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Caste and Well-Being

Why don't all people have equal opportunities? One reason is personal attributes, such as personality, personal effort, etc. Another reason is one's social status, depending on determinants such as one's relatives, sex, religion, race, etc. All societies hold a view on some of those determinants, and mostly prefer one to another. For instance, while Japanese people prefer people from rich and "honorable" families, Americans mostly interested in race and religion (Hurst 513). That kind of social discrimination is more concrete in some societies and transformed into a system in some countries such as India. The system in India is called the caste system and divides people into hierarchical groups based on religious beliefs. The group at the top of this hierarchy mostly referred to as "Brahmins", while the ones at the bottom are called "Dalits" or "untouchables". Contact between different castes is not approved at all, even leads to execution of some lower caste people. Obviously, this discrimination has an impact on human well being. Human well being is a concept that may be expressed as how satisfactory one’s physical, social and mental state is for the individual (Summers et al. 1). Human well-being consists of some aspects and requires the satisfaction of all of them. One of the most essential aspects for this paper is the self-actualization aspect. Self-actualization corresponds to becoming the best of everything that one is capable of becoming intellectually In others words, self-actualization means developing a personal vision, setting up audacious goals, knowing and fighting for what is right, and being able to contribute to the society in a moral way. Hence, having access to decent career and education opportunities is essential for the self-actualization aspect. The other crucial aspect considered in this paper is the safety aspect, which is determined by how secure one's body, health and family are (Summers et al. 3). Therefore, the safety aspect requires low crime rates, protection from harm, and easy access to medical services. As stated before, the Indian caste system determines one's social status, which is highly related to one's human well being. Based on various studies, the caste system of India affects human well being negatively in terms of self-actualization and safety aspects.

To begin with, the caste system of India affects self-actualization aspect of human well being negatively by limiting education and career opportunities. Lower caste people are seen as unworthy of proper education and are often prevented from getting into prestigious colleges. Most college application approvals are done by higher caste Indians, who tend to prefer higher caste people over lower ones (Tierney et al. 472). Prestigious colleges determine their quotas mostly considering the number of available upper-class students, the remaining ones have to "find ways to deal with Dalits"( Tierney et al. 473). One of the most concrete instances of "finding ways to deal with Dalits" is the Agra College example. Until the Agra college got its popularity, for the first few decades, "only a few elite families were willing to send their children to the newly founded college"(Rao 85), so the school started to admit poor and lower caste students. As the college's popularity increased, the percentage of lower caste people in the college started to decrease too. In the first 20 years, 49% of students belonged to "Dalits", or to the other lower castes. After a couple of decades, this number reduced to 4% ( Rao 87). This results in informal emergent of two types of colleges, Dalit Colleges and Brahmin Colleges (Rao 90), depending on the majority of students’ castes. Undoubtedly, Dalit Colleges are the cheaper and the indigenous ones, while the more prestigious ones are the Brahmin Colleges. The indigenous colleges are located mostly in more rural areas of India, so the students mostly have to deal with problems like outdated lab equipments, unhygienic washrooms, etc. Also in these schools, the academic personal mostly belongs to lower caste as well, which means the teachers are not well educated as well. For instance, in the vernacular schools of Bengal, 94% of the teachers are Dalit, and almost 100% of students are Dalit as well. Thus, as explained, the schools are mostly divided due to rejection of lower caste student's from prestigious schools. Therefore, lower caste people have to attend to the less prestigious schools which are mostly located in rural areas. One may claim that this should not be a problem for successful lower caste students, as they most probably will be accepted by prestigious colleges, unlike their counterparts. However, the lower caste people that are accepted to prestigious colleges due to their exceptional successes often can't keep their successes. Their academic successes are mostly ignored due to the discrimination they face in these colleges. For instance, a student from a lower caste in Delhi College named Balmokund won first prize in the annual English essay competition (Rao 85). However, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the head of the education department, refused to give the prize due to the "inappropriate circumstances"(Rao 85).So even the most successful lower caste Indians are not treated equally with others, the rewards that they get are much less than the others. This phenomenon continues to show it impacts when lower caste Indians graduate too. Their possibility of having a respectful job if they have a successful education life is very low due to prejudices against them. Since the quota of high paying jobs is mostly filled their higher-class counterparts, they are mostly enforced to work in lowest-income jobs. The first proof of that is the difference in the separation of jobs between the classes. Although only 37% of Indians are considered as upper castes," they accounted for almost 66 percent of all non- technical subject graduates, more than 65 percent of medical graduates, almost 67 percent of engineering and technology graduates, and about 62 percent of graduates in agricultural sciences"(Desphande 2449). Therefore, although the higher caste people make up only one-third of the total population, 2/3 of high-class jobs are accounted for them. One may claim that this is expected since upper caste people are mostly more educated and there is nothing wrong with choosing the more suitable candidate. However, this is wrong as well. In 1990, a study conducted in Nangal Jat to observe the successful lower caste graduates in their future carriers (Jeffery et al. 1). 10 students were taken into consideration, who were all exceptionally successful. All ten of them were determined to work in governmental jobs. In 2001, results of the work announced. Apparently, only one of them was able to fulfill his dream(Jeffery et al. 2). Other 9 of them worked in regular jobs, one had a small oil business, and another was working in a gas station. All of them applied for a governmental job at least 10 times over the last 10 years, but only one of them succeeded (Jeffery et.al,1). To conclude lower caste people's college applications are often denied, they have to attend to less prestigious colleges. Even the ones who manage to attend high-class colleges have to face a variety of problems and often are not rewarded even if they are very successful. Also, after graduation, even the most successful are not accepted for governmental jobs, they have to work in regular jobs. Hence, the caste system affects self-actualization aspect of human well being negatively, by destroying career and education opportunities of lower caste people, which prevents them from reaching their full potential.

The caste system does not only harm the self-actualization aspect of human well being but also it damages the safety aspect by putting people in danger too. Before analyzing the topic, some background information should be given to understand the topic. First of all, the caste system is based on the idea of protection of the "pureblood". According to Hindu beliefs, higher caste people are higher caste because their past lives were moral so they are reincarnated as higher caste people. Therefore, families should enjoy the prize of having a moral life in their past lives, while the untouchables should pay for the immoral things that they have done in their past lives. All of these beliefs result in a strict ban to marriages between lower and higher caste marriages as marriages mean the interaction of higher caste people with lower caste ones. Consequences of this are more serious than it seems. Intercaste marriages still lead to murders today. According to an online article titled "Erasing caste from hate crime" by EMIS, Pranay Kumar, a Dalit youth, in Miryalaguda, was murdered in 2018 since he was planning to marry with a higher caste woman. The murderers were the members of the family of the women, and only one of them sent into prison. The board allowed commutation for the other three murderers for "good behavior", and they were only made to pay surety. The murderers who showed "good behavior" reported that they had to murder to protect the honor of the family. They have raised the girl for 20 years with love and care, but she disrespected Hindu culture and her family for "some boy". They also stated that the girl may be too immature and naive to be able to understand this, which only means that she was deceived by the boy, which is unforgivable. Hence, they murdered the boy("Caste from hate crime"). If there was no caste system in India, the murderers would not have been forgiven. On the contrary, they would have been put into prison. However, due to the culture that the caste system brings, such kind of crimes almost has become a part of the tradition. Hence, most of the times murderers are not punished properly, so the safety aspect of human well being is damaged due to the caste system. A similar issue can be seen in the case of rape. According to NCRCB, rapes against lower caste people increased by 44% between 2010 and 2014. The reason for this is the lack of access to legal justice of lower caste people due to the caste system. Even the government don't think that lower caste people should have access to legal justice, as they are not %100 human according to the caste system." An Indian minister from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party says rape is "sometimes right, sometimes wrong", amid mounting public anger over sex attacks"( *"*Rape 'sometimes right'*").* This obviously means that rape against high caste people is wrong, but when it is against lower caste people it is right. This kind of understanding would not be so common if India were not under the caste system since the caste system obviously sees lower caste people as invaluable. Another reason for this high amount of rapes is the approach of the caste system towards women. The caste system does not only divide people into groups, but it also has some cultural effect as well. According to the caste system, women should be the ones that are responsible to protect themselves, so rapes against them mostly seen as women's fault, as they can't defend their honor. According to the online news named "The Crime of caste" by EMIS, a 12-year-old lower caste girl raped by a tribal elder's son in India. The boy confessed his fault. However, she still was accused of prostitution and beaten by elders into unconsciousness. After that, doctors refused to treat her because she was immoral and from lower caste("Crime of Caste"). If the caste system didn't exist, surely these women's conditions would have been a lot better. To sum up, marriages between different castes result in murders, also rapes against lower caste people are not seen as a problem due to the caste system, so caste system affects safety aspect of human well being negatively by putting them in danger.

Despite the given facts that are explained above, there are still some people who claim that the caste system does not affect human well being. They claim that one's well being only depends on the individual's subjective well-being. Subjective well-being most commonly referred to as the self-reported rate of well-being, regardless of the situation that the individual in. According to those people, if the individual is satisfied with his/her own life even without having anything, his/her subjective well being and also his/her human well being can be high too. However, this is wrong as proven by various studies. Most of these studies are based on social comparison theory, which states that a person's well being is not only determined by his/her ideas, but also by with the comparison with others. According to this theory, people tend to compare themselves with people around them, and if their situation is worse than the people around the environment, their human well being can't be higher than a certain level (Landeghem et al. 63). One should notice that lower-caste Indians are almost far behind from higher caste people almost in every aspect. Higher caste people's income level is incomparable to others. Higher caste people can access better education, better entertainment, a safer environment, only because of their [ascribed status](https://tureng.com/en/turkish-english/ascribed%20status). Also, lower caste people can't have any of these regardless of how much they work, only because they are from a low caste, which was not their decision at all. Seeing others live in such comfort with much less effort will create a prone to depression. Obviously, these people can not have a high level of human well being and not surprisingly 33% of lower caste people suffer from chronic depression (Landeghem et al. 65). Therefore even if the lower caste people claim that they are happy and satisfied with their lives, the human well being of lower caste Indians can't be high according to the social comparison theory.

To sum up, the caste system affects self-actualization and safety aspect of human well being negatively. It damages the self-actualization aspect by limiting the education and career opportunities of lower caste people. Lower caste people often get rejected by the colleges. Even when they manage to enter, they suffer from negative discrimination. They get rejected by high paying jobs as well, and mostly forced to work on jobs in poor conditions. It harms the safety aspect by making the murders easier. There a lot of people who have become the victim of murders only because they wanted to marry a person from a different caste. Also, rapes and murders against lower caste people are very common, since those people often lack access to legal justice due to the caste system. Sometimes lower caste people are even blamed for getting raped. Some people claim that the caste system does not affect human well being since human well being only depends on our subjective values. However as stated before, human well being requires the satisfaction of various aspects, so subjective well being is not enough to have a high level human well being. In addition, according to the social comparison theory, one has to have better conditions than others to have a high level of human well being, which is the exact opposite for lower caste people. Therefore, the caste system clearly affects human well being negatively. As a consequence, the people of India should remove their beliefs from their daily lives and try to create a more equal environment.

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