

Caste in the Era of Economic Growth, Development and Modernization

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Abstract

Caste is defined as a closed group in which membership is ascribed. Class means a person's economic position which may change according to change in financial status. In the present era, when economic determinant is the most important factor caste has not lost its past significance. Factors such as education, availability of resources, awareness about rights, constitutional safeguards have led to increased significance of Caste. Caste has found continuity in the reservation system but in the larger and socio-cultural context, it is forming nexus with the class system in India. People are now practically more influenced by a person's economic situation. As present day world is more and more focusing on economic prospects, growth and development functions are increasing leading to secularization of communities. Secularisation leads to tendency towards formation of class based society but Caste features have found relevance even in the modern and rational economic context.

Keywords: Caste, Class, Economic growth, etc.

Introduction

Caste is basically a contradiction of all what is deemed modern by contemporary scholars. Caste is incompatible with any notion of individualisation, let alone the egalitarian ideal underneath it. As basic attributes are acquired by birth and are beyond the scope of the individual, caste puts a limit to all forms of individual self-actualisation. The basic units for social interaction are not reduced to the individual, but remain on a group level. So the very idea of caste is already a contradiction of any notion of individual agency. When economic specialisation and division of labour is not only religiously legitimised, but also pre-ordained at birth, and therefore unrelated to actual aptitude, it precipitates an economic order that is fundamentally hostile to change. The division of labour imagined here, is attached to birth in a certain caste and fundamentally inflexible. It therefore creates a conflict with the requirements of a changing, modern economy. Nevertheless, Caste has found ways to adapt to the new economic order and reflect in its own manner in almost all the peculiar aspects of the present day society.

Review of Literature

Every community still associates (and is associated) with a traditional occupation, however symbolic or weak this link might be in real economic terms (Sahay 2004). With the concept of Substantialisation, described by Fuller as the "breakdown in hierarchical interdependence between [...] two castes" (Fuller 1996: 14), the interpretation of castes as structurally independent units is not entirely new or unusual. As B eteille (1996) points out, especially amongst the influential new Indian middle classes, caste has largely lost its legitimacy. When it is practised, it is with regard to the family and not seen as a hierarchical system within an economic field. The traditional nexus to a profession is replaced by an emphasis on professional

qualifications within the ideology of meritocracy. But this is still compatible with the model of caste developed here. This model helps reveal more clearly the development that Bêteille identifies. Tradition itself is not to be understood as static, but provides only the context for its re-formulation in modern circumstances (Giddens 1990). While individualisation is one of the main features of modernisation in Western societies, this has completely different connotations in India. In the most general terms, the basic social units are families in India, rather than individuals (R. Lee 1994; Patel 2005; A. M. Shah 1998), even though this is gradually changing (Rajen K. Gupta and Panda 2003; Tuli and Chaudhary 2010). Here, the consequences of India's trajectory to modernity are visible with clarity absent elsewhere. According to Sudipta Kaviraj, and despite the country's democratic credentials, group identities trump individual ones in India, and individuality is not a political concept, nor a cultural one (Kaviraj 2000). The famous phrase 'vote bank' (famously attributed to M.N. Srinivas, cf. Alam 1999; Heller 2009) implies nothing less than the assumption that people would generally vote en bloc, rather than through single, individual decision-making. As family obligations, traditional connections and religious associations all undermine the role of the individual, it is not surprising to find that the individual's role is marginal.

Objectives: To find out the changes in perceptions towards Caste in the present era where focus is more on economic growth, development and modernization.

Methodology: An exploratory and descriptive research design shall be followed to find out the changes in perceptions towards caste in the present era where focus is on economic growth, development and modernization. The data will be collected with the help of secondary data collection techniques. Secondary data will be used in this research and is collected through published and unpublished sources which include books, journals, articles, reports and other sources like the internet, magazines, research publications and so on.

Caste and Economic Rationality

The rationality in the present context is more stringent, since no reference to irrational belief systems are needed. The manner in which Caste is rationally employed in practical circumstances it is sufficient to note that the absence of religion is already an indicator of increased rationality. Modernity is informed both by increasing rationality and the survival of tradition that cannot be fully explained by rational argument; hence caste is a paradigm example: The everyday invocation of tradition goes together with the fully rational use of this institution in modern circumstances. Still, Caste is still not fully compatible with the democratic elements in modernity, since it puts the group before the individual. That it integrates so well with contemporary Indian democracy is perhaps due to an imperfect implementation of democracy, rather than to a harmonious relationship with democracy as a concept. However, Caste is amazingly adaptable to changing circumstances – the hallmark of modern capitalism. Even if capitalism is, as an ideal, based on individual competition and endeavour, Caste is an ideal adaptation for the insecurities of capitalism. Since the traditional division of labour is weak or irrelevant here, it does not hold back the individual from adaptation to new modes of production or income. That makes it adaptable to a wide variety of economic circumstances. And even if

some reservation regarding tradition rules might exist in day-to-day circumstances, the model provides no systematic opposition to capitalist forms of economy. Rather, Caste provides the individual with a backup system that, potentially, provides aid and resources for success in such an economy. This interpretation of Caste is, therefore, quite modern in its adaptability to an economy that is based on the market. Since the division of labour is largely irrelevant here, the functional differentiation that is intrinsic to modern society is not of much concern here. The compartmentalisation of society can perhaps be seen as an analogy for functional differentiation, but this doesn't provide any solution to the fundamental problem of organising society. While Caste was originally viewed as an ordering principle for society as a whole, here it is rather practised without much regard for its implications. Caste in this interpretation is thus both more compatible with modernity and with a reduction of social complexity at the same time.

Conclusion

The inter-linkage between Caste and economy is fundamentally reciprocal; changes in the economic circumstances of Castes must be accompanied by changes in the way Castes are perceived socially. The modernisation of the Indian economy cannot be separated from the changing relations between Castes, and of the social status that is the consequence of, and the basis for, these relationships. The result is a mix of traditional and novel perceptions about specific Castes and their respective economic role.

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