



THE CASTE SYSTEM

DR. DINESH VYAS

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPT. OF SOCIOLOGY MAHATMA
GANDHI CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, BIHAR

DEFINITION

MAZUMDAR & MADAN – *'CASTE IS A CLOSED CLASS'*

CHARLES COOLE – *"WHEN A CLASS IS SOMEWHAT STRICTLY HEREDITARY, WE MAY CALL IT A CASTE."*

GHURAY – *'CASTE IS THE BRAHMIN CHILD OF THE INDO-ARJUN CULTURE, CRADLED IN THE GANGES & YAMUNA & THEN TRANSFERRED IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY'.*

WHAT IS THE CASTE SYSTEM?

- INDIAN SOCIETY DEVELOPED INTO A COMPLEX SYSTEM BASED ON CLASS AND CASTE
- CASTE IS BASED ON THE IDEA THAT THERE ARE SEPARATE KINDS OF HUMANS
- HIGHER-CASTE PEOPLE CONSIDER THEMSELVES PURER (CLOSER TO MOKSHA) THAN LOWER-CASTE PEOPLE.
- THE FOUR VARNA —BRAHMAN, KSHATRIYA, VAISHYA, AND SUDRA—ARE THE CLASSICAL FOUR DIVISIONS OF HINDU SOCIETY. IN PRACTICE, HOWEVER, THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MANY SUBDIVISIONS (J'ATIS) OF THESE CASTES.
- THERE ARE FIVE DIFFERENT LEVELS IN THE INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM:-
BRAHMAN, KSHATRIYA, VAISHYA, SHRUJRA, AND, HARIJANS.

BENEFIT OF THE CASTE SYSTEM:

- EACH CASTE HAS AN OCCUPATION(S) AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE
- JAJMAN—GIVES GIFT (LANDLORD)
- KAMIN—GIVES SERVICE TO THE LANDHOLDER (LOWER CASTES)

CASTE SYSTEM IS A KINSHIP SYSTEM;

- A CASTE (VARNA) IS AN INTERMARRYING GROUP
- KINSHIP; HEREDITARY MEMBERSHIP
- A CASTE EATS TOGETHER
- A HIGH-CASTE BRAHMIN DOES NOT EAT WITH SOMEONE OF A LOWER CASTE; DIFFERENT DIETS FOR DIFFERENT CASTES
- DIVIDED BY OCCUPATION: PRIEST, WARRIOR, MERCHANT, PEASANT LEGAL STATUS, RIGHTS BASED ON CASTE MEMBERSHIP

ORIGINS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

- NO COMMONLY APPROVED ORIGIN/HISTORY THAT EXPLAINS THE FORMATION OF INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM.
- COMMON BELIEF: THE CASTE SYSTEM WAS FORMED DURING THE PERIOD OF MIGRATION OF INDO-ARYANS TO THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT.
- INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM IS ROUTED IN HINDUISM AND ITS ORDER OF FOUR CASTES AND FOUR STAGES IN LIFE. ORIGINATES FROM THE ARYAN INVADERS FOUR TO FIVE THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

WHERE DOES THIS SYSTEM COME FROM?

- THE MOST WIDELY ACCEPTED THEORY IS THAT THE FOUR BASIC DIVISIONS OF THE HINDU CASTE SYSTEM—THE VARNA—DEVELOPED IN THE PERIOD B.C. AS A RESULT OF THE ARYAN CONQUEST OF INDIA.
- THE WORD CASTE COMES FROM THE PORTUGUESE WORD CASTAS, MEANING "PURE." THIS PORTUGUESE WORD EXPRESSES ONE OF THE MOST CENTRAL VALUES OF INDIAN SOCIETY: THE IDEA OF RITUAL PURITY. IN INDIA, HOWEVER, THE WORD VARNA, OR "COLOR," DENOTES THE FOURFOLD DIVISION OF INDIAN SOCIETY.
- THE WORD VARNA MAY HAVE BEEN USED BECAUSE EACH OF THE FOUR CASTES WAS ASSIGNED A SPECIFIC COLOR AS ITS EMBLEM.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTE SYSTEM

- SOCIAL CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURE BASED ON FOUR GROUPS CALLED VARNAS
- SMALLER DIVISIONS CALLED JATI
- HEREDITARY
- PLACES RESTRICTIONS ON A PERSON BASED ON THEIR CASTE
- THINGS LIKE OCCUPATION, ECONOMIC STATUS, WHAT LAWS ARE ENFORCED
- CASTE UNCHANGING IN SINGLE LIFETIME
- CASTE CHANGES BETWEEN LIFETIMES BASED ON A PERSON'S KARMA AND DHARMA

VARNA SYSTEM

- BRAHMINS – PRIESTS, TEACHERS, JUDGES; USUALLY DON'T OWN LAND THEREFORE NEED OTHER CASTES TO WORK THE LAND AND PROVIDE FOR THEM
- KSHATRIYAS – WARRIORS AND RULERS (LANDOWNERS)
- VAISYAS – SKILLED TRADERS, MERCHANTS, FARMERS
- SUDRAS- LABORERS, WORKERS, SERVANTS OR NON-ARYANS

UNTOUCHABLES

- THE CASTE SYSTEM UNTOUCHABLES THIS NOT OFFICIALLY A CASTE BUT WOULD RANK BELOW THE SHUDRA CONSIST OF PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSIDERED UNCLEAN TYPICALLY UNCLEANLINESS IS RELATED TO OCCUPATION
- THIS IS THE LOWEST CLASS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM, CALLED “UNTOUCHABLES” GIVEN THIS NAME BECAUSE AT A POINT THEY WERE KNOWN TO BE THE DIRTIEST PEOPLE IN THE SYSTEM AND THEY WERE NOT FIT TO BE TOUCH
- IF A BRAHMIN PRIEST TOUCHES AN UNTOUCHABLE, HE OR SHE MUST GO THROUGH A RITUAL IN WHICH THE POLLUTION IS WASHED AWAY.

MODERN INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM

- “THE INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM IS GRADUALLY RELAXING, ESPECIALLY IN METROPOLITAN AND OTHER MAJOR URBAN AREAS, DUE TO HIGHER PENETRATION OF HIGH EDUCATION, CO-EXISTENCE OF ALL COMMUNITIES AND LESSER KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CASTE SYSTEM DUE TO ALIENATION WITH RURAL ROOTS OF PEOPLE.
- BUT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND SMALL TOWNS, THIS SYSTEM IS STILL VERY RIGID.
- HOWEVER, THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF CASTE SYSTEM SEEMS DISTANT, IF EVER POSSIBLE, DUE TO CASTE POLITICS.”



THANKS

