CHAPTER - V

SOCIAL BACKGROUND: RELIGIOUS, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL
ATTRIBUTES OF RELIGION AND UNTOUCHABILITY:

The preceding chapters dealt with the socio-economic family characteristics of the students and their background of attitude formation in general, and attitudes of students towards religion and untouchability in particular. The present chapter seeks to examine the various factors which are in the base of religion and untouchability.

In brief, on the basis of the views of the respondents, it can be inferred that the norms of ritual purity and the rigidity in the division of occupation are declining in their force. On the other hand, caste considerations play a crucial role in educational, occupational, political and bureaucratic institutions due to favors bestowed by governments on lower castes.

Although under the changing conditions the imposition of caste norms is of lesser magnitude and does not persist in its original form.

However Damle (1957) describes the situation thus, "Our examination of the factors which are supposed to have been weakened, shows that the weakening is more apparent than real. Consequently, they also do not have
sufficiently important effects on the caste system as a whole. What we observe is that the caste still continues to operate under the new situation."

Professor Ghurye (1961) does not think that the situation had changed in the course of eighteen years (1932-50). Though the caste system had shed some of the features of the 19th century, its vitality in social life is as strong as ever and the task of uprooting the system is not so easy as some might believe. The present study also reveals that religious dogmatism and intolerance still pervades in the society.

Untouchability and religious dogmatism are closely associated phenomena. Thus, the same religious, economic, social and political factors which strengthen the base of religious dogmatism also strengthen the base of untouchability. In the present chapter these attributes of religion and untouchability are discussed.

(i) Religious attributes: In the present study no propositions were included in the scale regarding the opinion of the respondents about the religious basis of untouchability. The data is gathered by the interview method and by the observations.

From the very beginning, the Indian social system has been described by social scientists as an unique system
of inequality sustained by religious and ritual conceptions of purity and pollution, (Manusmriti, 1967). The opinion of the respondents was taken on the above proposition 69.33% of the respondents agreed. It is observed that the concept of ritual purity and pollution though exists but, situation differs from region to region. In the rural areas the ritual conception of purity and pollutions still persists and in no case cobbler and sweepers are permitted to enter into the houses of other castes. Though in the cities like Bombay, Kanpur and Delhi, the concept of ritual purity and pollutions are not so rigid as lower caste people are engaged in all the household work.

However, our respondents were not of industrial area and Jhansi is not culturally an advanced city, 69.33% of respondents opined that the concept of ritual purity and pollution still operates. The Brahmins were and even today are, at the top of hierarchy and the untouchables were and are even today at its lowest.

52% respondents were of the opinion that the religious sanctity beneath the social relations, keeps them neutral to the forces of change from without. 46% of the respondents who disagreed with the statement viewed that in the modern age of technology, religious sanctity underlying the social relations is influenced by the economic,
social, and political factors. Practice of untouchability and religious dogmatism, though arises out of religious superstitions, but notion of pollution and purity persist due to the unequal economic and social conditions.

Historical evidences indicate that the social relation from which the caste system derives its existence, might have evolved from the superstition of the divine right. The varna system supplies some ground for the appearance of the institution of caste built in the divine superstition. According to this superstition Brahmins (priests) emerged from the divine mouth of the Brahma and were employed in the educational pursuit. Kshatriyas appeared from the divine arms of the Brahma and were given administrative and welfare work. Vaishyas were born from the divine thighs of the Brahma and were assigned to carry on agriculture, trade and commerce and finally those who emerged from the divine feet of Brahma known as sudras, were to serve others. In the words of Kamle "the essential thing is that the four varnas emerged as part and parcel of the divine system" (Kamble, 1978).

The 70% respondents viewed descrition of the origin of the caste system as given in the Shastras to be an orthodox myth. Explanation for those things which could not be explained on the empirical basis were provided
by some superstitious basis.

Thus, it can be said that the religious sanctions to the ideas of inequalities given in the Hindu scriptures are based on old religious values and were condemned by the social Hindu reformers. The modern generation believes in the humanistic outlook on these matters.

"Humanism in this sense rejects the supernaturalistic notions of creation, heaven and hell, inherent sin, and so on, and strives to unite people on the basis of a code of social morality rather than on the basis of creed or domination or belief. It generally welcomes the discoveries of science physical and social," (Maciever and Page, 1962). Though the view is held only at the ideal level. Observation of the behaviour of people does not confirm the ideals.

In the opinion of the 80% of respondents, most of the people still believe in the doctrine of Karma, but relation of this inequitable distribution of function, acceptable as being part of divine order, is prevailing only among illiterates and villagers. However, 88.67% respondents opined that castes rules and taboos were evolved primarily on basis of religious interpretation of shastras. The persistence of caste rules and taboos can not be explained on the basis of religious sanction only.
The view of Srinivas (1964) that the belief of the people in the law of Karma and doctrine of Puarjarjamma namely the transmigration of the soul, had been responsible for the acquiescence of the lower caste to the whole system. 80% respondents disagreed with this view. Moreover, it can be said that religious movements such as Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism have always been questioning the legitimacy granted to social inequality. The reformist movements started by Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and Ram Krishna Mission all have generated the idea of equality of men.

In the view of the 76.34% respondents, Indian marriage system also constituted a religious factor to strengthen the base of religion and untouchability. In the view of Karve (1968) admission to the caste system and transformation by sanskritization do not affect the principle of endogamy and hierarchy. Thus it appears the roots of caste system lies in the endogamy.

In response to the item of the scale "when someone of the upper caste marries to a girl or boy who belongs to schedule caste/tribe, one should do nothing about it or feel nothing about it," only 62% of the respondents agreed with the statement. When inquired about their personal view of marriage, none of the upper caste respondent was
ready to marry a girl or boy from the scheduled caste, because of the notion of purity and pollution. Even scheduled caste respondents do not wish to marry a girl or boy from the upper caste because they do not feel secure into the hands of upper caste persons.

In the view of 76% respondents, in the past it was due to some religious factors that Brahmin caste was considered superior in respect to others. This is the reason that Harijans themselves did not make any organized movement against the upper caste for the removal of their social disabilities. Prasad (1957) puts forth the familiar argument that there has been no revolution because of the myth of holiness and infallibility of the Brahmins without questioning it.

In the view of 73.33% respondents, in the traditional Indian society religious values of caste hierarchy based on Shastras and Darshanas, were prevailing. The Psychological possessions of the people were grounded in the religious beliefs of Shastras and Darshanas. Thus, the religious factors were considered to be basic originating factor of untouchability and religious dogmatism. From this study, it is clear that orthodox religious values have been replaced by the rational values, though only on the ideal level. Old traditional religious Sanskar of the notion
of caste hierarchy and religious dogmatism are still persisting.

It is observed that the beliefs, traditional or rational, in order to be effective must be preserved and propagated by a norm setting group in a society. The Brahmins in particular and the upper caste in general was such a group in the past. Today, the position of the Brahmin is shaken but not that of the total upper castes as the norm setting group. They are largely engaged in the upper administrative government and semi government services, in business and in industry.

As far as the religious dogmatism and religious intolerance is concerned, the study reveals that majority of the respondents do not believe in the traditional orthodox view of religion. In the view of the 66.67% of the respondents, religion is too much related with fiction and denomination to be a strong force for righteousness. 83% of the respondents expressed during interview that the belief in old traditional value of Karma and Punarjanama has been at the root of the hierarchical stratification. The value of Karma suggests that man takes birth into a particular caste according to his deeds in the past life. However, in the view of 77.34% respondents, now a days the modern generation does not like paternal and benevolent attitude towards religion.
The observation of the society indicates that there are changes in some part of the system, yet the magnitude of change in traditional religious thinking is not as great as it is believed to be. Thus, the religious factors strengthening untouchability are very important, as majority of our respondents believe that passing an act is not enough to alter the social practice of untouchability and religious dogmatism. There should be new social movement educating the public through propaganda.

(ii) Economic attributes: The above discussion led us to believe that caste stratification based upon birth were the root causes of untouchability. They are further enhanced by the economic and social factors.

There are certain items in the scale related to the economic aspect of religion and untouchability. Moreover, the data was supplemented by the responses of the respondents to certain other items which could throw some light on the economic factors which have strengthened the base of religion and untouchability.

77% of the respondents were of the opinion that the hereditary adoption of occupation is one of the economic factors which have strengthened the base of religious dogmatism and untouchability.
Other studies (Beteille, 1966) have shown that there are two kinds of stratification existing side by side in the villages as well as in the urban areas. One is based upon caste system and another upon class system. But there is correspondence between the class hierarchy and caste hierarchy.

Basically, the village economy in India is broadly based on agriculture. The ownership of land gave rise to agrarian class structure. There are the land owners who form the upper class on account of their wealth and proprietorship. There is middle class consisting of the tenants who take the land on lease for cultivation from the land lords and lastly there are the agricultural labourers who are employed on daily wage basis by the land lords or tenants to help them in the cultivation of land. Most of the untouchables live in rural areas of India. (70, 441, 388 in the rural areas compared to 9, 254, 508 in the urban areas) (Census 1972). "Many untouchables are occupied in hereditary occupations like scavenging of dead animals, sweeping dirt and soil cleaning and leather working" (Glen and Johnson, 1978). The adoption of these occupations have associated all untouchables with permanent ritual pollution. Infact, however, the greatest majority of the scheduled caste labour force (72.20%) are engaged in
agriculture labour. A high proportion of these people are landless labourers. Among landless labourers generally, scheduled castes figure 50 percent (Department of Social Welfare, 1969).

In the present study, in the opinion of 77% respondents, the adoption of hereditary occupation is the reason that in the frame work of traditional Indian society, there is no interpersonal relationship between these untouchables and higher caste persons. And the majority of (77%) respondents viewed that the difference of occupation can be abolished if all the menial work is done by machines. 96.67% respondents agreed with the view that in comparison to mental work preference or recognition should be given to manual work. Though only 68.34% respondents agreed with the view that very high salary should be paid to the workers doing menial work, so that everyone tries to take up that occupation.

The responses to above statements show that weak socioeconomic background of the untouchables is the main factor which has strengthened the base of untouchability. 97.34% respondents think that some economic aid should be given so that they can live like others.
It is observed that economically the untouchables tend to be totally dependent on upper caste good will. In the villages, untouchables generally laboured for particular upper castes patrons with Jajmani system. Though some scholars such as Wiser (1958) tended to idealize the Jajmani system as beneficial to all. It is clear that untouchables were generally at the mercy of the upper castes, whose position was backed by both status and power. Additionally a traditional system of forced labour known as bonded labour, though constitutionally prohibited, has been found to be widely prevalent in India (Wiser, 1956).

It is also observed that participation of scheduled caste in working force is higher than those of non scheduled castes both in rural and urban areas of various states in India as they do not possess any other source of living than selling of their labour and they are totally dependent on the mercy of the upper caste. Our 67.66% respondents were also of the opinion that economic dependance of scheduled caste is the cause of exploitation of untouchables by the higher castes.

On further enquiry from the respondents whether the growth of industries and cities influence
caste and religion in any way. Majority (82%) gave positive answers. It is observed that with the growth of industries majority of the untouchables could get the job and have migrated from the rural areas to the big industrial cities. But still they were in the low paid jobs in comparison to non scheduled castes.

Further, the respondents were enquired about the village economic pattern. Most of the respondents did not have any knowledge about the economic pattern of the villagers. Only 5.67% respondents were from the village area. In the opinion of these respondents, many Harijans have improved their economic position by purchasing land. Most of them migrated towards big towns for securing jobs in the industries. Sweepers who belong to scheduled castes are still doing the work of cleaning latrines. Superstitious belief still prevails and superiority of Brahmins is still there.

Thus, the economic dependence of scheduled castes on the upper castes, their weak socio-economic status, employment in low grade and unskilled jobs are the various factors which are the causes of the persistence of the inferior position of the untouchables in the hierarchy. The caste system and adoption of hereditary occupation are related and can be well illustrated by the study of
Ramu (1972) cited below:

The division of labour, broadly can be pictured in terms of caste, although, of course the constitution of India prohibits discrimination along such lines. Among the salaried occupation at the Kolar Gold field, are the elite, bureaucracies are almost drawn from the Brahmin caste. Only 7.7% of Brahmin respondents hold positions that are not white collar and involve manual labour. 18.25% Kshatriyas respondents have taken up 'policy' jobs in the mines. The vaisyas are mostly in business activities. The shudras have taken up jobs that are not associated with their caste. For example one third of the shudra are white collar workers and the rest are employed in the mines as underground workers. The respondents of the study, who gave their occupations as gold smithery, hair dressing and washing clothes, sweeping and cleaning of streets and latrines belong to caste groups that traditionally followed these occupations.

The economic factors, thus, strengthen the roots of untouchability. In the view of 72% of respondents, if economic conditions of the untouchables improve, the social distance between the upper castes and lower castes will gradually disappear.
The above view of the respondents is very well supported by the economic interpretation of social change given by Karl Marx (1867). Marx stated that the character of the society depends on the way in which the economic problems are solved by any society. These ways change into norms and these changes in the norms of the society further changes throughout the fabric of the society. This is the cause that with economic advancement in India the caste rigidity is gradually diminishing.

The results show that our respondent have a secular and rational outlook towards religion. Further, to find out the economic factors on the basis of religious dogmatism, their opinion was taken whether in any form economic factors are related with religious values. In the opinion of the 70% of the respondents poor people are more orthodox and conservative in their religious faith while rich class is not so rigid, they are open minded, liberal and having secular faith in religion.

The reason is psychological for the different outlook towards religion amongst lower class and upper class. The main factor is that the poor people compensate for their lack of social status by emphasizing their religious status.
Whenever any religious riots take place the politicians exploit the poor villagers, illiterates and innocent people by provoking their religious feelings. Recently, in Punjab the most of the people who indulged in antisocial activities were from villages and lower class. One of the former ministers said "No matter what the government does, I am sure there can be no settlement with the Akalis. Their intransigence will have to be fought politically in the villages." (India Today, May 1985).

The another probable reason for this difference is that because of limited means of knowing things, limited education, limited social circle, the poor cannot broaden their outlook. Common bond for them: religion and it gives them a sense of community. On the other hand, because of education wide opportunities of gaining knowledge the richer class develops a secular outlook.

This view is supported by the study of Pope et al. (1942) which demonstrated that the mill workers were bound together by their religious sect and had become a family of believers. Their religion gave them a sense of community, a sense of being supported under very trying living condition. The religion of the Millhands told them that they are better than the owners of the mills, that in the eyes of God, they were not the wealthy but the superior people.
The Pope's classic exploration of how the small religious sects of the Millhands assist in compensating for their demeaning and degrading life. The study is a well researched and a nice portrayal of the interaction between religion and economic factors.

The responses of the respondents support the Marx's view as well as of Weber's view of religious determinism. At the time Weber (1930) undertook his study of religion many sociologists agreed with Marx's tenet of economic determinism which maintained that all social institutions (including religion) are determined, or result from economic factors. Thus, catholicism arose from the economic structure of Feudalism; Protestantism from the economic structure of Capitalism.

Weber (1930) turned Mary's analysis around. He demonstrated that religion can have a determining effect on the economic structure. Thus, the protestant religion encouraged people to value thrift, hard work and sobriety. According to Weber, it was the people's belief in which capitalism could grow. In this case, at least, religion was as important as material force in determining the social order of a people.
Both views support the respondent's contention that there is a close relationship between economic structure and religion of the society.

(iii) Social attributes: To find out the social factors underlying the base of religion and untouchability, there were certain statements in the scale which emphasized the social importance of caste system.

In the opinion of 79% respondents caste provides the sense of security and fulfillment which the individual requires to bear the burden of life and its responsibilities. In a similar way, in the opinion of majority of the respondents, caste is a social institution which is an extension of family so it caters to the need of people who are yet not politically integrated.

Observations also confirms the fact that caste provides some benefits to the individual. If an individual keeps contacts with caste leaders and politicians, participates in religious festivals organized by one's caste group, lives within a caste neighbourhood, patronizes caste cliques, and has affection and favouritism towards one's own caste members, the members of the caste also reciprocate the sentiments.
Individuals generally express sentiments of solidarity toward their caste groups. These in turn collectively reciprocate the sentiments. Srinivas (1962) describes the situation: "Joint family and caste provide for an individual in our society some of the benifits, which a welfare state provides for him in advanced countries of the west. Earliest friends are frequently drawn from his caste, his kin belong to his caste, his kin are important part of his Kith."

In a positive sense, an individual's dependence on his caste, for assistance at certain times, provides him an extra qualification. He is led to think that he is not alone in his success or failures, his caste also has a share. A collective feeling enables him to be well integrated into his kinship and caste groups. Negatively, an individual's intimate identification with his own group reduces the chances of his growth in an individualistic terms and in terms of cosmopolitanism.

The analysis of the results of the present study indicated that religion can console and give strength in times of personal difficulty or national crisis and it can inspire to bring about change in both, ourselves and society. Respondents viewed religion as a determinant as well as a reflection of social structure. However, they
also think that religion is a conservative institution and is paradoxical to the dynamism of society.

To say that caste system and religious dogmatism persists because in some respects they are beneficidal to the individual as well as to the society. This is one of the social factors which strengthen the base of caste system and religion.

It is evident that attitude of respondents towards untouchables is sympathetic but even then there are certain religious, economic and social factors which have separated lower castes and upper castes.

During interview, it was found that the majority of the respondents believe that even when the political system has changed, the social system continues unaffected.

There are so many incidents which support the view of the respondents. Some of them are quoted here. In Yerengaon village in Nagpur district of Maharashtra, a scheduled caste youth was offered as a sacrifice to propitiate the Gods. One youth of 24 years was tied to a tree and beaten to death in Peravalepalam village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh as he was suspected to have stolen a Mangalsutra from a high caste family (The Statesman, Calcutta: 5 August 1974). In the M.G. polytechnic near Agra in Uttar Pradesh, Scheduled caste students were forced by high caste students to leave the institution. Those who
remained, inspite of harassment, were severely beaten up. In the same manner scheduled caste students were forced to polish the shoes. On the annual day when a scheduled caste student helped himself from a table, he was severely beaten, (Times of India, Bombay, 22nd July 1973).

Examples amply show that even within the same economic class the social and economic exploitation faced by the scheduled castes is far greater than faced by their higher caste colleagues. Moreover, socially exploited scheduled castes seem to be more susceptible to economic exploitation.

It is observed, the traditional hierarchical system of caste though originated on the basis of interpretation of shastras, yet the privileged class tried to maintain it for their own benefits. Social factor for this condition of untouchability lies in the fact that the upper castes maintain their position of authority by the ownership of land since olden days and by taking advantage of modern education in the recent times. On the other hand there was no revolt amongst lower castes because the caste system involved a network of mutual interdependence in the group.

82.67% respondents agreed that religion provides rules of conduct and provides a fixed pattern of behaviour. This is the basis social factor for continuation of
institution of religion. On this aspect Harold and Hodges (1971) write: "Religion acts as an agent of socialization and social control as a means of indoctrinating people into toeing the line with societal norms. Such religiously ordained codes of conduct as the Ten Commandments, Mosaic law, the writings of Buddha, the Koran, the Analectus of Confucius and Papal encyclicals, the Indian epics Ramayan and Mahabharat all affect the way men act and the way they act towards each other."

In the view of the respondents, religion governs directly or indirectly the social lives of people, so this is the social cause for having faith in religion. 76.67% respondents believe that on the basis of religion people of one nation become united. On the contrary, 86% respondents also believe that religion is a point of dispute and quarrelling over matters of little significance.

In the broader sense, it is correct to say that religion represents collective feelings. For example we listen at the time of national crisis the slogans like "One nation under God." In the Elementary forms of religions Emile Durkheim (1947) writes "There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which makes its unity and its personality."
As religion serves to link group identity, so it unites people of the same religion socially and morally. However, religion maintains national integrity but sometimes becomes the cause of social and national tensions. Historically India has been a land with many powerful religious sects. Every group is bound together emotionally and socially on the basis of religion and whenever any dispute arises between two religious sects, it becomes the cause of national and social tension.

(iv) Political attributes: Majority of our respondents have an attitude that Democracy is a form of Government under which the weakest have the same opportunity as the strongest. 96.67% of respondents believe that there should be no disability for an individual on the ground of his caste. In the opinion of 90% respondents all men are equal before law and that the nature of wrong is not affected by the caste.

The results of the present study show that the attitude of the modern generation has changed. Morally they do think that the practice of social equality should become an important goal. There are certain factors which hinder the actual practice of equality. In the opinion of the 83.33% respondents the faulty circle of social, economic and political exploitation of the schedule caste by the higher caste is
strengthened by the legal and judicial obstructions in India. Observation also emphasizes that the criminals responsible for arson, loot, rape, killing of innocent men, women and children and so on have often gone unpunished as the culprits have been acquitted by the judiciary on technical reasons. "An obvious reason for this bottle neck and loop hole in law is prejudice which is more widespread and deep seated than most people would like to admit. It is by no means limited to the illiterate villagers or lower strata of the administration. As a matter of fact it pervades the entire society" (Kamble, 1978).

One item in the scale that privileges which are given to the untouchables are motivated by the political interests, 79% of the respondents agreed on the statement. This is an observed fact that at the time of election many promises are made by the politicians for securing votes from the untouchables. In this connection Singh (1982) writes: "The state practice on reservation reveals that the device of reservation has become the tool of aggrandizement in the hands of politically dominant castes who always try to strike political bargains to retain the privilege of being classified as backward even at the expense of the really needy and deserving. Even those in power, see the advantage in the system for winning over their political caste supporters."
Backwardness has become a vested interest and any attempt to eliminate it is strongly resisted."

It is previously indicated that in the opinion of the respondents, everybody is equal before law and the nature of wrong should not be affected by his caste. Now it is a well known fact that consitution has rejected the principle of inherited inequality and had aimed at the creation of a casteless and classless society. The Indian parliament passed an Anti-untouchability Act in 1955 but left its implementation to the state governments which are not free from the pressures of the majority community, therefore, aim remains to be achieved. Moreover, it has been alleged that in the process of implementing these programmes the intermediary seek benifits for themselves. Religion is an important institution. However modern generation do not like paternal and benevolent attitude towards religion. Respondents believe that the orthodox religious views represent shallowness, hypocrisy and prejudice. 80% respondents believe that temple are the houses of politics and business. Respondents also believe that on the name of religion, the uneducated gullible mass is exploited by the priests as well as by the politicians.

Observation confirms the view that the political leaders exploit minority groups for their own interests. The main problem is that the politicians practice to divide and rule policy has created hatred, bitterness, fear and distrust among various religious groups, thus inciting riots. Blaming
the opposition by the party in power or appointing a judicial inquiry will not solve the problem in any way. Nor will a high powered, all party body or a national commission on "communal harmony" as suggested by the National Police Commission help. The immediate need is a change of heart on the part of our politicians.

The conclusion derived from this study is that the oppression of the scheduled castes is mainly due to their low status in the caste hierarchy. The economic, social and political factors perpetuate the situation. Therefore, the roots of caste system itself needs destruction rather than perpetuation in the present form. In the opinion of the respondents problem must be tackled from all sides. The majority (82.67%) of the respondents think that passing an act is not enough to alter this social practice. There should be a new social movement educating the public through propaganda.