



“बेटी बचाओ, बेटी पढ़ाओ”

JAYOTI VIDYAPEETH WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY, JAIPUR
Faculty of Law & Management

Faculty Name	-	JV'n Dr. Rameshwar Raikwar
Program	-	Indian Society & Culture, M.A. Sociology first sem.
Course Name	-	Caste System
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Academic Day starts with – August 2023

- Greeting with saying '**Namaste**' by joining Hands together following by 2-3 Minutes Happy session, Celebrating birthday of any student of respective class and **National Anthem**.

Introduction

In every society some form of inequality and differentiation exists. Social differentiation separates people into distinctive categories on the basis of age, kinship, sex, territorial proximity, etc. Social stratification in sociology denotes the placement of individuals and groups in different layers or strata on the basis of social differences in income, occupation, education and ascribed position, etc.

India is one of the most stratified societies. Social, economic and cultural differentiation in India is represented by the institutions of caste, class and tribe.

Caste is primarily a social institution whereas class is primarily an economic institution. This, however, does not mean that caste is devoid of the economic dimension or class is without social aspects. It is, only a question of primacy. Caste represents primarily social differentiation while class represents primarily economic differentiation. Both of them result in social and economic inequality and are, therefore, systems of stratification. Tribe is not a form of social stratification like caste and class. Rather, it is a form of social organization or social formation. Instead of representing a stratum, a tribe represents the whole society. In the Indian context, tribe is primarily a linguistic and cultural group. Therefore, tribal and non-tribal contexts denote cultural differentiations. Of course, the deprivation of various opportunities, which has been suffered by the tribal people, has brought them into an area of social stratification. Let us look at caste, class and tribe in detail.

CASTE SYSTEM

Caste is an English term, which is derived from the Portuguese word 'casta' which means a group. Castes are ascriptive groups, membership of which is determined by birth. An individual is born into a caste, and this status is more or less permanent. Initially, European scholars used caste as a synonym for the Indian concept, *Varna*, but later on it was also used for other terms like *jati* and *up-jati*. Most sociologists today translate caste as *jati* and not as *varna*.

Caste and *varna* in Sociology represent two different orders of reality. *Varna* may be described as an abstract classification of people on the basis of mythical origin. Caste, by contrast, is a concrete empirical grouping based on social, ritual and occupational criteria.

Caste or *jati* is a concrete, and generally, endogamous group with characteristics of its own such as its hereditary occupation. Marriage rules, common sale taboos, occupational rigidity and even village politics operate at the *jati* level. M.N. Srinivas says that *varna* has been the model to which the observed

differences of jatis are sought to be fitted in.

In the *varna* order there was the scope for social mobility. Vishwamitra, a *Kshatriya* by birth, became a *Brahman* through achievements or *purushartha*. There is hardly any such possibility for social mobility of individual from one caste to another in the caste system. Further, the *varna* model had no room for the concept of Untouchability, though the feature of untouchability proved a baneful aspect of the caste system.

Features of the Caste System

The salient features of the traditional caste system in India include the Following:

1. ***Segmental Division of Society:*** Society is divided into general social groups called castes. Each of these castes is a well developed social group, the membership of which is based on birth. The segmental division of society refers to its division into a number of groups, each of which has got a life of its own and stood in a relationship of higher or lower status to other castes. Mobility from one caste to another is severely restricted. The behavioral pattern, food habits, manners of dialogue and interaction differ from caste to caste.
2. ***Hierarchy:*** According to G.S.Ghurye in each linguistic area there are about 300 castes which can be graded and arranged into a hierarchy on the basis of their social precedence. At the top of this hierarchy is the *Brahman* caste and at the bottom is the untouchable caste (shudra). In between there are the intermediate castes. Thus, castes are supposed to be based on the basis of superiority and inferiority and involve gradation on the accepted scale of value and prestige of the caste hierarchy.
3. ***Restrictions on Commensality and Social Intercourse:*** There are certain rules regarding eating, drinking and social interaction which are to be

followed by all castes in order to avoid defilement or pollution and to uphold rules of purity. These rules are powerfully enforced by the caste *panchayats*. The notions of *karma*, *dharma* and purity and pollution have figured prominently in both religious and legal thought relating to the caste system. There are many taboos regarding the acceptance of *kachcha* (boiled) and *pakka* (fried) food by one caste from another.

4. ***Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation:*** Membership in a caste is hereditary and choice of Occupation is not supposed to be free. Traditionally a caste is usually associated with an occupation. It has made the system closed. Different castes depend on each other for fulfillment of various social and economic needs. Thus, the system has an organic character.
5. ***Restrictions on Marriage:*** Endogamous marriages are an essential feature of the caste system. A person has to marry within one's own caste.
6. ***Interdependence:*** Each caste is dependent on other castes within the *jajmani* system at the village level. Their dependence is not only economic but also social, cultural and religious.

FUNCTIONS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system is credited to ensure the continuity of the traditional social organization of India. It succeeded in accommodating multiple communities by ensuring each of them a monopoly of a specific means of livelihood. The caste system has handed down the knowledge and skills of the hereditary occupation of a caste from one generation to another. It has, thus, helped the preservation of culture and ensured productivity. Simultaneously it has led to interdependent interaction between different castes following different occupations in a village or cluster of villages, through *jajmani* relationships. The notions of *Karma* and *Dharma* sustained through the caste system enforced traditional

socio religious control. Performance of rites and rituals promoted cooperation of the members of the caste and among different castes. On the other hand, the superior position of the higher castes, for example, *Brahmans*, had been reinforced through it.

The importance of above functions traditionally performed by caste has no doubt declined today. In recent times caste has proved to be an effective vehicle for political mobilization of the vast rural masses for participation in the electoral process sustaining Indian democracy.

DYSFUNCTIONS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system creates obstacles to the unity of the country. It opposes national consciousness by imposing social restrictions and ideas of purity and pollution. Untouchability is the cancer of society .Caste hinders horizontal and vertical social mobility and may, thus, force an individual to carry on the traditional occupation against her or his will and capacity. This is a great hindrance to the industrial development. This may also retard the development of human. Personality in some instances since efficiency and motivation is throttled by the rigidity of the caste system. The caste system usually does not provide opportunity to enhance the status of in the public sphere.

CASTE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Being a member of a caste or sub-caste does not have the same meaning in contemporary India. Caste sanctions have also become weak and do not operate with the same force in all sections of Indian society. There is, however, significant continuity in the realm of marriage. Endogamy is still the dominant mode in contemporary India but inter-caste marriages are also acceptable today in some sections of Indian society, particularly in the urban places. The political use of the caste is increasing day-by-day in every region of India.

The structures and functions of caste system have weakened. The ritual

injunctions and interdictions relating to food and physical contact have almost vanished. The association between caste and occupation is, more or less, a thing of the past. The relations of *jajmani* have been fully replaced by market relationships in urban areas. Even in villages *jajmani* relationships are maintained only at the ritual level. Caste dominance no longer depends on ritual status. Factors like numerical strength, economic strength, education, political network and internal cohesion within the class also determines the dominance of a caste in the village today. Caste system is making adequate adjustment with the changing times. It has retained its relevance by becoming more resilient and accommodative.

There are different social processes at work. The most important of such processes include Sanskritisation, Westernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and constitutional legislation.

CLASS SYSTEM

Social class is a type of social stratification which is most evident in industrial societies. But classes are found in non-industrial societies also. Unlike the other types of strata, classes are neither defined by law nor sanctioned by religion. Social class is generally defined as a stratum of people occupying similar social position in terms of wealth, income, occupation and factors like education. Classes are related to one another in terms of inequality or hierarchy. Class is a system of stratification in which a person's social status depends upon her or his achievement. It permits an individual to strive for and attain a change in her or his status. It encourages individuals to select their occupations. Membership of a class is not inherited as in the case of the caste system. Social status in the caste system is ascribed to a person at the moment of her or his birth, which she/he bears for life.

The boundaries between classes are never rigid between people from different classes. Social mobility — upward and downward movement within hierarchy

or stratification – is much more common in the class system than in other forms of stratification such as caste system or caste. However, the individual may not achieve upward social mobility in the class system at ease under all the circumstances. Further, a social class is also a cultural group sharing a particular way of life. It is related, of course, to the life chances available for the group. Karl Marx talked about two classes in the capitalist society on the basis of the ownership or lack of ownership of means of production, viz., the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Max Weber had, however, suggested that there can be more than two classes on the basis of social status and political power in society. Cumulative inequality is the characteristic of caste, whereas dispersed inequality is the There are no formal restrictions on inter-marriage characteristic of the class system. Social class constitutes an important segment of social structure in modern India. The social classes as we see them today in India had their origin during the British rule. In pre- British India division of the people into classes did not get crystallised for two reasons. First, the self-sufficient village communities produced only that much which the villagers needed. There was hardly any surplus and, therefore, there was little differentiation among the village population leading to clearly formed classes. Secondly, even when there was a differentiation along the dimension of class, it was overshadowed by the caste and *jajmani* system. The class division, understood in a broad sense, existed there between the ruler and the ruled. There were also the classes of administrative officers of various ranks of merchants, artisans and specialists of different kinds.