



Continuity in the Hindu Caste System

Harishchandra Mishra (Ph. D. Research Scholar)

Department of Sociology, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University Lucknow (India)

Abstract: *This paper as entitled “Continuity in the Caste System” talks about the nature, characteristics and dynamics of continuity in the Caste System. The nature of caste system indicates inequality in terms of status of different castes in the society, privilege and disability associated with different castes, the notion of purity and pollution (vegetarianism), practice of untouchability, the practice of endogamy etc. As peculiar in Indian society, this paper explores the current continuity in the features of the caste system. There is no uniformity in the definition of caste system. Different scholars have defined caste system on the basis of its characteristics. G. S. Ghurye (1932) has described caste system on the basis of its six features segmental division of society, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileged of different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and restrictions on marriage. L. Dumont (1980) defines caste system it as the system of ideas and values in Hindu social structure and talks about caste as a hierarchically arranged groups based on purity and pollution, hereditary division of labour based on religious qualities, regulation on marriage on the basis of endogamy, restrictions on food and vegetarianism in different groups. Various aspect of the caste system like social, cultural, political, economic and religious which are contributing to its continued survival have been explored in this paper. Caste system is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a lifestyle which often includes an occupation, status in a hierarchy, and customary social interaction and exclusion. But most importantly, it focuses on the dynamics of continuity in the Caste System which is still continuing today and also it discusses some of the other current emerging trends on the issue of reservation like jat, Maratha and patidar agitation*

Keywords: Caste system, Varna, Jati, Endogamy, Hierarchy, Continuity

Introduction: The fact which is well known that the Portuguese term Casta underlines the aspect of purity of blood and descent as does the term Jati which is a Sanstrit word by insisting on the rule of endogamy ensures the purity of descent. Jati is a generic term used in Indian social structure. So both the term caste and jati are understood synonymously in Indian society from the past. Now the precise relationship between Varna and Jati has been demonstrated by the eminent Indian sociologists, Prof. M. D. Altekar and by Prof. Yogendra Singh

respectively. They are of the opinion that in India “from the history every vocation gave birth to a new caste, and as time went by the original four castes had been subdivided into many more.” “Theoretically, caste system is rooted in the Varna division of society into four caste categories such as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The Varna model of caste system is macro structural in nature”.

While analysing the continuity in the caste system it is imperative to know the fundamental features of the caste system. There are various groups of scholars who talk about caste as a system and define it on the basis of its fundamental features. According to N.K. Dutta (1986), its features are endogamous group, occupational specialization, hierarchy, commensality and hereditary membership. G.S. Ghurye (1932), has described caste system on the basis of its six features- segmental division of society, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and restrictions on marriage. Morton Klass (1980), talks about the units of caste including three tendencies namely- repulsion, hereditary specialization, and hierarchy. Dumont (1980), defines caste system it as the system of ideas and values in Hindu social structure and talks about caste as a hierarchically arranged groups based on purity and pollution, hereditary division of labour based on religious qualities, regulation on marriage on the basis of endogamy, restrictions on food and vegetarianism in different groups. A. Beteille (1965), defines caste in Weberian sense as the status group in Hindu social order. Y. Singh (1986), holds that structurally the caste system manifests two tendencies, one segmental and other organic. As a segmental reality, such caste tends to articulate mutual repulsion, social distance and social inequality but as an organic system the caste segments are mutually interlinked and by the principles of reciprocity in the jajmani system.

Statement of the problem: It was expected that as a result of modernization, democratization, politicization, industrialization, bureaucratization, urbanization, secularization and legislative measures after independence the traditional identities like caste would gradually disappear. But that has not happened. In recent studies it has been held that caste has taken its modern avatar in contemporary India as reflected increasing in caste-based mobilisations and counter mobilisation in politics demand for reservation by some traditionally dominant castes like Jats, pattidars and Marathas on the issue of reservation and incidences of tensions and conflicts in rural India etc. Hence there is a need to understand the static aspect of the caste system in recent years

Objectives: (1) To know the nature of continuity in the structural and cultural features of the caste system in recent years;

(2) To find out the factors that are responsible for continuity in the caste system in recent years.

Methodology: I have used descriptive Research design in the analysis to know the nature and factors responsible for continuity in the caste system. I have used mixed method approach that would include both qualitative and quantitative methods. Both primary and secondary sources of data I have used. Primary source of data is information gathered by using open ended questionnaire, group discussion guide and secondary sources of data are relevant books, research articles in journals, newspaper reports, government documents, etc.

Review of Literature: : To know about the continuity in caste system we need to focus on its different dimensions like social, cultural, political, economic and ritual (religious) aspects which have been studied by Sociologists. Hence a review of literature is given here.

- i. **The Times of India. (2019)**, The ground reality of the caste system and its persistence in contemporary Indian society has been shown in this section of the newspaper. Although the discrimination against marginalized community or any other castes has been abolished by the constitution of India, but the ground reality of the caste persistent in Indian society exist even today. This is an occasion of utilising one's own right. It is an occasion when the dalits were denied from their rights to life with dignity. The incidence took place when a jatav groom Mahesh Kumar accompanied with baraties were going to taking out his wedding procession to bride Kajal's home. The dominant castes of that area stopped the baraties of balmiki community sub caste, by blocking the road way to the venue. When the groom's family members objected then the dominant Brahmins of that region began to used castiest slur and manhandled to the family members of the groom and bride both. So, in this way we can see the cultural reality of the discrimination against lower castes in contemporary India even today.
- ii. **Hindustan Times (2018)**, One of the editorial column of this newspaper shows the existence of privilege and disability associated with different caste groups in contemporary Indian society. The exploitative nature of caste system restricts the peoples from lower castes or from the dalit category to assimilate with the cultural practices and life style of the upper castes in Gandhinagar till now. It has been quoted in the newspaper that “the anger stems from an assault on a group of dalit youth near Gandhinagar by Rajpoot men for supporting moustaches. The assailants said keeping the strip of male hair above the upper lip (moustache) is a privilege reserve for the upper caste community especially for Kshatriya not for the other castes.”
- iii. **S. S. Jodhka (2015)**, In his book “Caste in Contemporary India” Jodhka is of the opinion that the Institutionalization of caste through the politics of reservation policy-the quotas for schedule castes, schedule tribes and other backward classes is recognized as the continued survival of caste in India. He describes that the continued presence of caste is the result of incomplete modernization of India's economy and its cultural values. The wily actors in India's electoral politics are responsible for its continued survival in Indian society.
- iv. **Ajeet Kumar Singh (2011)**, he has talked about “why Jat reservation” and the basic causes of Jats mobilization on the issue of reservation in government jobs and to get admission in educational institutions in the western parts of the India and particularly in Uttar Pradesh. In this article author is of the opinion that the recent protest by the Jats in western Uttar Pradesh asking for OBC classification and reservation in government jobs is driven by the extended govt. neglect of their backwardness. The western part of India and particularly western Uttar Pradesh farmers grow sugarcane and other cash crops for their livelihood. And because of the unsupportive minimum price announced by the government, farmers are aggressive for mobilization. The protest for reservation via disruption of train, road traffic and the destructions of public property are encouraged by the delayed and unresponsive approach of the government.

v. **I. P. Desai (1954)**, the eminent social Anthropologist and sociologist I.P. Desai is of the opinion that in India, having around the two third population living in rural areas are strongly traditional in their behaviour and ideological. He argued that there are two forces against the persistence of caste system in India, the first is joint family system which provides security for its members and second is arranged marriage (endogamy) which perpetuate the caste system in India till now.

Generalization and Conclusion:

Yet caste has not disappeared from contemporary India. It was expected that as a result of modernization caste would disappeared. When we read in the newspaper the role of Khap Panchayat in western part of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. Khap panchayat regulates and maintains the cultural hegemony to their community and particularly to their caste and clan groups to regulate inter caste marriages and to internalise the traditional norms and values. Caste is also influencing the electoral politics in Indian social structure. Caste is evolving as a form of identity and by using this form of identity certain caste groups are asking certain kind of compensation for their historical backwardness and now caste based political parties are also appearance. Therefore caste is bouncing back in Indian social structure. The rural social structure where hereditary occupation, ancestral worship, the desire of the twice born castes and particularly by the Brahmins to keep themselves vegetarian and pure, the sacramental meal, etc. can be said to the growth of unchanging, static social structure like caste system in Indian society. The influence of religion would be one of the key factors that facilitate the continuation of the caste system. The Hindu caste system is looked upon as a divine ordained institution in which the beliefs in reincarnation, and the doctrine of Karma also further strengthen the caste system in Indian society and particularly in rural settings. Some of the older aspects of caste have persisted. The practice of vegetarianism in upper caste Hindus particularly in northern India is in momentum. Even now most people marry within their own caste or tribe. Untouchability has not ended completely, despite constitutional prohibition. The form of untouchability has been changed, each and every sections of the society can sit, talk, share food and interact with anyone, but untouchability still persisted in today's Indian Hindus. It is because of the ideology and mindset of the believers of the Hinduism. When we read in the newspaper the atrocities against Dalits such as Rohith Vemula's case of suicide, NCRB data on atrocities against Dalit women rapes around 40 thousands above etc, these statistics show the continued practice of untouchability even the implementation of prevention of atrocities act. Effects of centuries of advantages and disadvantages continue to be felt today. In Marxian and Weberian sense the mode of production still have monopolised by the twice born castes in Indian society. The ownership of land mostly by the twice born caste still continue to be witnessed. The domination of jat community is unabated in western parts of Uttar Pradesh. The caste groups that had access to education under the old system have done very well in acquiring modern education as well. Those groups that did not have access to education or were prohibited from acquiring it have naturally lagged behind. That is why there is a disproportionately large presence of 'upper caste' among the urban middle classes in our country. Caste continues to be closely linked to economic status. Most of the upper and middle castes possess maximum landholdings and the lower castes are denied to have land right from the earlier to till now. The deliberate developmental and economic policies followed by the government to eradicate inequalities in different castes

also have contributed to the growth of the caste system in India. The existence of many castes (around 5000 communities) in the country led to the formulation of many strict norms and values concerning discrimination also endeavours each caste to maintain its identity. Thus the social, cultural, economic, political, and ritualistic, aspects of caste system largely continue to maintain its identity, and determine the rank position of castes to select groom and bride to maintain arranged marriage in terms of endogamy and observance of ritual practices performed by Brahmins are till now in appearance, which were earlier practiced.

References:

1. Deshpande, S. (2015) (eds). *The Problem of Caste*. Orient BlackSwan publication, private limited, New Delhi.
2. Fuller, C.J (eds). (1996). *Caste Today*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.
3. Ghurye, G. S. (1969). *Caste and Race in India*, Popular Prakashan. Bombay.
4. Hindustan Times. (2018). Lucknow edition Lucknow. 20th December 2018.
5. Jodhka, S. S. (2015). *Caste in Contemporary India*. Routledge Publication. New Delhi
6. Srinivas, M.N. (1996). *Caste, its twentieth century avatar*. Penguin Books Ltd. Delhi.
7. Singh, A.K. (2011). Why Jat Reservation. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.46, No.17, April 2011.
8. The Times of India, (2019). Lucknow Edition, Lucknow. 06th may 2019.

