CURRENT CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This present paper explores the current caste system influence the religion, political, economical and social. It influences based on our classification of caste. It is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a lifestyle which often includes an occupation, status in a hierarchy, and customary social interaction and exclusion. The caste system divides Hindus into four main categories - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. Many believe that the groups originated from Brahma, the Hindu God of creation, the Kshatriyas, or the warriors and rulers, supposedly from his arms The Indian society is characterized by the caste system, agrarian class structure, urbanization, multiplicity of religions, a variety of regional cultures, joint family, spiritual outlook and superstition, and resistance to change in tradition. India is a country of unity in diversity. However, modernization is evident and social transformation has brought in its wake, problems and conflicts – features of the present day Indian society.

Keywords: *Caste System, Social stratification, and religion.*

INTRODUCTION

Current Caste System has become very rigid and inflexible in India with the result that it has converted itself into casteism. It is this rigidity in current casteism system, which resulted in untouchability and superiority complex and hierarchy. It checked mobility in society and promoted caste conflicts for establishing supremacy. Casteism is now quite visible and very much in operation in our social, economic and political life. In spite of the fact that in theory it is being much criticized and condemned, in practice it is still very much deep-rooted in society and has become its integral part. Caste has been the basis of Hindu society since Vedic times. After independence, the Indian Constitution sought to establish a more egalitarian society by according special privileges to the backward castes so that they could overcome the disabilities suffered due to centuries of discrimination. However, the Mandal report has again brought the issue of caste to the forefront.

The Mandal report sought to provide the backward classes with reservation in Central Government jobs. But it provoked strenuous opposition by the upper castes, manifesting it in horrifying self immolations by scores of young upper caste students. Despite wide ranging legislation and even special machinery for implementation and monitoring casteism has become more entrenched in modern India than ever before endangering the very unity of India. Immediate abolition of Caste System and Untouchability from the current Indian scenario is only a wishful thinking. For centuries it has remained in our society and to think that a psychological change can come by legal measures is a difficult proposition. The people will have to be mentally prepared for this change and for that many efforts are needed. All that can be said is that the ground has been laid and unless constant efforts and Endeavour's are made the good work done will be lost to society.

CASTE SYSTEM

The leaders of independent India decided that India will be democratic, socialist and secular country. According to this policy there is a separation between religion and state. Practicing untouchability or discriminating a person based on his caste is legally forbidden. Along with this law the government allows positive discrimination of the depressed classes of India. The Indians have also become more flexible in their caste system customs. In general the urban people in India are less strict about the caste system than the rural. In cities one can see different caste people mingling with each other, while in some rural areas there is still discrimination based on castes and sometimes also on untouchability. Sometimes in villages or in the cities there are violent clashes which, are connected to caste tensions. Sometimes the high castes strike the lower castes who dare to uplift their status. Sometimes the lower caste gets back on the higher castes.

In modern India the term caste is used for Jat and also for Varna. The term, caste was used by the British who ruled India until 1947. The British who wanted to rule India efficiently made lists of Indian communities. They used two

terms to describe Indian communities. Castes and Tribes. The term caste was used for Jats and also for Varnas. Tribes were those communities who lived deep in jungles, forests and mountains far away from the main population and also communities who were hard to be defined as castes for example communities who made a living from stealing or robbery. These lists, which the British made, were used later on by the Indian governments to create lists of communities who were entitled for positive discrimination. The castes, which were the elite of the Indian society, were classified as high castes. The other communities were classified as lower castes or lower classes. The lower classes were listed in three categories.

The first category is called Scheduled Castes. This category includes in it communities who were untouchables. In modern India, untouchability exists at a very low extent. The untouchables call themselves Dalit, meaning depressed. Until the late 1980s they were called Harijan, meaning children of God. This title was given to them by Mahatma Gandhi who wanted the society to accept untouchables within them. The second category is Scheduled Tribes. This category includes in it those communities who did not accept the caste system and preferred to reside deep in the jungles, forests and mountains of India, away from the main population. The Scheduled Tribes are also called Adivasi, meaning aboriginals. The third category is called sometimes Other Backward Classes or Backward Classes. This category includes in it castes who belong to Sudra Varna and also former untouchables who converted from Hinduism to other religions. This category also includes in it nomads and tribes who made a living from criminal acts.

According to the central government policy these three categories are entitled for positive discrimination. Sometimes these three categories are defined together as Backward Classes. 15% of India's population is Scheduled Castes. According to central government policy 15% of the government jobs and 15% of the students admitted to universities must be from Scheduled Castes. For the Scheduled Tribes about 7.5% places are reserved which is their proportion in Indian population. The Other Backwards Classes are about 50% of India's population, but only 27% of government jobs are reserved for them. Along with the central government, the state governments of India also follow a positive discrimination policy. Different states have different figures of communities entitled for positive discrimination based on the population of each state. Different state governments have different lists of communities entitled for positive discrimination. Sometimes a specific community is entitled for rights in a particular state but not in another state of India.

In modern India new tensions were created because of these positive discrimination policies. The high caste communities feel discriminated by the government policy to reserve positions for the Backward Classes. In many cases a large number of high caste members compete for a few places reserved for them. While the Backward Classes members do not have to compete at all because of the large number of reserved places for them compared to the candidates. Sometimes in order to fill the quota, candidates from the lower classes are accepted even though they are not suitable. Sometimes some reserved positions remain unmanned because there were few candidates from the lower classes causing more tension between the castes. Between the lower castes there are also tensions over reservation.

In the order of priority for a reserved place of the Backward Classes, candidate from the Scheduled castes is preferred over a candidate from the Scheduled Tribes who is preferred over a candidate from the other Backward Classes. As stated earlier Other Backward Classes are about 50% of India's population but only 27% of the Other Backward Classes are entitled for positive discrimination according to central government policy. Some Other Backward Classes communities are organizing politically to be recognized as Backward Classes entitled for positive discrimination. The Scheduled Tribes who are seen as the aborigins of India got ownership and certain rights over Indian land. Many communities in India claim also to be aborigins of India and they are claiming the same rights as the Scheduled Tribes.

The caste identity has become a subject of political, social and legal interpretation. Communities who get listed as entitled for positive discrimination do not get out of this list even if their social and political conditions get better. In many cases the legal system is involved to decide if a certain person is entitled for positive discrimination. But with all this positive discrimination policy, most of the communities who were low in the caste hierarchy remain low in the social order even today. And communities who were high in the social hierarchy remain even today high in the social hierarchy. Most of the degrading jobs are even today done by the Dalits, while the Brahmans remain at the top of the hierarchy by being the doctors, engineers and lawyers of India.

SCHEDULED CASTES OR DALIS AND SCHEDULED TRIBES OR ADIVASI

According to census 2011 broadly reveals that members of the SC/ST communities in the country are moving towards cities and are gaining better education. On the flip side, there are concerns on the sex ratio and spread of education for women. The move towards the cities should not be a surprise. Dalit movement founder Dr. B R Ambedkar urged his followers to pursue education as a means of escaping from poverty. He also encouraged them

to move to the cities as they would experience fewer caste restrictions there. The SC and ST list is prepared by each state and Union Territory under Article 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India. Hence, every year, new castes are added and removed from the lists. 20 new castes and 41 new tribes that have been added from 2002-2008 by states/UTs have been included in Census 2011. This has led to SCs increasing from 1,221 to 1,241 and STs increasing from 664 to 705 in the last decade. When the first list was made after independence in 1950, the total number was 1,108 under scheduled castes and 744 under scheduled tribes.

We can see that the ST population increased from 30.1 million to 104.2 million between 1961 and 2011. And the percentage of ST population to the whole population increased from 6.9% to 8.6%.

A similar pattern can be seen with the SC population where it increased from 64.4 million in 1961 to 201.3 million in 2011. As a percentage to the whole population, it increased from 14.7% to 16.6% in that period. The majority of SCs and STs live in rural areas though the population growth rate is the highest in urban areas with 41.3% for SCs and 49.7% for STs. Urban areas have seen the highest increase in SC and ST population, and a major factor responsible for this is migration. Among states, Punjab has reported the highest percentage to total state's population with 31.9% as SCs (and the state has not reported any ST population) while Mizoram reported only 0.1% of their population as SC. One reason Punjab is witnessing an increase in SC population is possibly in response to demands to bring more communities under the classification. This could be happening elsewhere too. In case of STs, Mizoram reported the highest percentage to total of state's population with 94.4% (this could be explained by the fact that most of Mizoram falls in the tribal belt) while Uttar Pradesh reported the lowest population percentage with 0.6%. In Punjab (2001), Mazhabi was numerically the largest SC, constituting 31.6% of the total SC population, followed by Chamar (26.2%), Adharmi (14.9%), Balmiki (11.2%) and Bazigar (3%). UP had the highest share of SCs of the country with 20% followed by West Bengal with 10%. Madhya Pradesh had the highest share of STs of the country with 14.7% followed by the Maharashtra with 10.7

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. All societies arrange their members in terms of superiority, inferiority and equality. Stratification is a process of interaction or differentiation whereby some people come to rank higher than others. In one word, when individuals and groups are ranked, according to some commonly accepted basis of valuation in a hierarchy of status levels based upon the inequality of social positions, social stratification occurs. Social stratification means division of society into different strata or layers. It involves a hierarchy of social groups. Members of a particular layer have a common identity. They have a similar life style. The Indian Caste system provides an example of stratification system. The society in which divisions of social classes exist is known as a stratified society. Modern stratification fundamentally differs from stratification of primitive societies. Social stratification involves two phenomena (i) differentiation of individuals or groups on the basis of possession of certain characteristics whereby some individuals or groups come to rank higher than others, (ii) the ranking of individuals according to some basis of evaluation. Sociologists are concerned not merely with the facts of social differences but also with their social evaluation.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND FOUR FOLD DIVISION

Social stratification in Indian society and culture is complex because there are factors of class as well as caste involved. The caste system, basically a fourfold division of society into: Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. It was well entrenched by the end of the Rig Vedic period. The Vedic Caste System that was divided into four divisions is still prevalent in Indian Society.

The four Varnas (implying colour) of India developed out of very early Aryan class divisions. The stratification grew more rigid when a situation arose with a dominant "fair" minority striving to maintain its purity and its supremacy over a darker minority. Tribal class divisions hardened and the dark-skinned aboriginal found a place only in the basement of Aryan social structure. Even in the earliest hymns we read of ksatra, the nobility and the vis, the ordinary tribesmen. But the four classes — Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra were crystallizing throughout the Rig Vedic period. In theory the fourfold division was functional.

The Brahmanas was to study and teach, sacrifice, give and teach, sacrifice, give and receive gifts,

The Kshatriya to protect the people, sacrifice and study;

The Vaishya to breed cattle till earth, pursue trade and lend money, though he too may study and sacrifice; The Sudra was to serve the other three classes. Gradually, the system became so deeply entrenched in the social structure that it continues to this day, though the rigidity is gradually being diluted.

DISADVANTAGES OF CAST SYSTEM

1. SOCIAL INEQUALITY: The caste system is responsible for the social inequality or social gap. The high caste people expect the low-caste people to view them with honor. The high caste people do not give equal treatment to low-caste people.

2. DIGNITY OF MANUAL LABOR: The dignity of manual labor is yet to be fully recognized in the minds of certain classes of people. The higher caste people are still averse to perform tasks that involve manual labor.

3. PREVENT LABOR MOBILITY: caste system prevents labor mobility. it restricts the flow of labor from one profession to another according to their economic needs. the wages remain unequal in different professions.

4. RESTRICTED SUPPLY OF LABOR: Since, the people remain stick to their hereditary profession; the supplies of labor do not increase with the increase in demand.

5. HINDERS LARGE-SCALE PRODUCTION: The caste system is based on concept of growth of self-reliant independent workers. The growth of large-scale production becomes difficult.

6. NEGATIVE EFFECT ON ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES: The economic activities of the people are negatively affected because of the caste prejudices.

7. LOW COMPETITION: The economic force of competition does not work properly because of the restrictions of caste-based system.

The solutions to cure the malady of caste system are:

Political parties should stop playing caste-based politics, and not encourage casteism. Magazines, papers and press should promote communal harmony and sense oneness among the people of India.

1. Government and NGOs should promote education. Educated people are less likely to get trapped into the trap of casteism.
2. Mass media campaign to promote caste-harmony would encourage people to live and work together.

RELIGION

ORIGIN: The origin of caste system in India is attributed to the functional division of labor. The population was divided into classes on the basis of functions or occupations of particular families and groups. However, in course of time, these divisions between various sections of the society became very rigid.

Former times: It seems that, in the former times, caste system gave scope for specialization and distributed the work in way that promoted professional skill and expertise. It helped the various art and industries to flourish. Even a least talented person had the opportunity earn his living.

Modern times: In modern society, there is no place for a rigid caste system that hinders adaptability or that restricts a member of the civilized society to choose a particular profession. No one should be forced to adopt or remain in a particular profession for any reason.

Conclusion

The Constitution of India abolished untouchability. The recent years have witnessed some relaxation in caste-restrictions. However, one cannot say the evils of caste-system have been totally eradicated. We hope that a time will come when absolute equality in the matter of earning a livelihood would be enjoyed by all the citizens of our country. And every human being is a energetic and social animal so everyone considered all are equal and should not bias on different human beings, In modern context our society probably change and love for each other at the same time you permanently abolish the caste system.

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