

Caste and Ethnicity after 1947

***Ranjeet Poonia**

ABSTRACT:

One of the most significant ways that people in India have traditionally been socially differentiated based on class, tribe, language, location, religion, and gender is via the caste system. The Indian caste system has always existed, even if these or other types of discrimination exist in all human cultures. The caste system in India has long been used to set individuals apart into several groups. The caste a person is born into defines their social rank since the Indian caste system is a closed system of stratification. There is little interaction and behaviour with persons of differing socioeconomic rank. Over time, the caste system has changed and developed.

Since India's independence from Britain in 1947, the regulations controlling the caste system have been greatly loosened. While the lowest castes continued to eat apart from the others, the middle and upper castes ate more meals together. Men's career objectives and interests had a comparable significant transition between 1954 and 1992. The majority of men devoted themselves to their conventional caste-related jobs before to 1992, however by that time the majority had changed to modern professions.

Although wealth and power were no longer significantly connected with caste, there was still some caste-based prejudice and hierarchy in place. While caste still has an effect on daily life in urban places, it is far less pronounced than in rural areas and still depends on socioeconomic position and job. Among urban middle-class professionals, caste is hardly discussed in public and is generally inconsequential, particularly when it comes to marriage arrangements. Even then, adjustments are done while taking things like religion, language, job, and money into consideration. Despite being forbidden in India, caste-based prejudice continues to exist in society today.

The paper looks into the development of India's caste system, and asks if it has altered considerably since India's freedom.

Keywords: discrimination, caste, stratification, hierarchy

Introduction

The Indian caste system has traditionally been one of the primary methods used to socially separate individuals in India based on class, tribe, language, location, religion, and gender.

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system of stratification. There are few interactions and displays of behaviour with persons from other socioeconomic classes.

Those with the authority to remark describe a "caste" as "a set of families or group of families sharing a same name; claiming shared lineage from a mythological ancestor, whether human or divine; professing to practise the same hereditary activity; and are regarded a single homogenous society". There are four varnas in the Indian caste system. In comparison to the lesser castes, the two upper castes are dominant and seen as superior. The order is Brahmins first, then Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, then Shudras. The Brahmin social class is characterised by its supposed primacy (as the first class created by the Creator God), its familiarity with the Vedas, and its exclusive right to offer sacrifices.

The discrimination and social stratification that are inherent in the Indian caste system are some of its unchangeable features. There are other Jats, or sub-castes, within the castes. These sub-caste structures were founded on certain occupations. The highest caste, for instance, was Brahmin, however there were other tiers of Brahmins, such as Tamil Brahmins, Tanjores, and so on. Advancement to mixed group status and changing your profession are against the law (Velaseries No. 2) A person must abide by a variety of laws and restrictions in order to operate in society, and if they do not, they will be excluded from their caste and their family.

Origin and history

The history of the caste system in India is explained by a variety of ideas. Some are biological while others are religious. The proto-man Purush killed himself to establish human civilization, and four distinct Varnas emerged from various pieces of his corpse, according to the Rigveda, an old Hindu text. From his head, hands, thighs, and feet sprang Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The hierarchy of the varna is determined by the decreasing order of the numerous organs from which the varnas were created (Daniel). For instance, Brahmins, descended from the head of Purusha, are regarded as the most knowledgeable and powerful varna due to their knowledge and education and are a symbol of the brain. Similar to this, Kshatriyas, members of the warrior caste, are born with powerful arms. According to a different theological account, Brahma, the Hindu deity who created the universe, provided the varnas with their physical functions.

Different individuals carried out various duties in the ruler's administration, which eventually served as the foundation for the caste system. Biological theory states that every living thing falls into one of three groups. The three gunas are sattva, rajas, and tamas. White stands for sattva, red for rajas, and black for tamas. In varied ratios, these three gunas create a class or group of individuals with various temperaments over the globe (Lahiri). Based on the traits he has, a person picks his vocation. Wisdom, knowledge, honesty, compassion, and other excellent traits are examples of sattva attributes. A Raja must possess passion, pride, and fearlessness. Tamas is said to cultivate traits like dreariness, ignorance, a lack of inventiveness, and other undesirable traits (Daniel). Typically, Brahmins inherit sattva traits, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas raja attributes, and Shudras tamas qualities.

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Hierarchy of the caste system

The hierarchy and vocational specialisation of the Indian caste system are two of its most prominent and crucial features. Endogamy and occupational restrictions were quite stringent. It is forbidden for a person to marry outside of his caste or subcaste. Each sub-caste had a limited employment, and individuals could only work in that occupation. When it came to the mingling of top and lower castes, there was no tolerance policy. Rules controlled the degree of contact between members of various castes. There was a notion of cleanliness and contamination back then. A member of a higher caste was seen to be tainted by the very act of touching a shudra or untouchable. People from higher castes were seen to be purer than those from lower castes. In addition, a person who is born into a caste is obligated to remain in that caste for the remainder of his life. At all costs, neither an upward nor a downward mobilisation within the caste system is feasible.

During the Middle Ages

The caste system remained tight throughout the mediaeval era, which was mostly comprised of the Rajput and Muslim eras. There were more castes and sub-castes throughout the Brahmanical era. Even as the number of castes grew, the caste system remained strict. The caste system remained as strict as ever throughout the Muslim era, despite the many attempts by Muslim rulers to convert Hindus to Islam. Instead, the Brahmins maintained control of the Hindu population.

During the British Rule

In 1774, when Mughal dominion came to an end, the British took control. The British had not previously opposed the caste system, but over time they became to dislike their anti-caste beliefs. The caste system was resisted by them. However, the divide-and-rule strategy of the British helped to strengthen caste identity (Corbridge and Harriss 8). The British made several purchases in order to bring about socioreligious reforms that would strengthen governance. To solve the unequal institutions of society, laws like the "Caste Disabilities Removal Act 1850," the "Widow Remarriage Act 1856," and the "Special Marriage Act 1872" were passed.

The new social changes were accepted by social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of Brahmo. The country's social consciousness increased as a result of the reform movements. The work culture altered as a result of the new factories that emerged. Many individuals who had been in the same jobs for generations changed their professions after being employed by these factories. The whole caste structure was impacted by this. The three foundations of the caste system—hereditary specialisation, holy hierarchy, and mutual repulsion—were essentially directly undercut by the British government (Bouglé 82).

But certain British customs favoured the caste system. For instance, the British government launched an Indian census for administrative reasons and to determine the make-up of Indian society in order to better regulate Indians. However, "the colonial authority has included caste and religion groups in the enumeration of the Indian people from the first census in 1872" (Bhagat). According to linguistic standards like Bengali, Oriya, and others, castes were renamed. In 1881, a census was taken by the

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Census Bureau. Brahmins, Rajputs, well-to-do castes, lower castes, and non-Hindu or indigenous castes are the five classes into which W.C. Commissioner Plowden chose to divide the different castes. Scheduled Caste Order, enacted in 1936 (Bhagat). All Indian states have legalised the caste system. Although these initiatives did not succeed in ending the caste system, they greatly contributed to reducing how strict it was.

Post-Independence

Many measures were done both after and before independence to stop the unfair behaviour that the caste system had brought about in society. The socioeconomic advancement of the lower castes was the main focus of these campaigns. Prior to independence, in the early part of the 20th century, Dalits pushed for separate electorates for Dalits in an effort to distance themselves from Hinduism. Gandhi attempted to assimilate them into Hinduism, whereas Ambedkar formed the Dalit movement and pushed for greater rights for Dalits in the form of reservations.

Since India's independence, the caste system has seen tremendous adjustment and development, starting with the Aryans and progressing steadily downward in terms of unfair laws, prejudice, social stratification, violence, and inequality. Historically, restricted communities separated by caste, faith, and language have allowed India to continue to exist as a country for millennia (Velassery 11). Work was apportioned among people based on their social rank, and the profession remained the same for centuries. Caste and career mobility was almost nonexistent. The caste system was so strict that failing to follow its rules and customs may result in someone's death or expulsion from society.

In current times, caste dynamics have become more relaxed. In neighbourhood restaurants, where a lot more dining is done and more food is shared across castes, caste differences are less frequent. One of the key trends in India was the rise of men's occupational interests (Sekhon, 43). (and subsequently, women). Historically, the majority of men worked in caste-related occupations like pottery and blacksmithing. Today, a large number of individuals work in newly developing, non-caste-related fields including government, education, retail and service, and machine repair. In the hamlet, caste is no longer as strongly correlated with income and power as it previously was, and land ownership has become more varied (Sekhon, 44). Less people also feel that lower castes are responsible for pollution and cleanliness. Even though they have only somewhat declined in public, caste-related purification ceremonies are still practised in private and during special occasions. Endogamy is still illegal in families, albeit less rigidly than before.

People from these disadvantaged groups have mostly been successful in obtaining employment at all levels of government and educational institutions (Sekhon, 50). Unfortunately, only a very small portion of the lowest castes have benefited from these preferential policies. Even if lower caste people are being accepted more often, there is still increased open hostility and violence towards them in many parts of India.

Conclusion

The values, obligations, and occupations in Indian society have been profoundly impacted by the

caste system. Religion has been the constant force pushing society toward this stratified structure for aeons, beginning with the Aryans and continuing down a long road of terrible discrimination, segregation, brutality, and injustice. The purity pollution complex was built on the principles of Hinduism, which also had a profound influence on the way of life and worldview of the Indian populace. Even 63 years after obtaining their independence, Indians still battle with caste consciousness.

But contemporary Indian society is eschewing its strict framework in favour of a period of growth characterised by the exaltation of the human spirit in spite of caste and religious differences (Velassery 12). Today, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and OBCs have a strong presence in political organisations and government jobs. They later established respected political parties in India and participated in elections with members of higher castes. Nowadays, it is simpler to see interactions between members of different classes. People from these disadvantaged groups have mostly been successful in obtaining employment at all levels of government and educational institutions (Sekhon 50). After independence, the caste system was only partly eliminated, thus many people have now achieved the respect and position they deserve in society. It is important to commend India for its efforts in eradicating this injustice from society. To entirely eradicate caste-based discrimination across the country, more effort must be placed into this issue.

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