



An extensive analysis of the caste system: How did it developed?

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Abstract

The Indian caste system is historically one the main dimensions where people in India are socially differentiated through class, religion, region, tribal gender and language. The Indian caste system is consider as a closed system of stratification which mean that a person's social status is obligated to which caste they were born into. The caste system is a classification of people into four hierarchically ranked castes called 'Varnas' (The Brahmans, The Chhatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras). They are classified according to occupation and determine access to wealth, power and privilege. The Varnas are then divided into specialized sub caste system called 'Jatis'. Each Jati is composed of a group deriving it's livelihood primarily from a specific occupation. People are bourn into certain caste and become members. There are limits on interaction and behaviour with people from another social status. This paper will exploring the various aspects of the Indian caste and its effects on Indian society.

Keywords: varnas, jatis, religion, culture, history

Introduction

Vedic texts from the Hindu religion, which have been complied, legitimized and interrupted by the Brahmans, provided the rational for the hierarchical classification and the ritual and governing social behaviour. Caste become a lot less significant part of daily lives of people lived in urban areas compared to rural areas but it's significance still varies by social class and occupation.

Defining the word 'Caste' itself is harder than thought to be risely defines it as "A Common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, Human are divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community."

The Indian caste system is a classification of people into four hierarchically ranked castes called 'Varnas'. The Brahmans usually priests and scholars are at the top. The Brahmans class is essentially define by it's supposed priority by knowledge by the Veda, and by the monopoly this class holds often operation of sacrifice.

Caste includes three elements repulsion hierarchy and hereditary specialization. According to velassery "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. I does not tolerate the principle of rising in the status of groups mixture and of changing occupation."

Theory of Origin in the Indian Caste System with Vedic Age

The origin of the Indian Caste System has many theories behind it. Some of them are religious, while others are biological. The religious theories explains that according to Rigveda, which is the ancient Hindu Book, the primal man determined themself to create a human society and the

different parts of his body created the four different Varnas. The Brahmans were born from his head, the Kshatriya from his hands, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the shudras from his feet. The Varnas hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the Varnas were created. For example, Brahmans who were derived from the head of Purush are a representation of the brain. In the same way, Kshatriya's considered the warrior caste were created by arms, which represent strength. Another religious theory claims that the Varnas were created from the body organs of Brahma, who is the creator of the world in Hinduism.

The biological theory claims that all existing things inherit three categories of equalities. Varnas means different shades of texture or colour and represents mental temper. There are three Gunas namely Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Satva is white, Rajas is red and Tamas is black. These are combination of various proportions constitute the group or class of people all over the world with temperamental differences. Satva qualities includes characteristics related to wisdom, intellectual, 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. People with different amount of these inherent qualities end up adopting the appropriate occupation.

Historically, however it is believe that the caste system began with the arrival of the Aryans in India around 1500 B.C. of the many cultures that flourishing in India, the literary record of the Indo-Aryan Culture are not the earliest. They do, however contain the first mention and a continuous history of the factors that make up the caste system. The Aryans came from Southern Europe and North Asia with fair skin that contrasted with the indigenous natives in India. When they arrived there main contact was with the Dravidians. The only other culture

whose records are dependable about the origins of the caste system are the Dravidians, but when that cultures documents were put forwards, it had already been largely influenced by the Indo-Aryans tradition.

The Aryans possessed a particular principle of social ordering called Varna Vayvastha, which was based on the four hierarchical divisions of functions in society. They were placed in order of decreasing importance religion and educational functions, military and political functions, economic functions and menial functions. The first group Rajayanas were the warriors, which were followed by the Brahmans who were the priests. The final group consisted of the farmer and the craftsmen and were called the Vaisyas. Between the outcaste and the three Aryans Varnas were the Shudras, who were simple worker of the society.

As most of the societies in the world, India had a patriarchal system. Most of the time the son inherited his father's profession, which led to developing families, who acquired the same family profession for generations. Later on as these families got a bigger they were seen as communities or Jat.

The fluidity of the caste system was affected by the arrival of the British Empire. The Britisher brought them with their own traditional form of government and as Christians they did not have much sympathy for the Hindu Institution. During the initial days of the British East India company's rule, caste privileged and customs were encouraged, but the British Law courts began to disagree with the discrimination against the lower caste. However British policies of divide and rule contributed towards the hardening of caste identities. The three supporting pillars of the caste system hereditary specialization, the secret hierarchy and mutual repulsion were basically directly undermined by the British administration.

Relation between Religion and Culture

The Division of caste contributes one of the most fundamental features of Indian's social structure. In Hindu society, caste divisions play a part in both actual social interaction and in the ideal scheme of values. Member of different castes are expected to behave differently and to have different values and ideals. These difference are sanctioned by the Hindu religion.

The caste system would not have found approval among the Vedic people unless there was some reference to it in the Vedas. The Purusha Sukta in 10th mandal of the Rigveda describes how the caste came into existence from different part of the Purusha, The cosmic soul, at the time of a grand sacrifice performed by the Gods. As mentioned earlier the Brahamins came out of his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arm, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. Another justification derived from the theory of karma. This concept rationalizes the caste system based on birth. It support the argument the people of the lower caste have to blame themselves for their troubles and lower status because of their bad karma in their past life. The Law of karma states that the present condition of your soul, for example confusion or serenity is based on your decisions in the past and that you as an individual have made yourself what you are based on actions. Also your present thoughts, decisions and actions determine your future life events and these events and these events can alter one's Karma through natural moral decision

and action. It is an unfortunate that although the original intent of Varnas was not to create caste, it has evolved into emphasizing the idea of the caste system. Varnas are conditioned with ones actions and desires based on Gunas, but people have mistaken Varnas for caste and treat them as identical. Varnas are got created, whereas caste is man made, it is simply a social institution and can easily be changed and modified according to changing needs of society.

The Varna system stood on the basis of Gunas and Karmas of the individual and has nothing to do with birth.

Different Revolution and Policies against caste system

These were many revolutions and movements and governmental actions that took place pre and post independence in order to overcome and attempt to eliminate the inequalities and injustices associated with the caste system. During the national movement Gandhi Ji began using the term "Harijans" to refer to the untouchable in order to encourage a shift towards positive attitude towards the lower castes. The British Government of India considered a list of 400 groups are untouchable. Those groups included on this list came to be termed scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The anti caste dalit movement began with Jyotirao Phule in the mid 19th century, and he started a movement for education and the upliftment of women, Shudra's & Dalits, the movement spread to many parts of India.

Another prominent revolutionary movement was the Dalit movement under B.R. Ambedkar which began between the 1920's and 1930's. He campaigned for greater rights for Dalits in British India, and even after independence. Dr. Ambedkar believed that "The subordination of Dalits was primarily economic and political, and could only be overcome by changing the social structure through legal, political and educational means."

These are three main categories of people that have been identified as eligible for preferential policies that reserve seats in legislature, in governmental jobs, in public sector enterprises, and in state supervised educational institutions, in terms of their population reserved for the three groups. The commission recommended that 27 percent of seats be reserved for OBC's in addition to 15% for SC's and 7% for ST's. Unfortunately, the government did not implement these policies in fear of large scale opposition from the people, but in 1990 the Janta Dal government attempted partial implementation of recommendation leading to wide spread unrest and opposition from middle and upper caste youths, intellectuals and elites.

Caste System in Modern Indian Society

Relationships between castes have become more relaxed today. There is more food sharing between caste and a lot more eating done a local restaurants where caste distinctions are less likely to be made. One of the biggest changes that took place in India was occupational pursuits among men and women. Earlier, most men did not veer away from their caste linked occupations such as blacksmithing, and pottery making. Many have now taken up newer occupations that do not relate to their caste such as government jobs. Teaching, retail and services, and machine repair. Wealth and power in the village is now less associated with caste than before and landowner

ship has become more diversified the idea that purity and population is caused by the lower caste has diminished a good amount.

The problem with this is that caste and economic status have been largely correlated in the past and even now caste base prejudice and discrimination hinder economic advancement for the lower castes.

The reservation for the SC's and ST's began in 1960 but the individual states the one's that were to determine which would be identified as OBC'S. Many southern states identified economically dis-advantaged castes as OBC'S. But there has been considerable opposition to implementing these policies in other Indian states. The Central government appointed a commission headed by B P Mandal to look into the issue and by 1978, the Mandal commission report was completed. It was concluded that caste was the main contributing factor to social and economic backwardness. Many seats in state institutions were reserved for lower castes, but in urban areas, caste is still difficult and slow for lower castes, but in urban areas, caste is now a less significant part of daily life. Although discrimination on the basis of caste has been outlawed in India, caste has become a means for competing for access to resource and power in modern India, such as educational opportunities, new occupation and improvement in life chances. This trend is connected to Indian preferential policies and the implementation of these policies.

Conclusion

The Indian caste system has played a significant role in shaping the occupation and roles as well as value of Indian society. Religion has been the constant push towards this stratification system for centuries, beginning with the Aryans and continuing down a long road of unfortunate discrimination segregation, violence and inequality. Hinduism was the backbone of the purity pollution complex and it was religion that influenced the daily lives and beliefs of the Indian people. Even after 71 years independence Indians continue to be in the grip of caste consciousness. Historically India has been surviving as a nation for millennia with closed groups divided by caste, creed and language. Work was divided and each had his allotted task since birth and hereditary of occupation was a rule that played a big role in the economic of urban and rural life. 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 caste and creed. It is however important to look at the importance of how caste states has affected the quality of life and social mobility in India.

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