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REVISITING THE ISSUES AND DEBATES ON CASTE IN RURAL SOCIETY: AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Introduction

The broader objective of this paper is to map out significant political consequences from the colonial period to post-independence as well as to retrace about major academic debates on the multiple dimensions of caste in rural society. The paper also deals with few sharp critiques on previous studies and extends the discussions with some new insights. Few examples have been drawn from Tandawa village of Sultanpur district in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. It appears that there have been concerning 'political consequences' which have been affecting rural India over a period. Therefore, we need to address them with a new approach. The fresh idea of the present paper is to understand how 'rural studies' of India look at those socio-political dimensions, and extend those concerning knowledge production in spatial or holistic context with a synchronic or a diachronic approach. These impute can be traced back from the British Indian government to till present regime.

British India: A Few Insights

The late 19th and the entire 20th centuries were a very remarkable period in India because it gave a way to move ahead. In general, thanks to Lord William Bentinck (a Governor General of British India) and few social reformers-Savitribai Jyotirao Phule, Rammohan Ray, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Rabindranath Thakur, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, etc. who have shown an egalitarian path through various social reforms in traditional practices like *sati-pratha* (practice of burning a widow), child marriages, slavery, etc. as well as introducing western science in 19th century (Sharma *et al.*, 1996). Although it is also important to point here that various consequences of the 19th century show an ugly image of British India because it was the only time for Indian continent when about 26 huge famines were recorded which led to the death of 215 lakh people especially rural society was affected severely to which Shashi Tharoor (2016) calls "An Era of Darkness."

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Besides, it is important to notice here the fear of untouchability (which was more prevalent in rural society) led a military revolt in 1857¹ (Majumdar and Chakrabarty, 2007). By this incident, British Empire learned a lesson and began knowing the local cultural diversity of Indian rural society. In the specific context, the idea of revenue collection also attracts our attention because few privileged castes used to function it. As we know that during kingship, the land was divided into *jagirs* (apex body for controlling the revenue collection), *jagirs* were allotted to *jagirdars* (middle body), and these *jagirdars* split the land they got and allocated to subordinated *zamindars* (lower body of revenue collection). Both (*zamindars* and *jagirdars*) functioned as the government in themselves (Sharma, 1974). Although in British India, '*zamindari*', '*ryotwari*' (introduced by Thomas Munro in 1820), and '*mahalwari*' (introduced in 1833 by William Bentinck) system were part of revenue collection, but the lack of proper welfare schemes the condition of the farmers were in pathetic conditions². Resultantly, many peasants and tenants based revolts took place in which 'Indigo Revolt' of West Bengal in 1859-60, 'Pabna Agrarian Leagues' in 1870-1880, 'Deccan Riots', etc. influenced a lot to the British Indian government³.

Above pointed socio-political consequences are very significant to understand the decades of the early 20th century. The early 20th century was also witnessed for the social dynamic in Indian society. Let me point out a significant amendment, which is popularly known as 'Morley-Minto reforms.'⁴ It was a very important decision of the British Indian government during the first decade of the 20th century by which the dominant section got representation in the British Indian government, but marginal sections, especially lower castes felt deprived because they could not get proper representation with respect to their proportion of the population. Therefore, few backward caste associations, for instance, Kurmi Caste Association (1890), Ahir-Yadav Kshatriya Mahasabha (1910)⁵, Gop Jatiya Maha Sabha (1912), and anti-Brahmin movements especially Satya Shodhak Movement (1874), Arya Samaj (1875) emerged (Rao, 1987). These organizations projected themselves as "Depressed Classes" for their outfit (Jaffrelot, 2003: 187-97). The movements gave a clear-cut way to the marginal sections to go ahead and find out a socio-political vision of equal representation. After two decades of the effort of B.R. Ambedkar (a popular leader among lower castes), marginal sections could get space in politics when 'Communal Award'⁶ was granted for the welfare of these sections. The 'Communal Award' was a turning point of Indian politics by which a route was determined for lower castes including *dalits* (ex-untouchable castes) by 'Poona Pact'⁷ with certain circumstances (DN, 1991: 1328-30). The major aim to point out above instances is to indicate the importance of social justice. For the reasons that lower caste especially ex-untouchable castes⁸ could not have same legal rights as higher castes. However, agricultural labourers, poor peasants, tenants, and many artesian communities were also a matter of concerns, but they could not get proper social justice during the British period. Therefore, after independence, Indian leaders introduced 'Community

Development Program' as well as few other welfare measures in the first five-year plan (1951-56) with the proper mechanisms.

In sum, above pointed political shift could be called as an alteration of 'other' into 'self' anthropologically, because after independence a new constitution was adopted by which Indian citizens, including socio-economically backward section could get some fundamental constitutional rights and some protective measures.

Apna Raj: A Shift in Politics

The rural inhabitants of India have seen a political shift from 'British *raj*' (colonial rule of the British Government) to '*apna-raj*' (self-rule/governance of Indians), but the issues of caste still exist. Here, the concept of '*apnaraj*', '*swaraj*' (self-governance)⁹ or "home-rule"¹⁰, latterly, means independence from foreign rule' (British Indian government) to some extent. Meanwhile, the idea of '*apnaraj*' would be examined with a new approach by extending the ethnographic debates of 'self' and 'other' (Sarukkai, 1997; Ellingson, 1998). For extending this discussion, few epistemological questions come in front: Has '*apnaraj*' come for rural inhabitants, especially farmers and marginal sections, if yes, then why does the rate of farmers' suicide remain same? Why do atrocities on lower castes still occur despite certain constitutional rights?

However, first let me, explore a significant debate on rural politics. As we know, during, British command of India there was no particular desire for economic and social development for rural India except only those activities necessary for safeguarding the rule. Therefore, after Independence from colonial rule in 1947, the concern for rural administration as well as 'decentralization of power' was a prime concern of M.K. Gandhi and Indian National Congress. Thus, there were two major discourses among leaders. First, few leaders, including B.R. Ambedkar, advocated that there should be a representative democracy much in the shape of western countries. Second, a most popular leader M.K. Gandhi advocated about '*gram swaraj*' (village self-governance) passionately. These contrasting views are held by one who is known as 'father of the nation' and the other the architect of Indian Constitution (Venkatesu, 2016). Gandhi felt that the real development of India can take place only through its political system of '*gram swaraj*' in which the State Government will only exercise such powers which are not within the scope and competence of the lower tiers of participatory governance institutions. His idea of '*gram swaraj*' falls under participatory democracy. Gandhi believed that 'the spirit of India lives in villages', therefore, much of the lines of Gandhi, JawaharLal Nehru (first prime minister of India) believed that the development of rural India is equally important, and started 'community development programme' in 1952 (Viswanadham, 2016). It was multiple projects with few objectives of an overall development of rural India. This programme consisted of agriculture, animal husbandry, irrigation, public

health, cooperation, communication, education, village industries, etc. He also believed that small-scale industries and cottage industries would be effective solutions to the massive employment problems. In sum, we can say that the community development program was a start-up program for a consolidated village economy.

Panchayati Raj and Village Politics

Keeping in view the agenda of the rural local governance in the form of 'Village Panchayats', Article 40 was included in the chapter on 'Direct Principles of the State Policy of Indian Constitution' by which the abstract idea of 'village politics' could become a reality (Khan, 2016). Therefore, few committees were also constituted for seeking effective implementation of various schemes over a period, and 'Balwant Rai Mehta Committee' was one them. The head of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was Balwant Rai Mehta, and his prime concerns were to inspect about the progress of 'Community Development Program' (1952) and the 'National Extension Service' (1953)¹¹. Apart from this, another objective of the committee was to give suggestions for the betterment of these schemes. In 1957, the committee recommended the establishment of '*panchayati raj*', which is also known as 'democratic decentralization of power.' Keeping in mind the socio-political empowerment of the rural community, the committee suggested for the three-tier *panchayatiraj* system in India (Viswanadham, 2016). These three-tier systems can be seen in the following way-

1. The *gram-panchayat* at the village level or at the bottom level of power distribution,
2. The *panchayat-samiti* at the block level or in the middle level of power distribution, and
3. The *zila-parishad* at the district level.

Mehta wanted to bridge the gap between the local/village leaders and the authority because corruption was an inevitable part of various schemes. Once, Rajiv Gandhi said that 'for every rupee sent to the common man, only 17 *paisa* reached him'¹². It means there was a possibility to stop this larger corruption through implementing the participatory democracy. Therefore, the committee recommended that 'the village *panchayat* should be constituted with directly elected representatives and all planning and development activities should be entrusted to these bodies. The idea of village *panchayat* has become a key to rural development which has brought a silent revolution after 73rd amendment. Women, OBCs (Other Backward Classes), SCs (Scheduled Castes), and STs (Scheduled Tribes) have found a way to enter into the mainstream of the society. Yadav (2015: 115-20) reveals that there are few places in eastern Uttar Pradesh where OBCs have emerged as 'dominant castes'. Subsequently, the emergence of '*nayeneta*' (new leaders)¹³ in rural areas is a recent phenomenon.

To sum up, there are several studies have been done on caste and politics in North Indian villages. It is often noticed that '*jar*' (asset), '*joru*' (wife), '*jamin*' (land) and '*jati*' (caste) are causes of each conflict among inhabitants of a village. If one is able to deal with these major sources of conflict, he/she may be a popular village leader. These problems also determine the direction of village politics as well as the functional aspect of 'factions.' Lewis (1958) found that 'faction' plays a very important role in rural politics. Although the concept of faction is losing its virtue after 73rd amendment¹⁴ of Indian constitution (after 1993) because new changes have been taking place after the implementation of the suggestions of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee for Panchayati Raj.

Caste and Self-reflexivity

The issue of caste in rural society has been attracting and studied by many scholars from the colonial period to at present. It appears that caste is most discussed rural problems, but foremost point is that there is a major variation among rural studies especially when we look at caste system. Therefore, we need to re-examine the binary of 'book view'¹⁵ and 'field view'¹⁶ that is rooted from a long time in the discipline of anthropology and sociology. On the one hand, a well-known scholar L. Dumont adopted the 'book view' by extending Bogle's theory, which looked at the caste system as a peculiarly Hindu practice (Jodhka, 2012). Thus, the idea of participant observation which was advocated by Srinivas gives space to understand the grounded 'multiple truths' from the perspective of research participants, on the other hand. Scholarly his book 'The Remembered Village' (1976) was accepted as a classic piece of writing on 'field view.' To get in-depth understanding, he spent nearly eleven months in the study area and studied various issues of rural society including political-economy, caste, culture, religion, etc.

However, the alternative method of inquiry on caste related issues in rural society can also be established by an 'inter-subjective discourse.' This discourse can be carried out by 'standpoint theory' (Allan, 2014: 386), 'auto-ethnography' (Prasad, 2015: 532-33; Ellingson, 1998: 492) as well as by literary texts like 'biography' and 'autobiography' in which a researcher try to understand the existing phenomena through subjective experiences of daily life. The work of Sharan Kumar Limbale (Akkarmashi, 2009), Omprakash Valmiki (Joothan: A Dalit's Life, 2008), B.R. Ambedkar (2015), Kancha Ilaiah (Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva, Philosophy, Culture, and Political Economy, 1996) as well as few narratives can be exemplified in this method of inquiry. Thus, it has also some limitations because experiential baggage of researchers always carries emotions and perceptions, which might lead to 'partial truth' of the grounded reality.

Caste Undercurrents

Conceptually, the idea of caste as a unit shows the status of members, their occupations, the field of mate-selection, and close interaction with others which are assumed to be fixed. In a broader sense, it predicts restricted collectively. The restriction indicates towards 'heredity' based membership, occupation and endogamy. Each caste has an impression of superiority or inferiority that is relatively contested in a local setting by other fellow castes with mutual perceptivity. Although after the independence of India, many changes have been counted in the fundamental structure of Hinduism including in the values of caste. On the one hand, the ritual dimension is being disappeared (Sheth, 1999; Deshpanday, 2014) to some extent, but certain circumstances lead it into reappearance with innovation because ritual always gives 'legitimacy.' On the other hand, few scholars (Jaffrelot, 2003; Michelutti, 2008, etc.) say that the socio-political aspects have been consolidated in the caste system over the last few decades.

D.L. Sheth, as well as few other scholars, claim that 'a new type of stratification system in rural society has emerged' i.e. 'secularization of caste.' On the one hand, the old stratification of caste system was based on ritual hierarchies by which a member of caste could get some legitimacy of 'ascribe status.' The social apparatus could be seen in the form of '*khappanchayat*' (caste-based statutory body), '*panch-parmeshvar*' (the concept of traditional social justice at village level), etc. *Chaudharis* (heads of a caste) usually got legitimacy by these social apparatuses. On the other hand, at present, the concept of ritual hierarchy among villagers is being vanished while the idea of power politics has flourished. In addition, Sheth(1999: 2504) argues, "This process, which can broadly be characterized as the 'secularization of caste', has detached caste from the ritual status hierarchy on the one hand, and has imparted to it a character of the power-group functioning in the competitive democratic politics on the other." He says that these changes can be noticed in two ways: 'de-ritualization' and 'politicization (Ibid).'

However, he missed the understanding of a process of the reappearance of innovative ritual practices in a modern democracy. In this regard, Michelutti's (2008) study, '*The Vernacularisation of Democracy*', is very relevant to point here, which gives a new discourse of current political scenarios. She argues that modern popular democracy is giving chance to a mid-to-lower-level cluster of pastoralist castes (who popularly known as 'Yadav') to become a 'dominant caste'. In this context, she reveals that Yadavs of Mathura town claim themselves as 'caste of politician.' Krishna mythology also lends them one kind of legitimacy with regard to pastoral occupations that relate directly to cattle (Michelutti, 2004). In sum, it is important here to notice for a lay reader; the title 'Yadav' is an umbrella term, which represents many cognate castes /sub-castes¹⁷, across the country. She has coined a term 'Yadavization' to understand the entire process of caste mobility of cattle-

centered castes. She found that the ritual has been redefined with a political ambition by Yadav community.

Rural Society: From the Perspective of Caste

The discourse on 'caste' was based on heredity with the dominant mythologies of *punarjanama* (rebirth) and *karma* (action)¹⁸ by which certain sanctions became privilege economically while remaining sections became unprivileged. In the same way, few eminent social thinkers pointed out to the caste as a 'closed group' because it was characterized by endogamy and biometric scale. It means the possibility of structural changes, based on skill, was negligible at the beginnings. Whereas, the phenomena of the second decade of Indian independence when rural inhabitants got some constitutional rights (the freedom of religion),¹⁹ these underprivileged sections oriented towards a cultural change with the ambition of social mobility by following ritual activity, for example, wearing the *janeo* (sacred thread), worshiping gods/goddess or more specifically began imitating the lifestyle of ritually higher castes (Srinivas, 1952). Moreover, it can be predicted that from the long-time lower castes did not have the fundamental right to worship or practice ritual activities in public places. Therefore, the orientation of ritual activities had been occurring during the first as well as the second decade of independence.

The first decade of Indian Independence was quite a significant time for Indian anthropology as well as rural sociology because few books and several rural studies gave a new dimension in order to understand caste as a way of life in rural society. Dube's *Indian Village* (1955), Majumdar's *Rural Profiles* (1955), Marriott's *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (1956), and Srinivas's *India's Villages* (1955) were very significant contributions of this decade. In addition, the effort of these scholars gave a new scientific discourse on rural society by putting their ideas, for instance, 'De-Sanskritization' (Majumdar, 1958), 'Individual Dominance' (S.C. Dube, 1968), 'Dominant Community' (Roy Burman, 1992), 'Bhumij-Hindu Continuum' (S. Sinha, 1965), 'Tribalization' (S.L. Kaliya, 1961), 'Sanskritization', 'Dominant Caste', 'Westernization', 'Modernization' (M.N. Srinivas, 1962), forwards. Although in recent past Michelutti (2008) found a 'Yadavization' process in the backward caste of Ahirs in Mathura town of Uttar Pradesh. The motive of Ahir behind this was to form a pan caste identity with the ambition of 'socio-political mobility.'

In the same context, Sharma (1969) reveals few structural changes in six villages of Rajasthan. His study shows that new structural changes are leading to the caste system into a new dimension. He says that the major changes have been occurred due to 'modernization', 'De-Sanskritization', 'Proletarianisation', 'Bourgeoisification', and 'Sanskritization.' He has examined to these changes on basis of few variables- types of soil, rainfall, crops, economy, dialects, dress, etc., and he claimed that two types of changes took place in

those villages. First, 'structural change' which can be said as a result of the abolition of *jagirdari*, *jamindari* system, *panchayati raj*, co-operative, etc. while second, 'peripheral change' which can be measured throughout the development process, for instance, establishment or construction of the modern schools and roads, etc.

Methodology

The debates discussed in this paper are based on various studies of caste in rural society. Few examples have drawn from Tandawa village. The 'historical-ethnographic method', interview schedule and 'dialogic partnership' with research participants have been used for getting in-depth understanding.

Multiple Meanings and Multiple Truths: The Case of Tandawa Village²⁰

The rural society has been witnessing the availability of necessary accessories like two/four wheelers, washing machine, hand-pump, etc. while the monetary system is also making village-life easier. The important thing is that the discourse of ritual hierarchy is being changed in the last few decades. Therefore, the assumption of hereditary based occupations becomes questionable because many castes have given up their traditional occupations, settled in urban areas. Another issue 'caste-based hierarchies' is also in transition phase. Although many scholars have been studying it widely and came up with few different findings.

Scholarly explanation of caste hierarchies from different perspectives with certain context have also been given for a long time, but none of them could deal with 'totality of the truth' to understand the mobility and hierarchal setting in caste system because it is shaped by 'multiple truths' which vary from one context to another. Let me give an example of field experiences which I could make sense of the data collection. I was conducting an interview with my research participant (A)²¹ in Tandawa village; and an old-age person namely, RM Singh came and asked casually to A, "*Goalinkahanhai?*" It means where is your wife, but as a trained ethnographer, as well as my subjective experience (as I belong to this community), could make the meaning of '*goalin*.' The term '*goalin*' is a caste remark that indicates towards purer and occupation identity. According to the Government of India, the caste of my research participant 'A' is '*Ahir*.' Thus, people use the term '*goal in*' for a female while '*goala*' for a male person of *Ahir* caste to show the heredity of cattle-herder occupation. Thus, *Ahir* (mostly old age people of the same caste) perceives it with the proudest sense because they believe that Krishna (a popular god in Hindu religion) was also engaged in the same occupation in his early childhood. Therefore, another name of Krishna was '*gopal*' (protector of the cows). Moreover, throughout the dialogue, I asked RM Singh, how did you get to know the information about the traditional occupation of *Ahiror Goalacaste*? He replied, "Once I was listening to *birha* folklore of *Ahir*. The theme was

'Krishna-Leela' (performance of Krishna). At that time, I could get some information about Yadav.”

Thus, there is a long journey of transforming old (*Ahir*) identity. *Ahir* identity was constituted with a derogatory sense like ‘rude’, ‘illiterate’, etc. Although after the conversation with few *chaudharis* (head of the *Ahir* caste), it appears that a few decades back they transformed their ‘*Ahir*’ identity with ‘*goala*’ (occupation association with cattle or milk-selling). At present, the words ‘*ahir*’, ‘*goala*’ and ‘*yadav*’ often are used synonymously by local inhabitants. Although if someone wants to give a derogatory remark or wants to underestimate to this community, he/she would say ‘*ahira*’ with the sense of rude, uneducated, or socially backward. If someone says, ‘*goala*’ or ‘*goalin*’: it means he/she wants to give little more value with the sense of ritually purer occupational-identity. Now, a most popular title among cognate castes is ‘*Yadav*’²² which is used as a surname among the new generation with proudest sense. On the one hand, the primary objective behind this illustration is to demonstrate how subjective experiences help to field investigator to get ‘grounded reality’ and hidden ‘multiple truths.’ On the other hand, the aim of pointing out of my field experience is to indicate that how an ethnographer catches the fact and gets rich data because ‘facts and texts are organizational achievements but not independent truths of the world’ (Allan, 2014: 388).

Another observation is also very interesting because it gives a glimpse of recent changes in the discourse of ‘ritual hierarchy’ and social dominance. I was conducting an interview with Ram Asare Yadav. Throughout that ‘dialogic partnership’, I could make sense of the idea of recent changes in the caste hierarchy. It appears that caste hierarchy has been degraded because of some technological inventions in Tandawa village. In addition, Ram Asare Yadav reveals that ‘decades back Thakur caste was a dominant caste and the community members of this caste used to maintain their social status. Lower castes called them *babu/bhaiya* (protector/father) with ‘honour’. Most of the land of Tandawa village was under control of Thakurs. ‘During that time, Thakurs were also requiring ‘*begar*’ and ‘*harwahi*’ (unwanted or free wage labours) forcibly but now these traditional practices have been vanished (Prasad, 2016: 191-193)’.

A ‘key-respondent’, Durga Prasad Yadav speaks about these new changes. Politically, he is an active member of Tandawa village, and due to his efforts, many infrastructural changes (electricity, a link-road, a school, a building for Village Panchayat, etc.), as well as socio-political changes, have been taking place. He points out about the availability of two government schools and says that due to these two schools the motivation for education has developed among lower-income families in Tandawa village. His cousin-brother, Raju Yadav, says, “Years ago lower caste used to go for plowing the field of Thakur caste with cattle, but now tractor becomes a popular medium

for plowing. ...a person from Thakur caste of my neighbouring village (Deeh Dhaggupur) has bought a tractor. Now he comes for plowing my field.”

Above instance, shows that machinery-tools or new technology have changed the discourse of traditional caste-hierarchy in the rural area. RajuYadav indicates that ‘dominance of Thakur caste is negligible because the economic position of lower castes has improved.’ Meanwhile, few alternative social groups can be seen among lower castes in Tandawa village. These groups popularly are known as ‘*hoond*’. The idea of ‘*hoond*’ system is an alternative to high wedgelabour. Five to ten families make a ‘*hoond*’ during peak-season of agricultural works. Members of ‘*hoond*’ help each other or share their labours mutually with the sense of ‘saving’(money) because in peak season each peasant needs more labours in order to finish their work on time. A *hoond* is formed with five to six same strata’s families (Prasad, 2015: 535). In addition, the idea of sharing wedgelabour through ‘*hoond*’ system builds close relationship among them. The members of this group can be from the same or different castes’ group. It appears that each group plays an important role as a pressure group in village politics. *Hoond* system also saves its members from the exploitation of ‘dominant caste’ in Tandawa village, after becoming part of the group; there is much possibility to build a close reconciliation. Therefore, it appears that the ‘*hoond*’ system is very popular in many villages of Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Few Important Observations

The approach of research participants sometimes becomes more insightful to understand the hidden truth of the field. Therefore, I would like to analyse about the lifestyle and contributions of two key respondents who will give a glance of rural life and the role of ‘organic intellectuals’ in rural development. Both cases are taken from Tandawa village.

Ram Asare Yadav- Case of a Peasant

Ram AsareYadav is 60 years of age and educated till the fifth standard. He lives in the village with his wife and five children. He is a very active member of *biradari bhoj* (a community feast)²³. His father was also a poor peasant and cattle herder. A few years back his father passed away. Therefore, Ram Asare has been working as peasant because there was no other source of income in the village for him, and his educational background and chronic illness are not allowing him to go for livelihood in urban areas.

Years back, a family from Thakur (a local dominant caste) caste had captured his one-acre land by claiming that ‘the land belonged to the ancestor of Thakur. However, the matter was brought in to the district civil court. After a long debate, the civil court gave a decision in favour of Ram AsareYadav. Thus, it is important to notice here that ten years have passed, but he could

not still get '*malikana-haq*' (ownership-right) over land that was given through legal procedures by the civil court. At last, the basic aim here to point out this incident is to make visible the local social milieu, which motivates to a person for consolidating their caste network. This kind of incident is common among rural inhabitants.

Ram Asare Yadav talks about *biradari bhoj* very happily with a pride sense. He has also observed few changes in the traditional pattern in *biradari bhoj*. He claims the influence of Brahmins on *biradari bhoj* of Yadav community has been degrading for the last two decades. He narrates few important points about old socio-cultural practices among Yadav community. He says, "Decades back Brahmins were not accepting *kheer* (a dessert made of milk and rice) if the *kheer* was made by other castes including Yadavs." However, his wife never attended *biradari bhoj* because an organizer invites to the head of the family, especially male member. Although he never convinced his wife for participating in a community feast while both husband and wife keep interest to organize a big community feast once in their life.

He also speaks about his childhood's days. To him, *begari* (forced or bonded labour), atrocity (by Thakur caste), food crisis, illiteracy, etc. problems give a bad image of past for Tandawa village, but happily, he says now the situation has changed because of the effort of 'village *panchayat*.' Especially, he regards the leadership of Durga Prasad Yadav and Ram Surat Vishwakarma.

Durga Prasad Yadav- Case of a Progressive Leader

Durga Prasad Yadav is 45 years of age and is educated till ninth standard. His illiterate father Ram Lal Yadav migrated four decades back from Nimasaray village to Tandawa village because there was not enough land for surviving to a joint family. Four years back, his father passed away due to the heart attack. In the *terhavi* (the last rite) of his father, around fifteen hundred people participated, and most of them were from the same caste (Yadav). Moreover, he lives in a joint family with his wife, mother, two brothers and five children of his younger brother, namely Mata Prasad Yadav (Nanhe). He keeps interest in politics and firmly believes in family welfare through attaining higher education. Therefore, the new generation of his family is getting the quality education. He has about ten acres land and a restaurant (which is popularly known as 'Yadav Restaurant' in the Sudnapur market (four km away from Tandawa village). The Yadav Restaurant is also a spot place for local Chaudharis of Yadav community where they discuss current political scenarios and their personal affair. The 'Yadav Restaurant' is handled by his younger brother, Mata Prasad Yadav. His brother is also following the path which is shown by Durga Prasad Yadav.

In Tandawa village, there are fifty-five families and divided into three factions. Durga Prasad Yadav leads one progressive largest faction. The term

‘progressive’ means here the way of working for the welfare of entire villages without caste or personal interest. At the age of thirty, he joined ‘Communist Party of India (CPI) in the head quarters of Sultanpur district, but after working several years, he felt that the primary objective (development of Tandawa village) of his political career cannot be fulfilled. Therefore, he worked independently with ‘*gram-pradhan*’ (elected representatives of village *panchayat*) namely, Ram Surat Vishkarma and Ram Kirat Vishkarma. In brief, it is crucial to point out here that Tandawa was a very remote village where lacks of accessibility of road, electricity, school, proper drinking water, etc., people were living in pathetic situations. In the rainy season, the inhabitants had to pass through a shallow, if they wanted to go for livelihood.

With the support of Ram Surat Vishkarma and a few volunteers, under the leadership of Durga Prasad Yadav, first a bridge and a link-road (*kachcha*: made by soil) were built. Later on, he got some fund from local M.L.A. namely Ram Ratan Yadav for building semi-*pucca* road. At present, there are availabilities of school (till the eighth standard), well-connected *pucca* road, electricity, water facility, and a latrine-room in each household in Tandawa village because of his efforts.

In terms of community concern, he also keeps little interest for the welfare of his community. Therefore, he often expresses his view that ‘*biradari bhoj*’ is a very expensive feast²⁴ which leads to the people of Yadav community into poor and backwardness’. He also narrates an interesting observation about local (ritual based hierarchal) social situation. He says that ‘due to the notion of purity/impurity, peasant castes (Ahir, Kurmi, Gaderiya, etc.) were not participating in the commensal practices of Rajput/Thakur caste, but now the old pattern of participation in feast has changed’. Moreover, he is a very respectable member of Yadav community. Most of the *chaudharis* of Yadav caste keeps close relation with him because of his gentle nature. It appears that if someone from the Yadav community needs to find a suitable bride/groom for his daughter/son, Durga Prasad Yadav is always ready to help them, and he also keeps updated about these issues.

Concluding Remarks

The present research raises few important research questions about the issue of sympathy, empathy and value neutrality, which have been the major concern for anthropological and sociological research, especially after Indian independence. In addition, ethnographically, the idea of ‘self’ and ‘other’ comes in front when we point out ‘orientalists’ and ‘indologists’ like Charles Metcalf, L. Dumont, etc. because they tried to understand Indian society with certain western values. They usually collected some data from Hindu-Sanskrit’s scriptures and historical records, and they projected the rural community of India as an ‘independent’, ‘village republics’ and caste-based society through ‘book view’ in a narrow sense. Therefore, during the political

shift (1947), to which we can call the beginning of '*apnaraj*', was time to rethink or come out from the perspective of 'orientalism', and it was required time to understand such relevant issues from the point of view of 'organic intellectual' in an Indian context.

After going through various studies and field experiences, it appears that the traditional notion of caste-based prejudices have weakened the internal cohesion of the village, while the rational idea of village *panchayat* has given a space to reunite by and large. Resultantly, the notions of personal achievement, dignity and 'self-respect' have gained weight among lower castes in rural society. Meanwhile, the traditional pattern of social cohesion has been fragmented and transgressed by new generations. Therefore, the discourse of rural politics seems bounded with a specific issue of 'development', but the issue of caste is still another relevant point in village politics.

Similarly, '*khap panchayat*' (a caste council), untouchability, *begari* (unwanted free wage labour), etc. social evils have created a social gap, which enforced to a section of rural society into marginalization. To make a systematic study of such downtrodden group, there is an approach called 'subaltern perspective' which is also known as 'the history from the below approach' by which social thinkers and scholars try to understand the problems of marginal sections including ex-untouchable, women, and physically-challenged people. The discussions on 'subalternity'²⁵ touched upon many aspects of academia, but here I must evaluate the ideas of a great rural society of three prominent personalities: Jawaharlal Nehru, M.K. Gandhi, and B.R. Ambedkar. They are important progressive figures in term of bringing modernity and social justice for marginal sections. They influenced the thought of Indian masses more largely and their thoughts are still relevant for getting the real picture of rural society at present. On the one hand, Gandhi was firm in his belief that if the ex-untouchables (now popularly known as *dalits*) were permitted to enter the temples, the blot of untouchability practices would vanish. Gandhi once said, "I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I share their sorrows, suffering, and the affronts leveled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, prayed that, if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra, but as an Atishudra (untouchable)²⁶." This belief encouraged Gandhi to incorporate temple entry as a part of his anti-untouchability campaign which was intensified during post-Poona Pact period.²⁷ In due course, Gandhi also led nationwide campaigns for ending untouchability practices, expanding women's rights, building religious and ethnic amity, etc.

While following the footstep of Gandhi, but little contrary Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, had invoked "Dams are temples of modern India" while opening the famous Hirakund dam in the 1950s. He believed that the dam will give an alternative source for irrigation in deserted areas. Apart

from this, he also pointed out about the caste system. He said 'caste is wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive, and barriers to progress' (Nehru, 1946: 257). On the other hand, a learned scholar and architect of the Indian constitution, B.R. Ambedkar worked throughout his life for marginal sections of the society after completion of his education. To build a healthy society, total eradication of untouchability was his main aim, and for fulfilling this aim, he presented evidence before the 'South Borough Committee' to constitute separate electorates for untouchables. 'Educate', 'Agitate', and 'Organize' were his mantras (a clarion call) for marginal sections. To create awareness of human values and give voice to most backward section, he began publishing a weekly paper '*Mooknayak*' (Leader of the Dumb) from 31st January 1920. In 1924, he also established an association called "*Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha*' (the untouchable's welfare forum). However, as he was chairman of the drafting committee of India Constitution: his philosophy of modernity is reflected in many articles²⁸ of Indian Constitution.

To sum up, scholars accept that assumption of caste-based occupations have become meaningless in urban areas, but the rural area still witnesses such practices to some extent. Few occupations like mobile shop, computer centre, agriculture, husbandry, milk-selling, opening a new shopping centre in the market have no caste-based affiliation at present. These occupations have resulted in breaking down the nexus between hereditary and ritual status, which was once defining features of a caste. It is no longer necessary to justify the status of one's occupation in terms of its correlation with the degree of ritual purity or impurity associated with it in rural areas. The influence of religion over social systems (like marriage, *jajmani* [exchange of labour]) and individual domains (like beliefs, 'purity/pollution', 'priest', etc.) have been declining with modern democratic ethos and values.

Apart from the above discussion, caste politics was another matter of discourse, which got larger attention in academia decades back. Marginal sections have been feeling deprived over a period. We can notice that the idea of getting support from different caste groups, political parties used to constitute or follow few caste formulas like DYM (Dalit, Muslim, Yadav), MY (Muslim and Yadav), AJGAR (Ahir, Jat, Gujjar and Rajput), KHAM (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, Muslim), MAJGAR (Muslim and AJGAR), MAMULI (Marwaris, Muslims, Lingayats). Gupta (2000: 174-75) hints that these formulas give space to different caste groups to unite with a common interest. It appears that above pointed political formulas keep influence on rural inhabitants to some extent.

Sociologically, above pointed instances about Durga Prasad Yadav and Ram Asare Yadav show a new path and break the binary of 'dominant caste', 'individual dominance', 'community dominance', etc. because both persons belong to a lower middle socio-economic background, but keep influence on local politics politely. On the one hand, Revenue officers, local MLA and block

pramukh (head of the block) always keep close relations with Durga Prasad Yadav because of his social contact/relationship with many village *pradhans* (elected members of village *panchayat*) and local leaders as well as higher castes (Thakur, Mishra, Panday, etc.). On the other hand, Ram Asare Yadav has a good tie-up with his community members, *chaudharies* (heads of caste), and local inhabitants. Occasionally, if he feels helplessness, he takes advice and help from Durga Prasad Yadav. So, both become a means of achievement for each other in due course of time. The provision of democratic decentralization has created a new enthusiasm in rural areas where the narrow idea of caste politics has been undermined after 73rd amendment of the Indian constitution in rural areas.

However, the idea of caste-based 'naming' of a locality is another social fact and sociologically interesting to engage with. The living place of Kori caste is generally known as *chamartola* or *chamarauty* (a derogatory remark) wise-versa *thakurauti* (for Thakur caste), *ahir-tola* (for Ahir caste), etc. For an individual, people use the term '*wala*' in Hindi belt. On the one hand, the term '*wala*' is often used for certain identity with different context likewise '*dodh-wala*' (for a milkman), '*chodi-wala*' (for a glass-seller), '*riksha-wala*' (for a riksha-puller) etc. These words are used in order to show an occupation identity. The word '*wala*' is also used for an identity where a person lives (belongs), for example, '*gaon-wala*' (for villagers), '*shahar-wala*' (for urbanites).

Despite certain social boundaries, rural inhabitants have been trying to build social reciprocity. They carry such relation with the sense of the economic security and social cooperation. Above pointed social values are getting more priority in day-to-day life while in such social environment the idea of maintaining caste hierarchies are getting less precedence. Above instances might be happening due to the frequent contact between the rural residents and urban inhabitants. Those social processes have also created many new opportunities to adapt and learn the socio-cultural values in due course of time.

The idea of celebrating the community feast has given a new prospect to Yadav community in two ways. First, this feast creates a sense of a 'collectiveness', and 'community feelings'. Resultantly, Yadav community gets ample confidence to challenge the traditional caste dominance of higher caste in the rural area. Second, the frequent performance of such commensal practices provides an opportunity to the organizers to make close contact with their community fellows. These community members may be bureaucrats, leaders, teachers, businessmen, etc. who become a means of empowerment (Social Capital) for each other, for instance, a businessman may get dedicated employees from his own community; a leader may get recognition; a progressive farmer may exchange some relevant information with his counterpart especially related to farming.

NOTES

1. Besides that, the exploitation, unrest, corruption, lack of the proper mechanism for development initiative, etc. factors also led to the military revolt of 1857.
2. See. *Land Revenue Systems in British India: Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari*. (2016, November 28). Retrieved March 1, 2017, from www.clearias.com/land-revenue-systems-zamindari-ryotwari-mahalwari.
3. See. "Peasant Movements of India (1857-1947): Natures, Weakness, Activities, Post-War Phase" by Mondal. Retrieved on March 1, 2017, from www.yourarticlelibrary.com/history/peasant-movements-of-india-1857-1947-natures-weakness-activities-post-war-phase/23720/.
4. The Government of India Act of 1909, better known as the Morley-Minto Reforms (John Morley was the secretary of state for India, and Gilbert Elliot, fourth Earl of Minto, was Viceroy), gave very limited roles to Indians in the central and provincial legislatures, known as legislative councils. Indians had previously been appointed to legislative councils, but after the reforms, some were elected to them.
5. This association also claimed that the Ahirs descended from Yadu dynasty to which Lord Krishna belong.
6. It was made by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on 4 August 1932 granting separate electorates in India for the Forward Caste, Lower Caste, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, India Christen, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, and Untouchables. .
7. The Poona Pact refers to an agreement between Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi signed on 24 September 1932 at Yerwada Central Jail in Pune, India. It was signed by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and few other leaders to break the fast unto death undertaken by Gandhi in Yerwada prison to annul the Macdonald Award giving separate electorates to *dalits* for electing members of state legislative assemblies in British India.
8. One of the most deprived communities in India. They are also referred as 'Scheduled Castes' in Indian Constitution.
9. In Gandhi's understanding, swaraj (self-rule) lived in the moral heart of his people, though he made it clear that by 'his people' he did not mean the majority community alone' but for him 'Hind Swaraj is the rule of all the people.
10. The term 'home-rule' was coined by *Bal Gangadhar Tilak* (an Indian leader).
11. "The People in all the projects areas of community development programme responded enthusiastically and the need for a rapid expansion of the programme to other parts of the country were urgently felt limited resources, however, did not permit a rapid expansion of the C.D projects. A year later, in 1953, the National Extension Service (NES) programme was launched with the idea of having wider coverage at less cost and more people's participation. Each NES block had about 100 villages and about 65 thousand population officer (BDO) and had a number of extension officers (EDs). For the NES blocks, funds were drastically reduced, and the number of multipurpose village level workers was brought down to 10. NES was a thought of as the agency and CD as the method to bring about the socio-economic transformation of the rural people (Retrieved 30 October 2017, from <http://agropedia.iitk.ac.in/content/national-extension-service-1953>)."
12. Retrieved 30 October 2017, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Rajiv-was-right-Montek-says-only-16p-of-Re-reaches-poor/articleshow/5121893.cms>
13. Commonly known in villages as *nayeneta* (new leaders) or *nayekaryakarta* (newly inspired cadres/workers), the new political entrepreneurs have gained considerable

influence within the past twenty years. More villagers by far consult the *neyeneta* for diverse tasks involving party politics, market brokerage, and interaction with government officials than any other types of leader...These “young village workers,” the *nayeneta* in villages, have consequently acquired greater political clout than either caste leaders or traditional patrons Krishna (2003).

14. The 73rd amendment act has added part IX to the Constitution of India entitled as ‘Panchayats.’ A new schedule called as ‘eleventh schedule’ lists 29 functional items that Panchayats are supposed to deal with under Article 243-G. The basic provisions of the Act are divisible into compulsory provisions and voluntary arrangements.
15. ‘The ‘book view’ of rural India of the title is that of Indologists and Orientalists, constructed from Hindu scriptures (especially Sanskrit text) and the historical record. In the post-Independence period, this was gradually replaced by the ‘field view’ of sociologists and anthropologists, based on particular observation (S. Jodhka, 1998).
16. The word ‘field view’ is used to such ethnographic record that is incorporated through participant observation by which an ethnographer tries to understand the grounded reality of society or social problems.
17. For instance, Ahir, Goala, Panwar, Dabre and Jangade, etc. in Maharashtra; Golla, Kurwa, Peragolla, etc. castes in Andhra Pradesh; Gaulla (They also have sub-castes like Hal, Hav, Kad, Kampe, Uja, etc.), Gauvali, Gopal, Kodar, etc. castes in Karnataka; Adayan, Aruman, Naiyar, Nambiyar, Konar, etc. in Kerala and Tamil Nadu; Yadavan, Konar, Athiyar, Adiyar, Udayar, Vaduga, Adeayyar, Golla, Manthi, Karyalan, etc. castes in Pondicherry; Pradhan, Gola, Sadgop, Ahir, Das, Bhutiya, Yavat, Gurbholiya, Mahato, etc. castes in Odisha (see. www.yadavhistory.com), and collectively these allied castes is known as ‘Yadav’ (see- M.S.A. Rao, 1979: 124-125).
18. The idea of rebirth is closely associated with karma theory of Hinduism. People believed that each work could only be performed by such caste who has been assigned by God. Therefore, the concept of skilled labour is negligible in Hinduism.
19. The Right to freedom of religion, covered in Articles 25, 26, 27 and 28, provides religious freedom to all citizens of India.
20. For more details about Tandawa village, please go through the references (Prasad, Devi, 2015; 2016).
21. Due to the personal request, I have codified the names of people.
22. The title ‘Yadav’ was introduced during the early twentieth century by All India YadavMahasabha in 1923. The respondents from Yadav community feel that the recently invented umbrella term ‘Yadav’ gives a sense of modern, educated, and politically empowered identity.
23. The word *biradari* is being used with the meaning of ‘*bi*’ and ‘*aadar*’, which means ‘a group of people who deserve equal honour while the word *bhoj* can be referred for a comensality. *Biradaribhoj* as a grand feast is dedicated to a community and ancestors. It also gives chance to such community fellows who do not usually get together, because they belong to different villages and this grand community feast gives them an opportunity to interact and keep dialogue.
24. For organizing a *biradaribhoj*, the concerned family spends about one lakh to five lakhs rupees because more than one thousand people usually participate in each feast.
25. The term “subalternity” refers to a condition of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic, and/or cultural dominance.

26. See. Gandhi, M. (n.d.). *Gandhiji and Harijans*. Retrieved March 3, 2017, from www.gvpwardha.iecit.in: <http://www.gvpwardha.iecit.in/documents/books/contemplatinggandhi/Ch-8.pdf>.
27. The Poona Pact refers to an agreement between B. R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi signed on 24 September 1932 at Yerwada Central Jail in Pune, India. It was signed by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and B.R. Ambedkar and some other leaders to break the fast unto death undertaken by Gandhi in Yerwada prison.
28. Indian Constitution incorporates the social and political philosophy (of B. R. Ambedkar), which is most noticeably evident in the various provisions of the Constitution. The Preamble, Part III, Part IV, and Part XVI among others are determined to establish a just society by upholding the concepts of liberty, equality, fraternity and safeguarding the unity of the country (see for more details. SampathKumar(2015).”Indian Constitution the Vision of B.R. Ambedkar”, *Historical Research Letter*, Vol.17.

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