

According to Dipankar Gupta- Social Hierarchy like Caste is not a natural difference but a social difference.

Name of the book:

- 1. Caste: Ghurye, G.S. 1992. 'Features of the caste system' in Dipankar Gupta (ed) Social Stratification in India. New Delhi: OUP; pp: 35-48.**

Ghurye outlines the features of caste explains why Caste has still persisted in modern India, in fact till today. These features and practices of caste system makes the caste system to continue. As long as these practices continue, it is difficult to annihilate/uproot caste system.

Restrictions on Marriages:

Most of the groups in the caste are divided into a number of sub groups, all groups of which forbids its members to marry persons from outside it, referring to an endogamous system in caste. Endogamy here refers to marriages permissible only within a specific group as required by the custom, which is an opposite to exogamy. Endogamy is so dominant in caste system that it is considered as an essence of caste system. Few exception to this general rule is due to practise of hypergamy. For example, in Malabar the youngest son of nambudiri or other Brahmins can marry kshatriya , but these exceptions are rare compared to the majority practices who prefer to marry within their own caste, especially the upper castes.

Any man transgressing this law will be put out of the sub group and is doubtful if he will be allowed in any of the respectable caste group. Along with the expulsion from the group, the penalty has to be borne by the offender's family members as well. Social evil emanating from such restrictions on marriages leads to crimes like Honor killing example.

To treat endogamy as the chief characteristics of a caste is to treat all sub caste as the real caste because sub-caste is real. It is the caste that is recognised by the society at large but it is the sub caste (jati or gotra) that is regarded by the particular caste, community and individual. That in order to get a sociological correct idea of institution we should recognize sub castes as real castes. As per Ghurye's work on caste, in each linguistic area there were around 200 groups called castes with distinct names, which was further divided into about 2000 smaller units, particularly known as sub castes based on which limitation on marriage and effective social life, cultural tradition is marked.

Restrictive choice of occupation:

In Caste system, hereditary occupation has been one of central feature of social stratification in India. Meaning that to pursue another occupation outside one's inherited caste identity, where the occupation may be more lucrative or the person may be equipped with skill, was not considered right in caste system. While Brahman thought it is his right to be a priest, the chamber thought it as his duty to repair shoes, which is true for many other castes like labour, military, agriculture, trade etc. No higher caste would allow its member to take on any occupation which is more degrading than their calling. For example, it is unthinkable for a Brahmin to take up scavenging job even in the situation of extreme poverty etc.

The Indian constitution allows any member to choose any vocation, however Caste system puts a moral-community restraint and social check on one's fellow members, especially the lower caste. There are restraints on choice of one's occupation. Social inhibition especially in rural India.

2. M.N. Srinivas. 1992. 'Varna and caste' in Dipankar Gupta (ed) Social Stratification in India. New Delhi: OUP.

MN srinivas essay tries to bring about the relation between caste and the traditional concept of Varna. Varna has been the model observed by sociologists to understand caste. The layman is unaware of the complexities of varna. To him it simply means division of hindu society into four orders: Brahman (priest and scholars), Kshatriya (ruler and soldiers), vaishyas (merchants), and shudras (peasant, labourers and servants). As per MN Srinivas research, the untouchables had no place in the varna model, but they do have reference in vedic literature to groups such as ayogava, chandala etc. who are outside the varna system. The first 3 castes are twice born as the men from them are entitle to *don*, the sacred thread as per the vedic rite of upanayana, while the shudras are not allowed.

The term Varna historically and originally means colour referred to the distinction between the arya and dasa. It is this distinction in the rig veda between arya (the conquerers) and dasyu (the conquered aborigines) that gave way to the distinction between arya and shudra. Varna as a term then emerged to distinguish on the basis of colour and appearance, which later was used to refer to the hierarchical division of the society based on caste. It is necessary to free oneself of this varna model if one needs to understand caste, argues MN srinivas. The position of caste in the hierarchy vary from village to village and the hierarchy is also to some extent local. Each caste has a name & body of customs and tradition.

3. Mencher. 2005. 'The caste system upside down' in Dipankar Gupta (ed) Social Stratification in India. New Delhi: OUP; pp: 93-109.

Mencher wanted to look at Caste system from bottom up approach, meaning looking up from the bottom of the hierarchy. He made 2 important observations:

1. Caste has and it continues to function as an effective system of economic exploitation. – to understand the economic or social change process, it is important to understand the relation between the higher caste and the lower caste. Superior economic position of high caste historically, managed the suppression of low caste. Dalits serve to be agricultural labourers. According to census, the distribution of dalit population increases in rice producing/cultivating areas, paddy fields where majority are labourers. For example, in Tamil Nadu out of ten thousand paraiyans, six thousand and five hundred was in the four major rice producing areas. Composition also varies from one village to another.

2. Caste system functions as a system that prevents formation of system with commonality of interests and unity of purpose: the system functioned to keep people separate from one another. For example system of land holding: historically lower castes were not allowed to own land. Caste system also draws its viability from the extreme socio-economic differences. Strategy used by upper caste- confine the lower caste- non accessibility to land, wealth, privileges, in the process less material and social resources- narrower contact with outside world- the UC makes sure for the LC to have lesser contact with non-villagers.

b. Labour/working class belonging to different caste strata are separated by caste. Mencher uses a Marxian perspective to understand caste system. What mencher is trying to show is how caste has functioned both in the past and today that keeps the labours from different strata of the caste system from uniting (uniting with labours from other castes) as proletariats against the bourgeois.

The functionalists would say that there is exclusivity and also harmony in the caste system. But harmony and reciprocity is from unequal parts and not equal parts. Examples of harmony and reciprocity: Acceptance of low caste position due to religious reasons-public perceptions like: God must have placed them wherever they are – They must have done something bad in their previous life -If they obey do their work dutifully perhaps in the next life/*janam* they will be born into a higher caste. This is one of the most important distorted understanding of Indian society, to see Caste system as non-conflictual and harmonious, when in reality it is conflictual and disharmonious. The reason why Karl Marx said that 'Religion is the opium of the masses'. Functionalist model of social order is problematic as it projects caste system as acceptance by the groups, making the system look like it is a harmonious reciprocity when it is a forced reciprocity. The assumed harmony are also not harmony of equally valued parts but are rigorously subordinate to one another.

Measures introduced by the Govt of India to prevent caste discrimination –an effect of government policies- in schools- policy of all children sitting together irrespective of caste, illegalizing and preventing teachers from enforcing caste attitudes and practices in school especially in rural India, allowing temples entry irrespective of castes.

- 4. Berreman, G.D. 2005. 'The brahmanical view of caste' in Dipankar Gupta (ed) Social Stratification in India. New Delhi: OUP; pp: 84-92.**

History of Humiliation and the superiority of the upper caste continues in modern India:

In this Caste system, the Brahmin never bows to anyone who is not a Brahmin but requires other to revere him. When other non-brahmin salute the brahmin-he pronounce benediction. Lower caste reverence to him is normalized throughout India and historically the lower caste do not cross the shadow of the Brahmin because it was believed that it would defile him. Historically in some communities, the lower castes did not take food without sipping water in which big toe of Brahmin was dipped. There is weakening of pollution concept but superiority of caste through lifestyle is still prevalent and manifesting into elite culture. Ex: vegetarian etc, avoiding certain kind of foods etc. The most sacred literature cannot be studied by the shudras, certain sacraments and rituals cannot be performed by any caste other than the Brahmins. No caste can employ any other priests than Brahmin with few exception in south India. For example, the artisans of Madras the goldsmith caste of the Maratha regime employ their own priest.

- 5. Caste: Ghurye, G.S. 1992. 'Features of the caste system' in Dipankar Gupta (ed) Social Stratification in India. New Delhi: OUP; pp: 35-48.**

Ghurye began with a narration how a foreigner was struck by the phenomenon of caste system. According to Ghurye, the segmental division of caste is not a full understanding of the system but awareness to people belonging outside the caste system, about the division of people into different groups, which also causes culture shock to him. The caste groups are not just groups but have different degree of respectability, status and differential treatments to it. Caste system viewed from the outside marks a remarkable contrast to social organizations or grouping prevalent in Europe or America. So based on these premises the first impression of caste is a) Strangeness and b) ubiquity or pervasive/everywhere. According to Ghurye, because of the complexity of caste it is difficult to have one general definition of caste. The term caste lacks precision and so, he did not define but explained.

The idea or the philosophy of the system is usually unaffected by the modern ideas of rights and duties because the modern India continues to practise these features of Caste system in

their everyday life and that it is embedded in their religion. As discussed some earlier, caste do have features:

1) Segmental division of society: the membership to the groups in caste is not selection but by birth. The status is not dependent on his wealth as in the case of classes in Europe but it depends on whether a person is born into, in the case of Marathi would be, Brahmin, vani, bhandari, chambhar or mahar etc. Vocation is earmarked for a particular caste by birth.

A Brahmin General and a Maratha General in military although of equal status in the army but they belong to different status groups in real life, which is not the case in class society where status depends on vocation and thereby income. In class system, other than the laws of the society or community, it has no other council to guide the conduct, morals and lives of its members. The difference between caste and class is such that in class stratification members of the class whether upper class or lower class generally follow professional etiquette or economic gain and they do not have community rules as such. Whereas in caste, Brahmin and Rajput have councils deciding on the matters encroaching or concerning whole community. The governing body of caste is usually represented in Panchayat. Some offences defined by the panchayats, based on caste are eating, drinking, non-payment of debt, breaches of customs peculiar to the caste, insulting a Brahmin, defying the customs of caste regarding feast, marriage rules etc. At the very intent of panchayati or caste is justified, to meet out the justice to its members or community as a whole. This quasi sovereignty of the caste is particularly brought to notice by fact that the caste council was prepared to retry the criminal offences decided by the courts of law. In this sense, the members or citizens owes their moral allegiance to their caste in a caste bounded society first, rather than to the law.

By segmental division ghurye meant a segmental quasi-jurisprudence of a society: the punishment that these councils award are-

- 1) out casting either permanent or temporary.
- 2) fines
- 3) feast to be given on certain grounds
- 4) corporal or physical punishment
- 5) at times religious purification rituals imposed on them etc.
- 6) Drawing water from the well- depends on the well sometimes, masonry well is easily defiled as one constructed with clay pipes. All over india, historically the so called impure castes are debarred from drawing water from the village well.

6) Temple entry sanctions. In most cases the innermost recesses of the temple can be approached only by the Brahmins. The lower most castes cannot even enter the outer portion of the temple and must be at the courtyard of the temple.

Under the peshwa rule, there was a great distinction in the punishment on account of the caste of the criminal rather than on the nature of the crime itself. It largely depended on who/belonging to which caste committed the crime, rather than what crime was committed? Hard labour and death was the usually meted by the lower castes.

Other cultural differences are in customs about marriage and death varying among different castes. Marriage- endogamous, whether marriage can have public street procession etc. Another religio-Cultural differences he sates is the different caste having different deities.

2. Food and Heirachy

As a rule belonging to the structure of caste, a man will not eat kachcha food unless it is prepared by a fellow caste man or from his endogamous group. But in reality most caste take no objection to kachcha food from a Brahmin, but on the contrary, a Brahmin can accept kaccha food from the hand of no other caste. There are exceptional cases, where some ppl do not accept food even from a Brahmin in Bengal. For Pakka food a Brahmin can take from the hands of some caste only. But the study of E.A blunt suggests that the severity of cooking taboo is not strictly followed in all the regions of india, although some do follow them religiously. According to Ghurye, the idea that impurity can be transmitted by the mere shadow of an untouchable or by his approach at a distance is not prevalent but the idea about the power of touch that can defile or pollute are prevalent, & more so in southern part of india. Southern india in matter of ceremonial purity and pollution stands out distinct in the rigidity of these rules. Article 17 of the Indian Constitution abolished the practise of Untouchability.