CASTE AND BACKWARD CLASSES

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CASTE AND BACKWARD CLASSES

(1) INTRODUCTION:

Caste system in India is so universal, that no study of Indian social, economic and political institutions, would be complete without a reference to it. Besides, caste constitutes the very basis of the structure of Backward classes. The problem of Backward classes viz. 'The Scheduled Castes', 'The Scheduled Tribes', 'Other Backward classes', and 'Denotified Communities', has arisen chiefly from the social structure of Hindu society. Hence a brief review of the caste system from different angles is imperative.

A caste in India fairly definable as an endogamous group or even as a collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, whose members follow traditionally a single occupation or certain cognate occupations, have by fact or fiction a common origin and are generally deemed to form a homogeneous unit, whose constituent parts are more closely allied to one another than to any other section of society.

A.L. Kroeber defined caste as 'an endogamous hereditary subdivision of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank or social esteem in comparison with other such subdivisions'.

1. Encyclopaedia Brittanica, Vol. 4, 1910, P.
2. Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Vol
A caste is an organism of a lower type; it grows by fission, and each step in its growth detracts from its power to advance or even to preserve the art which it professes to practise.\(^3\)

Caste has been variously defined by both Indian and European scholars. The factors emphasised by scholars in their definitions centre round endogamy, hereditary professions, exclusive social classes with codified social distance, ritual ranking of society, etc. However, there is no unanimity among the scholars as regards the definition of the term 'caste' and its genesis. This is because, the complexity of the problem defies an impartial treatment of the subject.

Of late, Taya Zinkin has arrived at the conclusion, that caste is not class, it is not colour, it is not Aryan or non-Aryan, and it is not occupation. But then what is it? She very humourously remarks 'It is much easier to say what caste is not, than what caste is'.\(^4\)

(2) ORIGIN OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

Origin of the caste system is a much discussed problem. Innumerable theories are advanced and the most

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3. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.1, 1907, p. 343.
for livelihood. Kshatriya was bound to protect the people. Vaishya had to undertake business, cultivation of land etc. Shudra was destined to render service to the other three groups. This functional classification was considered important for the smooth running of administration.

Caste system in its original form - Chathurvarna- was dynamic, liable to change according to the corresponding change in the traits of individuals. According to the Varna theory, 'Guna' or character was chiefly responsible for the classification of castes. But the Varna theory cannot be interpreted in the strict sense of colour theory. Physical colour was not so much emphasised as the intrinsic qualities of the people. The intrinsic qualities were symbolised in colour. The 'Satvaguna' of Brahmans was symbolised in white colour, 'Rajas' or passion was symbolised with the red colour of valour for which stood the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas were attributed to yellow colour, the lust for wealth, and the Shudras were supposed to be of a 'tamasic' nature of dark. This fourfold division of society was referred in the Bhagavad Gita as:

The four orders of society (viz. the Brahman, the Kshatriya, the the Vaishya and the Shudra) were created by Me classifying them according to their prenatal qualities and apportioning corresponding duties to them; though the author of this creation, know Me

the immortal Lord, to be a non-doer. 7

Brahmans were exalted to the highest social status for the presence of virtues like self-sacrifice, self-control, selfless motives and profound thought. Then came the Kshatriyas for their heroic venture to put down anti-social elements.

Next in order were the Vaishyas to maintain the moral standards in business, as wealth constituted the social trust of the country. Likewise, the menial service of the Shudras was never degraded but viewed mainly from the angle of spirituality.

Coming to the critical theories of caste, Wesfield was of the firm conviction that 'Function and function only, as I think was the foundation upon which the whole caste system of India was built up'. 8 His theory runs as follows:

Each caste or group of castes represents one or other of those progressive stages of culture which have marked the industrial development of mankind, not only in India, but in every other country in the world wherein some advance has been made from primeval savagery to the arts and industries of civilized life. The rank of any caste as high or low depends upon whether the industry represented by the caste belongs to an advanced or backward stage of culture; and thus the natural history of human industries affords the chief clue to the graduations as well as to the formation of Indian castes. 9

7. The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, 12.
9. Ibid.
Sir Denali Ibbetson's hypothesis of caste centred around tribal division, functional guilds and religion. To quote his theory in brief:

Thus, if my theory be correct, we have the following steps in the process by which caste has been evolved in the Punjab -

1. The tribal divisions common to all primitive societies;
2. The guilds based upon hereditary occupation common to the middle life of all communities;
3. The exaltation of the priestly office to a degree unexampled in other countries;
4. The exaltation of the Levitical blood by a special insistence upon the necessarily hereditary nature of occupation;
5. The preservation and support of this principle by the elaboration from the theories of the Hindu creed or cosmogony of a purely artificial set of rules, regulating marriage and inter-marriage, declaring certain occupations and foods to be impure and polluting, and prescribing the conditions and degree of social intercourse permitted between the several castes. Add to this the pride of social rank and the pride of blood which are natural to man, and which alone could reconcile a nation to restrictions at once irksome from a domestic and burdensome from a material point of view; and it is hardly to be wondered at that caste should have assumed the rigidity which distinguishes it in India. 10

Senart emphasised the family or gentile theory as the basis of 'caste'. According to him the functional theory of caste system was superficial because, dislocation of the functional division, where members of the different communities performing functions contrary to their allotment by the caste

rigidity was widely seen in the country. He opined that:

'It would be an exaggeration to imagine Hindu society as enclosed according to the occupations of its members in a chessboard of unchangeable and impassable squares'.

His theory of caste was based on usage and tradition. He remarked:

'The social organism of India, the play of its motive forces, is moreover regulated infinitely more by custom, varying according to locality and baffling in its complexity, than by legal formulae laid down in authentic and easily accessible texts'.

He argued that caste was but a normal development of ancient Aryan institutions adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing in India. The parallelism put forward in the development of his theory was, the close correspondence between the social organisation of the Hindus and that of the Greeks and Romans. He further observed, that the caste system:

By the domination it claimed for the Brahmans it preserved a rigidity concerning religious scruples which was reflected in the severity of the caste rules; it served as a basis for that hierarchy which has become an integral part of the system and facilitated its establishment by lending peculiar force to the ideas of purity which, generally speaking, determine the levels of the social scale.

11. E. Sonart, Caste in India, 1930, P. 33.

12. Ibid. P. 2.

13. Ibid. P. 197.
Sir Herbert Risley presented his theory of caste on 'a basis of fact and a superstructure of fiction'. The basis of fact was, the invasion of a country by another instils the principle of racial distinctions. So caste system started with the fact of racial distinctions after the Aryan invasion of the indigenous Dravidians.

Once started in India, the principle was strengthened, perpetuated, and extended to all ranks of society by the fiction that people who speak a different language, dwell in a different district, worship different gods, eat different food, observe different social customs, follow a different profession, or practise the same profession in a slightly different way must be so unmistakably aliens by blood that intermarriage with them is a thing not to be thought of. 14

The peculiar characteristics of the Indian intellect which contributed to the growth of the caste system according to Risley were:

- Its lax hold of facts, its indifference to action,
- Its absorption in dreams, its exaggerated reverence for tradition, its passion for endless division and sub-division,
- Its acute sense of minute technical distinctions, its pedantic tendency to press a principle to its furthest logical conclusion, and its remarkable capacity for imitating and adapting social ideas and usages of whatever origin. 15

Modern theories of caste attribute racial factors to the genesis of caste system. The theory developed by G.S. Ghurye reads as follows:

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15. Ibid. P. 275-76.
Basing my calculation on some of the physical measurements taken by anthropologists and using one of the statistical devices to gauge the nearness of distance of one caste from another in the totality of those measurements, I have established a general correspondence between finer physical type and high position in the caste hierarchy.\textsuperscript{16}

The physical affinities of high castes and their marked separation from low castes are further illustrated in the caste hierarchy of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Bengal and Bombay. He further observes: 'This racial origin of the principal feature of the caste system is further supported by the early term 'Varna' meaning colour, used to specify the orders in society'.\textsuperscript{17}

Similar ideas are expressed by N.K.Dutt,\textsuperscript{18} as regards the origin of caste system. But in the course of his argument he paves the way for the conclusion, that caste is a function of more than one variable, race, occupation, language, residence and religion.

Thus a number of theories have been advanced on the genesis of caste system. But unfortunately there is no unanimity among the scholars as regards the origin and nature of caste system. The complexity of the problem has influenced the

\textsuperscript{16} G.S.Ghurye, \textit{Caste and Class in India}, 1957, P. 176.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. P. 178-79.
\textsuperscript{18} N.K.Dutt, \textit{Origin and Growth of Caste in India}, 1931.
scholars to emphasise one sided views. From the Varna theory of caste system to the modern critical theories of caste, there is great divergence of views. Some authors emphasise the religious aspect of caste, some describe caste as the functional division of society, while others rely on racial factors, custom and usage, tradition, tribal divisions, etc. The conclusion arrived at by Herbert Risley after a detailed study of the problem is:

The origin of caste is from the nature of the caste an insoluble problem. We can only frame more or less plausible conjectures, derived from the analogy of observed facts. The particular conjecture now put forward is based - firstly, upon the correspondence that can be traced between certain caste gradations and certain variations of physical type; secondly, on the development of mixed races from stocks of different colour; and thirdly, on the influence of fiction. 19

A detailed study of the social institution of caste points to the direction, that a number of factors have contributed to the genesis and growth of this institution at different intervals. Since the institution was subject to several influences, the basis once accepted to be the origin, ceased to be the sole factor with the transformation of the social institution. For instance, 'Guna' or character was emphasised in the Varna Theory of caste, which is incidentally the oldest and the widely accepted theory. But with the lapse of time, we find references

being made to the factor of 'birth' as the sole determinant of caste in Mahabharata about 700 B.C. With the Aryan invasion of the indigenous Dravidians, we find several theories springing up emphasising the functional division, racial distinction, etc., constituting the origin of caste system. Modern practice has travelled very far from the early origins. Hence from the above analysis it could be safely concluded, that the genesis of caste system is attributable to a number of factors - 'Guna' or character, birth, occupation or guild, tribal division, racial distinction, tradition and usage. To emphasise a single factor would be to err on the origin of caste system. The only consolation that the study of caste system has offered to the social scientist in the words of Herbert Risley is: 'The search for origins, like the quest of the Sangreal, possesses endless fascination, and if it does not yield any very tangible results, it at least has the merit of encouraging research'.

(3) CASTE SYSTEM - AN ANALYSIS

Caste system is not a peculiar phenomenon found only in India. Analogous institutions are found in almost all the major civilizations of ancient times, even though they may vary in intricate details. Stratification of society is found even in the advanced countries of the world. Social distinctions

20. Ibid. P. 258.
and social distance are common in all societies. In a democracy egalitarian ideology holds good in theory. It may even sound a basic reality before the court of law. But in actual practice inequality is an accepted social order in all countries of the world. Inequalities in income, wealth, social prestige, social standing, political power, intellectual abilities, etc. do exist and they cannot be ruled out absolutely. Ranking is therefore a common feature in all societies. But the social stratification of society in India stands out distinct because, the basis of stratification is 'hereditary' rather than 'individuality'.

Institutions similar to the caste system were found in the primitive societies of Egypt, Japan, China, Persia, Greece, Rome, Ceylon, Siam, South Africa, Burma, Germany and England, etc. In Egypt, the society was divided into three classes - landowners, serfs and the slaves. Occupations were traditional and hereditary, particularly the artisans were prevented from professing any occupation other than their hereditary trade. Likewise, sacerdotal literature of ancient Persia makes a reference to the division of society into four classes - priests, warriors, cultivators and artisans. In China, society was divided into four orders - gentlemen, agriculturists, artisans and merchants. In Japan the five distinct social divisions were - hereditary soldiers (the Samurai), farmers, artisans, traders and Eetas. The Eetas of Japan compare favourably with the Untouchables.
living in the outskirts of the cities and villages. Roman society was divided into the patricians, the plebeians and the slaves. Similarly, Anglo-Saxon English society was marked with three social groups - the nobleman, the common free man and the slaves. In Europe, occupations involving manual labour were rated very low in social estimation. But here, the option was given to the goldsmiths who in spite of being grouped under the artisan class were rated high, as their work involved brain work more than manual labour. German society of the eighteenth century was marked with five divisions - Princes, nobles, burghers, peasants and serfs.

review
A brief of the social divisions which prevailed in different parts of the world helps us to demarcate the distinct features of the caste system. The notable distinction is, the term 'caste' is not found in any social stratification. Instead, we come across the term 'class'. This poses another problem as to whether 'caste' can be equated with 'class', are they synonymous? But this is only a hypothesis. Caste stands altogether on a different plane and it has very remote comparison or correspondence to class. Yet another distinct trait is, the caste organisation as found in India is very comprehensive and all in all. It regulated not merely the vocational set up of different social orders but even catered to their moral behaviour. Apart from this, there was a social injunction, that the failure to observe caste rules would render people to be out-castes. On
the contrary, the scope of class organisation was limited in
the sense, that it regulated only the professional behaviour
of the people. It left untouched the social life of the people.
Moreover, class distinctions in Western societies were based on
race, language, rank and social status. But under the caste
hierarchy 'birth' was made the determinant for social stratifi-
cation. Social isolation among the people professing the same
religious faith was the glaring feature of the caste system as
contrasted with the class organisation. It is true, that in
both class and caste organisation public service ranked high
and the menial jobs were rated low. Class hierarchy was found
in all mediaeval civilizations, so also social stratification
and certain taboos on eating, marriage, etc. But the practice
of 'Untouchability' based on ceremonial purity was a peculiar
trait found only in the Indian caste organisation.

(4) A SURVEY OF THE CASTE SYSTEM:

Caste as conceived by the Varna Theory had flexibility.
Even though there was fourfold classification of society, it
rested on the basis of intrinsic qualities of individuals. There
was some spirituality behind the caste structure rather than
absurd rigidity. 'Guna' or character gave way to 'birth' as the
determinant of caste during the time of Mahabharata (700 B.c.).
With the Aryan invasion functional classification became marked.
But there was mobility of occupation. Even as remarked by
Dr. Buhler\textsuperscript{21}, that occupations were not hereditary in Vedic or Buddhist times. The functional classification emphasised more the spirit of co-operation. But gradually there was functional disintegration with every fresh invasion of the country. The result was, a number of castes professing varied occupations came into existence. From the original fourfold division, there were as many as Fiftyseven mixed castes which were ethnic or functional in origin.\textsuperscript{22} But still the caste system aimed at a synthesis of the diverse social and cultural elements in the country. It was a sort of social security for racial groups of different types. It illustrated the comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration of races and the co-operation of cultures. 'Paradoxical as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust.'\textsuperscript{23}

Later, the stamping of occupation to particular caste of a specific region became the order of the day. This specific allotment of functions was necessitated by the self-sufficiency principle. Every village was a self sufficient unit and so to avoid competition, caste groups on functional basis were formed. Rural India with agricultural economy was

\textsuperscript{21} Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXV.
\textsuperscript{22} Manu Samhita, X, 8. P. 48-49.
\textsuperscript{23} S.Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life, 1948, P. 93.
able to maintain an autonomous and compact system of functional division of society. The most important thing to be noticed in this context was castes acted as occupational guilds. There was united action on the part of the caste groups because of their dual membership to the caste on the one hand and occupation on the other. Thus caste system acted not only as a political stabiliser but also was responsible for the preservation of the cultural heritage of our hoary past. As Taya Zinkin has observed:

In the long turmoil that was Indian history, caste held together the fabric of society; the integrity of the village was built round the framework of caste; the survival of Hinduism under Muslim and Christian onslaughts might well have been impossible without the devotion of peasant and scholar alike to caste-customs and caste-ritual. 24

Yet another unique feature to be noted is, the people opted social security and solidarity rather than equality. This was the keynote for the survival of functional classification of society. The lower castes were impressed by the Hindu philosophy, that whatever may be one's caste Brahman or Shudras, one can attain perfection by doing well the duties assigned to him and remaining within the fold of his caste. People were not induced to aspire for higher social status. The performance of duties rather than the demand for rights was emphasised. The

sense of unity and social harmony regulated society. Functional classification of castes worked well for centuries chiefly because, of the social divisions were more conscious of their responsibilities and duties rather than rights and privileges.

Gradually, caste system began by the principles of endogamy and traditional occupation, culminated in the vivisection of society with the ideas of purity and impurity. It sowed the seeds of segregation and exclusiveness in short the 'touch-me-notism' in Hindu society. In due course, the caste structure deteriorated beyond repair. It sealed society into water-tight social divisions isolated from each other by imposing taboos on food, matrimony, social get-togethers, etc. The social distance between the sub-divisions of the same caste was made so great, that a person born in a particular caste (sub-division) had no mobility in occupation or mingling with other sub-divisions for purposes of marriage. The only mobility was found in the violation of caste rules which meant social boycott and extermination. A.B. Wadia has commented on this malady as: 'the high metaphysics of the Upanishads and the ethics of the Gita have been reduced to mere words by the tyranny of caste'. 25 Thus, at a time when artisans and cultivators breathed-in an air of freedom and liberty in Western countries their Indian counterparts were imprisoned within

25. A.R. Wadia, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, P. 368.
the folds of the rigid caste system.

The perverted motives of caste system which later took hold of Hindu society were - the rigid concept of social hierarchy, the theory and practice of pollution, birth as the lever for selecting profession, and static social structure. Primary importance was given to a man's 'birth' in a particular caste for deciding his 'be-all' and 'end-all'. As J.H. Hutton remarked:

From the point of view of the individual member of a caste, the system provides him from birth with a fixed social milieu from which neither wealth nor poverty, success nor disaster can remove him, unless of course he so violates the standards of behaviour laid down by his caste that it spews him forth - temporarily or permanently.26

The climax of the perverted motive of caste system culminated in propounding the theory of pollution to extremities. This social malady of India brought in its train a pandora's box. As Dr. A.R. Wadia rightly pointed out: 'Worst of all she has become the home of Untouchability and unapproachability which have branched her with the curse of Cain'.27

The theory and practice of pollution was exalted to the maximum. It was asserted that the touch and even sight of the untouchables caused pollution to members of high castes particularly the Brahmans. The untouchables were deprived of


all services of the community - use of public wells, entry to temples, schools, medical aid and other facilities, for fear of contamination, Brahmanism was in due course attacked for creating rigid social distinctions. Dr. Ambedkar pointed out: 'Inequality is the official doctrine of Brahmanism and the suppression of the lower classes aspiring to equality has been looked upon by them and carried out by them without remorse as their bounden duty'.28 'Dharma' the keynote of the Hindu social organisation gave way to 'Artha', and 'Kama' subsequently. Caste system started with the spirit of social harmony turned out a sort of plague hampering the progress of Hindu society. It was incessantly felt by the intelligensia of the country, that the eradication of caste system was inevitable for the integration of society. Dr. Ambedkar emphatically stated: 'The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. 29

Thus, caste system which was the outcome of trust and tolerance, co-operation and consolidation became an institution of discrimination and segregation repugnant to the spirit of Hinduism. As Radhakrishnan pointed out: 'Though it has now degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and

29. Ibid.
develop the spirit of exclusiveness, these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system'.

The nations of caste discrimination and social exclusiveness were repudiated from times immemorial. The principles of unity of human race and brotherhood of mankind were taught by the great religious thinkers from Buddha down to Vivekananda. Each of these thinkers bequeathed the message of universal brotherhood. Indian history is replete with social and religious movements starting with the Upanishads and followed by a number of isms (Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Sikhism, etc.), working towards the eradication of caste system. These movements inspired in the people a liberal social philosophy preaching the gospel of equality. But it is our misfortune, that in spite of a rich cultural heritage and high ideals we fostered a rigid caste system.

Till the advent of the British rule, the Brahmins enjoyed high social status in caste hierarchy. But gradually the caste structure started showing signs of decay and disintegration. With the rapid industrialisation of the country, there was a further setback in the rigid observance of caste rules. The dwindling of cottage industries and handicrafts in the face of foreign competition and the destruction of village autonomy gave a rude shock to the caste structure necessitating

some modifications. The establishment of a uniform British law throughout the country undermined the integrity of the caste structure. It deprived caste councils to decide civil and criminal cases concerned with the members of the particular castes. This put an end to legal inequalities arising out of the exercise of justice by different caste councils. Besides, they issued a warning to all educational institutions against the segregation of depressed class pupils. Grants were withdrawn to schools which practised segregation. The universalisation of education by the Britishers, gave a setback to Brahmanical supremacy in the field of education. As a result of this the passive submission of the lower orders to higher castes ceased to operate. It stirred the intelligentsia of the lower castes to organise popular movements like the Non-Brahman Movement in South India, to cast off the domination of caste Hindus. The new class of intellectuals trained under the system of English education was chiefly responsible for weakening the rigidity of the caste system. The political writings of Rousseau, J.S. Mill and others infused ideas of liberty and equality among the educated classes. Naturally the newly educated sections who were denied the benefits of education for ages, felt the need for improving the social status of their communities. The emergence of a new class of intellectuals imbued with the spirit of liberty spontaneously found in the writings of Western thinkers realised the futility of Hindu
orthodoxy. This influence of English literature on Democracy was far reaching. The principle of popular sovereignty left a lasting impression on the minds of the younger generations. There developed in the country, an urge to end caste superiority and substitute in its place the dignity of individual personality and the unity of the nation.

Here it is relevant to touch the debit side of the British impact on caste system. It is true that the British regime did many things to put down caste system. But they did not evince interest in shattering the caste institution root and branch. In the first place, the census enumeration on caste basis definitely produced opposite results. As remarked by the census superintendent Mr. Middleton:

Caste in itself was rigid among the higher castes, but malleable amongst the lower. We pigeon-holed everyone by caste, and if we could not find a true caste for them, labelled them with the name of an hereditary occupation. We deplore the caste system and its effects on social and economic problems, but we are largely responsible for the system we deplore.31

They encouraged caste consciousness in States by way of reserving seats in the Legislature on caste basis. Electorates were divided on the basis of religion. They further divided the separate electorates by reserving certain seats in each constituency to Non-Muslims, as they were supposed

to be underrepresented in the country's legislature. This method of reservation created cleavages between different communities, Brahmans Vs Non-Brahmans in Madras, Maravhas with the rest of the population in Bombay etc. Caste consciousness was encouraged in a different way. Some vestige of this conflict is prevalent even to the present day. The conflict of Brahman Vs Non-Brahman started during the British regime is continuing to operate particularly in Madras (Dravida Munnetra Kazagam Party). Thus, caste which was mainly a social institution entered the arena of Politics during the British regime. In course of time it became a problem to be tackled on the political and social plane at par. It would be no exaggeration if we remark, that caste element was revived rather than eliminated during the British regime. Caste system was seen under a new garb in British rule.

Coming to the mobility of occupations in the caste system, Brahmans had the option of going in for any trade other than their own and meanwhile retain the same social status accorded to them. Mobility was strictly restricted in the case of lower orders. Even thinkers who refused to accept the rigidity of the functional theory of caste, admit that preferential treatment was given to Brahmans in the choice of occupation. J.N.Bhattacharya, a firm believer in the social harmony of caste system admits: 'caste is often described by
European scholars as an iron chain which has fettered each
class to the profession of their ancestors, and has rendered
any improvement on their part impossible. This view may, to
some extent, be regarded as correct so far as the lower classes
are concerned'. 32 Emile Senart also observed: 'It is perhaps
among the Brahmans that there occurs the most complicated
mixture of occupations and confusion of trades'. 33 By way of
illustration he further remarked: 'People who proudly bear
the title of Brahman and to whom everywhere this assures great
respect may be found engaged in all sorts of tasks; priests and
ascetics, learned men and religious beggars, but also cooks and
soldiers, scribes and merchants, cultivators and shepherds, even
masons and chair-porters'. 34

The change of social status was visibly found among
Non-Brahmans in the course of the evolution of caste system.
There were chances of the last three orders getting merged
with each other by improving their social status. But birth
was the sole criterion for classifying Brahmans. People born
in Non-Brahman castes had no chance of calling themselves
Brahmans or raising their social status at par with Brahmans by
any means learning or wealth. Birth as the chief determinant

34. Ibid. P. 35-36.
of caste was markedly found among Brahmans.

We may quote as typical of the movement for consolidation the desire of the artisan castes in many parts of India to appear under a common name; thus carpenters, smiths, goldsmiths and some others of similar occupations desired in various parts of India to be returned by a common denomination such as Visvalarma or Jangida, usually desiring to add a descriptive noun implying that they belonged to one of the two highest varnas of Hinduism, either Brahman or Rajput. 35

The lower classes thus displayed the desire to rise in social estimation by attributing new designations to their caste groups.

The difficulties wrought by such community fancies in changing the nomenclature of their castes have been well stated by the Superintendent of Census operations for Madras, thus:

Sorting for caste is really worthless unless nomenclature is sufficiently fixed to render the resulting totals close and reliable approximations. Had caste terminology the stability of religious returns caste sorting might be worthwhile. With the fluidity of present appellations it is certainly not .... 227,000 Ambattans have become 10,000 ....; Navithan, Nai, Nai Brahman, Navutiyan, Pariyari claim about 140,000 - all terms unrecorded or untabulated in 1921 .... Individual fancy apparently has some part in caste nomenclature. 36

36. Ibid. P. 432.
Some new ranks claimed by old castes are recorded in Table I.37

### TABLE I

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<tr>
<th>OLD NAME</th>
<th>1921 CLAIMS</th>
<th>1931 CLAIMS</th>
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<td>BRAHMAN</td>
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<td>KSHATRIYA</td>
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<td>RAJPUT</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHAMAR</td>
<td>BAIHYA RISHI</td>
<td>GALHOT RAJPUT</td>
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Thus there was a tendency among lower castes to attribute Brahmanhood to their caste groups for purposes of social superiority. Such a tendency is visible even today and this social imitation of the lower caste groups has been termed by M.N. Srinivas as 'Sanskritisation'. The Brahmans becoming more and more westernised and the lower orders are aspiring to be Sanskritised. The lower orders of the caste hierarchy are adopting new customs and habits discarded by the Brahmins. Sanskritisation is therefore supposed to be the

37. Ibid. P. 431.
preliminary step to westernisation. Economic advance, political leadership and education are some of the relevant factors in Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation in short means cultural and structural changes in society. But at the same time as M.N. Srinivas remarks: 'Sanskritisation does not always result in higher status for the Sanskritised caste, and this is clearly exemplified by the untouchables'.

Nineteenth century marked a notable change in traditional Hinduism. The intelligentsia of the country sought to reorganise society on the basis of reason rather than faith. They attributed difference in wealth and educational attainments particularly to the unequal opportunities given to the people. The emergence of a new middle class from among the lower orders who broke away the barrier of hereditary occupation and took to business, was chiefly responsible for undermining the domination of Brahmanical supremacy. Hindu orthodoxy and religious conservatism were questioned by the lower orders. The lower orders not only entered educational institutions but also emerged as the ruling capitalists of the country by undertaking big enterprises and managing agencies. Hence birth and caste were made figments of fancy. On the contrary, wealth and education constituted the determinants of individual social prestige. The concept of equality was emphasised. A revision

of the old social ideal in the context of social transformation was urged. These ideas found expression in a series of socio-religious movements - the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission etc. These religious movements inspired in the people the value of universal brotherhood, rationality, liberalism and the concepts of equality and justice. Eradication of caste was felt indispensable for the dynamic evolution of society. They aimed at the establishment of society on the twin principles of catholicity and cosmopolitanism. The fact that caste system was a man made institution, rather than ordained by God was manifested to the people. These religious thinkers made a restatement of Hindu Scriptures and convinced the people to work for the salvation of mankind rather than to parade under the banner of high and low. Vivekananda appealed to the Brahmans that:

It is clearly the duty of the Brahmans of India to remember what real Brahmanhood is. As Manu says, all these privileges and honours are given to the Brahman because 'with him is the treasury of virtue'. He must open that treasury and distribute its valuables to the world.39

Likewise, Gandhiji's entry into Politics constituted a landmark in the history of caste system. To him goes the credit for averting the danger that would have befallen the country by mass conversion of Untouchables to other religious

beliefs. Commenting on the sin of Untouchability he remarked:

Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to Untouchability. It has degraded us, made us the pariahs of the empire. Even the Mussulmans caught the sinful contagion from us, and in South Africa, in East Africa and Canada the Mussulmans no less than the Hindus came to be regarded as Pariahs. All this evil has resulted from the sin of Untouchability.  

He convinced the people the philosophy of Vedanta, that every man is eternally free. He appealed to the moral regeneration of society to break away the shackles of Hindu orthodoxy. He fervently criticised caste system as: 'Caste today is in the crucible and only Heaven knows, or perhaps the Brahmans know the final result'.

Another outstanding personality who stood for the cause of Untouchables was, Dr. Ambedkar. He fought for their rights and carved for them a niche in the Republican Constitution of India. He emphatically stated that: 'In a changing society there must be a constant revaluation of old values and the Hindus must realise that if there must be standard to measure the acts of men there must also be readiness to revise these standards'. He vowed to wean away Untouchability and observed: 'If I fail to do away with abominable thraldom and human injustice under which, the class into which I was born

The unflinching courage and daring efforts of a number of leaders of thought and action were chiefly responsible for the weakening of the caste system, if not its complete abolition. In the long run caste system underwent radical changes in its structure. Caste system begun with socio-religious motives, turned a political issue under the British regime and finally assumed constitutional importance.

The next phase in the transformation of the caste system started with the framing of the Indian Constitution. An increasing interest has been shown for helping the lower orders of the caste hierarchy. The down-trodden sections familiarly known as the 'Backward classes' received special attention of the Constitution makers. The uplift of these sections has been recognised as an important responsibility of the Government. The circumstances necessitating the incorporation of certain articles in the Constitution for Backward classes have been explained by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, that: 'The Indian Constitution must provide safeguards to prevent castes "with their own interests" from doing mischief to other helpless castes'.

44. B.R. Ambedkar, What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables, 1946, P. 193.
purpose behind this constitutional safeguard as:

Where the spirit which actuates the various social groups is only non-social, their existence may not be taken into account in framing a constitution. There is no cause for danger in a group which is only non-social. But where a group is actuated by an antisocial spirit towards another and to which alien is synonymous with enemy, the fact must be taken into account in framing the constitution and the class which has been the victim of antisocial spirit must be given protection by proper safeguards.45

Independent India has realised that freedom would be futile, if the fruits of freedom are not equally shared by all sections of society. The Democratic ideal emphasises a footing of equality for all citizens irrespective of their caste affiliations. The aim is to bring about radical social and economic changes, to correct the imbalance in society caused by the caste structure. The aim is reflected in the following words:

"JUSTICE, Social, Economic and Political;
LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;
and to promote among them all,
FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation".46

Part III of the Constitution guarantees a series of Fundamental Rights to the citizens. Hence specific provisions

45. Ibid. P. 193-94.
46. Preamble to the Constitution of India.
have been made to safeguard the special rights and interests of Backward classes. Part IV contains the Directive Principles of State Policy, wherein, a mention has also been made for protecting the weaker sections of society. Part XVI of the Constitution deals with Special Provisions for Backward classes.