

CHAPTER VIII

INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHEDULED CASTES AND OTHER GROUPS

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Introduction

In Hindu ideology, ritual purity or impurity constitutes the criterion generally accepted for justifying and explaining a caste's rank (Stevenson, 1954; Harper, 1964), although relative power is more likely to determine caste rank; in the United States, on the other hand, "an innate difference between races" is the justification. If ritual purity, to the exclusion of wealth, race, skill or knowledge, is the sole criterion for ranking Hindu castes along points of a continuum, then lack of agreement about the relative ranking of two castes is a dispute over which is more pure, not over what standard of evaluation is to be used. Although the Hindu caste ideology theoretically uses only a single "immutable" scale for evaluating a caste's intrinsic worth, in actual practice secular factors such as power derived from wealth are employed when castes compete for positions on this scale (Singer and Cohn 1968: 54-55).

Caste is but one of many status positions, accompanied by culturally defined role behavior, which an individual occupies and which forms part of his social identity. Castes are composed of individuals of equivalent statuses and thus are status groups in which all members have the same "quality of social honor or lack of it" (Weber 1958: 39) in respect to their being caste members. This "social honor" exists independently of such factors as wealth, education, age, or accomplishment. In the southern United States, any Negro, and in rural India any Untouchable is just as unwelcome in restaurant which caters to higher status groups as any other Negro or Untouchable. In a hierarchically ranked status group system there are culturally defined modes of interacting based solely upon status group membership, which are symbolically expressive not only of differences but also of superiority, deference, or equality (ibid: 56).

VIII.1. Inter-caste Relations

For analyzing the inter-caste relations, castes may be divided into three groups: clean castes (Brahmins, Rajputs, Kayasths, Jats, etc.), unclean castes (Teli, Dhobi, Nai, Kumhar, Lohar, etc.), and untouchable castes (Bhangi, Chamar, Pasi, etc.). The relations among these castes may be studied at four levels: commensal relations, marital relations, occupational relations, and social relations (Ahuja 1993: 304).

VIII.1. a. Commensal Relations

Commensal relations refer to a caste/person with whom a man will eat. In daily relations, persons accept food only from the members of their own caste. The question of commensal relations arises only on occasions of feasts. The usual practice on such occasions is that even though members of different castes are invited, it does not mean that they take food together. Members of clean castes sit in one row (pangat), while members of unclean castes occupy another row. Several feet open ground is left between the two rows. Mathur (1964: 126-127) has pointed out some exceptions in which clean and unclean caste members sit in the same row. While the members of clean castes are eating, the members of untouchable castes will not sit with them. When commensal circle is narrow, dietary relations are spread to wide area. Regarding eating with others, there are separate taboos for eating *kachcha food*, *pucca food*, and green vegetables and fruits with peelable skins. The *kachcha food* is regarded as impure (because it is cooked in water and salt); hence it is highly pollutable. The *pucca food* is regarded as pure and less pollutable as it is cooked with ghee. The green fruits and vegetables are regarded least pollutable. (Ahuja 1993: 304).

Earlier there was strong restriction in the commensal relation between the Lois and the Hindu Meiteis publicly as well privately. The concept of *kachcha food* or *pucca food* was not prevalent but any kind of food, the place where it is to be taken,

touching of utensils in the kitchen and the caste/religion of the person cooking the food are the barriers in commensal relation. A middle aged (0.25%) women told that her Hindu Meitei friend did not take tea in her house though they are very good friends. Usually in any Meitei family food is taken in the kitchen but 14 (3.5%) of them from all the four districts have not been allowed to take food inside the kitchen or in any social functions of their friends. Their touch was considered polluting so were restricted to enter or touch anything in the kitchen also. A middle aged man (0.25%) stated that he was not invited in his close friend's wedding feast as all the other Hindu Meitei guests would not like a Loi to be in the feast. Two old aged men (0.5%) were restricted from entering mandap (a place close to temple where religious ceremonies are officiated) in the Rath Yatra festival. While 382 (95.5%) of them from all the four districts have not personally experienced such restrictions in commensal relation. Now the younger generation is not facing any such incidents. The Hindu Meitei invites their Loi friends in social gatherings and interdine with them. But Hindu Meiteis attend Loi function provided separate arrangement for the food is made. The food should not have meat item and should be cooked and served by the Brahmin. Generally in any social gathering food should be cooked by a Brahmin otherwise no Hindu Meiteis or Brahmin will eat the food.

The Brahmins are still hesitant to interdining with the Loise especially the older generation. The case of interdining with Yaithibis and Loise or even with the Hindu Meiteis is still very rare among the Brahmins as they do not have much interaction with them.

VIII.1.b. Marital Relations

The Mahabharata describes a number of inter-caste marriages. Manu has classified and named the offspring of *Anuloma* (higher varna man marrying a lower varna woman) and *Pratiloma* (lower varna man marrying a higher varna woman) marriages and

all possible combinations of the marriages, indicating that during his time inter-varna marriages were prevalent. He was one of the social thinkers who forbade such marriages. As Kannan (1963) writes, “.During the first thirty years of the 20th century, inter-caste marriages were very rare because in an agricultural society following caste system and arranged marriages, it is very difficult for a man or a woman to marry outside the caste”. However, since the thirties, probably with the increase of woman’s education, there have been many inter-caste marriages (Kuppuswamy 1972: 131).

A caste group is generally endogamous, but occasionally endogamy is found to coexist with hypergamy. In Pocock’s (1962) terminology hypergamy corresponds to the “inclusive” aspects of caste while endogamy corresponds to its “exclusive” aspect. A caste would like to include itself with those it considers superior, and the existence of hypergamy provides an institutional basis for such inclusion. Similarly the practice of caste endogamy is an implicit repudiation of the claims of lower castes to equality. Hypergamy may occur among different sections of the same caste or jati when such sections are more or less clearly distinguishable. The giving of girls in marriage to boys from a higher caste or higher section of the same caste added to the prestige of the wife giving lineage and caste. In some cases it also enabled the lower group to claim, eventually, equality with the higher group. Hypergamy was significant for mobility in yet another way. A caste or section of a caste would Sanskritize its way of life and then claim to be superior to its structural neighbors or to the parent section (Srinivas 1966: 29-30).

Inter-community and inter-caste marriages have been given legal sanction as well as social approval. Though people do not mind marrying with persons of other castes, yet a large number of people still marry in their own castes. This is perhaps because the marriages of children are still settled by parents and they believe that marital adjustment becomes easier when both partners have a similar social background. There are cases

where not only children marry outside their caste but even the parents settle their children's marriage in other castes. The main change is that marriage is considered to be 'more a mutual thing'. A young person today does not emphasize 'caste' factor in mate selection but he/she wants a "partner whom he/she knows and understands and who understands him/her and who can give him/her much more of a sense of fulfillment." Such person may or may not belong to the same caste (Ahuja 1993: 307).

Among all the total respondents one middle aged female (0.25%) from rural area and one middle aged female and a middle aged male (0.5%) respondents from urban area are married to Hindu Meitei. And twelve (12) family members of 6 rural and 3 urban respondents have married to Hindu Meitei while an urban respondent's brother married a Meitei Brahmin and another urban respondent's daughter has married a non-Manipuri outside the State. While the remaining 69 (17.25%) are unmarried and the rest 328 (82%) respondents are married within their own caste (Table VIII. 1).

Table VIII. 1
Inter-caste marriages among the Scheduled Castes

Caste into which they got married	Respondents				Respondent's family members			
	Lois		Yaithibis		Lois		Yaithibis	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Meitie Brahmin	0	0	0	0	0	01	0	0
Hindu Meitie	01	02	0	0	08	04	0	0
Other Caste/Non-Manipuri	0	0	0	0	0	01	0	0
Total	01	02	0	0	08	06	0	0

According to 25 (6.25%) respondents, the Meitei Brahmins still consider them as somewhat low as there is strong hesitation in intermarriage with them. While the majority of 373 (93.25%) respondents from all the four districts expressed that they share a normal relationship with Meitei Brahmins. And 2 (0.5%) of them from urban area had nothing to comment.

VIII.1.c. Occupational Relations

Srinivas writes (1952: 28) "Some occupations are considered defiling because of the contact with some defiling object or other necessary to their practice. Swine-herding is defiling because swine defiles. Leather defiles, and consequently the making and repairing of shoes are an occupation of the untouchables.... Finally, any occupation, however, remotely implying the destruction of sentient life in any form would be prohibited to the high castes." According to Srinivas, Sanskritization is the only way to remove impurity or minimize.

The occupational relations refer to the exchange of products and services in a regular manner. Since the caste system permits and forbids certain occupations to castes, the traditional specialization determines interdependence of castes. The continuity and change in these contractual group-oriented and long-term bonds between food-producing families and families that supply them with goods and services have been analysed in occupational relations (Ahuja 1993: 308).

All the Loi respondents expressed that they share a very cordial occupational relation with Hindu Meiteis as well as with Meitei Brahmins. In case of Yaithibis they cannot give a proper opinion as they have less interaction with them but expressed that the relation would be good. Some of the Yaithibis also feel that their occupational relations with the Hindu Meiteis and Lois are normal. As majority of the Lois and Yaithibis are involved in cultivation and some of them are cultivating paddy crops for the Hindu Meitei/Meitei Brahmin owners. The Hindu Meitei/Meitei Brahmin also visits their field located at Scheduled Caste areas along with them if required. Some of the produced goods like country liquor, silk clothes, and pots etc. are mostly supplied by the Lois to the Hindu Meitei/Meitei Brahmin for commercial purposes. They all share a proper economic relation according to their requirements.

VIII.1.d. Social Relations

The social relations among castes depend upon the ranking of castes in caste hierarchy. When villagers meet either for council meetings or for gossips, they generally seat themselves with consideration to caste rank. Some sit on the cot and some on the ground. The members of the higher rank castes (Brahmins, Rajputs) sit on the upper part of the cot where one puts the pillow for sleeping while those of the next higher ranks sit at the foot of the cot. The members of the intermediate castes sit on the ground near the cot whereas the members of low caste sit on the ground far away from the cot.

The inter-caste relations at various levels have undergone significant changes in the last few decades. The important changes noticed are:

(i) Brahmins no longer show any hesitation in accepting kachcha food from the low caste people. (ii) Rules about seating disparities are fading away. (iii) Some low caste now invite Brahmins to participate in their ceremonies. (iv) Members of low castes no longer meekly obey the dictations of the members of high castes. (v) Members of low castes no longer perform forced labor for upper castes.

The high caste people are now more tolerant in their attitudes towards low castes, and backward castes are throwing off the fetters with which they were bound few decades ago (Ahuja 1993: 308-10).

In Manipur such kind of social distance maintained for particular castes are not visible. Though some Hindu Meiteis are also settled in Scheduled Caste areas, but in all the Loi villages/municipal areas they are the majority. Similarly Yaithibis are in majority in their areas. Earlier they were not allowed to enter inside the house of the Hindu Meiteis and Meitei Brahmins when they visited them. An old aged Yaithibi from Thoubal Khunou have narrated that he and his other villagers were prohibited by the Hindu Meitei parents to enter the class room as they will defile the Hindu Meitei and Meitei Brahmin

children. The Yaithibis had to wear a blue colored turban whenever they were in public places. This is to distinguish themselves from others and to maintain distance so that the higher castes do not get polluted.

In religious ceremonies and rituals Brahmins are hired by 40.75% respondents from all the districts while those 16.25% followers of Sanamahism / Sanamahi Cult from all the four districts except for Imphal (West) urban hired Meitei poojari for their rituals and for cooking purpose. The 4.75% respondents of all districts except for Imphal East (rural) does not hire Brahmin but are helped by friends and family members. And 37.25% of Imphal East and Imphal West do not hire Brahmin and even now they follow the traditional ways of preparing everything by the village youth. But now sometimes they also hire Brahmin for cooking as they are more experienced in such matters and above that the local youth are mostly out of the villages for study purpose and thus, hiring Brahmin becomes an easy option. And especially when Hindu Meiteis are invited in any function or in case of inter-marriage Brahmins are called for, otherwise the local youth perform everything in social gatherings. The 0.75% of them from Bishnupur hired both Brahmin and Maiba (priest) according to the situation. An old aged man said that he does not eat anything cooked by Brahmin as they do not eat food cooked by them and above that the Brahmins are not original Meitei.

For the adherent followers of Hinduism it becomes a pre-requisite for the Brahmin to officiate in any religious matters. But there has been an increasing incidence of indigenous followers hiring Brahmin in certain social ceremonies. This according to them is to temporarily adapting to the situation when Hindu Meiteis are invited but the fact is, they are imitating very frequently and constantly the process of Hindu Meiteis' ways of life. Majority of them are very less aware of their historical origin or the present situation of the Scheduled Castes

VIII.2. Intra-caste Relations

The members of one caste co-operate with one another in many ways, though relations depend on the size, social and economic status, and the formal subdivisions of the caste. Some castes and sub-castes are so small that they are located in a small area and maintain caste/sub-caste relations with all members, but some castes/sub-castes are so large that they are spread over a large area and scattered in far off villages, which compels that relations be maintained only with a small part of the total. Mayer (1960: 151) has called this part of the caste as 'effective caste'.

VIII.2.a. Commensal Relations

The Lois in Manipur constitutes the majority Scheduled Caste who are expanded in different Loi villages. Commensal relations are maintained between Lois of all the areas all these areas. Except for the Hinduised Lois who have totally sanskritized, all the other indigenous followers from within or outside the village invites one another and dine together in any social or religious function. And in any ceremony where Hinduised Lois or Sanamahi followers are invited then, certain arrangements are made according to the requirement. Similarly the Yaithibis also share commensal relations among themselves regardless of economic or social status. Generally everyone eat the food cooked by the Brahmin in any social feast.

But between the Lois and Yaithibis, being both of them belong to Scheduled Castes, there is lack of commensal relations among them.

VIII.2.b. Marital Relations

For marital relations, some castes are formally divided in various sub-groups for the purposes of rules of hypergamy. A member of one sub-caste may accept a daughter from a certain sub-caste with a lower status and prestige but they may not give

their own daughter in the same sub-caste. The marital relations depend upon the hierarchical ranking of the sub-division.

For day-to-day co-operation among the members within the same caste/sub-caste, members depend mostly on those who live in the same village or the nearby village. Whether the co-operation is needed for celebrating a festival, or organizing a social religious family ceremony, or fighting a rival group or political purposes, the members of a caste or sub-caste depend very much on each other and in some cases on those who are economically strong and politically powerful.

The Lois and the Yaithibis of Manipur do not have division of sub-castes for forming marital relations. The Lois and Yaithibis generally marry within their own areas. Among the Lois they also make marriage alliance with other Loi villages (1.25%) whereas the Yaithibis being less in number mostly confine to their respective areas. For any religious ceremony in the family or in the village they co-operate and help each other.

However, it is found that the marital relations between Lois and Yaithibis are totally absent.

VIII.2.c. Occupational Relations

Like in any other society among the Lois and Yaithibi castes also the one with good occupational position is always respected. But there is no strict hierarchy of occupational position among the Lois or the Yaithibis. The Lois as well as the Yaithibis does not share a good occupational relation among themselves. But the occupational relations between Lois are very important. They are very much interdependent upon each other for various economic purposes. They frequently visit each other's places for occupational as well as for social reasons.

VIII.2.d. Alliance

Ralph Nicholas has talked about the sub-divisions of Mahisyas caste who mostly keep on fighting with each other on political issues for gaining public power. These divisions function more as factions (conflict groups) than as caste groups. Sharma (1963) has used the term 'resource group' for such sub-groups in order to emphasize their collaborative function. Sometimes the 'alliance' between the groups is only for a limited purpose and period. It is not the individuals but the families who are involved in such alliances.

The alliance (within the sub-caste) is generally made up of a few core families to withstand challenges from other families, or to loan bullocks, money, etc. to the dependent families, or to achieve support in court cases, or to give honourable employment to needy persons in the groups, and so on. An alliance may last for decades or few years or few months or it may alter suddenly because no formal and durable principles bind the members together. The strength of the alliance rests on wealth, manpower, and ability to bring influence from outside the village (Mandelbaum 1970: 242-246).

Alliance in its strict structure and meaning is not prevalent among the Scheduled Castes in Manipur. In various occasions the mobiled ones among them render help and support in any development work for the people and the area. Among them those who are wealthy help the poor by lending money when required. Those who own tractor or power tiller gives it for hiring to those who do not have. It can be mentioned here that the disagreement between the Lois of Kakching and other Lois have formed an alliance kind of a structure. The mobiled individuals among the Kakching Lois are supporting their members financially and physically and working hard to gain support of other weaker Loi villages to retain their Scheduled Caste identity. On the other hand the Lois in Sekmai, Phayeng, Khurkhul, Andro etc. are supporting each other in every possible way and trying

to influence other small Loi villages to support them in removing the Kakching Lois from the Scheduled Castes category.

VIII.2.e. Leadership Roles and Panchayat Patterns

In maintaining harmony among members of a caste/sub-caste, leaders of caste/sub-caste panchayats play an important role. Though caste leaders and caste panchayats are not as powerful today in many villages as in the past, yet they have not completely lost their hold. Earlier leadership was hereditary but now it is elective. If the sub-caste organizes some function in the village, its leader also acts as the spokesman of the sub-caste. He protects and defends the group's interests against outside encroachments. He also acts as a link among the members.

Sub-caste panchayats resolve conflicts among members, punish deviants who violate caste norms, launch group enterprises for the benefit of the members, and collect funds for village festivals and public works. Certain problems brought before the caste panchayat require not only the panchayat members but also some elders from more than one village (Ahuja 1993: 314).

Similarly in the Scheduled Caste villages the panchayat members and the *pradhan* act as political leaders in all the matters of the area. Now they are the ones consulted in all social as well as religious matters of the village/municipal area. Earlier the village *Khullakpa* (chief) was vested with all the powers of the village in social and religious matters but with the introduction of the panchayat system except in the religious matters, the power has been shifted to the panchayat members.

The panchayat member / *pradhan* have the power of recommending the names of the member for beneficiary schemes. They give awareness of various beneficiary schemes and also help them in applying for such benefits. They act as mediator with the government and their Scheduled Caste followers. In any conflict or disagreement within

the village the panchayat members along with the village elders are the ones to decide and to bring solution to the problem.

VIII.3. Inter-caste Conflict

If there is co-operation among castes, there are conflicts too. The conflicts arise when (i) one caste attempts to dominate over others; (ii) when higher castes exploit the lower castes; (iii) when castes perceive other castes as barriers in mobility and in achieving political power; and (iv) when castes find that they are not able to share in the new economic opportunities or acquire symbols of high status. Though caste conflicts and the incidents of caste violence are found more in the rural areas but they take place in the urban areas as well (Ahuja 1993: 315).

VIII.3.a. Dominance of One Caste over Others

In his original definition of the concept of a “dominant caste” in a South Asian village community, Srinivas (1955: 18) emphasized four criteria of dominance: (1) numerical predominance, (2) preponderant economic power, (3) preponderant political power, and (4) relatively high caste rank. Later, Srinivas (1959: 15) added Western education and occupations to his list of criteria, but these accomplishments are directly dependent upon economic position and are not relevant to the many South Asian villages still largely unaffected by Western education. The concept of the dominant caste, as Mayer (1960: 425) points out, is a descriptive rather than an analytic one. But there seem to be only two essential terms contained in it: the dominant caste must be more populous than any other caste in a village and it must be economically the most powerful of the village castes; it must have these properties, that is, if it is to exercise “decisive dominance” (Srinivas 1959: 15). In the absence of numerical majority and perfect control over wealth in a village, we might say that a caste exercises “relative dominance,” which implies that, in fact, most communities are characterized by several castes exercising various degrees of

“relative dominance” and attempting to expand their control at the expense of other “relatively dominant” caste groups (ibid: 273).

Quite contrary to the Scheduled Castes in other parts of India the Lois and Yaithibis in Manipur do not suffer from any kind of exploitation from the higher caste Meitei Brahmins and Hindu Meiteis. The Meitei Brahmins and the Hindu Meiteis are the dominant castes but they do not interfere in the life of the Scheduled Castes. This may be because of the non-interference of one another due to the separate settlement of the Scheduled castes in the periphery of the villages. The similar origin of the Scheduled Castes and the Hindu Meiteis may also be a reason. So far there is no incidence of inter-caste conflict between the Scheduled Castes and the Meitei Brahmins and Hindu Meiteis.

VIII.3.b. Exploitation of Lower Castes by Higher Castes

The attitude of the upper castes has always been to consolidate and maintain their high social status. The intermediate and lower castes feel deprived and exploited. It is thus this attempt of ‘assertion’ of high caste people which creates caste conflicts. The refusal of the backward castes to render any unpaid labour and sell their products at reduced rates to landlords and moneylenders, the demands of the lower castes for occupancy rights over their land, stoppage of menial services etc. lead to violent reactions on the part of land lords and moneylenders mostly belonging to upper castes and result in caste riots. The reprisals taken by the landlords against the lower and backward castes are: to deprive them of their lands and to turn them out of their houses on the ground that the house belonged to the landlords; refusal to allow their cattle to use the ordinary grazing grounds and to take water at the ordinary drinking tanks; and complete social boycott (Jha 1977: 551).

The concept of purity and pollution was not absent in Manipur during earlier days. The Lois and Yaithibis were restricted from certain things but all that was for

the reasons of ritual purity. They had certain traditional occupations but those were neither caste based nor forced by any higher castes. In the case of the Lois their habits of brewing and eating meat was the main reason whereas with Yaithibis except for the reason of practicing incest no other concrete reason was given. But neither in the history nor in the present situation has there been any case of death of a Loi or a Yaithibi due to caste riot or conflict with the Meitei Brahmins or Hindu Meiteis.

VIII.3.c. Barriers in Mobility and Achieving Political Power

Mobility of individual castes in local hierarchy has always been possible, according to Srinivas (1992: 317-20). The potent sources of mobility are: the process of Sanskritization, gaining access to some source of wealth, appealing to census officers to change the status of castes in the decennial census, and mobilizing caste groups by forming caste associations. Many low and backward castes concentrated on acquiring the symbols of high status that is, possession of political power, education, and a share in the new economic opportunities. The high castes resented the appropriation of the symbols of high rank by the low castes.

To achieve mobility in the social and ritual status as many as 163 (40.75%) of them from all the total respondents have sanskritized their ways of life. Some 69 (17.33%) of them have secured an improved social status by achieving economic improvement. Some of them also aspire to be political members. But they all feel that the 1% reservation in the Legislative Assembly for the Scheduled Castes is very less a post to fight for their cause. For the purpose of improving the Scheduled Castes status and enhancing their identity they form associations which work at the State Level. The Hindu followers among the Lois and the Yaithibis are somewhat considered as inferior to the Meitei Brahmins and Hindu Meiteis though they do not illtreat them directly.

VIII.3.d. Competition for Economic Opportunities and Acquiring Symbols of High Status

Though the status of each caste is fixed in the caste hierarchy but in the absence of clear-cut hierarchy with the position of each caste defined precisely, vagueness characterizes the position of many castes. In independent India, competition between different castes seems to be the normal situation. With the passing of political power to the people, castes have become pressure groups and are competing for power and using power to benefit caste fellows. This tendency has increased caste conflicts in the country (Ahuja 1993: 320). As Beteille (1965: 134) has pointed out "Competition for power and office requires a certain aggregation of segments as individually they cannot compete in the struggle for power".

Competition for economic opportunities is prevalent in every society. In these Scheduled Caste communities also starting from the issue of getting beneficiary schemes in their respective villages/municipal areas till the competition for the reserved political seat is visible. As everyone wanted the political leader to be elected from their respective constituency they form alliance and support the competing member from their respective areas. There is also fierce competition for the reserved seat in the government sectors as the percentage of literacy is increasing among them. Achievement of a government post or becoming a political member leads to high social status of the individual and of the family as a whole.

VIII. 4. Conversion of Scheduled Castes to Other Religions

In religious terms, this refers to sudden and dramatic experience of God, which brings about a profound change in a person's religious status. In sociological terms, conversion refers to the process by which a person achieves membership of a religious group; it is common to contrast the achievement of Christian membership of a sect by a conversion experience and of a church by training and ritual. In some branches Judaism

conversion is achieved by circumcision. Sociologists argue that in fact individual conversion is normally preceded by a period of preparation or socialization (Marshall 1998: 120).

Bishnupur,

In this district 5% of the respondents have converted to Christianity (Presbyterian). They have converted strongly for their faith in Jesus and hence the question of converting to avoid stigma is irrelevant. In all nearly forty (40) families have converted from their village. According to two of them the practice of traditional religion depends upon the situation while the other three of them are no more practicing their traditional religion. They all visit church on Saturday at night and Sunday in the morning.

Imphal East,

In this district 3% of them from urban areas have baptized for their undying faith in the religion of Christianity. And so far here, fifty (50) families have converted. They said that if they apply for educational benefits the church will help them for studies in missionary schools, studying nursing, doctors and Theology for free of cost. They visit church on Sunday morning and evening and have stopped their traditional religion but sometimes adjust according to the situation demands’.

Imphal West,

4% of them from both rural and urban areas have converted to Christianity for their strong faith in it. Those from rural area said that they have received financial help for constructing church and village road from the missionary. They have stopped practicing their traditional culture and visit church on Sunday and Thursday every week. So far, approximately thirty (30) families from Koutruk, thirty (30) families in Khurkhul, four (4) families in Sangaitel, and forty (40) families from Sekmai have converted to Christianity.

Thoubal,

From Thoubal district (rural and urban) 7% have converted. According to the urban converts though they do not practice their traditional religion but at different occasionsn they follow and adjust to some traditional practices also. Five (5) families from rural and around sixty (60) families from Thoubal urban have converted so far. They explained that the question of improving social identity and other's attitude towards them after conversion is not relevant here. By converting they are not benefiting in securing a job, financial assistance or in attaining higher social status. According to them Christianity teaches good character, peaceful living by giving love to all, to discard all intoxicants and to attend salvation through good deeds.

Conversion to Christianity to avoid social stigma is quite irrelevant among the Scheduled Caste converts in Manipur. Enhancement of status by conversion also is not relevant here as their Scheduled Caste status is still known by others. After conversion also some of them still follow their traditional practices at certain situation which according to them is required to adjust to the society. Though they express that they have converted purely due to the strong faith in the religion but there are certain facilities they can receive in the form of education in missionary schools, funds for village development or for building church etc. The latent motive may be the facilities attached to conversion which none of them have hardly mentioned.

VIII.5. Interrelationship between Scheduled Castes and Other Religious Groups

All the respondents answered that they have a very normal relationship with Hindu Meiteis and they do not consider the Yaithibis as polluting and so if required they also maintain normal relation with them. And they intermingle with the Hindu Meiteis with whom they work. Similarly they also share good economic as well as social

relation with the tribals who are settled nearby to their village. They do not experience any accusation of pollution by physical contact with Hindu Meiteis or Meitei Brahmins now.

They all admitted that inter-dinning and inter-marriages take place among Hindu Meiteis and Lois as well as with Yaithibis though the cases of inter-dining or inter-marriage with Yaithibis are negligible. The case of inter-marriage with tribals is also negligible. The Lois and Yaithibis are allowed to enter temples like any other Hindu Meitei. Among them five respondents from Imphal West (urban) expressed that there has been cases of Loi and Hindu Meitei marriage but they cannot say of inter-marriage with Yaithibi as they have not heard of it yet.

The Lois, the Yaithibis, the Hindu Meiteis and even the Meitei Brahmin share a cordial relation with each other. There are cases of inter-marriage between the Lois and the Hindu Meitei though not very common but the case of inter-marriage between a Loi and a Meitei Brahmin is almost absent. This is because in some important matters like religious ceremonies and marriage alliances both the Hindu Meiteis and the Meitei Brahmins want to restrict among themselves. The earlier position of Yaithibi and the resulting lack of interaction with the other Loi villages can be a reason for the absence of inter-marriage of Yaithibi with the Lois and the Hindu Meiteis.

VIII.6. Crimes against Scheduled Castes

The reports of the National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been regularly reporting an increase in the number of crimes against the Scheduled Castes. Most of the Scheduled Caste women are the victims of rape by upper caste men. The Scheduled Caste men on the other hand are exploited by usurping their lands, giving them low wages, and using them as bonded labour. Because of these atrocities, the cases of proselytization of Harijans into Islam and Christianity are also reported from time to time (Ahuja 1993: 375-6).

The Lois and Yaithibis in Manipur are not victims of any kind of atrocities from the Meitei Brahmins and Hindu Meiteis. Except for the earlier illtreatment experienced by some of the older generation now, there is no incident of such illtreatment. The atrocities and exploitation as experienced by the Scheduled Castes in other parts of the country is absent among the Scheduled Castes in Manipur.

VIII.7. Developmental Programmes Required

There is need for development in transport and communication, developments of inter-village roads and infrastructure like proper educational facilities such as special residential schools from primary to higher level with modern equipments at nominal charges, vocational training in different fields to enable them to compete with others. Special training for art and craft or professional training institute for economy enhancement should be introduced. They wanted the percentage of reservation be increased and reserved seat for Scheduled Caste women at Assembly will be appreciated. Hospitals, proper sanitation program, power supply and proper irrigation system, income generating schemes, construction of community hall, pure water supply and establishment of organizations funded by government as well as non-governmental organizations are also important.

The prevention of liquor consumption Act is supported by 181 (45.25%) from all the four districts as they consider brewing is harmful for the society at large. They further expressed that earlier brewing was done only for religious matters and for medicinal purpose but lately much has been commercialized. And this has affected the behavior of the youngsters. More importantly as rice is used for brewing, there has been a stiff rise in the price of rice also. Among them some of them expressed that brewing should be allowed strictly for religious purpose. But 219 (54.75%) consider it as the main source of survival for many and thus, opposed against the Act. It is used in customary

rituals and mainly in Lai Haraoba (God pleasing ceremony). They included that the wastage after brewing is very useful for piggery and duckery; in short, it is a circulation of business. They do not need to go out to trade as the traders themselves will come to collect it and can be done simultaneously with household chores. So, they suggested that instead of preventing it the government should make certain plans and policies to develop the business by legalizing the product for exporting to other states to draw state's income as well.

The economy will be adversely affected as brewing has been the main source of income. They feel that it will affect the paddy farmers also who sell surplus rice to brewers and so, the whole circulation of brewing and animal husbandry will be disturbed. With the prohibition there will be increase in bribery and black marketing. So, the government should provide a suitable and practical alternative before passing the Act of prevention. But even with alternative they will face problems as not skilled enough to take up another occupation easily.

According to them all available schemes will be benefiting if implemented properly and if provided according to the suitability of the area and the people. Schemes providing agricultural aids with proper irrigational plan for multi-farming, proper equipments for sericulture, pottery etc. will help in increasing the quality and quantity of the productions. Providing tractor and fertilizers at subsidized rates, weaving and animal husbandry and fishing aids, building proper storage for surplus productions, establishing small scale industries with proper equipments and other income generating programmes will be suitable and beneficial for them.

CASE STUDY

Leimapokpam ongbi Leirentombi Devi
Female, Age-38, Married
Primary education, Housewife
Waroijing (Sadu Koireng),
Bishnupur District

Leirentombi started by saying that she still feels insulted and humiliated when her boyfriend of three years, left her and married a Hindu Meitei only because of his parent's unwillingness to accept a Loi as their daughter-in-law. It was then, she thought that she would not allow any of her daughters to marry a Hindu Meitei. Above that, marrying to Hindu Meitei means adopting a new culture with strict rules and if her daughter fails to adjust she will be treated badly. So, she says, it is always safe to marry from the same community.

She faces inadequate financial condition as she has no proper source of income. Her income from agricultural source is not enough for daily expenses. The field in her place is rocky and less fertile due to which more manual labour is needed. And to add to the burden tractor cannot be employed because of the hard rocks. She brews but cannot do it in large quantity as it again needs money to buy rice and woods for brewing and seeing the cost, the benefits become too nominal. Above that there is no proper market whereby she can expand the business thus, have to wait for the middle person to collect it. She has to pay a sum of rupees fifty as tax for brewing to the police also. So far, got a piggery grant from which three pigs died after some time as they gave low quality pigs. Till now, her labour in agriculture has sustained her family but does not have income to send her children to good school.

According to her the workers and politicians are biased and they could have helped much if they wanted. The members of Panchayat, educated people and agents are all from Leimaram only and as such whatever benefits given together are mostly benefiting the people in main Leimaram only. She continues that people are so much in need of these grants that they do not see what they are getting or whether they have the required skill for it or not. Thus, later ends up misusing the grants by selling them. She says that the agents should properly enquire about the beneficiary and should be given according to one's skill and suitability. But as they are mostly uneducated and less aware of things it is the prime duty of the agents to distribute the facility properly to improve them on one hand and to reduce further misusing of grants on the other hand.

VIII.8. Conclusions

There has been a cordial relationship between the Lois and the Hindu Meiteis in general. The Hindu Meitei influences the Lois and the Yaithibis in almost all spheres of life. In religious occasions the indigenous followers among the Lois have started hiring Brahmin priests. Various changes and adaptation in the marriage ceremony not only between Lois and the Hindu Meitei but among the Loi marriages is also visible. The certain adaptation followed by Lois when Hindu Meiteis are invited shows that both the communities have started to mingle in social / public ceremonies. Here, certain arrangements like vegetable or fish for the Hindu Meiteis invitees and meat items for the Loi invitees arranged by the Loi host reflect that the Lois are not totally assimilating to the Hindu culture but are trying to emulate some behavior accepted by both the communities. Again, having Hindu Meiteis as guests in their function is a sign of status symbol because among them there is a common belief that those who have achieved socio-economic status maintain ties with the Hindu Meiteis. They all share a very normal relation with the Hindu Meiteis and the Meitei Brahmin with whom they work with. In social relation unlike earlier times the Lois and the Yaithibis no more experience restriction from entering into Hindu Meitei houses. The change in attitude is a result of the Scheduled Caste's socio-economic development as well as changes in their style of living also. The case is different with Yaithibi as they are already staunch followers of Hinduism and quite unlike the Lois in every sphere of life. Their earlier lower status than the Lois and their location has distanced them from both the Hindu Meiteis and the Lois due to which there is a vast lack of interaction among them.

Among the Scheduled Castes themselves they maintain a harmonious relationship in the matter of commensal, occupational or social relations. Though there is less interaction between Yaithibis and Lois but both share a normal relationship. The

political representatives among them guide the fellowmen in attaining certain benefits. Those who are mobile within a group at times also render certain helps to their fellowmen for their improvement. But at the same time there is also competition among them for acquiring various economic opportunities. The Meitei Brahmins and Hindu Meiteis do not dominate or exploit the Lois or Yaithibis in any matter.

Conversion to Christianity to avoid social stigma is not the case of Scheduled Castes in Manipur. All these converts are well aware that by conversion they are entitled to certain facilities which they can employ to improve their life. But the practice of their traditional customs even after conversion, which according to them cannot be avoided considering the feelings of their parents or other family members at certain occasion somewhat blurs their status as converts following the preaching of Jesus.

The Lois and Yaithibis share a good relation with the Hindu Meiteis, tribals and other religious groups in socio-economic matters. The notion of pollution attaches to the Lois and the Yaithibis are no more prevalent and they are not victimized against any kind of crimes or atrocities by the higher castes. But despite such a harmonious relation there is always a strong sense of hesitation from the Hindu Meitei when it comes to intercaste marriage with the Lois. And intercaste marriages between Lois and Meitei Brahmin or with Yaithibis are almost absent and still a distant one.

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