Chapter Two
Caste and its Origins

Synopsis

*Without an understanding that Dalit exclusion is rooted in the larger social reality of caste the thesis would not be able to make any serious contribution to the existing discourse. Therefore it is imperative to look at caste and its origins because that would throw light on the systemic oppression of Dalits in India which can also be seen in the history of English Language Education which has conventionally been in the hands of upper caste elites.*

2.0. Introduction

As it is known well that caste plays a predominant role in India for the last many years. If we go through the politics of India we can find out many variations in the field of politics. In fact the principle of social justice tends to be ignored by the upper caste people because they have power in their hands. When people have power, they can do anything and earn sound finance which brings cultural change also. When we see the living style of the people belonging to undeveloped (exploited) castes there is a lot of cultural deviation in between the developed and undeveloped castes in Indian society. Those who have the educational background there we can see some sort of change in their lives, when we come across certain lives of people there would not be any change in their living styles because of lack of education. In fact education certainly brings some sort of change in the society. Every society depends upon culture, tradition and customary habits etc. Every group of people in a society has its own culture which can be promoted by way of reciprocal understanding. This is to say that cultural facts are useful
to strengthening the members of a society. Raymond Williams (1988, p.14) in the essay “Culture is Ordinary” from his book *Resources of Hope* says that education “is the process of giving to ordinary members of society its full common meanings and the skills that will enable them to amend these meanings, in the light of their personal and common experience”. Education for Dalits must take into consideration the fact of the “full common meanings” that they are capable of giving to their lives and the “skills” that are peculiar to their communities as well as their experience of living.

The human brain generates ideas, processes them, evaluates their worth etc. But how can a person perform such evaluative tasks? It comes from experience and knowledge and there is no better source of knowledge than education. Education helps us throughout our life. An educated person is better equipped to face any kind of dangers or difficulties that come his way at various stages of life. He not only understands the problems better but is also able to derive more logical and enhanced solutions to the problems. An educated person knows his rights and duties and so does not sustain any wrongs done to him. Many years back, education was provided to only upper caste people and Dalits were denied education. The upper castes wanted education for their children that prepares them for technical and professional life. But due to the efforts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Dalits got recognition in society and the right to educate themselves. Due to his efforts they have reservations in various educational institutions.

The study deals particularly educational exclusionary practices in India with reference to Andhra Pradesh one of the South Indian states on the ground of Dalit untouchables. Basically, this study will be done in the educational status of the Dalit in Andhra Pradesh. It particularly attempts to find the reason behind the Dalit low
involvement and poor achievement in schools and colleges, and examines how the educational opportunity of the Dalit children being affected by their caste status. The research will be shown how social exclusion is determining the educational attainment of the particular caste group of the country.

The research is particularly descriptive. It will first and foremost offer an analysis of the overall situation of Dalit children in their educational areas, and how they are being excluded on grounds of caste, gender, socio-economic status, and also culturally and politically as individuals. In general the research conclusion brings out the argument that caste based discrimination is interrelated with backwardness of Dalits in education. There should be special educational provision for the upliftment of Dalits in education from the government and Dalits should have awareness of the importance of education and its outcome.

According to Gramsci (1999, pp.166-7) "today education is given keeping elites in view whereas what is important is that we need “a common basic education, imparting a general, humanistic, formative culture; this would strike the right balance between development of the capacity for working manually (technically, industrially) and development of the capacities required for intellectual work. From this type of common schooling, via repeated experiments in vocational orientation, pupils would pass on to one of the specialized schools or to productive work”. Dalits need both intellectual education as well as education that will help them to work. The one-sided education given in the schools and colleges benefits the upper caste and upper class children because they have the tools of language beforehand. This kind of an education is oriented
to the needs and demands of the market but not to the overall development of the child who comes from a background of exploitation.

2.1. Caste system and Dalits

This section looks at the history of an old aged traditional Hindu caste system as well the history of Dalits in India and the culture, religion and education of Dalits would also be discussed in detail.

Pruthi (2004) expressed that “the social system of India is dominated by a hierarchical caste system which is closely associated with the Hindu religion, its philosophy, custom and tradition. It is a social institution rooted deeply in India. Moreover, we can say, it is a system of social stratification that divided communities into thousands of endogamous hereditary groups and promoted untouchability and discrimination against certain members of the society”. In the popular understanding, caste system is an ancient institution of the Hindus, based on the ideas of Varna, karma, and dharma written in a text called the Manuscript. According to Ekta Singh (2009) “these ideas translated into a hierarchical society, structured around the notions of purity and pollution. The main ideas, involved in the conception of caste, are homogeneous community, hereditary membership, inter- marriage and inter-dining”.

However, it is an established fact that the Brahman, Kshatriya and Vishya castes maintained superior position than the rest of the casts such as Shudras and Ati Shudra or Punchamas. Of course, Shudras might have been allowed, to some extent, to enter the main stream society, but the same thing has not happened with the Punchamas or untouchables who were even not included in the Chaturvarna or hindu four fold system. Because of this peculiar social stratification, the untouchables, what are of now called
Dalits, have been struggling for thousands of years. Even after many years of Indian independence, caste system deadens paralyses and cripples the people from fruitful activity. Therefore, many argue the fact that caste continuous to survive in some form or the other in present day India is enough to establish that nothing worthwhile has changed in the underlying ideological structure of the Hind mind. Jodka’s (2012) point of view India’s modernization or the associated process of development, democratic governance and secularization are all superficial. The essential realities of caste, inequality and social exclusion, largely survive.

2.2. The word "caste"

According to J.H.Hutton (1963), a well known social anthropologist, the term “caste” has a Spanish and Portuguese origin which means ‘lineage’ or ‘race’. It is derived from the Latin word “castus” which means pure. The Portuguese seafarers, who arrived on the west coast of India for trade in the fifteenth century, were the first ones to use it in the Indian context. The current spelling of the word is after the French word “caste” which appeared in 1740. Before that it was spelt as “cast” which meant ‘race’ or breed of a man which was used as early as 1555 (Jodka, ibid).

2.3. Chaturvarna system

The first literary traces of the caste system are to be found in the Rig-Veda, where three groups are mentioned: Brahmins- priests, Kshatriyas-kings or rulers, Vishyas-merchants. The Purshasuktha hymn, according to Srinivas (1980) however, speaks of four classes originating from four parts of the body of the creator. These four classes are referred to in later literature as Chaturvarna. Therefore, it is understood that the stratification of the Indian society had its origin in the Chaturvarna system or four-fold
According to the Chaturvarna system, Hindu society was divided into four Varnas or classes. And thus the four varnas came to be known as four main castes. They are in the following order:

1. The Brahmins or the class of preaching community or the teaching community.
2. Kshatriya or the class of warriors or soldiers
3. This group is known as “Vishya” or a trading community and the last
4. Group is known as “Shudra” or the artisan or menial class

Beyond, the four varnas were untouchables. These four or five categories were occupied different positions in the status hierarchy, with the Brahmins at the top, followed by the other three varnas in the order mentioned above, with the untouchables (fifth Varna) occupying a position at the very bottom. According to Purusha Sukta, The Chaturvarna is a creation of super God. The 11th and 12th verses of “Purusha Sukta” explain how these four classes were created. Indrajeet (1992) explains that “the Sukta says that these four classes were created from the body of the creator, God, himself. Brahmins were born from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vishyias from thighs of the God and the “Shudras” were created from his feet”.

“This peculiar form of social institution called “Chaturvarna” was accepted as ideal form of social organization in ‘Indo- Aryan’ society’. Madan (1984) to say, “this system not only divided the people into four or five main categories but also has sanctioned several rights in favour of upper groups, especially for Brahmins. Rest of the ‘Varnas’ were imposed with certain duties, particularly on the “Shudras” and followers. The law of Chaturvarna prohibits the Shudras from pursuing knowledge, from engaging
in economic enterprise, and from bearing arms, with the result that they could never revolt and became ever reconciled to eternal servitude as an inescapable fate”.

2.4. Features of Caste System

Many scholars have worked and much has been written on the caste system. To know the nature and characteristics of caste, it is better to look at the definitions given by eminent social anthropologists. Some of the famous definitions, discussed in Ambedkar’s (1916) famous book “Castes: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development” are as follows: According to Senart (1975) a French authority, defines a caste as "a close corporation, in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary: equipped with a certain traditional and independent organisation, including a chief and a council, meeting on occasion in assemblies of more or less plenary authority and joining together at certain festivals: bound together by common occupations, which relate more particularly to marriage and to food and to questions of ceremonial pollution, and ruling its members by the exercise of jurisdiction, the extent of which varies, but which succeeds in making the authority of the community more felt by the sanction of certain penalties and, above all, by final irrevocable exclusion from the group."

Nesfield defines a caste as "a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community."

According to Sir H. Risley (1999) "a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional callings and are regarded by
those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community."

Ketkar (2002) defines caste as "a social group having two characteristics: (i) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born; (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group."

However, there are some other definitions also. Some of them have been discussed below:

According to Andre Beteille (1969), caste is a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system.

Ghurye (1969) has defined caste and enlisted its six outstanding characteristics: Endogamy, Hierarchy, Restrictions on consensual relations between castes, Restriction on choice of occupation, Civil and religious disabilities and Privileges of certain groups, and Untouchability. It follows that membership is fixed for life, because the individual cannot alter his caste by any effort of his own. Further he makes a distinction between caste societies and class societies by arguing that 'the status of a person in a caste society depended not on his wealth as in the classes of modern Europe, but on the traditional importance of the caste in which he had the luck of being born.

Hutton (1981) points out that caste provides the individual members with a fixed social milieu, a prominent body of association which controls almost all his behaviour and contacts. Finally, the popular definition given by Ambedkar is as follows:
According to Ambedkar (1945), Caste in India means "an artificial chopping off the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another the custom of endogamy. Thus, the conclusion is inevitable that endogamy is the only characteristic that is peculiar to cast". Furthermore, he says, endogamy is a key to the mystery of the caste system.

Though the above definitions of caste vary from one to one and person to person, they may explain the origin and the principal characteristic features of the caste system. According to several sources in the literature, many social anthropologists use similar principal characteristics of caste. They are as follows:

2.4.1. Segmental division of the society

Ambedkar (1945) explains, castes were groups with well-developed life styles of their own. The membership of a person in the caste is determined by birth and not by choice. The status of a person depends not on the amount of wealth he possess but on the rank that his caste enjoys in the Hindu society. Furthermore, Caste membership could be taken away, by other caste members, for 'violation of caste rules'. Every individual is assigned a permanent status according to his parentage. Thus, speaking in a sociological terms, caste is an ascribed or closed group.

2.4.2. Hierarchy

Jodkha (2012) defines "there is a definite scheme of social precedence amongst castes. Each group occupied a specific status in the overall framework of hierarchy. For instance, Brahmins at the top, followed in order by Kshatriyas, Vishyas, Shudras, and Ati-Shudras. It is a system of institutionalized inequality. An individual's rank was determined by the rank of his caste".
2.4.3. Purity and pollution

The concept “purity and pollution” was first introduced by Louis Dumont (1988) in his famous book “Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications”. According to him, occupations were usually ranked on a purity and pollution scale. For example, a lower caste person should not chant the mantras at the temples. In addition, a higher caste person should not touch a lower caste person, particularly a person from ati-Shudra community. Dwarakanath Gupta’s (1999) point of view “the breaking of rules makes the higher castes “impure” and they have to perform certain prescribed rituals. The concept of purity and pollution plays a crucial role in maintaining the required distance among the different castes”.

2.4.4. Endogamy

Marriages are restricted to members of the same caste. Caste groups observe strict endogamy. According to Ambedkar (1945) “endogamy is the most fundamental characteristic feature on which the caste system is built” and according to Ghurye (1969), “endogamy is the Core and soul of caste”. In India caste forbids its members to marry persons from the other castes. But the Indian legislation has declared all inter-caste marriages as valid.

2.4.5. Occupational Specialization

Sanjay Paswan, (et al, 2002) explains “occupational specialization has been one of the major features of caste system. The caste position in the hierarchy was decided on the nature of the occupation that people possess. Since caste system is ascribed by birth, it naturally led to the occupation being fixed and transmitted from father to son. For
example, the son of shoemaker pursues the occupation of his father; the son of blacksmith becomes a blacksmith while the son of a carpenter becomes a carpenter”.

2.4.6. Restrictions on social intercourse

As per Ghanshyam Shah (2002) pointed out that “this character tells that there are restrictions on eating and drinking with members of other castes. Actions like taking food and drinking water from a person depend on the caste of the person how he is ranked in the social hierarchy”. Furthermore, a vegetarian is considered superior to a non-vegetarian. On this account, the vegetarians are regarded as belonging to superior caste. Contrast to this, the non vegetarians especially, pork and beef eaters are regarded as belonging to inferior castes.

2.4.7. Distinctions in Custom, Dress and Speech.

According to Srinivas(1962), “each caste has a culture which is to some extent autonomous. Lower castes were prohibited from taking on the dress ornaments and customs of the higher castes. He further mentions that mentioned a number of incidents where conflicts rose due to the imitation of dress and other customs of the upper castes by the lower castes”.

2.5. Theories of origin of Caste

Many of the social scientists, interested in the Indian caste system, say it is the product of cultural conflict between Aryan and non-Aryan. Some social scientists argued that the division of labour was the basis of the origin of caste the Indian caste system. Others tried to give a racial explanation of the origin of caste system. Thus, there are various theories put forward to the study about the origin caste system in India. The explanation concerning the theories of origin of caste system is as follows.
2.5.1. Traditional theory

The traditional theory believes that the caste system has been established by the divine ordinance or at least with the divine approval. This theory goes in line with Varna system which is found in Purushasukta of the Rig-Veda. According to Rajendra, K. Sharma (2004) this theory Brahmins were born out of mouth, Kshatriya out of the hands, Vishyas out of stomach or things while the Shudras out of feet. Thus, different functions of the body, these castes have to perform the function accordingly.

2.5.2. Political theory

This theory was originally pro-pounded by French scholar Abbe Dubois (1816) who lived in Mysore in the first half of the 19th century. He explains that the caste system was developed and maintained by the Brahmins to maintain their higher status. This theory was also supported by Ghurye (1969). In his own words: “I may conclude that caste in India is a Brahmanic child of the Indo- Aryan culture, cradled in the land of the Ganges country”. Furthermore, this theory holds a view about the caste system that in caste system, the occupations held by the Brahmans and Kshatriyas have been considered as the best and the highest.

2.5.3. Occupational Theory

The occupational theory of origin of caste was developed by John. C. Nesfield, a sociologist who worked on the census of India at a certain period. According to him, occupation is the main base of the theory of the caste-system. He explains that the origin of caste system can be found in the nature of the work performed by the various groups of people. As per the logic of this theory, the hierarchy of castes is associated with the hierarchy of occupations. The superior castes follow “pure” conditions whereas inferior
castes follow “impure” occupations. To quote his words: “Function and function alone is responsible for the origin of the caste system.”

2.5.4. Religious theory

This theory was developed by an eminent scholar Emile Senart (1975). According to this theory, religion had a prominent place in ancient India. The king was considered to be image of God. This king allotted different positions to different functional groups, at the top of which were the priests who were mediator to God. In addition to this, this theory also explains that that caste system has grown out of the restriction on food habits. Senart has tried to explain the origin of caste system on the basis of prohibitions regarding sacramental food. According to him, on account of different types of duties they grew up certain prohibitions regarding sacramental food. Each group worshipping a particular deity gradually assumed caste status.

2.5.5. Racial theory

Herbert Risley (1999), a British ICS officer, is the chief protagonist of the racial theory of origin of the caste system. He claims that the origin of the caste system in India is due to racial differences. In his book ‘The people of India’ he says that there are two factors that have become responsible for the development of caste system in India. Those two factors are:
a). Racial differences and
b) Endogamous marriage.

According to Risley (1999) “the racial differences occurred in between the Aryans and Dasus. The indigenous groups of ‘Dasus’ were defeated by the Aryans. Aryans being a superior race was not willing to give equal status to Dasus. As a result of
the struggle of different racial groups endogamous groups were born. They tried to maintain their racial and cultural purity and also maintain their unity”. Chronologically, this gave a rise to thousands of sub castes. As a result of this, occupations were fixed for these different classes and later on the caste system developed. Therefore, he concludes that “castle was an institution evolved by the Aryans in the attempt to preserve the purity of their own stock, and afterwards expand and adopted by the influence of a series of fictions, to fit an endless variety of social religious and historical conditions.

The interpretation of racial theory (Aryan) is early Indian history. The Aryan theory has a centuries long history in India. The theory of Aryan’s in India, as a controversy and conflict. First of the research observers the basic function of Aryan and their exist in India. Who the Aryans are? Are the Aryans homogenous people of Indian land or are they the outsiders (foreigners) of India? For this anthropologists, historians, and the social scientists have different opinions like they came (Aryans) from the place called the Arctic and another opinion says the Aryans belonging to a place called middle Asia. The theory of Aryan race is an on-going controversial topic and still a site of contestation in the academic space.

2.5.6. Evolutionary theory

According to Vidyabhushan and Sachdev (1978), that “this theory, the caste system has originated as a result of the process of the evolution. It is said that, caste system did not come into existence all of a sudden or at a particular time. According to this theory, the caste system has evolved gradually. There were many factors gave rise to the formation of castes based on the pretty distinctions from time to time. The caste system is built with a mixer of Varna system, racial factors of Aryan and non- Aryans,
and the so-called belief in the doctrine of karma. This theory also says that the rules and restrictions that were introduced by Hindu Kings caused the caste system to be established. The other factors like occupational divisions of society and the economic condition of the social groups have sanctioned the rigid caste system in India”.

2.5.7. Ethical theory

Ramesh Chandra (2005) the theory explains about origin of caste system in India was propounded by S. C. Roy. According to this theory, caste system originated from the class system of Indo Aryans, the tribal system of Pre-Dravidians and conflict among the occupations. This theory, while emphasizing the philosophical aspect of the caste system, does not explain the contradictory and complex circumstances leading to the evolution of caste system.

2.5.8. Mana Theory

This theory was associated with Hutton (1963). According to this theory, the caste system was originated from the religious and rituals of the non-Aryan groups particularly the theory of mana. According to him mana is mystic power. He says the traditions of endogamy, untouchability etc. have their roots in defense against the influence of Mana.

Whatever the origin of caste system, it became the most pernicious institution among the Hindus in India. Today also we see the harmful acts of this system which forces the orthodox Hindus to follow the strict endogamy, untouchability and inequality on the basis of caste.

The entire discussion of caste is to show a basis for what eventually can be seen as the discourse of Dalit exclusion. Though untouchability is legally abolished in the social world we still see certain forms of institutional discrimination that are being
practiced on a day-to-day basis. In order to understand what that discrimination is all about one needs to look at caste as an independent reality on its own. In the next chapter, I intend to enter the domain of English Language Education in order to examine how exclusion is built into an important area that becomes the ideological basis for the exclusion itself.