



CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT



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ABSTRACT :

Today India facing so many social problems, but here we have to discuss the problem of caste discrimination in Indian context. (SC/ST/OBC) The exact origin of caste system can not be traced, prof. Rapson opines that the varna was the root cause of the caste system. The term varna literally means colour and it was originally used to refer the distinction between Arya And Dasa in ancient India. In its very early stages Indo- Aryans had no social or professional groups.

KEY WORDS - social problems , Aryan society.

INTRODUCTION:

They lived as one homogenous people. In the Rig Vedic age there were only two classes of people in society, the Aryans and non Aryans. Thus, the Aryan society was divided on the basis of varna. The Aryans felt themselves superior to the non- Aryans. The Aryans intentionally avoided social inter-course with non Aryans in respect of marriage, diet etc. so the idea of superiority complex did its work and that led to the birth of casteism.

CASTE SYSTEM IN MODERN INDIA

The leaders of independent India decided that India will be democratic, socialist and secular country. According to this policy there is a separation between religion and state. Practicing untouchability or discriminating a person based on his caste is legally forbidden. Along with this law the government allows positive discrimination of the depressed classes of India.

The Indians have also become more flexible in their caste system customs. In general the urban people in India are less strict about the caste system than the rural. In cities one can see different caste people mingling with each other, while in some rural areas there is still discrimination based on castes and sometimes also on untouchability. Sometimes in villages or in the cities there are violent clashes which, are connected to caste tensions. Sometimes the high castes strike the lower castes who dare to uplift their status. Sometimes the lower caste get back on the higher castes.

In modern India the term caste is used for Jat and also for Varna. The term, caste was used by the British who ruled India until 1947. The British who wanted to rule India efficiently made lists of Indian communities. They used two terms to describe Indian communities. Castes and Tribes. The term caste was used for Jats and also for Varnas. Tribes were those communities who lived deep in jungles, forests and mountains far away from the main population and also communities who were hard to be defined as castes

for example communities who made a living from stealing or robbery. These lists, which the British made, were used later on by the Indian governments to create lists of communities who were entitled for positive discrimination.

PROBLEM OF CASTE DISCRIMINATION

The base of India's social structure is caste and sub-caste, Caste system has been an integral part of Indian society. The members belonging to lower castes (i.e. SC/ST/OBC) were treated worse than animals. Although the constitution provided laws for abolition of caste discrimination, yet the practice continues to some extent even up to present day laws have been passed by parliament for the abolition of caste discrimination. The constitution also forbids discrimination against any citizen on the basis of caste. But the problem of caste discrimination still exists in India.

The castes, which were the elite of the Indian society, were classified as high castes. The other communities were classified as lower castes or lower classes. The lower classes were listed in three categories. The first category is called Scheduled Castes. This category includes in it communities who were untouchables. In modern India, untouchability exists at a very low extent. The untouchables call themselves Dalit, meaning depressed. Until the late 1980s they were called Harijan. Meaning children of God. This title was given to them by Mahatma Gandhi who wanted the society to accept untouchables within them.

The second category is Scheduled Tribes. This category includes in it those communities who did not accept the caste system and preferred to reside deep in the jungles, forests and mountains of India, away from the main population. The Scheduled Tribes are also called Adivasi, meaning aboriginals.

The third category is called sometimes Other Backward Classes or Backward Classes. This category includes in it castes who belong to Sudra Varna and also former untouchables who converted from Hinduism to other religions. This category also includes in it nomads and tribes who made a living from criminal acts.

According to the central government policy these three categories are entitled for positive discrimination. Sometimes these three categories are defined together as Backward Classes. 15% of India's population are Scheduled Castes. According to central government policy 15% of the government jobs and 15% of the students admitted to universities must be from Scheduled Castes. For the Scheduled Tribes about 7.5% places are reserved which is their proportion in Indian population. The Other Backwards Classes are about 50% of India's population, but only 27% of government jobs are reserved for them.

Present Indian Population can also be largely classified in the following social categories.

A) Forward Hindu Caste & communities	17.58%
B) Scheduled Castes	15.05%
C) Scheduled Tribes	7.51%
D) Other Backward Classes	52.00%
E) Other (Residual)	7.86%

Source: Govt. Of India Report 2009

Even in the 21st century, students and professionals belonging to Sudra communities are victimized by the Manu-wadi teachers, bureaucrats, ministers, judges, doctors, and all other professionals. Brahmin, Shatriya, and Vaishya castes make up 15% of the population, yet claim about 65% of the upper-level jobs. In the first-ever statistical analysis of its kind, a survey of the social profile of more than 300 senior journalists at 37 Hindi and English language newspapers and TV studios found that in "Hindu upper-caste men"- who form 8% of the country's population —hold 71% of the top jobs in the "national media." Hence, the media is biased and does not report the SCs/ST asked members of the media to lodge a formal complaint, they said that "if we do that, our whole career will be finished by these professors who treat us worse than animals." Such is the terror of these Manu-wadi professors. The SC/ST students prefer to swallow these insults and suffer silently.

Inequity has existed for thousands of years for the SCs/STs and has included educational discrimination, housing segregation, physical harassment and abuse, economic suppression and disenfranchisement, discrimination in medical care, religious discrimination, and violence (e.g., torture, murder, rape). Despite several Indian laws enacted for the protection and empowerment of the SCs/STs, Indian society still treats them as outcasts. The Indian government has passed laws to protect the Sudras, but failed to promote democratic principles, secular thinking, and progressive ethos. For instance, despite a constitutional mandate, India has repeatedly failed to fulfil the reservation quota for SCs/STs In faculty positions (saying suitable candidates are not available).

Recently, the Indian government created a committee-headed by Prof. S. K. Thorat-to investigate discrimination in the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Delhi. The committee found widespread discrimination, harassment, torture, and abuse against SC/ST students and professionals, including examination assessment (theory and practical papers), consultation and interaction, discrimination in teaching, segregation in residential hostels, mess and dining discrimination, social isolation in cultural and sports events, ragging, anti-quota agitation, and hiring and promotion discrimination.

The AIIMS is a 100% grant-in aid institution of the Indian government and should comply with all rules, regulations, and directives of the government to provide constitutional guarantees to the SCs/STs. According to the Thorat committee report, more than two-thirds of SC/ST students did not receive adequate support from teachers, which resulted in poor performance and psychological problems. A student at the AIIMS lost his eye due to ragging by upper-caste students, but had no forum in which to complain. There is no student representation for the Sudras.

CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS

The constitution of India prescribes protection and safeguards for the SC, ST, and NT. With the object of removing their social disabilities and promoting their varied interests. The main safeguards are : Abolition of untouchability, protection from social injustice and Various form of exploitation, removal of restrictions of access to shops, restaurants, wells, tanks and roads. giving them right to move freely and acquire property. giving them the right of admission lo educational institutions and receiving grants out of state funds, permitting the state to make reservation for them in various section and setting up separate departments and advisory councils to promote their welfare and safeguard their interests.

But with all this positive discrimination policy most of the communities who were low in the caste hierarchy remain low in the social order even today. And communities who were high in the social hierarchy remain even today high in the social hierarchy. Most of the degrading jobs are even today done In the Dalits, while the Brahmans remain at the top of hierarchy by being the doctors, engineers and lawyers of India. In modern India new tensions were created because of these positive discrimination policies. The high caste communities feel discriminated Inthe government policy to reserve positions for the backward classes.

The following table gives the measurable position of Backward Classes in union services and highest representation of upper caste people in the union services.

Sr. No.	Department/ministry	No. of class 1 officers	No. of backward class officers
1	President secretariat	48	None
2	Vice-president secretarial	07	None
3	Atomic Energy	35	None
4	Civil Supply & Co-operative	31	None
5	Communication	42	None
6	Health & Social Welfare	240	None
7	Labour Ministry	74	None
8	Parliamentary Affairs	18	None

9	Petroleum & Chemical	121	None
10	P. M. Office	34	01
11	Cabinet Secretarial	20	01
12	Agriculture & Irrigation Ministry	261	14
13	Defence Ministry	1379	09
14	Education Social welfare	259	04
15	Electronics	92	02
16	Energy	641	20
17	Foreign Ministry	649	01
18	Finance Ministry	1008	01
19	Home Ministry	409	13
20	Industry Ministry	169	03
21	Information & Communication	1506	124
22	Law Department	143	05
23	Legislative Department	112	05
24	Company Affairs	247	06
25	Planning	1262	72
26	Science & Technology	101	01
27	Shipping & Roadways	103	01

Source Udyan Sharma.Arakshana in Ambedkar Centenary special issue.

Reservation of other Backward Classes, SC/ST in central Govt. services

Class	Total	SC/ST	OBC	Genral
1 st	174026 (100.00)	9891 (5.68)	8169(4.69)	155966 (89.63)
2 nd	912925 (100.00)	165982 (18.18)	97063 (10.63)	649880 (71.19)
3 rd & 4 th	484687 (100.00)	118282 (24.40)	91975 (18.98)	274430 (56.62)
All Classes (Excluding sweepers)	1571638 (100.00)	294155 (18.72)	197207 (12.55)	1080276 (68.73)

Source Govt. Of India Report 2009

SUGGESTIONS:-

To empower the SC/ST/NT communities and to secure their rights some suggestions are as follows:-

1. Acknowledge that caste based discrimination is deeply institutionalized in India and must be stopped.
2. Provide effective remedies and adequate compensation for cases of caste discrimination under domestic legal mechanisms.
3. Stop forthwith any illegal actions through its agencies directed against lower castes in India.
4. Take immediate steps through committed actions in educate the public and judicial bodies on caste - based discriminations.
5. Equal opportunity employment, equal opportunity housing, and a proper mechanism for resolving discrimination and harassment complaints.
6. Positions allocated to SC/ST/NT kept vacant until suitable candidates are found.
7. Elimination of caste discrimination.
8. Promotion of fair recruitment, selection, and career development processes with clear objectives and goals.

9. Monitoring, detecting, and remedying caste discrimination and harassment in education, employment, social and religious events.

CONCLUSION

Although India's national constitution of 1950 sought to abolish cast discrimination and the practice of untouchability. the caste system remains deeply entrenched in Hindu culture and is stillwidespread throughout southern Asia, especially in rural India. In what has been called India's "hidden apartheid", entire villages in many Indian stales remain completely segregated by caste Representing about 15 percent of India's population or some 160 million people the widely scatter Dalits endure near complete social isolation, humiliation, and discrimination based exclusively on their birth status Even a Dalit's shadow is believed to pollute the upper classes. They may not cross the line dividing their part of the village from that occupied by higher castes, drink water from public wells, or visit the same temples as the higher castes. Dalit children are still often made lo sit in the back of classrooms.