

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 5 | Issue 5

2022

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Let's talk about Caste by Facts: A Study of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe in India

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ABSTRACT

Though mostly outlawed, the Indian caste system continues to be one of the key players of inequality, poverty and discrimination in India. This article is trying to explain the myth and reality of the caste system. Data wise, a large number occupy top positions by upper caste people whether it is public or private institutions, not SC, ST. Traditionally the maximum land is occupied by general caste people, and SC, and ST is dependent on wage labor. So this article provides a logical answer to this type of growing debatable topic. There is a glimpse of similarity between the caste system and world system theory. It also focuses on the unholy nexus between caste and alienation in India.

Keywords: Caste System. Reservation. Caste Politics. Dalit Lives Matter.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Equality may be a fiction nonetheless; one must accept it as a governing principle.”

B.R. Ambedkar

A spectre is hunting India – the spectre of caste. In India, a small number of people have the idea of caste and casteism. The caste system is very complicated; people think that caste means only reservation. They see the caste system through the lens of reservation, but in reality, it's beyond that. The caste has several shapes, hierarchies, and dimensions. The caste is the product of the Varna system. According to the Hindu holy book Manusmriti written by Manu, there are four types of castes, Brahmin, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras, which is called the Varna system. This division is based on their work in society.

II. JOBS, RESERVATIONS AND DATA

There is a myth spread around our society by upper caste people that general candidates are not getting government jobs because of the reservation quota system in India. They claim that general candidates are deprived, but statistics is showing a different scenario. Social discrimination and existing socio-economic realities add to the disadvantages faced by SCs and STs in the labor market. According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Report, 2011-

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12, the central government's share in organized sector employment has decreased since 1994. Another study report by PRS Legislative Research reveals that a total of 8.5 percent of the central government employees work in the organized sector (Army, Railways, Post office, etc), and rest of the percentage of the total population work in the unorganized sector (factory worker, private jobs, small shop business etc.) where reservation is not applicable.² Among these SCs and STs are at the bottom level and are the worst sufferers. And the lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19 has affected the employment prospects of workers from lower castes more than those from upper castes.³ The SCs and STs have the lowest land ownership in India, and this makes them more dependent on wage labour. According to the 2011-12 NSSO statics, the share of wage labourers among SCs was 63 percent. The SCs, STs, and OBCs used to face caste-based discrimination in public and private sectors both. Total 12.41 percent Schedule caste manual casual labour (Including manual scavenger). The Schedule Castes have a greater unemployment rate than the rest of the population. The percentage of households that make between 5000-10,000 rupees per month is 2.17, and more than 10,000 rupees per month is 0.86 percent.⁴ The NSSO and Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) reveal that only 4 percent of rural STs and SCs households have a family member in a government job. The restrictions on SCs to take the occupation of upper castes will reduce their chances of employment; upper caste community feels insecure. That's why Ambedkar says caste becomes a direct cause of unemployment in India.⁵

III. LAND IS POWER

In economics, land is the main factor of production, along with capital and labour. It's better to say that land is power and land is wealth in India. And undoubtedly, India's maximum land is occupied by the upper caste community. Whether it is pre-independence British period or post-independence parliamentary democracy, zamindari-feudal system or capitalistic neo-liberal economic system land possessed by upper caste Savarna community. In India, big landowners are mainly from influential upper castes Reddy and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh, Patiders in Gujrat, Brahmins in Uttar Pradesh, and so on.⁶ On the other side of the coin, SCs own 10.2% of rural land while STs owns 14.1% of the total land. So, SCs have the lowest land

² 'Overview of the Central Government Employees', PRS Legislative Research Report, 8 December, 2015.

³ Priyanka Sahoo, 'Lockdown Hit More Workers from Lower Castes, Reveals Study by University in Haryana', 4 August, 2020.

⁴ Suraj Yengde, 'Caste Matters', Penguin Random House India, 2019. Page 177-179

⁵ .R. Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste and Other Essays', Maple Press Private Limited, 2021. Page 35-36

⁶ Sanjay Baru, 'India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution', Penguin Random House India, 2021. Page 98.

ownership in India, and this makes them more dependent on wage labour. Two-thirds of the Dalit population stays in one or two-roomed houses, excluding a kitchen. After seven decades of independence, there is no proper land reform policy in India. Land distribution initiative was taken by Kerala and Bengal's left government, but it was not successful. And now, inequality has been rising in the field of land possession.

IV. SIMILARITY BETWEEN CASTE SYSTEM AND THE WORLD SYSTEM

The Indian caste system is similar to Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory in international relations. The caste system is where caste-based discrimination and exploitation are available, but in world system theory, rich versus poor states' economic exploitation is the main issue. In world system theory mainly, three categories of states are available: Core, Periphery, and Semi-periphery; on the other side is the Varna system, where four main categories are present: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Sudras, and Dalits. The fifth category with no Varna designation. According to the Indian caste system, Brahmins community (top category) is the cream layer of the society that occupied land, wealth, quality education, political power, and so on. Traditionally all the top institutional positions are occupied by the upper caste (mainly Brahmins, and Baniyas.), and that's why social, political, and economical discrimination and inequality can reflect on Indian citizens. The bottom category of the caste system is Dalits or SCs, who are deprived most. In world system theory, few states have occupied the Centre or Core position, and the basic features of these states are highly industrialized, technologically developed, strong economy, powerful military, and stable democratic governments like the USA, and Japan. The Core states economically exploit periphery states which are economically poor and dependent, weak in the military and have unstable governments like Latin American states. Rich Core states can be compared with upper caste Brahmins who exercise all the facilities, and poor Periphery states can be compared with lower caste Dalits or SCs who are the victim of the Varna system and cannot improve their socio-economic status. Both concepts have few common agendas or common patterns, which are exploitation, discrimination, inequality, and deprivation.

V. HAS RAPE BECOME A WEAPON TO MAINTAIN CASTE SUPREMACY?

Has rape become a weapon in India to maintain caste hierarchy? The Dalit female belongs to the most oppressed and vulnerable group in the world. They face all kinds of atrocities like rape, child abuse, molestation, violence, and humiliation. In a strict patriarchal and caste-based society like India, where SCs and STs, female are a routine based soft target. A burning example is the Hathras incident in UP, where a 19-year-old Dalit girl was gang raped by four upper caste

men. And very interestingly, upper caste men supported this incident in that area. A report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs noted by National Crimes Records Bureau shows that the crime against Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe women and children has increased from 2017 to 2019⁷. Apart from these registered cases there are uncounted incidents of molestation and humiliation against SCs and STs girls and children. And overall crime rate increased among the people belonging to scheduled communities.⁸

VI. NEXUS BETWEEN ALIENATION AND CASTE

Karl Marx describes the theory of alienation to explain the social condition of the proletariat class. The alienation from the self is a consequence of being a mechanical part of a social class, the condition which estranges a person from their humanity. But in India, not only class, but caste is also a reason for alienation in the Hindu community. In the Varna system of the Hindu community where caste based hierarchy is responsible for this. In every stage of life SCs and STs feels alienation, when Dalit students eat meals separately in school they feel alienated, when upper caste students refuse to eat Dalit cook's food Dalit cook feels alienated,⁹ when a manual scavenger cleans our unhygienic drain and people do not want to touch or recognize manual scavenger as a human being they feel alienated (recent RTI report reveals that 445 villages practice untouchability in Tamil Nadu), 'water is life', but Dalits are not allowed to touch water, (Ambedkar also faced the same water discrimination which he wrote in his 20 pages autobiography 'Waiting for a Visa'), tankers servicing, hand pumps or well water reserved for upper caste people and Dalits do not get fresh water then Dalits feel alienated,¹⁰ when a reserved category candidate clears government job exam he or she used to hide their caste identity because their merit can be questioned by the general category people that time they feel alienated, when men and women both love each other but cannot get married because of their caste barriers they feel alienated, when maximum social production depend on lower caste communities but maximum wealth occupied by upper caste that time lower caste communities feel alienated, and so on and so forth.

VII. INITIATIVE TO MAKE AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY

Now a simple question arises: what is the role of political parties to make an egalitarian society

⁷ Press Trust of India, 'Crimes against SCs, STs Went up in 2020; UP, MP Top Charts: NCRB Data', Business Standard, 16 September 2021.

⁸ Sravasti Dasgupta, 'Crimes against SC/ST Women, Children, up 15%, but Conviction Rate Low, Says House Panel', The Print, 23 March, 2021.

⁹ Express News Service, 'Upper- Caste Students at Uttarakhand Government High School Again Refuse to Eat Dalit Cook's Food', Indian Express, 21 May, 2022.

¹⁰ 'Dalits Not Allowed to Touch Water, Tankers, Servicing Upper caste Villages in UP's Bundelkhand', India Today, 3 July, 2019.

in India? The simple answer is jointly, they have failed to cultivate social democracy after seven decades of independence. The top decision-making body of major political parties is dominated by the upper caste in India. These parties used to play with caste sentiments during the election to get a vote. These upper caste English speaking leaders were reluctant to share representative power with SCs and STs, whatever the opportunity lower caste community has been getting it is possible because of Ambedkar's strong battle with Gandhi for Depressed class's reservation in 1932. Today politics over reservation in India's political parties has been one of tokenism and has never aimed at genuinely giving political respect to Dalits. The CPI(M), took 58 long years to appoint a Dalit leader in its highest decision-making body, the Politburo. The upper caste community has spread wire over the society. ¹¹

So the real representatives of SC and ST must include in major political parties, but not like rubber stamp representatives.

VIII. ECONOMIC GROWTH CAN BE A FACTOR IN LOWER CASTE UPLIFTMENT

1. The upper caste community used to claim that whatever the opportunity today, SCs and STs are getting only for the reservation, and they are deprived by it, but if we study in detail, we can see that not only reservation (which is available only in government institutions), but also economic growth, LPG policy, rapid industrialization, a revolution in information and technology sector plays a significant role. The upper caste community is extremely bothers about SC, ST, and OBC quota, which is applicable only in a few government institutions, but cunningly they used to be silent when they saw inequality and discrimination in the fastest growing private sectors, where reservation do not include applicable. There must be reservation in private sectors also because maximum jobs are available in the private sector and this sector quickly became a hegemonic sphere of English speaking dominant upper caste in 1991.

2. The judiciary system plays a significant role in making an equal society. The government must recruit more judges to all the courts in India to solve caste-based discrimination. And we all know that justice delayed is justice denied.

3. land is the the most precious asset in India, and the maximum land is occupied by the upper caste. So government must launch a proper land reform policy in India.

¹¹ Subhajit Naskar, 'Can't Build a Nation on Caste', *The Quint*, 14 April 2022.

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