

Origin and Development of Caste System in Ancient Indian Aryan Society

Dol Raj Kafle*

Abstract

This study explores the origin and development of the caste system in ancient Aryan society in India. The caste system is a social construct that has shaped the social, economic, and political landscape of communities for centuries. The study uses a qualitative research design, with the framework based on the principle of the Varna System, meaning the division of labor according to social class. The caste system was established based on occupation and social class, dividing people into four groups: priests, rulers, producers or traders, and manual workers or servants. The caste system has endured throughout history, deeply rooted in cultural and traditional practices. The term 'caste' used to describe social hierarchy in Western countries has its roots in the Spanish and Portuguese as well as the Latin word 'casta' which only came into use in the 15th century. In India, the word 'caste' was originally used to refer to a social division system designed to preserve the purity of bloodlines within a group. Over time, the term expanded to include people with close social or blood ties as well as groups with economic privileges and rights, and it became associated with hereditary equality, independent traditional organizations, and customs. The study's objective is to explain the origins and evolution of the caste system in ancient Indian society.

Keywords: Landscape, civilization, ancient Aryan society, bloodlines

Introduction

Caste is a complex social construct that has endured throughout history, with its roots deeply embedded in cultural and traditional practices. It is a system that has shaped the social, economic, and political landscape of communities for centuries. However, the system has been subject to criticism and controversy due to its hierarchical nature, which can lead to discrimination and inequality. The primary form of social organization in certain communities is known as caste, a concept that has developed alongside the evolution of civilization in human society. Caste is not only ethnic in nature but also maintains a subtle and hereditary unity (Dumont, 1970). Historically established, a caste is a community that largely shares a common

* Dr. Kafle is an Associate Professor at Central Department of History, Tribhuvan University and a faculty at College of Applied Business and Technology. Email: dolraj.kafle@rrlc.tu.edu.np

language and cultural similarities, with the differences between castes being in a state of disappearance (Darwin, 2012). It is not clear what the exact differences between castes should be, as inter-caste equality is a more important issue than the distinctions between them.

When examining the global phenomenon of caste origins and development, one can observe that various castes emerged in different regions of the world due to similarities in language, culture, and other factors. Among these groups, the Czechs in Austria, the Poshil in Russia, and the modern Italian race, which combines Roman, Teutonic, Ituscar, Greek, and Arabian influences, are notable examples. Additionally, the French race has been formed through the amalgamation of Gauls, Romans, Britons, Teutons, and others (Smith, 1994). While some argue that each race should have a common language, it is not necessarily logical to assert that different races must have distinct languages (Stalin, 2010). It is apparent that individuals of the same race may speak diverse languages while people of different races can speak the same language like the Doteli language is spoken in the far western region of Nepal, the Awadhi language is spoken in the western Terai districts, and the Maithili language is spoken in the eastern Terai districts. Interestingly, people of all castes residing in those regions speak these languages. Thus, it is difficult to argue that a specific caste must have its own language.

The etymology of the English term 'caste' can be traced back to the Spanish and Portuguese word 'casta,' which encompasses a rich semantic range, including notions of race, lineage, tribe, and breed (Crowther, 1996). The term 'caste' used to describe social hierarchy in Western countries has its roots in the Latin word 'casta' This term only came into use in the 15th century. In India, the word 'caste' was originally used to refer to a social division system designed to preserve the purity of bloodlines within a group. Over time, the term expanded to include people with close social or blood ties as well as groups with economic privileges and rights, and it became associated with hereditary

equality, independent traditional organizations, and customs (Datta, 1968). Caste refers to a hierarchical classification of human communities and societies that are transmitted genetically and persists from generation to generation (Bereman, 1972). Caste is essentially a familial grouping that is recognized collectively rather than individually. Such ethnic groups trace their origins back to common ancestors and share genetic similarities. Initially, these groups typically engage in the same profession and practice as endogamy marriage (Ambedkar, 1917). Initially, the caste system appeared as a cohesive unit, but over time it became increasingly divided into sub-groups. As long as members of a particular caste adhere to the social norms of their society, their social status is considered equal within that group. From a broader perspective, the caste system can be understood as a classification of people who share a common ancestry, characteristics, and physical traits. The Varna system, economic, and Aryan invasion theories are the most significant frameworks employed to elucidate the development of the caste system in ancient India. This study aims to examine the origins and development of the caste system within ancient Aryan society in India.

Review of Literature

The book 'Caste in India: their mechanism, Genesis, and Development' is a comprehensive exploration of the caste system in India. The book meticulously examines the origins and evolution of the caste system within the context of ancient Indian Aryan society. It delves into the mechanisms that perpetuated caste divisions, shedding light on the historical, social, and cultural factors that shaped its development. Overall, the book provides a profound understanding of the complex dynamics and historical roots of the caste system in India's ancient society (Ambedkar, 1917).

The 'Glimpses of World History' offers a comprehensive overview of global history, but it does not specifically focus on the origin and development of the caste system in ancient Aryan society. While the book provides valuable insights into

various civilizations and their historical contexts, it does not delve into the specific topic of caste origins in Indian Aryan society. Though, it is a valuable book for studying world civilizations, including Indian civilization, and it can offer some insights that may be useful for researching the caste system in the ancient Indian Aryan society which can indirectly contribute to the study of the origin of the caste (Nehru, 1934).

The article 'The Early History of Caste' by Arthur Anthony Macdonell, published in *The American Historical Review*, offers a concise and insightful examination of the origin and development of the caste system in ancient Indian Aryan society. Macdonell's scholarly analysis delves into the historical context and religious texts to trace the early stages of caste formation. His work sheds light on the social, cultural, and religious factors that contributed to the evolution of the caste system in ancient Aryan society, making it a valuable resource for understanding the complex origins of caste divisions in ancient India (Macdonnell, Jun 1994). But it is not broadly connected and based on the origin of the caste system in Indian Aryan society.

The book 'Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications' by Louis Dumont is a seminal work that provides a comprehensive analysis of the caste system in India. Dumont explores the hierarchical nature of Indian society and its deep-rooted impact on various social, economic, and political aspects. Drawing on extensive research and anthropological insights, the book examines the ideological foundations of the caste system and its role in shaping individual identity and social structures (Dumont, 2004). Despite being first published in 1966, the fourth edition of the book remains a significant contribution to the understanding of caste dynamics and continues to be highly regarded in academic circles.

The book 'Cast, Class, and Occupation' by G. S. Ghurye, is a renowned work that explores the intricate nature of caste, class, and occupation in India. It provides

valuable insights into the historical and sociological aspects of the caste system. In ancient Aryan society, which is believed to have originated around 1500 BC, the caste system gradually developed as a complex social structure. According to traditional theories, the caste system was initially based on Varna, which classified society into four main varnas or classes: the Brahmins (priests and scholars), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Shudras (laborers and servants). The caste system became more rigid over time, with the addition of numerous jatis (subcastes) and the development of social norms and restrictions associated with each caste. The hereditary nature of caste and the assignment of specific occupations to each caste further solidified its structure (Ghure, 1961). It is important to note that the origins and evolution of the caste system are complex and multifaceted, and different scholars may have varying perspectives on the subject. The book by G. S. Ghurye likely provides a comprehensive analysis of the caste system, its historical context, and its role in ancient Aryan society.

'The Origins of the Caste System in India Vs. (and how it relates to) The Formation of Race in America' is written by Anu Thakrar. The origins of the caste system in ancient Aryan society and its potential comparison to the formation of race in America. the varna system evolved into a more rigid and hereditary social hierarchy known as the caste system. Castes were further subdivided into numerous jatis or subgroups, which were based on occupation, social status, and birth. Individuals were born into specific castes and were expected to adhere to their assigned roles and duties throughout their lives. The caste system eventually became deeply entrenched in Indian society, with rules and restrictions governing marriage, social interaction, and economic opportunities. The caste system in ancient Aryan society and the formation of race in America are complex historical phenomena with distinct origins and characteristics. While both systems involved the categorization of people into hierarchical groups, they differ significantly in their historical development and

societal impact. It's important to approach the study of these systems with an understanding of their unique contexts and the specific experiences of those affected by them (Thakrar, 2001).

Methodology and Materials

This research study has relied on various sources, including secondary documents. These sources have been gathered from various libraries, self-collections, online, and other places. In ancient Indian Aryan society, the caste system was established based on occupation and social class. The system divided people into four groups: priests, rulers, producers or traders, and manual workers or servants. Over time, additional rules were introduced to reinforce this work-based division and to maintain the purity of blood, resulting in the development of the caste system. The present study has employed a qualitative research design, with the framework based on the principle of the Varna System, meaning the division of labor according to social class. Using collected materials, the study utilizes descriptive and analytical methods to explain the origins and evolution of the caste system in ancient Indian society.

Result and Discussion

Origin and development of caste system

The word 'caste' only came into use in India after the seventeenth century (Béteille, 1965). Similarly, the term 'caste' was not included in the French dictionary until 1797 (Bouglé, 1971). On the other hand, the word 'caste' was first used in the fifteenth century and has been a part of the English language since 1455 (Velassery, 2005). The caste system in India is considered to be a fundamental system established on the basis of religion. It was started by the Indo-European-speaking Aryan people in India, and it has been maintained from ancient times up to the present day. The system has gradually developed from the highest to the lowest, similar to the existing

rank in the army (Dumo, 2004). In English, this positional order is referred to as a hierarchy, which encompasses class, inequalities, differentiation, and various forms of distinctions among people.

The origin and development of the caste system in Indian society were primarily based on business, ability, experience, and wealth acquisition. The Indo-Aryan community, who had been residing in the Gangatic plan for an extended period, is considered to be the originators of the Indian caste system. These Aryans, who founded Hinduism and migrated to India in ancient times, are believed to have Indo-European, Indo-Germanic, Teutonic, Roman, and Iranian origins (Nehru, 1934). Historical records suggest that the Aryans who arrived in the Indian subcontinent around 5000 BC, had close cultural connections with the Spanish and Portuguese (Hsu, 1963). However, after separating from them, the Aryan people in India had their own unique culture and caste system that still exists today.

The ancient Indo-Iranian society, much like the Indian society, was divided into four groups according to a caste system. These groups were known as Atharvas (priests), warriors, Astriya Suentus (cultivators), and Huitis (artisans). This form of classification was also prevalent in ancient Greece, where people were divided into gents, Kuriya, and phyles. However, similar to the caste system in Europe, the caste system in Iran did not remain stable for long. Despite this, the social standing of priests and the ruling class in society remained high until the Middle Ages. The ancient Iranians also divided society into different classes based on occupation, but this too did not last for a significant amount of time (Dutta, 1931). Unlike the Indian society, other developed societies in the world did not perpetuate the caste system, instead opting for class divisions as a means of social stratification.

Out of all the caste systems that have existed throughout history, the Indian caste system has been the longest-lasting system in the world (Macdonnell, Jun 1994).

This system was developed to separate the people of the Aryan race, who had a clean complexion, from the non-Aryans, who had a spotted complexion. During this time, Aryans were considered priests, rulers, and people who engage in money-based work and while non-Aryans were considered insignificant and forced to do menial tasks (Chaudhary, 2006). Thus, while the caste system has existed in many societies worldwide since ancient times, the Indian caste system was unique in its origins and structure.

During the early days of Indian society, caste originated based on occupation, ability, experience, and wealth. The caste system was developed by Hindu society during the Vedic or post-Vedic period around 1500 to 800 century BC. Over time, even among those who embraced different professions, differences started to emerge. As a result, many sociologists believed that it was appropriate to classify caste based on occupation. Although some Indian casteists claimed complete equality among castes, there is a distinction between the caste system and the varna system, with the former being the foundation of the caste system (Ostor, Fruzzetti & Barnett, 1982). Such evidence shows that society became organized due to the development of the caste system in Indian society at that time. But only after a long time, it is believed that the issue of discrimination in the caste system is being added.

By the 6th century BC, the Aryan people of India had given priority to the issue of racial purity. During that period, caste started to be determined by occupation, and occupation by birth in India (Singhal, 1972). As early as the sixth century BC, the Aryans had insisted on upper-caste marriage to maintain caste purity in Indian society (Senart, 1975). In such a situation, there arose a problem of determining the caste of children born from a marriage between individuals from different castes. As a result, the number of castes in Indian Aryan society gradually increased since they did not strictly adhere to a specific set of rules (Ghurye, 1961). When examining the caste

system in ancient Indian society, several castes can be identified based on specific occupations (Thakrar, 2001). These include spinners of yarn known as 'Suta', doorkeepers known as 'Kshatta', potters known as 'Kumal', hunters known as Nishadha or Pabjika, bow makers called 'Ishukrit', winemakers known as 'Surakar', rope weavers known as 'Rajak or Sarg', etc. (Alavi, 1998). In this way, it seems that profession, inter-caste marriage, and business have become the main basis of the development of the caste system in Indian Hindu society.

Regarding the development of the caste system, it has been suggested that a closed class system can evolve into a caste system (Baral, 1993). The caste system in Indian Hindu society evolved from a larger form of family aggregation, ultimately becoming a class system determined by birth. Following the Rigvedic period, the caste system developed within the Hindu society from inter-caste marriage groups, with membership based on lineage. Gradually, the system imposed social restrictions on its members and separate groups started to embrace distinct professions, accumulating rights in certain products while being bound by rules (Datta, Majumdar & Raychaudhary, 1967). This resulted in the formation of a separate homogeneous class among the people, which gradually developed into a caste.

The Aryans, who established the Varna system, were a minority group compared to the indigenous population of the Indian subcontinent. Despite their numerical disadvantage, the Aryans were deeply concerned about maintaining the purity of their bloodline and thus devised a variety of methods and regulations to safeguard it. They encountered numerous obstacles in preserving their cultural identity and purity, which prompted them to institute abstentions, prohibitions, and restrictions for the Shudras and slaves. This system, known as the policy of social exclusion or exclusionary practices (Kshetri & Khatibada, 1997), gradually led to the social confinement and untouchability of individuals belonging to the Shudra caste.

Caste refers to a group that intermarries within its own group, maintains restrictions on eating with other groups, has a distinct profession for its own group, receives inferior treatment compared to other groups, is determined by birth, and is inherently bound by group rules (Sharma, 1966). Over time, as differences and internal divisions increased in the Indian caste system, the behavioral differences between one caste and another also increased. With the development of the caste system in Indian Hindu society, the society was divided into different sections. After the implementation of the caste system, a person belonging to a particular caste or group could not become a member of another caste or group, as they were bound to follow the rules of their own group. Failure to abide by these rules could result in punishment (Ghurye, 1969). Such social rules led people to gradually join a particular class, group, or caste.

The caste system is not exclusive to Indian Hindu society and can be observed in other regions of the world among individuals of diverse religious backgrounds. In countries such as Egypt, West Asia, China, Japan, America, Rome, and some parts of Europe, society is segregated into classes akin to castes. In Egypt, for instance, the populace was classified into pyramid landlords, agricultural laborers, and slaves, with the latter two groups relying on the former. During the pyramid era in Egypt, the ruling class of the eighteenth generation proclaimed the presence of four societal classes in accordance with the governmental edict (Dirks 1989). They were priests, soldiers, builders, and servicemen. Among them, the existence of the first two classes was somewhat good, while the latter two classes were considered to be created for the service of society. In this sense, the caste system is not a separate and unique system, but it seems that it is only a classification that has been maintained in the global human society (Deshpande, 2010). It seems that such a classification has helped to maintain simplicity in the identification of the related class or caste, On the basis of that, later on, people have created a very comfortable environment to search for their rights and authority.

Conclusion

The concept of race refers to the various forms of human categorization observed across different regions of the world. However, despite such differences in physical appearances, humans are considered to be a singular species, given that they all evolved from the same gene pool and geographical origin. Over the course of human civilization, individuals residing in diverse regions for extended periods developed varying physical traits, owing to the localized environment and climate. With increasing population sizes, people eventually segregated themselves into smaller units for identification purposes, which later became known as castes. The fundamental principles underlying caste division are known to manifest in different forms across various parts of the world. The division of labor is regarded as the foundation of the caste system in ancient Indian society, which was initially segmented into four classes - Bramins, Kshetriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras - based on their professions. This class system was referred to as Varna. While some scholars have hypothesized that the division was based on physical characteristics or color, many concur that the caste system was rooted in the profession. As society became more complex, intermarriages, occupational diversity, and varying professions resulted in the emergence of numerous castes while attempts were made to maintain societal purity based on bloodlines. This system endured for a considerable period, and to this day, Indian society remains stratified into many castes. Its influence continues to be felt in South Asian countries such as Nepal.

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