

Tribe and Caste

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Population in India has always presented an amazing mosaic of human affairs – an unimaginable diversity. K.S. Mathur and B.C. Agarwal (1974), steering clear of debatable and controversial points rightly comment that “traditional India is said to have three types of communities – tribals, caste and peasant”. Tribal communities are those, which like the Naga of Nagaland, the Munda of Chotanagpur, the Gond of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh, the Bhil of Rajasthan and Gujarat, and the Toda of Nilgiri hills in Tamil Nadu – constitute a distinct society of their own, i.e., they do not - or rather did not – regard themselves as part of the larger society in India, they had a distinct and distinctive way of life, an individual dialect and a socio-religious system peculiarly their own. Castes or *jati*, on the other hand – are communities knit into a wider social organization of the Hindu society based upon a well-defined and understood system of stratification and status differentiation. All castes – with the exception of the Brahmin and the untouchable are higher to some, equal to others in rank, and lower to others. Stratification is based upon mystic notions of purity and pollution which are demonstrated in the behaviour patterns of the people – in matters of marriage, food, choice of occupation, and the like. There are several thousand such *jatis* in the country but people in any part of the country are concerned with castes in their own region with whom only they come in intimate social contact. Peasantry loosely refers to village communities consisting of Hindu castes and other religious groups whose principal character is that they live in a common village and have, for this region developed over the ages a socio-economic solidarity as such. Peasants are cultivators of land, people who use - or have been using till

recently – indigenous methods of land cultivation, but the peasant community also has in its fold non-cultivators who cater to the needs of the cultivators and live on them. Peasant economy is basically of the subsistence type and whatever little surplus they are able to accumulate is exchanged in the village market or sold in the neighbouring town market for acquiring other material goods such as cloth, shoes, ornaments, pots and pans, and the like. Peasant communities thus have economic but also social, ritual, political and ideological extensions which encompass neighbouring villages and towns.

The British colonial administrators also viewed the Indian population in terms of two broad categories – caste and tribes. That is why a number of British administrators – scholars compiled and published '*Handbooks of Castes and Tribals*' pertaining to different regions of colonial India.

Tribe

What is a tribe? What exactly are the criteria for considering a human group, a tribe? What are the indices of the tribal life?

Interestingly but sadly the anthropologists, sociologists, social workers, administrators and such people who have been involved with the tribes and their problems either on theoretical plane or on practical grounds are still not on the same wave length regarding the concept and the definition of their subject. Arthur Wilke *et al.* (1979) puts the problem in proper perspective by stating that for years ambiguity has stalked India's official portrait of tribal people. From 1917 through the 1931 census, for instance, the nomenclature referring to tribes underwent successive modifications, involving primarily changes in the descriptive adjectives such as "aboriginal" or "depressed classes". By the 1941 Census, these qualifying adjectives were dropped, a practice continued after independence with the adoption of the notion of scheduled tribes or as they are commonly called, *Adivasi*. Such standardization did not, however, remove all ambiguity.

No doubt with the passage of time, the differences on the concept and definition of 'tribe' have certainly narrowed down to an appreciable extent, but a theoretical discussion seems imperative to understand this problem in its proper perspective.

Here are a few definitions of "tribe" being used as the basis of discussion in the present chapter:

A tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so.

- Imperial Gazetteer of India

A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as descendants of a common ancestor.

In its simplest form the tribe is a group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in culture, frequent contacts, and a certain community of interest.

- Ralph Linton

A tribe is a group united by a common name in which the members take a pride by a common language, by a common territory, and by a feeling that all who do not share this name are outsiders, 'enemies' in fact.

- G.W.B. Huntingford

A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes, without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, followed tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration.

- D.N. Majumdar

Ideally, tribal societies are small in scale, are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal, and political relations, and possess a morality, a religion, and world-wide of corresponding dimensions. Characteristically too, tribal languages are unwritten, and hence, the extent of communication both in time and space is inevitably narrow. At the same time, tribal societies exhibit a remarkable economy of design and have a compactness and self-sufficiency lacking in modern society.

- I.M. Lewis

Majumdar and Madan (1967) rightly comment that when one looks into the definitions given by various anthropologists, one is bound to be impressed by the dissimilarity of their views as regards what constitutes a tribe. Kinship ties, common territory, one language, joint ownership, one political organization, absence of internecine strife have all been referred to as the main characteristics of a tribe. Some anthropologists have not only accepted some of the characteristics, but have also stoutly denied some of them to be characteristics of a tribe. Thus, Rivers did not mention habitation in a common territory as a vital feature of tribal organization, although others like Perry have insisted on it, saying that even nomadic tribes roam about within a definite region. Radcliffe-Brown has given instances of one section of a tribe fighting another from his Australian data. The only conclusion one can draw from such diversity of learned opinion is that the views of each anthropologist arise from the type of data with which he is most familiar. One may, therefore, make a list of universal characteristics, some of which would define a tribe anywhere. Thus, Majumdar claims universal applicability of his definition given on the preceding page.

A major hurdle of defining a tribe is that related with the problem of distinguishing the tribe from peasantry. "It is no doubt possible to use the labels 'tribal' and

'peasant' for this type of social organization and to characterize one by contrasting it with the other. But in spite of all the effort invested by anthropologists in the study of primitive societies, there really is no satisfactory way of defining a tribal society. What this amounts to in the Indian context is that anthropologists have tried to characterize a somewhat nebulous sociological type, by contrasting it with another which is almost equally nebulous. Earlier anthropologists had not paid sufficient attention to define tribal society, but tacitly assumed that what they were studying in Australia, Melanesia, and Africa were various forms of tribal society. The tribe was somewhat vaguely assumed to be a more or less homogeneous society, have a common government, a common dialect and a common culture" (Andre-Beitelle, 1973). Though not everybody will agree with the assumption of Beitelle but his statement may be cited as one of the many schools of thought grappling with the problem.

The above discussion shows that it is not easy to define a tribe or tribal society conclusively and any standardization in this regard is very difficult to obtain. Hence it will be better to shy away from international or universal plane keeping in view the regional connotation of the concept of tribe and focus attention on gaining standardization within the Indian universe to solve our own problems. This seems to be quite sensible in the situation when definitions of universal applicability are either very broad and loose or very narrow and restricted. In this context Andre Beitelle (ibid) aptly remarks that Bailey is perhaps the only anthropologist working in the Indian field who has tried to characterize tribes in terms of segmentary principles, but the contrast in which he is interested is not between 'tribe' and 'peasant' but between 'tribe' and 'caste'. Further, unlike Bailey, the majority of Indian anthropologists have not given much serious thought to the problem of creating a definition of tribal society which will be appropriate to the Indian context.

Now let us examine the problem specifically in the India context. T.B. Naik (1960) raises the problem in proper perspective by talking of the criteria and indices of the tribal life in specifically Indian setting. What should be the criteria and indices of tribal life? Living in forest? The Dublas of Surat and a host of others do not live in forests. They live in fertile plains, nevertheless they are included in the Schedule. Primitive religion? But you do not know what primitive religion is in India, there being a continuance from the most abstruse philosophy to the tribal gods and superstitious beliefs in the religion of most of the advanced communities of India." This index being very fluid and not exact will not do. Geographical isolation? There are hundreds of tribal groups who are not living an isolated life. Primitive economic system? There are many peasant groups who are living by equally primitive economic system. Thus, Naik goes on to present his own criteria for a tribe which are as follows :

1. *A tribe to be a 'tribe' should have the least functional interdependence within the community (the Hindu caste system is an example of high interdependence).*

2. *It should be economically backward, which means:*
 1. *The full import of monetary economics should not be understood by its members;*
 2. *Primitive means of exploiting natural resources should be used.*
 3. *The tribe's economy should be at an underdeveloped stage; and*
 4. *It should have multifarious economic pursuits.*
3. *There should be a comparative geographic isolation of its people from others.*
4. *Culturally, members of a tribe should have a common dialect which may be subject to regional variations.*
5. *A tribe should be politically organized and its community panchayat should be an influential institution.*
6. *The tribe's members should have the least desire to change. They should have a sort of psychological conservatism making them stick to their age old customs.*
7. *A tribe should have customary laws and its members might have to suffer in a law court because of these laws.*

Naik further elaborates that a community to be a 'tribe' must have all these attributes. It might be undergoing acculturation, but the degree of acculturation will have to be determined in the context of its customs, gods, language, etc.; a very high degree of acculturation will automatically debar it from being a tribe.

Ehrenfels elaborates some of the points already discussed by saying:

1. *A community, however small it may be, may remain in isolation from the other communities within a geographical region. This applies to a caste as well as to a tribe. The members of a true tribe, however, are generally not included into the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy and frequently speak also a common dialect, entertain common beliefs, follow common occupational practices and (most important) consider themselves as members of a small but semi-national unit.*
2. *I would delete in the above definition the words "economically backward", "primitive means" and "underdeveloped stage" and substitute them by the words "self-sufficient" (of Khasi, Gond, Bhil, Agaria and others who are in part more specialized economically, even much more than their non-tribal neighbours). Yet each individual of a tribe may work for his family group and thus may remain functionally dependent of solidarity with the tribe as a whole, rather than as a co-partner in the caste hierarchy of non-tribal Hindus.*
3. *I agree with the definition of geographical isolation though not every tribe is an isolated unit of people (e.g., Bhil, Santhala, Irula, etc.). But if a tribe has its own system of economy, its solidarity will no doubt be more stable.*

4. *Common dialects or languages are typical for tribes in Assam and the Central areas, but not in the Southern and Western States of India-community of language stresses that, but is not imperative for building up tribal consciousness. The original religious concepts of most tribes in pre-acculturation days were different from their Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or Christian neighbours, but are not always so now.*
5. *A tribe need not always be politically organized nor have a community panchayat. It may, or may not, have a single chief or a few elders who may wield more or less power within the community.*
6. *I would delete the relevant para of the above and substitute it with the words, "The members of a tribe have a feeling of belonging to a group the existence of which is valuable".*
7. *Almost all tribes have customary laws and practices, more or less different from the non-tribal neighbours. Very often they are indeed made to suffer on this account in law courts and in other contact situations with non-tribals.*

The Tata Institute of Social Sciences in its report on the Indian tribes has also joined those who have been criticizing the anthropologist's approach of the problem. It says that the (anthropological) criteria apply to ideal typical tribal communities as conceived by the anthropologists for theoretical purpose. These do not appear to be empirically related to communities that have been included in the list of the scheduled tribes. The logical implication seems to be, that communities which do not satisfy the above criteria should not be considered as tribes even though they are included in the list of the scheduled tribes. Arthur Wilke *et al.* (1979) too, like some others, opine that some measure, if not a substantial measure, of the difficulty is inherent in the intellectual legacy of the discipline of anthropology. Aiyappan, provoked by such statements remarks rather skeptically, reminding us of the well-known definition given by Tate Regan of 'species'. Adopting the definition he (Aiyappan) said that a tribe is a group which a competent anthropologist considers to be a tribe. If the administrator wants a clear-cut definition which he can apply blindly and get along with, he says, we should tell him that we don't have it, just as the zoologist is not in a position to give a clear-cut all-purpose definition of 'species'.

Despite such rhetoric and academic polemics on the problem of definition of 'tribe' quite a substantial measure of standardization has been accomplished in designating which people are or are not entitled to particular protection and privilege. This could become possible only due to vigorous academic efforts of the much maligned and misunderstood anthropologists who, with the help of rigorous and painstaking empirical research, ultimately came out with definite and empirically verifiable ethnographic data to clear the cobwebs of misgivings regarding Indian tribes. Majumdar and Madan (1967) demonstrate this new mood by emphatically stating the following facts:

1. *In tribal India a tribe is definitely a territorial group; a tribe has a traditional territory, and emigrants always refer to it as their home. The Santhals working in the Assam tea gardens refer to particular regions of Bihar (or Chattisgarh) or Bengal as their home.*
2. *All members of a tribe are not kin of each other, but within every Indian tribe kinship operates as a strong, associative regulative and integrating principle. The consequence is tribal endogamy and the division of a tribe into clans and sub-clans and so on. These clans, etc., being kin groups, are exogamous.*
3. *Members of an Indian tribe speak one common language, their own or/and that of their neighbours. Intra-tribal conflict on a group scale is not a feature of Indian tribes. Joint ownership of property, wherever present, as for instance among the Hos, is not exclusive. Politically, Indian tribes are under the control of the State governments, but within a tribe there may be a number of Panchayats corresponding to the heterogeneity, racial and cultural, of the constituent population in a village or in adjacent villages.*
4. *There are other distinguishing features of Indian tribes. Thus, there are their dormitory institutions; the absence of institutional schooling for boys and girls; distinctive customs regarding birth, marriage, and death; a moral code different from that of Hindus and Muslims; peculiarities of religious beliefs and rituals which may distinguish tribesmen even from the low caste Hindus.*

To wind up this discussion, it seems quite apt to refer to Arthur Wilke *et al.* (1979) who opine that even the constraints of bureaucratic decision-making and administration reign supreme, there is a tendency to gloss over the rich and at times puzzling mosaic of human affairs. What accounts for indeterminateness in the concept of tribe is likely that the dictates of bureaucratic procedures and the unceasing acculturation going on throughout India and particularly among many identified tribal people make it difficult to apply an idea which is in many respects, ideal type formulation.

Caste

'Caste' has come to be associated with a social science concept. The phenomenon which we now call 'caste' was named by western observers of India at an early stage in the colonial period. The phenomenon of caste has probably aroused more controversy than any other aspect of Indian life and thought. Some scholars see India's caste system as the defining feature of 'Indian culture'. Caste is such a complex phenomenon that it is difficult to define and the definitions pose lot of problems. Yet, in order to use it for practical purposes, some of the following definitions may be used:

Caste is a collection of families, bearing a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to following the

same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.

- Herbert Risley

When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste.

- C.H. Cooley

When status is wholly predetermined so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then the class takes the extreme form of caste.

- MacIver and Page

Caste is a closed class.

- D.N. Majumdar

Caste system is a form of social stratification in which castes are hierarchically organized and separated from each other by rules of ritual purity.

- Penguin's Dictionary of Sociology

On the basis of these and dozens of other definitions caste may be understood and explained as a form of social stratification which involves:

- (i) a system of hierarchically ranked,
- (ii) closed,
- (iii) endogamous strata,
- (iv) ascribed membership,
- (v) restriction of contact between castes,
- (vi) mobility theoretically impossible.

Although, "it reflects economic inequalities, by virtue of the occupations typically followed by, or permitted to members, caste stratification is ultimately rooted in non-economic criteria. In its' purest form, in Hindu India, the caste principle is religious: castes are ranked in accordance with the degree of 'ritual purity' ascribed to members and to their activities" (David Jary and Julia Jary, 1991). Historically, the most developed form, and some would argue the only true form, of caste stratification has occurred in India in association with Hinduism. The origins of this system are obscure. They probably lie in the twin bases of ethnicity and occupational specialization. The system which the Brahmins perfected was founded on five main divisions, four caste groups (*Varna*) and an out caste group (*Pancham Varna*), the untouchables. The four caste groups were the *Brahmins*, the priestly class having religious authority, the *Kshatriyas*, the secular and military ruler and landlord caste, the *Vaishyas* the mercantile middle class and the *Shudra* – the servants and slaves class. The untouchables performed only the most degrading ritually impure/polluting tasks.

Caste has been described as the fundamental social institution of India. As Andre Beitel (1996) points out, "sometimes the term is used metaphorically to refer to rigid social distinctions or extreme social exclusiveness wherever found. But it is among the Hindus in India that we find the system in its most fully developed form, although analogous forms exist among Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and other religious groups in South Asia".

Functions of caste system

Caste system may be seen traditionally as performing the following functions:

- (i) It minimizes economic competition by determining the occupation of various caste groups.
- (ii) By restricting and limiting the range of choosing spouse, it helps its members in their endeavour of choosing a life partner. The rules of endogamy are, traditionally, very strict and violations are taken seriously with punishments.
- (iii) The economic basis of the caste system is *jajmani* system. It is an elaborate division of labour governed by a well defined system of exchange of goods and services. The higher landed castes, and the lower occupationally specialized castes or 'service castes' are traditionally bound by certain Jajmani obligations. The *patrons (jajman)* or higher castes who control land ownership exchange the land produce against the services provided by other castes.
- (iv) Caste may also be seen as a social and psychological resource for its members. Because of a sense of solidarity and common consciousness the members of a caste come to the rescue of fellow casteman.

Ritual Aspect of Binary Opposition Between Pure/Impure (Pollution)

1. The opposition between pure and impure has been regarded by Louis Dumont as the fundamental principle underlying the Hindu Caste System.
2. The *principle* is implicit in the three predominant features of the caste system which were systematically spelt out by Bougle and later endorsed by Dumont. According to Bougle the caste system comprises a series of hereditary groups (the socially relevant *jatis*) characterized by (i) 'hierarchy' or gradations according to ritual status; (ii) 'mutual repulsion', implying rules governing contact, ensuring their separation; and (iii) division of labour and consequent inter-dependence.
3. Dumont shows that the opposition between the pure and the impure is implicit in all the three attributes: in hierarchy because the pure and impure must be kept separate; and in the division of labour because pure and impures occupations have to be segregated.
4. Following from this, the caste system is viewed as a 'whole' which is founded on the necessary and hierarchical co-existence of the opposites (the pure and impure). This represents a view point of caste according to which both the pure and the impure have their *rightful place* in the system and each has its privileges and co-exists with the other.
5. One way of assigning rank to castes in terms of their relative purity and impurity is to study their attributes and accordingly order them in relation to one another. The attributes of purity include features such as wearing sacred thread, veneration of cow, vegetarianism, teetotalism and prohibiting widow remarriage. Pollution is associated with human emissions, death, disrespect of cow and consumption of meat and alcohol, to mention the principal elements.

6. The attributes of purity and pollution discussed above may be used to identify the two broad extremes in the caste hierarchy – the Brahmins and the untouchables. But the precise determination of the highest and the lowest among Brahmins and untouchables respectively is conditioned by local interpretations of the pollution concept. Thus, while scavenging and beef eating would make a caste group untouchable almost anywhere, it may still be able to establish its precedence over some other group through fine distinctions of behaviour. The fact that the empirical referents of the pollution concept are subject to local interpretations highlight the point that caste hierarchy when viewed as a specific phenomenon, is confined to a given local area. Hence caste (*Jati*) hierarchy shows regional variations.

7. The tendency which results in the hierarchical arrangements of castes in a given locality is often replicated within a caste and leads to the grading of segments both in the same local community and over a wide territorial area.

8. The operation of local interpretations of pollution explains various regional differences in the evaluation and ranking of castes. However, even within a given locality and multiplicity of attributional criteria and the necessity of evaluating them in relation to one another render it difficult to grade all the castes in a fixed hierarchical order.

9. Dumont attempts to show how these attributes may be used to establish a series of divisions, each more precise than the other, between superior and inferior castes. For example, the vegetarian castes may be placed above the non-vegetarian ones: among the vegetarians those who prohibit widow remarriage would be superior to those who permit it. Similarly, among the non-vegetarians further dichotomies may be established between beef eaters and non-beef eaters; and among the later still further gradations may be made between those who eat only mutton or birds and who eat pig (pork) raised by lower castes and fed by garbage. Dumont argues that such dichotomies, which establish distinctions of relative purity and impurity, reaffirm the importance of the hierarchical principle.

10. At the same time it is difficult to explain that any particular village hierarchy solely depends on the basis of attributional criteria. A vegetarian caste, in some cases, may actually rank below a non-vegetarian caste. It is also not clear how the various attributes of pollution combine together to form an unambiguous hierarchy of values. For example, are the attributes of diet more important than those of occupation? Among certain occupations, such as butchering goats, cutting hair, and tapping toddy, which would be lowest?

11. Such difficulties led Mickim Marriott to propose an interactional theory of caste ranking based on inter-caste relationships as manifested in the *ritualized giving and receiving of food, and the giving and receiving of ritual services*. He considers food transfers more decisive in establishing rank than the receiving of ritual services, but the two are connected since the services are paid for partly in food.

12. The circulation of food is one significant index of rank because a caste which receives more of the purer kinds of food than it gives to other caste groups may be regarded as the recipient of relatively more ritual honour in relation to the

others. Following the same principle, a caste which receives more ritual services from other castes than it gives to them ranks higher. It is lower if it gives more ritual services than it receives or renders these to lower castes.

Caste System as Viewed by Contemporary Social Anthropologists

Since the late 1940s, a number of British and American social scientists have taken a new approach to the Indian caste system. The dominant features of this approach are inspired by contemporary social anthropology. Pauline Kolenda (1984), a keen observer of the Indian scene, in a sharp analysis, has tried to identify the important features of this new approach. According to her, the first important feature is the collection of information about the caste system by residing in a village and observing. According to her

1. Caste as a system operates only within a limited locality, a single village or a few linked villages.
2. A village or local population is composed of a series of mutually exclusive castes, usually numbering anywhere from a handful to a score or more.
3. A dominant caste, or a dominant family, or set of families, typically has preponderant political and economic power over everyone else in the locality. Dominance is rooted in monopolistic control over *arable* land and in physical force.
4. Each caste has an occupational speciality, and offers this to other castes in exchange for food, products, or services. Especially important is the foodgrain provided by the land-controlling dominant caste or families to the landless servant, artisan, and medicant castes. This exchange of food, goods and services is a ritual system concerned with purity and population as well as an economic system. Called the *jajmani system*, it functions so that the highest castes remain pure while the lower castes absorb pollution for them.
5. Castes within a local caste system tend to be mutually ranked according to their respective degrees of pollution in this ritual system.
6. Efforts to improve caste rank in this local caste hierarchy are made by middle and lower castes, especially by means of discarding polluting customs, and by emulating the customs of the higher purer castes.
7. Political power is monopolized by the dominant caste, family, or families, or occasionally by a pair of competing dominant castes. Non-dominant castes tend to support their patrons within the dominant segment. Such support may be important if there are *factions* contending for power within the dominant segment.
8. Disputes may be settled either by councils within a caste segments, or by one or more elders of the dominant caste or family.
9. The caste segment itself is an endogamous descent group. The local contingent of a caste is usually composed of kinsmen, ideally related unilineally, though often actually related cognatically. (Patrilineal descent refers to a line of males related through father-son-links, going

back to a common male ancestor. Matrilineal descent refers to a line of mother-child links, going back to a common female ancestor. Cognatic descent refers to a line, related through either male or female links, going back to common ancestors).

10. Each caste segment tends to live in its own quarter. Universally, untouchables (who are unclean) live in isolation from those of purer caste, either in a separate hamlet or on the outskirts of a village.

Caste: Cultural and Structural View

Caste is a system of stratification. To be more precise, caste system is a system of social stratification in the Indian society. It represents the basic idea or notion or ideology of social stratification in the traditional Indian society. Sociologists, sometimes, take divergent views of caste. Two most popular of such views are (i) Cultural view and (ii) Structural view. The differences in these two views lie not in the basic content but in the levels of analysis.

Those who tend to take the cultural view of caste treat it as a system of ideas and values. It may also include beliefs and norms. In this view, the most important factor is hierarchy, which forms the basis of ranking of persons or groups. Among those who are protagonists of this view, the prominent ones are Louis Dumont, G.S. Ghurye, Edmund Leach, and M.N. Srinivas. They look at caste as a social or cultural phenomenon peculiar to the Indian society, more precisely to the Hindu society because among the non-Hindus it does not constitute the religious ideology despite the fact that they have also developed 'caste like' stratification. Treating caste as a cultural phenomenon within the general principle of social stratification, they pinpoint hierarchy of hereditary groups as its basis. These hereditary groups are separated by caste endogamy, restrictions on commensal relations (exchange of food and water) and physical contact. But despite this separation and exclusiveness they are interdependent because of the traditional division of labour. The underlying principle of this arrangement is based on the opposition of the pure and impure, a sort of binary opposition.

Yogendra Singh makes further elaboration of this arrangement. He talks of Universalistic or Particularistic categories. The former means that caste system is regarded as just another manifestation of the universal phenomenon of social stratification while the latter means that caste system may be viewed as a system of stratification, which is unique to the Indian/Hindu society.

Those who take the structural view of caste look at caste at a higher level of abstraction i.e. 'social structure'. Thus, caste for them is a structural reality. Proponents of this view can be found among the Marxist and functionalist sociologists. A.R. Desai, a Marxist sociologist, represents this view among the Indian sociologists. According to the 'structuralists', caste as a social structure is comparable cross-culturally. Yogendra Singh again divides the proponents of this view into two categories: Structural Universalistic and Structural Particularistic.

For the structuralists, caste system is nothing but the representation of class relations in caste idiom. The religious sanctions behind caste have been interpreted by the Marxists as simply a legitimizing ideology to sustain the existing mode of production. Since the landed castes are mostly upper castes who largely control the means of production and exploit the 'ritually inferior' landless lower castes, the dye is cast in favour of its interpretation in terms of class in the Marxian sense of the term. Majority of sociologists studying the Indian society have subscribed to the structural particularistic view of caste. They have treated caste as an institutionalized system of interaction among the hierarchically ranked hereditary groups for marriage, occupation, economic division of labour, enforcement of cultural norms and values by caste *panchayats* or organizations. Structural analysis of caste views it as a system of institutionalized inequality. Thus, caste may also be understood as the structural basis of inequality.

Caste Mobility

Sorokin, whose pioneering work on social mobility is yet to be surpassed, says that there has scarcely been any society whose strata were absolutely closed, or in which vertical mobility in its three forms-economic, political and occupational – was not present. At the same time, there has never existed a society in which vertical society mobility has been absolutely free and the transition from one social stratum to another has had no resistance. Contrary to the popular “book view”, caste as a stratification system provides room for social and occupational mobility.

M.N. Srinivas exploded the myth of caste system as static. He puts forward a dynamic view of caste and contends that “the caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component is fixed for all times. Movement has always been possible.” He further says that the stronger the norms against social mobility, the greater the desire for it. An indication of the widespread desire for mobility comes from an unusual source – the census operations. The Indian census reports of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries give us abundant idea of this upward mobility.

The caste system discouraged individual mobility from one caste to another during one's lifetime. Thus, mobility manifested itself as the collective splitting off sub castes or what Hutton calls the “fissiparous tendencies of Indian castes”. The process of mobility becomes more clear if we distinguish models of mobility. Though, there may be two referents: the *dwija* (twice born higher castes) and modern, educate elite. The cultural emulation of caste elite as referent or reference group is more important in the process of caste mobility yet the modern elite is also used as referent. But in most of the cases both are combined in caste mobility as per the empirical realities.

In his path breaking study, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs* (1952), M.N. Srinivas explained caste mobility in terms of cultural emulation of the Brahmins

by the lower caste. He then broadened the definition of Sanskritization in *Social Change in Modern India* as:

“a process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently “twice born” caste. Generally, such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community”.

In terms of *varna* referents the Kshatriya model has been the most popular. Surjit Sinha, however, describes it as *Rajputization* instead of *Kshatriyization* on the basis of his fieldwork in central India. The popularity of Kshatriya model is attested by a large number of petitions by the lower castes before the census officials to change their names and hierarchy and recognize them as Kshatriya. The Brahmin model of Sanskritization has been the most difficult because in most of the cases the Shudra castes found it difficult to be recognized as Brahmins. William Rowes’ study of the Noniya in Senapur village in eastern Uttar Pradesh shows the success of a middle level caste in acquiring upward mobility through Sanskritization after achieving economic prosperity. It attests David Mandelbaums’ view that a low caste must accumulate wealth and prosperity before adopting Sanskritization as a means of upward social mobility.

Similarly, Pocock has shown successful upward mobility in the case of *Kunbi*, a traditional middle rung peasant caste of Gujarat to the new and more honourific status of the *Pattidar*. It is generally accepted that untouchability has proved to be such a big barrier that does not allow any upward mobility. However, F.G. Bailey in his study of Bissipara in Orissa has presented a rare example, which shows the success of the untouchables in achieving status elevation through Sanskritization. From liquor distillation, a ritually impure occupation, they moved upward after acquiring land and laying their claim on Kshatriya status, which was conceded, though grudgingly, by the local Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

In terms of inter-caste mobility, education and occupation have been the most important factors of upward mobility. With the expanding avenues of secularization of education and occupation a number of individuals and groups within a caste attain upward mobility. Thus, an elite sub-stratum emerges in every caste. We can witness this phenomenon even among the scheduled castes, other backward castes and tribal communities.

Through historical and anthropological analyses, attempts have been made to understand one of the fundamental historical transformation to have taken place in India (and in the whole of South Asia). This was the transition from tribe to caste. Dev Nathan (1997) rightly points out that the result of this process was the formation of the institutions like private property, the caste system, the state and the patriarchal family. Increased cultural contact resulted in ‘Tribe-caste continuum’. Dev Nathan (ibid) laments that “in India ethnocentrism consists of all

communities as being merely the striving to become Hindu, to become a caste. There is no distinction between tribe and caste. All communities are castes, only the degree of being castes is different". In sociology and anthropology it is seen in G.S. Ghurye's refusal to allow any separation between the tribes and castes. For him, the tribes were only "backward Hindus" (1963). During later years scholars such as Baidyanath Saraswati (1997) insists on the "cultural oneness" of tribe and caste. He asks for "tribe" to be treated as "caste" and "caste" to be understood as a cultural unit. This is simply to deny the essence of Indian civilization – 'unity in diversity' and 'let the million flowers bloom'.

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe

The term 'Scheduled Caste' has been in vogue for about half a century. The term appeared for the first time in the *Government of India Act 1935*. In April 1936, the British Government issued the *Government of India (Scheduled Caste) Order 1936*, specifying certain castes and tribes as scheduled castes in the then provinces of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Central Provinces, Madras, Orissa, Punjab and United Provinces. Prior to that these castes were generally known as 'depressed classes'. The depressed classes were systematically categorized in the 1931 census. The list of 'scheduled castes' issued in 1936 was in continuation of earlier list of 'depressed classes'. The list drawn in 1950 was revised version of the list. After proclamation of the constitution these lists were notified by the President in accordance with the provision of Article 341 of the Constitution. Meanwhile the term 'Harijan' continued in vogue for non-official purposes.

Under Article 341 of the Constitution certain backward castes/communities suffering from untouchability and other social disabilities were declared as the scheduled castes. Any amendment in the existing list of scheduled castes is to be made by parliamentary enactment. Thus, we see that the scheduled castes were administratively and not socially created.

Under the Constitution of India certain tribes have been specified as the Scheduled Tribes. It is to be noted that only those tribes which have been included in the list of Scheduled Tribes are given special treatment or facilities envisaged under the Constitution. The Constitution neither defines nor lays down any criteria for specifying the Scheduled Tribes. As per Article 36(25) of the Constitution, the Scheduled Tribes means such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of the Constitution. The Scheduled Tribes are specified by the President under Article 342 by a public notification. The parliament may, by law, include or exclude from the list of Scheduled Tribes any tribal community or part thereof in any State or Union Territory.

Significantly, unlike Scheduled Castes which are supposed to be Hindu castes along with Sikhs and neo-Buddhists there is no bar for specifying a person as a member of a Scheduled Tribe. Thus, we have Muslim Scheduled Tribes such as

tribal groups of Lakshdweep and the Gaddi and Bakriwal of Jammu and Kashmir and Scheduled Tribes following Christianity such as the Nagas, Mizos, etc.

The principal criteria adopted for specifying communities as the Scheduled Tribes include:

- (i) relative geographical isolation
- (ii) distinctive culture
- (iii) traditional occupation of a definite geographical area
- (iv) 'primitive traits' depicting occupational pattern, economy, etc.
- (v) relatively lower level of techno-economic development

Rights of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes : Principal Legislation

- Equality Before Law – Article 14 of the Constitution of India
- Prohibition of Discrimination on Grounds of Religion, Race, Caste, Sex or Place of Birth – Article 15 of the Constitution of India
- Equality of Opportunity in Matters of Public Employment – Article 16 of the Constitution of India
- Abolition of Untouchability – Article 17 of the Constitution of India
- Right Against Exploitation: Prohibition of Traffic in Human Beings and Forced Labour – Article 23 of the Constitution of India
- Right Against Exploitation : Prohibition of Employment of Children in Factories etc. – Article 24 of the Constitution of India
- Right to Freedom of Religion: Freedom of Conscience and Freedom of Profession, Practice and Propagation of Religion – Article 25 of the Constitution of India
- Safeguarding and Promotion of Cultural and Education Rights
 - i. Protection of Interests of Minorities – Article 29 of the Constitution of India
 - ii. Facilities for Instruction in Mother-Tongue at Primary Stage – Article 350 (A) of the Constitution of India
 - iii. Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities – Article 35 (B) of the Constitution of India
 - iv. Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Weaker Sections – Article 46 of the Constitution of India
- Political Safeguards
 - Minister in Charge of Tribal Welfare and Welfare of Scheduled Caste and Backward Classes in Selected States – Article 164(1) of the Constitution of India
 - Reservation of Seats in the Lok Sabha
 - Reservation of Seats in the Vidhan Sabha
 - Time Limits on Reservation of Seats

- The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976
- The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986
- The Protection of Civil Rights Act, and Rules, 1955 and Rules 1977
 - The Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955
 - The Protection of Civil Rights Act 1977
- Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and Rules, 1995
 - Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
 - Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995
 - Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995 – Annexure I, Norms for Relief Amount
 - Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995 – Annexure II
- Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and Rules 1997
 - Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993
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- The Provision of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.

Suggested reading

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