

Harijan Students of Uttar Pradesh

***Dr. Arun Kumar Chaturvedi**

EDUCATION is one of the E important factors which can make appreciable contribution towards improving the social states of Harijans by widening their mental horizon and providing them with hotter job opportunities. With this end in view the Government has been encouraging the education of scheduled caste students at different levels by offering them substantial scalars. The literacy rate among Horijanx has accordingly, risen and thousands of them are being admitted in schools and colleges every year.

The author was engaged in a project based on a study of 200 harijan male students studying in five degree and post-graduate colleges of Agra, Mathura, Meerut, Kanpur and Lucknow. Among the Harijan only chamars (leather workers), the bhangis (scavangers and sweepers) and the Julahas (weavers) were included in the sample. The female students were not kept within the purview of this investigation as they formed a very small percentage of the total college-going Harijan population. The data was collected on the basis of questionnaire schedule. 40 students (20 from degree and 20 from post-graduate classes) were selected from each of the above cities by random sampling.

Poverty still stalks their life

was observed that quite a large majority of respondents (72 per cent) had weak financial position, and their monthly income ranged between Rs. 150 and Rs 450, Parents of 68 per cent of respondents were found to be illiterate, while fathers of eighteen per cent e respondents and mothers of six per cent of respondents were elicited upto primary level.

Parents of eight per cent respondents had studied upto the Junior High School standard.

Harijan students under this in vestigation, were found to be slightly overage in relation to the classes

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they were studying. Sixty seven per cent of students studying in degree classes were within the age-group 20-22 years, and 72 per cent in post-graduate classes belonged to the age-group 23.25 years. Sixty three per cent of them had taken up Arts subjects in preference to science and commerce subjects because they felt that the arts courses were easier. Fifty eight per cent students admitted that they devoted four or even more hours to their studies daily, and seventy eight per cent reported that they faced no difficulty in following the courses they pursued.

The teachers assessment of these students was, however, not found to be satisfactory. Eighty per cent of the teachers felt that the Harijan students they taught were not academically upto the mark. They could not stand in open competition with the students of other castes, but it was not due to any inherent shortcoming. It may be due to the absence of any educational background at home.

Persisting old attitudes

The attitude of the students towards marriage was found to be still somewhat traditional. Seventy two per cent of them said that they would prefer a marriage arranged by their parents, and only eighteen per cent reported they would not care for anybody's advice, but would prefer to marry a girl of their own choice. To the question: which quality would they prefer in their mate-economic status, caste status, family status, educational status or beauty. They gave the highest weightage to the caste and family status. Beauty or appearance was given the third, Education the fourth and economic status the fifth preference. This shows that the educated Harijans are gradually becoming conscious of their own responsibilities in the selection of their spouse. Beauty or appearance of the girl has become an important consideration in selection of a bride.

Sixty five per cent students admitted that their classmates behaved coldly and indifferently towards them, and only thirty five per cent felt that their attitude was normal. It was found that their circle of friends was mainly restricted either to their own caste or to another scheduled caste. Sixty eight per cent students reported that their best friends belonged to their own caste, twenty two per cent said that their most trusted friends came from another scheduled caste, and only ten per cent revealed that their reliable friends came from among the people of other castes.

Asked whether any member of the other castes had ever ill treated them, it was reported by seventy eight per cent respondents that they did not have any such experience. Neither did they face any personal humiliation nor were their women folk ever harassed.

Seventy five per cent of the students admitted that their status in society had somewhat improved but it still continued to be inferior to other castes. Twenty per cent reported that in spite of all development plans their status had not improved at all, and only five per cent claimed that it was equal to that of other castes.

Change in profession preferred

Asked as to which work they would like to do in future, eighty seven per cent made it clear that they would not join their father's profession whereas thirty eight per cent expressed their liking for professions of doctor, lawyer and professor. Thirty seven per cent of them were satisfied by becoming a school teacher, a gramsewak or a clerk in the postal, railway, income tax or any other government department. Those who join the police or defence services formed twenty eight per cent of the respondents in the study. Eighty seven per cent of the students said that the reservation policy of the government had proved beneficial to them whereas, seven per cent reported that it had not been useful at all and six per cent were indifferent about it.

The findings of the study indicate that in spite of all developmental and protective efforts, most Harijan families are still illiterate and poor. Most of the Harijan students opt for arts courses because they think that are easier than science I and commerce counts. They tire slightly overage in relation to the s classes they study. They work hard in their studies but face a of difficulties in competing with other caste students. Although their views about marriage are will conservative, a few have started holding independent opinion regarding the selection of their life partners. The behaviour of their classmates towards them is ant cordial and their circle of friendship is mostly limited to their own caste. They feel that their status in society is still lower than that of the higher castes. Most of them do not like their father's profession, and would prefer to adopt some white-collar jobs in life. They hold positive opinion about the reservation policy of the government and want that its should be continued for a longer period.

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