

Atavism of Social Stratum and its Absolutism in the Indian society

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Abstract:

From ancient times, India has been a country for the people of foreign origin, the outsiders, more correctly the invaders. The social stratum, which subsists today, is the effect of the slump of Mughal era and the rise of British Raj on the Indian subcontinent. So, it is obvious that the caste and untouchability prevails in India from the past and it is clearly obtainable now from literary assets. The trauma in this twenty-first century is the notable facet of world political, economic, social, cultural, education and religious whirls around the issues of status and inequality, based on sex/gender ethnicity/race, caste and class. As a result, the scholars are engrossed in recreating the bygone history of untouchability. The theories we have now are not firm and obvious, but various contradictory facts, which are expressed in credible ways. Hence, it would be germane to scrutinize the origin, progress, role and connotation of caste in India.

Keywords: Dalits, Harijins, British Raj, Social Stratum, Inequality

I. Introduction:

Historians, Anthropologists and Sociologists argue that, the Dravidians came to settle down on this land from some other parts of the world, even before Aryans invasion. It is believed that pre-Dravidian settlers were the natives the aborigines of India. It was a savage and primitive society. The Dravidians were an organized race and first attacked the aboriginal of India. They were basically nomads and wanted a settled life. The defeated race of natives or aboriginals joined the social life of the Dravidians and got assorted. But those who fled away from the Dravidians remained aloof in the forest, lived uncivilized and barbarous life.

According to historian Stanley Wolpert the Dravidians reached a higher stage of development after settling in India. They had a developed civilization as compared to the other races. The Dravidians were the first to attack and defeat the aboriginals of India and wanted a settled life. It seems all aborigines and natives were mixed up with the

Dravidians in due course of time. Thus the Indus valley civilization emerged and flourished in India, much before Aryans settlers in India.

A great deal of time and research has been devoted to attempt to arrive at an explanation of the origin of caste. The central view discovers the origins of caste, as the Aryans made entry into the Indian sub-continent in groups. Gradually the Aryans started dominating the Dravidians and the natives. The Aryan society underwent important changes in their way of life, social thinking and culture. They become interested in permanent dwellings and establishment of tribal political system. In due course of time the Varna system, which was initially social gradation, was on its way towards crystallization

The confrontation and the rivalry among the three not only affected the culture and social status but also their occupations and functional division. In order to avoid a larger scale intermixing of the natives amongst the invading race of Aryans a fourth caste, the Shudras came into being when they were conquered and enslaved or employed by the organized society of the Aryans, were forced to be laborers. The fourth caste was forced to live outside the community and assigned low work for survival.

In the process of conquest, compromise, and settlement, customs all changed. Some native tribes submitted themselves to the Aryans and accepted their faith and rituals and cultural pattern was graded higher rank and those who did not submit and accept the faith were tortured and kept as untouchables. These lower ranked people or Shudras were apparently a conquered race. The castes were deeply rooted in Hindu social life. For Hindus the caste became a social and political package and for the Shudras and untouchables it became a curse, a license of slavery and serfdom.

II. Objectives:

- To propound various theories of social stratum
- To spotlight the origin of caste
- To discern the position of Dalit in the existing scenario

III. Need for the study:

The current generation is not conscious of the origin of caste system in India. They blindly believe and accept the social stratum practiced by their ancestors. The caste system in India persists to have a powerful repercussion on the society in day to day life of common man. Even after seventy-five years of Independence we can find that people are conscious in holding the caste. Though the educated civilians are moving away from the framed system it is still being practiced invisibly everywhere. Now it's responsible of each and every one to exterminate the stratification from the culture. However it is

important to look how the caste system has affected the living standard of one particular group by not allowing them to attain either status or equality in the society.

IV. Analysis

Research scholars have come to no denouement despite of devoting time in putting forward the theories of social stratum. Some theorists say it was the Brahmanic class categorized people by their occupation and economic status in the society in the name of Hindu scripture. In the present social set up the eradication of the caste system is very much desirable in the best interest of democratic traditions and national unity.

The word Caste is derived from Portuguese. In the Indian context the word “Caste” means ‘jati or’ jat’. It decides the social position of a man in society. The categorized people follow the common occupation and live together as a community and never mingle or marry the other community who belongs to the higher social position. The status of persons in India at present is determined on the basis of his birth in a particular caste or community and his socio-economic standing besides his interaction with others. Changes in such a status are possible only in the next life or if he renounces this world and becomes an ascetic

The word caste had been defined by many scholars, and none of the definitions are satisfactory. It is defined as a group bearing a common name and following the same rituals and customs and commonly forming a sole analogous community. It is believed from the sacred textbook that they are born out of Brahma’s parts of the body. The Brahmins born out of Brahma’s mouth took their occupation as priests, teachers and scholars, the Kshatriyas born out of the chest took their occupation as administrators, rulers and warriors, Vaisyas born out of the thighs took their occupation as traders and agriculturalists, the last Shudras, from His feet were not given the choice to select instead forced to be service providers and manual workers.

Theoretically, it is being used to study on caste by the scholars who have taken an interest upon caste to dig into its origin. The Brahmins or priests were just like the bureaucrats of today. They were virtually powerful and claim intelligence. The kshatriyas or warriors were military personnel, the rulers suggests valour and strength. Vaisyas were merchants and cultivators, while the shudras were the menials and labourers. The Brahmins were always higher than other caste while a shudras the servant and meant to serve all others, beaten, tortured and even killed. They were also not allowed to mix up with the other caste. It seems right from an earlier period their voice was suppressed. They were not allowed to access the scriptures and other knowledge books.

The origins of the suppressed classes are traced from the early periods as it is mentioned in Hindu scriptures. The Shudras were not even considered to be a human being. They were treated even worse than shits by the upper class people. It is still hard to accept this kind of caste tyranny is prevailing in the nooks and Corners of our country. Compared with before, the difference now is that discrimination can be seen early but now it is invisible. For centuries, Dalits have been repudiated even the basic human rights such as to fetch drinking water from the common well, walk in public roads that is common to upper caste people, their dwelling areas are constructed outside the village and no rights to select their occupation instead it is assigned one by birth. The fight back of untouchables over centuries is a communal story to wage the chosen self identity as Dalit. Undoubtedly, their dwellings were far away from the village so that their shadow could not be visible to other communities. Their services were commissioned even for the meanest jobs. The element of reluctance or avoidance was never found on their lips. They were used as bonded labourers; even the very young children were employed to rear animals, and perform several other functions whether their physique permitted them or not. Very often they were the victims of deadly diseases on account of pressure of work.

Since the days of yore, the Dalits, very often despised as untouchables, has been suffering socially, culturally and economically. In fact our orthodox society always segregated them from the urban dwellings and existing norms and allotted menial works to them. It is thus evident that they were always at the beck. Their service could be commissioned for any kind of job even at an odd hour and it was not possible for them to refuse. Thus their social status remained pitiable throughout their life. They were just limping under the acute social pressure and their voices were stifled without any consideration in their favour. Whereas the elite or the upper caste people had complete dominance in all socio-economic matters, the lower class suffered perpetually and miserably and they were devoid of any hope for their better future. Thus, they were always at the beck and call of the elite class and were found readily available for service even at odd hours.

This pitiable condition of Dalits was seen and well-dressed by some eminent social and political philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi, Jgajivian Ram, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar and others and during their long career they have taken some ameliorative measures in order to raise their social status. Such, measures include the launching of a long-drawn movement, reservation for jobs, constitutional safeguards, conversions, health and hygiene, inter-caste relations, vote-bank politics, giving of education and entry into religious places. Many great leaders have sincerely questioned their pitiable conditions of the status of Dalits in our society.

From the above said statement it is proved that the social plight of Dalits in the Indian sub-continent had been most deplorable for several centuries. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar started his rebellious movement against Brahmin caste and Hinduism for the salvation and

development of the Dalits. At one point he understood clearly that within the Caste Hindus the Dalits would never receive respect or social status therefore, in 1956 he got converted to Buddhism. He criticized the caste system vehemently. He wanted to bring solution to the caste system by wanting the society to hold three basic fundamental principles such as liberty, equality and fraternity.

The phrase Dalit expresses not only single cluster of caste but it show how one group of people is browbeaten socially, economically, politically from all aspects of life. Earlier these depressed classes of the Indian society were called in the names of Untouchables, Dasyu, Adi Dravida, Tirukulattar, Atisudra, Panchama. The term “Harijan” was given to the depressed class people as an alternative of Antyaja by Gandhi in 1932. Though he was in favor of granting them equality and status in the society it was some or the other Dalits felt they were kept within the bounds of Hinduism. The label Dalit was readily accepted by the depressed class people all over the country only after the two towering figure repeatedly represented them as a separate community as “Dalits”. At present, they combat inequality and strive and believe to get equality. Dalit symbolize of Transformation and Rebellion.

Ambedkar staunchly suspected that the country needs a cultural insurrection to demolish the social stratum. To up bring Dalits in the society he reminded his followers the three mantras, “educate, regulate and agitate”. In order to get awareness the Dalits should be educated to equip themselves and to handle any situation that they might have to face in life. He recommended the suppressed class to use “education” as a tool to build an egalitarian society. In the vedic era they considered education only for the Brahmins the superior caste. Thus education became highly religious oriented, restricted and subjective based on the caste Hindus.

This was not the case that prevailed for a very long time. After independence the government took necessary step to change traditional social structure by formulating new policies. Now the government is trying to provide education to all class people by pulling down inequality. It is trying to make certain secularism, equality and liberty by endorsing education to the lower caste. It’s heartbreaking to bring forward that still the caste controls over education. Though people call themselves as educated and don’t see any difference in caste their inner conscious is not ready to accept everyone with equality when it comes to marriage, politics, education, jobs etc. for instance still in some schools the upper caste teacher invariably prefers the boys of the upper caste for tasks of bringing them water, tea, foodstuffs, and the like, while for other services, such as cleaning, sweeping, and furniture arrangements the lower caste boys are preferred. This shows as if the former type of work, if rendered by the lower caste children, will make the teacher impure.

Numerous examples can be quoted from the schools and colleges. Even at other institutions of higher learning and research, including those located in central places like Delhi, where there is internal; assessment, factors like caste, religion, language, region, ideology, and personal consideration do play an important role, resulting in subjective and biased assessment by the teachers.

The Education Commission has strongly advocated that there is one instrument “to be used to achieve the desired socio – economic and Cultural Revolution” is through ‘Education’ The Commission further highlights the importance of education in national development, by saying that it is only through this instrument the “destiny of India is being shaped in the classroom”. But unfortunately, education in general, and the classroom in particular, are used as a new apparatus to preserve caste inequality and traditional control.

Even today, it is not free from socio-linguistic, cultural, regional and parochial forces. Education is being moulded by these factors in such a way that irrational values are transmitted and social inequality is reproduced. Education becomes an instrument to strengthen these roots because it is a part of the social reality in which it exists. We need more powerful forces to counteract the values behind these forces which are highly pervasive and deep-rooted in the structure of Indian society.

As for the Dalits, only a minuscule part of them have been benefited from the reservation and the other facilities provided by the government to them. A large number of Dalits still continue to be oppressed in the villages. All these issues are, however, not intended to negate the changes made so far in society. There have been changes and there will be many more. Power equations still have to be altered and lower-caste still have to strike hard both individually and collectively if ever they want their lives to change for the better. The argument only proves that we still have a long way to go, before we comfortably talk of equality of the people in society.

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