

Evils of Caste System

The caste system is the most fundamental feature of the Hindu society. Looking back over the course of centuries since its unknown beginning, the system has exercised a profound influence on the social and economic life of the people. Originally, it was introduced on the basis of division of labour in society and was calculated to promote its economic strength and efficiency. The division was, to begin with, completely flexible and it was possible for a member of one caste to change to the other. But as time passed, the caste system became a watertight compartment.

J.H. Hutton is of the opinion that social stratification on the basis of caste in India owes its origin to the Aryan invaders. It has never died, only changed its form and manifestation from time to time. In the pristine Vedic form, the caste system had its validity in the modern, fast changing times; it is, however, not India's monopoly. It existed, and still exists in parts of Egypt and Europe, though in a wilder form. It comes from the Spanish word caste, which means breed, race or strain. Risley has defined caste as a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single, homogeneous community.

Being a unique stratification system in the Hindu social organization system it has acted as a block in the nation's progress. It has unwarrantedly divided the Hindu society into mutually hostile and conflicting groups and sub groups from which the practice of untouchability has emerged. The restrictions put by the so-called higher castes on the so-called untouchables has created dissensions in Hindu society. It not only hinders progress but also growth of national unity as even the slightest deviation from the rigid system is severely dealt with in a majority of castes. Caste, in the words of sociologists, is "its own rules," innovation has no place in the caste system. The system makes no compromises because, within its ambit, the most ignorant Hindu is also able to compel the obedience of the most intelligent."

Since caste is based on tradition and custom, the worker is denied of his freedom to choose an occupation of his choice. Talent and merit are sacrificed at the altar of casteism, leading to immobility, and inefficiency of labour which results in economic backwardness. As Sir Henry Main maintains, a transition from status to contract is essential for political as well as economic progress of the society.

Excessive caste loyalty has brought about political disunity in the country, wrecking the successful working of the multi-party system. While democracy implies equality of all categories of people in public life, the caste system inevitably tends to give

them special treatment, members of a special caste are discriminated against. Organizations flouting casteist leanings invariably win at the Hastings to the detriment of people and in the hands of the so called upper castes hold on to their privileged position in society with the result that they behave in a despotic fashion creating permanent feelings of inferiority and insecurity in the minds of the 'lower' castes.

The caste system has also harmed our social fabric by encouraging and perpetuating such evils as child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage and denigration of womenfolk. The caste system thus leads to stagnation; it makes society static rather than dynamic.