



## A RESEARCH STUDY OF ANTI-CASTE ON SOCIAL HISTORY IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

The historical history of caste in modern-day India is a complicated fabric that has been weaved over centuries of cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. The historical perspective that is anti-caste is investigated in this abstract, which sheds insight on the development of the caste system as well as the issues that it faces. Caste divides were historically based on vocational duties; nevertheless, throughout the course of history, they have evolved into deeply ingrained social hierarchies, which have contributed to the perpetuation of discrimination and injustice. The historical narrative follows the challenges and victories of anti-caste movements, beginning with the adoption of the Constitution of India, which prohibited untouchability, and continuing on to the modern campaigns against discrimination based on caste. Caste biases continue to exist in India, despite the fact that legal measures and progressive policies have been implemented. This presents a substantial obstacle to India's goal of creating an equitable society.

**KEYWORDS:** Anti-Caste, Social History, India, modern-day, social hierarchies, caste system

### INTRODUCTION

Over the course of many centuries, caste, which is a complex and time-honored social system that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of Indian society, has been a relentless force that has shaped the lives of millions of people. A complex web of hierarchies and inequities is created as a result of its origins, which go deep into the historical, cultural, and religious layers of the subcontinent. The anti-caste historical worldview, on the other hand, has arisen as a strong and transformational story within this historical framework. The dominant narrative that surrounds caste is being challenged by this viewpoint, which seeks to dismantle the repressive aspects of caste and offer a forum for the voices and struggles of people who have been historically disadvantaged. The debate on caste in modern India has developed beyond the status of a simple historical remnant; it has become a live reality that connects with a

variety of aspects of day-to-day life. The purpose of this introduction is to delve into the theoretical framework that underpins the anti-caste historical viewpoint. It does so by tracing the historical roots of the caste system, exploring pivotal anti-caste movements, analyzing post-independence developments, and addressing the contemporary challenges and debates surrounding caste. Through the process of peeling back the layers of history, the purpose of this investigation is to shed light on the continuous fight against discrimination based on caste and the quest of a society that is more equal and just within the intricate fabric of modern-day India.

Providing a prism through which to view the historical backdrop of the anti-caste fight, the roots of the caste system in ancient India are firmly anchored in religious and cultural standards. This is the historical context of the battle against caste. A hierarchical social order was dictated by the caste system, which was described in ancient religious books. According to this system, people were grouped into separate groups depending on their birth, occupation, and social rank. The purpose of this stratification was to preserve social order; nonetheless, it resulted in the formation of a rigid framework that was responsible for the perpetuation of discrimination and inequality. By conducting an in-depth analysis of this ancient foundation, the anti-caste historical perspective seeks to disentangle the complex web of factors that contributed to the formation of a system in which one's social status and possibilities were decided by birth.

Throughout the course of human history, several movements have surfaced with the purpose of challenging the deeply ingrained rules of the caste system. One example is the Bhakti and Sufi groups that emerged during the medieval period. These movements were essential in fostering social inclusion and challenging the severe caste order that existed at the time. The saints and poets who were affiliated with these organizations called for a direct and intimate relationship with the divine, which transcended the limits of caste. Their words struck a chord with those who were oppressed, providing an alternative perspective on spirituality that was in opposition to the repressive systems that were prevalent at that era. It was through these movements that the foundation was created for a social order that was more equitable, so planting the seeds for future anti-caste campaigns.

The influence of British colonial authority added another layer of complexity to the hierarchical structure of caste in India. Despite the fact that colonial practices often served to cement pre-existing caste systems, the introduction of Western concepts of equality and

human rights were also responsible for the emergence of new forms of resistance. The time of colonial rule was marked by the establishment of socio-religious reform groups that aimed to address the discriminatory practices that were ingrained in the caste system. Jyotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar were two prominent figures who played important roles in the movement to promote social justice and equality. Ambedkar, in particular, became an important architect of the Indian Constitution, which included measures to eliminate discrimination based on caste while also promoting affirmative action via reservations.

## **HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CASTE**

The historical origins of the caste system in India may be traced back to ancient times, and it is intricately woven into the social, religious, and cultural fabric of the country. References to the division of society into varnas, which include Brahmins (priests and scholars), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Shudras (laborers), can be found in the sacred texts of Hinduism, particularly the Vedas. These texts are where the earliest expressions of this complex system can be found. With the passage of time, this varna system developed into a more intricate hierarchy, which included jatis, also known as sub-castes, and resulted in the formation of a wide variety of social classifications. The notion of birth-based purity and profession served as the basis for the tight demarcation of these groups, which in turn served as the foundation for a hereditary social order. A system in which social mobility was severely limited and one's station in society was predetermined was perpetuated by the practice of assigning tasks and responsibilities to people on the basis of their birth. The caste system became firmly embedded in the sociocultural environment, exerting an influence on every aspect of life, from marriage to employment, and producing a hierarchical structure that persisted for centuries. Because of this, the historical origins of the caste system show a complex interaction between religious teachings, cultural standards, and the ever-changing sociopolitical environment, which in turn shapes the path that the anti-caste fight has taken in modern-day India.

## **ANTI-CASTE MOVEMENTS**

There is a rich tapestry of social, political, and cultural mobilizations in India that are focused at opposing the established hierarchical structure of the caste system. These movements are known as anti-caste movements. Some of the most important contributions that these movements have made include the promotion of a spirit of resistance, the promotion of social justice, and the questioning of the legality of discrimination based on caste. Both the Bhakti

and Sufi movements that emerged throughout the medieval era were essential in laying the framework for anti-caste attitudes. These groups challenged established conventions and fostered a feeling of equality. Saints and poets affiliated with these movements, such as Ravidas, Kabir, and Basava, expressed their belief in the need of spiritual equality and denounced the limits based on caste that were prevalent in society during that time period. These groups, which were often marked by devotional poetry and activities that were inclusive, aspired to establish a place in which people might transcend the confines of caste and connect with the divine on a personal basis.

For anti-caste movements, the colonial period was a pivotal moment that represented a key turning point in their trajectory. It was the meeting with Western concepts of equality and individual rights that triggered a reevaluation of the social standards that were already in place. In the process of challenging caste-based systems and pushing for social justice, social reformers like as Jyotirao Phule and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy played critical roles. During the 19th century, Phule posed a challenge to the supremacy of the Brahmin caste and pursued educational reforms with the intention of elevating the lower castes. He founded the Satyashodhak Samaj, also known as the Society of Truth Seekers, with the intention of eliminating caste inequalities and advancing education for everyone. At the beginning of the 20th century, Periyar was a staunch opponent of the Brahminical rule that existed in Tamil society. He also advocated for the complete elimination of caste. He laid the basis for the Dravidian movement in South India by advocating for rationality, self-respect, and social equality. He was part of the Dravidian movement.

During the course of the Indian independence movement, there were leaders who emerged who combined anti-caste beliefs into the larger battle for freedom. B.R. Ambedkar, a major Dalit leader and the primary architect of the Indian Constitution, was a staunch advocate for the cause of social justice. His unrelenting efforts resulted in the incorporation of clauses into the constitution that were intended to eliminate the practice of untouchability and to encourage affirmative action by means of reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. A symbolic rejection of caste-based discrimination and a demand for social and spiritual equality, Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism, along with the conversion of thousands of followers, was both of these things.

In the years after independence, anti-caste movements gathered steam as oppressed populations attempted to confront the structural inequities that existed in their society. The

Dalit Panthers were an organization that was established in Maharashtra in the 1970s with the intention of using direct action and political mobilization to combat the injustices that Dalits were subjected to. Recognition of the necessity for affirmative action that extends beyond Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was acknowledged by the Mandal Commission in the latter part of the 20th century. The commission made recommendations about reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in education and employment. As a result of these changes, discussions have arisen over the effectiveness of reservations as a means of achieving social advancement, as well as the more general issue of social fairness.

Anti-caste groups in the modern era continue to confront the deeply established biases and discriminatory practices that are still prevalent in Indian culture. In an effort to combat the socioeconomic and political marginalization that Dalits experience, organizations such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which is headed by Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, and the Bhim Army, which is led by Chandrashekhar Azad, are working to find solutions. The expression of Dalit identity via the mediums of literature, art, and activism has evolved into a potent method of resistance against oppression based on caste. Furthermore, the advent of Dalit feminists has given a gendered component to the anti-caste movement. This is a recognition of the interconnectedness of caste and gender in the process of constructing experiences of oppression.

The movements that are opposed to caste are not limited to the realms of politics and society; rather, they extend to the realms of cultural expressions as well. A forum has been established for marginalized voices to recount their experiences and challenge prevailing narratives as a result of the emergence of Dalit literature, art, and film. Literature has been utilized as a vehicle by a number of authors, including Bama, Urmila Pawar, and Daya Pawar, amongst others, to communicate the complexities of caste-based persecution and the resiliency of Dalit communities.

Despite the fact that anti-caste groups have achieved tremendous progress in combating discriminatory behaviors, they continue to encounter hurdles and criticism. Certain individuals contend that the reservation system, which was designed to rectify past wrongdoings, has resulted in the perpetuation of caste-based divides and has led to the practice of reverse discrimination. There have been discussions regarding meritocracy and the need of searching for other methods to alleviate socio-economic inequities as a result of the challenges involved in the implementation of affirmative action policies in education and



employment institutions. Furthermore, the impact of caste dynamics in politics has sometimes resulted in the instrumentalization of caste identity for the sake of political gains, which has diverted attention away from concerns of social justice that are more fundamental in nature.

## **POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA**

In India, the period after the country's independence marked the beginning of a new chapter in the intricate story of caste dynamics. This was a time when the country was working to rectify past wrongs and construct a society that was more equitable. The individuals who were responsible for drafting the Constitution of India, lead by B.R. Ambedkar, were aware of the deeply ingrained inequalities that were inherent in the caste system. They made an effort to eliminate these inequalities by establishing a thorough constitutional framework. Not only did the Constitution of India, which was ratified in 1950, proclaim India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic republic, but it also included measures that were intended to eradicate untouchability and promote social justice. For the purpose of elevating historically marginalized communities, particularly the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), Article 17 explicitly abolished untouchability and its practice in any form. Additionally, Article 15(4) introduced affirmative action measures, which included reservations in educational institutions and government jobs.

It was the intention of the introduction of reservations, which was sometimes a difficult and disputed matter, to right past injustices by offering chances for education and employment to those who had been systematically barred from receiving such possibilities. The socioeconomic imbalances that were caused by the caste system were addressed via the use of affirmative action, which was a crucial step in the process. On the other hand, it not only provoked disputes about the effectiveness of reservations in attaining substantive equality, but it also aroused debates about the possibility for caste divides to be perpetuated in society.

In addition, the period after independence was marked by the birth of major social justice groups. These organizations tried to confront the deeply embedded biases and discriminatory practices that continued to exist despite the many legislative changes that were implemented. By fighting for the rights of Dalits and opposing the established power structures that were controlled by higher castes, political leaders such as Kanshi Ram and Mayawati played significant roles in transforming the political landscape. Kanshi Ram established the Bahujan

Samaj Party (BSP) with the intention of bringing together the Bahujans, who make up the bulk of the population and include Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), in opposition to the upper castes' perceived role as the dominant social group. The ascension to power of Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh, which is considered to be one of the most politically crucial states in India, was a momentous occasion for the empowerment of Dalits and the representation of their interests in politics.

According to the recommendations made by the Mandal Commission, which was established in 1979 with the purpose of evaluating the socio-economic backwardness of different groups, reservations should be made for OBCs in education and government positions. The execution of recommendations made by the Mandal Commission in the early 1990s resulted in extensive demonstrations and disputes. While some people saw it as a stride toward social fairness, others saw it as an assault on the ideals of meritocracy. The conclusions of the Mandal Commission placed an emphasis on the intersectionality of caste and class, drawing attention to the fact that caste-based inequities interacted with economic vulnerabilities.

Despite the implementation of these affirmative action policies, the period after the country's independence has not been without of difficulties and complaints. A number of issues have been expressed about the continuation of caste identities and the effects that reservations have on the general advancement of society. Reservations have been called into doubt for their efficacy in elevating underprivileged populations. In addition, the execution of reservations has often been plagued with problems such as allegations of corruption, the exclusion of individuals from the creamy layer, and insufficient representation in certain fields.

## **CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND DEBATES**

As the historical specter of social hierarchies continues to cast its shadow on the social fabric of the nation, contemporary India is confronted with a multitude of difficulties and discussions regarding the deeply ingrained issue of caste inside the country. The continuation of discrimination on the basis of caste continues to be a harsh reality, despite the constitutional protections and affirmative action measures that have been put in place. This prejudice may be seen in a variety of forms, including education, employment, marriage, and social interactions. Remaining discriminatory practices against Dalits and other underprivileged populations, which are often maintained by deeply ingrained societal attitudes and biases, are one of the most significant difficulties that must be addressed. Many



people are unable to access possibilities because educational institutions, which are supposed to be places of social mobility and enlightenment, continue to be places where caste-based discrimination is practiced. The workplace is another sector where systematic prejudices are seen, with examples of Dalits being subjected to discrimination in the areas of employment, promotions, and general professional growth within the workplace.

It is common for inter-caste marriages to be met with opposition and criticism, since marriage, which is a key social institution, becomes a battlefield for caste preconceptions. In spite of the fact that manual scavenging, a demeaning vocation that has historically been associated with Dalits, is prohibited by law, discriminatory practices such as manual scavenging continue to exist. This lack of compliance emphasizes the gap between legislative purpose and the reality that exist on the ground. The invisibility of caste-based discrimination is another issue that has to be addressed. Many incidents of this discrimination are not reported because people are afraid of being punished or being stigmatized by society. The difficulties that people who manage numerous levels of discrimination experience are compounded by the intricacies of caste dynamics, which overlap with other social identities such as gender and religion respectively.

Divergent viewpoints on the efficiency and fairness of such rules are reflected in the ongoing discussion about reservations as a weapon for affirmative action, which continues to be heated. On the other hand, proponents of reserves say that they are a necessary corrective mechanism to remedy past injustices and promote social equality. Critics contend that reservations maintain caste distinctions and stand in the way of meritocracy ideals. An additional degree of complication is added to the discussion by the problem of the "creamy layer," which refers to the perception that within the restricted categories, the advantages of reservations are believed to accrue to a more privileged sector than to the whole. Policymakers have a huge issue when it comes to finding a way to strike a balance between giving chances for those who are the most disadvantaged and preventing the allocation of advantages to a limited group.

The conversation on caste in modern India has spread beyond the traditional confines of the social sciences and has made its way into the realms of technology and digital platforms like never before. Despite the fact that it has made it possible for voices from underrepresented groups to be heard and for tales of prejudice to be shared, the emergence of social media has also brought about new difficulty. This highlights the digital expression of age-old biases,



since there have been reports of instances of online abuse and trolling based on caste. An ethical challenge arises about the obligation of internet platforms to limit hate speech and prejudice when considering the role that technology plays in either sustaining or challenging assumptions of caste.

## CONCLUSION

There is a comprehensive knowledge of the social history of caste in present times, which is reflected in the future scope of the anti-caste movement in India, which draws heavily from its historical origins. The anti-caste movement can be traced back to the ardent efforts of social reformers such as Jyotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. These individuals were attempting to deconstruct the oppressive caste system that had been deeply ingrained in the social fabric of India over the course of many centuries. While we are looking into the future, it is becoming clearer that the anti-caste movement will play a significant part in the process of remaking the social landscape of India. Due to the fact that it is a hierarchical social structure, the caste system in India has historically been responsible for the perpetuation of discrimination and inequality based on birth. This profoundly embedded inequality gave rise to the anti-caste movement, which challenged the age-old conventions that consigned some populations to the periphery of society. This movement evolved as a reaction to the deeply ingrained imbalances. The movement is set to develop into a more inclusive and intersectional force in the future, addressing not just problems of caste but also issues of gender, class, and religion that connect with one another with regard to their intersectionality. Education, urbanization, and the democratization of knowledge are the driving forces behind the current anti-caste movement, which is characterized by a rising awareness and activity over the issue.

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