CHAPTER SEVEN

Cattle-herders, a part of the larger peasant society.

Since about two decades, it has been a subject of vital discussion among many of the foreign and Indian anthropologists, to define the term 'peasant', and they have devoted seriously their attention to reach a common definition. Peasants are the largest part of societies in many parts of the world, and so, I would like to discuss and analyse the thinking of some of the renowned anthropologists, whose contributions to the concept of 'peasants' or 'peasant societies' are thought-provoking and stimulating, in this chapter.

Norbeck (1965: 490-91) has stressed that taking the most commonly cited traits, modern peasant society may be defined as a sub-society of a large stratified society which is either pre-industrial or only partly industrialised. It is further characterised by most or all of the following traits: rural residence; familial agriculture on self-owned small landholdings or other simple rural occupations providing a modest or subsistence livelihood; the family as the centrally important social unit; low social status; economic inter-dependence in varying degree with urban centres; simple culture; and attachment to the soil, the local community and tradition. As a societal type, peasant society occupies a position between tribal society and industrial, urban society, sharing in some degree the characteristics of both.

Redfield (1956), who in his earlier writings employed folk culture (q.v.) to include what others have called peasant society, later distinguished peasant society as intermediate between the two extremes of a folk-urban continuum, embracing all societies from the simplest primitive to the most complex
urban. Foster (1953: 159-73) presents a view of folk-culture which excludes primitive society and deliberately includes Redfield's peasant society. As Firth (1951:87) notes, the term 'peasant' has primarily an economic referent, i.e. livelihood is provided by small scale, technologically simple agriculture engaged in by family groups. Firth and others would, however, also include in the category-peasant economy, simple fishing and rural crafts.

Among the peasants of Chhattisgarh we find that different castes combine agriculture with their caste occupations. Farming is the common occupation of the rural communities and their role of specialisation makes them interact with one another, in a pattern of economic inter-dependence. The earliest stereotypes of peasant societies as socio-economically self-sufficient has been modified by later writers on the peasantry like, Redfield, Wolf, Foster and others, who consider the peasant village societies as essentially parts of larger stratified social systems like State and Civilisation. It has been pointed out by Marriott (1961) that society and culture in rural India can be properly understood only in terms of interaction of local "little traditions" and specialised "Great Traditions".

To understand peasant societies, anthropologists have made use of impressive concepts like 'a community that is a whole all by itself' (Redfield, 1956:8); 'farming is the activity, and relations with other communities are the stipulated consequence' (Moerman 1968:19); 'defensive ignorance', 'cultural brokers' (Wolf, 1956); or 'the dyadic contract' (Foster, 1961) and 'dependent incompleteness' (Moerman, 1968:20). When we discuss 'dependent incompleteness' we find, it has given major attention to changes in extra-community relations. Secondly, the peasantry is usually considered not merely as incomplete, but also as dependent. The 'part-society and part-culture' (Kroeber, 1948:284) is partial because it is involved with an lean upon superior centres of control.
markets, priests, capitals. It is with this dependence in mind that he has devoted major attention to extra-community relations that involve the nation and the market, and sometimes to intra-community affairs that reflect these institutions.

Indian anthropologists have also worked in this line to understand the concept of tribe-caste and tribe-peasant continuum (Sinha, 1955; Maharashtra, 1974; Srivastava, 1966; Mahapatra, 1974; Sachchidananda, 1970). In a preliminary statement on the position of the tribes of Peninsular India in the general context of Indian civilization, Sinha (1958) tried to define two ideal levels of socio-cultural systems - the 'tribal' and the emergent level of 'Hindu peasantry' - in terms of a set of characteristics in habitat, economy, social structure and ideological system. The peasant level included a number of emergent features like a surplus in economy based on settled agriculture, social stratification, ethical religion and puritanical value system as distinguished from the essentially egalitarian and non-puritanical tribal level (ibid., 515).

Sinha further writes that in contrast to the isolated, homogenous and unstratified 'tribe', 'caste' is typically connected, heterogenous and stratified. When Sinha discusses the isolation of the tribal community, it does not remain the same. Either that may be geographical isolation or the social isolation. In Chhattisgarh we find both the tribe and the caste people living together. Gond and Kanwar tribal groups have so finely interspersed with the local peasantry that it seems difficult to separate them. In Katghora tahsil of Bilaspur district, they are the good farmers and Rauta serve them as the Kamin caste people. In the urban areas too, they have adopted the occupation of artisan class, such as, carpentry, etc. He mention the following social structural features of
the caste; multi-ethnic residence in the local community; inter-ethnic residence in the local community; inter-ethnic participation in an economy involving occupational specialisation by ethnic groups and stratified land tenure; ranked and inter-dependent interaction with other ethnic groups. He puts some critical features which distinguish the caste pole of the level of 'culture'; interaction with the subcultures of other ethnic groups in the region; interaction with the Great Traditions; polarisation of lay and elite cultures with elaboration and systematisation of cultural ideals in the latter; hierarchic view of social relations bolstered by the concept of ritual pollution; emergence of ethical religion and puritanical view of life (1965: 62).

Movement from the tribal pole to the caste and peasant end thus involves a progression toward ethnic heterogeneity in social interaction, role specialisation, social stratification and emergence of elite classes and enlargement and diversification of territorial network with civilisational centres (Ibid: 62).

Mahapatra writes that Redfield is quite clear on the inevitability of the fold coming progressively under the influence of civilisation and thus moving towards peasant society which is half-way house (Redfield 1953b: 53, 1953a: 286). Both Redfield and Sinha are dealing primarily with the post urban revolution and pre-industrial society. Redfield's categorical characterization of the 'peasant' as a "people who make a living and have a way of life through cultivation of the land" (Redfield 1956:27), however, precludes a peasant like transformation of the Eskimo, other hunter-food-gatherers and perhaps some pastoralists who come under the grip of civilisation. Sinha, however, does not believe that there is any inevitability in the Indian tribes developing caste society but he does not say categorically if the tribes are invariably
on the road to peasantry as a social type. He takes up the tribal village and the peasant village for comparison and contrast and has not taken up the peasant as a social type which a tribesman is expected to become in the Redfieldian scheme and is becoming at present in many areas. Mahapatra's types, like the marginal society (the Hill Maria, the Dafila and many other tribes of North-eastern border land), associative society (like the Hill Bhuiyan in the interior who are on the threshold of Hindu Society, yet hesitant on the hills for the final plunge though their co-brethren in the plains had long since taken it or the Bhumij of Manbhum) or the partly assimilated society like the Raj Gond, Binjhal and a few others in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh or the adivasi as emergent minority may be other possibilities on the tribe-peasant continuum in India (1974: 79,82).

Srivastava deals with the ancillary problems of tribe-caste mobility. He finds the concept of 'cultural approximation' helpful in this context. Cultural approximation is both a process and an end product at a given time. It is a 'form of adaptation in which an interactive and mutually beneficial cultural co-existence is rendered possible. Adaptive mechanisms emerge from within the cultures often without organised effort' (1966: 168). The tribe-caste mobility in India may be viewed as part of the general process of acculturation which has been continuing since ages (Sachchidananda, 1970). The cultural changes and upward mobility of so many ethnic groups bring them in the strata of cultural similarity and at the same level of moral order. The castes which are in lower rung of the strata are trying to uplift themselves by adopting the norms and values of the upper caste people. In this way, the process of acculturation or Sansciritisation is gradually transforming their sense of values and they are adapting with the new situations to stand equally with other caste people. In the same dimension of cultural
transformation, we find that different sections of the Rauts follow different customs and norms to achieve their position in the regional caste hierarchy. They are incessantly trying to refine their customs and the Kanaujia section of the Rauts have set their moral values in line with the norms of the Brahmanical values, but it is very difficult to demarcate their position, due to some other criteria, which also affect the caste ranking of the local peasantry. These criteria include their economic position, political leadership and ritual purity.

In economic position, the Rauts are not a well-off group. In the day to day life, they are depending on other caste people living in the Chhattisgarh villages. Political leadership is also not in their hands, except in some areas, where they have got their dominance. Ritual purity does not provide them so high position to make their place remarkable. Being a clean caste people, they are enjoying good interactive relations with the other castes of the peasantry. So, this interactive relation which is termed as 'Jajmani relation' is worth to be described with its ethnical values, to know the position of the Rauts in the local peasantry of Chhattisgarh.

**Jajmani System**

Wiser (1936) was the first to describe in detail how the goods and services are exchanged in a rural Indian village. He characterised the Jajmani relations as a system. Under this system, each caste group within a village, is expected to give certain standardised services to the families of other castes. Each man works for a particular family or group of families with which he has hereditary ties. The family or family head served by an individual is known as his Jajman, while the man who performs service is known as the Jajman's Kamin or Kam Karnewala (literally a worker). Kamin is known as Pouni in Chhattisgarh.
The Jajmani system has received the attention of social scientists interested in the caste system. Wiser (1956), Gould (1958), Lewis (1958), Beidelman (1959), Vidyarthi (1961), Kolenda (1963), Rowe (1963), and Bose and Jodha (1965) have indicated the sociological aspects inherent in its functioning and have, in the process, emphasised the importance and interplay of different factors. The functions of the system, roles, distribution of power, benefits, codes, and relationship with other systems have also been discussed.

In Chhattisgarh, the main Kamin castes are Raut (cattle-herder), Nai (barber) and Dhobi (washerman). Kumhar (potter), Lohar (blacksmith), Chammar (shoe-maker), Mahara and Ghaisi are the other Kamin castes which are the functional groups working in the ceremonies and rites of the other caste-groups of the local peasantry. Brahman-priests have got the highest position in Jajmani system and their role is of prime value. Their specialised services have brought them to interact with the other ethnic groups to fulfil the needs of others. They occupy the first rank in the Hindu caste hierarchy. They are assigned to disseminate knowledge and to perform the rituals of the twice-born castes. Their role as the priest in birth, marriage, death and other religious functions is prestigious and essential to be observed by high caste Hindus. On those occasions, they are paid in cash and kind. They are locally known as 'Purohit'.

The Rauts are cattle-herders. They are a clean caste and are generally employed as water-carrier, domestic cook and graziier. They also work as ritual agent. At time of marriage among the twice-born people, they carry the goods of marriage taking on their shoulders. The Raut women are sent as 'Lokarhin' with the bride. In death rite, the Raut women pound the pulse for 'bara'. On all such occasions of ritual functions or domestic celebrations, they supply water. Those Rauts who are graziers, bring the Bhalawo-bogagh from the
jungle and keep it on the door of their employer during the festival of Hareli. They are paid, both in cash and kind.

Nai (barber) is an important caste in the regional peasantry. Some of the rituals cannot be performed without them. They work as purificatory agent during the birth and death rites of the twice-born people. They cut the hair, shave the beard and head and pare off the nails. In the marriage ceremony, they go with the bridegroom’s party. They also wash the feet of the persons attending the wedding party. During these rituals, they supply 'dona-patari' to eat food. They are paid in cash and kind.

Dhobi (washerman) is also a purificatory caste. During the birth-rite, on the day of Chhatti, they collect the used clothes from the houses of the kins of the family where the child has been born, and wash these on the termination of the pollution period. In the death rite too, they wash the clothes on the termination of the pollution, and work as purificatory agent. In the marriage ceremony of some castes, the brides are taken to the washerwoman’s house for 'Sahadeva,' and thus they assist in the ritual.

By the nature of their services, these three castes, i.e., Raut, Nai and Dhobi are the principal Kamin castes. Without them, the rituals cannot be completed. In the village society, it is also the arrangement that if a man has to be severely punished or outcasted, he is deprived of the services of these three castes people. In the local context, it is said that 'Nai, Dhobi chhuda do', i.e., 'deprive him of the services of Nai and Dhobi.'

The Kumhar (potter) supplies earthen vessels to the village people. For the marriage and death rites, people bring earthen vessels from them. On the day of Baisakh Akti, people give an earthen vessel to the Brahman, who is their family priest. On different occasions of day to day needs, people
purchase earthen pots for cooking purposes. It is cheaper than any other metallic pot and is easily changeable. If anyone dies, the family becomes impure for 10 to 13 days and the relations of the deceased observe this rite. After hearing the news of the death of the relatives, they break their earthen cooking vessels, throw the stored water and cook in a new pot from that day. So by the nature of their services in matters purification and pollution, these castes play a significant role in the village community.

Lohar (blacksmith) is an artisan caste. He melts the iron and prepares all the tools and implements needed for traditional agriculture. He prepares some of the weapons too, viz. axe, spear, sword, etc. In the festival of Kordli, he fastens a keel on the drom for which he is paid in kind. In marriage, he gives 'kankan' for both the bridegroom and the bride. He is paid in cash and kind for his services.

Chamar (shoe-maker) is an untouchable caste. Their hamlets are found in the outskirts of the village. They carry the carcass of the dead animals of the village. They prepare country-shoes and sell these in the local market. They also prepare shoes for the bride and the bridegroom among some of the caste groups of the village. They prepare 'mahani' (leather-ropes) which is used to tighten the yoke of the cart and plough with the two converging poles. In both sides of the yoke, bullocks or buffaloes are harnessed.

Mahara and Chasia castes people are palanquin-bearers. They carry the palanquin in the marriages of the twice-born castes. They are contracted for the marriage and are paid in cash. Mahara caste people are seen as wage-labourers. They prepare 'bidi' (country-cigarette) and grow and sell vegetables.
The other castes of the regional peasantry are linked with their caste occupations. To some extent, they cultivate the land and grow food-crops. The goldsmiths (Sonar) prepare gold and silver ornaments. We know that ornaments are symbolically attached with the Hindu caste people since ages, for customary use. Ornaments are essential to be worn in some parts of the body and they are gifted by the parents to their daughters at the time of their wedding. Baniyas are the grocers and merchants; Thakurs till the land and do some other jobs; Dhemur, Kewat and Kahara have got the same occupation some of fishing, Koshtas weave cloths, but, in Udaipur area of the Raigarh district, Panika and Gonda caste people do weaving. Telis press oil; some ethnic groups have adopted carpentry as their occupation, such as Gond, Kanwar and Panika among the local peasantry; and Chamar, Mahattar and Dewar are untouchables. The Mahattars are sweepers and scavengers. Chamar are shoe-makers, and they are also known as Mochi and Paikaha. Their wives serve as 'nurse' at the time of parturition and they are locally known as 'Suin'. Dewars are semi-nomads and pisherders. Agharia and Kurmi are good cultivators in this region.

The interactive relation which has been shown by describing the role and function of different castes is not only limited to serve the twice-born castes, but it applies on them too. In their own concern, they are served by the other castes. In case of Rauts, we see that some sections of them employ the Brahman priests to complete the marriage and other ceremonies and rites. They are also served by other Kamin castes, which have been described in earlier lines. So, we find that the Rauts are not only a Kamin caste, but they are also served by other castes of the peasantry.

Now, I would like to discuss here the inter-village spared of the castes and their inter-dependence. How the villages of the region are inter-related and interact in the
rituals and functions of each other have been also discussed here. So an analytical account of habitation of the villages chosen for study is given below, with inter-ethnic relations. All these villages are inhabited by the Rauts, along with other castes people.

Baloda is a big village. Several ethnic groups like, Brahman, Thakur, Sonar, Baniya, Raut, Dhobi, Kai, Koшла, Kumhar, Teli, Lohar, Kewat, Dhemur, Kahara, Gond, Kanwar, Panika, Ganda, Satnami, Chamar, Mahettar, Dewar, Punjabi and Mussalman live here. Recently, some families of Marwari have also settled here as traders. The priestly and Kamin castes are also found here. But in the small villages, we do not find all these caste groups, and they call the specialists from the nearby villages, when it is needed.

Mahimarn is a small village. Only four ethnic groups live here. They call the priest from Baloda (6 miles), and the Kai and the Dhobi from the village Odangi. They buy earthen pots from the village Mahuda. In this way, they are related with 3 villages for domestic needs and observance of rituals in religious ceremonies.

The village, Surenana, is related with three villages of its proximity for ritual purposes. They call the Dhobi from Bokaramuda, which is situated 2 miles away from there. They bring domestic earthen pots from Barbhata (1 mile), and 'Kankan', lamp-black container, etc. from the village Kandara (2 miles) away, where a family of blacksmith lives.

The village Parasada is related with three nearby villages, Pounsara (1½ miles) for services of washerman; Lakhira (1 mile) for pottery, and Akaltari (3 miles) for priest. In the same way, the village Katakadabari is related with two villages of its proximity - Hardi (1 mile) for priest
potter and shoe-maker; and Raliya (1 mile) for the Patel. The Patel supplies the 'mourd' for marriage. Five ethnic groups - Kanwar, Panika, Binjewar, Thakur and Jheria and Kavarai Rautes live here.

The village Piparda is constituted of nine ethnic groups. They call the blacksmith and washerman from Bachhoud (2 miles), and the priest from Baloda.

The villages studied by me consist all the local Kamin castes. The Rautes have an unquestionable social importance here. Their role is significant among the regional peasant society. They live mainly in rural areas; cultivate small landholdings; and their traditional caste occupations are cattle-herding, live-stock raising and selling of milk and milk-products. They also supply water to the houses of the farmers. They also serve as seasonal and contractual labour, and work as ritual agents for subsistence livelihood. The family is the focal social unit. The nature of their interdependence with the other castes of the local peasantry and urban centres, low social status, and simple localised traditional culture have been described, in relation to their position in the larger regional milieu of the peasant society and culture.

Inter-ethnic relations fulfil the needs of each other. They are engaged in different occupations and their specialised services make them interact with other groups. The production units of the society have been trained in different skills and transaction takes place at various stages, in cash or in kind, to get the goods and services of their demand. Mutual obligations are also fulfilled. The Patel and Mouvvar castes people produce vegetables, the Koshtas weave the cloths, cultivators grow the crops, the Rautes produce the milk and milk-products, and other caste people produce other things of the day to day use. Thus, a balance is ever maintained in the society.
So, we can say that the Rauts are an integral part of the village society, as also of the local peasantry. Their contributions are an asset to the village society, as a principal Kamin caste. They have also attained a good place in the local caste hierarchy due to belonging to a clean *caste*. They have got access into the kitchen of the twice-born people which has conferred on them a prestigious role among the regional peasantry.

**Summary and discussion**

Beteillo (1974b:24) writes that "the term 'peasantry' has a variety of referents. But it is most meaningfully used to describe a more or less homogenous and indiffereniated community of families characterized by small-holdings operated mainly by family labour". He further writes that "very often the Indian village is clearly differentiated in terms of the ownership, control and use of land that in addition to peasant proprietors, subsisting mainly by family labour there are other social classes both above and below. Where a community includes non-cultivating labourers at the other, it is misleading to use the blanket term 'peasantry' to describe it " (ibid.25). Some would limit it to owner-cultivators while others would include tenants and landless labourers as well (Thorner, 1968:503-II). Again some would include in addition all those who live by the various forms of labour which are associated with a community of tillers (Firth, 1946).

In case of the cattle-herders of Chhattisgarh, they have started cultivation since long back when they settled down in the villages and left their wandering life with the herds of cattle. But, they are still ordained with their caste occupation of grazing, milk-selling, water-supplying, etc. Thus, they have become an integral part of the village society and culture in Chhattisgarh. This role of the
cattle-herder groups and their interest and inclination towards cultivation makes them a part of the larger peasant society.

It will be very difficult to say that all of the sections of the village society are merely based on cultivation or cultivation is the sole occupation of a certain caste, but it is an universal occupation of many caste groups irrespective of their ritual status and position in the caste hierarchy. Mathur denotes that "It is necessary........to point out.......that I regard as........fundamental to any understanding of the occupational role of the castes the fact the practice of agriculture is largely considered to be 'caste-free'......and 'open' occupation which could be......pursued by any caste irrespective of its ritual status and position in the caste hierarchy" (1958:51-2). The caste groups engage in their own traditional hereditary occupations with the cultivation of land and thus, they interact in goods and services for ritual and other socio-economic purposes.

In this way, the village society, i.e. the peasant society works as a corporate group to supply the needs of each other and also their network of transaction extends up to nearby villages and urban centres. Gould (1974:298) states that peasants are "self contained" and "autonomous", i.e. centripetal to the degree that they are concerned with the task of providing themselves with subsistence; they are centrifugal to the degree that they must take their surpluses available to the urban centres and in the process involve themselves with the numerous facets of the "national culture". Furthermore, no village community is ever able to meet all the immediate subsistence needs from its internal resources. Relations with other villages exist which fill gaps in needed goods and services.
Hence, the peasant society is an aggregate of rural communities working as a corporate group and linked with various kinds of socio-economic network centering around the cultivation of land. It also includes other caste groups which come under the fold of village society and interact with the peasants for different socio-economic purposes. Mathur (1974) also notes that peasantry loosely refers to village communities consisting of Hindu castes and other religious groups whose principal character is that they live in a common village and have, for this reason, developed over the ages a socio-economic solidarity as such. Peasants are cultivators of land, people who use or have been using till recently indigenous methods of land cultivation, but the peasant community also has in its fold non-cultivators who cater to the needs of the cultivators and live on them.

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