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Caste & Racial Discrimination: The brutality faced by the underprivileged section of the society in India; in comparison to the racial discrimination seen in the United States of America.

Ms. Janhavi N, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Jyoti Nivas College Autonomous, Bangalore

ABSTRACT:

Inequalities are pervasive throughout the world and have been a characteristic feature of societies since prehistoric times. With development, they tend to reduce but persist nevertheless. Inequalities and discrimination are related phenomena which thus strengthens each other. One such form of discrimination is still present in India, and that is the caste system. Caste refers to the hereditary social classes in Hinduism that restrict the occupation of their members and their association with the members of other castes. Caste is been defined in such a manner that it applies only to India, just as it possible to narrow down any other form of sociocultural phenomena. The caste system in India follows the *varna system* that divided the population initially into four and later into five mutually exclusive, endogamous, hereditary, and occupation-specific groups: the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras, and Ati-Sudras. The last two comprised together that do menial jobs with the latter being considered “untouchables”. Racial identity or “Race” on the other hand, refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant. If the race is a system of ascriptive or color-based disparities, then caste is called a system of non-ascriptive or non-color-based disparities. The caste system (Bhramin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudras) is mostly observed in India whereas the race system (whites, blacks, and colored) is observed globally, but predominately seen in the United States of America. Internationally, caste discrimination has been affirmed since 1996 by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as a form of racial discrimination prohibited by the International Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and since 2000 as a form of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law. Caste discrimination in India and racism in the USA are often compared for their similarities, especially under the notion of discrimination and unprofessional treatment shown towards the underprivileged section of the society economically, socially, and culturally. Due to these unjust acts, many have been mistreated and some have also lost their lives due to these mistreatments acquired from their society.

Thus, this current study focuses and highlights, the Caste & Racial Discrimination faced by the underprivileged section of the society in India with the Racial Discrimination observed in the United States of America. The paper also sheds light on the dark side of Indian society and how as a citizen can we bring a change to these barbaric practices, so that in future a single citizen isn't criticized or discriminated based on the caste or race they belong to.

Keywords: *Caste system, Racial identity, Caste Discrimination, and Racism.*

INTRODUCTION:

Inequalities are pervasive throughout the world and have been a characteristic feature of societies since prehistoric times. With the development and, modernism, they tend to reduce but continues nevertheless. They relate to unequal distribution of some valued characteristics like income, wealth, status, knowledge, skills, and power across different units such as individuals, households, social categories, religious communities, groups, castes, regions, and nations. Unfortunately, the caste system in India and Racism in the US contributes to these inequalities in some form of manner or action.

India is ethnically and religiously heterogeneous. Its predominant religious tradition sanctifies the concept of HomoHierarchichus (Dumont, 1970). The referent ideology of Hinduism in Varnashrama dharma, according to which mankind divided the population initially into four and later into five mutually special, endogamous, hereditary, and occupation-specific groups i.e. the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras, and Ati-Sudras which according to the people is ordained by God. The last two are comprised of one that does all the menial jobs and are considered “untouchables”. Even their presence is considered polluting and thus is avoided by society. According to this ideology, all men are born unequal with unequal capacities to perform functions of unequal importance to God. The caste system is the most pervasive parameter in differentiating Indian society. The secular constitutional government notwithstanding, this “sacral tradition” still has a stronghold over the minds and lives of Indians. It is well known that caste discrimination against Dalits is rampant in India. In an undisguised form, it is both political reality and social fact. Statistically, the largest varna is the Sudra, constituting nearly half of the population. Being at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, the former untouchables are not only poorer but they are being continued to be targets of discrimination, oppression, violence, and exclusion. They are subjected to violence, especially in rural areas such as their women being raped and their land being taken by the upper caste members. They also perform the most dangerous and disgusting forms of labor in society, such as manual scavenging (removing human or animal waste) or performing low-end ‘dirty’ wage labor in leather-factories. They are poorly represented in the professions, business, media, and the higher levels of the government including the police, the army, and the judiciary. There is also rampant social discrimination against Dalits, including through the caste-ridden system of ‘arranged’ marriages. Caste discrimination against Dalits has deep-rooted the society and the economy, and quick-fix solutions through the law alone will not help.

Camara Phyllis Jones in her work “Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener’s Tale” presented a theoretical framework for understanding racism in three different levels: institutionalized racism, personally mediated racism, and internalized racism. Institutionalized racism is manifested in societies where there are different levels of access to goods, services, and opportunities, and it may sometimes be legalized or institutionalized and become an “inherited disadvantage.” Personally, mediated racism is the assumption about others in terms of their abilities, motives, intentions based on their race, and it “can be intentional as well as unintentional, and it includes acts of commission as well as acts of omission.” Internalized racism is the acceptance of negative messages by the stigmatized race and it “involves accepting limitations to one’s own full humanity, including one’s spectrum of dreams, one’s right to self-determination, and one’s range of allowable self-expressions” (Jones 2000: 1212–13). History of the ethnic conflict in the US goes back to its foundation as a nation or its ‘discovery’ by white European settlers. Native Americans were subjected to

violent dispossession as the settlers moved in and gained control over land, the most precious natural resource. The subsequent economic development was based on black slave labor forcibly brought from Africa. The first stirrings of formal equality came only with the Civil Rights Act of 1866 that extended citizenship rights to ‘all persons in the United States’ and made it a criminal offense to deprive any citizen of these rights ‘under the cover of any law’. Under Slavery, Blacks had no rights whatsoever, but the system that replaced slavery was only marginally better and also had several features similar to the Indian caste system.

The US and India are the two largest democracies of the world struggling with racism. There’s evidence of increased racial discrimination and stigmatization in both these countries especially during the Pandemic (COVID-19). The case for affirmative action for Blacks in the USA and the former untouchables, or Dalits, in India, can be made both on account of historical deprivation as well as on grounds of persistent disparity and continuing discrimination. Thus, despite the differences between race and caste as institutions, the end result for Blacks and Dalits are very similar. One such example is the cold-blooded murder of African-American George Floyd on May 25 in the US and the vicious crime of J Jayaraj, 59, and his son Bennicks Immanuel, 31 in India. In the US, the victim was kned by a white police officer in Minneapolis while his colleague, of Asian origin, stood as a standby. This brutality was recorded on mobile phone cameras by onlookers who protested but to no help. The video shocked the global communities and demanded justice for George Floyd and called for an end to America’s mistreatment of its black and brown citizens by the cruel world of white supremacy and racial capitalism. Similarly, was in the case of Jayaraj and Bennicks. Their deaths caused outrage in the country where human rights groups say minorities have long been subject to police brutality and inspired comparisons to George Floyd. The father and son, who belonged to a Christian Dalit community were brutally murdered and raped by six policemen for opening their shops in the southern part of Tamil Nadu in breach of COVID-19 lockdown rules. This tragedy also underlined the role of police brutality towards the underprivileged. Many Protestors took out to the public and pointed the barbaric and mistreatments they show towards the people of the Dalit community. They also pointed out the similarities between caste and race discrimination with the US. In many cases, the murder of a Dalit is passed off as “another Dalit murder”.

The ideology of the caste has been deeply implanted in the people’s collective consciousness considerably influencing their behavior. Their adjustment to the secular value system is taking place but very slowly. Modern India officially abolished untouchability and introduced compensatory, positive discrimination in education and employment for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who have suffered cumulative, social, and economic disabilities. Recently these benefits have been extended to other lower castes in response to their organized political assertion. Yet the reality of the deprived social groups is more complex than indicated by the broad categories for extending compensatory benefits. The Indian government delegation that appeared before the U.N. human rights body cited a list of laws that have been passed to end caste discrimination and atrocities against Dalits. This much is, in fact, true and India should certainly take much pride in the establishment of a formal system of equality through laws. The political gains made by Dalit parties in recent years can also be celebrated as a healthy example of the virtues of Indian democracy in ending social ills. But, in practice, these laws are poorly implemented. Caste discrimination exists because people continue to believe in caste. Indian democracy is, paradoxically, a culprit.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The paper’s focal point is on the caste system in India and, how the system’s ideology has been imprinted into the minds of the people, which lead to the division of the society and, discriminating against one another. It highlights, how the society follows the varna system where the population has divided themselves. It is well known that caste discrimination against Dalits is rampant in India. Even India’s Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, on December 27, 2006, had compared caste discrimination to apartheid in South Africa, which is the worst example of racial discrimination. The paper also shows the comparison between the caste system of India and racism of the US, and how these systems are similar to one another, and how it contributes to the inequalities that take place globally. Both the minorities, suffer deep injustices, disparity, deprivation,

and discrimination. The current economic and social systems in both the US and in India perpetuate the patterns of caste-based or race-based disparities in all spheres of life. It also highlights the members of the higher caste in both the US and India, where they maintain their superior position by exercising powerful sanctions, and they rationalize their status with elaborate philosophical, religious, psychological, or genetic. As we all know the law enforcement is the most powerful and most respected people in society because they serve their lives in protecting the community. But in the case of minorities such as for blacks in the US and the Dalits in India, the case is opposite. Hence, the paper also highlights the cruel actions the police force/ the law enforcement exhibit towards the minorities of both countries.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

- ❖ Lewis (1985) observes that “those we look down on we feel free to exploit.” In such a situation, groups discriminated against may not only be denied equal access to the means of acquiring productive capacity but also receive lower pay than others on account of their ascriptive characteristics and not because of, or in proportion to, the lower capacity so they are caught in a double bind.
- ❖ Discrimination exacerbates inequalities by impacting the distribution of opportunities and the behavioral responses of the adversely affected groups. For instance, discrimination would not only lower the incomes of the subordinate groups but also induce lower investment in human capital due to expected lower earnings (Arrow, 1973).
- ❖ Obviously, to adequately explain discrimination, one has to go beyond the presumptive optimality and equilibrium mode of analysis which excludes the possibility of taking into account non-economic factors influencing decision making (Samuels, 1995).
- ❖ The race is ascriptive in that it is primarily based on skin, and thus, is more easily identified, it needs to be emphasized that race is a social construction, in that, the presumed phenotypical similarities that unite members of a given ‘race’ are more imaginary than real. There is enough evidence to suggest that there is greater variation in each of the phenotypical characteristics within races than between races (AAA resolution, 1998).
- ❖ In the pursuit of determinate optimum solutions, the analysis moves along presumptive, prefigured lines, bypassing some important aspects of the real world. The independent role of institutions in economic analysis is ignored. Institutions, as humanly designed constraints on decisions, do matter in the real world. They are of two types – formal and culturally embedded informal (Denzon and North, 1994; North, 1991).

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this study is to underline the caste system and the discrimination that is faced by the people who belong to the lower hierarchy, in comparison with racial discrimination observed in the US. The paper also showcases the injustice that the minorities face from the law enforcement in both the countries.

METHODOLOGY:

The data that is been used in this paper is collected with the help of secondary resources. These resources are readymade and qualitative. The sources that are used in this paper are Google Scholar, research papers written by various authors, newspapers, articles, and blogs.

FINDINGS:

Through this study, it has been observed that in the real-world culture and power matters a lot. The culture and cultural processes contribute to the formation of social structure and individual identities, goals and preferences, and lifestyles, all of which impact choices. However, culture itself is a product of interdependence among individuals and groups. The behavior of individuals and their choices contribute to the selective reinforcing and weakening elements of culture. Yet it is a distribution of power, defined as access to resources: social, political, and economic, that governs the nature of cultural changes. Since the caste system in India is a cultural phenomenon that has been followed for centuries, some people use this system as a power in the name

of cultural ethnicity, to discriminate, and mistreat the people who belong to the lower hierarchy of the system. The Untouchables or the Dalits are considered permanently and irredeemably ritually polluted and polluting such that all physical and social contact with them must be avoided, serves both as a cause of and a mechanism for social exclusion and material exploitation. Despite being a notional construct, Untouchability is conceptualized incorporeal and immutable terms as a permanent quasi-physical inherited characteristic that cannot be shed or removed. Even though India has demolished the concept of the caste system and discharged the title for Dalits as “Untouchables,” still they segregate the people during the time of voting by asking which caste they belong from. Through this study it has also discovered that the police force in India is in general, is an anti-Dalit. Their lack of empathy for victims of these groups indirectly makes them co-convicts. This has to do with the way police are trained and taught to respond to cases involving Dalits and other minorities. The same fall in the case of the US. In the US, there are different levels or forms of racism against the blacks and the Hispanic population, more specifically towards the blacks. It has been noted that police violence is a leading cause of death for young men in the United States. Over the life course, about 1 in every 1,000 black men can expect to be killed by police. Risk of being killed by police peaks between the ages of 20 years and 35 years for men and women and all racial and ethnic groups. Black women and men are significantly more likely than white women and men to be killed by police, according to research done by Frank Edwards and his colleagues. Policing plays a key role in maintaining structural inequalities between people of color and white people in the United States. Social scientists and public health scholars now widely acknowledge that police contact is a key vector of health inequality and is an important cause of early mortality for people of color. Police in the United States kills far more people than do police in other advanced industrial democracies. While a substantial body of evidence shows that people of color, especially African Americans, are at greater risk for experiencing criminal justice contact and police-involved harm than are whites.

Even though both the countries are considered democratic, violence towards minorities is still present and it is tremendous. The police forces of both countries have no right to violate the minorities by using their position as a weapon against them. Law enforcement must protect society and punish those who break the law, not punish them because they belong to a caste or a race.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, looking at the damning Dalit, African-Americans, and other minority murders and the cold response from the court and police system, there is a need for a renewed society-led response to these atrocities/whites on the minorities. A need for a moral force that is dedicated to fighting the injustice meted out to the poor, vulnerable, and the weak. In the face of lawlessness and the lack of State and police interest in curbing atrocities, there needs to be a Constitutionally devoted, socially conscious force that keeps violence in check, so that in the future, more lives can be saved.

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