

Social Economic Mobility of Halpati Tribe of South Gujarat Region

Dr. Manoj Sharma^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Mainly I Halpati tribe is considered as agriculture labourer in the region under study which includes Valsad, Surat and Bharuch District. Earlier Halpati's used to be called 'Dubla' which is derogatory name in the social set up of the region. Interestingly the Halpati's are not in real Sense tribe, however, they are not even considered as a segment of hindu caste fold.

Mostly the Halpati's are integral part of 'hali system'. However, before independence, the hali system disappeared due to the increasing market production and system that caused to disappearance of traditional arrangement that was based on mutual obligation in the field of obligation, polity and culture. Over a period of time the relation between landlord and hali gradually crystalized as a contextual and impersonal in every walk of life. The present paper makes an attempt to understand economic, political and cultural changes in the region in between landlord and the halpati. In the year 1961, social work among the Halpati's has been done to organize them. From the social work perspective with the help of Halpati Seva Sang, Bardaoli. In spite of that, the Halpati's have not recognised these organization, therefore, the effort of the Halpati Seva Sang could not take it as a social movement and was limited to mobilise the people of Halpati at grass root levels.

Keywords: *Social movment, hali system, HSS*

So far as the Halpati's are concerned, there are marked differences among the tribal communities. Unlike the Halpatis, who were accommodated at the bottom of Hindu society long ago, the tribal's living in the eastern parts where the country becomes increasingly infertile and hilly - succeeded in increasingly maintaining a position of semi-independence well into the nineteenth century. Only gradually were they subjugated as sharecroppers and tenants by penetrating caste Hindus.

The Halpatis are not really Adivasi's on the other hand they are not considered by the caste population of the central belt to be full-fledged Hindus. The ambivalent way in which the Halpatis are ranked in the social order indicates their dependent and inferior position. Most

¹Assistant Prof (Adhoc) M.S.W Programme, Sociology Department, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat Gujarat, India

[*Corresponding Author](#)

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probably, their low level of existence has prevented a more rapid process of Hinduisation in their case.

Agricultural labourers have usually been in the employment of the bigger land-owners. Their masters are nearly always Anavil Brahmans or Kanbi Patidars, members of the dominant castes of Bulsar and Surat districts. The dependence of the labourers was institutionalised in the hali system mechanisation of agriculture during the last few decades resulted in the disintegration of the hali system. Intervention in local affairs played a limited role in this process of change. A more important factor was the commercialisation of agriculture. Increasing market production put an end to the traditional arrangements that were based on widely varying mutual obligations of an economic, political, cultural, and social nature. The relations between dhautiamo and hali landlord and labourer gradually became more contractual and impersonal. The daily grain allowance which, together with other daily and seasonal perquisites, guaranteed a subsistence livelihood for the halpatis, was transformed into a wage paid in cash, in exchange for a more specific labour performance. The firm and intimate bonds between the households of land lords and their labourers, often continued from generation to generation, dissolved to be replaced by loose and limited contacts. The percentage of casual wage earners rapidly increased. To the extent that farm servants are still required, they are hired nowadays on a contractual basis.

In the emergence of who HSS advocated higher wages for the landless proletariat. However, when agricultural labourers go on strike somewhere to reinforce their claims, the social workers intervene in order to prevent rising tensions and to reach a compromise. Self-respect and class consciousness are not taught. On the contrary, the organisation does not aim at making the Halpatis able to stand up for themselves, aware of their exploitation and oppression, but envisages their adjustment to the social system without any fundamental change in their dependence. It is seen that the rural elite does not take very kindly to the existence of the HSS, even if no threat to the status quo emanates from it. But, says the present leader meaningfully, it is due to the absence of communist influences among the Halpatis that the organisation is assured of support by the government and does not meet with more obstruction on the part of the landlords. The mobilisation of the labourers is non-antagonistic in nature. The Gandhian principles of arbitration, compromise, and avoidance of open clashes between the parties concerned form the basis of this policy. In the Gandhian ideology, the class struggle is not so much strategically unjustified as immoral. In the conservative South Gujarat, to speak of an unbridgeable cleft between rich and poor is nearly viewed as sinful.

Whereas some decades ago the voluntary social workers in the villages followed Gandhi in stressing their spiritual guidance, they have since Independence narrowed down their role to that of local-level politicians. In a slightly different way the Gandhian movement itself has undergone professionalization. IP Desai, in a very interesting study, has described this pro.

cess of change and its implications.⁴ Referring to the ashrams' staff workers of today, he says, "The social worker is likely to be a paid worker and organiser, committed to fixed, assigned duties, rather than the Gandhian missionary type, which is becoming a historical type." The transition outlined by him from movement to organisation is very pronounced in the case of social work among the Halpatis.

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The local workers represent the 1-ISS in the villages. The contacts with the agricultural labourers are indirect, that is to say, through those who have come to therefore as leaders in one or more neighbourhoods (phalsas). They are visited in the villages or asked to come to the small office of the local branch in the taluka for consultation. So, this informal leadership can only be fulfilled by Halpatis who are not directly dependent on the landlords. Another condition is that they must have enough time to maintain their contacts. A Halpati is not recognised as a leader either inside or outside village until he proves that he is the member of the village. Since communication is verbal he has to be out most of the time, keeping up with the neNvs, maintaining and extending his channels of information. Some ability to read is a real asset, and he must at least be able to put his signature. Finally, all my informants asserted that a certain amount of "culture" was required: a leader must know how to behave in his contacts with outsiders.

These seems to be only channel through which the labourers can obtain benefits. But very clearly they have their own interests, and these do not always run parallel to those of the labourers. They are often blamed for being agents of those in authority. It would, therefore, be incorrect to believe that the Halpati influential enjoy the confidence of their fellow caste members this goes even more for the workers of the HSS, who are in fact identified with the government officials of the high castes, The local staff members also behave like minor officials. Dressed in tery lenle trousers, shoes, socks and shirts, and armed with plastic bricefeases with fountain-Pens in their breast pockets, they address the Halpatis on their rounds though the villages. Reprimandingly, because they do not send their children to school. or encouragingly hen it is question of a bhajan mandli to be formed, but always as their superiors, Some ability to read is a real asset, and he must at least be able to put his signature. Some ability to read is a real asset, and he must at least be able to put his signature. Their audience is silent, smiles diffidently, or shows signs of muted agreement. Behind their backs the Halpatis - those at least that know about the existence of the HSS - complain of the carelessness, arrogance, and also the corruption of the cadre. The Halpatis are as wary of them as they are themselves of voluntary social workers and politicians from the higher castes. The Halpatis have not much cause to regard the HSS as an organisation that fights for their interests. For them it is an obscure body, affiliated with the government and representing external interests. It is therefore doubtful whether the HSS may be called an emancipation movement at all. Its aims and methods rather seem to prevent mobilisation. With the above, the HSS would seems to stand condemned, but any such judgment must be modified by a paradigm of possible alternatives. First of all, the situation of pauperism as such prevents the agricultural labourers from reaching solidarity on a class basis. In such a situation of such extreme scarcity, how could we expect them to mobilise on their own? To be sure dissatisfaction among them is clearly growing. But it still expresses itself in disconnected incidents. particularly in strikes that flare up suddenly but remain limited to one village and soon fall flat when the landlords engage labourers from elsewhere. There is further, little like livelihood that the bargaining power of agricultural labourers may be strengthening by their joining forces. on their own initiative, with castes of small landowners. Their economic interests differ too much for that, and their social distance is too great.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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