SOCIAL PROCESS OF CHANGE IN CASTE SYSTEM AND THE CONCEPTS OF SANSKRITISATION, WESTERNIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

Social change is an inevitable phenomenon, it occurs with the growth of every society. As the developments in political, economic, science and technology come through, the society adapts to these changes. One of the prominent features of Indian civilization is its 'Caste-system'. Caste system is a unique way of stratifying the society. It has been conceptualized, originated and practiced exclusively in India. It has given a distinguished identity to Indian society. Some major approaches and concepts in social change in India are: Sanskritization and Westernization Modernization has given rise to the concept of 'welfare state'; there has been proliferation of governmental responsibility and a growth of new areas of law. There has been a reception, especially in the developing and least developed nations of the ideals of Democracy, Humanism and Constitutionalism. In this research paper new concepts of caste system and lifestyle have been focused.

Key Words: *Social Process, cast system, sanskritisation, westernization, globalization.*

Introduction

Social change is an inevitable phenomenon, it occurs with the growth of every society. As the developments in political, economic, science and technology come through, the society adapts to these changes. The recent trends of change in societies has been due to man-made factors like industrialization and resultant commercialization, urbanization and more recently the phenomenon of globalization,westernization,sanskritisation and modernization which has been the catalyst in a quick and speedy transformation of the Third World societies. Modernization is a kind of social change in where a traditional society inclines to develop new patterns of conduct in response to new challenges of the new age. Few countries in the world have such an ancient, diverse and rich culture as Indians. (Other well advanced civilizations of ancient world were of Egypt, Greece and Mesopotamia).Modern India presents a picture of unity in diversity to which history provides no parallel. India is the birthplace of many religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

As per the famous author **Mark Twain** "India is the cradle of human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legends and the great-grandmother of traditions."

Some major approaches and concepts in social change in India are: 1) Sanskritization and Westernization 2) little and Great Traditions i. Process of Parochialisation and Universalisation ii. Dialectical Approach. Modernization has given rise to the concept of 'welfare state'; there has been proliferation of governmental responsibility and a growth of new areas of law. There has been a reception, especially in the developing and least developed nations of the ideals of Democracy, Humanism, Welfarism and Constitutionalism. New constitutional models have emerged with the sanction of Fundamental Liberties to the citizen's unencroacheable by the State, Check on the powers of the state, ideals of Sovereignty and Secularism knitted into the fabric of the constitution and the wave of reform and rationalization.

One of the prominent features of Indian civilization is its 'Caste-system'. Caste system is a unique way of stratifying the society. It has been conceptualized, originated and practiced exclusively in India. It has given a distinguished identity to Indian society.

How Caste-system has changed its complexion with the changing times continuously, can be seen in its origin and process of evaluation – its origin, and moving through the eras of modernization, Sanskritization and politicization?

Origin of Caste System

Caste-system is very old and indigenous one, conceptualized, developed and practiced exclusively in India. As reflected in 'Rig-Veda', when people ceased to be a wandering people, started the Vedic period – the period when the process of building up socio-political structures and systems started leisurely. It took over about 2000 years (roughly somewhere around 2000 BC to about 600 BC) to develop Vedic culture, its values and systems. This was the time when Hinduism emerged in the scene. Initially people living beyond Indus River were called Hindus and their way of life as Hinduism.

Varna-system giving way to Caste-System – Caste-system came into existence, when numerous racial and other social groups – be it racial, immigrants, locals, tribal or professional desired to join the main-steam of the nation and be an integral part of their cultural system. It took thousands of years to evolve. It was done cordially through caste-system at different points of time. The beauty of the system was that the main society as a whole remained stable, even while offering a place to new groups within the main-stream. Later on, instead of Varna, caste became a dominant factor, a natural unit of Hindu society, running through the entire fabric of its social structure.

Why Caste by Birth – Over the time, due to economic and social reasons, caste system became a hereditary system. Assignment of different functions to different communities led to the transfer of knowledge and expertise through inheritance. It has evolved an atmosphere, where traits of a trade, intelligence abilities, experiences, values and skills were transmitted from one generation to another in a natural way through inheritance. It assigned them duties according to their natural instincts and qualities. It developed in them a feeling of belonging, interdependence and team-spirit.

Hinduism has made numerous new groups its integral part without conversion and brought them under one umbrella. Generation after generation, people of different castes and communities could co-exist despite of numerous foreign invasions, centuries of foreign rule, migrations and assimilation of new groups. Its unity of culture has binded together all people of Indian peninsula from one end to another. It gives the nation a synergetic character, a pluralistic tradition and an absorptive nature of internalizing alien influences.

Almost all the ingredients of good organization are found in the system like "team-spirit", "division of labor", "automatic checks and balances", "to each according to his capacity" etc. Decentralized self-regulated systems directed all activities in social, political, and economic life and controlled its malfunctioning or dis-functioning. Inter-dependence in social life and self-reliance has been the intrinsic features of caste system.

All sects living in India, whether foreign or indigenous, have throughout been greatly influenced by Vedic culture, its thinking, practices and systems. Discipline has been inculcated amongst ignorant masses and a sense of direction was given to them through infinite variety of rituals, prayers, practices, customs and meditation.

Caste system before Westernization

Seventh century onwards, the great Indian civilization gradually declined with the fall of Hindu rulers. Islamic civilization flowered, nourished by the wealth of commerce.

Continuous invasions – The continuous invasions resulted not only in the downfall of Hindus' value system, The whole of medieval period India, especially the western and northern parts faced continuous attacks from the borders – of Turks, Afgans and Mugals – Ghazani (998-1030) and others, establishment of slave dynasty (1206- 1030), Khilji Dynasty (1290-1320), Tuglak Dynasty (1320-1412), Sayyad Dynasty (1414-51), Lodi Dynasty (1451-1526) and Mughal Empire (1526 to 1757). Initially Muslims were interlopers in the subcontinent. They established their empire from the 13th century onwards. For a period of over one thousand years, Islam had walked hand in hand with power.

Widespread misunderstanding gave birth too many social evils, caste-conflicts, feudal oppressions and mass poverty. Continuous loot, arson, killings and violence on poor and women developed feeling of insecurity in Hindus, which led them to religious fundamentalism in order to retain their cultural identity. While living under an alien political order, whether it was Turks, Mughal, Portuguese or British, ignorant masses blindly followed the dictates of Hindu Priests and all the rituals suggested by them. To Hindus, rigidity in observing the rituals appeared as a shield to retain their cultural identity. They rigidly and blindly observed all customs and traditions, which had lost their sanctity in the light of the circumstances of that time. It tended to develop many evil practices in the system.

Rise of communalism – Hindu and Muslim priests arbitrarily distorted and misinterpreted tenets of their respective religions. They purposely highlighted and criticized the differences on the surface like "Hindus are idol worshippers" or Islam believes 'either you are a Muslim or else a Kafir' etc. It tended to make people superstitious.

Westernization of caste-system

Rise of European powers with Renaissance Movement – The Process of Westernization started with the Renaissance during late middle ages in Italy around 14th century. This cultural movement has profoundly affected European intellectual life. It started in Italy, and spread to the rest of Europe by the 17th century.

Europe set out on path of scientific and technological change. Reliance on observation and rationality had led to many inventions in the field of science and technology. The invention of printing, being one of them has helped in the dissemination of ideas from the later 15th century onwards.

Process of Westernization of Caste system

The process of Westernization of caste-system in India began with the frantic efforts of missionaries to convert as many Indians as possible into Christianity and coming of East India Company in India first to trade and later on to increase its political power in India. East India Company successfully established 'British Imperial Rule' in India by 1758.

The rulers adopted the path of 'divide and rule'. The way British governed India, served double purpose for them. They got the credit for amelioration and protection of primitive and inward-looking society of Indians. At the same time, they kept the natives busy in their in-fights.

British rulers devised a novel method to distribute and balance power on 'preferential-basis'. To restrict Brahmin's entry in Government jobs and make it available to non-Brahmins communities, British rulers started practice of "Preferences" by giving non-Brahmins financial assistance and preferences in education and Government employment at local and provincial level. It served double purpose for them – getting credit for amelioration and protection of downtrodden and keeping natives busy in their in-fights. Later on, it gave birth to the 'Policy of Reservations'. This practice was strongly established in the South at provincial level. The patronage of British rulers to non Brahmin castes has already led them to emerge as powerful pressure groups and demand for preferential treatment in education, jobs and elections. It ultimately gave birth to the policy of reservation. 1905 to 1940 was the period, when idea of Reservation/positive discrimination was conceived, experimented and established firmly. It opened up various channels of confrontation.

Sanskritization of Caste system

The form 'Sanskritisation' was first used by Prof M N Srinivas in his book 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs of India'. This book is a study of the Coorgs—a caste like group of people in India occupying the area called Coorg, located on the south west coast. The Coorgs are divided into two sections, one of which is "highly Brahminised in their customs and ritual'. Srinivas says that these Coorgs "exemplify a tendency which has always been present in the caste system; a small group of people break off from a larger whole, of which they are a part. Sanskritise their customs and ritual and achieve a higher status than their parent body in the course of a few decades'".

Sanskritization is the process by which a low caste or tribe or other groups takes over the customs, rituals, beliefs, ideology and life style of a higher caste.

Factors that hastened the process of Sanskritization

Political and Economic Factors; the establishment of British rule in India gave more opportunities to lower castes to sanskritize themselves and raise their social status.

Expanding means of transport and communication too have contributed to the process by the way of new avenues and opportunities of cultures contracts.

Democratic system provided more freedom to choose their own lines and hence more avenues for sanskritization.

However, lower castes aspiring to climb upwards in caste hierarchy have to face hostility from the castes of middle strata. The same from higher castes too when the lower castes try to start using shoes or wear neat and clean clothes.

Lower castes are more liberal, permissive and progressive despite their lower status. They have liberal and positive attitude especially towards the position of women but tend to become conservative by the process of sanskritization.

However, the lower castes besides restoring to sanskritization to acquire higher status in the society, they are also struggling fiercely to retain their backward status for taking advantage of educational concessions and government job.

Modern education, Western literature and philosophy widened the mental horizons of visionary national leaders and reformers. They welcomed rationality and other good features of and made good use of liberal and humanitarian ideas/thoughts of Modern Western World.

On one hand, national leaders got alarmed at the erosion of Indian Culture and divisible policies of the rulers. They realized the impact of British racial discrimination and their repressive policies on the Indian people. The destructive character of British imperialism lit the fire and gave birth to national movement. Economic loot, political

subjugation, assertion of lordly superiority over the subject on the ground of race, assumption of a haughty exclusiveness, persistent insulting and supercilious behavior towards all Indians, exclusion of Indians from all places of authority and responsibility and denial of their capacity for self-governance united Indians against British rule.

On the other, Reformers got alarmed at the erosion of Indian Culture and divisible policies of the rulers. They tried to revive their own rich ancient culture and prevent the masses from being swayed away by the glamour and materialism of alien culture. Social Reformers advised people to remain firmly rooted to the Indian Culture.

The intellectual ferment was strongest in West Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. In 1928, Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded Brahma Samaj in Bengal. He inspired the people of Bengal, UP, Punjab, Madras and other provinces, to form similar organizations and interpret religion rationally. Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra (1867), Arya Samaj in Northern India, Rama Krishna Mission, Theosophical Society of India (1879), Dev Samaj in Lahore and Servants of India Society took up the job to awaken the masses. They talked about the greatness of Hindu Vedic culture and about Vedas as the source of all knowledge and truth. Swami Vivekanand founded the Rama Krishna Mission tried to reveal to the world Indian Philosophy and culture. Some reform institutes like Vivekanand's or Rama Krishna Mission or Theosophical Society of India tried to familiarize the Western World, too, to the charm and graciousness of Indian Culture.

Reformers observed that ignorance, superstitions or irrationality of people was hampering the progress of Indian society. Reformers organized meetings to make people aware of the social evils/real issues. They advocated for giving women their rightful place in society.

Modernization of caste system

As a value, modernization includes secularization of familial bonds; in traditional Indian society, the younger family members and women did not participate in the decision –making process, they had to observe certain norms of conduct while in the company of elders, they had to abide by whatever was predicated by the senior members of the family and the like. In the present Indian set up, these issues are secularized; women are taking active part in the family decision making and are bread earners. Children also have a greater degree of autonomy and say in family matters, especially those concerning their own interest. This is a desirable change brought about by modernization.

Westernization refers to all cultural changes and institutional innovations in India as this country came into political and cultural contract with the western nations especially British.

Westernization includes establishment of scientific, technological and educational institutions, rise of nationalism, new political culture and leadership in the country.

Sanskritization and Westernization

M.N.Srinivas expressed that westernization and sanskritisation were going together. He emphasized the same from the following;

Westernization improved communication and technology; it hastened the process of Sanskritization through religious propaganda and caste and communal congregation.

Higher castes gave up traditional customs and adopted the life style of the westerns. Lower castes aspiring for higher status filled the higher caste vacuum through Sanskritization.

It was observed that the higher caste perhaps to maintain the social distance between them and the lower castes they have adopted the life style of westerns. By the time the lower caste reached their destiny through Sanskritization, the upper castes have vacated that place through westernization. However, aspiring sections of lower castes in towns and cities are going straight to westernization.

Still Caste-system presents one of the oldest social institution and a continuous and uninterrupted living culture still existing in the whole world. The strength of caste system has been proved by the following facts: Despite centuries of foreign rule over 75% of Indian population remains Hindu and have strong feelings for caste-system. Changes must be based on constant interpretation of past experiences and opinions.

Globalization

First of all Globalization is a positive thing and it benefits a country that, for example, specializes in a certain product and then exchange that good with other countries. But it does not only have positive aspects also the disadvantages.

Economic integration and free trade conditions have produced an unstoppable movement towards economic globalization. Most economists applaud the trend, pointing to the modernization and growing wealth that have resulted. But many countries have been forgotten or have even been harmed by globalization. So what have been the positive and negative effects of this globalization trend?

First of all the principal cause and effect of globalization is international trade, which has expanded substantially. A growing trade has often been followed by higher economic growth, although not in all cases. For example: Annual growth rates of GDP in East and Southeast Asia were 6-8 and in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa they averaged less than half a percent per year.

On the other hand there is the unemployment effect. While growing trade has general created more jobs, the parallel growth in competition has forced many companies to fire their workers in order to cut costs, boost efficiency and increase profits. Especially some less-developed countries had to deal with this negative effect. China, which has experienced a strong economic growth in the last years, has begun to struggle with unemployment, particularly in urban areas. So it becomes obvious that globalization is also accompied by negative aspects.

Another point which should be considered when talking about globalization is the income distribution. Experts suggest that the increased trade between North and South has reduced income inequality among skilled and semi-skilled workers in the South. On the other hand it has increased the inequality among such workers in the North. This is because manufactured exports from the South raise demand and wages for workers with only limited skills and education. But the effect in the North is the opposite. There the service and technology industries pay top wages to highly skilled workers but have little use for semi-skilled labor.

There are a lot of other fields where it becomes clear that globalization is followed by a lot of advantages, but also disadvantages. Overall it can be said that globalization appears to have deepened inequalities in the international distribution of income.

Universality means belonging to the world and opening it to humans, their ideas and information and transferring their practices, ideas and trends from their limited space (the homeland, the birthplace or the place of residence) to a wider space throughout which human-beings all human-beings as well as all ideas, information, currents and creeds - move without restrictions or borders what so ever so that the human thought becomes a factor that influences and is influenced by the universal environment as a whole. Communism endeavored to spread its dominion over the world. And now capitalism is poised to be the sole world order However, universalism did not often stem from man's ambitions of forcible expansion on others' land, as was the case of ancient emperors or modern colonizers, nor from man's tyrannical use of indigenous populations to serve his own interests. Universalism rather sought essentially to secure benefits and foster exchange as changing environment entails more diversified and larger prospects to achieve individual and collective purposes in wider and more favorable horizons. In this open world, shared values were spread amongst humankind, without being impeded by borders or stalled by any authority, blockade or restriction. These ideas, ethics, values, principles, religions and theories were described as universal.

Impact of Westernization on Indian Culture

Indian Culture, which is one of the oldest & richest cultures, is now days posing a serious threat as western culture is establishing its strong base in India and slowly and gradually wiping the Indian culture. It had already made its presence in Metro's & now slowly heading towards other parts of India. Westernization has greatly affected our traditions, customs, our family and our respect and love for others. The concept of joint families is fastly decreasing everyone wants to remain aloof from others. Nobody now bother about others and only cares about himself which is totally contradictory to our Indian culture which teaches to be a part of each other Joys and Sorrows to celebrate the moments together and share the grief together. Slowly all our value for which India has the pride is vanishing & western culture is taking its place. People are blindly following the western culture without knowing its consequences. Westernization has given rise to single families. Marriages are fastly breaking & our tolerance and patience has given the answer. The most affected are our new blooms, which have sprouted they find themselves stressed and isolated in this new atmosphere as there is no one to take care of them At different phases of growth the processes of change have affected the various aspects of society.

The processes of social change like: Modernization, Westernization, Urbanization and Sanskritization have contributed a lot in changing the Society. In the decade of 90's, the policy of Liberalization in the economic field, has resulted in frequent exchanges and a huge increase in the import-export between nations, and the development of various modes of communication has made the social exchanges between nations possible and easy. These social contacts have been defined in the form of globalization have also influenced the different aspects of Indian society. Westernization is effecting one of the oldest and richest cultures and taking away the traditions, customs, and family values that were once predominant in traditional Indian culture It is very unfortunate that today's generation has very little knowledge about their culture, traditions & their roots. This is not their mistake but the mistake of their parents who does not enlighten their children about their roots about their rich cultural heritage. Modernization involves a transformation in beliefs about the way the material world functions; westernization requires an alteration in cosmological viewpoints about how one should live their life. No doubt they made our lives easier and comfortable.

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