CHAPTER VI

MODERNIZATION: A PERSPECTIVE IN RELIGION AND UNTOUCHABILITY
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENTAL AND WELFARE AGENCIES
(PART A)

Lerner (1958) stresses that the modernization involves the replacement of sacred revelation by secular enlightenment in the guidance of human affairs. Secular enlightenment is personal to be achieved by each person. Modernization is essentially based on a "rationalist and positivist spirit." While Westernization once penetrated only the upper level affecting mainly leisure class fashions, modernization today diffuses among a wider population and touches public institutions as well as private aspirations with its disquieting positivist spirit.

Modernization process means a basic, profound, and widely disseminated change involving attitudes, the development of a rational and positive spirit, and the use of the new knowledge to the modes of living. "It is essentially a mass affair. It involves not only changes at the institutional level but also fundamental changes at the personal level, a change in modes of thinking, beliefs, opinions, attitudes and actions. It involves a fundamental change in social structure from the "immutable" Varna society which is a closed society to a castless, classless open
society in which the individual status depends not on "birth but on his personal achievement and attainment.” (Kuppuswamy, 1979).

The modernization process comprises the understanding of the natural, behavioral, and social processes and the application of this new knowledge to human affairs; it creates self reliance and an achievement desire in each individual and the development of educational courses to provide not only knowledge but also training in dexterity and in creativity.

The majority of (73%) the respondents believe that caste system should be abolished and ideally they do think that in democracy the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. They have also suggested certain measures to remove deep rooted practice of untouchability

Thus the present study indicates that a general awareness has been created among the modern generation regarding untouchability and religion. In this chapter, a brief historical background will be given about awareness towards untouchability and religion. The impact of this modern awareness in the society in general will be discussed.
The Indian constitution started a programme for the reorganization and changing of a medieval hierarchical society into a modern egalitarian society. While medieval hierarchical society emphasized inequality, the modern egalitarian society is based on individual's achievement and equal opportunity for all, regardless of one's caste, race and religion. In the present study, in the view of 91.34% respondents all men are equal before law and the nature of the wrong is not affected by the caste. 90% respondents viewed that there should be no disability for an individual on the ground of his caste. In the view of 83.34% respondents high class Hindus had ill treated the Harijans for centuries, therefore, they must make amends for their wrong doing. "But this ideal of egalitarianism did not come about suddenly but is a culmination of long process of change in the traditional pattern of our caste ridden society" (Singh, 1982).

These changes were effected mainly through social reformers, religious thinkers, national leaders and the intelligentsia of the country. These people constantly challenged the dominant values of inherited inequalities based upon the principles of Karma and Rebirth. Religious movements such as Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism etc. have always been questioning the legitimacy granted to
social inequality. They have been expressing the Hindu scriptures differently preaching human equality. The reforminst movement started by Brahma samaj, Arya Samaj and Ram Krishna Mission- all have generated the idea of equality of men.

The Bhakti movements by Kabir and Raidas present a saintly tradition of India in which the lower castes have been treated with profound honour. Thus, at every point of Indian History the social inequalities sanctioned by Hindu Dharma have been consistently and systematically challenged.

Many Indian intellectuales, like Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar were influenced by the Western ideas of equality and egalitarianism. They rejected the basis of Hindu orthodoxy and preached the principle of equality. Gandhiji's crusade for common brotherhood on behalf of the untouchables, was a strange mixture of western egalitarianism and Hindu reformism. Ambedkar adopted the cause of the backward classes in the western idioms. He viewed caste inequality as men made rather than as ordained by God. Ambedkar (1948) proclaimed "If I fail to do away with abominable thralldom and human injustice under which the class into which I was born has been groaning, I will put to an end to my life with a bullet. It was largely because of the Ambedkar's dramatization
of the cause of the depressed classes that the framers of Indian constitution embodied the policies of compensatory discrimination.

In view of the 58.67% respondents in India the status of an individual is determined by the social status of by the caste of the group in which he is born. On the other hand 90% of the respondents think that there should be no disability for any person on the basis of his caste. Thus, on the basis of the views expressed by respondents, it can be said that the ideas of inequality and the idea of human equality both have been part of a Hindu tradition. The reformist movements failed and Gandhiji could not reach the aim of inducing change without the help of Government. Thus, the Government induced the state supported system of compensatory discrimination to bring about social equality.

"In today's India, both the principle of hierarchy and principal of secularism and egalitarianism are operating side by side. Although, the constitution has rejected the principle of inherited inequality and has aimed at the creation of a castless and classless society, caste still continues to be one of the stubborn fact of real social interchange. And this stubbornness of caste has created all problems in the administration of the policies of preferences" (Singh, 1982).
(1) The impact of untouchability and religion on society: The analysis of this study reveals the substantial changes in the attitude of young generation. A general consciousness has grown, amongst the newer generation, regarding the problem of religion and untouchability. In the view of the majority (82.67%) of the respondents, the problem must be tackled from all sides viz. by improving socioeconomic status of the untouchables by implementing laws against the practice of religious dogmatism and untouchability, and by educating people through propaganda against the evils of this manmade distinction for which generally God is accused.

The impact of this attitude of the newer generation in the society in general is discussed in the present chapter.

Only half of our respondents agreed on the point that in India the status of an individual is determined by the caste. And only 67% of our respondents believe that caste system made it possible for the Indian society to be stable through the assimilation of various groups with different customs, religious beliefs and social habits etc. While 79% respondents view that caste provides social security to the individual. It provides some of the benefits which a welfare state provides in advanced countries in the west. 73% respondents believe that caste system should be abolished, majority of the respondents expressed that they want a
castless society. They want an "open" system society
instead of "closed" system of caste based on stratification
where all inhabitants enjoy equal power, material withdrawal
and prestige.

The impact of this attitude of the respondents is
that caste system in India is in its transitional phase now
a days. In some aspects the importance of caste has declined
in recent years while in others its utility has increased.
For example the norms of ritual purity and intermixing are
decreasing in their rigidity, on the other hand, caste
plays an important role in educational, occupational,
political and bureaucratic institutions.

The study made by Ramu (1972) gives the following
conclusion. "The new functions of caste can be conceptualized
in terms of expressive and instrumental functions. Expressive
functions, refers to the sense of social and emotional solidarity
that caste can bring about among its members. The behaviour
of individual tends to be "caste centre" because caste not
only provides them with a sense of identity but also acts
as a protective force. Instrumental functions, on the other
hand, are more pragmatic and concern the achievement of
personal or group goals in political or economical field."
The attitude of the majority of the respondents towards religion is secular and rational. 82.34% respondents have faith in religion but in broader sense. Like caste, religion also persists in an age marked by trust in empirical science. It is a major force both for personal and societal change and for stability. Though, the majority of the respondents do not believe in the paternal and benevolent attitude toward religion.

Impact on patterns of inter-caste and inter-religion relations: Majority of respondents believe in the new ideals of rationality, equality, fraternity and freedom. They have developed a generous and sympathetic attitude towards under privileged class. 84% respondents believe, if a schedule caste family comes to reside in colony where they live, they are ready to invite them to treat them equally. 65.67% respondents believe that one may have family relations with the neighbour who belongs to schedule caste. 92.34% respondents believe that there should be a common hostel for all the students. 93% respondents want that common dinners and parties should be arranged for all the students on special occasions.

The impact of this attitude of the respondents in society in general is that in schools and colleges, in reading rooms and play grounds, the members of the different castes come into close contact and the social distance
between them is gradually disappearing. The minor differences between the members of the different castes in the matter of dress, decoration and personal hygiene is gradually diminishing.

(a) The impact on dress: The observation indicates that the dress and food habits of a person provide indications of one's caste. Now a days in urban contacts and as result of mixing of the students of the different cultures, modern type of dress helps disguise one's caste status.

(b) Impact on food habits: 93% respondents of the present study have suggested that common dinners and parties should be arranged for all the students on different occasions. Information gathered during interview of respondents indicated that regarding food habits, the kinds of food cooked and served at home, rather than those eaten by specific members of the family, are most useful indicators of one's caste status. For example most of the Brahmin and Vaisya families do not cook and serve meat at home, but several upper and middle class Brahmins and Vaisyas eat meat on occasions.

Observation indicates socioeconomic class appears to be an important criterion in interdining practices and cleanliness and settings in which food is served. It is increasingly becoming more important than caste considerations. In fact, if one discriminates on the basis of caste, in such
settings, it is considered very peculiar. However conservative attitudes continue to show strength in interdining matters.

(c) Impact on social distance: In the opinion of 76% respondents, now a days the only caste considered literally untouchable, is the sweeper caste. Observation also indicates that most persons of this caste sweep streets, collect garbage and night soil and wash toilets. Because of the uncleanliness associated with their work, interaction with sweepers is minimal and these people are kept socially at a distance. Other untouchables of old times interact quite freely without consideration of defilement. In view of the 77% of respondents, this feeling of uncleanliness associated with the work of untouchables can be removed if all the cleaning work is done by machines.

(d) Impact on religious dogmatism: The attitude of the respondents towards religion is rational and secular. The modern generation has faith in religiosity, which, in a broader sense, is a faith in humanity.

The impact on the attitudes of the respondents is that the educated mass does not make any difference on the basis of one's religious views. The people of different religions interact freely. Majority (19.34%) of the respondents believe that while freedom to practice one's religion is guaranteed, his rights as a citizen are
not affected by the religion he practices. There are existing interreligion relationship in the social, economic, political and religious spheres. These involve mutual cooperation, duties, expectations and obligations which unite and organize the members of the different religion as a part of the country.

(a) Impact on rights and privileges: In view of the 91.34% respondents, democracy is a form of government under which the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. 96.67% respondents viewed that all men are equal before law and that the nature of the wrong is not affected by the caste. 90% respondents viewed that there should be no disability for an individual on the ground of his caste and 93% respondents were of the opinion that one should not be victimized in any way because of his caste and creed.

The impact of this attitude of the respondents is that the society has accepted the constitutional safeguards given to the scheduled castes as they are socially oppressed, economically exploited and culturally backward. Even after independence, untouchability is observed in various forms in various states throughout India. For example they are legally allowed to enter the public places, places of worship, the hotels, to draw water from public wells etc., but in practice they are neither in a position to avail themselves the full benifits of the constitutional provisions nor are
they allowed to do so by other people. They still continue
to stay outside the main village settlement, they are
discriminated even in public places and offices.

But slowly and gradually, as a result of urbanization,
land reforms, industrialization and education the modern
generation is developing a newer outlook towards the equality
of men. Now, despite interference, the untouchables use
public places, places of worship, the hotels and other
public properties quite frequently. However, due to low
economic status and illiteracy, they are not able to enjoy
the equal status in society. And in villages, as the majority
(78%) of respondents viewed that there is still considerable
hostility towards them.

In our sample, some respondents of the lower
castes were included. They are also conscious of their
rights and privileges. They informed that the majority of
the scheduled caste people are struggling to improve their
social status by educating their children and by raising
their socioeconomic standard.

"Under the impact of these new ideas of rationality,
equality and freedom many lower castes began to react and
refuse to submit to the man made inequality denying an equal
access to them in the traditional services of power. This
happened in south India where lower castes launched a
movement against Brahmin domination in every area of social
and political life and ultimately succeeded in securing caste quotas for them in government services" (Singh, 1982).

(f) Impact on intermarriage: 68% respondents viewed when some one of the upper caste marries to a girl or boy who belongs to scheduled caste/tribe one should do nothing about it or feel nothing about it, while 32% respondents informed that they continue to like the idea of endogamy. Under the traditional norms every caste in India is endogamous. Very few cases of regularly arranged marriage between members of two castes is reported. Caste endogamy, for the purpose of marriage, is one sphere where rigidity continues to be maintained. People continue to look down upon the very idea of inter-caste marriage. But there is a change in attitude and outlook among the younger generation. Even then in this aspect of social organisation, the force of norms seems so sound that the chances of deviation are rare. Hence, marriage within the caste is one of the strong factors, which has been responsible for the retention and perpetuation of caste complex. As Pannikar (1961) puts it, "The strength of the system of exclusive castes lay in the prohibition of intermarriage. By permitting marriage between different castes without reference to their superiority and inferiority, the new law has stuck at the root of caste system itself."
(g) Impact on occupation: Observation of the researcher as well as information gathered during interview of respondents emphasizes that, though the constitution of India prohibits discrimination along such lines, the adoption of occupation can be pictured in terms of caste. The majority of the upper caste people hold bureaucratic posts. The vaishyas are mostly still in business activities. Very few Brahmans hold positions that involve manual labour. However, there are exceptions. This is a well known fact that literate caste have an advantage over the rest in relation to their access to urban occupations. A considerable number of shudras have taken up jobs that are not associated with their caste. For example, many shudras are white collar workers and some of them are employed in factories, mills and other industries as workers. However, still a majority engaged in their ancestral occupation like gold smithery, hairdressing, washing clothes and the sweeping and cleaning of streets and latrines.

The correlation between certain castes and the new occupational system is clear from the patterns of division of labour in Kolar Gold Field (K.G.F.) "What is involved here is the differential life chances to use Weber's concept, conferred by the caste system. In K.G.F. the Brahmans for example, held subordinate ranks under
the European management of the mines. When the mines
were turned over to the Indian government, European
officers left and the ensuing vacuum was filled by
educated Brahmin subordinates. The bulk of the untouchables
continue in their relatively, much lower state."
Nevertheless, as Beteille (1969) recognizes, a certain
amount of fluidity is emerging. "In K.G.F. for example,
there now are two mine officers who are 'untouchables'
by caste and more and more non Brahmins are found among
the junior officer ranks. But hereditary specialization
persists not so much in the sphere of industrial employment
as in the areas of specific business activities and menial
services" (Ramu 1972).

"Business activities in K.G.F. are largely
controlled by vaishyas. Yet no rigid rules prohibiting the
entrance of persons from other castes into business
exists and few Muslims, Naidus, Mudaliars who have made
a mark as good and prosperous businessmen. But the
generalization concerning the vaishyas control on K.G.F.
business holds true."

Likewise the menial professions are open to all
but seldom have persons from other than the lowest castes
adopted such professions as their own. Most cobblers,
sweepers, barbers and washerman have continued in their traditional occupations. However, there is no obligation or compulsion for these groups to continue serving in such ways. Any person can switch to another occupation, such as that involved in a white collar job and so forth. Many persons from these caste groups are continuing in traditionally defined occupations because of failures in their educational aspirations, not because they especially desire to remain in caste trades.

In the opinion of the 77% respondents this difference of occupation based on heredity can be abolished if all the menial work is done by machines. 96.67% respondents viewed that in order to get rid of this problem the same recognition and preference should be given to menial and manual labour as it is given to mental work and majority of them also viewed that very high salary should be paid to workers doing menial work so that everyone tries to engage in these occupations.

The conclusion which is derived from the views of the respondents gathered through scale and during interviewing process is that, the attitudes of the caste Hindus towards untouchables are undergoing some change. The work of Anant (1971-1972) has also emphasized the same results that inter caste relations have been liberalized in recent years due to such factors as industrialization
and urbanization. National egalitarian values are adopted through the spread of education, persistent propagands for changing the heart of people.

The study also confirms the fact that this liberalization is most apparent in attitudes towards untouchables in public areas of life. While conservative attitudes continue to show strength on relatively private matters.

Moreover, it is also observed that in certain spheres the modern egalitarian values are adopted only at ideal level and not paracticed in actual life.

Our observational data emphasises the fact that the low caste people by adopting the customs, beliefs and the ways of life of high castes are able to raise their social status. Observation also indicates as the low caste people are gaining wealth and power Sanskritization is increasingly becoming common. The term Sanskritization was introduced by Srinivas (1966) meaning thereby a low caste is able to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy, by adopting characteristics of higher castes. In other words, low caste people adopts the custom, and beliefs of the Brahmins or of a local dominant caste in its efforts towards corporate mobility.
The material cited in the study leads us to believe that since the introduction of the Western Philosophy, and liberal education in India, people are increasingly becoming secularized and Westernized in their outlook and modes of life. The study also reveals the fact that the religious base is disappearing gradually but political and economic interests may hold caste considerations.