CHAPTER IV

RELEVANCE OF CASTE AMONG HINDU PUNJABI REFUGEES IN DELHI
In the previous chapters we discussed some of the theoretical and general orientations to the study of partition and its consequent effect on the population in terms of displacement and resettlement. In this chapter an analysis of caste is undertaken to explore whether caste could be among one of the dimensions that plays an important role in the aspect of resettlement of the displaced population and to understand how this social institution functions among the Hindu Punjabi refugees in Delhi.

Most sociologically oriented studies of India cover the understanding of caste. It is one of the bases of stratification and differentiation of individuals and groups. Stratification systems play an important role for they are the basis of gradation and ranking. But they can also take a negative connotation when these gradation systems and bases of differentiation lead to social stigma and strong notions of inferiority and superiority in terms of the position one occupies in them.

In trying to understand the role of caste among the migratory groups, one may point out that, firstly, the factor of caste could play an important role in the resettlement of most displaced groups. Secondly, it may also be a crucial dimension in order to understand its long-term effect in terms of helping to grasp the aspects of lifeworld and social system among the Hindu Punjabi refugees who came to Delhi at the time of partition. Caste has been an integral feature of Indian society and is considered an important determinant of the status of individuals and groups. However,
first of all it is essential to briefly present an overview of the caste system among the Hindu Punjabis.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CASTE SYSTEM AMONG THE HINDU PUNJABIS

It is important to understand in broad terms, how caste functions among the Hindu Punjabis. The case of the Punjabis in relation to the caste system is unlike that of most linguistic communities in other parts of India. This difference is mainly on account of the fact that while Brahmins are ranked at the top in the caste system in most parts of India, this is not the case in the Punjab where the middle ranking castes of the varna scheme hold a prominent position.

Talbot (1988:26) points out that the low status of the Brahmins arose mainly from the fact that the Brahmins not only had to compete with the Muslim Pirs and Sikh Gurus for religious leadership, but because they also lacked the economic power which the large Hindu temple complexes gave their brethren elsewhere in India. In the absence of a powerful Brahmin caste, Hindu social leadership had first rested with the Rajput princes but after their power had been smashed by the Mughals, it had devolved on the commercial castes of Khatris and Aroras.

Thus since early times society in the Punjab did not entirely conform to the traditional hierarchical pattern. Holding of land and economic prosperity has a lot of prestige attached to it in the Punjab. In accordance
with this, the importance and prestige of the various caste groups is determined. It is the land holding Jats and Rajputs in the rural areas and the trading Khatris and Aroras in the urban areas who are considered important and socially relevant caste groups. Thus the Brahmins do not enjoy the favoured position assigned to them by tradition or enjoyed by the Brahmins elsewhere in the country (Dungen 1972:37).

Talbot (1982:74) points out that western regions of the Punjab were dominated by large landowners who maintained links with their estates because of the fact that social status derived from land. There is a certain prestige and status attached to the fact of possessing and owning land. Thus in the rural areas it is the Jats and Rajputs who have large agricultural holdings and therefore are important caste groups. Land has a high value due to the fact it is a good source of income and therefore leads to a high economic status. Further, there has very often been a well-established relation between the economic and political aspects and so it adds to the dominance of these caste groups.

A similar kind of a situation could be seen in the urban areas where it is the trading and professional groups who have a good economic status and are also advanced in other areas such as education. In fact Sharma (1996:27) has pointed out that in the Punjab social status was based on the evaluation of a caste or occupational group in terms of 'high' or 'low'
which broadly corresponded to control over resources and skills and the economic benefits ensuing from it.

This favoured position of the Rajputs, Jats, Khatris and Aroras has to be understood in terms of the concept of dominant caste enunciated by Srinivas (1987). According to him, a caste is dominant when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, when it also wields economic and political power. However, what is significant to note here is that the concept of dominant caste cannot be applied to a multiplicity of castes. Therefore, when a number of caste groups hold importance in a society they can only be said to be socially relevant groups, which in the case of the Punjab are the Khatris, Aroras, Rajputs and Jats. Therefore, these castes are those which may not be ritually very high but enjoy a high status because of wealth, political power or numerical strength or a combination of these factors. One may speak of these caste groups as being significant due to their important position in certain realms of society. Due to this, one of the striking features of caste system in reality has been the vagueness of the hierarchy.

The Hindus in the undivided Punjab formed a minority being only about thirty-five percent of the total population, but enjoyed an enviable position among the middle classes. In the Punjab majority of the cultivators were Muslims. The Hindu commercial community formed a majority as town-dwellers. Hindu strength was mainly visible in the financial departments of
administration, in commerce and in the priestly and literary occupations (Tinker 1967:5). They mostly belonged to the intermediate castes such as Khatris and Aroras with trade and money lending as their main professions.

The establishment of British colonial regime created opportunities for urban Hindus to establish their ascendancy in education in comparison to Muslims. The Hindus dominated the professions of teaching, law, medicine, engineering and journalism. In trade and banking and agricultural fields too they were at an advantage. A section of Hindus associated with trade and commerce also maintained strong linkage with the rural areas and bridged commercial transactions between rural and urban sectors. The artisans in the Punjab were universally considered socially low. Among them the Sunars, Tarkhans, Lohars, Kumhars and the Julahas were regarded as higher in status as compared to the Chamars and Mochis (Ibbetson 1916:3).

The caste system current among the Hindus of the Punjab divides them broadly into three: agricultural caste groups of Jats and Rajputs found in rural areas; the non-agricultural but socially and politically important caste groups of Khatris and Aroras, the business groups concentrated in cities; and finally the Scheduled Caste groups found both in rural and urban areas. It needs to be pointed out here, that this is only a broad classification. In actuality, one finds the existence and persistence of
members of different caste groups among different occupational categories. Thus, one may note that the aspect of gradation on the basis of ritual criterion is not the one that is followed in actual existence, but social, political and economic criteria are important among the Hindu Punjabis.

Having looked at the caste system among the Hindu Punjabis it is interesting to note the role that Arya Samaj played in the Punjab. The Arya Samaj had an influence on the caste system in the Punjab especially so with regard to the so-called middle caste groups of the caste hierarchy.

THE ROLE OF ARYA SAMAJ IN THE PUNJAB

The Arya Samaj as a socio-religious reform movement had a major impact on the Hindu population of the Punjab province. There were religious reform movements also among other communities such as the Muslims and the Sikhs. The revivalism of Arya Samaj played a role not only in demarcating the religious particularism of Hinduism but also heightened a sense of pride among the Hindus (Tuteja 1997:126-7).

To a large extent the Arya Samaj had its impact and influence on the manner in which the caste system operated among the Hindu Punjabis. Unlike the Brahmo Samaj and other reform movements, the Arya Samaj had a wide recruiting base, ranging from the highest Brahmins to the low castes. Sharma (2000:100) points out that the Arya Samaj contrary to the Sanatan Dharma adopted an open door policy. It succeeded in gaining
membership of the low castes, including the Untouchables. In the beginning the Arya Samaj was purely an urban phenomenon which appealed more to the educated and the high caste. Later, when the Shuddhi movement gained ground many low caste groups were raised to the status of the twice born and brought into its fold (Dua 1999:21). This could have had a serious implication, as over a period of time many high castes detested the organization for its role in the Shuddhi movement.

Even today, most Punjabis are proud of being Sanatanists, in opposition to Arya Samajis and vice-versa. Thus, later it was the aspect of maintaining differentiation between the high and the low castes that played a significant role in the decision to join or not join the Arya Samaj movement. In fact even within the Arya Samaj, its ideology could not mitigate the differences based on caste (Dua 1999:21).

In the beginning the Arya Samaj had its influence in a major way on the urban middle caste groups. The Arya Samaj stood for a reformed Hinduism and downplayed the role of the Brahmins as the sole interpreters of the sacred texts and performers of sacred rituals (Gupta 1996:24). The influence was with respect to the aspect of education and the inculcation of progressive and rational ideas.

It was the Arya Samaj that provided a new and modern ideology to the emerging Punjabi professional classes. Its revival of Vedic rituals in a modern form, without a temple or a priest appealed to a restless,
questioning generation of educated Punjabis (Tandon1961:32-33). Arya Samaj shaped the political attitudes of Hindu Punjabis giving them an interpretation of India’s past and providing a vision of and pride in the Hindu nation (Barrier 1967:365).

The Punjab’s urban middle class was tantamount to Hindu merchant castes and a Hindu identity could effectively constitute its consciousness separate from other urban economic classes. Of those reported as Aryas in the 1901 census, sixty percent belonged to the major merchant castes, the Khatris and Aroras. The fact that the Arya Samaj had a major influence in the urban areas as compared to the rural areas is also brought out by the fact that in 1901, Jats and Rajputs, the major cultivating castes of the Punjab, composed only five percent of those reported as Aryas and in 1911, they made up only fourteen percent (Jones 1976:76). The success of Arya Samaj in rural areas was with respect to the low caste village menials. This in turn alienated the higher castes from the Arya Samaj movement. Therefore one can say that caste was an integral feature of Indian society in the past and it did play an important role in societal life in the Punjab too.

Arya Samaj appealed more to certain caste groups and had its recruitment from certain sections. However it propagated values and belief system that to a large extent had their impact on the people of the Punjab province as a whole. The areas of education and occupation were greatly influenced by the role of Arya Samaj in the Punjab.
It was the ideology of the Arya Samaj that appealed to a cross section of the Hindu middle classes comprising merchants, moneymongers, small entrepreneurs, professionals and service persons. They availed themselves of the fresh opportunities thrown up by the colonial set-up and soon acquired a dominant position in the Punjab society. In the sensibility of these middle class persons and the mode of existence in which they were rooted, many pre-capitalist features had persisted. This was particularly the case in small urban centers. The aspirations and ideals of such middle caste groups could not get articulated in a fully developed bourgeois form; they had therefore to express themselves through a reconstructed and modified version of their traditional identity. It can be argued that the reconstructed Hindu ideology of the Arya Samaj and the material interests of the middle classes coalesced in the Punjab (Tuteja 1997:127).

Thus, it was the middle caste and class groups whose interests coalesced and it was this section of the population of the Punjab that greatly benefited from the activities of the Arya Samaj. It was again this section of the population that advanced in areas of education, professions, trade and industry as pointed out earlier (see section on caste among Hindu Punjabis).

Thus Arya Samaj was a movement which came about to propagate a return to traditions and Vedas but was opposed to the caste system. It wanted to inculcate Vedic teachings and that is what appealed to the middle caste-class groups.
In a certain sense there can be traced a relationship between the Arya Samaj, the appeal of its traditions to the middle classes of the Punjab and the development in the economic field to the relationship described by Weber (1904) between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Weber highlighted the heightened capitalistic development to the sphere of religious beliefs, ethics and practices. A similar relation could be seen to exist between the traditional values of the Arya Samaj of returning to the Vedas and the pre-capitalistic mode of existence in which the middle classes existed, which got a boost through it and made the middle classes progressive over a period of time.

With the Land Alienation Act of 1900, the British policy of hiring more Muslims into colonial administration and more government control in the field of education, the position of the urban middle class was threatened. However it is significant to note that while the Land Alienation Act, 1900, was passed primarily to prevent urban caste (Khatri and Arora in the main) from investing their capital in rural pursuits, it could not curtail their efforts towards development in industry and high finance (Puri 1985:76). The Arya Samaj carried and matured the consciousness of the urban middle class to a certain point. Then the movement split into one group striving for a greater class consciousness through anti-colonialism and another searching out a more devout religious practice through proselytizing and conversion (Fox 1985:209). But howsoever it shaped up later, it did have an impact on the middle caste-class groups of the Punjab.
INFORMANTS’ BACKGROUND WITH REGARD TO CASTE

In order to comprehend the caste dimension among the Hindu Punjabi refugees, here it is necessary to understand the informants background with regard to the factors of education, occupation and their settlement patterns in terms of their residential distribution in the three areas of study. Along with the informant’s (GII) education level is presented the informant’s father’s (GI) and first son’s (GIII) education level. Where there were no sons, the education level of the eldest child has been taken into consideration. A similar pattern has been followed in the case of occupation in table IV.2.

From table IV.1 it is clear that the informants from the upper and middle caste groups are well-educated. Fifty-seven percent of the informants of this study are educated upto the level of higher secondary/matric or above. In a comparative analysis of the educational level across the three generations, one finds a considerable degree of increase in the educational level of informants with each successive generation in the three categories of caste groups.

Table IV.2 reveals the occupational background of the informants of each caste group. Here one finds a large number (38%) of informants from the upper and middle caste groups are officers. This is followed by business (20%). The lower castes are largely confined to the category of menial workers with eighty percent of the informants in it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Upper Caste</th>
<th>Middle Caste</th>
<th>Lower Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Technical</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary/Matric</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary/Middle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

G-I  Generation 1  G-II Generation 2  G-III Generation 3
Figure IV.1 Education Level of Persons according to Caste Group

Upper Caste

Education level

Middle Caste

Education level

Lower Caste

Education level

I - Illiterate
PP - Pre-primary
P - Primary
S - Secondary
HS - Higher Secondary
I2 - Intermediate
G - Graduate
PG - Post Graduate
P/T - Professional/Technical

G1 - Generation I
G2 - Generation II (Informants)
G3 - Generation III
Table IV.2 Classification of Persons according to Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Upper Caste</th>
<th>Middle Caste</th>
<th>Lower Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Academician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Officer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer/Landlord</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menial Worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified (including</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housewives)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

G-I  Generation 1           G-II Generation 2           G-III Generation 3
Figure IV.2 Occupation of Persons according to Caste Group

Upper Caste

Middle Caste

Lower Caste

Occupation

U - Unspecified
M - Menial Worker
W - Worker
F - Farmer/Landlord
B - Businessman
N - Non Officer
O - Officer
P - Professional/Academician

G1 - Generation I
G2 - Generation II (Informants)
G3 - Generation III

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It would be interesting to analyze the residential patterns of people belonging to different caste groups. During the study it was brought out that certain caste groups resided in specific localities. Most upper and middle castes were found in the upper and middle class localities of Greater Kailash and Kalkaji. The lower castes were found to be residing in lower class locality, which was the slum area in Tilak Nagar.

Only one case of a lower caste family residing in an upper class locality was noticed. This is a Scheduled Caste family staying in the vicinity of most upper and middle caste groups. This family does not have a refugee background and in fact the head of the family is the niece of a famous, well known and upper class Scheduled Caste political leader. Moreover, the fact that the members of this family have acquired high education and got into the medical profession which is considered as highly prestigious could have been a factor that helped this family to reside in an upper caste-class locality. This also brings out the fact that the congruence between the dimensions of caste and class is usual.

An important aspect of the resettlement pattern for the refugees that needs to be mentioned here is that the place of residence was not chosen on the basis of caste identity. Mehr Chand Khanna, the Rehabilitation Minister of the time was very careful in settling one set of people together at one place. Thus, for example, people from rural areas in Pakistan were settled in rural areas in India and those from the urban areas were settled
in the urban areas of India. As informant UUFP 15 pointed out, the people from Jhang and Multan areas of Pakistan who were mostly involved in dairy farming were settled in Haryana, while those from Peshawar and Mianwali had a different lifestyle and were settled in Faridabad. Those from Jhelum and Rawalpindi were flourishing people and hence settled in Delhi. This kind of resettlement was therefore a way to keep the culture of the people intact leading to the replication of their communities in the new habitat.

**ROLE OF CASTE IN THE PROCESS OF DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT**

It is important to point out that the factors of caste and class identity were important for their consequences for the refugees in terms of displacement and resettlement. While the class aspect will be looked into in the following chapter, here we attempt to look into the caste aspect. It needs to be mentioned that caste factor has to be looked at from the point of view of the lower castes. This is due to the fact that the lower caste identity of the informants proved to be a disadvantage for them. While the factor of class has to be understood from the point of view of the higher class as their identity was advantageous for those who belonged to it.

The role that caste played in the displacement and resettlement of the refugees has to be understood in terms of the following factors:
1 Deciding factor for movement

2 In the context of measures for rehabilitation

**Caste as a factor in the process of movement**

It is interesting to note the role that caste played as a factor in the decision to move into India. However, it needs to be pointed out that this choice has to be seen in the light of the manner in which the caste system was practiced in West Punjab before partition.

From the point of view of the lower caste informants, there was widespread practice of the caste system even before partition, especially evident in the practices such as untouchability, separate colonies for the lower castes, poor living conditions, no interdining or intermarriages between the members of the lower and higher/middle castes. As informant LLFU 3 pointed out:

*There has hardly been a change for us. Even in those days (that is before partition) we used to live in a similar kind of situation and now also it is the same for us.*

However, it is interesting to note here that the ritually clean Hindus never treated the Untouchables as ‘Hindus’ for they were always considered as the outcastes. The Muslims, on the other hand, were trying to lure them to stay back, which would in turn have meant the process of their conversion through embracing Islam.
As informant LLMM 16 said:

*Muslims would tell us to stay back. They told us that for many years Hindus had ill-treated us for the fact that we were Untouchables. They reminded that if we were to go to India this misery would continue for us. They ensured us that in case we decided to stay back in Pakistan, we were going to be treated well.*

Thus for the lower caste Hindus, the decision to move was really one that needed careful analysis. For if they were to move to India, they were to lose even the little material possessions they had and at the same time be ill-treated even at their new place of habitation. On the other hand, if they decided to stay back, it would have been like losing their religious identity in favour of a religious identity that for centuries had been perceived by them as alien.

Even in this situation, where they faced a dilemma, whether to go across to the Indian side of the border or to stay back on the Pakistan side, lower caste informant LLMM 23 pointed out:

*The Muslims could not lure us to stay back for the simple fact that most of us preferred being treated the same way rather than give up our religion in order to become a Muslim.*

Another informant, LLMM 25 noted:

*There were some people who did convert to Islam. They justified this on the ground that in this way they would atleast be ensured a life full of dignity. However, I feel these people were cowards. How can one give up one’s religion so easily?*
Thus the change of religion was the last thing that many of those who came to India could even think of. In order to avoid forcible conversion to Islam, the informants pointed out that they decided it was better to move on to India rather than stay back in Pakistan. This was a fact common for both the high and the low caste informants. But for the higher caste the choice for staying back was based on the fact that this way they could ensure that they did not lose out in material terms which was unlike the case of the lower caste informants. As informant LLMW 15 pointed out:

_The Muslims had all along ensured us that good care would be taken of us and we would not be harmed in case we decided to stay back. In fact during one such propaganda programme in our colony I overheard the conversation between two Muslim leaders. They said that they would make us eat beef. Till this time I was in a dilemma whether to move or not, but when I heard this, I immediately decided that I had to move to India immediately._

Thus, one finds that the caste identity of the lower castes made them vulnerable. On the surface there were promises by Muslim leaders that the lower caste members would be treated well. What is significant is that, most of this was only to ensure that these people convert to Islam. However, in the light of the situation of the Muslims who went as refugees from India to Pakistan at the time of partition, only to be referred to as ‘Mohajirs’, serious doubts can be raised about the treatment that these lower caste Hindus would have been meted out to, had they stayed back and embraced Islam.
What comes out clearly from all this is that the Muslims tried to cash in on the caste identity of the lower caste Hindus. Thus in a situation where the factor of religion was used to carve out boundaries, the further divisiveness in the form of caste within religious identity had also come to play an important role.

**Caste in the context of measures for rehabilitation**

It is now important to understand whether caste played any role in the process of resettlement by analyzing its relation to the rehabilitation programme of the government.

Eighty-four percent of the informants thought that caste identity was not relevant in the process of their resettlement. It was mainly friends, relatives and acquaintances who came forward to help for whom caste identity was not the topmost element in extending help. As informant MUFO 25 wondered:

*Who is bothered about caste when one does not even know where the next meal is coming from?*

However, what is interesting to note here is that when the refugees were asked to identify the caste identity of the friends who helped them (at a personal level) once they were in India, it is found that these friends mainly belonged to the same category of caste groups as of those helped.
While the informants insist that they got help from all those to whom they went seeking for help, it is important to note that, they went only to those whom they knew, which was mainly people from a similar kind of caste group as theirs. As informant MMMB 8 reasoned:

*After all I could not have asked a stranger to help me. I asked some of my relatives who were already in Delhi or were in a better situation than me to help. This naturally meant that they were from a similar caste group as mine.*

What emerges from this is that while at a personal level the informants were helped by members of their own caste group, this was not done consciously. Thus even when help was being extended or being sought it was never with an awareness of caste identity on either side.

Finally, if one tries to analyze the measures undertaken by the government to rehabilitate refugees from different caste groups a mention needs to be made of the Harijan Rehabilitation Board (HRB), which was set up to ensure and facilitate the rehabilitation of the Harijan section of the refugee population. However when the informants from this section were asked about HRB and the help they received from it, they expressed their ignorance of the fact that such an organization had been set up. This therefore raises an important point that the section of the population for whom such an organization had been set up were themselves unaware of it. Here it must be mentioned that there was no such organization set up for the resettlement of the higher caste members.
Though most refugees are aware of the caste system and viewed it as important in certain contexts, they in general point out that caste factor was not that important a fact in terms of rehabilitation programmes. They point out that the government supported and helped all those who were in any kind of need. However, the role that caste played in terms of movement from Pakistan to India can be gauged from the above discussion.

INFORMANTS' PERCEPTION OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The perception people have of society and its various aspects is influenced by their place in the social structure. Understandably, there were varied responses when informants were asked whether they believed caste to be an important aspect of life.

There are two divergent views as regards the extent to which caste system was practiced in West Punjab prior to partition. According to one view, generally held by higher caste informants, caste system was not practiced in a rigid manner in those days. Informant MUFO 22 justified this by saying:

In those days there was an organization called the ‘Jat Pat Todho Mandal’ that regularly published a monthly magazine with photographs of newly married couples where the partners were from different caste groups.

Another informant MUMO 6 pointed out in much the same vein that:
Caste was not practiced in Pakistan nor was it practiced in India in those days, that is in 1940s. It is a creation of the government after the 1960s for securing vote of the people. Thus, it is a creation for political reasons, for caste serves as a vote bank.

The other view was expressed by the lower caste informants who vouched that caste system was practiced even before partition. Informant LLFU 12 pointed out:

Even in those days untouchability was practiced. The higher caste people never wanted to see our face. They would turn away their heads on seeing us. We were separated from the mainstream and made to stay aloof in separate colonies.

Saberwal (1973:244-245) notes that although the caste hierarchy in the Punjab has long been more flexible than that of farther South, the basic framework requiring the lower castes to live and eat apart from the higher castes, persisted essentially unchanged in the 1940s.

Turning one’s attention to the present situation, one again finds there are two different views on the issue of the practice of the caste system. Sixty-two percent of the informants denied the role of caste as being an important one in everyday life and existence. This non-belief they expressed was on account of the fact that they are an educated section of the population and so responded that for them caste does not hold much importance. However, it was found that in certain aspects of life they regarded the caste system as being a predominant factor.
The above mentioned view was expressed by many of those from among the higher caste-class group. Those from the lower caste agreed on the view that caste was still very much an important aspect and their belonging to a low caste group was a fact they had to come to terms with almost everyday. An informant LLMM 18 mentioned:

*There were two-three occasions when I went to the barber shop. The barber refused to provide any of his services to me on account of the fact that I am from a lower caste group.*

In the same vein another informant LLMM 2 from the same locality pointed out that:

*In Delhi untouchability is practiced to a much lesser degree but when we move away to small towns and villages, untouchability can be seen to exist in a blatant form.*

He narrated the following incident:

*When we went to attend a marriage function to a small village on the outskirts of Delhi, the marriage party stopped to have tea at a shop before proceeding to the bride’s house. The shopkeeper inquired about our caste identity to which a member of the group replied that we were Khatris. The shopkeeper served us tea and snacks. However, in the meantime, someone from the bride’s family came looking for us, when the shopkeeper realized our caste identity. He ordered that all utensils used by us to be broken immediately as they had been polluted.*

This clearly points to the fact that even though untouchability is legally abolished and its practice in any form is punishable, the society has not got rid of it. An important point to be noted is that while there is no
open admission by the upper caste informants about practicing untouchability, there is still a restriction in free interactions with those below the pollution line. Even low caste members are discreet in this context. Informant UMMB 4 articulated the position thus:

*Restriction is not one-sided. If you observe carefully the behaviour of the sweeper who comes to your house for work, you will find that they too are very careful to avoid physical contact with members of the higher caste. Thus, the attitude of restriction and avoidance is not one sided but is prevalent on both sides.*

While the upper caste members did deny the practice of caste system, repeated discussions on caste revealed that in certain aspects caste still occupies a prominent place and is relevant in certain contexts. The first reaction of most informants is that they do not believe in caste. This is probably due to the fact that lower caste has negative connotations and caste system is viewed as one that perpetuates inequality by attributing certain characteristics to lower castes. It is a system that is considered undemocratic and therefore caste system is not held in high regard. Understandably, there is no open admission of the belief in the caste system.

This point raises an important question. If those from the upper caste claim that they do not practice untouchability and those from the lower caste experience it, where does the answer to this contradiction lie? In fact, it is important to note here that most upper caste informants
pointed out that there is not much scope for them to interact with members of the lower caste. But where the situation demands they do so. At the same time, they argue that even if the lower caste person is of a similar socio-economic status, the thought that he/she is from a lower caste comes to one's mind.

One finds that this psychological feeling of discomfort based on membership in caste groups is a hindrance to the development of a harmonious and healthy relationship in intercaste interactions.

In terms of obtaining loans, employment, admission in educational institutions etc., many upper caste members (42%) agreed that in these contexts their caste identity has been a fact that has worked to their disadvantage. However in their opinion, it is the lower castes that are greatly patronized by the government with respect to these facilities. Many a times the upper caste informants said that the government policy was really not justified, for if the lower castes want equality it should be applied in all contexts. An informant, MUMP 11, asked:

*Where do our children stand a chance of getting admission to government run educational institutions or jobs. A large number of seats are reserved for candidates from special categories.*

Another informant, MMO 5, pointed out:

*The policy of reservation has been continuing for several years now. If this is going to continue, what will be the future of higher caste people in government jobs? If you really want the upliftment of the lower*
castes, one needs to provide them equality at the basic level and then put them in a situation where they openly compete with general category candidates.

On the other hand, the lower caste informants questioned the fact of them being favored. They said that had they been favored they would not have remained as helpless as they are now. The fact that most lower caste members have remained within their traditional hereditary occupation and are constrained to taking up menial work indicates that only certain privileged individuals/families from amongst them were the ones who took advantage of these policies. For many of them there was hardly any awareness with regard to the measures for their upliftment. Many, of course today, lay great importance on education and there is universal agreement among members of all caste groups that what would really lead to their betterment is good education which would lead to a good job which in turn would result in their economic betterment.

This clearly points out that a high status in the economic ladder is what most informants keenly desire. Thus these days greater emphasis is being laid on the achievement-oriented aspect of class rather than the ascription oriented aspect of caste. This points to the fact that the change in status through the process of sanskritization is not what is emphasized. Most lower caste groups are not trying to bring about a change in their status through sanskritization processes such as giving up meat-eating,
consumption of liquor or imitation of higher castes in terms of dress patterns, food habits or rituals.

In the case of most lower caste groups, on an average, neither has there been an intra-generational mobility nor an inter-generational mobility (Saberwal 1976:39) in terms of the occupation that they pursue. However, in terms of educational qualifications there has been inter-generational mobility as their children are educated upto a certain level (see table IV.1).

In fact, it is important to point out here that in an urban area like Delhi, dress patterns and food habits of lower and higher castes are similar. At any rate it is difficult to know the caste background of persons in urban settlements. Therefore, real change for most of these caste groups is seen through economic, educational and occupational betterment. Thus social status, especially so in a place like Delhi is gradually shifting from the caste to the class dimension.

An interesting feature pointed out by the informants is the stereotypical image construction of the varna groups. People have a notion that food habits and value systems of each varna group differ. However this is true only for a certain section as westernization of food, dress habits and lifestyles have been taking place for quite a while. Now, with globalization people are open to explore more options, whether in terms of dress patterns or food habits.
DO CASTE FEATURES PERSIST AMONG HINDU PUNJABI REFUGEES IN DELHI?

Earlier we provided a brief description of how informants perceive of the caste system. It is now necessary to understand how far the features of the caste system can be found among the Hindu Punjabi refugees in Delhi. Ghurye (1961) has outlined six features of the caste system as under:

1. Segmental Division of Society
2. Hierarchy
3. Restrictions on Dining together and Social Intercourse
4. Civil and Religious Disabilities and Privileges of Different sections
5. Specific Occupations
6. Fixed Rules

In trying to understand the extent to which the features of the caste system can be found among the Hindu Punjabi refugees in Delhi, it is necessary to examine the relationship that caste system shares with hereditary occupation. In fact, in the caste system certain occupations are prescribed for certain caste groups. According to tradition, the Brahmins were supposed to take up priestly and literary functions, the Kshatriyas that of rulers and warriors, the Vaishyas were to be merchants and traders and the Shudras, artisans that included weavers, carpenters, washermen etc. The Untouchables were those who did menial work and were not accounted for in the chaturvarna scheme. While discussing the
occupational aspect of the caste system it is important to refer to the jajmani system, which is a hereditary, personal relationship, based on division of labour whereby each kamin family is expected to render certain standard services to families of jajman castes.

However, in a city like Delhi, the strict adherence to traditional caste based occupational structure is no longer possible. In fact, it is important to point out that this is especially so for the higher varna groups. The Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya varna category no longer follow the occupations prescribed for them by the caste system. In fact there are instances of cross-varna traditional occupational shift. For example, a member of the Vaishya community is a future teller, a work associated with the priestly function traditionally assigned to the Brahmins.

Informant UUMO 14 reported:

I always had an interest in astrology and used to practice it as a hobby. However, once I decided to do social work, I turned this hobby into a means to earn money. Through this work, whatever money I collect I use it for social work activities. Nowadays, people pursue occupations that help them to earn money.

Similarly, there are many instances of members of the Brahmin group having taken to business and trading activities. However we could cite only a few instances of high caste members who took to the occupation of the so-called Shudra or Untouchable group (mentioned below).
Here, it is interesting to note that when the refugees came from Pakistan to India, they took up various kind of jobs for livelihood and survival. In this context an informant MUMO 5 from middle caste admitted:

*I along with my cousins would go about collecting dead animal skins that we would sell to make a living.*

He also cited the case of his relatives who too belonged to the caste group of Khatri as himself, who took to this work of collecting animal skins and making leather products. He said that:

*In the beginning there was some opposition to this occupation from the extended family members. However today the same family has really prospered in their business and are not seen with despise for having taken up such an occupation.*

This case demonstrates that the sole objective was survival and this work was taken up much against the initial opposition from many, but it has paid off and today the high economic position of the family who took to this work overrides the nature of their occupation.

As mentioned earlier jajmani system was an important feature of the caste system. However, it is a feature that works well in a small geographical area of a village. In a huge city like Delhi there is no system by which an entire caste group shares a sense of social obligation. The relations are individualistic and not based on the social relationship of a Jajman (patron) and Kamin (client).
It has been pointed out that the caste system is a hierarchical one with each caste group having a certain specific place in the overall hierarchical system. The caste groups are ranked in accordance with the principle of purity and pollution and the occupation that it pursues.

With regard to this feature of the caste system, one finds that in actuality in most aspects the three varna groups, that of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, are regarded as more or less equals. Members of each of these varna group think of themselves as superior to the other two, while there is a universal agreement about the inferior position of Shudras. However, the important fact is that there are various jati groups among each varna group, wherein once again each jati competes with the other for a higher and superior position. Moreover, the ritual hierarchy of caste is different from the hierarchy based on the economic and political factors, which then accords a different status to different groups based on these criteria.

As far as interdining and social intercourse are concerned one finds that there is again flexibility with regard to eating with members of the other, higher caste groups. However informants (66%) from upper caste-class groups maintain that there should be some kind of compatibility with regard to certain factors such as social status in terms of economic or occupational criteria. As informant MUMP 23 asked:
How can I feel comfortable with people who have a different behaviour and cannot speak to me in a sophisticated manner. You can interact with people who are similar to you in most respects.

Most members of the upper three varna groups had no objection in interdining amongst themselves. However they did express their reservation in eating with the Shudras and Untouchables. Some of them tried to justify this by pointing out that the reason was hygienic because most of the members of these groups are into occupations that are not clean from the point of view of hygiene. Informant UUFU 7 expressed this in the following words:

_There is some truth in calling the lower caste people dirty. After all, they deal with dirt and live in unhygienic conditions, so one has to be careful. I give tea to my sweeper everyday but in a separate cup to ensure that my family members do not catch any disease._

There were still others who openly professed the idea that if for some formal/official reasons they had to interdine with members of these caste groups they would do so. They however also pointed out that the caste identity would linger at the back of their mind. But for reasons of courtesy they would not let this feeling of discomfort come to the surface.

One context where the varna and jati identities has a prominent place is that of marriage. Most informants pointed out that, ideally there should be gotra exogamy and caste endogamy. Endogamy and exogamy are
aspects that prescribe the preferred set of individuals whom one may marry. Preference for fixing marriage alliances within one's own caste group is important for most of the informants. Where the marriages have been fixed by individuals themselves and are outside the caste group, an attitude of resignation is adopted and many older members pointed out that they were in a helpless position in these cases. Informant MMFN 10 explained:

Marriages should take place within our 'own' set of people because then it is easier for the boy and the girl to adjust. But if they decide, there is no point in objecting. Nowadays children do not listen. We can only tell them, if they do not listen, what can we do?

Only a single case was cited where the daughter of informant UUFU 21 has married a Muslim. In the beginning the informant was rather reluctant to reveal this, but continuous probing made her come out with this fact, even against her husband's wishes.

She revealed that:

Personally I am not very happy that my daughter has married a Muslim but my son-in-law is a good human being and allows my daughter to practice all the customs and traditions of the Hindus. Moreover, the fact that my daughter's first marriage was a failure and this was only a second marriage for her, made me reconcile to the fact that she had married a Muslim. However in general, from the collectivity and community point of view, I do not have much fondness for Muslims.
A survey of the matrimonial column of a national daily over a four-week period reveals that the advertisements are classified and placed in terms of the jati groups. In eighty-two percent of the advertisements, the advertisers have clearly specified their caste identity. This, therefore, points out that in majority of the cases the emphasis on caste persists and caste is an important fact for fixing marriage alliances.

However today, there are many factors that have become important in marriage alliance such as the economic status, education, mutual consent of individuals, compatibility of interests, tastes, likes and dislikes etc. Informant UUFP 15 admitted:

*I was not too keen when my daughter wanted to marry a person from another caste group, but then sometimes you are helpless.*

The fact is that a metropolitan and urban area is a melting pot where cultures are becoming integrated to a certain extent for the fact of modernization and westernization. A cosmopolitan attitude is crystallizing and is being increasingly given importance by the successive generations. This is especially true of the upper three varna groups among whom intermarriages are taking place, rather than the lower caste Shudras. Thus where other factors are compatible, fixing of marriage alliances between different varna groups of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas have lesser reservation as compared to fixing an alliance with members of the Shudra varna or the category of Untouchables.
An interesting feature of caste is that it does not become the basis of fixing marriage alliances between the members of the same caste group drawn from different geographical regions (Sharma 2001:18). For example, the common identity of a Brahmin is usually not used to fix marriage alliances between members of the Brahmin community from North and South India. Informant UMMN 1 concurred:

*We are Brahmins. My son has also married a girl from a Brahmin family, but they are Kashmiri Pandits. So even if caste is the same there are cultural differences. I told my son that it would be difficult for the girl to adjust. But he insisted and they got married. Of course they are happy now.*

One may mention that in an urban, metropolitan area like Delhi, the strict adherence to principles of separation of the members of the different caste groups is no longer possible, for it is difficult to know the caste identity of people from superficial interactions. For example, it is difficult to know the caste identity of the person sitting next to oneself in a public transport. This is so because there are no manifest differences maintained by members of different caste groups in terms of dress, haircut etc.

It needs to be pointed out that a majority of the communities in Delhi are aware of (91.84%) and recognize (74.83%) varna system. A substantial proportion (42.86%) claim to be Kshatriyas against the national average of 15.90 percent. Likewise, 19.73 percent communities claim to be Brahmins as against 7.81 percent. The communities claiming to be Shudra are
smaller, 17.69 percent in Delhi as against the all India average of 29.08 percent (Singh 1996: xxiii).

Thus one finds that caste is not an all-encompassing system, rather there are various other factors that have become important. Sharma (1997:78) has pointed out that new norms of status-evaluation signifying change in the traditional 'composite status' system have acquired legitimacy and acceptance. Class, occupation, education, income, power, mobilization capacity and networks are accepted today as the effective channels of upward social mobility.

The following chapter will look at the aspects of class among Hindu Punjabi refugees in Delhi. The disappearance of primordial identities such as that of caste is not going to take place until and unless the mindset of the people is changed. Change has to come from within and not from without. Thus caste will continue to be an important basis of identity till such a change comes about.