CHAPTER - VIII

RELIGION AND UNTOUCHABILITY: MODERNITY VERSUS TRADITIONALISM

(i) Modern versus traditional Indian norms and values: To study changes in the attitudes towards religion and untouchability it is necessary to consider briefly the fundamental traditional social values of the Indian society and the new social values which have been incorporated. "The ancient Indians visualized that time and place necessitate certain changes in structure. They recognized by means of these concepts, that it is necessary for a culture, while adhering to its basic principles, to modify some aspects to suit the needs of time and place. It is this outlook which has enabled the diversities in the different regions to survive," (Gokhle, 1961).

The study of values is a suitable approach to understand and predict the social behaviour towards the untouchables and members of the other religion. In order to interpret concrete behaviour, one must have knowledge of the basic assumptions of the people, their preferences and values.

As Parsons (1961) has said "social system to be conceived as open system engaged in complicated processes of interchange with the environing systems. Thus there is a "strain" within the system. If the strain become too
intense, the mechanism of control and restraint will not be able to ensure conformity; as a result there may be break down of the structure. The strain may be relieved either by restoring full conformity with the normative expectations or by a change in the structure itself." He defines structural change as alteration in the normative culture defining the expectations governing the relation. As regards the problem of identity of the changing social systems. He asserts" It follow that crucial focus of the problem of change lies in the stability of the value system. A change in structure of a social system is a change in its normative culture. The most important factors favouring structural change are adequate mechanisms to overcome the vested interests which generate resistances of institutionalized structural patterns."

On the one hand, there is conscious deliberate effort to change the social structure by incorporating new social values. New Social values of social justice and equality of opportunity have been assimilated in society for political freedom and for economic reconstruction. On the other hand, there is the fear that the old social values based on caste are being destroyed. The farm labourer, the factory worker, the student, and people from the low caste are refusing to accept the authority which prevent them from social justice and equality.
Moreover, man is a servant to cultural conceptions of good and evil. Group shared expectations and commonly accepted notions of the desirable and the undesirable - without norms and values the society cannot exist. Norms of the society are based on the values of the society. They have been called rules in the game of life. Norms are group endorsed regulations or standards that specify what people should or should not do in a variety of situations. Every culture is designed to perpetuate the group and its solidarity to meet the demand of individuals for an orderly way of life (Kluckhohn, 1961). Norms are guidelines that allow to engage in the routines of everyday life without having to resort to continual invention, innovation, or guess work.

Not all norms carry the same sanctions because not all norms are of equal importance. In general, there are three types of norms - mores, customs and folkways, distinguished by the intensity of feelings they arouse and consequences that follow from violations of them.

Virtually any behaviour that arouse intense feelings and is subject to extreme consequences comes under the heading of culture mores (Ronald and Preston, 1977). Mores have to do with the basic moral judgements of a society. They are strongest of the norms. Mores can tell us
to do certain things, to love our parents and family,
for example, mores can tell us not to do certain things
as not to kill other human beings.

William Graham Sumner of Yale (1906), one of
the most influential of the early American Sociologists,
commented on the great power mores have over us. He saw
that "the mores can make anything right and prevent the
condemnation of anything." Despite the strength of their
hold, mores can change, usually slowly but sometimes
dramatically. Moreover, individuals sometimes shift
rather quickly from one set of mores to another, generally
as a result of group pressures.

In this chapter, the view of the respondents
towards religion and untouchability will be evaluated in
reference to whether untouchability and religion have become
sustaining forces of code and custom, expressed in the
folkways and mores of society. Moreover, it will evaluated
that whether the traditional mores based on social hierarchy
and religious dogmatism are changing into the modern social
mores of equality and rational outlook.

(ii) The mores as regulators of behaviour towards untouchability:
The mores of society are the pressure forces of the group
according to which the system of society is regulated. If we
interpret the results of the present study, it would be
found that 58.67% respondents still think that in India the status of an individual is determined by the social status or by the caste of the group in which he is born. 67.67% respondents viewed that caste system made it possible for the Indian society through the assimilation of the various groups with different customs, religious beliefs, social habits etc. And 79% respondents think that caste is a social institution, which is an extension of the family and so it caters to the need of people who are not yet politically integrated.

Thus, in the view of 68.43% respondents in India, society is still regulated in some respects by the caste rules. Caste has maintained opportunities for solidarity and mutual support and also served as a status symbol.

The discussion on the above points and observation of the behaviour of the respondents, led us to believe that in their opinion though the pollution aspect of the caste has weakened, but it serves as a cementing force for group formation. For within the structure of a caste oriented society, individual's behaviour is largely regulated in terms of the expected and accepted norms of the caste in which the individual is born. In short, caste represents a close clustering of the members on family and caste lines, especially with reference to birth, marriage, death, and
financial obligations.

In this sense Maciver and Page (1962) write "If we consider the folkways not merely as norms of behaviour but as regulators of behaviour, we are viewing them as mores." Hence the rules of caste (according to the views of the respondents given above) are part of the Indian social mores.

The second point is that when folkways are added to conception of group welfare, standards of right and wrong, they are converted into mores. The mores of society in group usages are considered as pressure forces. The mores identify the individual with the group. In the view of the respondents, rules of caste are established to maintain group welfare because 79% respondents think that caste provides the sense of security and fulfillment which the individual requires to bear the burden of life and its responsibilities. In the view of these respondents one still has to depend on one's caste for help at critical periods of one's life like marriage and death. "One's closest companions and friends are mainly from circle of one's caste. In a desire to help one's caste fellows, many ignore the principle of social justice and are led to do consciously or unconsciously or otherwise injustices to the members of the other caste" (Damle, 1981).
It can be inferred from the respondents' view that untouchability and religious orthodoxy is taught from the very childhood to Indians and they have an omnipresent influence towards the group linkage of the populace. During interviewing 75% respondents informed that their grand parents still believe in the concept of pollution. According to them a sweeper's entrance in the interior of the house is prohibited because this defiles ritual purity. These respondents also informed that they have gathered informations through their parents and through books and magazines that before independance, untouchables were not allowed to enter public places. Respondents reported that they have observed that even after independance till very recent times untouchability was strictly observed in various forms in various states of India. Untouchability expressed itself in many forms of social avoidance such as: Sitting on a common floor, Interdining, Admittance to the kitchen, touching metal pots, mixing in social festivals, admittance into the interior of a house and any kind of physical contact.

As mores have conscious or unconscious social control over its members so the caste rules also exert pressure on the individual act with the conformity of caste norms.
It is observed that untouchability is a mass phenomenon of group prejudice and discrimination. This attitude is affecting about 60 million people and 429 communities (untouchable caste groups) in India i.e. nearly one sixth of the total population according to 1961 census.

The present study revealed that now all these discriminations and avoidances are prohibited under law. In particular, special provision under the fundamental rights has been laid down in the constitution for the removal of untouchability. In addition, while various laws have been passed by the state government, to punish certain kinds of action involving its practice, the centre has passed the untouchability (offences) Act 1955, which has made the offence cognisable and punishable under law. But 88.67% respondents think that it is one thing to legislate and to implement such legislation is another thing. It is true that one can not now legally discriminate against Harijans in employment and other public dealings. The attitudes towards untouchables have also become liberal and sympathetic. However, the fact remains that they live for the most part as they have traditionally lived, carrying out the dirtiest and most menial forms of work. This is particularly so in rural areas, since the evil is
intricately woven in the social fabric itself. Hence, it is clear that in India the untouchability determine, much of our behaviour towards a certain class as other social mores do. As other social mores are compelling and forbidding apparatus, they constantly exert pressure on every members. The untouchability is also a compelling and forbidding force which exert pressure on both the groups i.e. untouchables and the upper castes.

The another point about the mores is that the mores are always considered right by the group that shares them. One reason for this is that they evolve out of a vast amount of group experience. But at most, it is experience that turned aside by the happy or unhappy combinations of experiences and events affect strongly the memory of the group. Thus mores are generally agents of conservatism. Indeed legalized efforts to change specific mores frequently fail, because they evolved out of the vast amount of group's experience, that change into tradition perverted from the true meaning by dominant interests, and strengthened by fear or dislike of the untried.

The above fact about the social mores is very well applied to the mores of untouchability. The study has indicated previously that Brahmans were considered as superior to all other castes and sudras were considered...
as the most inferior. The people of upper caste, specially Brahmins, thought that it is their birth right to treat untouchables as distinct from themselves. Moreover, they treated them as if they were slaves. Caste system and practice of untouchability could persist as there was no revolt of the lower caste against their disabilities and as caste system could evolve out of mutual interdependence and it gave security to the individuals of his own group. Moreover, it is observed, that in order that the social frame may be kept intact and free from challenges, various prohibitive laws and punishments were prescribed. For example in old days, if the shudras used strong words to a Brahmin, Kshatriya or a Vaishya, he was given corporal punishment. On the contrary, if a sudra was killed by the upper varna, the offender was fined 10 cows only which were to be donated to a Brahmin. A very fantastic judicial system was prevailing. This is why the varna system not only could remain intact for centuries but went on adding hundreds of castes and subcastes to Indian society. And for the mores of untouchability, it can be said that legalized efforts are not sufficient to change these mores. This is the reason that 82% respondents have opined that passing an act is not enough to alter the social practice of untouchability and religious dogmatism. There should be a new movement educating
the public through propaganda.

The concept of William Graham Sumner is very well applied to the respondents' opinion regarding untouchability. In the opinion of the respondents, at present taboos against untouchability are not as strong as they were. As we have seen in the preceding chapter that majority of our respondents believe in the new ideas of rationality, equality and freedom. 84% respondents believe, if a schedule caste family comes to reside in our colony where we live, we should invite them at home and treat them equally. 92.34% respondents believe, that there should be a common hostel for all the students and 93% respondents want that common dinner and parties should be arranged for all the students on special occasions.

Informations gathered during interview revealed that class is an important criterion in interdinning practices. Cleanliness and settings in which food is served and class status of the person who serves the food is more important than caste consideration in such contexts. In fact, if one would discriminate, on the basis of caste, in such settings, it would be considered very peculiar.

In the opinion of respondents, now a days the only considered literally untouchable, is the sweeper caste, other untouchables and shudras interact quite freely without
consideration of defilement.

68% respondents viewed that 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. But this view is not fully accepted in practical life. Under the traditional norms every caste 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. Hence, marriage within the caste is one strong factor amongst others, which has been responsible for the retention and perpetuation of the caste complex. We reach the conclusion that untouchability is a part of conservative Indian social mores and now these mores are changing due to increasing education, urbanization, land reforms and industrialization and through persistent propaganda.

(iii) The mores as regulators of behaviour towards religion:
We have mentioned earlier that for the purpose of this study, caste and religion are so closely interwined that it is difficult to separate the two. We can assess the respondents opinion regarding religion on the same line as it was evaluated towards untouchability i.e. in order to find out whether religious codes are part of the social mores.
In the opinion of 80.34% respondents, religion implies relationship not only between men but also between man and super power. 82.34% respondents believe that religion prescribes rules of behaviour and one should have faith in religion. In the view of 81.34% respondents, religion provides a fixed pattern of behaviour. Hence, on the basis of religious norms the individuals of the same religious group feel identified amongst themselves. Respondents believe that religions like castes provide their followers with an identity and a set of values which profoundly influence their social attitude and behaviour. In the opinion of the respondents, religious mores are those social bonds that are essential for satisfactory living. "Mores are the guardians of solidarity" (Maciver and Page, 1962). This is very true with religious mores because religion unites the people of the same religious group. Since every social unity has its own mores, so every religion has its own mores, and any group striving for greater solidarity endeavours to strengthen the hold of its mores on the members. "Beliefs, fear, worship, and attitude of reverence are different aspects of religion" and they are compelling and forbidding pressures which constantly force the individual to act in a certain way. For example, it is prohibited in Indian religion to eat the meat of cows and
buffaloes. While amongst Muslims killing of cows and
buffaloes is not prohibited. According to Muslim religion a
man can have four wives at a time while Hindu religion does
not permit polygamy. Every religion, thus, prescribes certain
rules in respect of beliefs, worship, rituals, ceremonies,
rites and the supernaturals including gods, goddesses, ghosts,
spirits and souls. In the opinion of 79.34% respondents,
religious teachings and morals are taught since very
childhood of a person, so he becomes accustomed to them
and they work as forbidding and compelling pressured which
constantly force the individual to act in a certain way.
Therefore, in the perceived view of the respondents religion
is part of social mores.

71.67% respondents think religion to be a conservative
institution and an obstacle in the correct judgement of right
and wrong. The results of the study also indicated that
religion is a major obstacle to modernization because it is
a fortification of traditionalism and repository of beliefs
and values incompatible with modern science, technology
and ideology of progress. Thus, the Indian spiritualism of
which we are so proud of, preserved a narrow and conservative
form of escapism from concrete responsibilities. Hence, it
is very correct to say that religion is a part of mores
because mores are the agents of conservatism as we have
discussed earlier. This conservatism of religion perpetuates in the interests of priests and politicians. Though, results indicated that the conservative religious ideas are being replaced by the secular idea of rationality and freedom. This further indicates that religion is a part of social mores because the mores can change usually slowly but sometimes dramatically.

There has been an attempt on the part of the Indian elite to acknowledge some institutions such as suttee and human sacrifice as evil, and to put down these activities, and in doing this they have changed Hinduism in the process of reinterpreting it. What has happened today is that we have a purified and reinterpreted form of Hinduism, and this interpretation has not come to an end. It is going on.

We have examined various aspects of mores and reached the conclusion that perceived view of the respondents towards religion and untouchability is a part of social mores.

(iv) Process and devices that perpetuate mores and its relation to the individual's attitude towards religion and untouchability: All the social orders can persist if they are merely dependent on the sanctions of the codes only but are deep rooted in a group. Behind the sanctions and behind the more superficial considerations that may persuade men to conformity, there are loyalties and convictions.
The particular loyalties and faith are clearly not inborn, but the result of social conditioning. In the light of the above discussion, it would be found that 98% respondents think that practice of untouchability and religious dogmatism are the deep rooted phenomena which direct the behaviour and interaction of the individuals with the members of different castes (specially the behaviour between upper caste and untouchables) and religion. Nearly 90% respondents agreed with the view that the untouchables are those who are kept outside the Hindu circle. These scheduled castes are considered by caste Hindus to be those who are destined by god to serve the higher castes. In the view of 93% respondents high class Hindus had ill treated the Harijans for centuries therefore they must make amends for their wrong doings. Hence, it is clear that as in other social mores that may persuade men to conformity, it is also true with the religious mores and caste mores. The particular faith and loyalties of upper caste towards the untouchables and towards other religion are not clearly inborn, but the result of their social conditioning.

There are certain moulding forces always at work in every society. Hence, it will be evaluated in view of the respondents, how far these moulding forces have succeeded in changing the conservative mores and establishing new mores.
regarding religion and untouchability.

Social indoctrination refers to the inculcation of modes of thought and patterns of beliefs. The mores of each culture become "interiorized" in the individual's personality structure, creating in each group common tendencies in disposition and character as well as a common belief and values (Maciver and Page, 1962).

These modes of thought are inculcated in a person through family, through temples or churches, by education and propaganda. This fact becomes apparent whenever the proponents of a new or different social order come to power. They realize quickly that the order they are establishing can not take root and thus endure. They can not mould the minds of people to the desired pattern of loyalty and conviction. Thus, they try to repress all unfavourable opinions and side by side persistent propaganda is thrust on the people. Even the school books are rewritten, the curriculum is remoulded and the teaching is directed to this end.

While indoctrination imposes opinions and beliefs by direct method of communication, habituation is the process in which people unconsciously adopt their ways of thought to the social conditions under which they live. According to the 75% respondents, we are actually habituated to see the lower caste people as inferior to us and also to see the people
of other religion as different from us. This habit can be changed through persistent practice of living together with the members of lower caste people and by mixing with the people of different religion.

By leadership means the capacity to persuade or to direct men that come from personal qualities apart from office. A policeman represents authority not leadership, so does a judge and so does a king, in so far as his power attached to his position. A leader on the other hand may be an insurgent against the established order. In the present study, respondents told that under the leadership of Gandhiji the campaign against untouchability was started. Gandhiji was fully aware that he had to break through deep rooted prejudices, orthodoxy and conservatism before any social legislation granting social freedom could be passed and implemented. He further believed that a change of attitude could be brought about through personal contacts. Thus, proper leadership can also bring about change.

Authority can also help in establishing and changing the existing social organisation. For example, in the present study the opinion of the respondents was taken that how the authority can help in establishing and changing the existing social organisation. The conclusion derived from the responses of the respondents is that discrimination on
the ground of caste and religion is punishable and
authorities like judges, policemen and social workers can
help in removing the evil of untouchability and religious
dogmatism.

Each established social order and every sub society
within it, is sustained in part by the ritual and ceremony.
We observe social rituals on almost all group levels—the act
of public worship, the collective celebration of social,
national and communal festivals, the singing of the national
anthem at various public events and so on.

During interview it was enquired from the respondents
whether these types of rituals and ceremony can help in
removing the mores related to untouchability and religion.
Nearly 80% respondents gave opinion that common dinners and
parties on various occasions of social gatherings will
bring together people of different castes and religions.
The taboos against sitting on the common floor, against
interdining, against intermarriage and against any type of
physical contact will also disappear gradually. The
respondents expressed that common gatherings of the people of
different religions on the national festivals will
perpetuate the feeling of national integration and unity,
and religious tolerance.
(v) Man's dependence on myths as a factor: No society can maintain a degree of stability without the myths upon which it rests, the myth of power or freedom and so on.

With this reference the respondents were enquired whether in their opinion the practice of untouchability and religion rests upon some myths. The 70% respondents viewed that the explanation for those things which could not be explained on the empirical basis were provided on some superstitious basis. According to shastras, the social relations from which the caste system derives its existence might have evolved from the superstition of the divine right and they viewed this description as given in the shastras to be an orthodox myth. Many Indian intellectuals, like Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar rejected the basis of Hindu orthodoxy and preached the principle of equality in Nationalist movement.

However, the conclusion is that in the opinion of the respondents, untouchability and religion have become part of the social mores and these mores can be changed by the social indoctrination and habituation through education and propaganda, through changing the curriculum by rewriting of books etc., by personal techniques of leadership and authority, by impersonal techniques of participation in rituals and ceremonies and establishing the myths of freedom, equality and rationality.