



# Misinterpreting Indian Social System: a Fundamental Problem of Theorizing

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## Abstract

Indian social system, i.e. patriarchal caste system has unique features which are changing in the span of time and space as it is a product of long historical process. Though, this is not a simple stratification but it is a segmentation of society as castes are not having any social interrelations relations other than economic interdependency. Thus, each sub-caste has an independent 'social' existence. All kind of capitals i.e. social, cultural, economic and political capitals are monopolized by high-castes and dominated middle-castes. Social sciences are not treated to caste system as an economic, political or cultural system and falsely display it as a social system only. Within this system, institutions does not have independent existence, including religion, as these institutions are continuously interact and intervene with each other and thus, specific division within social sciences become the fallacy. Western generated socio-eco-political theories are insufficient to analyse the 'Indian phenomena' whereas Brahminical oriented theories which 'see from top' are misinterpreted it. Structural-functional theories see it as an institution than system, and thus missed historical time span. Marxist interpretations are ignored inter-institutional bearings as well as Indian religio-cultural value system and thus fall into the category of non-human theories. These theories are insufficient to analyse contemporary patriarchal caste system. In Althusserian perspectives, these bourgeoisie social sciences ignored to Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar and other social theorist intellectually and thus, support to social stagnancy and refute social change. Thus, bourgeoisie social sciences do not have a single theory of social change which will fit in Indian context. In western ideology, Bourdieu provide the insight to analyse dynamics of various capitals and Ambedkar provide the insight to analyse unequal distribution of authorities and powers and its nexus with religio-cultural value system. Structuration theories are helped to understand the dynamics of interrelations of social system and agency. But these theories again fails to understand social psychology of caste system and this gap will be filled by Vasubandhu, Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti, who fought against caste system by analysing relationship of language and psyche of human being.

**Key words:** Power and Authority, Capital, Structuration, Phenomenology, Mental Dialectical, Restructuration

## Social Theories and Caste System

Indian social system is a unique system which is based on patriarchal caste system and spread throughout India and penetrated in all major religious groups and sects, even though in those sects which previously emerged as anti-caste movements, viz. Lingayats or Mahanubhavs. But four-Varna based caste system does not found uniformly throughout India as Kshatriyas or Vaishyas Jatis (i.e. castes) are not exists in Maharashtra or South India. In absence of Kshatriyas, middle castes from Shudras are emerged as dominant castes, e.g. Maratha or Jats or Reddis are emerged as dominant castes in rural areas and now, they have been maintaining the caste system in their areas. Even though the status of women is not uniform and it is also changing from caste to caste and area to area. Shudra women got more freedom than Brahmin women and she was participated in economy as a part of her routine work which was changed after Brahminization of these women. *Sati*-tradition, *keshavapan* or ban on widow remarriage was not the part of Shudra's culture which was found in Brahmin Culture in colonial India. Kancha Ilaiah properly differentiates Brahmin or Hindu culture from Indian Culture while denying his Hindu-identity. But the myths of Hindu society or Indian society which are portrayed in text books are put the curtains on facts of caste system and gave birth to pseudo-consciousness about system which was conducted through the veins of whole academia. This paper is a short discussion on the myth of Indian Social System. (Ilaiah, 1996, 2004) Dharmshastras are claimed it as divine and *sanatan* (unchangeable) system which was persist from the birth of society which is already denied by history (Patil, 1982). Ambedkar, Kosambi, Sharad Patil and others already explained its genesis and development which explored the changes within it. Caste system emerged as bi-product of agriculture based economy after Buddha's revolution after the end of Varna system and tribal republics in north India and spread over throughout India with the agriculture based economy (Kosambi, 1957, 1965, Ambedkar, 1990, Patil, 2010). In Maharashtra and south India, it emerged near about 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century after pastoral economy based megalithic period. So the period of existence of caste system is varied from region to region and thus six-characterised caste system is nothing but a myth which has been teaching in academia. The characters of caste system, as a product of long historical process, are not uniform as it is not the mere evolution of varna system because Varna system was not exists in non-vaedic society such as middle and south India or tribal republics. But caste system spread over whole society whether it is vaedic or non-vaedic, Hindu or non-Hindu. But texts exclude this phenomenon and portrayed it as a unique feature of only Hindu society by ignoring the facts that Christianity entered in India before existence of caste in Kerala, whereas Islam entered in India in the phase of development of caste. And these religious groups are followed to caste system as Hindus are followed it (Klass, 1998).

Cooley, Max Muller, Tilak or Fule understand it as a bi-product of racial differentiation, but Ambedkar showed that as per Bhandarkar, a genetic scientist, no one caste has the pure characteristics of any race as caste system is emerged after racial hybridization (Ambedkar, 1979, 1987, Phule, 1991). He gave example that Brahmin of South India is black as untouchable of his area and Brahmin of Punjab is white as untouchable of that area. Whereas Brahmin and non-Brahmin forces of colonial India (and post-colonial India also) was pressed the issue of racism as the cause of caste due to their political interests than historical or academic interest. Though, racial issue does not become helpful while handling the caste issue in contemporary world as the characters of racial differentiation and caste differentiation does not show any consonance and so it is not the part of any solution also.

Iravati Karve and others sociologists has been explained to intra-caste marriage as a prime-character of caste system. But they never discussed to intra-caste marriage system whether it is goal or mean. If it is a goal, what system achieved from it and if it is a mean, then what they maintain from this system? These sociologists are silent on this question, and thus this theory is not reach up to its logical end and failed to explain the issue of unequal distribution of various kinds of powers and authorities within different castes as Manusmriti and other sanhitas are discussed in their texts. Though, these theories are not differentiate "Brahmin in a varna System" and "Brahmin in a caste system" by ignoring the development of caste system historically from 'open' varna system to 'closed' caste system and thus not touch to the issue of development from 'Scholar' Brahmin of varna system to powerful (as administrator, minister, judge, military commander, priest, land-lord or feudal lord and king) Brahmin of caste system. These developments also follow the rule of time and space of historical period. The use of same word for different concepts not even creates confusion but gave birth to many historical blunders. This phenomenon of caste system can be explained by with the help of C. Wright Mills's theory of power elite where he explained that how power elites secured their interests and create monopoly over powers by generating a closed circle. Can scholar Brahmins (which coming from various varnas and races) create closed circle (called caste) for dominating their power by generating monopoly over it by the help of intra-marriage system and every caste follow them and create their own monopoly over their occupation? No one theory touch to such issues of power, authority and monopoly which distribute the responsibility of spreading of caste system on every head.

Another school focus itself on the issue of 'division of labour' as the division of caste depends on occupations. This school does not differentiate 'division of labourers' and 'division of labour' (Ambedkar, 1979). Caste system is denying the condition of division of labour as it has ascribed pattern-type social system. Each occupational group is an air tight closed container and it did not allow to others within the periphery of their realm. Caste system is non-market based barter system where no one allowed leaving the village (except than Brahmin). Shudras were occupied that space of economy where profit and power has no place, but on other hand Brahmin (including Kshatriyas and Vaishya) was engaged in non-productive labour where power, authority and money has ample space. The term 'division of economy' is not representing to economy of caste. Many available interpretations are ignored the mutual relations between occupation and power and only focused on the phenomenon that occupation as a livelihood. Even though occupation based division of society is not create the stratification but it divide society into different segmentation. Segmentation is not the stratification because in stratification, various strata of society have social interrelations; but in caste (as a jajmani system), there is mere economic relations/interdependency are exists and non-existence of social relations turn it into the segmented society. Each caste, or say sub-caste has independent social existence. Though, the term 'segmented society' is not found in classical sociology, most of the sociologists explain it as stratification, which is a misinterpretation of caste system. After Indian Constitution allows to liberty of accepting any valid occupation, caste system is not destroying after changing their caste occupations by various castes.

Ambedkar analyse to caste system as a social system, cultural system, economic system and political system. For him, Brahmanism is a synonym for a caste system. As Manusmriti stated, all kind of powers and authorities are permanently and unequally distribute among all castes and sub-castes where upper most Brahmins got overhand and ati-shudras are declined and came down to the status of slave. Thus Brahmin is not the priest class but it is the powerful group which monopolize all powers and authorities including economic, administrative, political, military, cultural and religious powers and authorities. These Brahmins are scholars as they are educated and hold the capacity of bearing these powerful roles in society (Ambedkar, 1987). They were coming from various racial and ethnic groups and

they used custom of intra-caste marriage, not for maintaining racial purity but maintaining monopoly on powers and authorities. This argument is not only applicable for Brahmins but this argument is equally applicable for all castes (Beteille, 1996). This logic is not the part of historical process only but it has a contemporary relevancy. In present society, high-status families bind themselves in marriage bonds irrespective to their religion and caste. Though, intra-caste marriage loses its importance as an instrument for maintaining power and authorities within a caste and thus now, intra-caste marriage is no longer remaining as the distinguishing feature of caste. In inter-caste marriage, child gets the caste-recognition from his father's caste (Shrinivas, 1996).

Caste theories are not discussed the issue of powers and authorities and they are focussing themselves on other issues like race, occupation and marriage. By this diversion, these theories generate pseudo-consciousness about system and intellectually ignored the real issue or place a curtain on it. Bourdieu analyse the social system on the basis of dynamic concepts of socio-cultural, political and other capitals (Grenfell, 2012). These capitals framed a habitus and this habitus become a war-field where rival groups are continuously engaged themselves in conflicts. Those who possess these capitals will get the victory. Caste as a dynamic system we observed these conflicts and exchanging positions of different castes as they achieve different kind of capitals. After adaptation of democratic political system, those middle castes which are in majority in population are emerged as powerful political groups which grabbed not only political capital but grabbed economic capitals also. And Brahmins are replaced by these middle castes in terms of political and economic powerful groups. Though, these middle castes are belonging to backward Shudras (OBCs), but they are used their political capital for upsurge of backward people. Even though most of the atrocities (on SC and ST) are done by these OBC middle caste and they are using atrocities as the instrument for throwing SCs or STs in a corner and reorganise OBC groups for retaining power with them. So politics of backwards are not take shape as a politics for backward. Caste-based politics of middle caste did not cross the boundary of their caste. Even though, those caste who lead the non-Brahmin anti-castes movements in colonial India, are forget their goals after grabbing power in post-independent India. But theories are touched to these issues or dynamics of caste.

These issues are unanswered because most of the social theories see caste system as an institution and not as the system. Like European societies, institutions are not having separate independent existence and all institutions are continuously intervening with each other. It is not possible to understand caste without understand these mutual interventions of institutions within the frame of caste. For example, religion and economy walk in hand in hand when temples becomes revenue generating machineries, or politics of middle castes work as instrument for economic empowerment of that castes (subsequently exploitation of other castes) or cultural capitals determined the social capitals, etc. This interdependency can be explored by existing caste theories and thus, many questions are remaining unanswered. Because of this lacuna, many issues are excluded from the realm of theories, such as how caste play significant role in education institution (means caste politics in education), how caste play role in private sector while getting job (means casteism in private sector), or how caste play role in politics of backwards also (caste politics of backwards). Most of caste theories are biased for upper-castes (if it construct by lower caste scholar) or for lower-castes (if it construct by upper caste scholar), which is again shows a caste relations with academecia. Some questions are fetched attraction of scholars, but many questions are remaining untouched as various institutions are considered as separate and independent.

On caste issues social sciences are not going beyond to Shrinivas and Ghurye (2004). The economics of caste or political science of caste or cultural theories of caste are yet to be generated. Basically interdisciplinary approach is necessary for exploring the issue from its base. But social sciences are not interested in caste issue as they shown their interest in class issues. In nutshell, the social sciences of Indian society are yet to be generated and thus, whole social sciences explored the societal issues of Indian society on the non-relevant western concepts or conceptual derivatives. Thus, whole social science become fallacy and not provides insight for analysing the caste issues. For example, when we define society 'as a web of social interaction' and we observe that 'social interaction is exists within sub-caste only'. Western generated socio-eco-political theories are insufficient to analyse the 'Indian phenomena' whereas Brahminical oriented theories which 'see from top' are misinterpreted to caste system.

Ambedkarite philosophy, though it is relevant but lagging behind due to lack of development in school. Due to stagnancy, this philosophy not touched to recent developments in caste system or impact of contemporary processes on it, such as impact of LPG on caste system or impact of electronic media on caste culture, etc. Though, Ambedkar analyse caste in terms of powers and authorities, but next generation Ambedkarite scholars are not develop this theory and so, we found that present Ambedkarism ignored the dynamics of power and authorities within the periphery of caste system. As per Brahminical theories, caste system is a steady system, and they denying changing structure, whereas Ambedkar accept it as a dynamic system. But, we not found any suitable theory which will address to such dynamism of caste system. Ambedkarite theories are silent on some dilemmas, e.g. can reservation concretize caste system? If yes, then can without reservation, dalits will get their rights? Is present democracy will provide justice to all caste groups? If no, then caste representation in parliament will provide justice to all caste groups (without concretizing the caste system)? Gopal Guru (2012) and Anand Teltumbade tried to make it contemporary, but they not set links within various institutions, and thus they analyse the concepts partially.

Marxist theories which are mainly explored the class system are not found suitable to analyse caste system. As Ketkar says, caste is a closed class, is not true because caste not found any other similarity with caste other than unequal distribution of income (Ketkar, 2002). Class is stratification whereas caste is a segmentation of society. But Marxist treated to caste in reference with class only, and thus it does not proper understanding about social system. For any required change, the first condition is, understand the rules or norms of that social system which you want to change. Marx's term Asiatic Mode of Production is not properly diagnose the systemic problems of Indian society. Kerala and West-Bengal where communist got the long term, not get succeed to create caste-less society or empower lower castes. Rulers of Indian communists take birth only in high-caste and not in lower caste. It means that economic determinism fails to analyse the caste system for requisite changes. Marxist interpretations are ignored inter-institutional bearings as well as Indian religio-cultural value system and thus fall into the category of non-human theories. These theories are insufficient to analyse contemporary patriarchal caste system. Marxists like Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (1991, 1992) tried to established religion-caste structure link, but again he not delinks his theory with dialectic materialism (mostly dominated by economic determinism) and ignored Vasubandhu's Dialect Theory, as Sharad Patil (1982) pointed out, and thus he missed the proper understanding of caste system. Radical Marxists rejects the existence of caste system.

## Theory and Social Change

As we pointed out existing theories are not sufficient to explore Indian social system and misinterpretation create pseudo-consciousness than understanding about it. Though, social work is the matter of social change and empowerment or social justice for deprived groups, needs most precise theories which can provide insight for identifying and analysing the problems of that section. If one wants to work with dalits or weaker sections of society, then understanding of caste system has come on prime step. Most of the theories are addressed to historical caste system and they ignore to changing characters of caste system. We are observing the drastic changes after open the doors of education, occupation and politics to all castes in the colonial India and after acceptance of Indian Constitution. Constitution is ruled out the rule of religious or traditional legal system and gives the assurance of liberty and justice, and opportunity of equality which yet to be achieved. So, it is necessary to come down to ground realities for push these goals toward reality. Social sciences are not mere disciplines which are part of epistemology, but these have the value of application. If theory and ground realities have gaps, and then these gaps worked as hindrances than facilitation. Though, it is the responsibility of social sciences to correct this detachment and provide the theories which can be attached to ground realities. Existing theories are insufficient to analyse contemporary patriarchal caste system. In Althusserian perspectives, these bourgeoisie social sciences ignored to Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar and other social theorist intellectually and thus, support to social stagnancy and refute social change. Thus, bourgeoisie social sciences do not have a single theory of social change which will fit in Indian context. On other hand as we already explained, theories 'coming from lower' are also lacks the contemporary reality while exploring the mechanism of exploitation. So, it needs multi-theory or theory-networking approach.

Post-Marxist theories can provide conceptual framework. Bourdieu's concept of Habitus helps us to explore the relations of various capitals. His theory explains the how culture or social position or social statuses provide facility to one group and deprives other from those facilities. The most significant contribution he provide in the concept of theory that according to him social structure or habitus is not a static phenomenon but it is dynamic entity which change as capitals are changes. It means that statuses, roles and social positions are changing entities which decide the structure or habitus of that society. On other hand the theory of structuration provide another insight that day-to-day activities are reproduce the social structure which is again dynamic for that theory. Structure and agency continuously interact with other where resources are determined the relations of structure and agency. Agency needs change in social structure if its requirements are not fulfilled within the periphery of that structure but it resist to change when it feels secured (Ritzer, 1996, Adams and Sydnie, 2001).

With the combination of these two theories we can understand the behaviours of various castes within the changing caste system. After the changes on various factors, like, education, democracy, etc. or changes in complementary institutions, we observe that subsequent changes are emerged in structure of various capital or resources. It means that caste habitus or structure shows the significant changes after alteration of these capitals. For example, in democracy, majority middle castes found that their numbers become more meaningful to gain the political power in changing (democratic) political system. Means, now caste become a social capital for majority middle castes and due to that they will maintain the caste system. Likewise, their caste becomes a resource for them. And thus they will deny the forthcoming changes as they feel security within the structure of caste. Thus, now these middle castes become the major forces in maintenance of caste system which was previously ran the movements against it. In democratic system, Brahmins are feel deprivation as they throw out from crown due to their less numbers.

Can provision of reservation become a resource or capital for lower castes? We need penetrating analysis to know the changing behaviours of lower castes.

Caste as a structure is reproduced from day-to-day behaviours. Actually sometime it should be understood from the views of people as their behavioural pattern is not determined by historical caste but determined by present structure of caste. Why people give vote their caste person only? Voting is not the historical phenomenon, but it is newly generated concept. Thus, many actions are reshaped by newly generated interests as various norms are institutionalized by caste groups. So, it is necessary to any social scientist to observe these changing phenomena and inculcate it within the frame or theory. Though, phenomenological methodology can help us to reconstruct the caste system. Or combination of structuration with phenomenological methodology will help to get more contemporary 'idea' of caste system. It is necessary to pull out the caste theory from historical background and make it a more relevant and contemporary.

Beside that we must give recognition to the social psychology of caste system. Most of the sociologists, again adopt caste psychology as a mere bi-product of caste system and ignored the process of 'making of brain or psyche'. In the issue of 'casteism' or 'caste mentality', we found a huge gap, which can be filled by Buddhist Logic i.e. Nyayashastra. Buddhists have a long tradition and experience of struggle with Brahminical caste system from Acharya Asanga to Acharya Dhammakirti. They developed science of logic against this system and they fought on various stages with different kind of instruments. Mahayana Buddhism developed critics against the Brahminical grammar. Vasubandhu developed the theory of Sauntranik Dwandwavada i.e. mental dialectical theory, which was further developed by his successors (Anacker, 2002). Nagarjuna, in his Shunyavada argue that the structure of grammar of a language breed the psyche which social structure need. If grammar is masculine then it will breed the masculine mentality. Likewise, Dhammakirti developed the concept of 'Apoha' where he analyse the origination of cognition (Stcherbatsky, 1994). Though, in western philosophy, post-structuralism, deconstructionism and postmodernism contribute, but they are not analysing the relations of mind and language as Buddhists philosophers were analyse it (Sim, 2001, Critchley, 2007, Choat, 2010). We need more penetrating research in this area that how our grammar and language breed our mind according to caste system and how it fertilizes it for its survival.

## Conclusion

For fruitful social work for the dalits and other weaker sections, we need a precise understanding of patriarchal caste system. Though, existing western philosophies, which are mainly generate in class system, are misinterpreting our social structure and generate pseudo-consciousness about it, which further miss-lead to applied social sciences, like social work. Indian theorist, are biased and they keep this theory according to their social position (means their caste interests) and again, many times these theories are not freed them from their historical roots and does not become relevant and contemporary. So we found a huge gap between theory and ground reality, which become a hindrance to get insights about real social structure or system. Sometime, due to misinterpretations of patriarchal caste system, our social work or say, implementation of programmes creates new problems or make it more complicated. Thus, problem solving efforts becomes the part of those problems. So, we need revisiting to these theories, and reconstruction of patriarchal caste system. For that we have to interweaving various theories very creatively and understand the caste system not 'from above' or 'from below', but from a neutral position by which we will get the 'ideas' for intervention in it.

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