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Why Did It Last So Long? Its Mystery And Chemistry??

Untouchability: A Stigmatic History of Oppression of the Greater Society

(From Ancient time to Mughal and Mughal to Colonial Era: A Traditional Indian Discourse)

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Abstract: Indian traditional social system and its peculiar uniqueness is surprisingly a highly talked-about issue in the modern world. The basic structure of this oldest society, which was formed about five thousand years ago, is still the same even today and remains unchangeable. Many researchers such as Louis Dumont believe that its main element lies in its religious factors, specifically, religious purity which regulates the whole society. Many other social factors have contributed to the growth of high-low distinction, conservatism and the issue of untouchables etc. in the society. Many others have prioritized elements such as political causes and governance, superior caste alliance culture, establishment of class interests etc. This article explores its root cause and highlights how the common Indian society has been oppressed under the system. Besides, the lower status, positions and conditions of the "original Indian mass race" has been discussed here.

Keywords: traditional society, oppressed, Incorporation, Dynamic equilibrium,

Introduction: The structure of traditional Indian society has been the same from the remote antiquity to modern times. Its basic mould has not changed. So there is no particular progressive change. In such society, education, initiation, practice of scriptures, religion - culture, political advices- guidance and all intellectual rights were traditionally controlled by only one caste named Brahmins. They used the Bahubali Kshatriya class for their benefit. The Kshatriyas had absolute power in the state affairs, governance and politics and they used to follow the Brahmins. Economy was one of the most important elements for managing and organizing all this. For this reason, those two upper classes together controlled the "Vaishyas" who owned the economy. In this case, the Vaishyas used to support the higher authority. Those classes collectively had the exclusive ability to manage the state affairs, society, governance, politics, education and religion-culture. This triangular love frame bound those three higher castes socially. Although there Vaishyas were hanging there as a third party, they were engaged collectively in exploiting the common Indians. It could be called the original framework of Indian racial hierarchy. As a result, a shifting balance has been maintained in Indian society for many centuries and no change has taken place in spite of various setbacks. For this reason, Muslim rule during the Sultanate and Mughal periods and even the British rule during the colonial period did not encourage any internal change or a progressive development of Indian society. All the rulers supported this traditional system whole-heartedly for ages. A shifting social balance has been maintained for a long time in this traditional

society. Despite various attacks from below, no change has occurred in its basic structure for thousands of years. In this traditional system, the common people of the country have been oppressed in various ways since the beginning. The mass Indians like Sanaiwala (flute player) continued to suffer. This larger section of society of the oppressed has constantly been exploited and deprived of opportunities and human treatment. However, in course of time, these people of mass society managed to survive somehow. It is in this sense that these people of lower societies, show a great enthusiasm, dynamism, upward changeability, patience, tolerance and special abilities.

In the traditional Indian social system, the vast majority of the society had long been bound by the castes (Jātis). The larger groups ¹ formed a rigid " caste - clusters ", ² that developed mainly among the 'occupational groups' outside the four-fold Varnasrama such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras varnas. ³ It is known as the Avarnars, the untouchables, including Dalits and Tribals. ⁴ They can be called the backward classes, the ignorant - darker lower castes, oppressed classes, the common people. ⁵ This larger group of people was known as the real Indians and the original inhabitants. They were the non - Aryan autochthons of the land. ⁶ Naturally, the group was defeated in the clan wars or failed in the struggle for their life. These numerous Jatis, weaker in all respects, remained oppressed. The concept of this belief was gradually evolving. The Indian ethnicity and races was recognized in the Muslim era and the colonial period. Based on this concept, the single master exercise of tabulation of the subject society was done in the official register of the colonial period.⁷

In modern Indian society, the number of such occupational groups was more than three thousand, among which their number was more in Bengal in East India. ⁸ So far as things are known, the castes (Jatis) emerged as numerous occupational groups, along with varnas, in ancient India, where the untouchability as fully developed institution appeared sometimes between the 3rd and 6th century AD. Since then, they were known by terms like Panchama, Ati-sudras, Chandalas etc.

Before the Muslim era, the Indians formed a nation or the ' subject (rayats) society ' in this subcontinent, that gradually grew in the bipolar shape due to the organized administrative structure and the professional reasons.¹⁰ This subject society consisted of two diametrically opposite poles namely - (i) the minority upper classes, and (ii) the majority lower classes and groups. The rationalized caste system was a ' unique social institution ' of ancient past that united disparate classes of the higher Indians in harmonious solidarity. It stood opposite to the oppressed or the subject society. ¹¹

The lower class people did not like it. For them, this unity of the upper traditional classes was a strategy to keep them down. However, the lower class people had nothing else to do, but to accept this socio - religious and cultural environment. However, a section of the traditional classes began to crowd into this ' subject society ' due to their professional degradation (s), or some kind of social failure (s), or It may be due to breaking social norms. Any one of the offenses mentioned above could have reduced a family of Brahmin origin to an untouchable one. Various persecutions in the name of religious impurity polluted it! ¹²

The other higher classes of the traditional society like the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Pure or Sat - Sudras are not mentioned here as their tragic fate after committing the above-mentioned offence in this system can easily be imagined. There are many such gruesome examples in the Indian social history. In such society, the tendency to keep such family expelled from society and consider that members of the family as the outcast was also seen became evident since then. The Muslim rule did not interfere in this domestic matter. The British also followed the ' non - interference policy or the ' policy of least intervention ' in these affairs in the colonial period. ¹³

During the Medieval - Muslim period, the Thakur family in the very remote area of Saflidanga - Orakandi (Gopalganj Sub- division, Faridpur District, the colonial Dacca Precidency, the bounds of the Greater Bengal ¹⁴ covered by the low and fallow lands, rainfall waters, forests and also the ignorant - darker population etc)

in the south - western marginal region of eastern India was subjected to such composite ancient - medieval mannered ruthless oppressions. In the Muslim states , the traditional Hindu society comprising the zamindars and moneylenders predominated . There was no exception to this type of afflictions in the colonial era. Here , only the colonial state was established instead of Muslim rule and in both cases the zamindars became more stronger .¹⁵ On this basis, the British proclaimed that they were not the originators of any new governance in this country , rather they were just reviving a dilapidated regime as a legacy .¹⁶

Even there, the custom of formation of castes and classes on the basis of occupation was prevalent in this traditional society. Along with the Brahminism, priesthood and its vigilances, caste system and its rigorous discrimination, social inequality and stringent untouchability etc have continued as before. These were the characteristics of Indian traditional society .¹⁷

This traditional society had its origin in ancient India and was transformed by various ruling elites in medieval, early - modern and even modern India , especially in the aftermath of the decline of the Mughal empire in the eighteenth century . In this era too, the caste lines were crossed in the indigenous traditional societies and the construction of Brahmin power as the original pure - caste already started according to Hindu mythology .¹⁸

As a result, this traditional society continued to grow in the bones and marrows of this country. In fact, since this era onwards, the caste clusters were transformed into the subject society and the structure of this ever - expanding subject society was bound more tightly by the traditional customs than before. Thus, the professional and ethnic groups (Jatis) or numerous lower classes became more tractable and formed rigidly restrained peasants' society . Since the Mughal - India they were known as Ryot (raiyat / rait) or ravat .¹⁹

It was a general economic term used for the subject peasantry and various cultivators throughout India, though it varied in different provinces. When the native zamindars became more well-established and began to grow stronger , the raiyats turned into their subjects and worked as cultivators and hired laborers .²⁰

About 90% of the people of this mass society were mainly peasants and associated with other low occupations. Out of them, about 49.2 % people were converted Muslims. They were converted to Islam from untouchables or the lower Hindu society as shown by the record of the first census under the British rule in India in 1872 .²¹ So , during the British rule, the strong and omnipresent organization of the traditional social system, its nature and effects, the Identity of the untouchables and the oppressed and the status of the lower professional Indians in the traditional society can easily be imagined .²²

However, in the Muslim society, intense caste discrimination of the traditional society and untouchability were less visible than in the Hindu society because , in the poor Muslim society, there was no issue of socio - religious purity - impurity just like the conservative Hindu society. In the higher Hindu society, the people of lower castes were forever considered impure and also dangerous .²³

Yet , they were not spared from the ubiquitous oppressions as seen in case of the subject society dominated by traditional Indian society . After all, they were people of the lower castes and classes, small - scale peasants, poor peasants , tenants with small holdings and the landless labourers. Many of them had a little arable land and others had none . They did not have the ability to manage their family. There was no guarantee or security regarding tenancy rights. Many of them were sharecroppers, and many were temporary subjects or tenants at will. ²⁴

In order to maintain the family with minimal agricultural works, they also engaged themselves in other occupations like fishing , cottage and handcrafts productions, blacksmithing, pottering, weaving, cobbling , hawking and retail trading. Majority of them were treated as untouchables for their lower occupational forms

in this subcontinent. It also seems to be the first in the South - Asian world .²⁵ In this regard, Jha (1975) suggested that the lower society **transcends all the stages** of the untouchability .²⁶

It may be said here that there was a special power arising out of tenacity and endurance of people of this lower society, by virtue of which they crossed all the stages of untouchability, perhaps even before the Muslim rule. This virtue was to work incessantly almost in silence, to produce things by toil and thereby to serve only the conventional society, depriving oneself of the dictates of the higher society. In spite of all the oppressions by the traditional higher society, those people of lower society remained united together. They were immersed in darkness. They had no knowledge and education, no wealth and land, no social influence and no political power. Hence everyone tricked them .²⁷

The unstable political situation of the country in early medieval India and the rigid caste disparity between high and low society in socio - economical and religio - cultural fields were well known to the Muslim. Also, they were not unaware of the characteristic features of the Indian society , where untouchables and the downtrodden (Dalits) were bound in the strict chains.²⁸

This opportunity was availed by the Muslim rulers. From this period, the oppressions of the people of lower-class society increased. It was more visible during the centralized Mughal administration in India, described as a military state .²⁹

In this context, Raychaudhuri (1982) has shown that in this era, although the large farmers could endure the pressure of the situation , the small farmers of the marginal society of the country were subjected to successive oppression .³⁰ There was no opportunity for a new national , ethnic or religious loyalties developed during this period . The policy of suppression and compromise was determined on the basis of the " patron - client relationship " between the emperor and the ruling class. It can also be called one of the new form of the Indian traditional society. The Mughal rule was accustomed to this traditional social system. However, it can be said that the patron - client relationship was ,³¹ as it were, a relationship of the mutual understanding, known as " Fitna " .³²

Due to its influence, the Mughal regime always tried to harmonize with this society, maintaining a balance of opposition or alliance between the two parties according to the Mughal custom of Fitna. Thus, as Mughal sovereignty survives on the effectiveness of suppression policies and settlements, so does traditional Indian social order .³³

In such a socio - political system, the intervention of Mughal rule was considered undesirable. Consequently, the institutions and the higher social classes of the traditional society of the country collectively enjoyed various privileges and rights. In Bayley's language, it is called the specific "Portfolio Capital ", which the Mughal rule invested to reap huge profits in this age .³⁴

From the seventeenth century onwards, as the Mughal ruling class such as Jagirdars, Mansabdars, Aristocrats, Amils and a part of the big - landlords became much powerful and the influence of those privileged classes also increased in this newly emerging mixed socio - cultural environment. However, just as there was a class hierarchy between the higher - lower classes and the " subject - societies ", there was difference between the ruling class and the landlords .³⁵

As the agricultural production in the country increased, so did the plight of the poor subjects and peasants improve in the country. The situation became so bad that even the Mughal aristocracy had to suffer much. ³⁶ Between 1686 and 1687 after the conquest of Golconda and Bijapur by Aurangzeb (1618 - 1707) , the collection of revenues increased by more than 23 % in the country . In this scenario, the tendency of exploitation of the mass societies was more noticeable .³⁷

At that time, the oppression of the Mughal Amils (revenue collectors), the native landlords and the people of traditional Hindu society was not less. Even during the reign of Bahadur Shah (1775 - 1862), the Amils , the other members of ruling classes collectively exacted as much revenues as possible from the members of rural society . If one could not pay the revenue as demanded by the ruling class, one was destined to be oppressed with misery, along with his ' childish family ' .³⁸

Meanwhile, the provincial Mughal officials, for gaining their own benefit, created new sources of collection of revenues around densely agricultural areas like Bengal, which increased suffering of the village society .³⁹

This process of oppression can be referred to as one of the Mystery of traditional society in India. During this period, the rural society had no way other than laboring continuously and increasing the agricultural productions without thinking about life or death. According to the Indian traditional rules, all the people in lower societies were obliged to produce all kinds of products by hard labors and to keep alive so - called country as well as the higher society.

Rather better to say, believing the traditional story of Lord Brahma's will for so long, those simple - minded people of lower class were ever ready for continuous sweat - blood labours, all types of productions and service to the superiors. It was said that all the lower - caste Shudras originated from the feet of the Lord " Brahma " in the distant past for all those tasks in the traditional India. In this story, there was no information of the birth of Ati Sudras (Panchamas). However, the world's best evidence has also been emphatically put forward in its favour .⁴⁰

Naturally, in that new - frozen situation, common villagers realized that " they had nothing else to do other than this ". The backbone of the rural society was broken in ancient times. The Muslim rulers and the people of traditional society collectively fed on the broken ribs of the rural society . It may be said that the poor people kept shivering in the bone - chilling winter.

It is needless to say that the upward movement and positive change in the society of lower - untouchable " the real Indian society " was seen from the 13th century onward, specially in eastern India after the Muslim conquest in Bengal due to socio- economic and political changes. It can also be called the social dynamics or the social mobility,⁴¹

Two notable texts written immediately after the Turkish conquest of the country in the 13th century AD are the Brihadharma Purana and the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, where North India's population , ethnical groups , Brahminical ideologies , social stratification , caste system , religious ideas - emotions and rituals show the uniqueness. Besides, the emergence of the hybrids as a new social class between the Brahmins, the highest caste, and the Shudras, the lowest, was seen in traditional society .⁴²

However , in that era , as described in " Vaivarta Purana " , the lower - untouchables occupied the lowest position among the three hybrids such as Best (20 classes) , Middle (12 classes) and Inferiors (10 classes) .⁴³ According to the description of the Brihaddharma Purana,⁴⁴ those untouchables occupied the 3rd position among the total ' nine inferior - hybrids ' .

As the exploitation and intolerable oppression of these societies increased in the later period , a dynamism and change within this society was more noticeable. As a result , the old loyalty - relationship of the superiors with those inferiors - was greatly disturbed, just as that of the zamindars with the Mughal rulers after death of Aurangzeb in 1707 .⁴⁵

Consequently , the zamindars, along with the peasants, resisted such exploitation of the Mughal ruler and the concerned officers . In this kind of resistance , the help and the support of the rural " subject society " depended

on the old - local or the regional traditions , ⁴⁶ whereas in the colonial era , the local rural society regarded the landlords as the " all - powerful lords ", even as the heroes of folk tales . ⁴⁷

However , the central Mughal government in Delhi saw these native zamindars only as temporary power holders , who had been enjoying hereditary power for so long in traditional society .The colonial government of Calcutta had the same idea about this native dominant (Zamindars) class . ⁴⁸

These subject societies were closely related to the clan of native zamindars . So at this time, many of them became one of the stronger leaders of the rural society. They could take the initiative to solve problems. ⁴⁹

As a result , various small and larger peasants' revolt occurred all over the country under the initiative and leadership of native landlords from this era. Sardars of different social groups, village headmen , rich peasants and common peasants came forward in support of the zamindars in this regard. Such kind of peasantry had substantial holdings, enjoyed security of occupancy rights and paid nominal rents to the zamindars . Later , people of the middle class, various factions of the peasants , tenants and poor farmers and even the agricultural labourers joined such revolt . ⁵⁰

This "pattern of participation" in Indian peasant movements can be seen mainly in the colonial period . However, its origin dates back to the eighteenth century during the waning Mughal period. Not only the peasant movement, but in every social or mass movement the pattern of people's participation is almost the same.

In these coups, the peasants did not ultimately achieve a lot of success. All of them were organized against the exploitation and oppression of the peasants in the Indian society and its main strength was the oppressed people's society . Bhadra has shown that during this era, the main force behind the Jat, Koli, Maratha, Sikh rebellions was the oppressed peasant society . ⁵¹

From this point of view, it can be said that there is no such evidence in the history, which proved that during the Mughal era , the peasants of the country were living a happy life and were quite comfortable . On the contrary , it can be said that the condition of the Indian subject - society or the rural masses during this period was not good at all .The people of this society were spending days in a very bad condition. It has been acknowledged by **almost all** scholars specializing in the history of the era. ⁵²

In this age, the native landlords had the courage to encourage such an uprising against the Mughal rulers. ⁵³
The reasons behind it -

- (i)The relaxation of central Mughal rule ,
- (ii) Increase in arable lands ; Expansion of agricultures
- (iii) Surplus productions ;
- (iv) Economic transactions in agriculture increased through cash money ;
- (v) opportunity to accumulate wealth in their hands (zamindars and peasantry both) and (vi) The inhabitants of the agriculturally rich regions developed socio - religious and political ties with the newly established peasant communities .

Hence they actively supported the local landlords against these prevailing oppressions. However, In many cases , the upheaval of these regional powers developed from the " notions of community " in this era . ⁵⁴

Despite all these ups and downs, no change occurred in the basic character of the traditional society, rather it continued even in the colonial period.

The caste system, social hierarchy and discriminations were the main features of the traditional society. Those features are believed to be the reason of the decline of the Mughal era and the rise of British colonial rule in this country.⁵⁵ In this context, Bayly (2001), St. John (2012), and Sathaye (2015) have blamed the caste system more specifically.⁵⁶

The British Raj developed the traditional ideology further in this country and made rigid caste organization a central system of administration.⁵⁷

Between 1860 - 1920, the British incorporated the Indian caste system into their governance system, offering administrative jobs and senior appointments only to European - Christians and some members of Indian Hindu upper castes. Later, they changed this policy due to social unrest from the 1920s onwards.⁵⁸ The traditional caste system was no longer used by the colonial authority to organize civil society. The educated people trained in western pattern began to raise a set of precise and practical questions about the traditional social order and gave prominence to "post - modernist rationalism".⁵⁹

As a result, changes occurred in administrative practices and understanding of expertise, and new European scholarly institutions emerged.⁶⁰

Here, the members of lower caste fell back more rapidly in the Indian society. The aristocracy prevailing in this society continued and was more active. The larger society did not change much. However, many people in this society were able to reposition and reconstruct themselves through the opportunities for social mobility and improved their socio - economic, political and even cultural standing. They were also able to maintain their superior position in the traditional racial hierarchy.⁶¹

Its main secret was that the traditional system could survive for many centuries and maintain a "dynamic equilibrium" in the face of various shocks from below.⁶²

However, after 1920s, the colonial administration adopted a policy of positive discrimination by reserving a certain percentage of government jobs for the members of lower castes. In 1948, negative discrimination on the basis of caste was banned by law and was incorporated into the Indian Constitution in 1950. However, in some parts of India, the traditional system is in operation. Now there are 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes in India. They are associated with a particular profession and continue to serve the society, nation and the motherland.

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