Research article

CASTE SYSTEM

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A B S T R A C T

The caste system is a complex social phenomenon particularly found in the Indian society. Caste is an arguable issue in the contemporary Indian context and it negatively being related to the provisions for the regulation of social control and determination of an individual status. Caste is the most striking institutional form taken by hierarchy. From the beginning of the human civilization itself caste discrimination, untouchability and marginalization have very intensively and adversely affected the society and made life miserable. This idea is constructed by Hindu society; as a result, it creates a scenario where the discrimination, untouchability and negligence get practiced in the society. Nowadays in some of the churches we can see scheduled caste Christians are looked down as defiled people by the high caste Christians.

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1.0. Introduction

Instead of being an egalitarian community, the church had become hierarchical community. "Caste remains a central issue in the Indian churches. This is complicated by the fact that different castes and tribes are now often associated with different denominations to form ethnic-religious communities. Christianity has not brought an end caste in the Churches themselves….Divisions in the churches based on ethnicity, class and gender are central issues in churches around the world."[1]

In this context it becomes significant for church to make decision what is wrong and right. This issue based study will help us to understand the significance of the each person's lives in accepting and embracing them in the church and society, particularly in refers to the Indian society. This paper also will educate us not to discriminate anyone on the basis of caste and race and also will help us to teach the church to abstain from this issue. This paper mainly focuses on caste system, caste system in India and the responsibility of the church in response to the caste system.

2.0. Concept of the Caste

The word 'caste' comes from the Portuguese word 'casta' signify 'breed', race or class.[2] According to the origin the word caste signifies a hereditary link or family origin. In India the word corresponds with 'jat' or 'jati', which means birth or descends.[3] Therefore all the members of a particular 'jati' claim their common origin and practice a traditional occupation.[4] Many social scientists have approached the problem by viewing the caste system as a social hierarchy which determines social status.[5] This has been linked to various aspects. Louis Dumont has highlighted the role of the purity pollution complex. M. N. Srinivas has elaborated on the status-symbols pursued in the process of 'sanskritisation' and 'westernization'.[6]

3.0 Definition of Caste

Sociologists define caste system differently. Bhupen Chaudhary says that "Caste may be defined as "an endogamous group or collection of such groups bearing a common name having a same traditional occupation claiming descent from the same source and commonly regarded as forming a single homogeneous community."[7] K. Singh refers to Herbert Risley and defines "…caste as a " collection of families bearing a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestors human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community."[8]

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[1] Paul G. Herbert, "The Christians response to Hinduism." *Missiology for the 21st Century: South Asian Persepectives,* edited by Roger E. Hedlund and Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), 333

[2] K. Singh, *Social And Cultural Anthropology* (Lucknow: Prakashan Kendra, 1985), 193.

[3] K. Singh, *Social And Cultural Anthropology*, 193.

[4] K. Singh, *Social And Cultural Anthropology*, 193.

[5] Gabriele Dietrich And Bas Wielenga, *Towards Understanding Indian Society* (Thirvalla: C.S.S, 2008), 49.

[6] Gabriele Dietrich, *Towards Understanding Indian Society*, 49.

[7] Bhupen Chaudhary, *Indian Caste System: Essence And Reality* (New Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2006), 2.

[8] K .Singh, *Indian Society And Social Institutions* (Lucknow: Prakashan Kendra, 1996), 54.

Caste in Indian society refers to a social group where membership is largely decided by birth. Each such local group avoids entering into marital relationship with outsiders. Originally, this group is associated with a specific profession. The mutual relationship of one caste with the other is established on the principle of lineage and the resultant purity of blood, making the relationship between one and another caste distant.[9]

4.0. Casteism

Casteism that slightly varies from caste system means the partial or one sided loyalty in favor of a particular caste i.e. a blind group loyalty towards one caste. When any mode of thinking assumes the form of an *ism*, it becomes rigid and partial.[10] According to Vatsyayan

The sense of caste is converted into Casteism only when consideration of superiority between castes and the tendency to consider the interest of one's own caste as opposed to the other castes are attached to it. Casteism is the blind and consequently irrational loyalty. Casteism is an overriding, blind and supreme group loyalty that ignores the healthy social standards of justice, fair play, equity and universal brotherhood.[11] Caste has been dragged into the political arena in the forms of Casteism.[12] According to M Stephen, "The main problem with caste system is that a person is born with indignity which is a serious discrimination"[13]

5.0. Origin of Caste System

Caste system commonly practiced in the India. The caste system has a dogmatic virtue around the denial of education to the dalits, it is prohibited in the holy book of Hinduism still than caste system has entered its fourth millennium.[14] Tayongtemjen says "Last thousand years it has been the most dominating factor of the Indian society entered in the collective consciousness of the people as an ideology of inequality. Every aspect of social life, organization of a society, human relation, and interaction between peoples' groups, social status, social roles and social participation determined by caste."[15] The caste system was practiced and prevailed from its origins. It is a hierarchical structure of discrimination developed by the Brahminic system.[16] M. Stephan says, "It was a crude Aryan method to de- humanizes the Dravidians". Further he explains the word caste come from the Spanish word called caste which means race. In order to explain the caste system there are some theory we find here. They are Varna theory priestly Theory, functional Theory or occupational theory and Ritual theory.[17]

D. Manohar Chandra Prasad says, "For many centuries, Dalits, the victims of Himdu caste, untouchability and *Karma* cried out for social emancipation and

[9] F. D. Vakil And K. H. Shivaji Rao, *Indian Government And Politics* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers,1993), 367.

[10] Vatsyayan, *Contemporary Indian Society* (Meerut: Kedarnath Ramnath & Company, 1979), 68.

[11] Vatsyayan, *Contemporary Indian Society,* 68.

[12] Vatsyayan, *Contemporary Indian Society*, 69.

[13] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 253.

[14] Tayongtemjen, *Introduction To The Christian Ethics* (Kolkata: SPACE, 2013), 215.

[15] Tayongtemjen, *The Christian Ethics*, 215.

[16] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* 252.

[17] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* 252.

annihilation of the castes system.[18] "… the Brahmins, in the course of time, converted the caste system into a rigid, closed and hereditary one.[19] Bhagwan Das says, "Caste is based on birth and ascribed status. Caste System ensures prestige, power and privileges for a small aristocracy and inherited deprivation and subjection for a large number of people who were forced to word and produce wealth to keep upper few in comfort."[20]

5.1. Varna Theory

According to M Stepehen, Varna theory says caste was developed on the basis of color in the Vedic period. There was a difference between Arya and Anarya. Brahmin Kshatriyas and Vaisya belonged to Arya Varna, Sudra and panchamas belonged to the Anarya or Dasavarna. This theory insists the caste duty.[21] The Hindu scripture subscribe to the caste system like this, Brahmin Kshatriyas,Vaisya and sudras came out of Brahman's mouth/head, hands, thigh and feet respectively. [22] "The 'Varna'system that was established in ancient India functioned at the larger framework within which the caste society was formed."[23]

5.2. Priestly Theory

According to this theory caste system is the creation of the priestly class in order to assert their superiority over other. The Priestly caste is Brahmins. [24]

5.3. Functional Theory or Occupational Theory

M Stephen explains, this theory says the difference in occupation has resulted in the caste system. The people who did similar jobs grouped together and formed guilds and this gave from to the caste system. Function and function alone is responsible for the origin of caste system. The ancient Hindu supports this theory. Because of this Indians the low caste people were suffering.[25]

5.4 Ethnic Theory

Ethnicity is another way of looking at caste system for the practice of castism. M Stephen says, "According to ethnic theory, caste place to Dravidians in society. This was because the social index of the Dravidians was different from that Aryans. Rajendra says that superiority or inferiority of occupation is represented in the hierarchy of the caste. The status of the caste depends upon the degree of blood and the extent of isolation maintained by the social group."[26]

6.0. Caste System in India

India had more caste discrimination compare to other nation. Tayongtemjen, says In India 64 percent are Hindus, 14 percent are Harijan (Dalits), 7 percent are tribal's 12 percent are Muslims and 3 percent are
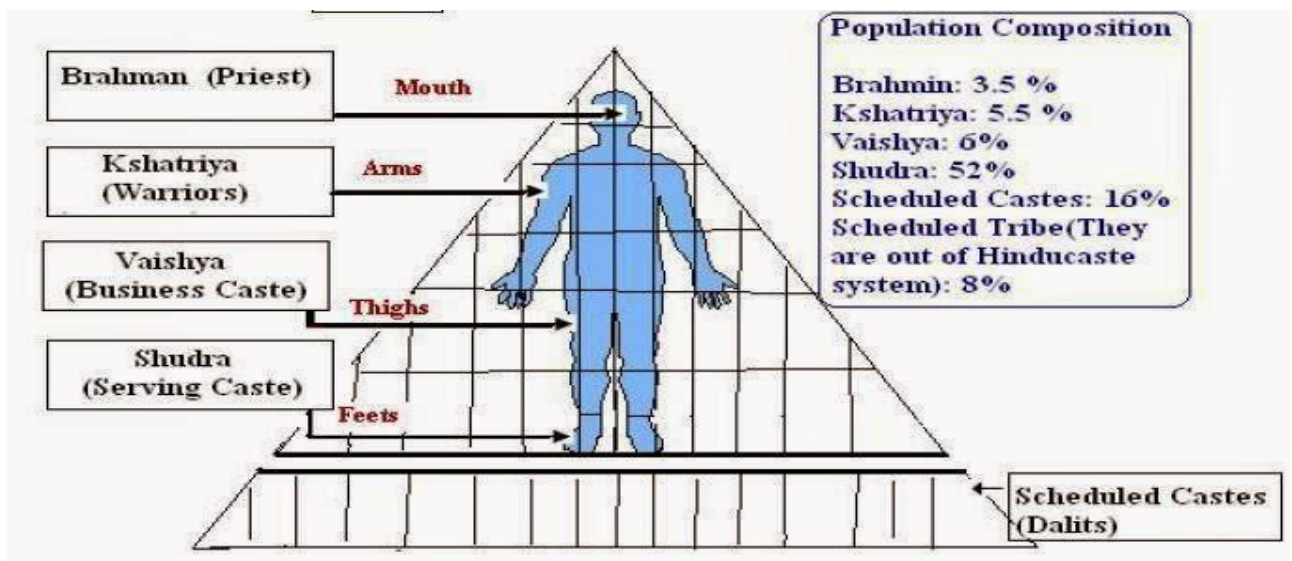
[18] D. Manohar Chandra Prasad, *Lamenting Loss and Resisting Repression: Towards Dalit Solidarity in Challenging Caste Oppression through Collective Laments* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007), 1.

[19] Ghanshyam Shah, "Dalits and the State: An Overview," *Dalit and the State* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002), 23.

[20] Bhagwan Das, "Dalits and the Caste System," *Indigenous People: Dalits; Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate* (Noida: Academy Press,1994), 56.

[21] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* 252.

[22] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* 252.

[23] Shyamlal, *Untouchable Castes in India* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2006), 2.

[24] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* 252.

[25] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* 253.

[26] Rajendra Kumar Sharma, *Fundamentals Of Sociology* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1996), 187.

Christian. Around 2000 BC Aryans began to invade Bharatha the land of the aboriginal. From time to time Aryans began to gain social, political and religious power by creating problems between kingdoms of native rulers. By100 BC Aryans got the position to capture all political power centers in north India by 600.Bc.[27] Further he explains, they controlled almost all the almost all the lands of the aboriginals. Then they divide in to four varnas or caste divisions. In that barhmins, constituted the highest Varna took control of social through religion. Second Kshatriyas they had the political control third Vyshyas got the economic control to rule the people and fourth is Shudras are including women are the servants of upper caste.[28] Even if this kind of discrimination we find in the church as well. Therefore caste system is evil, so Indian society should understand this evil practices. The below picture with chart may give us the proper understanding. [29]

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[27] Tayongtemjen, *Introduction To The Christian Ethics,* 215-216.
[28] Tayongtemjen, *Introduction To The Christian Ethics,* 215-216.
[29]"Caste system (partial) India" http://pentamento.blogspot.in/2014_06_01_archive.html

7.0. The Caste System as a Vehicle of Exploitation

It is important to distinguish two elements in the caste system, caste as a form of group identity and caste as a form of social oppression.

Basic forms of group identity built a various factors such as ethnicity, religion; region and language have existed in every society. But the caste system became an exploitative in which the dominant caste possess the economic resources and political power, and this result the higher hierarchy of the social order which was boost of the population by the few powerful people. Religion came in as a handy instrument to legitimize an exploitive system to make others accept it without protest. [30]

This became the basis for all social and cultural interaction in India. The dominant class does not just exploit economically and politically, they exercise also a subtle ideological and cultural exploitation.[31]

8.0. Casteism in Politics and Politicization of Caste

Most of the times caste becomes an important social institution of our country which gives the citizens a sense of belonging. Rajni Kothari says, the caste structure provides one of the most important organizational clusters in which the population is found to live. For the competitive style of democratic politics involves not only distributives and conflictual aspects, but also aspects of group actions. [32] Further he explains, by drawing the caste system hit its web of organization; politics finds material for its articulation and moulds its own design.[33] Politicians mobilize caste groupings and identities in order to organize their power.[34]

9. 0. Caste System in the Church

Caste system is not only in the Hinduism or other religion. Today caste system is seeing in the Church also. The history of Christianity of the India goes back to first century church onwards; the caste system had its origin in the Church from the time of St. Thomas and the very beginning of Christianity in the India. These Christians had many customs common to the Brahmins and were cut off from the main stream of the Christian world. They had their own lives styles in the midst of non-Christians. As a result these Christians had no proper instruction in Christian doctrine. They were also accused of practicing caste system in the church. This was the beginning of the caste in Indian Church. Not only that many missionary came in India and worked among the upper castes. Even though the Christian principles do not taught anything about caste system, but churches have different groups. Stephen says, the dalits are used by the church and society for their selfish service and as vote banks. Also some places have separate churches and cemeteries built for the dalits. This shows the complete discrimination.[35]

In Kerala the Syrian Christians became the oppressors by keeping caste discrimination in their mind. The Syrian Christian thinks that only high caste educated people could produce intellectual leadership in the Indian church and thus they

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[30] S.C Singhal, *Human Rights* (Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 2008), 8-9.

[31]S.C Singhal, *Human Rights*, 8-9.

[32] Rajni Kothari, *Politics In India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1999), 230.

[33] Rajni Kothari, *Politics In India,* 230.

[34] Rajni Kothari, *Politics In India,* 230.

[35] M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics,* 253.

were small in number became the ruling class in the church. But they are not considering the tribal and Dalits Christian. Therefore in Kerala caste attitude practiced in the Syrian Christians. While missionaries' introduced westerns idea of equality and the gospel of brotherhood and love to this society that was governed mainly by caste. In spite of this the influence of caste remained society and with the church though the rigidity of caste rules and untouchbility began to disappear. Therefore, missionaries are worked in India and taught against this evil practice in India. [36]

10.0. Biblical View and the Responsibility of the Church

It is important that churches around our country examine their own responses to these powerful social forces and decide how, theologically and socially, they must deal with the issues of the relationship between unity and diversity within the Church. Caste system is like apartheid. The caste identity should be realized only as a community identity and not as a means to underestimate a group of people, discrimination and exploitation. The Christian principle is not to support the caste system. Most of the times the dominant groups try to enslave the low caste, exploit and oppress them for their own interest. The Dalits are used by the society for their selfish service and as vote banks. The high caste, up lift low caste and the church has to be fight against practice of caste system. Also the Dalits must be uplifted.

While the Christian missionary came to India mostly they started their work among the poor and needy people. These poor or low caste people got the privilege to study the basic education as well as people got the basic awareness. Christians missionary open the school for the Dalits and low caste. The large number of Dalits and lower castes jointed the church as an objection against the Hindu religion. Later Christian movement towards the Western educational system later gave raise to anti Brahmin movement and the rationalist movement in south India. This Brahmin and rationalist are the main struggles of the dalits and lower castes. In this situation church have some responsibility. In early day's caste system was more common in Hindu and some other religion but today we finding this problem inside the church as well. So as a Christian must aware that God did not made any caste rather God create the human begins. Accept everybody equal and same. Also in God there is no high caste and low caste. The responsibility is needed to have unit among the people show good Christian attitude towards the society.

The Bible states that all human beings are created with equal dignity and no one is to be discriminated or exploited (Gen.1: 27, 28). In Galatians 3:28, Apostle Paul also says "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The Christian community should be an agent of transformation in the society to challenge what is evil. The resources should be made accessible to all human beings to have meaningful living and development. The policy of the survival of the fittest is against the teachings of the bible and the spirit of Gospel. The socio-economic and political

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[36] Bhupen Chaudhary, *Indian Caste System: Essence And Reality,* 180-185.

self-determination of the oppressed classes is much needed to have a society which is socialistic and egalitarian. Instead of making Dalits and backward caste people as a vote-bank, they are to be uplifted.

11.0. Evaluation and Conclusion

Caste system is devilish because God never made caste but God made human being. But this caste came out of the mind of the people. People always like to be first so that they always consider themselves as higher caste. If some people poor or they were lower back ground the higher caste people like to either mocking or criticizing them. That should not happen. Because each person created by God they have their own uniqueness. Respect everybody as they are. In India we can see more caste discrimination. According to the Bible there is no caste. Therefore every Christian must have attitude of receive everyone same. Respect each other. The low caste people should not victim for the other people. The caste system shows one person putting down other person. Even if these evils practice we find in side our Church as well. This evil practice should not allow in the church. This paper discussed about the caste system in India. India is practicing caste system very early itself. People more like to say about their caste if they are in upper caste. Christian should not keep any kind of caste difference or color difference. Jesus never taught about the caste system. Therefore, the churches keep their quality and respect every one as they are.

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