

Dominance of Superiority – Mother of Caste System; A Bane to the State

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Abstract -Every country has some roots in the society to discriminate one group with another group. These roots traces to some kind of stereotype like social, political or economic status. The caste systems are any ranked, hereditary, occupational groups that constitute societies in certain geographical regions of the world. The caste specifies the rules and restrictions governing social intercourse and activity for each group based on their economic status, practicing occupations and social status. The caste system provides mutual exclusion in many social activities, including eating, gathering, as well as marriage. Also, there existed another group, who are relegated to the worst occupations, ranked below the castes, thus treated as sub-human-"untouchable". The question arises in what scenario the caste system was evolved. If we want to understand this fact then we need to accept the human being is a unique creature of the universe who wants to be happy and make others happy but at the same time the human being wants to be superior with the others. Feeling of superiority is inherent in every human being and dominance of superiority is the mother of 'caste system'. The paper presents historical perspective of caste system in India and analyses the impact of the economic development. The paper also proposes various arguments to abolish the caste system.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The caste system in various religions was established in different times. Like the roots of the Hindu caste system were already in place between 1000 and 1500 B.C. during the settlement of Aryans in the Indus River valley. The book Rig Veda, describes the four main castes (varnas) in traditional Hindu society: Brahmins, the class of priests and teachers; kshatriyas, the warrior class, who were the rulers and soldiers; vaishyas, the commercial class of artisans, traders, and cultivators; and shudras, the servant and peasant class.

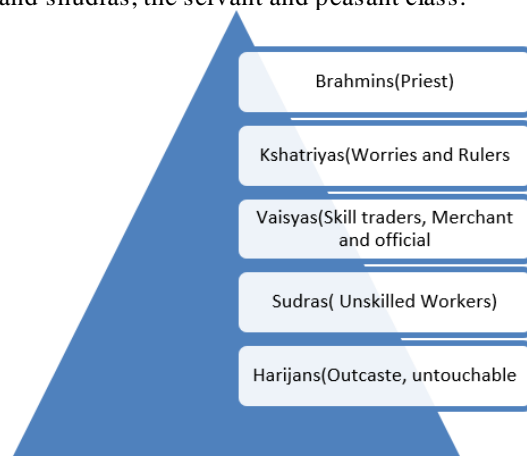


Figure 1. Hindu Caste System

Fundamentally, in Muslims there is no caste system. The Holy Qur'an insists on the radical equality of all Muslims, caste (zat, jati, biraderi) remains a defining feature of Indian Muslim society, with significant regional variations.

While the severity of caste among the Indian Muslims is hardly as acute as among the Hindus, with the practice of untouchability being

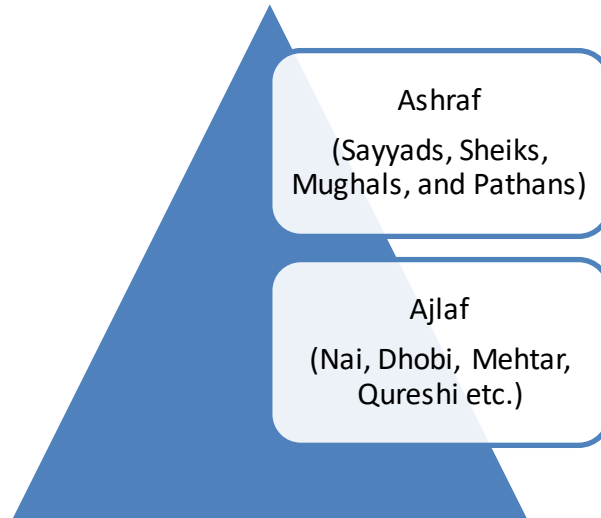


Figure 2. Muslim Caste System

virtually absent, caste and associated notions of caste-based superiority and inferiority still do play an important role in Indian Muslim society. However, Muslims of India adopted the Hindu caste system with all its disabilities in spite of the egalitarian and Islamic principles of equality

Thus, two main castes took birth among Muslims of India the Ashraf (the noble class) and Ajlaf (the low class). The Ajlaf were mainly the Hindus who had converted to Islam. They had belonged to the lower castes. The ashraf castes are broken down into four categories for purposes of ranking: Sayyads, Sheiks, Mughals, and Pathans. Like the four varnas of the Hindu system.

The Sachar Committee Report, on the existence of castes among Indian Muslims, says: “the present day Muslim society is divided into four major groups (i) the ashrafs, who trace their origins to foreign lands, (ii) the upper caste Hindus who converted to Islam, (iii) the middle caste converts whose occupations are ritually clean, (iv) the converts from the erstwhile Untouchable castes – Bhangi (scavengers), Mehtar (sweeper), Chamar (tanner), Halalkhor (Dom) and so on”

Caste is a religious and social institution of the Hindu peoples, who comprise about 80 percent of India's population. The rest of India is Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, or Jain. Caste is such a deep-rooted and pervasive concept, however, that it has influenced Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. For example, there are separate churches for dalit and non-dalit Christians. Even the tribals, who are not a part of Hindu society, have started observing "untouchability" toward dalits—who themselves have a caste hierarchy.

1.1 Features of caste system

The sense of superiority and inferiority is associated with the caste system. In Hindus, the Brahmins are placed at the top of the hierarchy and are regarded as pure or supreme. The degraded caste or the untouchables have occupied the other end of the hierarchy. The status of an individual is determined by his birth and not by selection nor by accomplishments. Each caste has its own customs, traditions practices and rituals. It has its own informal rules, regulations and procedures. The caste panchayats or the caste councils regulate the conduct of members. The caste system has imposed certain restrictions on the food habits of the members these differ from caste to caste. In North India Brahmin would accept pakka food only from some castes lower than his own.

But he would not accept kachcha food prepared with the use of water at the hands of no other caste except his own. As a matter of rule and practice no individual would accept kachcha food prepared by an inferior caste. The caste system put restriction on the range of social relations also. The idea of pollution means a touch of lower caste man would pollute or defile a man of higher caste. Even his shadow is considered enough to pollute a higher caste man. The lower caste people suffered from certain socio-religious disabilities. The impure castes are made to live on the outskirts of the city and they are not allowed to draw water from the public wells. In earlier times entrance to temples and other places of religious importance were forbidden to them. Educational facilities, legal rights and

political representation were denied to them for a very long time. If the lower castes suffer from certain disabilities some higher caste like the Brahmins enjoy certain privileges like conducting prayers in the temples etc. There is gradation of occupations also. Some occupations are considered superior and sacred while certain others degrading and inferior. For a long time occupations were very much associated with the caste system. Each caste had its own specific occupations which were almost hereditary. There was no scope for individual talent, aptitude, enterprise or abilities. The caste system imposes restrictions on marriage also. Caste is an endogamous group. Each caste is subdivided into certain sub castes which are again endogamous. Inter-caste marriages are still looked down upon in the traditional Indian society.

II. FUNCTIONS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system is credited to ensure the continuity of the traditional social organization of India, which itself is a bone. The knowledge and skills of the occupations have passed down from one generation to the next. Through subsystems like Jajmani system the caste system promoted interdependent interaction between various castes and communities with in a village. The rituals and traditions promoted cooperation and unity between members of the different castes.

2.1 The dysfunctions

The unfortunate part is that caste system promotes untouchability and discrimination against certain members of the society. It hindered both horizontal and vertical social mobility forcing an individual to carry on the traditional occupation against his or her will and capacity. The status of women was affected and they were relegated to the background. The caste system divided the society into mutually hostile and conflicting groups and subgroups.

2.2 Dominant caste

This is also very true that a particular caste is dominated when it is numerically higher than the other castes. The main criteria of domination of a caste are

- Economic strength
- Political power
- Ritual purity
- Numerical strength

The dominant caste also wields economic and political power over the other caste groups. It also enjoys a high ritual status in the local caste hierarchy. The dominant caste may not be ritually high but enjoy high status because of wealth, political power and numerical strength. The presence of educated persons and high occupation rate also play an important role in deciding its dominance over other caste groupings. Sometimes a single clan of dominant caste controls a number of villages in areas.

2.3 Social Pollution

The superior castes tried to maintain their ceremonial purity and they don't allow untouchable persons to join. This creates social pollution and plays a very crucial role in maintaining the required distance between different castes.

2.4 Mechanism to Abolish

Despite of having many fundamental rights and act the society suffers from this caste pollution. We should raise our voice to abolish the caste system and make casteless nation. Acts & Constitutional Provisions for a Casteless Society India has one of the best constitutions but it is rarely implemented fully. Few acts are presented in the below tables.

Acts	Description
Civil Right – 1976	Protection of Civil Rights Act-1976
SC & ST Act-1989	Prevention of atrocities against SC & ST's Act -1989
Article 14	Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
Article 15	Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
Article 16	Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.
Article 17	Abolition of untouchability and prohibition of its practice
Article 18	Abolition of titles except military and academic
51A- (e)	Fundamental Duty, to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional

	diversities and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. 7. Directive Principles of State Policy
Article 38	To promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order permeated by justice – social, economic and political – and to minimize inequalities in income, status, facilities and opportunities.
Article 46	To promote the educational and economic interests of SCs, STs and other weaker sections of the society and to protect them from social injustice and exploitation
Article 330	Reservation of seats in Lok Sabha for SC and ST's.
Article 332	Reservation of Seats in State Assembly for SC and ST's.

2.5 Proposal

Following are the various proposals to abolish the caste system.

Proposals	Description
Abolish of suffixing SURNAME	Thought this is very delicate matter but state can exercise to force not to suffix the SURNAME with their name.
Revision of History and Social Books	The text shall be excluded from the books of history and social that talks about caste/religion or shall be revised appropriately.
Changing mindset of teachers	Lessons should be included to teach the students that the caste system is manmade and should be ignore completely. The similarities between the different castes should be stressed rather than the differences.
Promotion of Inter-caste marriages	By promoting Inter-caste Marriage and by providing special offers for people who does inter caste marriage can bring changes in the next generation people
High Mobility	If high mobility is provided then people will mix up with others and there will be less dominance of a particular caste.
Improvement in Education System	This requires a healthy educated, participatory followership, and an educated, morally grounded leadership.
Social Reformation	The mindset and thinking shall be changed through workshops, community interactions and community inclusions.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The caste system is a bone for the society. This creates differences between the groups in turn affects the entire economic growth. Despite of having many provision and acts in the constitution we are unable to abolish the caste system. Therefore, we have proposed various solutions to abolish the caste system at the same time preserving the best practices which society is practicing.

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