

Caste System in India: A Historical Perspective

by Ekta Singh

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A child of but yesterday, destined to die the day after tomorrow, comes to me and asks me to change all my plans and if I hear the advice of that baby and change all my surroundings according to his ideas I myself should be a fool, and no one else. Much of the advice that is coming to us from different countries is similar to this.

Tell these wiseacres, "I will hear you when you have made a stable society yourselves. You cannot hold on to one idea for two days, you quarrel and fail; you are born like moths in the spring and die like them in five minutes. You come up like bubbles and burst like bubbles too. First form a stable society like ours.

First make laws and institutions that remain undiminished in their power through scores of centuries. Then will be the time to talk on the subject with you, but till then, my friend, you are only a giddy child."

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The fission of castes into sub-castes is due to many causes. One of the most frequent is the adoption of different occupations: it is common, for example, for the members of a caste who sell an article to separate from, and claim superiority to, those who produce it.

Differences of social customs are another cause of division, e.g. those who prohibit the remarriage of widows and those who permit it form separate sub-castes.

Membership of different religious sects is a third line of demarcation. For instance, one sub-caste may be Vaishnava, i.e. Vishnu is the object of adoration, and will not intermarry with a Saiva sub-caste, which specially venerates Siva. Territorial distribution also operates in the same way, members of a caste who have different places of origin or present residence being grouped in distinct sub-castes.

Difference of language is yet another barrier to union in some parts of Madras, where members of a caste who speak Tamil, Telugu and Kanarese belong to as many different sub-castes...

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From the above evidence it seems clear that the Sudras were really the indigenous inhabitants of India, who were subdued by the Aryans as they gradually penetrated into India. When the

conquering race began to settle in the land, the indigenous tribes, or such of them as did not retire before the invaders into the still unconquered interior, became a class of menials and labourers, as the Amalekites were to the children of Israel. ... The Sudras were despised and hated as worshippers of a hostile god. They could not join in the sacrifices by which the Aryans renewed and cemented their kinship with their god and with each other; hence they were outlaws towards whom no social obligations existed. It would have been quite right and proper that they should be utterly destroyed, precisely as the Israelites thought that Jehovah had commanded them to destroy the Canaanites. But they were too numerous, and hence they were regarded as impure and made to live apart, so that they should not pollute the places of sacrifice, which among the Aryans included their dwelling-houses.

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A person who dies with Sudra's food in his stomach becomes a village pig, or is reborn in a Sudra's family. An Arya who had sexual intimacy with a Sudra woman was to be banished; but a Sudra having intimacy with an Arya was to be killed. If a Sudra reproached a dutiful Arya, or put himself on equality with him on a road, on a couch or on a seat, he was to be beaten with a stick.

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A Brahman woman having connection with a Sudra was to be devoured by dogs, but one having connection with a Kshatriya or Vaishya was merely to have her head shaved and be carried round on an ass.

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The well-known traditional theory of caste is that the Aryans were divided from the beginning of time into four castes: Brahmans or priests, Kshatriyas or warriors, Vaishyas or merchants and cultivators, and Sudras or menials and labourers, all of whom had a divine origin, being born from the body of Brahma--the Brahmans from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs, and the Sudras from his feet. - это из *The tribes and castes*, почти буквально повторено в Caste System in India, где далее сказано сразу за этим: This statement is somewhat allegorical. 🔄

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from [Castes in India](#):

[18] Let us see what our imaginary group is likely to do with this surplus man and surplus woman. We will first take up the case of the surplus woman. She can be disposed of in two different ways so as to preserve the endogamy of the Caste.

[19] First: burn her on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband and get rid of her. This, however, is rather an impracticable way of solving the problem of sex disparity. In some cases it may work, in others it may not. Consequently every surplus woman cannot thus be disposed of, because it is an easy solution but a hard realization. And so the surplus woman (= widow), if not disposed of, remains in the group: but in her very existence lies a double danger. She may marry outside the Caste and violate endogamy, or she may marry within the Caste and through competition encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brides in the Caste. She is therefore a menace in any case, and something must be done to her if she cannot be burned along with her deceased husband.

[20] The second remedy is to enforce widowhood on her for the rest of her life. So far as the objective results are concerned, burning is a better solution than enforcing widowhood. Burning the widow eliminates all the three evils that a surplus woman is fraught with.

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"A really faithful man or woman ought not to feel affection for a woman or a man other than the one with whom he or she is united. Such purity is compulsory not only after marriage, but even before marriage, for that is the only correct ideal of chastity. No maiden could be considered pure if she feels love for a man other than the one to whom she might be married. As she does not know to whom she is going to be married, she must not feel affection for any man at all before marriage. If she does so, it is a sin. So it is better for a girl to know whom she has to love before any sexual consciousness has been awakened in her" Hence girl marriage.