

Overview of Indian Caste System and Its Existence in Post-Independence: A Historical Review

***Dr. Sunita Meena**

Abstract

The standing framework is common in India since days of yore. The Indian standing framework is generally considered a strategy for separation between individuals from various gatherings. The Indian Caste System is viewed as a shut arrangement of definition, and that implies that an individual's economic wellbeing is committed to which standing they were naturally introduced to. There are limits on cooperation and conduct with individuals from another societal position (Sekhon 39). The standing framework has been changed and modified over and over previously. This exploration would restrict its degree on concentrating on the historical backdrop of the Indian standing framework and the predominance of station framework post-freedom till date. We concentrate on the historical backdrop of the Indian Caste framework.

Keywords: Indian Caste System, economic wellbeing, post-freedom.

Introduction

Risley defines caste as “a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community” (Hutton 47). The Indian caste system is divided into four varnas. The two upper castes dominate over the lower castes and are considered to be superior. The Brahmins are at the top, followed by the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Brahmin class is essentially defined by its supposed priority (as the class created first by the creator god), by knowledge of the Veda, and by the monopoly this class holds on the operation of sacrifice. These traits justify the social position of the class vis-à-vis others: they are predominant because they are prior, and they claim to stand outside of the power relations that govern social life for others because of their superior knowledge and sole possession of the ultimate “weapons,” sacrificial techniques (Smith 48). There are certain characteristics of the Indian caste system with which discrimination and social stratification is fixed. Castes have other sub castes or jatis. People of these sub castes earned their livelihood from a particular occupation. For instance, Brahmins were the upper castes, but there were varying degrees of Brahmins such as Tamil Brahmins, Tanjore etc. “A society is characterized by such a system if it is divided into a large number of hereditarily specialized groups, which are hierarchically superposed and mutually opposed. It does not tolerate the principle of rising in the status of groups’ mixture and of changing occupation”. (Velassery 2) There are many rules and barriers a person

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Dr. Sunita Meena

needs to adhere to in order to breathe in the society. Not adhering to these rules and practices resulted in exclusion from the caste as well as from their own families.

Review of Literature:

Edited by Chaudhary (2018), there is a set of five volumes on Human Rights and Poverty in India, addressing a variety of theoretical issues and empirical evidences. The 94 papers in these five volumes analyze the interface between human rights and poverty, with particular reference to India. Dealing with conceptual theoretical and philosophical dimensions of poverty and human rights, they address a wide range of issues pertaining to the situation of human rights and poverty among different social groups in different states of the country. Various contributions provide information on the history of poverty in India as well as the consequences of such poverty.

Rose (2019) discusses the effects of various sociological factors such as joint family, caste system and Hindu religious values on economic development in India. He also provides possible solutions for increasing economic efficiency.

Kar (2020) wrote an article on religion and the roots of India's caste system for the New York Times, in which he reported on the origins of the caste system. He discussed what the Hindu scriptures say about caste as well as what the caste system actually turned out to be. The Gita, which is one of the Hindu scriptures, states that caste is not determined by birth but by behavior. However, today people's castes are determined as soon as they are born signifying an outside influence on the modern day caste system.

Objective of Study:

- Historical view of India Caste System.
- Remedies for caste system in India.
- To assess the consequence of Caste System.

Research Methodology:

The whole project's technique is based on secondary data. This research study was mostly based on the usage of books, journals, some case references, and websites, as well as newspaper and publish reports and websites on the internet. It would be preferable if I could visit a relevant practical sector and conduct an interview with the individual in question. I wanted to complete it, but it was impossible for me to do so in the time allotted. Despite the fact that this study was carried out by evaluating documents.

Scope and Limitation

- Inadequate research expertise to adequately accomplish the research project.
- There is a limit to the number of data and document sources available.
- The research was really part of our academic program. The frame was restricted for this advice. As a result, it was difficult to make this research more precise and successful.

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Hierarchy of Caste System

Hierarchy and occupational specialisation are one of the most important and major elements of the Indian caste system. Rules regarding endogamy and occupation were very strict. A person is not allowed to marry outside their own caste or sub caste. Every sub caste had an occupation and the person is bound to that particular occupation. A no tolerance policy was followed in mixing of higher castes with the lower castes. There were rules regarding the level of interaction between people of different castes. There was then the concept of purity and pollution. Mere touch of a Shudra or an untouchable to a person of a higher caste was termed as polluting the individual of the higher caste.

Origin of Caste System

In India, the origin of the caste system is vague. Different factors or theories suggest different origins of the caste system. Therefore, in India, the origin of the caste system is not based on a particular factor, but it is a blend of different factors and theories. Some of the theories are traditional theory, political theory, religious theory and the biological theory. According to the religious theory, Brahma created the caste system. Different castes were born from the different body parts of Brahma, the creator of universe. Brahmins came from the mouth, Kshatriyas came from the hands, Vaishyas came from the stomach and the Shudras originated from the feet. In contrast to it, the political theory suggests that the Brahmins wanted the power in their own hands, they wanted to rule over the other sections of the society, which originated caste systems in India. This idea was put forward by a French scholar, Nibey Dubais, and was later supported by many Indian scholars. It is also believed that various religious customs had given a birth to the caste system in India. People connected to religion like Kings and Brahmins were given higher positions. "Different people used to perform different tasks for the administration of the ruler that later on became the basis of caste system. Along with this, restriction on food habits had led to the development of caste system" (Kaur). According to the biological theory, every living being inherits one of the three categories. There are three Gunas: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Sattva is white, Rajas is red, and Tamas is black. These in combination of various proportions constitute the group or class of people all over the world with temperamental differences (Lahiri). According to the qualities one possesses, the person picks up a particular occupation. Sattva qualities include characteristics related to wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness, and other positive qualities. Rajas include qualities such as passion, pride, and valor. Tamas are considered to acquire qualities that include dullness, stupidity, lack of creativity, and other negative qualities (Daniel). Brahmins are usually seen to possess the Sattva qualities, the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas inherit the Raja qualities and the Shudras are seen to inherit the Tamas qualities. However, according to the historical theory, it is believed that the caste system in India flourished after the Aryans entered India around 1500 BC. Aryans were not the first people in India. Other cultures also flourished before the Indo-Aryan culture. But there was no mention of caste system in any of these cultures before the Aryans. Aryans were the fair skinned people who did not mix with the local inhabitants here, who were dark skinned. They could not and did not adapt the cultures prevailing here and started conquering the northern India, while pushing the local people towards the south in the forests of the Northern India. "The Aryans possessed a particular principle of social ordering called Varna Vyavastha, which was based on the

Overview of Indian Caste System and its Existence in Post-Independence: A Historical Review

Dr. Sunita Meena

four hierarchical divisions of function in society. They were placed in order of decreasing importance: religious and educational functions, military and political functions, economic functions, and menial functions.”

Caste System: Medieval Period

The caste system did not lose its rigidity during the medieval period, which mainly includes of the Rajput and the Muslim period. During the Brahmin period, more castes and sub castes were born. The caste system remained rigid, while the multiplicity of the caste system increased. During the Muslim period, although many Muslim rulers tried to convert Hindus into Muslims, the Brahmins continued to maintain their authority over the Hindus, and the caste system remained rigid as always.

Caste System: British Rule

The British rule started from the year 1774, after the end of the Mughal rule. Earlier, the British were not against the caste system, but as few years passed by, British began to resent their opinions against the caste system. They turned against the caste system. However, British policies of divide and rule contributed towards the hardening of caste identities (Corbridge and Harriss 8). There were a lot of amendments bought by the British in order to improve administration by bringing socio-religious changes. Acts such as ‘The Caste Disabilities Removal Act-1850’, ‘the Widow Remarriage Act-1856’, and ‘the Special Marriage Act-1872’ were passed in order to curb the unjust systems prevalent in the society. New social reforms were bought by social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, founder of the Brahma. Social awareness generated in the country because of these movements by the reformers. Working culture changed because of new factories which opened. These factories hired workers, which changed the occupation of a lot of people, which was constant since centuries. This affected the caste system as a whole. “The three supporting pillars of the caste system—hereditary specialization, the sacred hierarchy, and mutual repulsion—were basically directly undermined by the British administration” (Bouglé 82).

Caste System :Post-Independence

There were many steps taken post-independence, as well as just before independence in order to curb the unjust acts prevalent in the society due to the caste system. These movements mainly aimed to increase the socio-economic conditions of the lower castes. Before independence, in the first half of the 20th century, the Dalits wanted to separate themselves away from Hinduism and started demanding separate electorates for Dalits. On one hand Gandhi wanted to incorporate them as a part of Hinduism, Ambedkar on the other hand started the Dalit movement and advocated greater rights for the Dalits, in the form of reservations. He believed that justice could only be done to them by bringing socio, economic and political changes in the society. He did receive guarantees and got separate reservations for Dalits in the elections post-independence. “The process of ‘Industrialization’ and the process ‘Urbanization’ continued more constructively in Independent India, which already had weakened the rigid nature of the Caste System.” (The Caste System in India) While drafting the Indian constitution, the government drafted several laws in order to bring equality amongst the citizens of the country. Some of the articles are Article 14 – ‘Ensures equality -before law’, Article 15 – ‘Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, sex, place of birth,

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race and caste', Article 16 – 'Prescribes equality of opportunity in public employment' and Article 17 – 'Abolition of untouchability'. In 1956, he encouraged around six million Dalits to convert to Buddhism "as a means of escaping the social stigma of untouchability within the Hindu caste system" (Sekhon 49). During the 1970s, the younger Dalits started their movement which showed their anger and resentment against the failure of policies which would bring equality and end the discrimination faced by the upper castes. For instance, the 'Untouchability (Offences) Act' of 1955 was such a great idea but has little effect till date. "Only 2,900 cases were registered under it during its first six years, and of these, little more than 600 resulted in convictions; most of the rest were either compounded or pending" (Dushkin). In *Balaji v. State of Maharashtra*, the Supreme Court held that reservations should not exceed 50 percent in public sector companies and government educational institutions. Reservation in educational institutions and in providing public employment. "But it is unfortunate that the 45-year-old 50% rule is still in vogue though population of SC / ST and OBC has substantially changed and economic resource of the state has enormously increased" (Basavaraju). Although discrimination based on caste has been outlawed in India, caste has become a means for competing for access to resources and power in modern India, such as educational opportunities, new occupations, and improvement in life chances (Sekhon 45). The Indian Caste System has evolved significantly post-independence, there have been changes and improvement, beginning with the Aryans and coming down a long way, consisting of unjust norms, discrimination, social stratification, violence and inequality. Historically, India has been surviving as a nation for millennia with closed groups divided by caste, creed and language (Velassery 11). Work was divided according to their status in the society and the occupation was fixed since generations. Mobility of occupation and caste was almost nil. Caste system was rigid enough to kill a person or throw him out of the society in case of not abiding by the rules and practices of the caste system. However, only a small proportion of the total population of the lower castes have benefited from such programmes and policies. Although the condition of lower caste people has been improved, there are a lot of places where violence and hostility are shown against the lower caste people. "While apparently not more than 1% of the Scheduled Caste population receives Scheduled Caste educational benefits under the Plan in any one year, others receive such benefits under non-Plan programs, and still others, an increasing proportion, do so under systems where no caste criterion is operative" (Dushkin). For instance, the 'Untouchability (Offences) Act' of 1955 was such a great idea but has little effect till date. "Only 2,900 cases were registered under it during its first six years, and of these, little more than 600 resulted in convictions; most of the rest were either compounded or pending" (Dushkin). In *Balaji v. State of Maharashtra*, the Supreme Court held that reservations should not exceed 50 percent in public sector companies and government educational institutions. Reservation in educational institutions and in providing public employment. "But it is unfortunate that the 45-year-old 50% rule is still in vogue though population of SC / ST and OBC has substantially changed and economic resource of the state has enormously increased" (Basavaraju). Although discrimination based on caste has been outlawed in India, caste has become a means for competing for access to resources and power in modern India, such as educational opportunities, new occupations, and improvement in life chances (Sekhon 45). The Indian Caste System has evolved significantly post-independence, there have been changes and improvement, beginning with the Aryans and coming down a long way, consisting of unjust norms, discrimination, social stratification,

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violence and inequality. Historically, India has been surviving as a nation for millennia with closed groups divided by caste, creed and language (Velassery 11). Work was divided according to their status in the society and the occupation was fixed since generations. Mobility of occupation and caste was almost nil. Caste system was rigid enough to kill a person or throw him out of the society in case of not abiding by the rules and practices of the caste system.

Remedies for Caste System in India:

1. Proper Knowledge about Caste:

Proper education should be given to each and every member of the caste regarding casteism. Education seems to be the most ideal solution to the problem of casteism. People should be well aware about the dangerous effects of casteism.

2. Less use of the term Caste:

Precautions should be taken for the minimum use of the term caste. The word caste should be used only in limited context. The young generations, now-a-days, should give least importance to caste.

3. Removal of Socio-cultural Inequality:

Social and cultural inequalities between castes have been the main cause for creating socio-cultural inequality. If the differences will be removed and all castes are placed in the same socio-cultural footing, then nobody will think well of his own caste.

4. Promotion of Economic Equality:

Very wide economic gap is found between the upper caste and lower caste people. It widens the social distance and contributes to the development of casteism. Hence, all castes should be given equal economic opportunities to attain economic prosperity. In spite of the above remedial measures suggested, it seems impractical to harbour any hope for the complete removal of casteism. A strong and tremendous revolution is needed to get rid of casteism. Many eminent social scientists and philosophers have given their suggestion for the abolition of casteism.

Conclusion:

However, the present Indian society is moving from its closed systems towards a state of change and progression marked by the assertion of the human spirit irrespective of castes and creeds (Velassery 12). Today, OBCs, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have good representation in offices and electoral bodies. They have gone on to form reputed political parties all over India and stand in elections on an equal footing with the higher castes. Interaction between people from different caste is more visible today. People from these disadvantaged groups have largely made their way into government jobs as well as all levels of educational institutions (Sekhon 50). Many people have gained their deserved respect and stand in the society due to this partial elimination of the caste system post-independence, till today. The efforts India has made in order to eradicate this inequality from the society is worth appreciating. It is, however,

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important to work harder on this issue, so that these caste-based discriminations get eradicated from each corner of the country forever.

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