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Violence against Dalit and Reservation Policy Is a Big Challengeable Task in India

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Abstract

National policies and plans cannot be formulated on the basis of irrational acts by a few irrational people. Also it would not be right to blame the whole system or a society for their irresponsible acts. It is not desirable to pass on comments based on half cooked information, half a truth, partial or incomplete knowledge, which could be harmful for the whole society. Many a times, irresponsible acts of some irrational and cynic persons create misunderstandings. Quite often, caste system has been criticized as being highly discriminatory. The British rulers had condemned the Caste system strongly before the Independence. Now many political parties, many intellectuals Dalit activists and their leaders have joined them. They are born, educated and brought-up in an atmosphere, which is deeply influenced by rhymes and reasons of western societies.

Keywords: Discrimination, Caste system, Reservation Policy and Modern India

Introduction

Blaming caste system for all discriminatory practices or suggesting bringing to an end a well-established and accepted system in the name of discrimination needs to be given a second thought. For understanding the problem, answer of the following questions with an impartial, rational, sensitive and perceptive mindset is required –Are really the practices and values of caste-system problematic and complicated?

Is it the caste-system, which is responsible for discrimination and exploitation of weaker/unprivileged sections of society? What is the position of different castes as it exists presently in ground realities? Reality is much deeper than what is seen on the surface. One should not form an opinion or take a decision without analyzing rationally the whole scenario. Many misconceptions have been spread around about caste-system of India and its nature by vested interests of certain people during the last few centuries.

Discrimination everywhere

Discrimination in one form or other exists in all the social, political and economic systems/institutions, whether it is big or small all over the world in some form or the other. It exists even within as small an institution as a family. Vulnerable individuals or weaker sections of society have always become an easy prey for discrimination. Within a family, vulnerable family members like children, old or widowed parents, poor relatives or unemployed youth become an easy prey of discrimination. And in a society, poor, illiterate and ignorant people usually become victims of exploitation.

Intolerance reason behind discrimination

Usually, in every society, differences in behavior, character, education, language, way of life, culture, social background create a distance between two individuals or groups. Resistance to tolerate, adapt or appreciate each other widens the distance. Some become so aggressive that they openly abuse or oppress others. In order to be one up, either they let down others or try to control their destiny by adopting discriminatory practices. And in this rat-race, stronger always wins and weaker suffers.

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Grounds for discrimination

In every society and a nation there exists numerous identities based on factors like race, class, caste, religion, gender, language or region. Craving for more power – muscle, money or political – of some individuals or groups tends people to adopt discriminatory practices. Discriminatory practices work on whims and fancies/likes and dislikes of strong persons. Controlling the destiny of others satisfies their ego and serves their interests.

Racism and Western World

Racism is a much more serious problem than caste in matter of discrimination, as it is based on the color of the skin, which cannot be hidden. Societies in Western World are divided sharply into four water-tight compartments. “Whites” at the top of social hierarchy, then comes Yellows (Japanese, Chinese or Philippines) followed by “Browns” (Indians, Pakistanis and people from other South-Eastern nations and at the bottom “Blacks”. The western world is witnessing a rise in white supremacist movements. Last two categories have always been humiliated. They have to struggle to get suitable jobs according to their qualifications. They are forced to work for less money, accused for snatching jobs from “whites” and having slavish mentality.

Treatment to Indian students in western nations

Every year, on an average 430,000 odd Indian students go to Western nations for further studies. Recently in Australia, Indians, Pakistanis along with Vietnamese students of middle-class background are being targeted, racially abused, insulted, ridiculed and assaulted physically now and then by Whites. They take bank loans, borrow money and pass through many difficulties to get a degree from foreign university. Life is not easy for them in any way. They have to work very hard to fund their education there. Despite everything the exodus of students from upper castes continues because due to reverse discrimination policies, they are being treated as second rate citizens in their own country. It is an anomaly that Western society, where discrimination on racial grounds has always been a part of life wants to reform India.

Caste system and British rulers

In the past, British rulers in India, while laying foundation of democratic institutions of India, started many discriminatory practices. In order to keep balance of power and counter Brahmins hold on Indian society passed some discriminatory Acts like Act of 1919 (Minto Morely Reforms) or Communal Award of 1932. Till 1947, they kept their railway compartments, waiting rooms, parks, clubs, hotels, places of other entertainment and residences segregated.

Dalit Activists and caste system

Dalit Activists criticize caste system vehemently and hold it responsible for keeping 750 million Hindus – dalits, tribal's and other backward classes – poor, “subjugated, discriminated against and humiliated.” “Technologies for human survival were all developed by lower castes”, but “upper castes took away the fruits of their labour and invention.” “In the hearts of the oppressed castes, there is anger and hatred.” ‘Social-justice’ demands their emancipation by ending all kind of discrimination. There

are two options: “either complete equality to Dalit Bahujan communities or their conversion into other religions.” Such comments of Dalit Activists and political leaders arouse emotional sentiments of poor masses, generate venom in their heart and create a feeling of ‘other nesses’.

India and ‘Caste’ as a ‘System’

Caste is a very old and indigenous system, conceptualized, developed and practiced exclusively in India. It is difficult for the western world to understand its role – past or present – in Indian society or because of its complete localization and unfamiliarity to see it in its totality. Despite centuries of foreign rule over 75% of Indian population remains Hindu and have strong feelings for caste-system. Had caste system become obsolete, it would have given place to other system. Caste system has influenced all other communities living in India. In the past, caste assimilated numerous social groups – immigrants, locals, tribal, professionals or others into its mainstream without any conversion. It assigned each incoming new group a separate caste identity and made them its integral part in due course of time. This way, neither it disturbed its existing internal social order nor prevented new groups to join the mainstream. It did not annihilate their faith, way of living, internal order, customs, culture or language. Instead, it gave them freedom to prosper according to their internal rhythm.

Caste regarded as a natural institution by Hindus

Indian society regards family, extended family, Kula, Caste and religion as fundamental social institutions. An individual is a natural member of a family, which is a unit of an extended family, extended family of Kula, Kula of a tribe (Vish) – and a tribe of a Jana of Jati (Caste). Caste is second only to the family in widening a person's social radius and in getting importance in his/her private and occupational life.

Equal status to all within a caste

All the members within a caste enjoy equal social status vise-a-vise other castes. Caste values, beliefs, prejudices, injunctions as well as distortions of reality become an indivisible part of a person's psyche and conscience. They share moments of joy and sorrow. It is a common sense that a person's relation with his own caste-members is closer than with those belonging to other castes. Internalized caste norms define an individual role in the society. A person feels good and loved, when he lives up to these norms, and anxious and guilty, when he transgresses them.

Caste, providing social security and stability

Earlier, instead of government, elders of each caste (having sense of belonging, not a desire to exercise authority) used to take care of maintaining discipline within the caste and helped its destitute. Caste provided to all its members' social security and stability. Even as today, it does so in rural areas. Each caste still maintains its own rules, regulations, customs, and way of life and controls the conduct of its members. It encourages self-discipline, conscious, self-control, and self-direction.

Castes as a series of vertical parallels

The key, to understand the caste system, is not in seeing it as a framework of hierarchical layers of social order, each fitting neatly below the other, as pointed out by census

operations done during imperial rule, but as a series of vertical parallels. Each caste is an independent entity, with its own hierarchy, based either on a tribal identity or an occupational identity.

Inter-dependence an integral part of caste system

In ancient and medieval India, all people living in a village or city were bound together by economic and social ties. All castes living in a local area, whether high or low, had a strong bond of mutual dependence, caring, sharing and supporting each other in fulfilling different kind of needs. There was hardly any room for any section of society to consider itself, as being placed in greater or lesser disadvantageous position with reference to another. Concept of forwards or backwards or feeling of exploitation of lower strata by upper castes was almost non-existent at that time. Industrialization and modernization have changed the scene.

Critics on caste system

Some people blame Caste system for its being 'discriminatory' in nature. They say, it serves the interests of "haves" and enhances the agonies of "have-nots". But it is an anomaly, that still it is only the 'have-nots', who cling more tightly to their caste identities today. Caste system has been alleged for giving rise to disparities in the society, because it gives importance to birth in determining social status of a person. But same is the position in Western world also, where wealth determines social status. Wealth is also acquired through birth. There also exists a sharp distinction between the Aristocratic/elite society and common man. Critics claim that for centuries in the past and even at present, people born in lower castes have been suppressed or oppressed by people belonging to upper castes. Upper castes are accountable and punishable for the miseries of lower caste. They should make reparations for the sins/historical wrong done by their ancestors. How far this allegation and its remedy is correct? Justice 'Social, economic and political' never allows punishing somebody else for the crimes committed by others.

No access to education

It is alleged that upper castes has kept its monopoly on education to reinforce its traditional dominance and prevented lower castes from getting educated. When British rulers allowed legally admission to all irrespective of caste or creed in government schools, higher castes opposed admission of the children belonging to lower strata. It is only a half truth. British rulers did not bother much about mass education. It was not so much because of discrimination, that backward castes were debarred or denied access to education, as for –Modern education system was very costly and therefore, unaffordable by masses. The costly nature of education tended to make it a monopoly of the richer classes and city dwellers. Lower-castes did see any immediate use of education. It was more important for them to work and arrange two square meals day rather than spending on education. However, an impoverished group caste Hindus in search of livelihood looked upon modern education as means to earn their living respectfully and devoted their scarce resources on it. The relentless effort of missionaries and the reformers could educate a very small number of people from lower-castes.

Changes brought in by Industrial revolution

It was the industrial revolution, which had changed the trend. Now total aversion of modern youth from their traditional occupation has rendered millions unemployed or underemployed or confused about what they want to do. They waste their time, energy and efforts in search of white collared jobs rather than pursuing jobs, which suits to their knowledge, aptitude and qualifications. There is more job-satisfaction, happiness, success or contentment in doing a job, one knows well rather than in stepping on someone else's toes. Sir John Shore, who was Governor General of India during 1793-1798, observed that there was considerable latitude in matter of work in India. Among many cases, it was constantly found that one brother pursuing hereditary vocation and another entering army. "It may be received as a general maxim that occupation appointed for each tribe is entitled merely to a preference. Every profession, with few exceptions, was open to every description of persons and the discouragement arising from religious prejudices is not greater than what exists in Great Britain from the effects of Municipal and Corporate laws. In the past, whenever rigidities and discriminatory practices of society in the name of caste system suffocated Indian society, there arose alternative ideologies or styles of life, which gave people breathing space. Rise of Buddhism in Ancient India, Sufi tradition of Islam and Bhakti movement of Hindus in medieval India and reform movements of 19th and 20th centuries taught sympathetic attitude towards lesser human beings, brotherly love for each other and fellowship, love and respect all human beings irrespective of caste or creed and rejected practice of elaborate rituals and caste pretensions.

Modern India

Most of the allegations against caste system, which were there in the past, cannot be justified now in modern India. Process of modernization, industrialization, spread of education and growing awareness among masses have already brought to an end slowly but steadily many of the discriminatory practices of Caste system. It has become more liberal and less restrictive in all walks of life. Castes no longer enjoy legal or religious sanctions. Expulsion from castes means little, while earlier it meant complete social ostracism. Old style of authority and power exercised by caste-elders has already diminished. Restrictions or interactions between different castes arising due to considerations for purity and pollution are fading away from public life even from rural areas. Traditional barriers on marriage, hereditary occupations and commonality are losing its importance.

Constitution of India

Preamble of the Indian Constitution promises to secure to all its citizens: 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 and integrity of the Nation. Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits any kind of discrimination on grounds of caste, race, religion, gender or place of birth; Article 16 gives equality of opportunity in matter of public employment, Article 338 creates National commission for Scheduled Castes to safeguard their interests etc.

Legislations for equal opportunities

A number of amendments in the Constitution and legislation have been passed to remove the disabilities of backward people. Un-touch ability has been declared a crime. Bonded labor is abolished by law. Civil Rights Act, 1955, aims to eliminate injustice against weaker sections. Amendment to Prevention of Atrocities Act (SCT) 1989 provides for stern punishments for offenses committed against SCT by Upper Castes. Special Courts, under SCT Act, have been established for punishing officials, if found guilty. Still, there is no respite from discriminatory practices. Why?

Reasons for the miseries of downtrodden

There are many reasons, why people do not get respite from discriminatory practices. There is no denial of the fact that with the passage of time, and for a long time, living under alien rule, caste system had developed many deformities. The system became too rigid to keep its identity continuing. Still it is not so much because of the caste-system, but because of bad politics and poor governance, that millions of people have still to suffer discrimination and exploitation in modern India. Some of the causes are as following –

Emergence of Political Identities

During their imperial rule, the British had divided the Indian society into five major groups, giving each one an independent political identity based on the political power and the amount of wealth, they hold. The water-tight compartmentalization of Indian society had been done by Censuses during British rule into Minorities, Scheduled Castes, now popularly known as Dalits or SCs, Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward castes (OBCs) and Higher Castes.

Political compartmentalization of Indian society

Modern Indian society has been polarized on caste and communal basis into following unbridgeable sections – Upper castes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled tribes, Other Backward Class and Minorities. Stratification of Indian society has been done in most insensitive manner for the purpose of balancing the power. It has become a bye-word for Indian politicians.

Poor execution of rules and regulations

Indian society is sharply divided into two broad divisions- “haves” and “have-nots”. The most important factors responsible for disparities are present-day-politics, irrational and corrupt ways of pursuing the paternal policies of the government at central and State levels and government’s failure to address real issues.

Use of ‘Caste’ as the most powerful tool to create vote-banks

‘Caste’ has become for the present-day political leaders as the easiest and most powerful tool to sway public emotionally and to create a larger vote bank. It may be called ossification of caste-system fallen into the hands of power brokers and vote guzzlers.

Priority to abstract issues in order to divert public attention

Day in and day out, public attention is being diverted from real issues and public sentiments are aroused by floating in

political world abstract issues like discrimination, social justice, affirmative action/reservations, secularism. Sectional interests are being promoted on caste basis. Real issues like mass-scale illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, inflation, deteriorated law and order situation, increasing violence or general coarsening of moral fiber of the Indian society are pushed into the background.

Centralization of control systems

There is complete centralization of control systems in the hands of a few individuals, families and groups irrespective of castes or creed. They have enough money, muscle and political power plus and the support of criminals. They are flourishing day by day and control almost all the national resources. They enjoy life at cost of tax-payers. This very small section of society virtually controls the destiny of millions. They have a say in almost every walk of national life.

Corruption

Corruption has become a major/perennial impediment to implement various developmental schemes. Ignorance and pessimist attitude of masses makes corrupt persons bold. Once the public raises its voice against arbitrary behavior/actions of powerful lobby, all discrimination and malpractices would get automatically controlled.

Aversion from human, moral or traditional values

Aversion of people from human, moral or traditional values has aggravated the problem. The total concentration of educated people is on pursuit of money and materialistic pleasures by hook or crook. Favoritism, in-discipline, violence, corruption, and chase of materialism based on ruthless competition have given sharp rise to disparities and discrimination. It leads to cut-throat competition and creates rift amongst different groups. Political expediency and opportunism has made sectional forces more assertive/aggressive in attitude and vocal about their rights but ignores duties.

Reconcile the claims of growth with the claims of equity

It is one of the big challenges for the government to reconcile the claims of growth with the claims of equity. Compassion, sensitivity, equality or fraternity cannot be imposed or enforced by any outside agency or authority. Such a step may prove to be a cause of social unrest. It has to be in-built in the social economic and political system of a country through education and awareness – education, which is the source of knowledge and power; and awareness, which comes from availability of information.

Narrow loyalties of caste and religion

Narrow loyalties of caste and religion are encouraged generating sub-cultures like caste-ism, favoritism, and lure for easy money, nepotism, parochialism, communalism, regionalism, bigoted sentiments and irresponsible comments, spreading in-discipline in the society. The rising aspirations and demands of people, with the spread of education and awareness, has created added problem for the government.

Discriminatory measures taken by the Government

In Independent India, Governments at centre and the provinces are continuously thrusting upon the public many discriminatory/lofty/populist rules, regulations and policies

in the name of helping “poor masses”. Common men especially belonging to upper castes feel threatened, helpless and suffer from discriminatory policies of the government. Protective policies and laws can neither convert an iniquitous Society into an equitable one, nor does it help in any way the vulnerable, oppressed and submerged masses.

Conclusions

Most of measures taken by the Governmental authorities touch the problems superficially at its periphery only. Most of the solutions pursued by the government are totally unrelated to day to day problems of common man in real life. Instead of benefiting or helping the poor, on one hand such developmental programs increase corruption, and on the other it encourages lethargy, agitation and attitude to depend on authorities for each and everything.

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