

CHAPTER - II

CASTE AND ECONOMIC IDENTITY OF THE MARWARI COMMUNITY

Technically, the inhabitants of Marwar should be termed as Marwaris. But generally it is a common practice to term the inhabitants hailing from the state of Rajasthan and its adjoining places, as Marwaris, though Marwar was technically an old state of Jodhpur in Rajasthan. The Marwari expert Thomas A. Timberg writes, " Since significant groups of traders and industrialists came from the Shekhavati region of the neighbouring states of Jaipur and Bikaner and other areas of Rajasthan, there has been a tendency to join all these Rajasthani emigrants under the rubric of Marwar. In colloquial usage, outside of Rajasthan, Marwari is used to refer to emigrant businessmen from the vicinity of Rajasthan." (1) A recent researcher on the Marwaris, Dr. D.K. Taknet, identifies the Marwaris in the following way: The word Rajputana' symbolises the national fervour. Marwar is confined to the geographical and cultural aspects of Rajasthan. In fact, three factors - language, geography, and the exclusive social caste phenomena - constitute the Marwaris who use dialects spoken all over Rajasthan except for Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli regions. Some people living in Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and a few parts of M.P. have their origin in Marwar and have similar life styles and traditions. (2) According to All India Marwari Yuba Manch, all persons

having adopted the lifestyle, language or culture of Rajsthan, Haryan, Malwa in Madhya Pradesh or nearby regions and who themselves or whose forefathers living whether in India or any part of the world, would be identified as the "Marwaris". (3)

The Marwaris are a community by themselves in India and they are separated by caste, religion, ritual, regional and economic differences and like all the communities living in India, the Marwari community too is divided by several castes or 'Jatis'. Like the Rig Vedic Aryans, this community was divided into four casts or varnas, viz. the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Sudras. The Brahmins were at the top of the Society, having taught the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, observed religious customs and rituals, and worshipped gods and goddesses. The mostly lived by remuneration or lands provided either by the state or by royal families.

The Kshatriyas were the protectors of the societies and their social status was next to that of the Brahmins. Members of this caste were known as the Rajputs who had a glorious past, bravery, self-sacrifices and chivalry. The Rajput women once glorified their womanhood by performing the horrible rite 'Jauhar' (Jawaharbrata) to preserve their chastity from the Muslim miscreants. This practice has proved their bravery, devotion, patriotism and heroism and this heroic posture of the Rajputs helped them in

future to take part in the heroic venture of trade and commerce which is full of risk and adventure. Dr. Taknet truly writes, "A glorious tradition of gallantry has been set by the martial castes of Shekhawati like the Rajputs, the Jats, the Yadavas, the Kayamkhanis and the Gujars. The Kshatriyas have continued the tradition till date, though other castes have also not lagged behind".(4)

The Vaishyas had been ranked third in the list of social composition. Later, they became Mahajans or money lenders. But basically, they were traders and were connected with both export and import business and to some extent with retail and wholesale trade and that is why they are often called "Baniyas". Among the four castes of the Marwaris, they were the pioneers who had migrated to every nook and corner in India in quest of career in the 19th century. Perhaps there is no periphery in India where they did not migrate. The discomfiture of the geographical conditions had created in them, since their birth, the spirit of enterprise, adventure, hardwork, fortitude, frugality, adjustment, money saving tendency and it admits of no doubt that all these human qualifications are earnestly required for a man or a community to achieve success in trade and commerce.

And the sudras were the last in social ranking. They were the backward class people in the society and their major duty was to serve the other communities.

Howerer, the traditional or ancient caste -composition did not remain unaltered in modern times and a kind of inter - caste toleration among the various castes, and sub castes of the Marwaris grew up with the passage of time. There are instances of taking to money - lending as a profession by the Brahmins. So also the Kshatriyas are taking up business as an occupation. Generally speaking, there are at present only two wings of the Marwari Community as a whole the Brahmins and the Vaishyas. The Brahmins generally perform religious duties and rituals, though again many of them are inclined to seek employment and some also do business, specially hotel business by opening a 'Dhaba.' (5)

The Vaishyas are sub - divided into a few categories, such as Agarwals, Maheswaris, Oswals, Khandelwals, Porwals, an so on. Of them the Oswals are Jains and the rest are Hindus. The Agarwals are the followers of Raja Agrasena of Agroa which is situated in Haryana and that is why, their surname is 'Agarwal'. At first, Agrasena was a Kshatriya but for some reason or the other, he gave up 'Kshatra - Achara' and became a Vaishya. The Maheswaris are the devotees of god Maheswara (Siva) and for this reason, they commemorate the day 'Mahesh Navami' of every year as the inaugural date of their society. According to a legend, they were transformed from Rajputs to Vaishyas by the grace of god 'Mahesh' (Siva). The Jains are sub divided into two sects - oswals and saraogis and of them again

some belong to setambar and some to Digambar sects. Though by religion they are Jains, by practice, they are, to some extent Hindus. Among the Marwaris in general the folk-god 'Hanumanji' has been very popular. (6)

One may be curious to know why the Marwaris took to business as their occupation. Socio economic compulsions, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, no doubt provided an inducement to go into business, but perhaps a positive inducement also came from their religion. Jainism preached non-violence (Ahimsa) according to which the killing of any creature is a great sin. The vow of non-violence was so rigid that even an unconscious killing of an ant, while walking, was regarded as a sin. Non-violence was an obsession with the Jains, and they wore a muslin mask which covered the mouth and nose to prevent the involuntary inhalation of even microscopic insects. So agriculturalists could not opt for Jainism as cultivation involved killing insects and pests. Jainism also denied crafts as a profession, for, it endangers the life of other creatures, which meant committing of vice. Even ownership of land was very much limited within the fold of Jainism. So with the prohibition on farming, craftsmanship and restriction on ownership of land, trade and commerce was only possible occupation open to the Jains and the encouragement of frugality prescribed by Jainism also coincided with a proclivity to take up commerce as an occupation. For these reasons, Jainism spread rapidly

among the trading community to which the Marwaris belonged. The discovery of new routes and the revival of old routes were further incentives to trade.(7) The Jains became gradually experts in the purchase and sale of manufactured goods as bankers and in the job as middle men. Thus Jainism became interlinked with the spread of city culture. The prospect of maritime commerce was bright on the west coast of India, where the Jains became the money lenders while others sailed for overseas with their merchandise.(8) The Marwari community initially was of Jain faith, though caste-division had been a later development. Naturally, they opted for trade and commerce, the only possible occupation open to them.

The first step of the emergence of Marwaris was their migration between Rajputana and Bengal or, broadly speaking, between Rajputana and the rest of India. This outmigration is essentially understood as a movement of the Marwari community into different parts of India, particularly into Bengal, in search of opportunity for industry, trade and commerce. (9) Timberg also writes, "Thousands of merchant caste members from the north-western states of Rajasthan (Bikaner, Jaipur, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur) moved east and south. (10) However, the Marwari connection with Bengal may be traced back to the 18th century when the seths or scions of the House of Jagat Seth originally hailing from Marwar served as bankers to the Nawabs of Bengal. (11) But that does not mean

that the Marwaris, before their out migration all over India, were altogether without a trading background. Dr. N.K. Sinha has explained this in an introductory note of a book. In his opinion, Marwar enjoyed a considerable volume of trade during the Mughal period. Its chief mart was Pali which connected the west Indian sea coast with northern India. Dr. Sinha quotes Tod in the following manner : " Pali was the entrepot for eastern and western regions where the production of India, Kashmir and China (Tibet?) were interchanged for those of Europe, Africa, Persia, and Arabia. Caravans (Katars) from the ports of Cutch and Gujarat imported elephants' teeth, copper, dates, gum -arabic, borax, coconuts, broad cloths, silks, sandalwood, camphor, dyes, drugs, oxide, sulphate of arsenic, spices, coffee, etc. In exchange they received chintzes, dried fruits, Jira (assafoetida from Multan) , sugar, opium (from Kota and Malwa), silks and fine cloth, potash, shawls, dyed blankets, arms and salt of home manufacture ". Thus the sons of Marwar learnt how to earn money by trade. This knowledge, stood them in good stead in the 18th century. (12)

In this perspective, a question might arise as to why the sons of Marwar left their native land in search of livelihood after enjoying a brisk trade during the Mughal period or, what happened in Marwar that forced or pushed its inhabitants to migrate elsewhere. Two factors might have been responsible for this kind of movement : (1)

Population of Marwar had been increasing day by day in such a way that it could no longer be sustained with the limited economic resources that Marwar had (II) Marwar had lost its importance as a trading centre. That these two factors were at work seems quite possible. The following Table will substantiate the first point:

TABLE

Census Year	Population	Variation	
		Absolute	Percentage
1901	10,294,090	-	-
1911	10,983,509	+ 689,419	+ 6.70
1921	10,292,648	- 690,861	- 6.29
1931	11,747,974	+ 1,455,326	+ 14.14
1941	13,863,859	+ 2,115,885	+ 18.01
1951	15,970,774	+ 2,106,915	+ 15.20
1961	20,155,602	+ 4,184,828	+ 26.20
1971	25,765,806	+ 5,610,204	+ 27.83
1981	34,261,862	+ 8,496,056	+ 24.80
1991	43,880,640	+ 9,618,778	+ 21.92

Source: Census of India, relevant years.

The furnished table regarding the growth of population in Rajasthan during the past 60 years, i.e. from 1901 to 1961 reveals that population has increased by 95.8%. The break down caused to its growth between the decades 1911 - 1921 was due to famine and epidemics. But the population had been constantly growing since 1921. The highest rise of 27.83% had been recorded during the period 1961 -1971.

As regards the second point, we may postulate that Marwar lost its importance as a trading centre and obviously this coincided with the shift of Bengal's trade from west to east. This theory was propounded by Prof. H. Furber many years back. According to him this tendency of east ward trade was the almost simultaneous concomitant of the decline of trade in the west. (13)

Bengal had extensive trading operations with the western region since the 17th century. Bengal's market lay to the west of cape - comorin, the ports of Western India, specially Surat and those on the Persian gulf or the Red Sea. But it is not that Bengal had no trading relation at all with the east. Bengal had markets to the east of the straits of Malacca, ports in Malaya and Indonesia and above all, Manila in the Philippine Islands and canton in china. Around the Bay of Bengal itself, South Eastern India, Burma and West coast of Sumatra, Calcutta ships traded extensively. (14) Still Bengal's volume of trade with the west, do doubt, surpassed, in massive proportions the volume of trade with the East. However, Bengal's trade with the west sharply declined about the middle of the 1730s. A few reasons have been cited by P.J. Marshall to explain this decline. (1) Asian sea borne trade was a vulnerable business at any time. Hence its operation was laborious, hazardous, risky and expensive, and its success depended on large profits. Moreover, piracy was a recurring problem to which was added the danger of French attack

during the Anglo French war. Again, missing a ship in the sea meant serious hardship for many people in Calcutta. No less calamitous were the mishaps. So long as prosperous years followed one after another, the losses could be covered. But once the bad season started, trade would fall into a crisis. (II) Political instability was a deadly disrupter of trade and this instability was caused by war and disorder. By the middle of the 18th century, all Bengal's Markets in Western Asia were threatened. In the 1720s, the Maratha drive to the North put Gujarat in a period of civil strife and foreign invasion. Violence spread to Surat itself. Mughal rule was overthrown there in 1758. Eighteenth Century Iran suffered from Afghan invasion, wars against Turks and Russians. Basra Bengal's alternative port on the Persian Gulf was threatened by Arab insurrections against the Turks. There was civil war in Yemen. The rapacity of the ports at Jidda and Mocha made trade to the Red Sea precarious. So this political instability disrupted the ports of Bengalee merchants and the lines of communications by camel, bullock or river boat. By the middle of the 18th century, all Bengal's markets in Western Asia were threatened by the political instability.

(III) The Turkish Empire also suffered on the Eastern frontier. From this end, Bengal's Merchandise were transferred to different regions, viz. Egypt, Babylon etc. But the revolt in Egypt and its dislocation led to the

disruption of trade. The Caravan trade in Cairo, Suez and Baghdad also deteriorated. The local trade organisation was responsible for this decline. According to Verelst, Bengal's trade with Persian Gulf and Red Sea Region declined by about 80 p.c.

(IV) In the 1740s, the effect of rising prices in Bengal itself was a potent cause for the decline of Western Trade. The price of Bengal Sugar increased by 50 p.c. The price of raw silk increased by 40 p.c. and the price of Bengal's cotton piecegoods increased by 30 p.c. These commodities lost their markets in Western India and Persian Gulf. So mounting political disturbances and rising prices began to erode Bengal's trade to the Western Indian Ocean from the mid-1730s. (15)

These are the possible reasons for the decline of Bengal's trade with the west. But simultaneously something must have happened in the East, which created conditions for the shift of Bengal's trade from West to East. This shifting was determined by British needs. The Calcutta shipowners operated along routes which had been established by the Asian Merchants, carrying Asian freight or goods which would be sold in Bengal's traditional markets. But after the conquest of Bengal, the wealth which the British acquired and the control which they won over some Bengal's commodities, such as opium, enabled them to begin to carve out routes of their own. Trade between Calcutta and Malaya and Indonesia were essentially British creations in re-

sponse to British needs.

The background of the shift resulted from Bengal's expanding trade with China and other zones. Marshall writes, "The rise of Calcutta's trade with China was a response to two developments : to the increasing needs of East India Company for funds at Canton with which to purchase cargoes of tea for London, and of the makers of fortunes in Bengal to find new ways of transferring money to Britain".

(16) As it was a trade connected with Bengal, Canton and England, this kind of trade would better be called the triangular trade system.

The East India Company's trade in China was mainly concentrated on the purchase of tea and silk for London and the continental market of Europe. So money was badly needed to finance the tea purchasing. After the grant of Diwani to the company, the court of Directors ordered the Bengal Council to ship Rs.4000,000 annually to Canton, out of what was assumed to be the surplus of Bengal's revenue, to finance the purchase of tea. In the first two or three years, the council could comply with the request. But after 1768, the Bengal council was in no position to provide sums of this order due to an acute silver scarcity and scarcity due to tax difficulties and the company's involvement in recurring wars. So in 1773, it had decided that money remitted to Canton must largely be provided by private individuals. A number of schemes were devised to

attract private money from Bengal to Canton. But this dependence was not the solution. It soon became apparent that if bills on London at a reasonable rate of exchange were freely available at canton, large sums from calcutta would find their own way there. At last a substitute was found in the export of opium to China. Opium was the only Bengal commodity which sold extensively in China. (17)

This shift of Bengal's trade from West to East coincided with the decline of Western Trade and as a corollary to this fact, Marwar, which enjoyed a brisk trade during the Mughal period, gradually lost its importance as a trading and commercial centre. At the same time, this shift created new avenues for commercial enterprises which in its turn attracted commercial communities to migrate here and needless to say, the Marwaris with their shrewd business acumen were quick to seize this opportunity.

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