CASTE DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN MORDEN INDIA

Dr. Vimal Kumar Mahawar

Associate Professor in Political Science

Samrat Prithvi Raj Chouhan Government College Ajmer

Abstract

Over a long period of time, India has been home to a number of distinct civilisations. There is evidence of caste bias in this location, despite the fact that it is a place where people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and castes live. Over the course of history, individuals of higher castes have exercised discriminatory authority over people belonging to lower castes. The fact that change is both a natural occurrence and a law of nature is something that we are all aware of. The only things that are everlasting are ideas, civilisations, civilisations, and human deeds. Nothing is fixed. Things that were true thirty years ago are no longer true now, and things that were true 10 or twenty years ago will no longer be true in the future. Several philosophers, educationists, and sociologists have presented contrasting viewpoints with regard to the concept of caste as well as the changes that have been brought about by technological advancements and development. The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras are the four groups that are historically recognised within the Hindu community. The caste system is the basis for this classification. When it comes to the origins of the groupings, a significant percentage of Hinduism traces them to Brahma, the god of creation. Due to the fact that this divergence occurred, the higher caste had complete and utter authority over the lower caste. On the basis of this distinction, every caste has fulfilled its obligations and worked in the area that was assigned to it. There were three thousand main castes and twenty-five thousand sub-castes, and occupation functioned as the dividing line between the two groups.

Keywords: Morden India, caste discrimination, social justice, challenges, progress.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian subcontinent is still strongly divided along caste lines, despite the fact that it has many wonderful characteristics, such as its democratic spirit, cultural diversity, and plethora of traditional faiths and rituals. Throughout the course of human history, the caste system, which was a framework for ancient social stratification, has regulated political and economic activities. It has determined who has access to what and how high they may ascend in the social hierarchy. Despite constitutional safeguards and progressive legislation that intended to remove caste-based discrimination, persistent impacts of caste-based discrimination continue to have an impact on a variety of spheres, including education, labour, politics, and social connections. The ongoing struggle for social justice in India comprises a complex interplay of historical legacies, governmental

efforts, and grassroots activity. This is done in an effort to strike a balance between the ideas of equality and the embedded realities of caste-based prejudices. The purpose of this article is to investigate the present sociopolitical atmosphere in modern India, discussing the challenges that stand in the way of real social justice as well as the progress that has been achieved in the fight against caste discrimination.

The caste system is still very much alive and thriving in many sectors of society in India, despite the fact that it is prohibited by the constitution of the independent India. In its history, it operated as a tight hierarchical structure that benefitted the upper castes at the cost of lower-caste groups, notably the Dalits and the Adivasis, who were subject to intense prejudice and cruelty. There has been some mobility and integration as a consequence of urbanisation, economic liberalisation, and modernity; yet, caste identities continue to have an influence on the functioning of institutions, how individuals interact with one another, and the opportunities that are accessible to them. Certain affirmative action policies, such as those pertaining to employment and school reservations, have been implemented by the Indian government in an attempt to empower communities who have been historically marginalised. In spite of the fact that these measures are of critically important value, they have been met with opposition and criticism, with some individuals stating that they actually help to promote caste consciousness. Even if there are laws in place to prohibit caste prejudice, the fact that social boycotts, honour killings, and crimes based on caste continue to occur demonstrates that caste prejudice is still prominent in today's society.

The implementation of legal measures, such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, which expanded affirmative action for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), have been of significant assistance in addressing the issue of systematic discrimination. Through the implementation of these initiatives, lower-caste groups have been able to gain access to government jobs, educational opportunities, and political engagement. Despite this, there is ongoing discussion on whether or not these initiatives are effective. Some individuals have been able to climb the social ladder with the assistance of affirmative action; however, it has also been criticised for the fact that it has only assisted a tiny fraction of communities who have been historically marginalised and has allowed a power dynamic to develop within those groups. Additionally, the implementation of these projects is often hampered by a lack of political resolve, ineptitude on the part of bureaucrats, and instances of criminal activity. The continued existence of caste-based violence, discrimination in the workplace, and social exclusion casts doubt on the effectiveness of government measures aimed at reducing systemic bias via the elimination of these issues. The contemporary India is experiencing a number of sociopolitical developments, some of which include economic reforms, the expansion of digital technology, altering political beliefs, and caste dynamics. Indicative of a growing reaction against caste prejudice are the movements of assertion that are taking place among Dalits. These movements are being led by organisations that are striving for respect, equality, and justice. The amplification of Dalit voices, the challenge to dominant narratives, and the mobilisation of support for caste-based causes are all things that have been tremendously helped by digital platforms and social media. The mobilisation of political forces along caste lines has been a factor that has brought people together while also caused splits. Caste identities are often used as a weapon by political parties in order to win over supporters. This is done rather than working towards the creation of a society that is more egalitarian. It is possible to see a

reflection of the achievements and shortcomings of India's social justice movement in the creation of new political organisations that advocate for representation based on caste.

There are several forms of caste-based discrimination that continue to exist despite the existence of legislation and regulatory frameworks. Some examples of these manifestations include manual scavenging, institutionalized discrimination, and systematic economic exclusion. In the unregulated informal labour industry, which employs a significant portion of individuals from lower castes, there is minimal social safety and job security. Both of these factors are lacking. The practice of endogamous marriages, religious segregation, and segregated classroom seating are all instances of social actions that reflect caste prejudice. All of these practices are examples of caste discrimination. Caste systems have not necessarily been eradicated, despite the fact that urbanisation has led to a greater mixing of different castes interacting with one another. Caste identities, on the other hand, have a tendency to take on more complex forms, such as a preference for certain social and professional networks.

If social justice is to be realised in India in the future, it is imperative that law enforcement, educational reforms, economic inclusion, and cultural transformation all collaborate with one another. Education continues to play a crucial part in the process of deconstructing caste divisions. This is accomplished by fostering critical thinking, compassion, and community building among the young of today. Policies that target disadvantaged populations, such as those that stimulate entrepreneurship and offer financial inclusion initiatives, may pave the way for opportunities for economic empowerment and self-sufficiency. These policies may also create opportunities for economic independence. In addition, it is of the utmost need to strengthen the legal and police institutions in order to ensure that offences that include caste are dealt with in a timely manner. In order to confront discrimination that has been around for a long time and to advance a narrative that is inclusive of all individuals, regardless of their caste, progressive political leaders, media outlets, and civil society organisations need to work together.

Objectives

1. To evaluate how well laws and policies are working to reduce caste prejudice.

2. To recognise issues such as societal hurdles, aggression, and unfairness.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

"The existence of fraternity and the practicality of fraternity" was a primary point of focus for B. R. Ambedkar. It is made abundantly evident by his statements that the Constitution of a country is founded on the four foundations of liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice among other principles. Obtaining true democracy is like to aiming for the skies; in the absence of brotherhood, equality and liberty are unattainable objectives. According to his point of view, democracy is nothing more than an alternative name for equality; it is a system that acknowledges the significance of each individual's life and provides a fair playing field for members of various groups. "Democracy is not merely a form of government but it is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience," he explains in further detail. In its most fundamental form, it is an

attitude of reverence and regard for one's fellow human beings. As a fighter for social justice, he fought against the bias of caste, which impeded individuals from advancing in their careers and realising their full potential. In the event that every individual is born with the same set of inherent rights, then those rights need to be applicable everywhere. According to Sontakke (2004), it is imperative that the norms, laws, principles, and righteousness being respected everywhere. The concept of morality comes into play when one considers how they feel about other people who are members of the same community: fellow humans. Ambedkar believed that justice was the mechanism by which fraternity, which he conceptualised as a connection between liberty and equality, could be preserved. The only way for a diverse people to attain social equality is for them to actively engage in the process. The existence of a feeling of community among fellow citizens, which has the potential to enable individuals from a wide range of backgrounds to participate fully in society.

Integrity becomes a problem whenever there are differences between the majority and the minority in a situation. As a consequence of this, Ambedkar developed a framework that is founded on the legal component. This framework encompasses brotherhood, equality before the law, and socio-ethical justice. Ambedkar went even farther by identifying the underlying root of the problem that was preventing progress with limits. He identified the problem as a socially divided society with a caste structure. He advocated for the elimination of caste by posing a challenge to the discriminatory hierarchical order that existed in Indian society and by urging disadvantaged groups to stand up in opposition to the caste system. When applied to a civilisation as intricate and multifaceted as India's, the concept of social justice may be understood as the assurance of economic, political, and social equality. The following is what Ambedkar said: "the term social justice includes everything that the state is required to do in pursuance of the Preamble, the Fundamental Rights of the citizen and the directive principles of state policy." By providing the most vulnerable people of society with the opportunity to break free from their existing marginalisation, social justice would be the ideal technique for distributing resources in an equal manner. It is necessary to carry out a proportionate adjustment in the manner in which unequal individuals are treated, taking into account the significant similarities and contrasts between them. It is thus possible to define social justice in any context; nonetheless, the most useful foundation for this debate in India is the inequity that exists between castes.

Caste Discrimination and Social Change in India

In response to societal demands, the idea of a caste system developed out of an understanding of human diversity and a desire to accommodate it within a hierarchical framework. In order to resolve the conflict between individuals and communities, a plan for collaboration and synthesis was put up. Racial prejudice and the caste system, which is founded on the Varna system, have long played significant roles in ancient India. There has been a parallel and simultaneous operation of both of these elements. The second component, social transformation in India, is a result of the first, caste prejudice. Since one trait is the source and the other the effect, it is impossible to study one without the other. Indian history reveals societal transformation as one flips through the pages from antiquity to the present day. References to a society without castes may be found in the Rigveda, Mahabharata, and the Pali Canon. In the Satya yuga, the only caste of deva (gods), also known as Brahmans, existed. Enterprise on an individual level had no place here. Collaborative effort was required by the tribe. There was a uniform and equal distribution. In the one-caste myth, members of the herd are tied together

by blood connections and tribal discipline. Over time, animals began to supplant humans as the primary workers. To the same extent that animals and useful objects became loot, so too did humans. Along with it came the institution of slavery, which divided society into two distinct castes: the Arya and the das, or master and slave. Status was accorded to Brahmans, Kashtriyas, and Vaisyas according to their relative significance. The fourth one was Dasya or Sudra varna. Lord Bramhma's four castes—the mouth, the arms, the thief, and the feet—are recounted in the mythological Purusukta of Righveda.

The varna-based occupations were not rigidly passed down from generation to generation at first. According to Vedic literature, Vishwamitra was a kstriya who became a brahman by learning Brahminical knowledge and qualities; he excelled in intellectual studies. Similarly, according to Satpata Brahmna, the replaceable nature of society is shown by the fact that Raja Janaka, a Brahman, became king of Videha via his virtues and valour. The Brahamans, who trace their lineage back to the sage Bhrgu, went on to build kingdoms, according to Matsya Purana. The ploughing by Raja Janak was a metaphor for the development and output of agriculture. The fact that Balrama, Lord Krishana's brother, was known as Haldar, literally "the wielder of plough," demonstrates the significance of farming and the widespread acceptance of manual labour at that era. It was possible for Vaisya and Sudhra members to rise in rank if they exhibited the appropriate qualities and abilities. According to the Aiterya Brahmana and the Puranas, if one did not adhere to the rigorous requirements, he may be relegated from a higher caste to a lower one.As time went on, the smritis system solidified caste and profession as inherited roles. For the purposes of division and synthesis, a set of class regulations was draughted.

But its uncompromising and unyielding nature was imparted to it by the lawgivers. Brahamna, the first Varna, was portrayed in the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Jatakas as someone who had great dignity, rank, riches, and power. Brahmans reaped the benefits of tax-free land grants (Brahmadeya) or village income. Nobody among them had a solid grounding in religion or Vedic studies. Workers and slaves were used to develop these areas. There was widespread corruption and deviance due to the strict caste system and the large-scale distribution of charity. The statecraft and military occupations of the post-Buddhist era were open to all social classes and groups; for example, the Sarvananas were Brahmans.

The Guptas were Shudhra, whereas the Nandas were Vaishaya. By far, the most prevalent category was vaisayas. On the economic ladder, some of them made it to the top rung. The Vaisayas also accommodated some small-scale peasants, vendors, and low-ranking bureaucrats. One could see the Sudras' class character. Slaves labouring for pay made up the majority of them. From the notion itself, namely, the strong have the right to dominate the weak. Their role as the higher classes' servants made them indispensable to Aryan culture. Similarly, Mlechchas were a class below. They constituted the periphery of Aryan culture. In this caste-based culture, Shudras were considered lower-class citizens. It was forbidden to dine with Shudras and be married to them. There is much explanation and emphasis on the Varna system even in Sastras like manusmriti. It states that Purusha has been said to have given birth to Brahmans from his lips, Kashatriyas from his arms, Vaishyas from his thighs, and Sudhras from his feet. Caste was still mentioned in mediaeval India. Historians and tourists from other countries have made reference to India's caste structure and the prejudice that exists within it. There has been much debate over the virtues and shortcomings of the caste system.

In violation of the Sastras, caste becomes more complicated and multi-faceted as one moves from early to later smritis via manu, Vishnu Yajna, etc. There were ramifications of caste, and subcastes developed as a result. New professions and crafts emerged as a result of intercaste marriage. A new name, caste, and occupation were bestowed to the children of mixed-race marriages. It was useless, and the legalists fought back. Legal wedlock includes rape, and even Kautliya acknowledged this kind of passionate union. Additionally, it caused the caste system's ramifications to grow. Discrimination and social inequality based on caste systems have had a significant impact on Hindu society in India. Because of this, religious peace and togetherness among Hindus and other segments of Indian society have taken a hit. The dreadful situation of the people, who belonged to lower social classes, resulted from the advantaged classes' access to education and, eventually, respectable employment. These marginalised communities fell farther and more behind economically and socially as a result of widespread neglect. Using a strategy of "divide and rule," the British government sought to use each chance it could find to ensure the stability of their reign in contemporary times. The British authorities went to great lengths after 1857, during the first struggle of Indian independence, to form regiments according to caste and race, such as the Kumaon, Gorkha, Sikh, and Jat regiments.

There was no revolutionary shift in India's caste system even throughout the sultanate era, when Hinduism was the dominant religion. Nothing touched it. During the era of the sultans, there were panchayats based on caste. Racial and caste stratification were important to Balban. A lowly Hindu or Muslim would never have been appointed to a prominent position by him since he despised them. During the Middle Ages in India, the Hindu social system and caste-based social structure remained unchanged. As high-ranking members of society, the Brahmans were responsible for maintaining the temples, leading religious events, and instructing the next generation of writers. Their endeavours were unfettered by the state. The rajas, or governing class, were the Kashtrayas. Wealthy Vaishyas were involved in banking, trading, and other commercial pursuits. As previously, the poorer castes and sudras experienced limitations. Islam did not consider untouchability to be a sin, and for some, conversion may mean freedom. Members of different castes worked in different occupations, while the caste panchayats oversaw domestic matters.

Caste and class

A person's birth and blood determined their position, but differences in money also caused status to alter. Caste gave the Brahmans and Kshatriyas tremendous power when they stuck to their jobs. A Brahman or Kshatriya's social rank was preserved even when he descended into the lowest professions of trade and commerce. Although the Vaishyas became wealthy, they relegated themselves to the level of merchants. Sudhra Jainism does not disapprove of the Varans system, but it holds that a man is born into a lower caste because of his transgressions in a past life. However, he had the potential to achieve redemption via his life's good works and virtuous qualities. All persons, regardless of their social status, were treated with equal respect in Buddhist teachings. Many individuals were drawn to it because of its Ashtangika Marga and the ideals of Buddha sangh and dhamma, which promote men's equality. As a sign of societal transformation, members of the low caste and sudharas, who were before considered untouchable and lower-born, adopted Buddhism with open arms.

Bhakti movement

Social peace was ushered in by the Bhakti movement in India, which loosened the grip of sects and castes. The boundaries between affluent and impoverished birth were blurred by the Bakhti cult. They disregarded the long-established boundaries of religion and caste and were anti-ritualistic. To them, they were of little consequence. A Bhakti saint named Ramananda also brought together people from all walks of life; for example, the weaver Kabir, the cobbler Ravidass, the jaat Dhanna, the barber Sena, and the Rajput Pipa. Nirgun, the formless God, was worshipped by Kabir. Universal brotherhood of man was his message, and he vehemently opposed religion and caste-based divisions. Discarding the caste and creed system was Dadu Dayal's goal. The ideal of a society without castes was advocated by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Although he condemned caste differences, the Maharashtra saint Eknatha showed tremendous compassion for those of lower castes.

Social Reforms

Raja Ram Mohan Rao, Jyotiba phulle, and Swami Vivekanand were among several social reformers who advocated for the education of India's sudras and Dalits in an effort to abolish the caste system. Great literary figure and architect of the Indian constitution Baba Bheema Rao Ambedkar also sought to educate and raise awareness among the economically and socially disadvantaged in order to bring them on par with the more fortunate parts of society. In 1897, Swami vivekanand established the Ramakrishana mission. An outstanding social reformer, he battled for the racial, religious, and class equality that all members of society deserved. Sawami Dayanand Saraswat established Arya Samaj in the year 1875. He despised the Brahmans' caste structure and their perceived superiority. The study of the Vedas and other sacred texts should be accessible to everyone, he said, and he condemned the practice of untouchability. Following in Buddha's ethical occupational footsteps, caste was reinterpreted. It is commendable that Arya Samaj dared to do social activities.

To reunite the Hindu community that had strayed from Hinduism, the Arya Samaj launched the Sudhi movement. Many people from lower castes, who were socially and economically disadvantaged and did not hold themselves in high esteem in Hindu culture, converted to these faiths. In an effort to convert such Hindus, the Suddhi movement was launched. Secularism and social reform were hallmarks of Jammu and Kashmir's great Maharaja Hari Singh. He really cared about the untouchables' right to justice. Temples and wells were to be accessible to those of lower castes, as he had decreed. At the round table meeting, he was profoundly moved by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's speech and vowed to do everything in his power to help the oppressed, educate them, and pull them out of poverty. Additionally, Mahatama Gandhi worked to improve society. Working for the betterment of lower-caste Hindus and untouchables, he coined the name "Harijana" to describe the Dalits. The difficulties they had with mobility were his primary focus. However, he took a different tack than the early reformers, who saw the abolition of castes as the key to ending social exclusion.

Education

During the Middle Ages, indigenous Hindu colleges called Pathsalas did not accept students from the lowest castes, who were known as untouchables. The untouchables and other members of society's lowest castes benefited greatly from the missionaries' primary schools. Indigenous children's schools were superseded by elementary schools with the publication of Woods Dispatch in 1854. Female students and pupils from lower castes were welcome at these institutions.

The attitude of the British towards caste discrimination

Since ancient times, castes have been a fixed part of India's social structure. There was "an infinite variety among the governed social customs and religious beliefs," Mr. Rapson said. The day the government meddles with Hindus' religious and civic practices, according to L. Abee Dubois, "would be the last day of existence as political power." The British government was heavily criticised by the Indians for its role in social ills such as the Sati system and infanticide system, among others, and as a result, it did not actively participate in social changes inside Hindu culture. Consequently, it refrained from actively participating in caste-related societal changes. British officials blamed their meddling with India's social structure for sparking the uprising of 1857.

CONCLUSION

Finally, despite constitutional protections, affirmative action programs, and social movements that have helped India overcome caste prejudice, the country's underlying inequities remain. Despite progress in areas like as education, employment, and political representation thanks to social justice initiatives, disadvantaged groups still face obstacles to full equality, including economic inequality, social exclusion, and violence based on caste. Dismantling caste systems will need persistent work from the government, civil society, and individuals, but there is promise for a more inclusive society thanks to the growth of digital activism and legislative changes. Persistent dedication to enforcing policies and social transformation is necessary to attain a fair and equal India.

REFERENCES

1. Galanter, Marc (1984).Competing Equalities: Law and The Backward Classes in India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

2.   Government of India(2008).Constitution of India, New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice (Online book) available at

3. Guru, Gopal (1993). Dalit Movement in Mainstream Sociology. Economic and Political Weekly. 570-573.

4. Ilaiah, Kancha (1999). Reservations: Experience as Framework of Debate. Economic and Political Weekly. 25:2307-2308

5. Kumar, Anil (2015). Varna – Jāti Interconnection: Some Reflections on Caste and Indian Tradition. International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, 5(3), 788-793.

6. Basham A.L,The wonder that was India, Pub.Rupa.co., Culcutta.,1954.

7. Majumdar R.C.,The Classic Age "History and Culture of Indian People" Pb. Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan.

8. Majumdar R.C.,The Vedic Age Pb. Munhiram Manohar Lal pvt. Ltd.1997

9. Majumdar R.C., Ancient India, Pb. Banarsi Dass, Delhi.1952.

10. Singh Upinder ,A of Ancient India and Early Medieval India Pb. Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd.2008. [6] Shanker Rama,History of Ancient India pb. Banarsi Dass, Delhi.

11. Jha D.N., Ancient India, Pb. Ajay Kumar for Manohar publisher.1977

12. Sharma R.S, Ancient India (Text Book, History), NCERT

13. Mahajan V.D. Ancient India Pb. S. Chand 1960 New Delhi. [

14. Agnihotri Kuldeep Chand (in Hindi), Maharaja Hari Singh, Pb. Prabhat Prakashan 2016.

15. Pandey A.B., Early Medieval India Pb. Surjeet.,2012

16. Chhabra G.S., Modern India, Vol. ll Pub. Lotus Press. Darya Ganj, New Delhi ,2011

17. Chandra Bipan History of Modern India, Orient Blackswan pvt.ltd.2009

18. Chandra Satish History of Medieval India, pb. Oriental Blackswan Pvt.ltd. New Delhi.2007,