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ECONOMIC LIFE OF DALIT'S IN PUNE CITY

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Abstract:

In the traditional Indian social system many of the castes were ascribed particular occupation. Such a relationship between castes and occupations were particularly rigid in the case of the polluting castes i.e. Untouchables. And such occupations were considered impure. An untouchable could not change his occupation within a rural setting. Migration to towns and cities enabled him to have a certain measure of change in the occupational pattern. In this paper I studied the economic life of Dalits who were mostly migrated from villages to Pune city.

KEY WORDS

Economic, Social System, Dalit's

INTRODUCTION :

Scholars and activists use the term 'Dalit' in more ways, according to the criteria of either social status or economic position. A common usage among scholars, activist as well as the public is to mean the so-called untouchables, or those who are officially defined as 'Scheduled Castes' (SCs), a category which was coined in AD 1935 when backward groups were listed on a schedule to get access to reserved seats. The most common usage among today's scholars and activists seems to be to include all caste groups that were traditionally regarded as 'untouchables', although not all of them are now among the official list of 'SCs'.¹ In this study the term 'Dalit' is used for former Untouchables and present Scheduled castes people only.

HISTORY OF THE PUNE CITY :

Pune's origins have been traced back to the seventh century when it comprised a settlement made up of three villages in a more or less rural setting.² These largely conjectural theories however become more concrete from the thirteenth century, when direct evidence of the stationing of a small garrison fort on the bank of the Mutha river after the defeat of the Yadava kings at the hands of Ala-ud-din-Khilji is available. This settlement has been referred to as Kasbe Pune from that time. This tiny settlement in time grew with the addition of other small nuclei close by and came to be looked upon as one town, with the original Kasba becoming one of the wards together with the other nuclei known as Malkapura, Astapura and Shahpura. Open fields and agricultural lands lying in between these wards coalesced together. This process of accretion continued throughout the years. When the young Shivaji came to Pune (AD 1636-37) it was the most important town in the Jagir.³

Pune city prospered initially as the capital of the Peshwa's throughout the eighteenth century. Pune developed as the main trade and administrative centre and as a seat of learning during the Peshwa rule. The fall of the Peshwa's in early nineteenth century considerably affected the city's prospects and its economy faced a severe recession.⁴ After AD 1850, Pune emerged as a major colonial centre of the region along with Mumbai. A railway line connecting these two cities; establishment of military cantonments and

ammunition factories; and better irrigation facilities helped Pune grow steadily in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, till the AD 1950s, it was not the growth of industrial activities that significantly contributed to the increase in population of the city; rather, it was due to growth of activities that significantly connected with the government and administration. Industrial saturation in Mumbai after AD 1960 gave further boost to industrialisation in and around Pune due to its proximity and easy access to Mumbai.⁵

DALIT SETTLEMENTS IN PUNE CITY :

The history of Dalit settlements in Pune goes back to the seventeenth century. A small village in Pune's vicinity was mainly occupied by Dalits (mainly Mahars) in this period. This village merged with Pune during the Mughal rule and the Mahars became one of the early settlers of the city.⁶ Since then, Dalits have been migrating to the city in large numbers. The Peshwas imported Bhangis or Halalkhors to take up their traditional caste occupation of scavenging in the then growing city.⁷ Chambhars and Matangs are the other two major castes among the city's Dalits. Industrial expansion of the city in the sixties and seventies and severe droughts in the adjoining rural areas resulted in large-scale shift of these groups to the city. As per the AD 1991 census, they constituted 14.8 per cent of the city's population.⁸

OCCUPATIONS OF DALITS :

The city's transformation into a large industrial metropolis naturally reflects in its overall occupational structure and that of the Dalit groups. According to surveys, more than 90 per cent of Dalit earners worked as unskilled manual labourers in various capacities. Even in factories and in the railways their work was confined to manual jobs only.⁹

Table 1 : Occupational Profile of Various Dalit Castes in Pune City, AD 1911.

	Class IV Jobs in Pune Municipality	Workers in Factories	Workers in Railways	Domestic Helps	Coolies	Other Work
All Dalits	25	03	06	10	30	26
Mahars	15	07	15	15	35	31
Chambhars	-	01	01	01	06	91
Mantangs	28	01	-	12	36	23
Bhangis	80	-	-	-	-	20

Note : Other occupations include masonry, selling firewood, ward boys in hospitals and begging (for Mahars); shoe making and leather work (for Chambhars); broom/basket making and begging (for Mantangs); scavenging in private firms (for Bhangis).¹⁰

Also we found, retention of traditional caste occupations of Dalits by Bhangis and Chambhars. Majority of the earners from these two castes continued their traditional occupations in the urban context. Their monopoly over caste occupations also made these castes more prosperous than other Dalit groups. At the same time, it closed any further possibilities of occupational diversification for them.

MAHARS :

In Pune city, Mahars had not taken to any kind of hereditary work. They were employed as skilled and semi-skilled workers in the city. There were two areas of concentration for the Mahars. These were jobs in factories both skilled and semi-skilled, and government service.¹¹ During the ten-year period from AD 1952-62, the most noticeable new avenue of employment was in the government sector. The industrial Mahar workers were employed in the arsenal factory, vehicle depots in Kirkee and Dapodi and in mills. Railways seem to have absorbed a large number of Mahars.¹²

CHAMBHARS :

Migration to city, urban mobility and the increased scale in employment opportunities had not affected the pattern of employment for some scheduled caste groups such as Chambhars or Dhors. According to Sunanda Patwardhan, '69 per cent of the Chambhars in the study sample were engaged in their

hereditary occupation. They were trading community, who work in leather and leather goods.¹³ In a city, Chambhars were not compelled to continue with their hereditary job. They voluntarily accepted it, because they were skilled and the trade was lucrative. Those of them who were not engaged in hereditary work, were employed in government service (7 per cent) factory (9 per cent) and in miscellaneous trades like owning a cycle shop, brick factory and other occupations like carpentry, tailoring, vegetable selling etc.¹⁴

MANGS :

The traditional occupations of the members of this community were to make and sell brooms and baskets, ropes of coir and leather, sell cowdung cakes, grass and firewood. The 1961 census shows that, out of 512 sweepers or scavengers 437 were Mangs.¹⁵ Mangs seem to have taken steadily to jobs in the corporation. The AD 1950, AD 1955, AD 1960 and AD 1963 figures show a full quota of Mang workers in the corporation. A fairly sizeable percentage had entered service in the government as peons, watchmen, etc. These were reserved posts.¹⁶

DHORS :

Tanning was the hereditary occupation of the Dhors who work in leather, made saddles and water bags, cut and dry skins. They were nearer to the Chambhar community who exhibited a greater concentration in traditional occupations. Many of the Dhors could not be owners of the tanneries but only workers. Though the trade was lucrative, the control was not in the hands of the Dhor community. Among those who were not engaged in tanning, the preference seems to be for white collared profession.¹⁷

CONCLUSION :

Traditional Indian socio-economic system ascribed impure and menial occupations to the Dalits. This deteriorated their economic life. Dalits could not leave their traditional occupations in rural setting, so Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar directed Dalits to "migrate to the cities." Urban centres like Pune made available new opportunities of occupations for Dalits. It opened them new opportunity to improve their economic life.

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