

## **Necessity of Education for Removal of Caste System**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

At the time when the Aryans migrated from their homes in the northwest into India around 1500 BC, there is no evidence of such a rigid stratification of society as characterizes the caste system. The Rigveda and Avesta both portray the life of the people of that age and they give no indications of any divisions beyond the ordinary classes of priests, nobility and peasantry. However, the migrations into a country already populated gave rise to a new line of social cleavage, namely, between the Aryans invaders who were white, tall and cultured and the aborigines who were short, dark and primitive. This division was expressed as Aryas or Kinsmen and Dasa or friends, a word which subsequently came to mean slaves or servants. Again the classification was made on the basis of colour (varna) because the aborigines were so much more black (Krishna) than the invaders.

Subsequently during the Hindu-influenced law or Dharma was created to regulate society. It had similar characteristics to Buddhist thought but was also challenged by it. Hindu-society had also come to be dominated by the Aryan invaders who saw the caste system, mandated by Dharma, as a means of perpetuating their own superior positions in society. Consequently, the Aryan influence on the caste system was to associate it with racial elements and the immutability of social immobility.

### **CASTE SYSTEM AMONG HINDUS**

The highest caste was that of the Brahmins, who were the only ones permitted to read the Vedas (from which they drew their power) and their role was to spread knowledge and teaching throughout the world. The second caste was the Kshatriyas, who were the warrior-nobles of society. Below them were the Vaisyas, who were a form of bourgeoisie, including traders, shopkeepers, artisans and skilled workers of various kinds. They were worthy of receiving knowledge of the Vedas and respectable people in their own right but should remain in their place. Commerce, consequently, was inferior to governance, which was in turn inferior to religion. Ancient Chinese society had a similar means of organization. The Sudras were the service class whose task

was to serve and support the other three castes. Some Sudras could be classified as the unclean untouchables, while others became a slave class. Social mobility was, supposedly, a process that only ever moved people downwards.

### CASTE SYSTEM AMONG NON-HINDUS

In some parts of India, the Christians are stratified by sect, location, and the castes of their predecessors, usually in reference to upper class Syrian Malabar Nasranis. Christians in Kerala are divided into several communities, including Syrian Christians and the so-called "Latin" or "New Rite" Christians. Syrian Christians, especially Knanaya Christians tend to be endogamous, and tend not to intermarry with other Christian castes. Also, very rarely are there intermarriages between Syrian Christians and Latin Rite Christians (converted in the 16th and 19th centuries) in Kerala; the latter were converted mainly from lower castes where fishing was the traditional occupation. Due to active conversion by Latin Missionaries in the coastal belt of Kerala, the new Latin converts were poor and deprived. So the Government of India gave them the social benefit of OBC status (Other Backward Classes) so that the deprived members of that community can be uplifted. Anthropologists have noted that the caste hierarchy among Christians in Kerala is much more polarized than the Hindu practices in the surrounding areas, due to a lack of jatis.

Among Muslims, those who are referred to as Ashrafs are presumed to have a superior status derived from their foreign Arab ancestry, while the Ajlafs are assumed to be converts from Hinduism, and have a lower status. In addition, there is also the *Arzal* caste among Muslims, who were regarded by anti-caste activists like Ambedkar as the equivalent of untouchables. In the Bengal region of India, some Muslims also stratify their society according to 'Quoms'. The Jains too have castes in places such as Bihar. For example, in the village of Bundela, there are several "*jaats*" (*groups*) amongst the Jains. A person of one "*jaat*" cannot intermingle with a Jain or another "*jaat*". They also cannot eat with the members of other "*jaats*".

The Sikh Gurus criticized the hierarchy in the caste system. Where some castes were perceived by people as being better or higher than others (e.g. Brahmins being higher than others) they preached all sections of society were valuable and merit and hard-work were essential aspects of life. In Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, out of 140 seats, twenty are reserved for low caste Sikhs. However, the quota system has attracted much criticism due to the lack of meritocracy, where merit is considered the single most important component of winning a seat.

### ROLE OF EDUCATION

There have been challenges to the caste system from the time of **Buddha**, and from the time of **Mahavira** (Jaina founder). Opposition to the system of varna (caste) is regularly asserted already in the Yoga Upanisads (of early mediaeval date); and is a constant feature of Chinese-derived movement in Asom, and also of mediaeval date). Many Bhakti period saints rejected the caste discriminations and accepted all castes, including untouchables, into their fold. During the British Raj, this sentiment gathered steam, and many Hindu reform movements such as Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj renounced caste-based discrimination.

Britain confronted Indian Society with an altogether new situation: capitalist economic relations, modern industry, science and technology, modern learning, bourgeois legal system involving the concepts of freedom and equality of all citizens before law, on the one hand, and its agents in the form of civil and military officers, engineers, missionaries, contractors etc, on the other hand. This gave the backward sections of Indian society for the first time an opportunity for a significant social advance. It is in the context of this total situation that one has to see the role of the spread of education.

The disseminations of modern learning, although on a modest scale in the beginning, initiated two processes of change for the traditionally deprived and oppressed sections of society. It created an enabling situation for participation in the new pattern of economy. Education enabled them to join the new occupations. It also provided the necessary ideology, that of liberalism, for visualising an economic and social transformation of society. Thus a basis was laid for the transition from the caste bound, pre-capitalist social structure to a more egalitarian and freer society. The fight for equal educational, occupational and economic opportunity and for equal status is therefore a part of the long and unequal struggle for a more just and equal society.

Education plays a vital role in removal of caste system. The education is only the way to remove this evil from our society. By educating the society, it is possible to make people understand the literary meaning of the castes. In ancient times when the people were not educated, they were divided into these *varnas* according to their profession. Subsequently the generations of those persons of different professions were known by their ancestors' professions. This, over a period of time, took place to be known by their professions and became the castes. But profession changed from one generation to the other. If we look upon the history, we find the kings (ministers) today had their forefathers of different castes. Some body comes from a teaching profession and somebody comes from a so called untouchable caste. One must not be identified by one's ancestral caste but be known by one's present occupation. In this we have to educate each and everybody to understand the modern caste system and not the ancient one. The untouchable castes are not those described in books of history as they were to make people to understand easily who illiterates were. Today we have the logic to renounce the old caste system. We have to see that nobody is untouchable by birth. Now we have untouchables who are criminals or those who are not contributing to the upliftment of the society at large. We have Brahminas today also but not those by birth. The Brahminas are category who are teachers or who are engaged professing for the upliftment of the society. We have Kshatriyas not by birth but we have the military and police or those who are standing restlessly for the defence of society or the country. We have the Vaisias today also who are engaged in business irrespective of their ancestral caste. We have the caste of sudras today who are still illiterate and not aware of their rights and duties towards the society and country.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Dharma was created to regulate society as there was no written constitution to assure

the citizens justice for their freedom and liberty. Also Buddhist thought suggested that it was possible for an individual soul to accumulate enough good or bad work (karma) to move from one caste to another. For removal of the caste system the education is a big tool. We do not require any Manusmriti to define the castes; we do not need any division based on the *varna* as per the Vedas or Upanishads. What we need to understand today is that the caste system was started to make the people aware of their duties towards society. The practice of untouchability was formally outlawed by the Constitution of India in 1950. As is clear from the above study this evil existed in all religions only to make the system or religion work smoothly. But today we have the written constitution which does not differentiate on the basis of colour (*varna*) or the ancestral professions.

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