

1. relaxed: distinction
between 'pakka' food
and



1. The religious basis of the caste has been attacked: Caste is no more believed to be divinely ordained. It is being given more a social and secular meaning than a religious interpretation. 2. Restrictions on food habits have been relaxed: Distinction between ' pakka' food and ' kachcha' food has almost vanished.

Food habits have become more a matter of personal choice than a caste rule. Still commensal taboos are not completely ignored especially in the rural areas. Interdining has not become the order of the day. 3. Caste is not very much associated with hereditary occupations: Caste no longer determines the occupational career of an individual.

Occupations are becoming more and more " caste-free". Even Brahmins are found driving taxis, dealing with foot-wears and running non-vegetarian hotels and bars and so on. 4. Endogamy, which is often called the very essence of the caste system, still prevails. Intercaste marriages though legally permitted, have not become the order of the day. As KM.

Kapadia says, " there is an indifference to the intercaste marriages if not tacit acceptance by the society". 5. The special civil and religious privileges which the Brahmins enjoyed are no more being enjoyed by them. The Constitution of India has removed all such privileges and made all castes equal. Most of the legal, political, educational, economic and other disabilities from which the lowest caste people had suffered, have been removed by the constitutional provisions.

They are given special protection also. Adult franchise and " reservation" have given them a strong weapon to protect their interests. 6. Caste

continues to be a segmental division of Hindu society: Caste with its hierarchical system continues to ascribe statuses to the individuals. But the twin processes of Sanskritisation and Westernisation have made possible mobility both within and outside the framework of caste. 7. Caste panchayats, which used to control the behaviour of caste-members, have either become very weak or disappeared. Though they are often found here and there in the village areas, they are almost non-existent in the urban areas.

8. Restrictions imposed by the caste on social intercourse are very much relaxed. Distinction between 'touchable' and 'untouchable' is not much felt especially in the community of literate people.

However, instances of untouchability are heard in the rural areas. 9. Other Important Changes: (i) Though the dominance of caste is still found in villages it no longer depends upon its ritual status. (ii) Casteism which is associated with caste, instead of disappearing in the wake of modernism, has become till stronger. (iii) The 'jajmani' system which used to govern the inter-caste relations especially in the villages has become very weak.

In many places it has vanished. In place of intercaste dependence, intercaste strifes are found. (iv) Caste has lost much of its hold over the social usages and customs practised by its members. (v) Caste today does not dictate individual's life nor does it restrict newly valued individual freedom. Hence it no longer acts as a barrier to the progress of an individual. (B) Changes in the Role of Caste: The caste system in its attempts to adjust itself to the changed conditions of life has assumed new roles.

Besides industrialisation and urbanisation, other factors such as Westernisation, Sanskritisation, reorganisation of Indian states, spread of education, socio-religious reforms, spatial and occupational mobility and growth of market economy have greatly affected the caste system. Changes in the role of caste must also be understood in the light of the influence of these factors. 1. Increase in the Organisational Power of Caste: Education makes people liberal, broad-minded, rationale and democratic. Educated people are believed to be less conservative and superstitious. Hence it was expected that with the growth of literacy in India, caste-mindedness and casteism would come down. On the contrary, caste-consciousness of the members has been increasing. Every caste wants to safeguard its interests.

For fulfilling this purpose castes are getting themselves organised on the model of labour unions. Today every caste wants to organised itself. Such caste organisations are on the increase. Mainly to cater to the educational, medical and religious needs of their members, these organisations are running hostels and hospitals, schools and colleges, reading-rooms and libraries, dharmashalas and temples and so on. These caste-based organisations are also trying to project the leadership of some of their members to serve as their spokesmen. 2. Political Role of Caste: Caste and politics have come to affect each other now.

Caste has become an inseparable aspect of our politics. In fact, it is tightening its hold on politics. Elections are fought more often on the basis of caste. Selections of candidates, voting analysis, selection of legislative party leaders, distribution of ministerial portfolios etc., are very much based on caste.

Even the communist parties which project the ideal of a casteless and classless society are also not an exception to this. Politics of each state, as M. N. Srinivas says, is virtually the politics of confrontation of its “ dominant castes”.

Thus, unless one knows the political confrontation between the dominant castes such as Ligayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka and Reddys and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh, one cannot understand the politics of these two states. M. N. Srinivas also makes a distinction between caste at the ritual level and caste at the political level. Caste at the ritual level is smaller unit than the caste at the political level.

3. Protection for Scheduled Castes and other Backward Classes: The constitution of India has made enough provisions to protect the interests of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. They are offered more political, educational and service opportunities through the reservation policy. Seats are reserved for them from Mandal panchayat to Parliament and in all government departments. Though the reservation policy is against the declared goal of establishment of a casteless society, all political parties have supported it mostly, for political purposes. According to M.

N. Srinivas, “ The provision of constitutional safeguards to.... Scheduled Castes and Tribes has given a new lease of life to caste.” These provisions have made some of them develop vested interests to reap permanently the benefits of reservation.

They are also tempting many other Castes to bring pressure on the government to declare them as belonging to the category of Scheduled

castes. ~ 4. Sanskritisation and Westernisation: As M. N. Srinivas has pointed out, two important trends are witnessed in caste — the process of Sanskritisation and that of Westernisation.

The former refers to a process in which the lower castes tend to imitate the values, practices and other life-styles of some dominant upper castes. The latter denotes a process in which the upper-caste people tend to mould their life-styles on the model of Westerners. 5. Backward Classes Movement: The non-Brahmin castes today are getting themselves more and more organised to challenge the supermacy of the Brahmins and to assert their rights. The establishment of “ Satyashodhak Samaf’ by Jyotirao Phooley in Poona in 1873 marked the beginning of such a non-Brahmin movement.

This movement against the Brahmin supermacy by the lower castes came to be known as Backward Classes Movement. In the beginning, the main aim of this movement was to limit the Brahmin monopoly in the two fields such as education and appointment to government posts. The Backward Classes Movement has become a vital political force today. Its influence has changed the political scenario of the country. This movement has made the Brahmins politically weak and insignificant especially in Kerala and Tamilnadu. This movement has also brought pressure on different political parties to create special opportunities for the lowest caste people enabling them to come up to the level of other higher castes. Due to this pressure, Backward Classes Commissions were established at Central and State levels which recommended “ reservation” for backward castes/classes. 6.

Competitive Role of Castes: Mutual interdependence of castes which existed for centuries and was reinforced by the institutional system of 'jajmani' is not found today. As M. N.

Srinivas points out, the "vertical solidarity" of castes has been replaced by "horizontal solidarity". "Live and let live" policy which was once associated with the caste makes no sense today. On the contrary, each caste looks at the other with suspicion, contempt, and jealousy and finds in it a challenger, a competitor. Excessive caste-mindedness and caste-patriotism have added to this competition. The economic base of a caste and its hold over the political power virtually determine the intensity of this competitiveness. This competitive spirit further strengthens caste-mindedness.

7. New attempts to strengthen caste-loyalty, caste-identity, caste-patriotism and caste-mindedness: (i) Though Caste Panchayats are dwindling, caste organisations are on the increase. Some of these organisations have their own written constitutions and managing committees through which they try to preserve some of the caste rules and practices. (ii) Caste organisations run their own papers, bulletins, periodicals, monthlies etc.

, through which they regularly feed information to the members regarding the activities of caste organisations and achievements of caste-members.

(iii) Attempts are also made to increase caste integration through the establishment of caste based trusts and trust-units. These trusts arrange annual gatherings, get-togethers, annual dinners, occasional festival

celebrations they provide shelter to the needy members of the caste. They offer scholarships to the poor students of the caste.

Some of them run schools, colleges, hostels, maternity-homes for caste members and so on. (iv) The occupational castes are making determined efforts to improve the economic conditions of caste members by establishing cooperative credit and industrial societies. (v) Caste organisations collect regular subscription from the members, arrange annual conferences, discuss matters and issues affecting caste interests and caste solidarity and organise agitations and protest meetings against the governmental policies if they were to damage caste interests. In states like Bihar, some upper and lower castes have formed their own 'senas' [militant groups] to protect their interests.