Pervasion of caste system in urban areas- How does the caste structure hold itself in Urban areas

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Abstract— The caste system is a social concept that has plagued Indian society since its inception. Much water has passed down the Ganges and the structure has seen reforms, changes since its inception more than a thousand years ago, however, it is still relevant in the modern day Hindu society. One, from a privileged position can argue that the caste system is largely relegated to the rural stratosphere of Indian society, and not urban stratosphere, then they are extremely wrong. The caste system has creeped into urban Indian society as well. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Paike, employs 54,000 Pourakarmikas on a contractual and semi-contractual basis, close to 60% of them are from an SC/ST background while the remaining are a combination of OBC"s and other migrants. The Pourakarmikas are the frontline workers of the BBMP, cleaning public toilets, handling waste disposal etc. this is indicative of the caste structure perading our society. Marriages have always been a social institution in our society, intercaste marriages have always been viewed as a taboo, in present day and age matrimonial sites have considered caste as a prerequisite for marriage. Several matrimonial websites cater only to a particular caste, in a meritorious society , the necessity of caste being imperative for marriage is an aspect the paper casts light upon. The marriages among the SC/ST communities in urban areas, is met with a lot of hindrances, with matrimonial sites not catering to them to constant interruptions by the law enforcement agencies, to even having separate marriage halls for their marriages, they are often treated as third class citizens in their own society, Bengaluru, where the state civic body itself running marriage halls catering to the SC/ST communities. The facilities offered here are inhumane and subpar with even the state treating them with apathy. The Marriages also show the existence of the caste system, but rather silently. The most veiled form of caste discrimination exists in our housing societies and in our apartments, where in most housing establishments there is segregation of resources and facilities. Housemaids are not allowed to use elevators, have separate entrances, and utensils. This is not just with respect to private properties. A government statistic states that 35% of Bengaluru's population lives in 2% of the total landmass, that is, slums. Seventy to ninety per cent (varying from slum to slum) of these people are SC, ST or converted minorities. The very existence of slums is a clear indication of caste in urban areas. The concrete walls have been torn down but the invisible line of separation is still present. The paper"s scope of research is restricted to the city of Bengaluru and the caste hieararchy and structure that prevails in the urban civic society and its working.

I. INTRODUCTION

The caste system has left its imprint on the fabric of Indian society, as a dye would. Giving it the color that we see as a society today. From the privileged point of view, we think that the caste system is only limited to the rural parts of our society. The Scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes of our society are often given a blind eye to their problems. To understand the impact of caste one shall analyse the origin and the history of caste as an institution

History of caste - Caste is derived from the Latin word Casta[1] which means lineage. Portuguese used this word to describe the institution as they thought it was pure from blood. According to Risley, "a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name;[2] claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor; human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling; The name is generally associated with a specific occupation, for example, Brahmins were the priests and teachers, Kshatriyas were the warrior class, Vaishyas the businessmen and merchants and Shudras were the menial workers. Ketkar describes the characteristics of caste[3];

1. They are ascribed, i.e. they are given at birth and are not achieved by merit.
2. Caste groups are endogamous; there are irrevocable social laws that prevent one from marrying outside their caste group. Any kind of marriage outside the caste group was deemed void and unacceptable by society

3. Caste groups contained laws governing the eating habits of an individual, the highest-class Brahmins are seen as the ones that consume vegetarian food and are restricted from consuming meat. It is also to be noted that a person from the lowest caste cannot serve food to someone belonging to the higher caste, members of the higher caste shall not serve food to the lowest caste.

Origins of caste-

The divine theory - This theory is derived from the Vedas and the Manusmriti. Purusha Suktha states that it has been established by the order of God or at least by his wishes, and so it should be religiously followed. As per the „Purusha Sukta‟ in Rig Veda, the people belong to four main castes (Varnas) constituting the four body parts of the Purush (the creator). The Brahmin was his (pursha‟s) mouth, the Rajanya (Kshatriya) was his arms, the Vaisya was his thigh; the Shudra sprang from his feet.

Manu in Manusmriti asserted that different castes cropped up as a series of crosses between the first four Varnas and their descendants. The descendants were based on 10 primeval Rishis Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Prachetas, Vasistha, Bhriguand Narda. In the Mahabharata, divergent views have been expressed. In Shanti Parva, Bhrigu asserted that the world was created by Brahma and later on separated into castes as a consequence of work. It is also to be noted that the very Indian text also mocks the caste system, the Bhagwad gita in chapter 18 verse 41 tells brāhmaṇa-kṣhatriya-viśhāṁ śhūdrāṇāṁ cha Parantapakarmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ, this translates to The duties of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—are distributed according to their qualities, in accordance with their guṇas (and not by birth).

This goes against the very principle of caste being ascribed, the question arises, is caste a social construct by humans or a divine division?

Indian society, since its inception, has been dividing its society based on work. The Varna system, which eventually transpired into the caste system, has left its imprint on the fabric of Indian society, as a dye would. The point of view that is occupied by the privileged shall lead you to believe that the caste structure is limited to the rural aspects of Indian society. While they are often turned over with a blind eye, they are still a reality of urban Indian Society.

We often live in the delusion that the caste structure is parentheses of the rural parts of India, however, this is not true. The urban Indian society has imbibed in itself seamlessly, the caste system. Caste Discrimination is not explicit; rather, one can say that it is subtle. We see it all around us, but it is not present to us, it may be in the place that one resides, in the employment one receives, or the way one is treated, by service providers. Casteism still exists in present day and age in a very subtle manner; this can be seen in very simple practices such as names. The Delhi High Court observed that change in surname to avoid caste based prejudice is under right to live with dignity. Several members change their surnames to avoid caste based prejudices. This practice is called Sanskritiaisation as termed by MN Srinivas. Sanskritisation is the process through which the lower caste mimics the upper caste[4]. He gives the example of Smiths who considered themselves to be "Vishwakarma Brahmins"[5], and Sanskritized their ritual to climb to the higher position in societal hierarchy, this has led to alienation of lower caste practices as they have followed the footsteps of the higher caste. While caste as a system is dead or dying, individual castes are thriving (MN Srinivas) this is the most apt way to suggest caste still thrives in urban regions.

The paper looks into various ways it's still practiced today and analyse it through interviews and case studies.

Body

The caste system is divided into 4 parts, the Brahmans are at the top of the caste pyramid, followed by the Kshatriyas then the Vaishyas and Shudras. This is the structure of the traditional caste structure. The Shudras are considered peasants and servants of the Indian society. The work that is typically associated with the Shudras, has now been taken over by the city corporations. The city civic corporation of Bangalore, is the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, BBMP for short. The BBMP along with the BWSSB, the Bangalore Water Supply, and Sewage Board are the

two major civic maintenance organizations. The major chunk of the workers that constitute the workforce is predominantly from the castes that predominantly comprise the Shudras, which would predominantly be the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Pourakarmikas

The Lowest rung of the civic workers of the BBMP is called Pourakarmikas, a large chunk of the workforce, primarily workers who are scheduled caste. The Dalits, The Badigas[6], The Valagas, and The Madigas form the castes from which a major chunk of the workers are employed as Pourakarmikas and workers that engage in manual scavenging. These workers are mostly employed as sweepers, sanitary help in public toilets, etc.

An interesting fact that one must pay attention to is that out of the workers that are employed as Pourakarmikas close to 7 out of 10[7] belong to the scheduled castes while the remaining belong to OBC and the other castes. We believe that this is a very clear indicator that the caste structure is still a very integral part of the Indian urban society. The very nature of the work has been deprived of its dignity that is associated with the labor. The work that is done by these workers, is seen as work that is below the dignity of the castes that do not form the lowest rung of Hindu society.

The discrimination faced by these workers is also very evident, most of these workers are not allowed to use their premises to relieve themselves or to take a break, in fact many of these workers are not even paid their salaries and other allowances on time and are not even subjected to sub-par working conditions as well. The workers face discrimination not only from their employers but also from society as a whole.

Upon speaking to multiple BBMP Pourakarmikas, who requested to be anonymous, they told us that they are treated as second-class human beings by society. They told us that they are not allowed to enter homes to collect the waste, they are given water, which they mentioned only a few homes were kind enough to give them, gave them in paper cups, or had separate glasses and utensils for them. When they go to apartments to collect waste, they have to usually segregate the waste that is dumped in a common garbage disposal and are

asked to use separate entrances and are not permitted to use the elevators of the apartments. As per the recent BBMP report, funds have been rolled out for the creation of crèche facilities, restrooms, and recreational rooms for the Pourakarmikas. However, these funds haven't seen the light of day and have yet to be used for the same. This is not just through our interactions but also several reports suggest that these Pourakarmikas are not paid regularly, one report also suggests that Pourakarmikas haven't been paid for 6 months. It was also found that the contractors responsible for the Pourakarmikas treat them unfairly; this highlights the struggles of a Pourakarmika under BBMP.

Manual Scavengers -

Manual Scavenger (MS) means a person engaged or employed, at the commencement of this Act or at any time thereafter, by any individual or a local authority or an agency or a contractor, for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrines is disposed or, or on a railway track or in such premises, as the Central Government or a state Government may notify before the excreta fully decomposes in such a manner as may be prescribed, and the expression "manual scavenging" shall be construed accordingly.[8]

Manual scavenging has existed in India since early civilization, groups like Bhangi and Valmiki have engaged in the same. As per the 1993 Manual Scavengers and Dry Latrines Act manual scavenging is prohibited in India. The stats show it has been a sad state of affairs as far as manual scavenging in India goes. As per the 2017 survey on manual scavengers, there are 57,000 manual scavengers present in Karnataka. In Karnataka the manual scavengers predominantly belong to the Mehtar, Manargodis, and Madiga community[9], they choose the profession as there is no alternative for them. These workers have no social security savings or any kind of benefits for them. Within the Dalit community the Madiga community[10] is considered to be in the lowest strata, this community is considered untouchables within the SC/ST community and primarily engages in manual scavenging, disposing of dead animals, tanning, etc.

Another aspect of workers the paper would cover is workers private garbage collectors, these workers primarily belong to lower castes such as the Valmikis, these workers undergo various kinds of discrimination, unlike Pourakarmikas they don't have gloves or masks and this causes various health issues. These workers also accuse the government for not providing accessible healthcare for them. The lack of access to drinking water and toilets makes life hell for these workers.

Ghettoisation -

Roti, Kapada aur Makan, was the then prime minister Indira Gandhi"s campaign slogan, that propelled her to power, but urban housing, especially in major cities, is still based on caste. This process of particular groups staying together in a particular area is called Ghettoing. The Phenomenon of Ghettoing also exists in Bangalore, if you look at urban Bangalore, one finds it, upon observance.

The areas, where largely the slums have developed, such as Gavipura, Goripalya, Lakshmi Puram, Gouwthampura, DJ Halli, and Laggere, to name a few, have a large number, close to

18.75% population of the urban Bangalore population of which 98% are SC/ST and converted minorities. These areas are largely occupying the outskirts, of the old Bangalore region, This indicates that the residents of these areas have been generational and have been subjected to discrimination from the upper caste elites of the society. One must know that these areas are close to affluent areas in Bangalore, such as Chamrajpete, Vijayanagar, Indiranagar, Koramangala, and the Central Business District to name a few. This was done to ensure that constant service was being provided to those occupying the higher strata of society.

The residents of these areas are constantly treated like those of the Shudras of the ancient Hindu society, but methods of treatment have taken a much different route, residents of Lakshmipuram told us that, police if any crime has taken place first visit their area, and rounds up all the former criminals for questioning and are often profusely beaten up from

Upon our visit to these areas, we saw that there was a shortage of water, electricity, and unhygienic sanitary conditions. Most slums have an open drain and drainage, and they become a breeding ground for diseases such as malaria, chikungunya, and other diseases. This coupled with a lack of access to healthcare, economic opportunities

In regions such as Basvangudi in Bengaluru, to this day casteist practices have been observed by the members living in the region. Basvanagudi is a region with a high Brahmin population

It is observed that they prefer Brahmins over non-brahmins as tenants. This is done subtly by offering their property to only vegetarians. Some might argue that vegetarianism is a way of life and does not have anything to do with casteism. Historically brahmins have been vegetarians and this is a subtle way to indicate they want only Brahmins. This is a subtle method of ghettoization in India.

The recent study by Novostad et al.[11] proves that neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by SCs and Muslims have limited access to government-provided public services compared to other neighborhoods within the same cities. The Sachar Committee[12] has also previously made similar observations regarding Muslims in India. Various essential services such as secondary schools, healthcare facilities, electricity, water, and sewage systems are consistently of inferior quality in SC and Muslim neighborhoods[13]. This disparity in service provision is extremely substantial, with one exception being the presence of urban primary schools, which are relatively more common in urban SC neighborhoods but less prevalent in rural SC neighborhoods and similarly both urban and rural Muslim neighborhoods.

Young people in SC neighborhoods have systematically worse outcomes[14] than those in non-SC neighborhoods — but the difference is mostly explained by the economic status of their families. This does not rule out a negative causal effect of growing up in an SC neighborhood on child outcomes, because those parent outcomes could themselves be caused by living in a bad neighborhood. For example, parents might invest less in their house (lowering the

value of the consumption control) if they lack security of tenure.

CONCLUSION

We as privileged members of society have created a false narrative, that discrimination exists only in rural areas and urban areas are free from it but what we don"t realize is the subtle way these caste practices exist. Mechanisms to tackle discrimination exist, but they have fallen short in many ways, due to red tapism, lack of incentive and various others factors

The state of Karnataka has constituted the SC/ST commission, to look into the problems that are faced by the SC/ST community in the state. The commission has been partially successful in solving the problems of caste discrimination faced by the community outside of the capital. The commission deals with various problems faced by the community, but a look at its track record shows that it caters to the members of the SC/ST community who are economically well-to-do.

However, it has been inadequate in solving problems that come to it as well, because the commission is a quasi-judicial body. It does not have complete power to act on its own. What makes matters worse is that the commission has the position of a judge along with a political representative, as the head of the commission.

The Bright side of our interactions is how there has been an increase in awareness among the marginalized sections society with regards to discrimination and the SC/ST commission of Karnataka has admitted that there has been an increase in reporting of problems faced by the SC/ST community . The Journey towards caste equality is arduous but is an achievable target that requires our united efforts.

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