

Origins of Inequality

—Caste

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Abstract: Caste discrimination has a profound impact on the social, economic, cultural and political spheres in India and its neighboring countries. The caste system has had far-reaching effects in these areas, hindering social mobility and economic development for many. This paper focuses on the caste issue and its impact on lower-caste communities in India. The issue is deeply connected with various social challenges, including discrimination due to caste and sexual orientation, facing significant obstacles in expressing their identity, accessing social support, and securing equal rights. In education and health, the system leads to unequal access to resources for lower-caste students, resulting in high dropout rates and low tertiary enrollment, hindering their chances to improve their lives through education. Health is also impacted, as lower caste communities often live in areas with poor sanitation and limited healthcare access, leading to worse health outcomes and further deepening quality of life disparities.

Keywords: Caste system, Society inequality, Discrimination.

1. Introduction

Social inequality is the wide status gap that results from the inconsistency in the material wealth occupied and the unequal power wielded by different classes in society. In Charles Tilly's conception (*Durable Inequality*), social inequality is reflected in the clustering of social units in layers or strata that are homogeneous in terms of various goods (autonomous and relative goods) and have a unidirectional, clearly defined hierarchical order. A truly stratified system resembles a pyramidal skyscraper with a top and a bottom, as well as elevators and stairs that move between the different levels, and a series of subdivided systems arranged in multiple layers. The caste system is a form of social stratification based on hereditary classes. The caste system originated in India and it is a social system based on the theory of descent. It has a very strict hierarchy so that the divide from low to high caste is difficult to cross. The caste system has limited India's social development in every way. This is because it disenfranchises the lower caste people while consolidating the power of the higher caste people. The gap between the castes thus becomes like a gulf.

2. The Origin of Caste System

The caste system originated in India. The explanation of its origin is divided into two theories, the first being the religious theory and the other the biological theory. The religious theory holds that according to *Rig Veda*, an ancient Indian religious book, Purush, the original human being, destroyed himself. And after his death his various organs were transformed into different castes in turn[1]. For example, Brahmins were derived from Purush's head, so they were more intelligent and wise. The real origin of the caste system began when the Aryans came to India in 1500 BC. They completely ignored the local culture and introduced a social system of their own. Kshatriyas were responsible for holding military power. And the Brahmins were the priests who were responsible for conducting all the rituals. These two groups struggled for centuries, and finally it was the Brahmins who became the chiefs of the Aryans. And after that, the Shudras (the common people of the society) and the untouchables were derived. These two groups were even excluded from their religion. In many ancient Hindu stories, there are tales of Aryans fighting dark-skinned demons. The Aryans saw themselves as the embodiment of purity because of their light skin. The dark-skinned demons were actually the original inhabitants, later known as the shudras and untouchables. This is similar to the modern racism of dividing people by skin color. The formation of the caste system was clearly oppressive to the lower castes. Around the sixth century, many of the lower castes converted to Indian Buddhism. Buddhism was actually a revolt against the violence of caste. It was based on the idea that no one would be mistreated or demeaned because of where they came from. During the time of Ashoka, Buddhism was popularized. Later even when Buddhism declined, there was still Tantrayana welcoming people of all castes. However, in later years, the mobility of castes was affected by British colonization. During colonization, Britain hardened the caste system through many indirect means. At the same time Britain also influenced the religious beliefs of many high castes. They re-empowered the Brahmins with many of the powers they had been denied. They supported and encouraged the caste system and customs.

3. Manifestations of Caste System

The caste system has had far-reaching effects in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres in India and its neighboring countries. Although caste discrimination has been legally abolished, its effects continue to be felt in these areas, hindering social mobility and economic development for many. On the economic front, the caste system has led to occupational restrictions and income inequality, with higher castes often occupying higher-paying and high-status occupations, while lower castes are confined to low-paying or manual labor, resulting in widening economic disparities. [2] Social mobility is severely hampered by occupational heredity and unequal access to education, with many lower castes trapped in poor and underdeveloped areas and struggling to access development opportunities. At the cultural level, the caste system confers an identity on individuals, with different castes having their own distinctive cultural practices and lifestyles. However, it has also brought about serious social divisions and prejudices, and limited communication between different castes, leading to social tensions and divisions. In terms of religious beliefs and rituals, the caste system is often used to interpret and assert religious authority, with the higher castes controlling religious practices while the lower castes are excluded or restricted. In marriage and family, the caste system encourages endogamy and restricts inter-caste marriages, affecting individual marital choices and family structures. Art and Literature In art and literature, the caste system is often criticized. Many artists and writers highlight and condemn caste discrimination through their work, bringing attention to these issues. Politics In politics, the caste system significantly influences voter behavior and policymaking. Political parties often use caste to mobilize voters and manipulate political outcomes. During elections, people frequently make voting decisions based on their caste background.

4. Impacts of Caste System

The caste issue is deeply connected with various social challenges. Low-caste women face caste-based discrimination along with gender inequality, which severely restricts their education, employment, and social status. They often lack access to education, face workplace exploitation, and are constrained by gender roles, limiting their quality of life and social mobility. Similarly, lower-caste LGBTQ+ individuals experience dual discrimination due to caste and sexual orientation, facing significant obstacles in expressing their identity, accessing social support, and securing equal rights. In education, the caste system leads to unequal access to resources for lower-caste students, resulting in high dropout rates and low tertiary enrollment, hindering their chances to improve their lives through education. Health is also impacted, as lower-caste communities often live in areas with poor sanitation and limited healthcare access, leading to worse health outcomes and further deepening quality of life disparities.

5. Case Studies

The problem of caste system is not confined to India. In Korea, there was a system that strictly divided people into different social classes. During the Goryeo period, the system of two classes was just taking shape. They were the administrative core of the country. Even culture and academics were under their jurisdiction. The accumulation of power was often accompanied by the proliferation of corruption. This power was often hereditary. They hold the vast majority of cultural resources and economic wealth. And ordinary people had no chance of escaping their class. This exacerbated the inequality of the otherwise monarchical Joseon society. By the time of the Joseon dynasty, Lee Seong-gye had implemented a stricter class system, establishing the two classes as the dominant force in the upper echelons of society.

Surprisingly, casteism also exists in the mono-racial country of Japan. According to a BBC report, there are still 3 million “untouchables” in Japanese society[3]. They are still discriminated against and stigmatized. As a result, they are unable to take up regular employment and participate in marriages. This makes it impossible for them to get rid of their low social status. For a long time, undertakers, furriers and other “unclean” trades such as cleaners have been marginalized. This discrimination continues to this day. The tribal people have their roots in the feudal era, and these professions were deliberately excluded from society to form a segregated social neighborhood. Even among these people, there were the lowest-ranking “Eta”. Until the middle of the 19th century, there were judges in Japan who said that the value of an Eta was only one-seventh of that of an ordinary person.

6. Conclusion

The saddest thing is the casteism of thinking. Many people are born with the realization that the genes carried by those random combinations of sperm and egg determine one's social status. It is as if God has ordained a person's destiny in a meditative manner. Some people say that all roads lead to Rome. Unfortunately, some people are born in Rome, while others are born in the mire, never to be turned around. Casteism is undoubtedly a culprit. It is the origin of evil. If the majority of human beings are of essentially the same intelligence, then giving one group the power to control others by birth is undoubtedly a denial of human rights to another group. What is heartbreaking is that the lower caste population does not even think of resisting. It is as if conformity and servility are the basic norms that flow with their blood. Gerald Berreman, the preeminent American researcher on caste, writes[4]: “For those who live in a caste system, the anthropological meaning of caste is one of power and vulnerability, privilege and oppression, honor and denigration, abundance and poverty, reward and deprivation, security and anxiety. A description of caste that fails to show such facts is a distortion.”

Caste is like a brand that once engraved on a person can never be erased. Thus the gulf between class and class grows wider in society. Discrimination and inequality are thus born. Casteism justifies all this. It defines the future of man and denies his abilities and talents. It establishes that there are only two groups, those born into power or those born into inferiority. So I wish, I could live in a world without caste. Where people don't flaunt their families, the tribes they belong to or spend their days obsessing about the color of their skin. Albert Einstein once said that by joining the masses who know the root cause of such evils, the road through elimination will not be long. Mankind will eventually realize that it declines on the path of development when others suffer.[5]

In a world without a caste system, all will be free.

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