

Indian Society and Culture: Caste and Tribe

Module-4

Part I

Caste

- “Caste is a collection of families, bearing a common name, claiming a common descent, from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded as single homogenous community” Herbert Risley
- “chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy.” B.R Ambedkar
- “Caste is a closed class” D.N Majumdar

- “Any attempt to define caste is bound to fail because of the complexity of the phenomenon.” Ghurye
- M.N Srinivas sees caste as a segmentary system. According to him every caste is divided into sub castes which are the units of endogamy whose members follow a common occupation, social and ritual life and common culture and whose members are governed by the same authoritative body viz the panchayat.
- “Caste groups are united into a system through two principles of segregation and hierarchy.” F.G Bailey

Origin

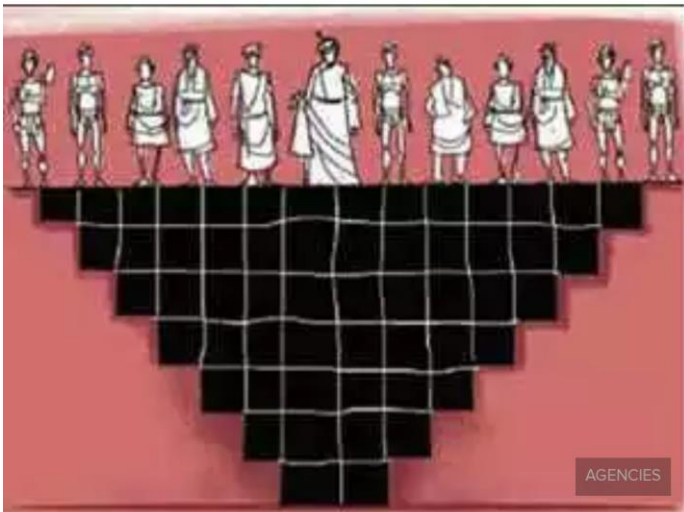


- Indo-European-speaking people from **West Eurasia** entered India from the **Northwest** and diffused throughout the subcontinent.
- They purportedly admixed with or displaced indigenous Dravidic-speaking populations. Subsequently they may have **established the Hindu caste system** and placed themselves primarily in castes of higher rank
- The word caste also signifies race or kind. The Sanskrit word for **caste is Varna that means color**. The caste system in India is an important part of ancient Hindu tradition and dates back to 1200 BCE

Study on origin of caste

Study reveals origin of India's caste system

Agencies | Updated: Aug 11, 2013, 07:02 IST



The study was carried out by Harvard Medical School and the CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad.

India's caste system, says a new [genetic](#) study, began about 2,000 years ago. The study adds that people from different genetic populations — from the North and the South — began to mix

Caste system: an indigenous invention in South India?

[D. BALASUBRAMANIAN](#)

JANUARY 10, 2013 01:13 IST

UPDATED: JANUARY 10, 2013 01:13 IST

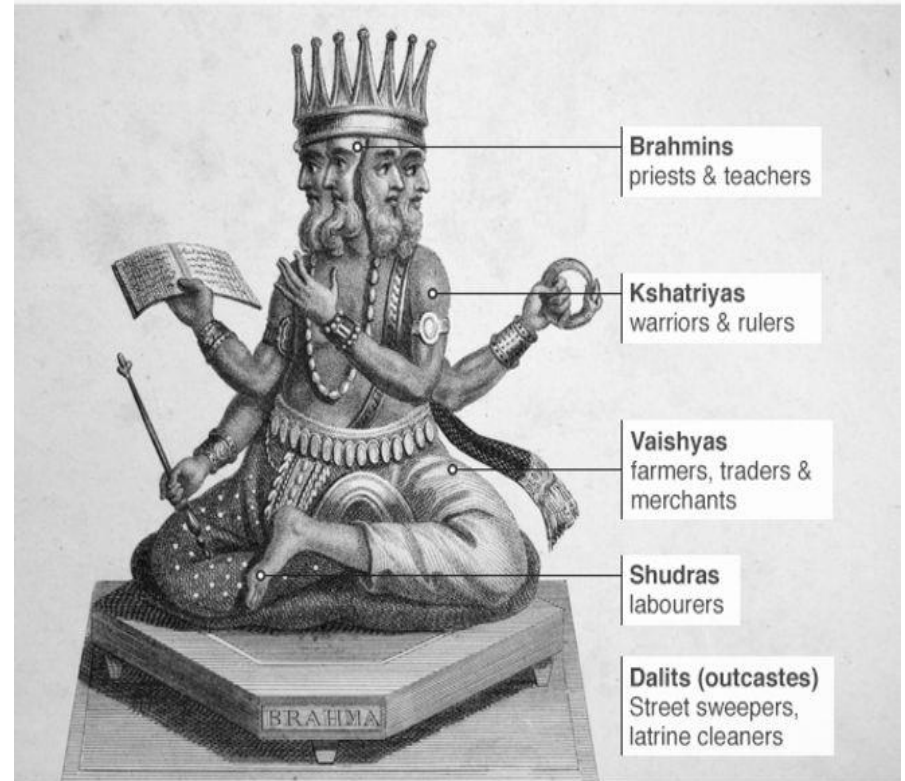
Patrilineage and demographic events seem to have brought in social strata and restricted gene pools, not external intervention

What is the origin of the caste system in India? This has been a contentious subject in the history of our country. Was this an import from outside? A strong group of scholars think that it was the doing of the people who came from West Asia who migrated and settled here around 3000 – 4000 years

Caste system in India

- The four caste groups:
 - **Brahmins:** Religious authority
 - **Kshatriyas:** military ruler and landlord caste
 - **Vaishyas:** traders and farmers
 - **Shudras:** the servants and labour

Brahma and the origins of caste

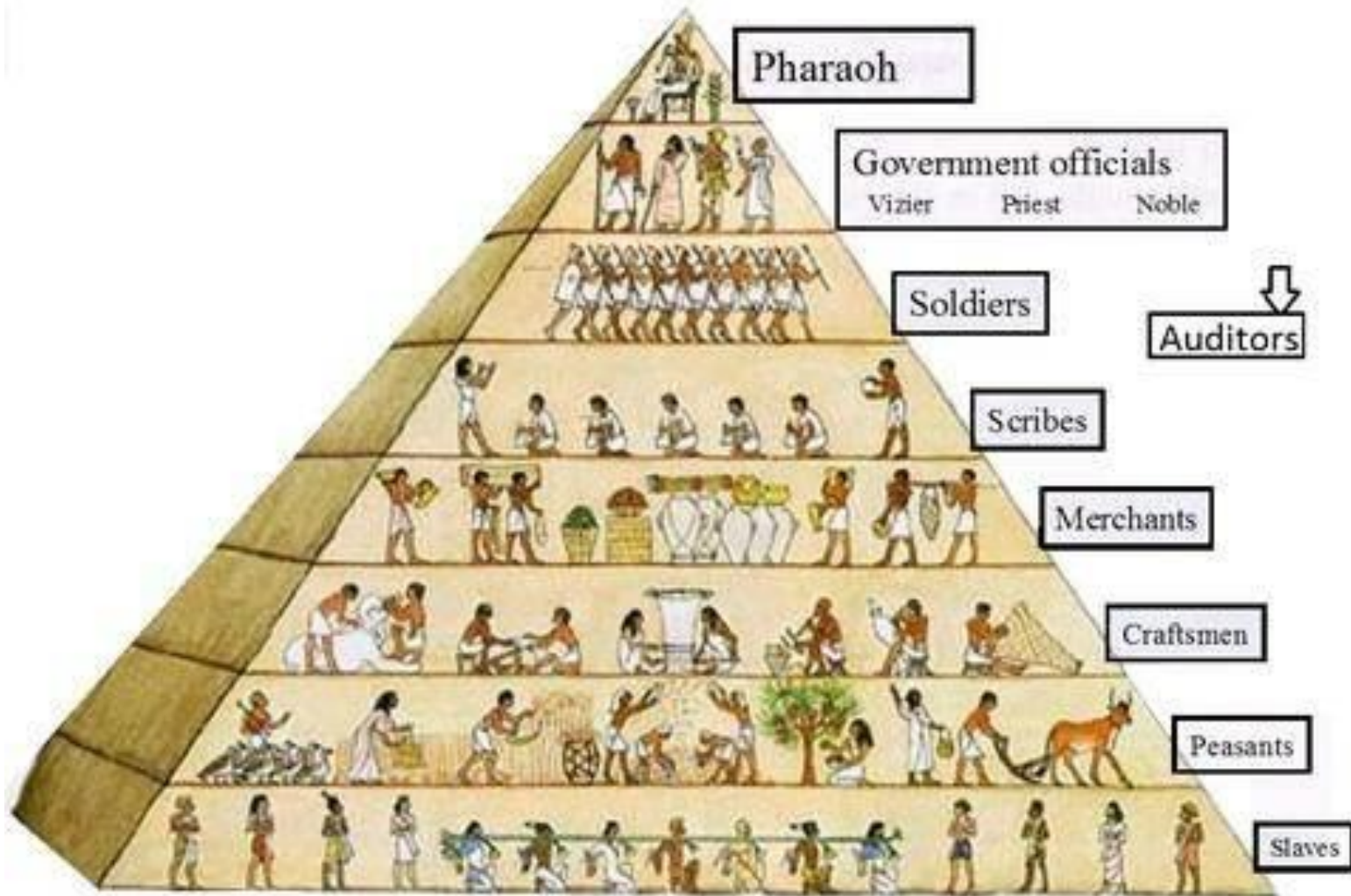


Source: Alamy

CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTE SYSTEM

- Caste is Innate
- Restriction on Food Habits
- Caste is Endogamous
- Hierarchical Social Structure
- Occupation is Fixed

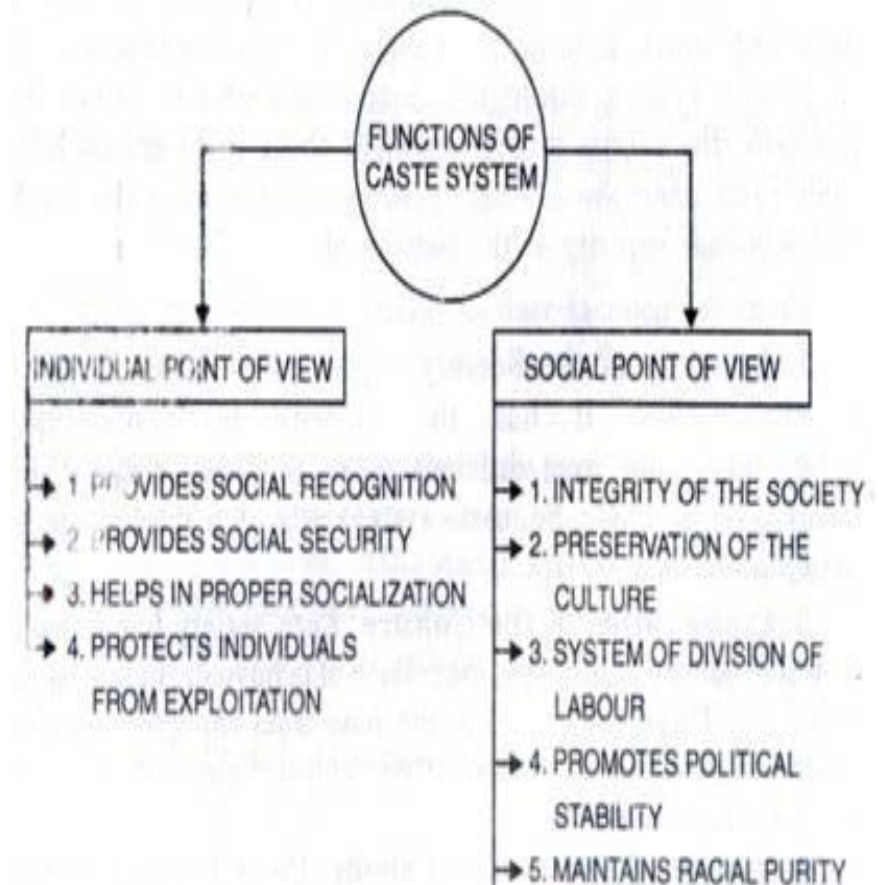
Order of people as per the caste occupation



Functions and Dyfnctions of caste system

Caste has been described as the **fundamental social institution**

- Minimises economic competition by determining the **occupation of various caste groups**.
- Restricting and limiting in choosing spouse, rules of **endogamy are traditionally very strict** and violations of rules are taken seriously.
- The economic basis of the case system is **Jajmani system**. The patorns (Jajmans) or higher castes who control land ownership exchange the land produce against the services provided by other castes.
- Caste also seen as social and psychological resources for its members, **Sense of solidarity**.



Dysfunctions of caste system

- **Create social obstacles:** Caste system divides society into many groups. Each group is attached to rigid social norms and values, because of which normal interaction among the categories is not possible.
- **Slow social change:** All the caste groups have to follow certain fixed and rigid rules and regulations. The basis of these rules and regulation is the principle of 'Purity and Pollution'. One has to conform the traditional norms and values to maintain the principle.
- **Hinders economic progress:** Unequal distribution of wealth, low caste people are allotted occupations which give them low income, denies social and occupational mobility.

- **Political conflict:** Caste system also breeds political conflict. Involvement of caste in democratic system creates conflicting situation in the political field. Political parties are using caste as their means to get vote.
- **Low status of women:** Prohibition of widow remarriage, women education, child marriage.
- **Untouchability:** Only caste system pushed people towards suffering of a particular section of the society who are untouchables. They are suppressed and exploited by the high caste groups.

Social change in modern India

- Caste mobility: Sanskritization and Brahminization
- Changes in ritual and economic aspect of caste: Urbanization and westernization
- Changes in economic aspect of caste: Industrialization
- Secularization and Democratization

Next class discussion on
CAUSES FOR THE CHANGES IN CASTE SYSTEM