



Caste System and Human Dignity: A Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the concept, origins, characteristics, and trends of change of the Indian caste system. The caste system is essentially a social stratification system, which is based on birth, occupation, religious purity-impurity, and social norms. In this, intermarriage, specific codes of conduct and hereditary occupations play an important role. There are two types of views on the origin of the caste system—classical and historical. According to the classical view, the creation of the four castes is explained by religious interpretations, while according to the historical view, it gradually transformed from a division based on work to a birth-based structure. This system was characterized by high-low distinctions, birth order, social and dietary restrictions, and occupational fixation, which limited social mobility.

However, modern education, social reform movements, legal changes, industrialization and urbanization have gradually reduced the rigidity of the caste system. Constitutional measures and reservation policies have also helped in the development of the lower castes. Although in some cases this practice is maintained for political reasons, the concept of equality and humanity is strengthening in society as a whole.

Keywords: Caste System, Endogamy, Arya Samaj, Equality And Human Rights, Constitutional System.

Introduction:

The Indian caste system is a unique system of social stratification. The word 'Caste' in the sense of race is misleading. According to Sister Nivedita, the origin of the word Caste is Portuguese vocabulary and she is in favor of accepting this English word as an indicator of honor or status. But some authors believe that the word Caste is derived from the Spanish word 'Casta'. Which means hereditary qualities. This word is used to mean different things in different contexts. The people of a group who are intermarried; for whom there are specific rules of conduct in society; and who are engaged in their group profession according to tradition should be considered as a caste. Generally, a person's caste is not determined by birth. But it is said that in Indian Hindu society, caste is divided on the basis of profession, religious purity-impureness and some assigned status determined by birth. Caste and caste system are not only prevalent in India, it is also prevalent outside India, for example, this system was prevalent in ancient Egypt, Japan, Rome etc., there are many examples in history of this system. Today, this practice is practiced among the Maasai, the Somalis of the East Horn, the Polynesians, the Burmese, and even in Europe and America (where anti-Semitism and racism have tainted human history in many ways). However, in modern times, the terms 'caste' and

'casteism' refer to the social class system prevalent among Indians, and more specifically among Hindus living in India.

Origin of caste system

Although there are different opinions regarding the origin of caste or caste, I will generally discuss two: the first is the scriptural opinion and the second is the historical opinion. The first opinion is the widely accepted explanation given in the Rigveda. At the beginning of the universe, the great abstract being called Brahma created everything, including the four varnas: for the prosperity of the world, he created from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet. He created the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras respectively. But to protect this universe, he assigned separate duties and professions to those born from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet. These four-faced At the top of the system is the Brahmin. Since the Brahmin is born from the mouth of Brahma, since he is the first of the three castes and since he holds the Vedas, he is the ruler of this entire creation by right. Since the arm is a symbol of bravery and valor, the job of the Kshatriya born from the arm is to protect the country through the power of the arm, through the use of weapons. The lower part of the body, the arm, the mouth, so the place of the Kshatriya is below the Brahmin. The word 'thigh' probably refers to the lower part of the body, the 'belly region'. Being born from this part of the body, the job of the Vaishya is to provide food for the people of the society through agriculture, trade, etc. The lower limbs are the lower limbs, so the Vaishyas are below the Kshatriyas in society. At the lowest are the Shudras. The Lord has prescribed only one profession for the Shudras: the three castes. To be devoted to service. Above all, the extreme contrast in hierarchy is made clear: a Shudra, whether he is a slave or not, can be forced to do servile work by a Brahmin; because he was created to be the servant of the Brahmin. The presence of these references in the scriptures has made the division of people in society very easy.

The writers of the scriptures have mentioned the origin of the caste system by mentioning the three gunas: sattva, rajah and tamah. In the Sankhya philosophy, it is said about the three gunas: sattvām laghu prakasakam, upashtanta kām chalanca rajah, guruvarana kameva tamah i.e. the sattva guna is the producer of happiness, is light and manifests. The raja guna is the driver i.e. it drives all actions. The tama guna is the manifestation of laziness, inertia, unwillingness etc. The four varnas are originated from the excess of the three gunas.

The second opinion is that when the Aryans came to India, they were simple and lived a simple life. They lived together. There was no caste system at that time. Then, with the spread of agriculture, life became much easier and simpler. As agricultural production increased, the need for communal living gradually decreased. The Aryans were divided into four groups. Those who remained engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry and trade were known as 'Vaishyas'. The wealth and production that was created were used to support two new castes, the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. The basis of this distinction was not caste, but occupation. The Brahmins were engaged in the study of the Vedas, performing rituals, worshiping, etc. The Kshatriyas were responsible for security and administration. At the bottom were the Shudras or slaves. This is why the Aryan society was divided into four castes. Originally, this caste system was not hereditary. Caste was determined entirely on the basis of work. It is mentioned in Vedic literature that Vishwamitra, although born a Kshatriya, was considered a Brahmin due to his excellence in learning. Similarly, a Brahmin could also become a Kshatriya. Vaishyas and Shudras could also improve their status through talent. At this time, personal initiative and willpower were very important. People could move from one caste to another through their own actions. But as time went on, this idea started to change. Now it has become hereditary.

Again, they would share the profits that were made as a result of working together. This again changed the way of life of the Aryans. So there was a complication in the environment because the state had to give a share of the profits. In the later Vedic period, we see that instead of divisions based on profession, society is divided on the basis of birth and various restrictions are imposed on marriage and social relations. During this period, the dominance of Brahmins and Kshatriyas in society is well established. With the increase in

social status, they became the privileged class, enjoying some attractive privileges. For this reason, many Brahmins, instead of pursuing education or religious practices, acquired great wealth by cultivating their lands through slaves and waged agricultural laborers. With the increase in political power, the status and prominence of the Kshatriyas also increased. Initially, neither Brahmins nor Kshatriyas were directly involved in production. Vaishyas were directly involved in this production. Although most of the Shudras were non-Aryans, some Aryans had also descended to the Shudra level due to financial hardship and degradation. Due to these reasons, caste system had emerged.

Characteristics

In present times, caste has been considered as a social class. Professor G. S. Ghurye in his famous book 'Caste and Race in India' has mentioned some of the following features of the caste system:

High-low distinction:- A notable feature of the Indian caste system is the hierarchical structure. Brahmins are at the top of this structure and Shudras are at the lowest level. However, it goes without saying that in many cases, the status of a nation is determined locally and the locally dominant caste exercises considerable authority in this regard. By dominant here, we mean the Brahmins. They want to establish dominance in society by their strength. They are ahead in terms of dignity. They consider the lower class people of the society as worthless. The influential people of the society make them do many moral and immoral things. The lower class people are exploited so much that they forget their position in the society.

Birth-based: The Indian caste system is a rigid one. At birth, the influential people in society determine which class a person belongs to. We have already discussed that every nation has its own customs, traditions, norms, and practices (imposed by society). There are also some restrictions through which the caste system is implemented, which are discussed in the Vedas and Manusamhita.

Dietary restrictions: A rule is a command to do something and a prohibition is a prohibition to do something. In caste customs, there are also some restrictions on food habits and these prohibitions differ from one caste to another. The restrictions that can be observed in the caste system regarding the consumption of food and drink. These restrictions have made the caste system more rigid. There is a heated discussion in the society about who will eat what and who will not eat what. In this way, the caste system is becoming more and more rigid.

In addition, many characteristics can be observed such as the importance of title, profession-based, restrictions on marriage, career independence, stability, etc.

Reasons for eviction and relaxation

In my opinion, as the days change and civilization develops, the caste system is gradually weakening or almost disappearing. Modern thinking is changing humanity. Civilized people want this system to be abolished. Many changes have taken place in social life due to the change in humanity and those changes have gradually reduced the rigidity of the caste system. Mahatma Gandhi's 'Harijan Movement' and Ambedkar's 'Dalit Movement' have severely hit this stigmatizing system by making people aware of its narrow-mindedness. Inspired by the ideals of social reformers of the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj like Raja Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Dayanand Saraswati, and humanists like Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi, the caste system is no longer felt to be necessary in the minds of the Indian people. The social and political factors that have given people the courage to move forward despite severe obstacles and dangers in the post-independence era are:

Spread of modern education: As a result of the introduction of modern education, moral education has been awakened among people. They have been able to free themselves from the harshness of society and religious prejudices. As a result of the spread of knowledge, the narrow-mindedness among people is being

removed. Forgetting the differences among themselves, people have come closer to each other, living together. In the light of knowledge, people realize that there is no real difference between people, that all people have equal dignity as 'human beings'. Socially conscious people believe that the caste system humiliates people and that in order to establish people as social 'human beings', it is necessary to eradicate this system.

Amendment Act System: Due to the amendment act system in India, the law has been amended whenever the people felt the need to amend it. This constitution states that holy places and temples in all parts of India are equally open to people of all castes, regardless of their caste. Untouchables and Dalits can now enter various holy places and temples in India; although there are still exceptions. The issue of contact is decreasing, everyone can eat together, and the distinction between high and low castes is changing. Since independence, the Indian government has taken various developmental measures to uplift the lower castes to the mainstream - introducing reservation in education and livelihood for Dalits and Scheduled Castes. Efforts have been made to improve educational and economic conditions, and the government is enforcing laws in places where caste-based discrimination is still prevalent, and if necessary, taking legal action against those directly involved. The constitutional legal system has greatly reduced the severity of caste discrimination.

Improved infrastructure: After the country became independent, improvements in infrastructure and technology led to huge changes in the transportation and communication system. Especially in waterways, land routes, air routes, telephones, etc. As a result, different countries are able to communicate with foreign countries and learn about the way of life in foreign countries. Therefore, people are becoming aware of their position. If someone is being insulted racially or if someone is shown to be inferior, other people are consciously protesting against it. Until now, the doubts, doubts, fears, superstitions or ideas that were deeply rooted in the minds of upper caste people about lower caste people or lower caste people about upper caste people have been realized as baseless through encounters. As a result, the caste system is being relaxed.

Industrialization and Urbanization: In ancient times, the main livelihood of people was agriculture, but due to the increase in population, agricultural land began to decrease. For several other reasons, the pattern of livelihood began to change and thus the Industrial Revolution began. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, industrial cities were established in various regions, especially in India, where people, regardless of their caste, gathered and worked together for the purpose of earning a living, such as in restaurants, shopping malls, private offices, schools, colleges, etc. As a result of travel, people started interacting with different people and exchanging ideas. As a result, it becomes impossible to observe the principles of high and low, purity, impurity, etc. In this way, people's thoughts, values, and lifestyles naturally change. As the saying goes, money has no caste. People need money to improve their lives and to earn money, people started working together, ignoring the differences of caste and class. Nowadays, employees are appointed in government and private industrial organizations according to their qualifications, not according to their caste. Today, people are no longer caste-bound if they do not accept a vocational education. As a result, the strictness of the caste system is gradually decreasing.

Freedom Struggle: The freedom struggle of the people of India against the British was able to unite everyone regardless of caste or religion. The freedom fighters were able to unite everyone, high and low, by awakening a sense of nationalism in everyone. They were made to understand that there is nothing in caste, everything is a creation of man. Various freedom fighters and social reformers used to ask everyone to unite regardless of caste or religion. After independence, the democratic government has tried to eradicate this caste system and is still continuing it.

In addition, the caste system is becoming less rigid due to Western ideas, culture, ideals of various philosophies, sense of individualism, etc. Many people believe that this system will disappear completely one day in the future. Chhibbar, in his research book, expresses the hope that the formal systems of caste system will soon come to an end and their existence will only survive as a monument of the past. Betteillie

has expressed similar hopes in his book *Caste Old and New*. Based on the data of the general elections in India, the Director of the Indian Institute of Public Opinion has concluded that people's loyalty to the nation is no longer so strong, because, inspired by the national spirit, the people today elect their representatives without any discrimination of caste or religion.

Conclusion

Today, some vested interests or political figures are trying to prevent this practice from completely disappearing, as can be seen in some states of India. There are killings due to caste differences. To keep their party interests intact, some political parties adopt the caste system as a cunning tactic. For example, if a particular caste (Brahmin or Kshatriya, etc.) is in the majority in a region, political parties declare a person from that caste as a candidate. The candidate elected by the majority caste wins. The political parties which declare the caste system as shameful in various public meetings are the ones who in some cases indulge in the caste system to gain majority in elections. It would not be a lie to say that only to keep the party interests intact, political parties try to preserve the caste system and use it as a 'trump card' in elections. Due to such corruption of political parties, the eradication of the caste system is not easily possible. To eradicate the stigmatized caste system, the country's political environment must also be decontaminated.

We also see in the present day that people of lower class with immense wealth can establish rule over the upper class. The association of respect, influence and prestige with land ownership has been a long-standing one—from the beginning of feudalism, the landowner, i.e. the landlord, has been considered a recipient of great respect and honor. It is true that in most cases land ownership was limited to the upper caste. However, if a lower caste person somehow managed to acquire land, then by virtue of that land ownership, he became equal to the upper caste people, and sometimes exercised authority over the upper caste people. For example: The lower caste Jat community of Punjab, the lower caste Yadav community of Bihar, by virtue of their land holdings, are more influential, prestigious and respected than the upper caste Brahmins. Therefore, in the present day, we can see that the caste system is changing.

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