system-its continuity and change on Bangladesh chapter nowadays.

Six Villages of Bengal of Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1971) is the foremost among the rural studies of Bangladesh. Socio-economic aspects of rural lives from six villages in the district of Bogura have been depicted in this book. In between 1942 and 1945, Ramkrishna Mukherjee stayed thrice, totaling five man-months in these villages, conducting survey and in-depth observation along with his assistants. Mukherjee clearly identified the Hindu villagers in accordance with their castes and sects; not only that, he also made a relation

---

[8]Renowned sociologists and institutions like Abhijit Dasgupta (Delhi); Syed Hashmi (Dhaka); Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR); Social Science Research Council, Bangladesh (SSRC,B); Program for Research on Poverty Alleviation (PRPA), Grameen Trust have extended their hands of cooperation for me for fruitful success of this study.

between caste and politics. Mukherjee analyzed the role of caste system played in social segregation, which divides people into homogeneous units of similar economic status. He rationalized this decision with the theory that the economic stratification in society is related to the caste division and communality. He divided the Hindu community residing in those villages into 'higher caste' consisting of *Brahmin*s, and *Kayastha*s with their half castes, and 'middle caste' consisting of other caste Hindus. Like this social division, he dichotomized the Muslims into 'general Muslims' and '*khulu* Muslims,' as if these are two different castes. He discussed the members belonging to different castes and social groups along with their social customs and practices.

Nazmul Karim's book '*Changing Society in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*' (1956) is a theoretical analysis dealing with general characteristics of social stratification and its changes in the then Indo-Pak sub-continent. Karim was dependent on secondary sources for writing this book. He opined that as an integral part of greater Indian society, the base of Bangladesh society was self-sufficient rural economy. The prospective transformation of feudalistic mode of production into bourgeoistic system during the Muslim rule in India had been nipped in the bud by the latter British rule.

Peter J. Bertocci (1970), in his *Elusive Village* described the findings of his research, which was conducted in two villages in Comilla district. He combined the socio-structural insights of Karl Marx and Max Weber with some concepts and techniques of anthropology. He depicted Bangladeshi village and its social life by analyzing the social structure and community life by using anthropological method. He recognized the *Reyai*, village and society as social organizations and highlighted on the relations between these organizations and classes with social structure. He admitted that the villages in Bangladesh are 'elusive' in nature. Due to high population density and disordered habitation, no one would be able to identify the physical boundary between villages. He observed that different social organizations and the reciprocal networks between the villagers had linked them socially. The main focal point of his research was to explain the relations between different community organizations and social structure within a *Thana*.

The Village Culture in Transition – A Study of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) *Rural Society* is one of the pioneer research works in the world of social science by S.M. Hafeez Zaidi (1970). He realized that culture is not static and unchangeable; rather, it is subject to change. Zaidi stated that as a general assumption, we may state that socio-cultural changes in tradition-oriented societies constitute situations of stress leading to disequilibrium in the culture and its social institutions. He conducted his investigation applying participant observation method partially and questionnaire and interview schedule partially. He stayed five months in two villages in Comilla district in 1967, which he named as Ramnagar which was dwelt in by Muslims and Alipur where both Hindu and Muslim communities resided. In a discussion of the village culture under stress, Zaidi states that due to socio-economic changes in East Pakistan villages, its culture was under stress and those changes had introduced the signs and symptoms of social disorganization. There occurred a shift from extended family to nuclear family in the villages, which imposed numerous adjustment difficulties on old men, women, and children.

Willem van Schendel, a Dutch anthropologist conducted his Ph.D. fieldwork in Bangladesh during August 1977--June 1978. His renowned book, *Peasant Mobility-the Odds of Life in Rural Bangladesh* (1982) is the revised copy of his Ph.D. thesis. He studied seven villages under Badarganj *upazila* of Rangpur district, Khetlal *upazila* of Bogra district and Kotwali *upazila* of Comilla district. The position of his 'houses' within the villages provided good opportunities for *participant observation* as his main technique particularly during the early stages of research. To study the real mobility of the peasantry, he collected information on histories of different families and differentiation, land utility, irrigation, etc. He discussed the 'model of Shanin' on peasant mobility and explained the *centrifugal mobility* and *centripetal mobility* of his theory and applied these theories to his own studies (Shanin: 8). To make an overall assessment of peasant mobility in Bangladesh, Schendel opined that between 83 and 93 per cent of all existing households had experienced inter-category mobility since their formation. He observed that most peasant households had experienced mobility and downward mobility was more likely than upward mobility. To him peasant classes were, therefore, of the 'omnibus' variety: there was always some joining and leaving of peasant households. He experienced that the households were not only aware of their trends of mobility but were highly interested in those processes.

Anwarullah Chowdhury conducted an anthropological study in a village under Dhaka district where he stayed for ten and a half months in two phases. *A Bangladesh Village – a Study of Social Stratification* (1978) which is one of the pioneer books in ethnographical world, and is the revised version of his Ph.D. dissertation. He followed the anthropological method for his study. The focal point of his research was social stratification of rural areas. He was very much inspired by the theory of social stratification --'Class' 'Status' and 'Party' of Max Weber, though he admitted that his (Weber) theory fails to accommodate fully the realities of stratification of Meherpur, the pseudonym of his research village. Chowdhury was interested to study 'Class', 'Status' and 'Power' structure of the village under study.

Researcher couple Jenneke Arens and J. Van Burden (1984) conducted a study on households and status of rural women in a village of Kushtia district. They stayed there from June 1974 to May 1975. They observed some signs of feudalism in agriculture, especially in large-scale ownership of landed property by rich farmers, which is not to be found in Comilla and Dhaka districts. They also marked a tendency of bourgeois development in the post-independent Bangladesh due to excess inflation, famine and increasing investment in agriculture. They noted decreasing tendency of sharecropping.

Helaluddin Khan Arefeen (1986) studied a village near Dhaka City where he stayed for 12 months in the year of 1977-78. He applied participant observation methodology along with a series of techniques. He aimed to study changing patterns of kinship organization, land tenure and class structure in rural Bangladesh. He was interested in changing pattern of agrarian and social structure in a village where urbanization process was sprawling out. To investigate the social organization, he used some local linguistic terms, which have upgraded his ethnography for anthropological study.

Betsy Hartmann and James K. Boyce (1990) are a couple anthropologists, who stayed in a village ('Katni'- the pseudonym of their research village) for about nine months to know the faces of the world's poorest people, the inhabitants of a Bangladesh village. It was just after our independence when they were influenced by their knowledge to study a Bangladeshi

village from the anthropological perspective, applying participant observation techniques. They have visited Bangladesh in August 1974, when the country was passing through a worse period of famine and lawlessness. Through the conversation with the villagers and their observation, they investigated the causes of misrule and man-made famine. They discovered that behind the screen, the rich landowners and moneylenders, whom the villagers call *baroloke* and the politicians along with the businessmen, were controlling the lives of the commoners.

Through a long unknown span of time, 'caste,' as a system of social hierarchy, is still continuing among the Hindus of this sub-continent. But, it is facing several legitimate obstacles, including social reforms and westernized values and norms. Though the system has lost its rigidity and cruelty, still the members of the Hindu community are nourishing the notions of caste hierarchy in their socio-religious activities. Several sociologists and anthropologists have studied recent changes of the caste system and its continuity. Some have provided theoretical perspectives to grasp the changing pattern. "Indeed, on the subject of caste, one of the most distinctive of India's social institutions, anthropologists and sociologists have generally been far more confident about structural continuity than contemporary change, and analysis of the relations between them has persistently posed serious intellectual problems" (Fuller 2000:1). In this study we have discussed some views and theories of a few sociologists and anthropologists on contemporary change in and structural continuity of caste.

Continuity of Caste System

Some Indian as well as Western sociologists and anthropologists have shown enthusiasm for caste system and have listed a number of functions of caste system in their books; caste is experiencing a process of change at present. Among this group we can name Bailey (Bailey 1957) and Frykenberg 1969 (cf. Sharma 1997:11). Dumont (1970) has enthusiastically supported caste system and traditional India, which is partly an India of his own construction. Dumont was very much influenced by French anthropologist, Abbe Dubois (1917). Dubois had studied the population of Southern India, and tried to understand that society and its religion. Dubois observed traditional India with reverence, and made his remarks as follows, "Such an institution was probably the only means that the most clear-sighted prudence could devise for maintaining a state of civilization amongst a people endowed with the peculiar characteristics of the Hindus."(cf. Dumont, 1970:23). Dumont expressed the necessity of hierarchy, which forms the hereditary divisions of caste system. The structural–functional theory of social stratification dominated in the middle of the last century, structural–historical perspective has been applied by those who are interested to emphasize on the study of differentiation, evolution and change in caste and class in India. Dumont was the spokesman of structuralism. However, Hutton(1980), Ghurye (1932), Hocart (1950), Bougle(1908), Leach (1960), Srinvas (1966), Marriot (1959) and Lewis (1958) treated caste system from structural viewpoint. Kothari, (1970) Sharma (1973) and Srinivas (1966) have studied both the continuity and changing pattern of caste system. Sharma states that "Dumont approvingly quotes from Hocart, Senart and Hutton, who have advocated for continuity of caste system by emphasizing the functions of caste system for individual members ...." (Sharma 1997:3-4).

Leach (1960) by defining caste in his book *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-west Pakistan,* as "a particular species of structural organization indissolubly linked with … Pan-Indian civilization". The Indian world to him provides the cultural syndromes in terms of which the structural aspects of the caste system may be investigated: it is in the nature of external relations between caste groupings that one can find essence of the caste system. He differs with other four ethnographers in his edited book, who generally accept the position of that the caste system is a system of social stratification; Leach takes strong exception to it (Varma 1961: 415).

Kothari thinks that caste was found as an adaptive and pragmatic system, performing as an interest group for it members. Kothari in his book *Caste in Indian Politics* stated "In dealing with the relationship between caste and politics however the doctrinaire modernizer suffers from a serious xenophobia. He begins with the question is caste disappearing? Now surely no social system disappears like that (p. 4). Politicians mobilize caste groupings and identities in order to organize their power (p. 5). … castes take on an openly secular form for new organizational purposes" (Kothari 1970: 21).Sharma is another scholar who has emphasized on studying caste from structural perspectives. Mishra while reviewing Sharma's book, stated that 'he emphasizes the understanding and explanation of the ideology, structure and process of social inequality both temporarily and contextually' (Mishra 2001). But Sharma states from Marxist and non-Marxist view, "The Marxists look at the origin or evolution of caste from the point of economic relations. Political activists like Dange (1949), Ranadive (1979) and Nambrodipad (1979) look at caste as a mechanism of exploitation in the lands of the upper castes. However, non-Marxists consider caste not as a super structural entity, but mainly as a basic institution of division of labor and harmonic relations" (Sharma ibid: 11).

Bouglé as he is a French philosopher identifies three features essential to the notion of caste: hereditary specialization, hierarchy, and mutual repulsion. "The spirit of caste unites these three tendencies . . . and all three must be borne in mind if one wishes to give a complete definition of the caste system" (p. 9). Bouglé's concept of repulsion encompasses all those features by means of which each caste attempts to maintain its distinctiveness and separation from every other caste. Thus, commensal and connubial restrictions are simply different aspects of one thing--mutual repulsion. Bouglé insists on the systematic character of caste and focuses on those features that account for relations among castes (Tyler 1972: 1380). Srinivas has followed Bouglé and notes the pre-eminence of religious values in the caste system. According to him, Hindu religious values rest on the notion of pollution and purity (Srinivas 1952).

Ghurye (1932) is another structural sociologist who has divided the concept of caste through four periods: the Vedic period with its Vedic and Brahmanic texts; the post-Vedic period dominated by the Laws of the Aryas, the great epics, and the Buddhist writings; the period of the *Dharmasastras*, summed up in Manu at the outset and in the *Vishnu Purana* at the end; and the "modern" period, in which these various texts recombined and flowered into a more systematic tradition. A pure functionalist might argue that caste in India as of the late 19th century had little historical depth. It could be a simple rationalization of occupational specialization in the then-present, a rationalization come somewhat adrift from occupation under the pressures of colonialism. But Ghurye's mastery of Sanskrit inevitably led him to focus on much deeper historical roots (Celarent 2011: 1715-16).

Hutton in his renowned book denotes that "The caste system enables the caste to act corporately and to control the behavior of its component members. It is able in this way to raise its position in society. This may not be easy to achieve and may perhaps be accomplished only in the course of generations, but it is certainly has been can be done" (Hurtton 1980:112). Hocart (1950) is another pioneer on caste system in India. Hocart's work is entitled *Caste – A Comparative Study* and in addition to India Hocart draws upon his experience in Ceylon, in the Pacific, notably in Fiji and in Egypt. But it is permissible and desirable that we should limit our understanding on Hocart's contribution to Indian society. For him caste in India is only one variety of a widely spread genus and to offers the definition that "castes are merely families to whom various offices in the ritual are assigned by hereditary" (SAGE 1968).

Kosambi (Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi) was an Indian mathematician, statistician, philologist, historian and polymath who contributed to genetics by introducing *Kosambi map function*, deemed that the caste system has been evolved from the notions of property system by the Aryans in India, Castes did not arise out of any internal division of the Varna in the original Vedic society but from an external process altogether. He is described as "the patriarch of the Marxist school of Indian historiography". Kosambi was a Marxist historian specializing in ancient India who employed the historical materialist approach in his work. He stated that "It may be supposed that these *dasas* were the descendants of the Indus settlers who had provided the surplus for Indus cities, being persuaded thereto by some method other than force, say religion. This was the beginning of the caste system in India. The word used here *varna* means colour, and is justified as the *Dasas* or Dasyus in general are spoken of as of dark colour; the Aryans had a colour of their own, white, or at any rate lighter" (Kosambi 1975: 98). To him, the *Dasa* people became the *Sudras* and the Aryans became the upper three castes. He added that "The *vaisya* (settler, husbandman) and the *sudra* (helots) are to be exploited for the advantage of the ruling warrior caste, the *ksatriya* with the brahmin priest's help" (ibid: 100). He saw caste as a class form dependent on the mode of productions. Irfan Habib in his article on Kosambi, wrote that Kosambi had applied Marxism to study Indian History, especially to his book *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, which substantiated and extended his views on both how Marxist insights needed to be used to reconstruct Indian history and how history would appear after being thus reconstructed. Kosambi had said in his 1954 ISCUS article: "Caste is class at a primitive level of production, a religious method of forming social consciousness in such a manner that the primary producer is deprived of his surplus with the minimum coercion" (Kosambi nd: 59).

In the context of the study area of Rajapur in Bangladesh, caste as system is still prevailing in spirit, but not in its rigidity. The Hindus believe in their hereditary caste status, as it is their religion, but not believe in its social cleavages which were the basis of Hindu social structure as well as stratification. The Hindus have set apart three socio-cultural aspects very delicately–these are religion, social life and occupation. As they are the followers of their distinct religion and ideology, they perform the religious rituals and worshipping of the gods like their ancestors. In Rajapur, the first generation (not less than 60 years) members of almost all but a few nourished the orthodox notions of stratification and rituals of purity and pollution. Among them, Kandura Chandra of *Dakshinpara* accused the third generation for breaking and disobeying the rituals. To him, this era itself has changed a lot due to the immoral practices of the children, they (the children) behave arrogantly, and are puffed up with pride of their wealth and young age, they are disobeying the elders, but, as the proverb goes, "pride goeth before destruction."

The Brahmin families are also forerunner of the caste system. Govinda Chakravarti of *Mothkholapara*, a Brahmin family member, whose occupation should be priesthood, is working in agricultural field as a day-laborer. To him the situation has changed. People do not revere the Brahmans; rather, they are becoming less generous to give alms to the priests. Some members of the *Kshattriya* caste, who were not ritually permitted earlier, are acting as priests. Govinda realizes that he has nothing but to seek for menial job. He is now working as a day-laborer in agriculture but not tilling the soil as he thinks that tilling the soil is strictly forbidden for Brahmans. To the Brahmin family members caste segmentation is a necessary practice and that must be preserved with prescribed honor and dignity of Brahmins, the ritually upper caste. Their expectations sound like the statements of Dumont and Able Dubois. This study has understood that these two scholars have enthusiastically supported the caste system and have acknowledged the importance and supremacy of Brahmins. To them the caste system is structurally important and needed.

The villagers in Rajapur have not given up the religion or their beliefs in caste system. Still, they tend to present themselves by caste names and titles. But, it is true that most of the villagers do not know the names of their sub-castes or sects among their respective castes. Except a very few who have some knowledge on it, they cannot say the traditional names of their own castes. Their activity or mentality proves that they don't bother for their traditional caste names or sects. They are too much busy with their occupation or to earn the bread for the survival of their families. In social interactions they don't have any bar between Brahman, so-called *Kshattriyas*, *Kaibarttas* and *Vaisnanvas* (these four are the caste identities of the villagers, and other one is *Sudra*) except for the case of two Sudra families. Inter – caste commensality (loosening of rules governing) is permitted for them. We have seen Govinda Chakravarti, the younger Brahman priest, is gossiping with the peer groups of *Kshattriyas*. His friends from *Kshattriya* were making fun with him, and were mocking at him for his manual labor in agriculture, as the villagers are not summoning him for priestly works. Males or females from different castes sit together and exchange private sorrows and happiness among themselves. They maintain friendly relations among them. Most of the villagers are not well informed or educated about this socio-religion based stratification and rituals. What they know is simply their caste name–*Brahman, Kshattriya, Kaibartta, Vaisnava or Sudra*. They are not aware of the segmentation of their respective castes or their respective sects. When we have enquired to them about the names of their own sects for *Kshattriyas*, they asked us to communicate with the *Sadhu* residing at Pukurpara. They are too much busy with their occupation. But, they don't maintain a close relation with the lower caste members of the scheduled castes, though they converse with them on various issues. The members of the lower caste are not being included in the *Dosh* run by the upper castes.

Men are more secular than women in the villages. Still, women try to keep their domestic life pure, and perform some pujas (worship) at home, especially the holy basil puja and the goddess *Lakshmi* at evening. Rituals and beliefs are being dropped or abbreviated. Women are more directly concerned with purity and impurity than men, as they are inclined to prepare food and use the kitchen, which is the heart of the notions of purity. Here one may remember Swami Vivekananda's condemnation of folk Hinduism as a religion of the kitchen. Women play the role of preparing food in the kitchen, and serve it to the members of the family; but, before that, they are expected to be ritually pure. "The rank of a caste depends on the avoidance of some impure foods (and liquor). Women are expected to know the special foods that need to be prepared for each important ritual, and women are the *de facto*

custodians of tradition" (Srinivas 1997 a: X.). As the concepts of pollution and purity have been the central component of caste system, food constitutes a critical part in the ritual of purity and pollution, which begin at home. Leela Dube, both sociologist and anthropologist has observed the caste discrimination from the point of view of women.

Women play the key role in maintaining the sanctity and purity of the home. They are required to observe strict rules of purity and pollution while preparing food, to give up the consumption of foods which are tamasik– which raise passion and desire- and to forego a 'proper' meal in the evenings. Responsibility for the preservation of traditions, maintenance of the sanctity of bounded space, control over rituals, the distribution of food and the task of socialization give women a sense of power over people and situations" (Dube 1997:6-8).

Women are more religious than men in Rajapur. They are the custodians of rituals as well as religious beliefs within household affairs. Usually men are extroverts; on the contrary, women are introverts in our rural life. Women in most cases are confined within the village boundary or within their respective *para*s. They need not move out of their respective *para*s for daily needs; so, they, unlike their males, remain out of the inter-mixing danger of pollution. Their world is very much limited within their own; so, they make friendship or gossip with women from neighboring *para*s. Gossiping with inter-caste members is not a matter of becoming polluted and cooking or offering food is still done according to the rituals. Some poor women from the least poor families don't bother about their prescribed rituals sanctioned by the *Smriti* of Monu (*Monu Samhita*). Women are responsible for all the homestead religious works. Ritual care of food, household works, worshiping family god, maintaining personal and family purity are all tasks very much compulsory for womenfolk in Hinduism. Doing impure tasks of their own or other members of the family pollute women, but women from rich upper castes are less related to the process of pollution as they are not directly related to manual works of the households. But, women from poor households depend for earning their livelihood on doing impure tasks. In Rajapur, the rich households of Kshattriya caste appoint maids from their own caste, and not from lower caste. Not only that, women who are from "*Kancha*' families are not allowed to perform kitchen-works, specially cooking food for "*Pucca*" members. So, when the maids are being appointed for household works then it is strictly maintained that no maid can be appointed from impure levels or impure castes. Women from three poor Brahman families of Rajapur are surviving in poverty, but are not eager to do manual works in the households lower than their caste. Women from *Chamar* households also are not allowed to perform any works in upper caste households, nor are they (Chamar females) allowed entering in their (upper caste females) kitchen premises. Sree Binoy Chandra Sarkar, a *Kaibartta* of Kaljani para reported as follows, "The Chamars can't enter into our houses. They can come to the courtyards only. Ifthey are served with food and water, utensils used by them should be cleared properly. Not only that, the person who will clean it must have to take bath".

Brindaban Thakur, a *Brahman*, who serves at the village temple (*Baroari* Mondir) at Mothkholapara. He is a permanent priest; so he need not move for work. Once he served the obsequies ceremony of a *chamar* family, which made him degraded, and for this act of *jajmani*, he was expelled by the *Kayasthas* (economically rich families) of Mothkholapara and surrounding *paras* from the Baroari

Mandir. Later he was readmitted into the community and profession after performing penances prescribed by them for breaches of caste rules. For the interim period Jogesh

Chandra Banerjee, served the Mandir. Basically, Brindabon was pressurized by the villagers to do penance according to the law.

.

Women were comparatively vulnerable than men in marriage and conjugal life. According to the law she is not allowed to divorce her husband whatever may be the provocation. If she is widow, again she is not allowed to remarry; rather, she has to relinquish her happiness and auspicious symbols of her married life. She is not allowed to put on vermilion on her forehead or put on conch bangles like a married woman. She has to shave her head as early as possible after the death of her husband. On the contrary, a widower is allowed to remarry; the dead wife's younger sister, if unmarried, is preferred for marriage first.

Men are enjoying freedom as they move in the public world and in the markets. Though markets may be the source of pollution, the males have nothing but to move there without being polluted. There they are taking food or water from the lower caste members in the restaurants, or exchanging goods, or touching them bodily. Dube has acknowledged this observations, "In situations away from home and their locality, men tend to be more relaxed about rules of commensality; in a similar context women are both chaperoned and watched over carefully and are expected to follow these rules more strictly" (Dube 1997: 7). In their hamlets, the male villagers are allowed to move hither and thither, and are allowed to interact with anybody without breaking the rules of pollution. But, women are directly concerned with the concept of purity as they are the custodians. It seems that widows are always impure. Dube as she has observed the same situations in Indian caste society, "Widows are not supposed to perform the *puja* of family deities: they do not cook the pure food offered to these deities. A man, on the other hand, is not similarly affected if he becomes a widower" (ibid.10). Srinivas also has shared the same observation, "Women are more directly concerned with purity-impurity than men, and the kitchen may be described as the heart of the purity-impurity system" (Srinivas 1997 a: IX).

Swami Vivekananda condemned Hinduism as a religion of the kitchen. The concept of purity has been confined to the kitchen, and the kitchen is not open for the females from lower castes, *katcha households* or from Muslims. Women from all these sectors can move within their own community, and gossip sitting together in the courtyards without entering into the kitchen or cooking food. Entrance is strictly limited in the kitchen of the *pucca* households, and purity is strictly maintained regularly by smearing floors with cow dung, as the live cow purifies. "The cow, when alive, is holy, like the river Ganga, and both transcend the duality of purity-impure" (Srinivas 1989: 36). Impurity emanates from two important sources–body and death. Still in Rajapur, death at any household pollutes the living members, and they have to pass a certain time to be pure by performing certain deeds. It should be mentioned here that the notion of impurity related to the body has been weakened due to the above-mentioned factors, but still it is being practiced in marriage, in preparing food, in the kitchen, and during the time of death of any household member. The concept of purity related to personal matters is also more obligatory for women than the male members of the households. "Women play the key role in maintaining the sanctity and purity of the home. ... Women tend to be more circumscribed in taking proscribed foods or accepting food from other castes. ... They are required to observe strict rules of purity and pollution while preparing food, to give up the consumption of foods which are *tamasik* – which raise passion and desire – and to forego a 'proper' meal in the evenings" (Dube ibid.: 6-7). For married women, they have to take shower in the morning before entering into the kitchen and preparing food. Bath makes them

pure for pure tasks. On returning from toilet, both male and female persons purify themselves, and they try to take shower to be pure in the morning. Women are also treated polluted during the time of their menstruation.

In Rajapur, though the notions of purity have been weakened, still these are in practice in some cases of community and personal life. The concept of purity related to the community is being weakened day by day, and the members are daring to violate it. The concept of purity is strictly in force in endogamy; where exogamy is still treated as a breach. The villagers who are ritually *'kancha'* (impure by marrying widow or divorced women) are always polluted, and they or their descendants never can attain purity in their lifetime. A pure Brahman or a member of the upper caste never can accept food or water from their hands, or they cannot cook food for the *'pucca'* (pure) members of the upper castes. Among the *Kayasthas* of Rajapur, the villagers consider some of them as *kancha* (ritually impure) because of marriage with divorced women. Depending on the notions of purity and pollution, these households are *kancha* with its all-family members. Norendra NathRai of Kaljani para, one of my informants, has provided me some important information about inter-caste relations. According to him, there are 21 households, out of 86, who are *kancha*, as they have become polluted due to their or their parents' marital relations with widow or divorced women. Women with second husbands cannot use vermilion or put on bangle made of conch-shell, which are the marks of a *shadabha* (married woman whose husband is alive). If any *kancha* household invites villagers other than *kancha*, there must be a separate cooking arrangement for the *pucca* (ritually pure) villagers.

To members of the upper caste, the *Sudras* are still subject to pollution; their women never can enter into the kitchen of the upper castes, though they are allowed to visit and sit on the courtyards of the upper castes. No member of the upper castes will accept food or water from their hands. To the villagers, the *Sudras* are ritually untouchable and polluted; at earlier times, the *Sudras* were not allowed to walk through the *Kayasthapara* or have a conversation with the villagers. But, days have changed with the changes of the notions; the concept of untouchability has gradually weakened, but so long Hinduism persists, the concept of untouchability will endure. But, in general, the concept has been confined to the kitchen, and women have been and continue as the custodians of the concept.

Despite some significant changes in caste in rural as well as in urban Hindu communities, a trend of caste endogamy is still in strict practice, and this may be called the effective endogamous unit. Endogamy is one of the basic characteristics of caste system, which flows from the distinctness of caste identity. As Mayer states, "If there is one thing, which has not changed over the years, it is this notion of the endogamous caste/sub caste unit" (Mayer 2000:57). In Rajapur, the Hindu villagers arrange endogamous marriage for their offspring. They do not permit any sort of breach or do not legalize the marriage or accept the couple into their own caste, though there are a few exceptional cases of exogamy, and the couples are still residing in the village. In these cases, the villagers have accepted them partially, and the villagers have allowed them to decide by themselves in which caste, they are willing to be enlisted. Leaders from both the castes sit and declare their enlistment into the desired caste. If they do not seek the help of the community, they can live in the village in an ostracized condition. In that case, caste-status of their offspring remains undecided. If a bridegroom from a lower caste wills to be the member of the higher caste through his wife, they can be treated to be *katcha* (polluted), and if the bride from lower caste enlists herself into a higher

caste through her husband is never treated badly. But the villagers are looking for bride or bridegroom even crossing the village as well as *Upazila* or Zila boundaries.

Change of Caste System

Srinivas has a great contribution to the study of continuity and change of caste system prevailing in India. To explain some features of religious, cultural and social change in India, Srinivas has put forward three concepts – Sanskritization, Westernization and Secularization (Srinivas 2001:6). To him, Sanskritization is the process by which a "low" Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and, frequently, "twice-born" caste. Westernization refers to changes introduced into Indian society during the British rule and continuing in independent India. In considering the values, norms and behavior of people in a country like India, one cannot ignore the changing pattern of them under the influence of the British rule. Srinivas has also pointed out the term 'secularization' as one of the major changing components, which implied an unimaginable impact on urban caste Hindus.

Like Srinivas, Jaiswal has also highlighted the pragmatic influence of Westernization. According to him, "The situation changed in colonial times. It is held that the introduction of Western education exposed the Indian intelligentsia to the ideas of social inequality, democracy and humanism, and this made them acutely aware of the evils prevailing among themselves" (Jaiswal 1998: 231).Sociologist Andre Beteille comments as follows, "Here I must point out that a change in the orientation to caste had come about in the course of the nationalist movement itself. Indian intellectuals did not condemn caste as widely a hundred years before independence as they were ready to do when independence came" (Beteille 2000: 151-4). Adrian Mayer has studied a village of central India and has observed some continuity and changes. "… caste also provided one of the avenues through which change could occur, notably through efforts by members to improve their status or gain political power, but this was a long process with an uncertain chance of success. Anti-class legislation, as well as the introduction of new political institutions, provided further avenues for social mobility … and the national ideology which stressed the caste-free equality of its citizens provided a counter – value for those who wished to adopt it" (Mayer 2000: 32).

K. M. Panikkar has found out some special effects, which embody the gains of social changes in Indian society. **First of those** is the Indian constitution, which contains a declaration of Fundamental Rights and incorporates certain Directive Principles. *Secondly*, communism, the egalitarian movement launched a revolutionary approach to re-organize society on completely new bases not merely to change its economy and political system but to build society on new principles. *Thirdly*, the impact of industrial society was also an important factor to change the social structure of the Hindus. *Fourthly*, the impact of science on Hindu society has also been far reaching.*Fifthly*, there is the impact of thought which has the most devastating force on social institutions.

Rakhal Chandra Nath is one of the critics of Hindu movements during pre- and post-British era. According to him, "Rammohan religious reform was an instrumental for social and political reform. … Rammohan never allowed his love for the formless God of the Upanishads to get the better of his zeal for awakening his countrymen from their 'dream of

error' (Nath 1982: 19-20). Sachidananda has studied the changing pattern of scheduled castes in India and remarks, "The changes came along three avenues. The first avenue was provided by the reform movements, which took place among some scheduled castes at various periods of time. The second was provided by the process through which a caste or a group of people move up in the social hierarchy by adopting the style of life associated by tradition with the upper castes. The third avenue was inspired by the process of westernization, which refers to the adoption by a community of western patterns in dress, manners and customs" (Sachidananda 1974: 278).

Bose and Jalal have underscored some socio-religious movements, which weakened the powerful beliefs in casteism. Ambedkar, the most renowned reformer of caste system pointed out that the caste system has no scientific origin. It has also no reason and morality, because the *Vedas* and the *Shastras* which founded caste deny any part to reason and morality. Therefore, religion of the *Shrutis* and *Smritis* which deny reason and morality in any form should be uprooted and destroyed in the way to social reform. Ambedkar himself dreamt of an ideal society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Such a society would have no discrimination of one by another. The development of such a notion lies in Ambedkar's dissatisfaction with the Hindu social system based on caste. For Ambedkar, Caste is evil.

Development of regional self-consciousness from the twentieth century onwards discarded Brahmanical language--Sanskrit. Printing presses, which printed Sanskrit religious books (which were forbidden for lower castes) in local languages, have played a revolutionary role among the lower caste groups as well the untouchables. Cities were the centers of both *Sanskritization* and *Westernization* processes and some reform movements.

The changes that have occurred in relation among different castes and in Indian society were due to various reasons; but obviously, it was a product of movements and mobility in which the lower castes and the scheduled castes or the depressed castes participated most. The impact of change was more striking for them, as they were depressed and deprived from authority. Not only that, they were not permitted to move or practice mobility. The traditional orthodox Brahmans who opposed the change have failed to continue their rigidity and powering status; on the contrary, the reformers whose object was to break down the system and equalize Indian citizens are not gaining success at all.

In this greater context, we will now discuss the continuity and some changing patterns of caste-system in Rajapur, as well as the changing mentality of the villagers. In Rajapur, The living members of the second (not less than 30 years) and third (less than 30 years) generations are well informed about their hierarchical order and positions in the *Varna*, but they are not willing to practice it in their practical life. They do not bother about segmental positions; rather, they tend to live a free social life. Gradually, people are being interested to believe in the *Varna* model of the caste, instead of the *jati* model of the caste, as Marriott has pointed out that people will increasingly use the *Varna* model of the caste system (see Marriott 1955).

Rajballav Robi Das of Kaljani doesn't believe in caste system. To him, "this cannot be the religion; you will not find any sort of cleavages in the religious books or in the *Gita*. It is the Brahmans who have created and set up laws in favor of them. The God is one, and, He cannot

divide his creatures. But, his creatures have divided themselves. This is not the era of Brahmans; now, we are all equal, though a few don't think so. But, days are coming when there will be no caste among the Hindus, except in someone's belief".

Parimal Sarkar, a *Kaibartta,* thinks the caste system to be a superstition. To him, during the period of gods, every person was equal in society. But, in course of centuries, the self-seekers have formed this superstition, and forced others to believe in and to do according to their will. This orthodoxy had crossed the apex of its period, and is now declining. People are now educating themselves, and know now the ins and outs of the caste system. Gradually, people are being aware and giving up all the superstitions which confined those years after years.

For example, Sree Khagendra Mohonto of Kaljani admits, "During earlier times, inter-caste marriage between the *Kshattriya* and *Kaibartta* was strictly forbidden. Norms and values were so rigid that no one even dared to think of this. But at present, society along with its norms and values is less strict. Nowadays, if some tries to do the same as before, he or she will be ostracized. This is '*kolikal*' (present age of the world)".

Considering the caste commensality, ritual behavior, untouchability and social interaction and the changing pattern of all of these notions, there are some factors, which contribute a potential role for change in the village. Actually, the villages are the integrated parts of the country, and the changes, which run through urban life necessarily, cover rural life simultaneously. Due to some varieties of economic and political factors, the 'cooperative caste system' and hereditarily ascribed occupational pattern has experienced a vital change. These are gradually disappearing from the caste-based societies. A new pattern of competitive initiative and formation of self–identity are replacing old ideas. Everyone is trying his or her utmost to get rid of the intransigence of caste-rigidity and seeking self-confidence. In support of this statement we can cite here the experiences of Jayaram as he has admitted the same experiences. He states, "This 'cooperative caste system' and 'the hierarchical organic solidarity' have been disappearing due to a variety of economic and political factors. In its place, a new system of competitive solidarity has been emerging as "fused combinations of castes compete with one another" (Jayaram 1997:73).

We have learnt that Srinivas has put forward three concepts – Sanskritization, Westernization and Secularization for contributing the changing pattern of the caste system in this sub-continent. The first positive factor, which affects both the caste system and the members to change or mobilize their own positions within the hierarchy, is the process of *Sanskritization*. Members of the lower castes in Rajapur make an effort to change their customs, rituals, ideology and way of life according to twice-born and dominant castes. But, one thing that is exceptional is that these efforts overflow not only inter-caste boundary but the caste boundary also. However, the villagers are no more dependent on their hereditarily ascribed occupations; rather, they are reliant on occupations of their own choice. Two cobbler families are no more in cobbling business; they are rather earning their livelihood from hawking, small trading and day–laboring.

As rationalism was replacing traditional beliefs and ideas of the Catholics as observed by Max Weber, a similar instance can be found in Hinduism. Rationalism, as an essential

element of secularization, involves secular beliefs and ideas instead of traditional beliefs and rituals, and it is assumed that Hinduism is more affected by secularization process than any other religions in India. Religious orthodoxy, concepts of purity and pollution, notions of untouchability, positions in the caste-hierarchy, caste-names which were once central as well as pervasive in Hinduism, are getting weakened greatly due to secularization process. Secularization is a process, which is reducing, removing and abbreviating the notions and ritualistic behavior of the villagers in Rajapur.

Srinivas, in his famous book, *Social Change in Modern India*, has analyzed some behavioral changes of the caste-members in their day-to-day life, which imply secularization notions among them. We have seen most of these behavioral changes in the study village. Different types of ritual ceremonies, which were once performed by the villagers, are beginning to be dropped. Ceremonies, such as name-giving, *annaprashon* (ceremony of putting boiled rice in a child's mouth for the first time) and wedding rituals are being abbreviated due to secular notions and economic insolvency.

Simultaneously, westernization and modernization, which stimulate secular notions, are creating fruitful effects in the village life. Westernization and two other concomitant processes--industrialization and urbanization have played radical and lasting changes in Indian society during the British rule. Modernization is more positive than westernization, as westernization is ethically neutral and modernization always conveys the sense of good and rationalization. It attempts to establish rational manner and behaviour among the beneficiaries. However, as the villagers of Rajapur are being affected by westernization, their traditional customs, costumes, and behavior are changing a lot. The villagers are shaking hands, instead of traditional salutation (with rising of joined hands towards the forehead and uttering *namaskar*). They are putting on pants, shirts, *lungis* instead of *dhoti* and *Punjabi*. They are watching television and cinemas, which teach them westernized and modern trend of social life instead of traditions. Indians ate sitting on floors as it is their tradition and ritual, but westernization has changed their lifestyle too, and, now they take food sitting on chairs and tables. In Rajapur, the rich landowner or *grihasthas*have their separate dining hall with table and bench or chairs. The middle *grihasthas* or the poor sit on the floor, and still perform some of their rituals before taking meals.

Individualism and freedom of speech are the two forms of western notions, which have awakened the villagers from predomination of orthodoxy. Not only that the villagers are openly criticizing old norms and values of caste system, they are also criticizing the Brahman communities for their past oppression. The priest Brahmans are steadily losing their prescribed honor and prestige due to the secularization and westernization process.

The *Vaisnavas*, whose occupations should have to be religious begging, are earning bread from different kinds of manual labor, trading and cultivation. The *Brahmans*, whose prescribed occupation is priesthood and teaching religious books etc., are being compelled to adopt manual labor to run their families. The *Kayasthas* (so-called Kshattriyas) are no more in scribing; they are earning livelihood from multifarious sources including agriculture. Nowadays, social honor depends on occupational as well as economic positions, which completely emanate from the members' personal or family efforts. So, castes have been completely competitive instead of cooperative integration. Even leaders of the *Dosh* (de facto

arbitrator body) are being selected on the basis of economic and social positions, instead of caste positions. Andre Beteille, in an early study of a village in Tamil Nadu, has shown that caste-status of an individual no longer determines his position in the class or power hierarchy (see Beteille 2000). Panini has expressed the same experiences, as he states, "Thus caste status no longer inhibits individuals from taking to new occupations. ... Occupational diversification has occurred in all cases and it appears that the caste system has adapted itself to the needs of development" (Panini 1997:30-31). Besides urban-based works, several new occupations have opened up within the village-areas. But, the holy books or great Hindu laws by Manu did not ritually prescribe these occupations. Since agriculture is a caste based occupation, *Kaibarttas*–a caste who are traditionally agriculturist, continue in this work along with other castes whose traditional occupations have ceased to be there. Tailoring, carpentering, mechanical works, wood works are some types of works followed by the caste members of the village.

Some changes have occurred due to several non-Brahmin movements which have been acknowledged by several scholars like Ghurye (1932), Bose and Jalal (1999). Ghurye's points can be cited here as a major supporting statement: "hierarchy is attacked by non-Brahman movement (p. 193), notions concerning impurity being much weakened (p. 209) and the rules concerning food and drink considerably relaxed, especially in the towns. The freedom of the new professions means that the caste no longer prescribes occupation". Bose and Jalal have underscored some socio-religious movements, which weakened the powerful beliefs in casteism. The study village doesn't have such movements literally, but the changing notions and attitude of non-Brahmin caste members of the village can be compared with such movements against casteism.

Because of liberal economic, political, educational and religious systems, some changes have occurred among members of the Hindu community. As people are free to accept whatever occupation they like, they can accumulate money, and become rich, whatever their castes may be; as economic positions determine social honor and prestige, so, caste has been much less important. Political affiliation has inspired and empowered the villagers to practice power in village and outside village in a greater arena. The villagers are participating in innovative programs launched by the national-level political parties. They are enjoying adult franchise, and electing their representatives to lower- and upper-level governments. Education played an important role, which has enlightened them from a state of ignorance and darkness of orthodoxy. Members of the *Sudra* families often criticize the verses ("so-called" in their words) from Vedas as described by the priest Brahmans; for, the *Sudras* have no right to study or to hear the Vedas. They think that the Vedas cannot declare like that, as god has created his creatures as equals. To them "we, the Sudras, have equal rights to study and hear the Vedas. That was a trick of the priest class, so that we remain uneducated, and remain aloof from the Holy Books. But, days have changed. We are going to schools and reading books including the holy books written in Bangla." This is due to spread of education, expansion of mental horizons, broadening of consciousness and self-formation of persons in Hindu community, which guide them to act with changes.

Varna model is not a new phenomenon; it rather experienced a substantial acceptance from the Hindus of the colonial period as well. Due to the effect of westernization, secularization, modernization and urbanization and the egalitarian notions of the British colonizers in respect to the Indian caste status, the *varna* model is gradually becoming popular. Most of the

educated and young members of the Hindu communities in Rajapur are willing to acknowledge them according to the *varna* model; for, they do not like to abide by the ideas of the *jati* model of caste – especially the notions of purity and the rigid rules of its maintenance. Though they are aware of their *varna-based* segmentation, most of them are not acquainted with the names of their own sects or *jati*s. They are not concerned with their caste names and hierarchical positions in the *jati model* of caste. What they know is the name of their *varna*, and that is everything for a large number of the villagers. The *Kayasthas* are proud to be declared to be *Kshattriyas*, and the *Kaibarttas* are proud to be declared as *Vaishyas*. Even the Brahman priests are ignorant about their sects. This may be their ignorance; but, they do not bother to know it properly. Except the Brahmans, all other caste-members criticize the inhumane system of caste very often. But, one thing to be mentioned here is that still the upper caste (Brahman, Kayastha, and Kaibartta) members hold an attitude of untouchability for the members of *Chamar* households. They (only Kayasthas and Kaibartas) believe that the Brahmans, the Kshattriyas and the Vaishyas are equal according to the *varna* model, and there should not be any sort of ritualistic segmentation among them. To them, anybody, who performs the deeds assigned by God and recites the holy books, can act as priest, or can be virtuous like a Brahman.

From Panikkar, we have learnt that there are five special effects which have embodied change in the caste system. To him, these are Indian constitution; communism; industry; science and human thought. In the study village only the last one has been traced as the contributory effect which accelerates social changes. It is the human thinking spirit which can be the pivotal element for changes.

In Rajapur, we have seen class-based distinction within the caste, and class exists along with castes, and these are inseparable phenomenon. Members of the Hindu castes are simultaneously the members of the class-structure. Here we should take into account that caste within the class system is not simply a ritualistic system, but it is also a system of power- relations and economic activities. Agrarian society is being understood in terms of its class structure. But we must also remember the structure that it is through the caste system. In rural areas, there is a complex relationship between caste and class. But the relationships between these two dimensions of social stratification are not straightforward. Normally, it is expected that higher caste are those who have large amount of land. For instance, in most areas the highest caste, the Brahmins, are not major landowners, and so they fall outside the agrarian structure although they are a part of rural society. In each region, there are usually just one or two major landowning castes, who are also numerically very important. Such groups were termed by the sociologist M.N. Srinivas as dominant castes. The dominant castes are the most powerful persons. While dominant landowning groups are usually middle or high ranked castes, most of the marginal farmers and landless belong to lower caste groups (online article-*Change and Development in Rural Society*).

From the very beginning, caste and class are found in a pronounced form, though a dialectical relationship exists between these two systems. Traditionally, dominant castes compete with one another for taking possession of land and power. This type of competition is not a new phenomenon, as we have seen this in a number of studies. Sharma has opined the same observation, "Not only families of dominant castes compete with each other to extend patronage to the lower castes for maintaining their dominance, but the lower caste families to compete to seek favours from the families of the dominant castes" (Sharma 1986: 21).

In Rajapur, the dominant caste is the *Kayastha* in four study *para*s (where the Hindu community resides); not only that, they are numerous too. There are only four rich farmers who possess land above 7.1 acres in Rajapur; all of them are members of the *Kayastha* caste. The *Kayastha* caste has the best access to the land and resources. So, here the two systems exist like two inseparable phenomenon of stratification. Following Beteille, we have also found conflict between the Brahmans and the non-Brahmans in Rajapur Hindu community. Being the members of the dominating caste, these rich landowners, *Kayasthas*, have overshadowed the caste hierarchy. They are also dominating and patronizing like the Brahman caste. The Brahmans are on the top of the chart of caste- hierarchy, and they are also superior to any other *Varna*, according to the *Varna* model. But, here in Rajapur, they have been dependent on the mercy of the *Kayasthas*, especially on this rich land-owning class. At earlier times, these dominating *Kayasthas* dared to expel a Brahman family from Mothkholapara. In fact there was *raiyatwari* system of land settlement in Rajapur. So, Kayasthas are the basic landowners in this area. There were areas that were under direct British rule had what was called the *raiyatwari* system of land settlement (raiyat means cultivator). In this system, the 'actual cultivators' (who were themselves often landlords and not cultivators) rather than the *zamindars* were responsible for paying the tax.

In fact, the *Kayasthas* are numerous not only in this village, but also in the surrounding areas. So, the three Brahman families who are landless are helpless, and do not dare to protest against the *Kayasthas*. They depend on the lower castes for ritualistic services–the *jajmani*, which support their families almost like day laborer. They have to pass some days without food, as they are unable to procure *jajmani*. They cannot till the soil, as it is tabooed for them. The rich land-owning class has extended patronage to members of other castes as well as Muslims too. A group of sharecroppers and land laborers are dependent on them for their subsistence and patronage. From the 'class' perspective, they have extended all sorts of patronage for strengthening their dominating power over other caste-members. Land, occupation, education, political affiliation have been the criterion to measure social and economic empowerment for both the depressed and dominating castes. People are also being honored on the basis of their land ownership, occupational status and educational qualification. It may appear a little that class is encompassing caste. This may be the cause of westernization, secularization and modernization and diversification of occupations. All caste-members are enjoying freedom for accepting any type of occupation according to their will. They are also enjoying their mobilizing of status vertically. As we shall see, however, there is a considerable measure of overlap between caste and class, so that a particular conflict is often as much a conflict between Brahman and Non-Brahman as between landlord and tenant. So, we have found a considerable measure of overlap between caste and class with some extent of conflict as well as coexistence with discrepancy.

Conclusion

Although, there are also some debate over this point; but we can conclude with remarks that at present, 'caste,' as a system of ritualistic social division, seems to have lost its power to encompass economic and political authority due to the gradual decrease of importance of its core concept-- 'purity and pollution', and gradual development of the process of 'Sanskritization' and upward mobilization within the *Varna* model. But, it is true that caste as a system of ritualistic stratification will never disappear so long Hinduism exists, as caste is an indivisible part of Hinduism. Regarding the changing pattern, we can say that caste, which

was prevailing in a rigid form, is turning less rigid, and becoming more flexible and adaptive in nature. It never was open, and never will be open like the class system. In the beginning, caste was a system for the division of labor, and social relations between different caste groups were regulated by the *jajmani* system. With the decline of the *jajmani* system and increasing livelihood diversification, caste identity became an instrument to mobilize people for economic and political gains. A basic shift took place in caste: from ritual hierarchy to identity politics, from ascribed and designated status to negotiated positions of power, from ritual definitions of roles and positions to civic and political definitions of the same (Kothari 1994 cited in Subedi 2013: 81-82). The caste system has eroded at the socio-religious and ritualistic level, but has transformed itself at the political and economic levels.

REFERENCES

Arefeen, H. K.(1986)*Changing Agrarian Structure in Bangladesh: Shimulia, A Study of a Periurban Village,* Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka.

Arens, J. and J. Van Burden (1985), *Jhagrapur*, Ganoprakashani, Dhaka.

Bailey, F.G. (1957)*Caste and Economic Frontier- A Village in Highland Orissa*, Manchester Univ. Press.

Berreman, Gerald D. (1968) '*The Concept of Caste'* in David L. Sills (ed.), The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, New York

Bertocci, Peter, J. (1970) *Elusive Village: Social Structure and Community Organization in Rural East Pakistan*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, East Lansing, Michigan State University.

Beteille, Andre (1971)*Caste, Class, and Power- Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, University of California Press, London.

Beteille, Andre (1991)*A Society and Politics in India: Essays in a Comparative Perspective*, Athlone Press, London.
k
Beteille, Andre (2000) 'Caste in Contemporary India', in Fuller C.J. (ed.) *Caste Today*, Oxford University Press, New Deli.

Bose, Sugata, and Jalal, Ayesha (1999)*Modern South Asia – History, Culture, Political Economy*, Routledge, London.

Bouglé, Célestin (1908) Essaissur le régime des castes. Paris, Alcan (rst ed., 1908) 1927 (Travaux de L'AnnéeSociologique). [The first part of the book was originally published as an article: 'Remarquessur le régime des castes' (Annéesociologique, t. IV, 1900, pp. 1-64). English translation of the introduction in Contributions to Indian Sociology, II, 1958, .cited from Dumont, Louis, 1970, *Homo Hierarchicus – The Caste System and its Implications*, Vikas Publications, Delhi. p. 221.

Change and Development in Rural Society,
file:///C:/Users/EEEPC/Downloads/ChangeanddevelopmentinRuralSociety.pdf,
accessed on 27/03/2018

Celarent, Barbara (2011)"Caste and Race in India", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 116,
No. 5 (March 2011), pp. 1713-1719, The University of Chicago Press,
http://home.uchicago.edu/aabbott/barbpapers/barbghur.pdf, accessed on 23/03/2018.

Chowdhury, Anwarullah (1978)*A Bangladesh Village- A Study of Social Stratification*,
Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka.

Deliege, Robert (2000) 'At the Threshold of Untouchability: Pallars and Valaiyars in a Tamil
Village', in Fuller C.J. (ed.) *Caste Today*, Oxford University press, New Deli.

Dube, Leela, (1997)'Caste and Women' in Srinivas, M.N.(ed.) *Caste - Caste – Its Twentieth
Century Avatar,* Penguin Books, New Delhi.

Dubois, Abbé J. A.(1906) 'Mœurs, institutions et ceremonies des peoples de I'Inde.' In Henry
K. Beauchamp, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, 3ʳᵈ ed*. Oxford, 1906.

Dumont, Louis (1970) *Homo Hierarchicus – The Caste System and its Implications,* Vikas
Publications, Delhi.

Frykenberg, R.E. (ed.) (1969) *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*,
University of Wisconsin Press, Madison,

Fuller, C. J. (2000) 'Introduction: Caste Today' in C. J. Fuller (ed.) *Caste Today, -
Understanding and Perspectives*, Studies on South Asia, Oxford University Press.

Ghurye, G. S. (1932) 'Caste and Race in India', London, Kegan Paul;New York, cited from
Dumont, Louis, 1970, *Homo Hierarchicus – The Caste System and its Implications*,
Vikas Publications, Delhi.

Hartmann, Betsy and James K. Boyce, (1990) *A Quiet Violence – View from a Bangladesh
Village*, University Press Limited, Dhaka.

HeigrujamPremkumar, *Revisiting B. R. Ambedkar's Views on Caste System
and Untouchability*, September 21, 2016, https://heignotes.com/2016/09/21/revisiting-
b-r-ambedkars-views-on-caste-system-and-untouchability/,accessed on 21/02/2018

Hocart, A. M. (1950) 'Caste, AComaparative Study. London', cited from Dumont, Louis,
1970, *Homo Hierarchicus – The Caste System and its Implications*, Vikas Publications,
Delhi.

Hutton, J. H. (1980) *Caste in India, Its Nature Function and Origins*, Oxford University
Press, London.

Irfan Habib, Kosambi (nd) *Marxism and Indian History*, https://app.box.com/s/1vyxvl6c88,
accessed on 23/03/2018

Jaiswal, Suvira (1998) *Caste-Origin Function and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.

Jayaram N.   (1997) 'Caste and Hinduism: Changing Protean Relationship', in Srinivas, M.N. (ed.) *Caste – Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, Penguin Books, New Delhi.

 Karanth, G. K. (1997) 'Caste in Contemporary Rural India', in Srinivas, M.N. (ed.) *Caste – Its Twentieth Century Avatar,* Penguin Books, New Delhi.

Karim, A. K. Nazmul (1996) *Changing Society in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Nawroze Kitabistan, Dhaka.

Kothari, Rajni (1970) *Politics in India*, Orient Longmans, New Delhi.

Kothari, Rajni, (ed.) (1970) *Caste in Indian Politics*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, e-book, https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.226424/2015.226424.Caste-In#page/n9/mode/2up, accssed on 23/03/2018

Kothari, Rajni (1994). 'Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29(26): 1589-1594.

Leach, E. R. (ed.) (1960) 'Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan', Cambridge University Press, cited from Dumont, Louis, 1970, *Homo Hierarchicus – The Caste System and its Implications*, Vikas Publications, Delhi.

Lewis, Oscar, (1958) 'Village Life in North India' , Urbana, Univ. of Illinois Press, cited from Dumont, Louis, 1970, *Homo Hierarchicus – The Caste System and its Implications*, Vikas Publications, Delhi.

Kosambi, DamodarDharmananda (1975) *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Popular Prakashan, India.

Kosambi, D. D. (nd), 'The Emergence of National Characteristics among Three Indo-European Peoples', reprinted: *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings* (ed), Compiled, Edited and Introduced by Brajdulal Chattopadhyaya.

Marriott, McKim, (1959) 'Interactional and Attributional Theories of Caste Ranking,Man in India', XXXIX (2): 104 cf. Srinivas, M.N., *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989.

Mayer, Adrian (2000) 'Caste in an Indian Village: Change and Continuity 1954-1992', in Fuller C.J. (ed.) *Caste Today*, Oxford University Press, New Deli.

Mishra, Anindya Jayanta (1997) Book reviews and notices: K.L. SHARMA, *Social Stratification in India: Issues and Themes*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997.

Mukherjee, Ramkrishna (1971) *Six Villages of Bengal*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay.

Nath, Rakhal Chandra (1982) *The New Hindu Movement – 1886-1991,* Minerva Associates (Publications) Pvt. ltd. Calcutta.

Panikkar, K.M. (1961) *Hindu Society at Cross Roads*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

Panini, M.N. (1997) 'ThePolitical Economy of Caste', in Srinivas, M.N. (ed.) *Caste – Its Twentieth Century Avatar,* Penguin Books, New Delhi.

Rudolph, I. Lloyd and SusaneHoeberRudolph (1967) *The Modernity of Tradition – Political Development of India*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, U.S.A.

Sachchidananda, (1974) 'Research on Scheduled Castes with Special Reference to Change – A Trend Report', *A Survey of Research in Sociology in and Social Anthropology*, Vol.-1, , Popular Prokashan, Bombay.

Sarkar, Smriti Kumar (1994) 'Caste, Occupation and Social Mobility:: A Study of the Kansaris in Colonial Bengal' in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Abhijit Dasgupta and William Van Schendel (eds.) *Bengal – Communities, Development and States*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.

SAGE online journal, (nd.) A. M. Hocart *On Caste—Religion and Power*, First Published January 1, 1968, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/006996676800200103?journalCode=cisa, accessed on 23/03/2018

Schendel William Van, (1982) *Peasant Mobility – The Odds of life in Rural Bangladesh*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi.

Sharma, K.L. (1973) "Downward Social Mobility: Some Observations", *Sociological Bulletin,* 22 (1).

Sharma, K.L. (1986) *Caste, Class and Social Movements*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

Sharma, K.L.(1997) *Social Stratification and Mobility*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

Srinivas, M.N. (1966) *Social Change in Modern India*, Berkley: University of California Press.

Srinivas, M. N. (1997a) 'Introduction', in M. N. Srinivas (ed.) *Caste, Its Twentieth century Avatar*, Penguin Books, New Delhi.

Srinivas, M.N. (1997b) 'Mobility in the Caste System'in Dipankar Gupta (ed.) *Social Stratification*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Srinivas, M.N. (1989) *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Srinivas, M.N. (2001) *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi.

Subedi, Madhusudan (2013) *'*Some Theoretical Considerations on Caste*'*, *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology,* Vol. 7, 2013.

Tyler, Stephen A. (1971) 'Essays on the Caste System'. in D. F. Pocock, *The European Understanding of India*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1971, https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1525/aa.1972.74.6.02a00150, accessed on 23/03/2018

Varma, Baidya Nath (1961) Book Reviews, Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan. Edited by E. R. Leach, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 66, Number 4, p. 415, https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/222944, accessed on 23/03/2018

Yadav, K. C. and Singh, R. (1994) *India's Unequal Citizens-A Study of Other Backward Classes*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delli.

Zaidi, S. M. Hafeez (1970) *The Village Culture in Transition – A Study of East Pakistan Rural Society*, East-West Center Press, Honolulu.