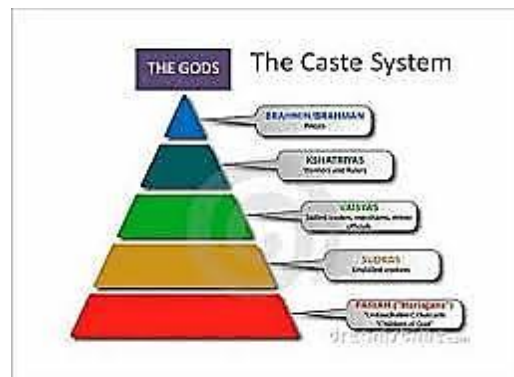


Caste and Class in Indian Society: Sociological Prospect

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Abstract

Origin of Indian Society



Indian society is very old, complex, plural and it has a long history. It is composed of different religious groups, racial groups and groups having cultural differences. In the long span of Indian history various groups from different parts of the world entered into India with their own socio-cultural and racial features. The best example is Indus valley civilization. In the later stage the Indo-Aryans came and they had interaction with earlier inhabitants of the land. They had their own socio-cultural pattern of living. They considered themselves as superior. They developed norms and customs for different social groups with their own category and for the outsiders. That was the phase when Varna's originated.

The Indo-Aryans were divided into different groups: Brahmins (Priests), Kshyatriyas (Kings and warriors) Vaishyas (trade and commerce) Sudras (Servicing group/those who serve these three categories). It is believed that sutras' were outside of the Indo-Aryan group. Perhaps this category emerged due to the union of Indo—Aryans and the inhabitants of the land. Social Stratification in India has been basically a caste-based social stratification. The Indian society stand Organised on the foundations of caste-system. It involves the presence of social relations based upon a system character by several castes.

The Indian society is usually described as a caste-based society. While defining caste in the context of Indian social system, M. N. Srinivas writes, "Caste in India is a hereditary group having a traditional association within occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed among other things by concept of pollution or purity and generally, maximum commensality occurs within the caste. Ketkar has written, "A caste group is a group having two characteristics: i) Member is confined to those who are born of members and includes all

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persons so born, and (ii) The members are forbidden by an inexorable, social law to many outside the group.

Segmental Division of Society

The Indian society stands divided into several castes and the position of each caste is based on traditional importance. The position of each individual is related to the position of his caste group and right at the time of his birth he becomes a member of either a high caste or a low caste.

Each caste group has a definite and determinate set of rules in respect of relation with other castes. Usually inter-caste marriages are prohibited and no one can ever get out of his caste.

Restrictions of Food-sharing and Social-Intercourse

The members of each social group are involved in exchange of relations among themselves. The higher class always tries to secure the formal purity of his caste. Each caste has its own caste culture which defines the food sharing and social intercourse rules which are to be followed by the members of the caste.

Social and Religious Hierarchy

Each caste group stands alone as a particular social group. For example, several castes are considered to be Brahmin castes while several others are considered to be Kashtriya castes. Some castes are considered to be higher castes while others are considered to be lower castes. All the castes are bound by a well-defined system of social and religious functions and relations. Social and religious hierarchy runs along the caste hierarchy.

Caste-based Occupational Groups

Traditionally castes in the Indian society have been inseparably associated with several professions. Parental occupation is always considered a good and essential occupation for the new generation. Only the son of a purohit or pundit can perform the functions of a purohit or pundit

Endogamy System

Each person gets placed in a particular caste at the time of his birth and he remains a member of his caste group throughout his life. Each member can marry persons belonging to his own caste groups. People of a Kshatriya caste can marry only in other Kshatriya castes. Usually no one can marry in his own sub-caste.

Civil and Religious Disabilities

Right from ancient times, the member of each class, particularly the members belonging to the lower class have to live with certain disabilities. A system of civil and religious disabilities has been traditionally associated with different caste groups. In ancient India persons belonging to some low castes were even not allowed to enter the cities and they were even not allowed to enter the schools.

Even some people used to be denied the right to study Vedas and other religious scriptures. As such several civil and religious disabilities were part and parcel of the Indian caste system and consequently of the Indian system of social stratification.

Indian society has been traditionally a caste-based stratified society. In the past, such stratification acted as a source of inequalities and exploitation of members of some castes by the members of the so-called high castes.

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India's Caste System

Brahma and the origins of caste



India's caste system is among the world's oldest forms of surviving social stratification. The BBC explains its complexities

The system which divides **Hindus** into rigid hierarchical groups based on their karma (work) and dharma (the Hindi word for religion, but here it means duty) is generally accepted to be more than 3,000 years old.

How did caste come about?

Manusmriti, widely regarded to be the most important and authoritative book on Hindu law and dating back to at least 1,000 years before Christ was born, "acknowledges and justifies the caste system as the basis of order and regularity of society".

The caste system divides Hindus into four main categories - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. Many believe that the groups originated from Brahma, the Hindu God of creation.

At the top of the hierarchy were the Brahmins who were mainly teachers and intellectuals and are believed to have come from Brahma's head. Then came the Kshatriyas, or the warriors and rulers, supposedly from his arms. The third slot went to the Vaishyas, or the traders, who were created from his thighs. At the bottom of the heap were the Shudras, who came from Brahma's feet.

The main castes were further divided into about 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes, each based on their specific occupation.

Class System

It is a system of stratification of society on the basis of education, property, business/work etc. **Karl Max** - 'Man is a class animal' i.e. his status age, education etc are not same in the society.

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Division of Class

- Property – capitalist & the poor – the haves & the have not.
- Education - Illiterate & literate
- Business or Occupation - farmers, clerk officers, industrialists etc.

Definition of Class

Max Weber

Held that "classes are aggregate of individuals who have the same opportunities of acquiring goods. The same exhibited standard of living

Herbal defines "A social class is a group within a society, whose members hold a no. of distinctive status in common & who through the operation of roles associated with these status, develop are awareness of the life interest as against the unlike trait & interest of other groups."

In general "A social class consists of group of individuals who are ranked by the members of the community in socially superior inferior position."

Characteristics of Class System

1. Class system is an open system.
2. Class system is based on occupation, wealth, education, age, sex
3. Hierarchy of status group. In general there are 3 Class – upper middle & lower. Status, prestige & role are attached. Upper Class is less in no in comparison to the other two whereas their status & prestige is most. .
4. Class consciousness – wherever a class is formed this feeling a consciousness is a must. There should be feeling of in group i.e. I belong class conflict is due to this the people of the preliterate class feel the upper class exploits them their they unite revolt. The behavior action is determined by this class consciousness.
5. Sub-classes, class is divided into different groups. Similar to caste system, the class system is divided.

Caste-Class Nexus

The nexus of caste and class, Prof. Y. Singh writes, "the situation corresponds to a 'prismatic' model of change where traditional sentiments of caste and kinship undergo adaptive transformation

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without completely being 'diffracted' into classes or corporate groups". Caste system is found to be a very effective system of economic exploitation of lower castes. Therefore, common class consciousness is created among the members of a caste on the basis of common economic deprivations.

Nexus is defined as a set of ties in connection to the basic structural and cultural changes.

It Indicates

1. Interdependency between both factors.
2. Contradictions and similarities.
3. Control of one group over the other.

Caste and class nexus implies observation of two as mutually inherent areas. This nexus between caste and class also implies going beyond caste and going beyond class in understanding social reality.

In conclusion, we can sum up that both caste and class are inseparable and closely interlinked. Class like distinction within caste and caste life-style within the class are a part and parcel of the members of the society. Both caste and class are real, empirical, interactional and hierarchical.

In Connection to Caste-Class Nexus Some Conclusion Can Be Drawn

1. The caste system functions as an extremely effective method of economic exploitation.
2. The caste hierarchy is linked with social hierarchy and it reflects ownership of land.
3. Caste determines a definite relation with the means of production.
4. B.R. Ambedkar rightly observed that the caste system not only divides labour or indicate division of labour but also divides the entire social structure.

So caste and class represent similar social reality but from varying perspectives

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