HISTORY OF THE INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM AND IT'S IMPACT ON INDIA

Nagappa R
Research scholar Magadh University
Bodh-Gaya, Bihar

Dr. Kishan Prasad
professor Magadh University
Bodh-Gaya, Bihar

ABSTRACT

People in India are socially separated according to class, religion, geography, tribe, gender, and language. The Indian Caste System is historically one of the primary characteristics that contributes to this social differentiation. Even though this and other types of differentiation are present in all human societies, the situation becomes problematic when one or more of these dimensions overlap with one another and become the sole basis of systematic ranking and unequal access to valued resources such as wealth, income, power, and prestige. Because the Indian Caste System is seen as a closed social stratification system, a person's social position is determined by the caste into which they were born. This implies that a person's social status is dependent on their birth order. Interaction and conduct with persons of different social statuses might be restricted due to these differences. Its history is heavily intertwined with Hinduism, which is one of the most important faiths in India. Additionally, its history was significantly impacted by the Buddhist revolt as well as the control of the British. In this article, we will investigate the numerous facets of the caste system in India, including its hierarchy, its history, and its influence on modern-day India.

Keyword: Indian Caste System,

INTRODUCTION

People in India are socially separated according to class, religion, geography, tribe, gender, and language. The Indian Caste System is historically one of the primary characteristics that contributes to this social differentiation. Even though this and other types of stratification are present in all human societies, there is a problem when one or more of these dimensions overlap with one another and become the sole basis for systematic ranking and unequal access to valuable resources such as wealth, income, power, and prestige. This creates a situation in which there is a problem (Sekhon, 39). Because the Indian Caste System is seen as a closed social stratification system, a person's social position is determined by the caste into which they were born. This implies that a person's social status is dependent on their birth order. Interaction and conduct with individuals of a different social rank are restricted to certain parameters (Sekhon, 39). Its history is heavily intertwined with Hinduism, which is one of the most important faiths in India. Additionally, its history was significantly impacted by the Buddhist revolt as well as the control of the British. In this article, we will investigate the numerous facets of the caste system in India, including its hierarchy, its history, and its influence on modern-day India.

Caste Structure and Characteristics

It is far more difficult than was first believed to define the word "caste." According to Risley's definition, it is "a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community." In other words, it is "a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a myth It is also possible to describe it as an endogamous and hereditary subdivision of an ethnic unit that occupies a position of either a higher or lower rank of social respect in contrast with other such subdivisions. As was said before, a caste name is typically connected to a particular line of work, and because it is a closed stratification, endogamy is a natural consequence of its existence. Varnas are the four distinct social classes that make up the caste system in India. These varnas are arranged in a hierarchical order. They are categorised according to vocation, which serves as the determining factor for access to money, power, and privilege. The most powerful and influential members of society belong to a small number of dominating castes (Pintane). The two top castes are traditionally seen as being on a higher spiritual level than the lower castes (Smith, 43). The Brahmans, who are mostly priests and academics, hold the highest positions in the society. The author of "Classifying the Universe," Brian K. Smith, offers the following explanation of his conception of the Brahman caste:

The Brahmin class is fundamentally characterised by its purported primacy (as the class formed first by the creator deity), by knowledge of the Veda, and by the monopoly that this class holds on the operation of sacrifices. These three characteristics combine to form the Brahmin class. These characteristics justify the social position of the class in relation to other groups: they are dominant because they came before others, and they claim to stand outside of the power relations that govern social life for others because of their superior knowledge and sole possession of the ultimate "weapons," which are sacrificial techniques. In other words, they are superior because they were first.

However, there are many other "degrees" of Brahmans, including Kanya-Kubja, Tamil, Tanjore, and others who live in a great number of different villages (Pintane). These sub-castes, known as jatis, are extremely endogamous, which means that a Brahman is not only limited to marrying another Brahman, but also to marrying a woman who belongs to the same subdivision of Brahmans (Hutton, 47). Every jati is made up of a community that is predominately subsisting on the earnings from one particular line of work. People are automatically members of the caste into which they were born. After that, they pursue the line of work that is most suitable for their jati. One of the many indicators of social rank is the degree to which these Brahmans are set apart from other people. Other indicators of social status include the possession of monetary things, social power or influence, and social skills (Pintane). The Brahman caste dominates modern India in terms of both economic rivalry and educational attainment, and they have maintained this position throughout the country's history (Sekhon, 44).

Kshatriyas, often known as political rulers and soldiers, are the next social caste after Brahmans. They were members of the governing elite and frequently worked in conjunction with the Brahmans to maintain their dominance over the realm. The Holy Scriptures of ancient India required the kings and queens to uphold fairness and equity in the administration of their kingdoms. The role of a Hindu monarch was to serve as the defender of his followers; but, in order to fulfil this role, a Hindu king was required to be an accomplished warrior. Physical and martial prowess are the defining characteristics of a Kshatriya (Smith, 48). These characteristics affected the nature of his interactions with other people: "the Kshatriya is tasked with the

protection of the higher Brahmin class with control over (and unfettered exploitation of) the lesser Vaishyas" (Smith, 48-9). Kshatra is a Sanskrit term that may be translated as "administration," "power," and "dominion" (Indianetzone). Kshatriyas have a reputation for being courageous, vigilant, and full of fortitude, as well as generous, disciplined, and humble (Lahiri). Priests and soldiers were seen to be "better" than or "superior" to the other castes, and the general public held the view that the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas formed a single governing class. This view was supported by the fact that both castes were considered to be the most powerful. The Brahmans, on the other hand, never shied away from proclaiming their own caste to be greater than that of the Kshatriyas, despite the fact that they and the Kshatriyas jointly professed themselves to be superior to the commoners. According to the Vedas, the reason for this is that Brahmans are described as being self-sufficient, but Kshatriyas are dependent on priests for their needs. It is for this reason that it is believed that brahmans can survive without rulers, but rulers cannot adequately carry out their responsibilities without the assistance of brahmans.

Origins and History

Numerous explanations have been proposed to explain where the caste system of India came from. Some of them have to do with religion, while others have to do with biology. The religious theories state that according to the Rig Veda, which is the ancient book of Hinduism, the primordial man, Purush, destroyed himself in order to establish a human civilization, and the various pieces of his body produced the four separate varnas. This is explained by the religious texts. From his head came the Brahmins, from his hands came the Kshatriyas, from his thighs came the Vaishyas, and from his feet came the Shudras. The Varna hierarchy is established according to the descending order of the several organs that were used in the process of creating the Varnas (Daniel). For instance, Brahmans, who are a depiction of the brain and were descended from the head of Purush, are regarded as the most knowledgeable and strong of all the varnas due to the fact that they have the greatest knowledge and the highest level of education. In a similar manner, Kshatriyas, who are often regarded as the warrior caste, were formed by arms, which are a symbol of power. According to yet another theological explanation, the Varnas originated from Brahma's bodily parts. Brahma is revered in Hinduism as the deity responsible for the creation of the world.

According to the biological idea, all objects in existence inherit either three, two, or one of three different types of attributes. The term "varna" refers to varying degrees of texture or colour and is symbolic of mental temperament. Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas are the three different types of Gunas. White represents Sattva, red represents Rajas, and black represents Tamas. These, in varying combinations and amounts, make up the group or class of people all over the world who have distinct personalities (Lahiri). The traits of wisdom, intellect, honesty, kindness, and other beneficial attributes are referred to as sattva qualities. Characteristics associated with rajas include fervour, pride, and bravery. Tamas are said to be able to acquire a variety of undesirable attributes, including stupidity, dullness, and an inability to think creatively, amongst others (Daniel). People with varying quantities of these innate talents end up choosing the suitable line of work for them. According to this school of thought, the attributes of Sattva are often inherited by Brahmans. They have the trait of austerity, which manifests itself in them as a calmness and self-control. Purity, uprightness, and forbearance are attributes that are commonly associated with them. Brahmans also have the desire to increase their levels of faith, knowledge, and intelligence (Lahiri). The virtues of Raja are passed down to the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, whereas the traits of Tama are passed down to the Shudras (Daniel). One's Varna may be defined by the nature of their deeds, the strength of their ego, the hue of their information, the feel of their comprehension, the tenacity of their resolve, and the intensity of their joy (Lahiri).

The Aryans had their own unique social ordering concept that they named Varna Vyavastha. This theory was founded on the four distinct levels of social function that were arranged in a hierarchical structure. In descending order of significance, they are as follows: functions of a religious and educational nature, functions of a political and military nature, functions of an economic one, and functions of a menial kind (Velassery, 2). The Aryans divided themselves up into three distinct factions. The first group, known as the Rajayana (later renamed the Kshatriya), consisted of the warriors. Next came the Brahmans, who were the priests in the society (Daniel). Both of these factions engaged in a never-ending power struggle for the position of political leadership among the Aryans. In due time, the Brahmans rose to the position of leadership within the Aryan civilization. The last group, which included farmers and artisans and was known as the Vaishyas, was composed of people (Daniel). The Aryan conquerors brought the natives under their control and made them their slaves. As a result of this process, the Vaishyas evolved into the society's landowners and businesspeople, while the locals transitioned into the roles of peasants and craftsmen (Daniel)

Caste, Culture, and Religious Beliefs One of the most essential aspects of India's social structure is the caste system, which divides people into several social classes. In Hindu culture, caste distinctions have a role not just in the way people actually interact with one another but also in how they conceptualise the hierarchy of values. It is anticipated of people belonging to different castes that they will act in different ways and have diverse beliefs and ideals. The Hindu faith allows for these varieties of behaviour and thought.

Historically, the caste system of social stratification in India was given legitimacy by the traditional Hindu holy books, particularly in the manner in which Brahmans understood these teachings. It has been said that Hinduism is "just as much a social structure as it is a religion... Its social structure has been the caste system from very early times, and this has...become...increasingly connected with Hinduism as such" (Smith, 9). In ancient India, the caste system was justified using a variety of different reasons. The rationale offered in the Vedas was one of these options. If the Vedas did not make some reference to the caste system, then it is quite unlikely that it would have been accepted by the people who created them. The Rigvedic text known as the Purushu Sukta, which can be found in the 10th Mandala of the Rigveda, explains how the various castes came into existence. According to this explanation, the castes originated from various parts of the Purusha, or the Cosmic Soul, during the time of a massive sacrifice carried out by the gods (Jayarama V).

OBJECTIVES

1. To study India caste system
2. To study Caste, Culture, and Religious

Movements and Political Policies against Caste

Before and after the country's independence, there were various social movements as well as acts taken by the government that were taken in order to combat and make an effort to eradicate the disparities and injustices that were caused by the caste system. In order to foster a shift toward a more favourable attitude towards the lower castes and untouchables, Gandhi began using the name "Harijans" (which literally translates to "people of God") to refer to untouchables during the national movement. However, many people of lower castes felt that the word was condescending toward them. The British had begun the Census of India in the late 19th century, and in 1935, "the British Government of India came up with a list of 400 groups considered untouchable, as well as many tribal groups, that would be accorded special privileges in order to overcome deprivation and discrimination." (The British Government of India came up with the list.) It was eventually

decided to refer to the groups that were listed on this list as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. However, throughout the 1970s many of the leaders of castes that were designated untouchable began referring to themselves as Dalits (Sekhon, 48). Jyotirao Phule was the one who initiated the anti-caste Dalit movement in the middle of the 19th century. He established a campaign for education and the upliftment of women, Shudra's, and Dalits, and the movement eventually extended to many other regions of India. He also worked on eliminating the concept of "untouchability," which involved removing barriers that prevented people from entering temples and locating a place for Dalits within the religion of Hinduism (Sekhon, 48). After 1910, however, Dalit leaders started advocating for a separate electorate for Dalits and began focused on distancing themselves from Hinduism. They did this in the hopes of gaining more political power. However, Gandhi, who was one of the leaders of the Indian National Congress, attempted to instead urge the absorption of Dalits as part of reformed Hinduism rather than attempting to abolish the caste system.

Modern India

The interactions between different classes have grown less rigid in today's society. It is more common for people of different castes to share meals together, and more people are eating at neighbourhood restaurants, where caste differences are less likely to be made. According to Sekhon (43), one of the most significant shifts that had happened in India was in the vocational activities of males (and women later on). In the past, the majority of men did not deviate from the jobs that were tied to their castes, such as manufacturing pottery and blacksmithing. Many people have moved on to more recent careers that have nothing to do with their caste, such as working for the government, teaching, working in retail and services, or repairing machines. Caste is no longer as strongly connected with wealth and power in the village as it once was, and the distribution of land ownership has become more diverse. Additionally, the notion that people of lower castes are responsible for issues of impurity and pollution is becoming less prevalent. Purification rites connected to one's caste position are still carried out on ceremonial occasions and behind closed doors, despite the fact that this practise has only somewhat decreased in its visibility to the general public. Endogamy is still practised within families, although not with the same level of rigour as in the past. Education and awareness of the need for women's equality have gained tremendous traction across India, despite the fact that the status of a woman is still heavily dependent on the standing of a man. In rural regions, breaking out of caste-restricted jobs and gaining access to resources is still challenging and time-consuming for members of lower castes. On the other hand, caste plays a much less role in urban settings since it has become less important. Caste has become a means of competing for access to resources and power in modern India, such as educational opportunities, new occupations, and improvement in life chances. Despite the fact that discrimination based on caste has been made illegal in India, caste continues to be a factor in this competition (Sekhon, 45). This pattern is associated with India's preferred policies and the manner in which those policies are being implemented.

CONCLUSION

The caste system in India has had a considerable impact on the development of the professions and functions within Indian society, in addition to the values held by its members. Since the time of the Aryans, religion has been the driving force behind the perpetuation of this social stratification structure. This drive began with the Aryans and has resulted in a long history of tragic discrimination, segregation, violence, and injustice. It was the religion of the Indian people that had the most effect on their day-to-day life as well as their beliefs, and Hinduism was the foundation of the purity-pollution complex. Caste awareness is still deeply ingrained in Indian society even after the country has been independent for more than sixty-three years. Since the beginning of recorded history, India has maintained its status as a country despite the existence of closed

groups that are differentiated by caste, creed, and language. A law that played a significant part in the economy of both urban and rural life was that occupations were hereditary. Work was divided, and each person had his assigned work from the time they were born.

REFERENCES

[1]. Lahiri, R. K. "Caste System in Hinduism by Dr. RK Lahiri, PhD." Boloji.com - A Study in Diversity - News, Views, Analysis, Literature, Poetry, Features - Express Yourself. 20 Nov. 2005. Web. 3 Nov. 2010.

[2]. Malalasekera, G. P., and K. N. Jayatilleke. "Buddhist Studies: Caste System." BuddhaNet - Worldwide Buddhist Information and Education Network. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.

[3]. Pintane, Andrea. "Brahmans Within the Caste System." Home - CSU, Chico. Web. 11 Oct. 2010.

[4]. Pyakurel, Sourav. "Caste System in India | Articles." Rajput Brotherhood: A Blog Focused on Technology and Web-development. Web. 29 Nov. 2010.

[5]. Smith, Brian K. Classifying the Universe: the Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste. New York: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.

[6]. Tweet, Jonathan. "JoT Rel Reincarnation." JoT Welcome Page. July 2004. Web. 23 Nov. 2010.

[7]. V, Jayarama. "Hinduism and Caste System." Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and Other Resources. Web. 14 Nov. 2010.

[8]. Velassery, Sebastian. Casteism and Human Rights: toward an Ontology of the Social Order. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005. Print.

[9]. Alavi, Seema. Sepoys And The Company Tradition and transition in Northern India 1770–1830. Oxford University Press India. 1998. Print.

[10]. Daniel, Aharon. "Caste System in Modern India." Adaniel's Info Site. Web. 4 Nov. 2010.

[11]. Ghurye, G. S. Caste and Race in India. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969.

[12]. Hampton, Andrea. "The Untouchables." Home - CSU, Chico. Web. 23 Nov. 2010.