

A MODEL OF SPATIAL STRUCTURES OF SCHEDULED CASTE EXCLAVES (VIS-A-VIS THE MAIN VILLAGE)

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ABSTRACT : In the context of Indian rural society, a dichotomous settlement pattern is commonly observed in which the scheduled caste exclave necessarily appears as an appendage to the main settlement. The present analysis, with the help of some case studies, examines the possibilities of building regional empirical model (typologies) of space patterns for scheduled caste residential areas for Maharashtra.

Introduction

Though it is common knowledge that separate residences exist for all scheduled castes in every village, a large number of studies mundanely deal with the religious-ritual aspects of the arrangement of various castes. Few in-depth studies at the micro-level, examining the possibilities of building empirical models for scheduled caste exclaves have been undertaken by either social or settlement geographers with the result that the spatial aspect of these unique sub-settlements, remains largely unexplored. The present study was inspired by the stark contrasts in the residential patterns of scheduled castes in diverse physiographic units as observed by the authors in the course of field work in some villages in Maharashtra.

Origin of separate exclaves for scheduled castes

Even at first glance the scheduled caste exclaves, like the Jewish 'Ghettos' of medieval European towns, appear to be the result of segregationist caste policy. Their origin must therefore be linked to the practice of untouchability though no precise record exists to establish the date of inception, or the manner in which these socially

discrete clusters were created; their peripheral position at one end of the village does suggest that they might be later appendages. On closer examination it appears that a functional distance (walking) was maintained between the main settlement and the scheduled caste exclave so that though they were apparently kept out of the way, yet they were near enough to perform the agricultural and other menial tasks for the other castes (Gosal, 1971).

The social and economic circumstances that have produced these dichotomous village, sub-village settlement forms appear deeply rooted in history and may be traced to the occupational hierarchical organization within the caste system, (as will be seen later) wherein a labour intensive rather than a capital intensive system of agriculture was operative. On a broad level of generalization one might state that over a long period of time a variety of factors created by an exploitative culture like the purity-impurity concept, and the religious sanction for the social and functional segregation, together with similarities in the organization of land tenure, the aristocratic cultural traditions and labour utilization practices have all comb-

ined to give rise to the isolated form of scheduled caste clusters. This is not unique to the study area but has a parallel not only in other parts of India but also in different parts of the world (the Black settlements of the American South, Hudson, 1976).

A general impression of scheduled caste exclaves

The word ' Maharwada ' as the scheduled caste locality is generally referred to in Maharashtra, would earlier evoke a myriad of images, like slushy badly drained area with a congregation of dingy, dreary and broken huts, with sewage and much strewn about, and abject poverty, decrepit locality and teeming population. Today, even though the scheduled castes remain spatially segregated they do not live in such squalid, sub-standard conditions (Patil, 1975). In the present context, their segregation may be viewed more in terms of past conditions of settlement, retained due to the inertia of property lines on account of economic deprivity rather than a social malaise.

Regional variations in the spatial form of scheduled caste exclaves

An analysis of the residential patterning of scheduled caste clusters in the major physiographic units of Maharashtra shows that there are enough references (in the case studies undertaken) to allow for an empirical typology of four distinct types of scheduled caste exclaves to emerge in the Plateau, the Konkan and Maval regions.

The Plateau area

The plateau shows the classical pattern of dominance of the caste system, segregating the houses of the scheduled castes on the periphery of the main village (Carter, 1971). The generalized settlement form appears like an amalgam of a nucleated central core area, interlaced with secondary clusters of scheduled caste exclaves. (Fig 1a, 1b, and 2).

Walled villages

In the case of a walled settlement which is a pretty common feature on the plateau

(dictated by the needs for defence and protection in former times), a concentric ring or girdle type of settlement structure emerges. The outermost ring is invariably occupied by the different scheduled castes, followed by a second ring of other service castes (touchable) and lastly the central core comprising the founder clans and Brahmins.

Unwalled villages

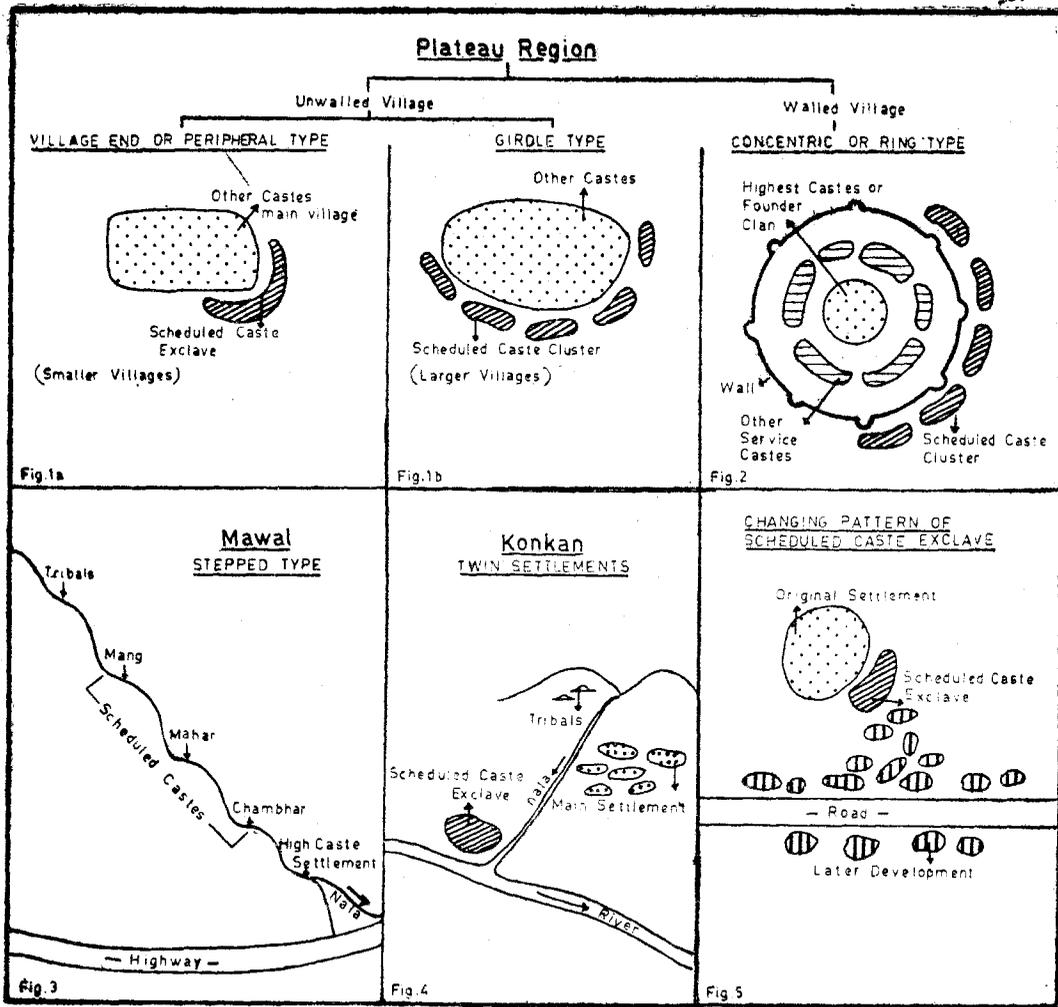
Two sub-types commonly observed with slight variations in the case of unwalled villages on the plateau are :

1. For villages with less than 2000 population, a single settlement area is the norm, with the scheduled castes occupying the village-end or peripheral location (generally to the south-east as the prevailing wind direction is westerly).

2. In case of the larger villages, a complete roster of scheduled caste specialists are found to fulfil the needs of not only the village itself, but also a number of villages around. Here the settlement form could best be described as one with a spatially recognizable central nucleus, with the outer fringes formed by secondary satellites of scheduled caste clusters. Since the satellites formed by the scheduled castes are located in such close proximity to the main core, it gives the overall impression of being a single settlement unit rather than a twin or multinucleated settlement type. The above settlement form described in the foregoing consisting of a spatially distinct central area with one or more scheduled caste satellites in close proximity, or peripheral to the main villages is the most commonly observed form and found nearly everywhere on the plateau (Fig. 1a and 1b).

The west coastal plain or Konkan area

Unlike the Plateau region, the ridge and valley topography of the Konkan precludes the genuine nucleated form found on the plateau. Typical of the region is the twin settlement type in which the parent or main settlement area can be identified as a loosely arranged mass of houses, separated by another distinct but smaller cluster of sche-



duled caste houses. There is only a single scheduled caste cluster which is invariably located at some distance apart from the main settlement area, and at the same time separated by a very real natural barrier in the form of a nala, stream, marshy or bottom lands, even a small ridge or broken ground. The twin settlement form of the Konkan is attributed mainly to two causes: Firstly the terrain which brings about near total physical segregation between the two settlements. Another commonly observed feature of the Konkan village is the poor representation of the scheduled castes in general,

due in part to the limitations imposed by meagre amount of cultivable land. This in turn has given rise to smaller size of villages, which have a restricted potential for the services offered by the scheduled castes. Hence for most Konkan villages it is not uncommon to find either total absence or only one of the major scheduled caste which (mostly Chamar) performs all the services carried out by the different scheduled castes. Unlike the plateau area, occupational specialization among them is totally absent here. Also, the location of the scheduled caste hamlet is in most cases

where the boundaries of two or three villages meet so that they can offer services to an enlarged clientele. The near absence of cattle power for agricultural operations in the Konkan further inhibits the total number and kinds of scheduled castes represented. All these factors have combined to give rise to the twin settlement form with the bigger cluster composed of other castes, while the scheduled castes form the smaller cluster (Fig. 4).

The Maval area or the ghat zone of the Sahyadris

In these parts the steep and rugged terrain has given rise to a unique terraced structure of scheduled caste hamlets. Like any other Maval village, the general settlement pattern of the area is of a dispersed type, with the nature of the terrain itself conducive to bringing about residential segregation among the different scheduled castes. In the village, the houses of caste Hindus are generally found lined up along the main road. The location on slightly raised ground in an area of copious rainfall seems desirable. Here, drinking water is close at hand and accessibility fairly good. From the road, as one proceeds upwards (towards the hill slopes) there is observed a distinct stratification of hamlets in a step like fashion, beginning with the cluster of Chamars, Mahars, Mangs and lastly the Tribals (locally called Thakars) occupying the hill tops. The spatial arrangement of the various scheduled castes denotes their relative rank in the caste hierarchy, which is determined by the amount of skill required for the occupation practised and its utility to the farmer. In the caste hierarchy, the Chamar is at the top, (most skilled), since he manufactures only finished goods; the Mahar comes next in rank, being the extractor of leather, while the Mang occupies the lowest rung of the scheduled caste hierarchy. This occupational

hierarchy amongst them is clearly reflected in the hierarchical structure of scheduled caste settlement in the Maval zone (Fig. 3).
Changing locations of scheduled caste exclaves

Apart from the four distinct space patterns associated with the major physiographic units in Maharashtra, one finds that the relative location of the scheduled caste exclave is fast undergoing change. Today the scheduled castes in many instances occupy a more central rather than the earlier peripheral position, especially in the case of villages along the highway. Village Wagholi, on the Poona-Ahmednagar Highway (twelve km to the north east of Poona) is used to exemplify the continuum that is evolving in the settlement pattern (Fig. 5).

At Wagholi, the *gaothan* or the main settlement is an area where absentee ownership and deteriorating housing quality (as seen from the numerous ruins in the main settlement area) are common features. This is because of the large land holders flight from the main *gaothan* to the *wadis* (dispersed hamlets in the fields) and to the city nearby. Government highway construction programme has further stimulated the exodus of the high castes and land owners from their traditional overcrowded residences in the village to either the highway location or to form the dispersed hamlets in the *wadis* on their agricultural lands. Since the scheduled castes still continue to reside at their original location with the new outward development beyond, their exclaves now occupy a more central rather than the earlier peripheral position. Today, it is the high castes who find themselves in the interior, inaccessible and disadvantageous position, while the scheduled castes are enjoying the more open and central location along the main arteries of transport.

Note : *Konkan* is the narrow coastal strip between the Sahyadris and the Arabian sea. *Maval* is the hilly region lying immediately to the east of the Western ghats crestline *Plateau* is Upland Maharashtra plateau, east of Maval.

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