HSL7370: Sociocultural Theories

Assignment

Journal on a topic discussed so far.

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Chinmay Garg, B16CS041

# **The Manifesto of ‘Caste’ – Struggle: Relevance of the Marxist theories in the context of the Indian Caste System**

Where Marx defines class as a “manifestation of economic differentiation”, the caste in the Indian scenario can be referred to as the ‘manifestation of social differentiation’, a differentiation backed by the religion itself. Although, Marx distinguishes class on the basis of their relation to economic means of production, where few owned the economic infrastructure against many. Similar analogy can be drawn where historically, institutes of religion and learning have been exclusively controlled by the few upper castes against the many other present. Similarly, this large population of lower caste has been denied the right to do business, to own large patches of agricultural land, and even the involvement of any kind in the politics, so much so that, they were not even allowed to wield weapons to fight for their king.

This blatant discrimination led to the “alienation” of lower caste from the very religion itself. It was no wonder when foreign religions came to India, large numbers from these castes saw new hope in them as they promised equality, at least in theory.

Thus, it would be quite right to say that if Marx calls the “history of all hitherto existing society” as the “history of class struggle”, Hinduism can also partly, if not entirely, be said to be a ‘history of caste struggle’ – their oppression and their subsequent rise to power. Yes, rise, and a very steep rise, like that of an impulse on the force curve. This rise came with India’s independence and the appearance of Bhimrao Ambedkar as the messiah of the deprived class, just like how Marx predicts as the necessary condition for emergence of socialist revolution.

Like Marx, who dreamed of a “classless society”, Ambedkar wished for the “annihilation of caste”. But by introducing caste-based reservation policies in the Indian Constitution, he only cemented the presence of caste for the coming decades. Caste, which until then was only an abstract and invisible (but still very overwhelmingly visible and in existence) division, had become something with the legislative backing, something which can be proved with official documents, something as expressible as the gender, and this was unlike any time in the Indian society. Amusingly, it became so important, that you do not have to explicitly produce your gender proof while getting admission in a college, but your caste documents are a must. Another matter of amusement is that earlier the people of upper caste who vehemently supported the caste system, now want it to go away; also the people of lower caste who earlier wished for the extinction of this caste system, now argue for its survival so as to continue enjoying the exclusive fruits that come with caste-based reservations.

But the question is, if this so-called lower caste can still be compared to the Marx’s proletariats, especially when today the caste system has grown from a social phenomenon to a behemoth in the Indian political system, and when caste-polarization is an inseparable aspect of every electoral strategy? Today with people from deprived castes (by definition) occupying at least fifty percent seats in all government jobs, including all executive and judicial positions, and at least twenty five percent seats in the nation’s parliament, we need to consider if the definition for bourgeoisie needs to be reframed? Also, what is the future of this caste system, what is going to be its “communism” (which Marx considers to be the final culmination of class struggle)?