

Caste and Social Exclusion from Historical Perspective

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Abstract:

Indian social system is a caste-based system, or we can say that the caste system is a distinctive feature of the Indian social system. This has attracted and continues to attract the attention of many scholars, anthropologists, historians, politicians, and sociologists. Studies are conducted on the nature of the caste system, its interrelationship, and the effect of the various processes in society.

The basis of Indian social structure lies in endogamy, occupation, religion, ideology and concepts like purity and pollution. The above aspects of society play a vital role in social acceptance and social exclusion of caste. Social acceptance of the socially excluded is not given priority in the Indian social system. Many social problems emerge because of social exclusion. The list of excluded groups is becoming long, according to various research studies by scholars. Indian society contains many characteristics related to exclusion which are connected to the social identity of an individual. This exclusion can be seen based on caste, race, gender and religion and also with the social, political and economic aspects of individuals and groups in Indian society.

It is a descriptive cum analytical type paper based on secondary sources. Historical Indological and structural-functional approaches are used to understand the Indian social structure that is based on the caste system. The present paper articulates the concept of social exclusion from a social perspective. The paper can be helpful in understanding social phenomena and the emergent consequences that hint at the Hindu social structure.

Key Words: *social exclusion, caste system, varna system, brahmins, stratification, social structure, degradation.*

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Introduction:

Indian social system is a caste-based system or we can say that the caste system is a distinctive feature of the Indian social system. Looking at the history of Indian society, it is seen that before the arrival of the Mughals, the invasion of various nations from different directions, the invasion of Muslim nations and then the invasion of European nations had started the process of transformation into the traditional caste system of India. And consequently, the caste system is also found in the various religions found in India. (Singh: 1973)

The original form of the Indian caste system was that of varna system but no definite information is available as to when the form of caste system took its form from varna system. But, it is found in some earlier studies that there were four varnas in this description. Also, some Vedas mention that Hindus have also the fifth varna in the social system. (Makwana:1986). This varna system also had a hierarchical system. Brahmin was at the top, followed by Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra and Pancham. In which Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya description is also known as Dvija varna. While the castes included in Shudra varna do not get the right to have Janai (a sacred thread). They are known as seva varnas, and in the fifth description they were kept outside the village because of their occupation which was considered unholy. Thus, the caste system is seen to be associated with the concept of the sacred and the profane, who were closely integrated into the society. In the described situation, the castes included in each varna had to perform the duties according to their caste. If it was violated, it was punished by the society. Sometimes there was an attitude of putting an individual or a caste out of the caste or even out of the society for its violation. Apart from this, the Brahmin caste enjoyed the most privileges and dominated the Hindu society. So mostly the rules of the society (statutory basis) were also framed by him. Which was recognized by the society. In which the relations between the castes and the transactions of each caste were also decided by him. Violation of which was punished. Moreover, it is also seen that even among the castes considered to be Brahmins included in the Brahmin varna, the hierarchy was seen based on their works. Brahmins were also used to performing Yajna, worshipping in temple, teaching Vedas, conducting social and other rituals in the host society, etc. In the Hindu society, Brahmins knew Vedas-Puranas and scriptures, so they occupied a high position in the society and people of other castes respected them.

Indian society is based on a caste system and that is an unequal society. Indian society contains many characteristics related to exclusion which are connected to the social identity of the individual. This exclusion can be seen based on caste, descent, race, ethnicity, gender and religion and also with the social, political and economic aspects of individuals and groups in Indian society. Many social problems emerge because of social exclusion. The list of excluded groups is becoming long through various scholars' research.

In the Indian context, social exclusion can be seen as the systematic exclusion of individuals and groups from one or more dimensions of society, such as structures of power and privilege, opportunities and resources (Radhakrishnan, 2009).

People from other disciplines generally discuss exclusion or are concerned with problems related to the market. At the same time, the structure of inequality helps to understand its impact on persistent social exclusions and how it also results in new forms of exclusion, it is important to understand the so-called exclusion debate both in general and in the Indian context.

Methodology of the study:

It is a descriptive cum analytical type paper that looks at the historical phenomenon that had been observed in the society. Historical Indological and structural-functional approaches are used to understand the Indian social structure that is based on the caste system. Secondary sources are used to articulate this paper. After a description of the historical facts found in literature about the Indian caste system, the concept of social exclusion can be understood from a social perspective. The paper can help to understand the social phenomena and the emergent consequences that hint at the Hindu social structure.

Concept of Social Exclusion:

Social exclusion is a product of institutional processes, group dynamics and social practices. The concept of social exclusion refers to accessibility in terms of needs and personal experience. With reference to accessibility, it refers to needs, rights and rewards. It can be also understood by what it should be and in relative terms.

Buvnik (2005) states that some groups of people in society create a situation where opportunities in society can be taken by others. He explains social exclusion as meaning "it implies an individual's inability to participate in the basic functions of society, political, economic, and social." Which leads to three things. In which the first is the effect of social exclusion on the culturally defined 'group', the second is the closure of social relations with other members of the people who have been socially ostracized, and finally the consequences of that exclusion are described. And it is clearly visible that the economic organization falls above. Because in it the tension of social relations plays an important role. In which system the power relations are clearly seen above. According to Buvnik, the exclusion of a person from a group in general is largely based on the individual's assigned status. This does not affect the status of the individual due to excommunication.

Makwana (2012) explores social exclusion and inclusion from a sociological perspective, referencing thinkers like Ambedkar, Kosambi, and Amartya Sen. The study highlights that social exclusion hinders the development opportunities of individuals, groups, or communities, affecting their social status and relationships. Achieving overall societal development requires addressing the marginalization of disadvantaged groups.

Many reasons and factors play an important role in the society for the exclusion of some members by other members of the society. In which mainly the desires in a person's mind and the tendency to dominate others work. This attitude forms the backdrop for boycotts and boycotts. Social exclusion of a person or a group in the society to achieve superiority in social dominance position/status and to achieve inferiority of others, to establish only one's own dominance over economic or political power and to keep it in one's possession permanently or to create one's ownership right, influence over other social institutions. As you can see the meaning of exclusion in almost all groups of the world, social exclusion is/is done on the basis of association, caste (female/male), caste, caste, economic and education. India's Hindu social system which is structured based on caste and caste. In it the process of social exclusion, the result is clearly understood. If we talk about caste council, earlier it was not seen in higher castes of the society. It has a control over its members. It preserves caste identity, which determines the boundary.

Indian society is a highly stratified society, based on caste system. Caste and its underlying occupation are seen in the caste system in which caste and profession were associated in the described system. In caste-based communities, other rules can be seen along with business. Which clarifies Ghurye (1969) in caste characteristics. In which restrictions on food and drink are also found along with business and many examples of social barring for breaking these rules are found in history (Ketkar: 1909:15; Sherring: 1974:19; Enthoven: 1920:216; Munshi:1926; Jote:1945:139; Rajgor:1987:1; Hutton:1960:05).

The structure of Hindu society:

The social structure of Indian society is based on the caste system, which is a hierarchical system. The stratification seen in this system can be understood on the basis of certain characteristics. This can be understood by Dutt (1931), Ghurye (1969) and Bhattacharya (1973). If we want to understand the Hindu social structure, we have to understand the caste structure first. In higher castes, there is no caste council. It is been observed it only in castes that render services to upper castes of the society. Caste council preserves caste identity, which determines the boundary.

Each caste, which is included in the caste system, has its own caste council. The main function of which is to determine and control the social behaviour of the members of its caste. Apart from this, they also decide what, how much and how to have relations with the people of other castes and kept an eye on whether it is followed or not. The caste council has a hold on its members. Because, any social question or matter resolve through it and it is acceptable to everyone. The punishment for mistakes includes expelling the caste, imposing a financial fine, providing food to the caste members or performing religious rituals, etc.

Rajgor (1987) mentions the various differences seen among the Brahmins and states that the Brahmins' omissions in their duties and conduct are responsible for their status. That is, even among the Brahmins, there are excluded groups due to which their status has been lowered socially. The author describes them in 'Prakirna Brahmins' (pp: 542).

It is evident that the different castes are the effects of different qualifications, merits, occupations, acts and castes of the people concerned. (pp: 02) Those Brahmanas who do not follow up their Brahmanical duties, e.g. who act as spiritual guides or as priests of the lowest classes, such as Suvarna vanika, Chandala & c. are called Patita (degenerated or fallen) Brahmanas. (pp: 18) It was settled that the varna sankaras would be classified according to their birth and respective professions would be settled, and any are among them, who would be found to be acting against those rules should be punished. (pp: 13)

In Madras, there are over 50,000 persons returned as Brahman by caste, which title probably represents those who are the hereditary or elected administrators of large temples, or who perform religious services in connection with the deities in honour of whom the temple was created (erected). It has been already mentioned that very early in the Indian portion of the history of the Arya, the Brahman ceased to perform these functions, and the few that continued to participate in them were held to be thereby degraded. (Census of India 1891- A general Report (1985: 203))

In addition, some books on history of Gujarat provide details of the deep conservatism seen in caste and society. This conservatism is related to marriage, occupation and dealings with other

castes. In society, the examples of reverse marriages taking place are found. But still, there was complete conservatism towards certain types of marriages and their prohibition was observed. If these norms that separated one caste from another were violated, the punishment would be social exclusion. And that would have very serious impacts on that society. As a result, people from every caste and society followed it with orthodoxy.

In the Indian Hindu social order, social exclusion was limited to interactions, religious activities, rites, worship recitals and money-making activities (business). People in independent India were forced to change customs and practices willingly and unwillingly and because of this, social exclusion is seen in some so-called traditional social practices and spheres. It can be understood according to geographical areas, because, its form and extent are different in rural and urban areas.

Indian society contains many characteristics related to exclusion which are connected to the social identity of individual. This exclusion can be seen on the basis of caste, race, gender and religion and also with the social, political and economic aspects of individual and group in Indian society. In the Indian social structure, its basis lies in endogamy, occupation, religion, ideology and concept like purity-pollution. Social acceptance of the socially excluded is not given priority in Indian social system. Many social problems emerge because of social exclusion. The list of excluded groups is becoming long through various researches made by scholars.

Social Exclusion from historical perspective:

Caste is one of the most important social institutions in India. Caste and Varna are the basis of social stratification in India just as class is the basis of social stratification in western countries. Indian society is a society characterized by many types of exclusion linked to one's social identity. This boycott has been associated with social, political and economic aspects based on caste, ethnicity, gender and religion in Indian society. The list of groups included in this gets longer through various studies by scholars.

Ghurye (1969:25-26) has shown caste as a hierarchical system, a system with restrictions on civil and religious deprivations and rights; food and drink; marriage; and on occupation. We can see these things shown by them practically as well as in the studies done by different social scientists.

Dutt (1931:15) has mentioned structural and cultural features of caste like: A member of a caste cannot marry outside the caste; each caste has certain restrictions/restrictions regarding eating and drinking with other castes; caste occupations are mostly fixed and due to which the status of Brahmins is highest; and a person's place in society (caste of a person) is fixed for life on the basis of his birth, and for breaking the rules of caste he can be expelled from the caste, but it is not possible to move from one caste to another.

Neisfield (1985) holds occupation responsible for the origin of caste. According to him people doing the same profession declared themselves as one caste. The high and low of professions is determined by its sanctity and impurity. The professions which are considered high and holy in the society also start to be considered high in the society by the adopting caste. The social position of the caste doing professions considered impure and low is also considered low. The group who established authority over the functions related to religion based on specific

knowledge were called Brahmins and later the position of priests became hereditary. Thus the Kshatriyas established a monopoly over administration and the Vaishyas over economic activities.

Ghurye also opines that Brahmins gave birth to caste system to build/maintain their clan and honour. Explains the caste elements in the origin of the caste system as well as the special contribution of the Brahmins in its development. Due to the desire to keep the Vedic rituals sacred, the natives' sense of self-superiority and the desire to prevent blood mixing, they made such strict rules that they could not mix with the Shudras and for this reason taboos related to social contact, food and marriage were born.

The body and property of Brahmins were considered above the law. A Brahmin was considered untouchable. They were engaged in teaching, priesthood and doing Yajna (rituals) etc. Some Brahmins belonged to royal families and some worked as priests of certain villages. Samaj Karma was given priority and was seen to be associated with the concept of the sacred and the profane. Certainty was also seen in the specific occupation of each caste and the relations with other castes. There are examples of reverse marriages taking place in the society. But still there was strict orthodoxy towards certain types of marriages and their taboos were observed.

Rajgor (1987:542) mentions 'Prakirna Brahmins', who have been looked lower status in brahmanical caste hierarchy. He also mentions the emergence of sub-caste or other caste. The reasons related to rituals performed during various occasions of life cycle which results in sub-caste or other caste. Brahmins who earn their livelihood by dancing and going to Shraddha events were put in lower rank in brahmanical structure. Also, Baudhayan mentions Brahmins earning a living by performing dramas on stage. Further, he has discussed that since ancient times, the duties and conduct of the Brahmins and what the punishment for breaching them should be on the basis of various religious texts. On the basis of which the reasons for the differences found among Brahmins are clear. Over time, the various sections among the Brahmins became evident. Some of the books on history in Gujarat give details of the strictness of caste and society.

Bhattacharya (1973) mentions about the Barna Brahmins from various regions of India. Where he specially mentions that in Bengal, Mithila, Gujarat & Rajputana and Telingana region Barna Brahmins are found in some low castes of the society. The Barna Brahmins that minister to the low Sudra castes and outcastes, are looked upon as degraded persons, and they generally form separate castes. The good Brahmins will not take even a drink from their hands, and intermarriage between them is quite out of the question. (pp: 99).

He also mentioned the regulations by which the castes have been made exclusive. He also stated the origin of the additional castes and the sub-castes. The sentiments which Brahmanical legislation engendered and fostered have led to the formation of a vast number of extra castes and sub-castes. In all probability the laws of the Shastras failed to bring about a complete fusion of all the clans and races that had been intended to be included within the same group, and their recognition, as distinct sub-divisions have also been formed in later times by the operation of one or other causes like: By migration to different parts of the country; by different sections being devoted to the practice of distinct professions; by any section being elevated above or degraded below the level of the others; by quarrels between the different sections of the same

caste as to their relative status; by becoming the followers of one of the modern religious teachers; and by the multiplication of the illegitimate progeny of religious mendicants.

The Husainis, Kalankis, Maha-Brahmans, Agradanis, Sanicharis, gangaputras, etc., have become more or less exclusive by being degraded and debarred from association with the other classes of Brahmans on a footing of equality. When one section of a caste affect a superior status and refuse to give their daughters to another section, the latter may for a time admit their inferiority by betraying an eagerness to marry their daughters in the superior caste without having the compliment reciprocated. But sooner or later the connection between them is cut off altogether, and they become distinct sub-castes. (pp: 10)

Apart from these he also mentions some acts which lead to exclusion from the caste like embracing Christianity or Mahomedanism; going to Europe or America; marrying a widow; publicly throwing away the sacred thread; publicly eating beef, pork or fowl; publicly eating *kachi* food cooked by a Mahomedan, Christian or low caste Hindu; officiating as a priest in the house of a very low class Sudra; by a female going away from home for an immoral purpose; and by a widow becoming pregnant.

In the villages, the friendless and the poor people are sometimes excluded from caste for other offences as, for other offences as, for instance:-adultery, incest, eating forbidden food and drinking forbidden liquors. But when the offender is an influential personage or is influentially connected, no one thinks of visiting him with such punishment. (pp: 13)

In Bengal the classes of sudra and outcastes have special priests:- Sonar Vaniya (Gold merchants), Goala (Cowherds), Kalu (oilmen), Dhopa (washermen), Bagdi (Aboriginal tribe of woodcutters and fishermen) and Kaibarta. The priests of each of these classes form independent castes, without the right of intermarriage of dining together with any other section of the Brahmanic caste. With the exception of a few of the Sonar Vaniya Brahmans, these Barna Brahmans, as they are called, mostly very poor, and utterly without any kind of social position. The priests of the Kaibartas are in some places Vyasokta Brahmans. In Mithila, the old town, have also found the special Brahmans. Tatwa (weaver), Kasara (Brazier), Teli (Oilmen) and Sonar (Goldsmith) have their own Barna Brahmans. Low castes from Telingana like Ganda Dravidras, Nambi Varlu and Eedus the priests of Nairs have Barna Brahmans.

The castes from Gujarat and Rajputana region have their own priests. Castes like Cowherd caste, Kunbi, Gujarati fishermen, Musician, Koli and Chamars and Dheds have their own Brahmans. They are regarded as Barna Brahmans and have a low caste status. The priests of Chamars and Dheds are Garudyas (Page no. 100). The number of separate clans among the Gujarati Brahmans is very large. They generally say that there are not less than 84 different sections among them. The list given in Wilson's Hindu Castes includes 160 independent clans among them. There are very few among them who live by begging or manual work. They usually perform their tours on horseback. (pp: 58-59)

Tagore (1884) provides a detailed analysis of the caste system in Hindu society. He explores the origin of the caste system, its evolution over time, and its impact on the social, economic, and political structures of Hindu society. Tagore examines the four main castes of Hindu society - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras - and their respective roles and responsibilities. He also delves into the sub-castes and the hierarchical nature of the caste

system, highlighting the discrimination and oppression faced by those in the lower castes. In his discussion about caste, he discusses the religious and philosophical justifications for the caste system, as well as the criticisms and challenges to it. Tagore argues that the caste system has been used to maintain the power and privilege of the upper castes, and that it has hindered social progress and equality. Overall, The Caste System of the Hindus is a comprehensive and insightful analysis of one of the most complex and controversial aspects of Hindu society.

Oza (1933:38) writes, with the emergence and expansion of Bodhdh religion, the caste system became more lax and various caste started doing the work that suited them. But, they tried to keep themselves different and higher than other castes. During the Buddhist era, labour-related tasks like agriculture, handicrafts, labour etc. started to be considered low. These works were adopted by the Shudras. As a result, they had many castes and they may have started to look down on people of other castes.

Risley considers race as the cause of the birth of caste system. Ibbetson considers the group of Aryans as the cause of the birth of caste system while Neisfield considers occupation or business as the cause of the birth of caste system (Rajgor:1987:1).

According to Hutton (1960:05), due to the invasions by various peoples on Hindustan, different people came into contact with each other and this led to the formation of new castes and they would have tried to keep themselves separate from other peoples and live. During the Muslim period, due to insecurity, varna discrimination, caste discrimination and Disrespect increased. As a result, many strata and divisions came into existence in the castes and the distinction between high and low became more acute (Rajgor:1987:82).

One of the reasons for the differences among castes is the rituals performed on various occasions. Due to differences in these, a caste is divided into different sections. Thus, due to changes in profession or occupation, many sub-castes arise from one caste. In addition, as a result of migration or due to upheavals in the political or social situation, one sub-caste stops interacting with others and tries to identify itself by a different name by breaking social ties with them. Such incidents give rise to social exclusion.

Conclusion:

The transformation of the caste system has been influenced by several factors. The arrival of the British in India marked a significant turning point in the evolution of the caste system. After the independence, the constitution of India has empowered marginalized groups in social, economic, and political aspects. The introduction of new education policies, expansion of industrialization, and urbanization weakened traditional caste restrictions and facilitated the social inclusion of historically excluded castes and classes. Altogether these processes has weaken caste based discrimination and provided equal opportunities. Scholars like Ghurye and Dutt have noted structural and functional changes in the caste system.

However, caste-based organizations have emerged at regional and national levels to safeguard their interests, fostering social and political mobility while securing economic benefits. A new kind of social exclusion can be seen in the society due to globalization and localisation processes.

Overall, the caste system remains a dynamic institution, evolving with changing social, political, and economic contexts. It continues to adapt, demonstrating its resilience and capacity for transformation in response to contemporary challenges and necessities.

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