Caste Discrimination and Social Change in India

Ira Leo[1*], Dr. Debahuti Panigrahi[2]

[1*]*Research Scholar, (Reg. No-41700188), Lovely Professional University*
[2]*Asst. Professor, Sociology Department, Lovely Professional University*

Email: [2]debahuti7@gmail.com
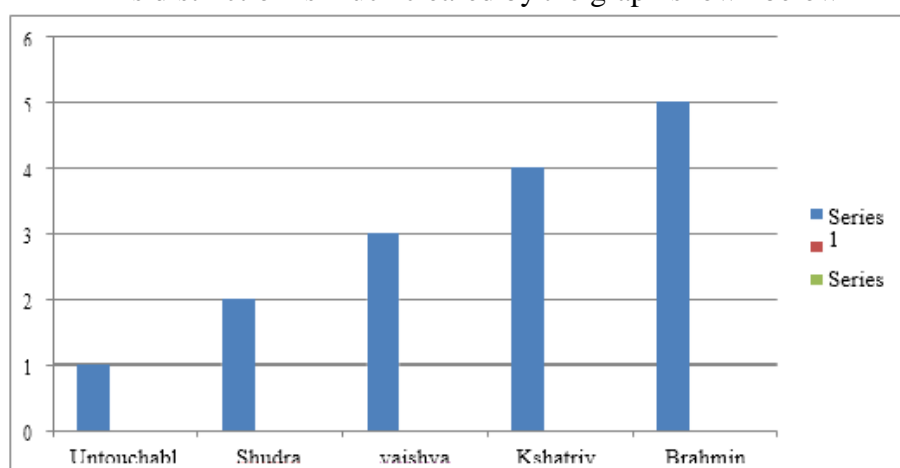*Corresponding Email: [1]*iraibhu@gmail.com*

Abstract: India has a great history of cultural diversities. It is the land where people of different castes and culture live together but it has been seen that along with unity there exists caste discrimination also. It is commonly noticed that higher caste people always dominated lower caste people with discriminated behaviour. As we all knows that change is the law of nature and change is a natural phenomenon. All things, including ideas,culture, civilization and human activities, are changeable. The circumstances that existed 30 years ago, does not exist today and it will not remain so after ten or twenty years. Many philosophers, educationists and sociologists have given different views regarding caste and the changes which has come with development and technology. 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. Because of this distinction the caste which was placed at top dominated other caste which was placed at down. According to this distinction each caste has performed their duties and the type of occupation. The main castes were further divided into about 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes, each based on their specific occupation. It has been seen that caste discrimination is mostly prevalent in rural areas as compared to urban areas. In rural areas the upper caste people and lower caste people lived in different colonies, even the people of higher caste does not share their commodities with them. They did not allow them to sit equally and they would not like to take food or drink from the lower caste people. But it has also seen that social changes in India has boost their conditions to much extent and the problems which lower caste people had faced since last centuries has been improved now. In this paper researcher shall discuss the caste discrimination and social change in India.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Caste discrimination is an important matter of concern since centuries. There are many causes of discrimination, like superiority of caste, the effect of urbanization and advanced means of transport and communication. Caste can be defined as hereditary endogamous group, havinga common culture, common rituals and obeyed the same norms and principals. It has been seen that Indian stratification is largely based on caste. The membership of caste is determined by

birth and thus caste is hereditary in nature. According to the UGC Net sociology book (2012) it is hard to find the exact origin of the caste system originated in India. There are some important theories of the origin of caste system like political theory,
racial theory , occupational theory, traditional theory and guild theory. Here we discuss traditional and occupational theories in occupational theory it was discussed that nature and quality of social work performed by the various group of people described their caste. And in traditional theory it was explained that caste is a divine origin and it was said that caste were created by Brahma, the supreme creator so that the human being may harmoniously perform the various social functions essential for the maintenance of society. It has been observed that caste system is prevailing in Indian society since the ancient times it is a ill reputed that hampers our progress and spread the feeling of hatred among people. Classically caste system is not a new concept it is originated from the Vedic era where it was assumed that four Varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras) were the creation of Lord Brahma. And the another caste which comes in this category are untouchables. Of all the castes the condition of untouchables were very worst during ancient times they were the largest victims of caste discrimination. Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar were the two significant personalities who committed a lot against the degrading condition of untouchable and lower castes. The very term Harijan which refers to lower caste people as a son of God, was coined by Gandhiji. Gandhiji also established the organisation Harijan Sevak Sangh against the exploitation and discrimination of them. With the efforts of Gandhiji untouchability was abolished by the constitution under the Article-17. Gandhiji assumed that like upper castes, lower castes are also the son of God they also have the same blood, thinking, ability, value but they have been pushed to live a shameful and degrading life by the rest of the society. On the other hand Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who himself was an untouchable caste, was considered the masiha or prophet for the untouchable and lower caste. He fought against the exploitation and inhuman condition of low castes. He did a lot for the upliftment of untouchables and lower castes.

This distinction is much cleared by the graph shown below

Brahmins is on the top of hierarchy, Kshatriyas is on the second number and Vaishyas is on the third number and Shudras is on the fourth and after that untouchables.
Brahmins: (Priests, Teachers and Scholars)

Kshatriyas:(Rulers and Warriors)
Vaishyas:(Farmers, Merchants, and Traders)
Shudras:(Labourers)
Untouchables :(Sweepers, Shoemakers, Washers and others)
The first three castes are called Dwija means twice born and the shudra was called ekjati means once born. According to evolutionary theory the caste system did not come into existence all of a sudden on a particular date. It is the result of long process of social evolution. Some of the factors which played their parts in the development of present caste system are: Hereditarily occupation, the desire of Brahmin to keep themselves pure, The lack of rigid unitary control of state, Belief in reincarnation and belief in karma. But it has been observed that with the passage of time many social changes have been seen in the social structure of castes. Many old beliefs, rituals and traditions have changed with the transformation in society.

Reviews of Some Authors
According to Deshpande (2010) has studied "History of the Indian caste system and its impact on India today" and concluded that the present Indian society has moved from its traditional and closed system towards change and progression marked by the assertion of the human spirit irrespective of castes and creeds. It has been observed that lower castes have gained a lot from the partial elimination of the caste system. Now Indian society eradicates this system of divison from its culture.
According to Joti (2000) in her book "Modern India" she explained India in its Modern state and how the changes has happened in every aspect like how the rigid caste system has changed and how religion, economic, and politics play a role in shaping the stratification system of India.
According to Dumont (1970) in his book "Homo hierarchicus: the caste system and its implications" he discussed the concept of' pure' and 'impure' he regarded the concept of purity as the real cause of the caste system , he further added that Indian mind is primarily concerned with purity. In Homo-hierarchias he highlights the caste and varna systems in india. He explained that Indian Ideology in binary opposition to west, he emphasizes on integrative function of caste system. He gave concept of purity and pollution where purity is related to Brahmins and pollution is related to Shudras.
According to Beteille (1965) in his book "Caste, Class and Power: changing pattern of stratification in a tanjore village" discussed that there was a huge gap between upper castes and lower castes he also talked about land owner and land less people he differentiated caste and class caste is a closed group and class is a open group caste is complex and it is not confined to one ideas but class is based on fact. He studied three major castes in tanjore village like Brahmins, non Brahmins and Adi-Dravidians. There are huge cultural relational gap between these castes. He has given the brilliant description of caste in his book.
According to Ghurye (1969) in his book "Caste and Race in India '' explained Caste system becoming pluralistic in terms of performing various function through associations. According to him Caste is hierarchical in which Brahmins occupy the top position and Shudras occupy the bottom. Ghurye said that Caste system is of divine origin as mentioned by Rig Veda that imposed restrictions on certain things like marriage, occupation and on certain duties.
According to Hutton (1963) in his book "Caste in India": Its Nature, Function and Origins" discussed the detailed structure of caste its functions and how it played a role in different

parts of India. He also discussed its divine origin, and how upper castes did not allow lower castes to use their things.

According to Chaudhry (2013) studied "Caste as an Institutionalised System of Social Exclusion and Discrimination: Some Evidences" and concluded that all the social relations and interactions between people of different groups have their base in Caste system and also it is concluded that ancient culture is still prevailing in society, some changes have been seen in its depiction but caste based discrimination is still existing in Indian Society.

Social Change And Development In India

After Independence of India it has been observed that there is tremendous conversion in the thinking of people regarding caste system in India. In 1950's Prof.M.N. Srinivas introduced the concept of' Sanskritization' and 'Dominant Caste' to discuss the mobility in the caste system. Sanskritisation is a process where a low caste group or tribe adopted the culture and life styles of higher caste and with the passage of time they acquired the position of higher castes. According to his book 'Social Change in Modern India' M.N.Srinivas has outlined the view that there is scope for mobility in caste system. Babasaheb Dr. B.R Ambedkar made strict efforts to convert the hierarchical structures of Indian society for the reclamation of equal rights and justice to the unwanted lot by making up a assessment from within the structure of Indian society. He thought that until and unless the authority of the Dharam Shastras is shaken which provided divine sanction to the system of discrimination based on the caste hierarchy, the eradication of untouchability could not be realised. After Independence many laws were formulated to safe guard the interests of lower castes several commissions have been set up to look after their requirements and to checked the discriminated behaviour in many places like hospitals, temples schools and so many places but all these efforts failed to some extent, because due to illiteracy low castes did not know their rights and their utilization. In ancient time the condition of low castes people was very worse ,these people are debarred from doing many things like they are not permitted to enter the temple, and cannot use gold ornaments or umbrella, but now things have changed due to contemporarily social changes in India these restrictions are hardly found today. Multiple procedure like Sanskritisation, Westernisation, Modernisation, Dominant caste, Indutrialisation, Urbanisation and democratic decentralisation are the social changes which happened to dignify the Indian caste structure, but unfortunately some people are benefitted from them and some are not. One of the study conducted by Mahi Pal (2004) cited by (Mishra, 2006) on the basis of his study in Haryana defined that" caste system still exercises a stronghold on Haryana's panchayat institutions where dalit women representatives of panchayat still face opposition from members of the panchyat and village people belonging to higher caste, who hampers their activities". The study conducted by Verinder Jain (2008) found that "Issues related to discrimination and work related insecurities in the Punjab's urban unorganised manufacturing sector found a relative deprivation of SC/ST wageworker upholds the relevance of social class analysis in India's unorganised sector". (Gundemeda 2020) conduted study on Caste in twenty first century India and Concluded that " The prevalence of the caste system in India continues to be an issue of crucial importance even today, despite the Indian constitution providing a strong legal framework to ensure equality of opportunities across caste, race, religion, region, and gender. The constitution of India abolished the practice of untouchability and declared caste-based abuse a crime. Every effort have failed to abolish the forms and practices of the caste system in both public and private spheres in India. Studies of social scientists on the caste system reveal that it has survived by

adopting new forms, by shedding its ritual character and taking on social, political, cultural reincarnations in modern society". In a study conducted by (Shah et.al, 2006) cited by (Rao 2010) covering 560 villages in 11 states found that public health workers refused to visit Dalits homes in 33 percent villages, dalits were prevented from entering police station in 28 percent villages, dalit children had to sit separately while eating in 38 percent of government schools, Dalits did not get their mail delivered to their homes in 24 percent of villages because of segregation and untouchability practices. Since India's independence there has been lot of changed seen in the rules related to caste system. Now members of each caste shared their belongings with one another, inter caste marriages are also started with some of the caste. Now caste became a less important factor in daily lives of people who lived in urban areas. In rural areas it is still prevalent but the people of rural areas who migrated to urban areas in search of work in industries has shed of their old beliefs related to caste. With the advancement in techonology India has developed in almost all spheres of life and with this modification thinking of many people has changed in relation to caste. In earlier India most people were adopted their ancestors job as a profession, but with the passage of time many people had join newer occupations. Now people of any caste can join job of their own choices. Although some caste-based prejudice and ranking still existed discrimination on the basis of caste has been outlawed in India, is still exists in the community today. Education is the only tool which can eradicate this false consciousness of people regarding caste, so it is very important to give education to every member of society so that they can use their rights and the laws which are made for their benefits. Now a days you can see that in restaurants every castes sit together and eat where caste distinctions are less likely to be made. In the modern industrial society caste and occupational mobility is rapidly increasing because of social change. Now many lower castes has enjoyed the status of higher castes by giving up their traditional occupation and adopted another occupation.

2. CONCLUSION

Caste system constitutes the framework for development of social relations and interconnections between diverse groups, people and social systems in Indian society .From the above text it is concluded that Indian society has passed through many stages of development, from the ancient times to 21st century tremendous change have been seen in the Indian caste system. In ancient time there were only caste based society every superior castes dominated the inferior castes, even low castes people prohibited to visit some of the places. But now a days people of every castes can visit places of their own choice. But in some places caste consciousness is still prevalent because of illiteracy, many laws has developed to safeguard the interests of low castes but due to their illiteracy they do not know their rights they do not know the provisions which are made to uplift them by the constitution. These people still not get equality in the Indian society. Many of the lower castes have gained a lot from the partial elimination of the caste system, but still there are some who continuously confront the same behaviour of discrimination everywhere. There are still some people who discriminate on the basis of castes, if we want to change and progress of India then we have to remove casteism. We have to educate our population of rural areas, we have to run awareness campaign so that these depressed castes should know their rights and no one dominate them on the basis of caste in future. India will developed more if we established a society which is not based on castes, which is based only on equality and solidarity.

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