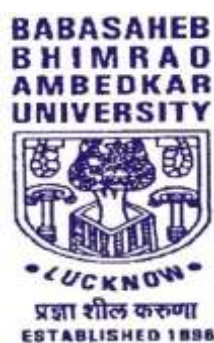


Continuity and Change in the Caste System: A study of two selected villages in Uttar Pradesh

**Abstract
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**Supervisor
Prof. Kameshwar Choudhary**

**Submitted by
Harishchandra Mishra
(Enrolment no. 219/12)**

**Department of Sociology
School for Ambedkar Studies
BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

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The present study is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 is Introduction of the study. It briefly discusses the definition and meaning of the caste system, its features and origin, theoretical perspectives adopted in the study of the caste system and review of literature. Moreover, it provides details about significance of the study, statements of the problem, objectives, hypothesis, methodology and limitations of the study. In addition it discusses the village-wise social profile of the respondents selected for the study. Chapter 2, first, discusses in brief the concept of culture and cultural features of the caste system. Then, it's empirically analyses on continuity and change in the cultural features of the caste system. The analysis is based on the data collected from the respondents of the study, which results to their opinion and behavior regarding different cultural features of the caste system.

Chapter 3 briefly discusses first, the concept of social structure and the features of the caste system as a structural phenomenon. Then, it analyses empirically continuity and change in the caste system related to its economic dimension which is based on the data collected from the respondents of the study pertaining to their economic status. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of political dimension of the caste system, which deals with continuity and change in the nature of political representation of different caste groups at the village panchayat level and voting behavior of the respondents belonging to two selected villages of the study. Factors and Processes related to change in the caste system are discussed in the chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 provides the main findings and conclusion of the study.

To begin, it may be noted that caste has existed in India since ages. Various studies have been conducted on the caste system in India. Some scholars consider it as a structural reality and others as a cultural phenomenon. It is generally held that structural features of the caste system, namely its economic and political aspects, have significantly changed;

whereas its socio-cultural features are said to be continuing to a large extent, particularly in rural areas. Both continuity and change have been observed in the caste system in earlier studies. In some recent studies it has been held that caste has taken its modern avatar in contemporary India as reflected increasing in caste-based mobilizations in politics, demand for reservation by some traditionally dominant castes like Jats, Pattidars and Marathas, and incidences of tensions and conflicts on the issue of reservation.

It was expected that as a result of increasing modernization and recent globalisation, traditional identities like caste would gradually disappear. But that does not seem to have happened. Hence, there is need to understand the changes in the caste system in terms of continuity and change in its socio-cultural and structural features as it stands currently.

Objectives and Hypotheses of the study

The objectives of the present study are -

- i. To know the nature of continuity and change in the socio-cultural features of the caste system;
- ii. To examine the nature of continuity and change in the structural (economic and political) features of the caste system; and
- iii. To understand the factors and processes that are responsible for continuity and change in the caste system.

The hypotheses of the present study include -

- i. Socio-cultural features of caste system have higher degree of continuity than its economic and political features;
- ii. The congruence between social (caste) status and economic status has declined less than that between social (caste) status and political status; and
- iii. Several factors and processes have been responsible for continuity and change in the caste system.

Methodology of the study

Broadly speaking, research methodology refers to the design of research involving approach and methods used in a piece of research to obtain valid and reliable results that meet the

research objectives. The theoretical approach adopted in the present study is the Weberian trichotomous schema of caste, class and power referring to the socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions of the caste system. Descriptive and diagnostic research design was followed in the present research. The universe of study includes two villages namely, Bhainsi and Jandheri, which are located in Khatauli tahsil of Muzaffar Nagar district in Uttar Pradesh: i) Bhainsi village consisting of large population of upper castes, and ii) Jandheri village having numerical preponderance of lower castes. Only two villages were selected for the study mainly due to resource constraints of the researcher in terms of available time, money, etc. Moreover, these villages were selected because in the recent years the district witnessed movements by the Jats, a traditionally dominant caste, demanding reservation in the central government jobs and in admissions in central government educational institutions. Purposive sampling approach is used in the study. The sample size is 150 households each from the two selected villages i.e. total 300 households. For this, 50 households (respondents) were chosen from upper, middle and lower caste groups from each of the two selected villages. The study uses mixed method approach which combines both quantitative and qualitative strategies of research. Accordingly, two methods have been used to collect empirical data from the respondents – i) Questionnaire (the same used as Interview schedule in case of illiterate respondents), and ii) Interview guide. Data collected through use of these methods form primary source. Secondary sources used here include relevant books, research articles in journals, newspaper reports, government documents, etc. The study area was visited three times to build rapport with the respondents and data collection. The fieldwork was completed in the selected villages from August 2019 to December 2019. The data have been interpreted and analyzed with the help of tables and figures. SPSS 22 version software was used for data analysis. The findings and conclusions of the study may not be generalized for the state of Uttar Pradesh as a whole because universe of the present study is limited to only two villages in the state.

Main Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of empirical data relating to socio-cultural, economic and political features of the caste system, pertaining to the study of two villages in UP, shows the following main trends of continuity and change:

Socio-cultural features: Traditionally, the upper castes (General category) were accorded higher social status than the middle (OBCs) and lower castes (SCs) in social hierarchy of the caste system. The cultural norms governing the caste system ensured maintenance of their higher social status through putting various types of restrictions on interactions with other castes. In this connection, in case of the two selected villages it was found that around one fourth (26.3%) of the total respondents believe that the caste system was created by the God, but majority (60.7%) of them believe it was created by the society. However, category-wise there was some difference in their opinion, as 22% Brahmins thought it was created by the God, whereas the ratio for the OBC and SC was 24% and 26% respectively. (ii) As regards commensality, large majority (78.3%) of the total respondents believed it should be done fully, 15.7% believed it is partially, and a small fraction (only 5%) did not support it at all. There is found some difference in their opinion across categories in this matter. Moreover, large majority (83.3%) of them always practiced commensality, 13.7% practiced sometimes, but a tiny majority (2.3%) never practiced it. (iii) In respect of inter-caste marriage, large majority (85.7%) was not in favour of it; only a small majority (10.3%) supported it. There was no difference on this across different categories of the respondent. Also, overwhelming majority (95%) of the respondent reported no inter-caste marriage done in their family; only 3.3% reported in the positive. (iv) Large majority (81.3%) of the total respondents did not believe in the practice of untouchability, 14.7% believed in it partially and a tiny majority (3.7%) believed in it fully, further large majority 73.7% never practiced untouchability, 22% practiced partially and 4.3% believed fully. There was found some differences across categories e.g. 7.1% Brahmins practiced untouchability fully whereas the ratio for OBC and SC respondents was 6.9% and nil respectively. (v) Majority of the respondents believed in the theory of Karma (39% believed fully and 26% believed partially) whereas small section (15%) of them did not believe in it. (vi) Large majority (73.7%) of the respondents fully believed that different castes are unequal to each other; only 13.3% believed it was completely false to think that castes are unequal, 13.3% considered it partially true. (vii) But overwhelming majority (91.7%) believed all caste should treat each other as equal. Coming to behaviour aspect, overwhelming majority 90.7% always treated castes higher than oneself as equal to them, 7.3% did so sometimes and almost nil

(1%) never did so. Moreover, large majority (71%) of the respondents treated castes lower than oneself always as equal, 22.3% did so sometimes, and 5% never did so. Also overwhelming majority (93.3%) of the respondents participated in religious festivals and ceremonies in the village without any caste discrimination. There is found almost no difference among them across categories in this regard.

Thus, on the whole, it is found that there is very high to high degree of continuity in: a) the belief and behaviour of the respondents regarding inter-caste marriage (around 90% respondents), b) very high degree of continuity in their belief that castes are unequal to each other (around 80% respondents), and c) high degree of continuity (around 60% respondents) in their belief in the theory of Karma. d) The continuing existence of khaps even today in the study villages adds to the caste system as an element of continuity. But there is high to very high degree of change in: a) their belief regarding the creation of caste system (around 68% believe society created it, only 26% said create by God), b) belief in commensality (78% fully believed in commensality), practiced commensality (83% practiced it), c) belief in untouchability (81% did not believe), practice of untouchability (74% never practice, only 4% practiced fully), d) treatment of caste higher than oneself as equal (91% treated always as equal), treatment of castes lower than oneself as equal (71% did so always, only 5% never did so), and participation in religious festivals and ceremonies in the village without any caste discrimination (93% said yes always, only 1% said no). So, there is found very high to high degree of continuity in four socio-cultural features of the caste system. And there is also found very high to high degree of change in four socio-cultural features of the caste system. Moreover, it may be noted that there is found some difference in the socio-cultural belief and behaviour of the respondents across categories (i.e. General, SC and OBC) regarding some cultural features of the caste system and almost no difference in case of some other cultural features of the caste system.

Caste and Economic status: Traditionally, there was a congruity between the social (caste) hierarchy and economic hierarchy under the caste system, i.e. the castes that were higher in social status were also higher in economic status and the vice versa. The findings of the empirical analysis regarding economic status of different caste groups in

the two villages are : (i) The ratio of SC respondents living in kaccha houses is the highest (i.e. 17.1%), among the SCs followed by the OBCs (11.3%) and General category/Brahmins (only 4.1%). But ratio of the respondent living in pakka houses is highest among the General category/ Brahmins (79.6%), followed by the OBCs (67%) and lowest among the SCs (45.7%). (ii) Agriculture used to be the main family occupation of about half (66%) of the General/ Brahmins households in the earlier generation, followed by slightly more than one-third (35%) of the OBCs and about one-fifth (19%) SC households. But agriculture as the main family occupation has declined in the present generation as the ratio in case of General/ Brahmins, OBCs and SCs category 50%, (6% decline), 20.4% (around 10% decline), and 15.4% (around 4% decline) respectively. (iii) In case of labour as the main family occupation, the ratio has increased over generations in all categories. In the earlier generations labour as the main source of family occupation was highest among the SCs (around 42%), followed by OBCs (28%) and the General category/Brahmins (12%). The ratio increased in all categories but the pattern remained the same in the present generation as the ratio in the present generation stood at 65.5% for the SCs, 32.4% for the OBCs and only 15.3% for Brahmins. The intergenerational increase in ratio is found to be about 25%, 4% and 3% and in case of SCs, OBCs and General (Brahmins) respectively. (iii) The ratio of business as the main family occupation has increased over generation the most in case of OBCs (around 8% in earlier generation to 28% in present generation i.e. 20% increased followed by General/Brahmins categories 4% to 9% now i.e. 5% increased) and SCs (7% to 10% now i.e. 3% increased). The ratio of sources as main family occupation has decreased in case of General/Brahmins category (around 21% in earlier generation to 14% in present generation i.e. 7% decline), but has increased among the OBCs (about 9% earlier to 11% now i.e. 2% increased), and remained roughly the same among the SCs (i.e. about 5% earlier as well as now). As regard main source of present family income dependence on labour is the highest (48.6% families among the SCs, followed by business 19% and agriculture 15% families). The trend is similar among the OBCs in whose case dependence on labour as the main source of income is the highest (about 37% families), followed by business (about 29% families), and agriculture (21%). But in case of the General (Brahmins) category, the highest ratio of main source of income is agriculture

(about 43% families), followed by labour (17.4% families) and service (10.3%). (iv) Further, as regard the size of landholding, it is found that the ratio of families without any landholding is highest among the SCs (around 10%), followed by General (Brahmin) category (4%) and the OBCs (3%). Again the ratio of those having marginal/ small landholding is highest among the SCs (around 89% families), followed by the OBCs (72% families) and the General (Brahmins) category (65%). In contrast, those having medium landholding are highest (about 26%) among the General/ Brahmins category, closely followed by the OBCs (around 22% families), and nil medium landholding by the SCs. Among the OBCs, around half of the medium landholding the Jats have (12.4% out of 22% for the OBCs as a whole). Large landholding is possessed by the General (Brahmin) category (around 3% families) and the OBCs (3% families), but none by the SCs. So, the SCs possess no medium or large landholding. And among the OBCs, mainly the Jats have large landholding (2% families out of total 3% OBCs families). (v) Moving further, it is found that the respondents belonging to all three categories reported improvement in their economic status at present compared with their earlier generation. As substantial majority (around three-fourth of total families) belonging to all categories reported intergenerational improvement in their economic status- the ratio being around 72%, 74% and 75% families for the General (Barhmins), OBCs and SCs categories. Around one-fifth of the families in all categories reported no intergenerational improvement in their economic status the ratio being around 23%, 18% and 23% families among the General (Brahmins), OBCs and SCs categories. Only around 5% families reported no change in their economic status from the earlier to present generation. (vi) Coming to total family income from all sources ranging between Rs. 1-25000, the ratio of SCs families is the highest (i.e. around 28%), followed by the OBCs (around 21%) and lowest among the General (Brahmin) category (7% families only). In the range of family income between Rs. 25000-Rs. 1 Lakh, the ratio of families is 56%, 43% and 33% among the SCs , OBCs and General (Brahmins) categories respectively. The ratio of family income in the range of Rs. 1-2 Lakhs in case of the SCs, OBCs and General (Brahmins) categories is 11.5%, 12.3% and 31% respectively. The ratio of family income in ranging between Rs. 2-5 Lakhs is around 20%, 29% and 5% families respectively for the General (Brahmin), OBCs and SCs. In the range of family income between Rs 5-10 Lkajs the

ratio is found to be 8.2%, 8.24 and nil families in case of the General (Brahmin), OBCs and SCs categories. The ratio is the highest range of total family income between Rs. 10-20 Lakhs, there are only 2% families belonging to the General (Brahmins) category and nine from the OBCs and SCs. In the higher range of total family income between Rs 2-5 lakhs and Rs. 5-10 Lakhs among the OBC families, it is the Jats which constitute the main caste. So the main trend of total family income follows the caste hierarchy i.e. higher the caste status higher the family income and lower the caste status of the family lower is the family income. (vii) In terms of possession of consumer durables at family level, except AC, General Brahmin category respondents are at the top followed by the OBCs and SCs. For instance refrigerator is possessed by majority of the families of General (Brahmin) category (63.2% families) and the OBCs (54.6% families) but only 40.7% SCs families. Cooler is possessed by 33.6% General (Brahmins) category families followed by the OBCs (21.6%) and SCs families (only 4.7%). The possession of washing machine at family level is 21.4%, 17.5% and 2% families among General (Brahmins) category, OBCs and SCs respectively. Televisions set is possessed by 79.5% General (Brahmins) category families followed by 63.9% families among the OBCs and 50.4% families among the SCs. Gas cylinder is possessed 90.5% General (Brahmins) categories families followed by 77.3% OBCs family and 74.2% SCs families. As regards distribution of non-possession of any of the above items, the ratio is highest among the SCs (6.6% families), followed by the OBCs families (3.1%) and the General (Brahmin) category families (only 1%). AC is possessed by 2% families in General (Brahmin) category, 5.1% OBCs families (i.e. 3.1% Jats and 2% Sainis) and none from the SCs categories. Among the OBCs, the more expensive consumer durable are possessed by mostly the Jats families followed by the Sainis in some cases and very few by the other OBCs.

(viii) The possession high value transport vehicles is found to be highest by the Jats and then Sainis among the OBCs families, followed by General (Brahmins) category and none or least by the SCs. For example, Trucks/Buses are possessed by 5.1% OBCs families (3.1% by Jats and 2% Sainis families followed by General (Brahmins) category (3.1%) and none by the SCs families. Around 20% OBCs families (7.3% Jats and 6.2% Sainis families) possess Car/Jeep, followed by General (Brahmin) category families (12.2%) and only 7.6% SCs families. Motorcycle/ Scooters are possessed by significant majority of

families across categories- the ratio being 81.4% OBCs families, followed by 76% SCs families and 75.5% General (Brahmin) category families. The possession of cycle is most common across overwhelming majority of families in all categories- the ratio being 94.8% OBCs, 92.3% SCs and 75.5% General (Brahmin) category families. Possession of none of these items is highest among the SCs (7.6%) category (6.1%) and the OBCs (3.1%) families. The ratio of possession of high values agricultural machinery is highest among the OBCs followed by the General (Brahmin) category and none of the lowest among the SCs. For instance, harvester is possessed by only 1% Jats families (OBCs) and not at all by the General and SCs category families. The possession of Tractor is highest among the OBCs (24.7% which includes 10.2% Jat families and 9.2% Sainis families) followed by the General (Brahmin) category (13.2%) families and the SCs families (9.5%). Trolley is possessed by 26.7% OBCs (including 6% Jats and 9% Sainis families), followed by 19.3% General (Brahmin) category families and only 9.5% SCs families, the possession of tubewell is the highest among the General (Brahmin) category families (22.4%) followed by the OBCs (12.3% families) and only 6.6% SC families. Diesel engine is possessed by 52% General (Brahmin) category families, followed by 49.4% OBCs and 33.3% SCs. In terms of possession of none of these items, the ratio of the SCs is the highest (66.6% families), followed by 29.8% OBCs and 17.3% General (Brahmin) category families. Hence, it emerges that in terms of possession of expensive consumer durable as well as high value agricultural machinery, the OBCs (mostly the Jats followed by Sainis) are at the top, followed by the General category (Brahmin) in the middle and the SCs families at the bottom.

Thus, on the whole it is found, as regards the two selected villages, that in terms of certain economic indicators the General category (Brahmins) is at the top but in case some other indicators the OBC (mostly the Jats) category is at the top of economic hierarchy in the village. The SCs continue to remain at the lowest rung of economic hierarchy. So, there is only partial congruity between caste hierarchy and economic hierarchy with respect to upper castes (General category) and middle castes, especially the Jats (OBCs); but there is complete congruity between the lower caste status of the SCs and their position at the lowest rung of the economic hierarchy in the village.

Caste and Power position: Traditionally, there used to be congruity between caste status and power positions occupied by people belonging to different castes at various levels. The empirical findings of this study relating to two villages show the power positions of different caste groups at the village panchayat level. (i) It is found that despite being just around 11% of the Bhaisi village voter population, the Jats have always won elections and occupied the position of Pradhan at the village panchayat level since 1975 till the present. Another General caste, viz. the Brahmin who constitutes around half of the total village population have not become village Pradhan; neither any person of the OBC and SC castes has ever become village Pradhan at the panchayat level in Bhaisi village. (ii) In case of Jandheri village, the Jats constitute around 15% of the total voter population, and the SC castes are in numerical majority. In nine panchayat elections held in this village since 1975, the post of village Pradhan has been won twice by the SCs, once by Saini (an OBC caste) and six times including at present, by the Jats who belong to the OBC category in the state list. So, it emerges that despite being numerically in minority, the Jats have been able to acquire and retain the most powerful panchayat position of Pradhan continuously for decades in Bhainsi village and also six out of nine times in Jandheri village. Even when people belonging to other castes OBC/ SC castes won Pradhan election in Jandheri village the Jats continue to exercise their influence over them in decision making at the village panchayat level.

(iii) Further, as regards ward members of village panchayat, it is found that in Bhainsi village panchayat, the ratio of General/Brahmin, OBC and SC categories in the total voters was about 44%, 35% and 21% respectively, and their respective ratio of the ward members who won in 2021 village panchayat elections was 47%, 33% and 20%. Hence, the ratio of ward members who won election from different categories comes to roughly the same as their ration in total population of voters, though the ratio of general category was slightly higher and that of the OBCs slightly lower than their respective share in voters' population. In case of Jandheri village panchayat, it is observed that General/Brahmin category constitutes 9.1% of the total voters in the village but they won no seat of ward member in 2021 village panchayat elections. But the OBCs who form 40.3% of the total voters won 73.3% post of ward members, i.e. around double their ratio in the total voters. The SCs form 50.6% of the total voters but they could win only 26.7%

of the post of ward members, i.e. almost half of their share in the total voters. Among OBCs, the Jats won more seats than others (i.e. five out of total 11 seats won by the OBCs). So, the power distribution in terms of holding the post of ward member in the village panchayat in Jandheri village is in the order of first the OBC (mainly Jats) followed by the SCs, and General category being nil. But in case of Bhaisi village the order is first the General category, followed by the OBCs (mainly Jats) and lastly the SCs. Finally, as regards power distribution at the village panchayat level, the post of village panchayat Pradhan has been held for decades by the OBC (Jats) in the Bhaisi village, but the ward members are presently higher in number from the General/ Brahmin category than the OBCs and SCs taken separately. But in Jandheri village where the SCs are in majority they have won the post of Pradhan twice only in the period after 1975, whereas the post was won by OBCs for the remaining period (six times by the Jats out of total seven times by the OBCs). But as regards ward member, the position of the SCs is better than in case of the post of Pradhan. On the whole, the in the village power structure, the OBCs (say Jats) are dominant and the position of the SCs has slightly improved in the present compared with the past mainly due to the Constitutional Amendment providing reservation to them in PRIs. The General/Brahmin category is not at the top in PRI in the selected villages. So, there is no significant congruence between social (caste) status of the upper caste (Brahmins) and their position in the power hierarchy at the village panchayat level. The Jats, who are part of the OBCs, have dominance in power hierarchy in the villages. The SCs continue to largely remain at the bottom of the power pyramid though their position has improved in distribution of power at lower level (as ward member and sometimes as Pradhan) in the village.

Factors and Processes: There are both historical and contemporary factors and processes which have facilitated change in the socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of the caste system, though it has not been replaced with some other system. These factors and processes have operated at both macro and micro levels. Mainly starting from the British period, these forces got further strengthened after Independence with India's march on the path of modernization and current globalization. Processes of sanskritisation, westernization and secularization have been instrumental in change. The introduction of land reforms, green revolution, adoption of democratic political system based on universal

adult franchise and PRIs, spread of modern education, etc. have been important factors leading to change in the caste system. Also, there are certain micro-level factors in the selected villages like partition of family, sell of some land by upper castes, increase in population, increasing political awareness among many OBCs and the SCs, that have facilitated change in the caste system to some extent.

Finally, it may be broadly concluded that the Jats are found to have political and economic dominance in the selected villages, not the upper castes. And the SCs remain at the bottom in local hierarchy not only socially but also economically and politically, though it must be noted that their economic condition has improved and they have also started getting representation at village panchayat level where they are numerically significant among voters. Broadly speaking, socio-cultural features of the caste system are not found having much higher degree of continuity (except prohibition on inter-caste marriage) than its economic and political features. Congruence between social (caste) status and economic status has declined much more in respect of status of the upper caste and the OBCs (mainly the Jats) rather than regarding the SCs. There is higher degree of incongruity (dissonance) between respective social (caste) status and political power regarding the upper caste and the OBCs (Jats), but not so in case of the SCs. So, first hypothesis of the study is not valid, but the second and third hypotheses are valid.