

The Modern Caste System in Tamil Nadu: A General Outline and
research towards proposed systems to minimize the discrimination

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A Journey based on the Author's experience

The Caste System of India is one of the pillars for culture in Indian Society. By Pillars, I mean it forms a social-identity among various groups within Indian Society. The Caste System originated from the Vedas in Hinduism. It mentions that every person is born into a caste. This is determined by his own karma. Karma is defined as good-deeds. It is his own karma and cannot be blamed upon others.

Even Brahman (Supreme Creator) cannot intervene in his cycle of karma. It provides a strong-social structure in society. It creates inequality among various sects within the system.

My experience living in a society of caste-system in Tamil Nadu gave me some thoughts to write about it.

I am writing some of the places where caste could be used to discriminate people in Tamil Nadu. My first real experience of caste was in my sophomore year of undergrad.

All I knew was I belonged to this sect of caste even though I was a Christian. I experienced the prejudice of caste system. Once I knew the famous people within my community (caste), I began to have a sense of haughtiness because of those people. As I kept learning and started arguing for the caste prejudiced. I figured out that I was discriminating people, finding their castes and trying to find common ground (caste). [I have to add my thoughts from Honor/Shame

framework]

As I figured out a person's caste and found that they belonged to the same community, I had some kind of affinity for that person. A person was part of my own community. At the height of casteism in my life, I began to discern caste by people's face.

This was done by seeing similarities among various sects, for example: Most of the priests have pale skin and can be distinguished from darker skin tone people. I believe that people maintained this by marrying within their community. This is followed strictly all over India. This entails, the logic behind my recognition of finding a person's community by their face structure and skin tone.

When I was in a rural village, people respected me and welcomed. I belonged to the same caste. This is where they found the common ground. I could state, "I am from this caste and they would put a smile and greet you with openness."

Most of the people you meet from rural community would politely ask you, "Which community do you belong to?"

Perhaps, they are curious to know if you belonged to the same community.

Some of the techniques used to figure out a person's community are finding the place of their ancestors. A lot of people have knowledge on the population of castes in each district. And by finding out where a person's ancestors are from would allow the person to guess from the majority of dominated castes in that district.

What is the reason one needs to know someone's caste?

In order to know the reasons, let us see the areas where caste system is pivotal in Modern Tamil Nadu.

I consider them as arguments because reasons for knowing a person's caste could be a case for marriage.

Someone old might want to know your caste because they might want to consider their daughter married to a sweet handsome boy like you.

Modern reasons to support the Caste System:

Argument for Marriage

At Present, in Tamil Nadu — I would argue that marriage is strictly followed based on the community. Even religion is tolerated sometimes but caste is a greater force to decide, as to, who you will be marrying. To support my claim of the previous statement, I can give an example -- My grandfather belonged to a religion different to my grandmother. Even though the difference in religion was challenging, Caste was the pivotal decision for their marriage. Since both belonged to the same caste, one person agreed to change their religion. However, the Bible says, a Christian accepts Jesus as savior and Lord, thus it is a change of heart, and not man-made names (Romans 10:9). In Most cases, the women's religion will be more appropriate to choose than the Men's.

I could also support this claim by my aunt's marriage. Her husband was forced to change his religion. This is not objective in all cases for marriage. By now, you have seen the pivotal place for caste system in Indian society, where, it is taken in consideration more than religion. Although, religion drives a person from the inside and is crucial for every part of his life when he's practicing, I find no real life experience where caste drives a person to make decisions other than marriage.

One might argue, the traditional answer to this question, ***“So and so caste has such behavior, habits, thus it is easier to get along.”***

However, by using caste, one cannot simply find the inside of a person. No person would come out openly about his bad deeds. At first, family would promote their best or try to have good virtues. As people get used to each other, the real self comes out.

I argue, that a person's virtues are more important than human constructed caste.

The Philosopher Socrates, says, one likes a person due to their virtues. And, Socrates suggests that, as couples fall in love, they ought to appreciate each other's virtues and grow stronger. Therefore, if two apple fruits are kept close by to each other, and one looks beautiful on the outside but rotten on in the inside, the fruit is merely barren to the person's life.

Now, there is also materialistic worldview, where, people prefer fame, money, and social status over Caste system. However, this could be

acceded in a lot of situations, for example, one family, would be suffering in gargantuan debt. In order for them, to prevail over the perils of life, it is permissible to take decisions on materialistic worldview. However, the same analogy of bad apple could be repeated here.

There are certain individuals in the society who don't entail the caste system in marriage but this is a rare scenario.

Argument for cultural unity within Society

This argument was presented to bolster the persons' marriage. I first heard this during my freshman year of High school.

A person, who is a priest, has necessary habits such as abstaining from alcohol, meat and following rituals to their God/Gods strictly. By rituals, I am saying that a person wakes up early by 4 a.m and starts chanting praises to their God. Now, based on this teaching and cultural upbringing, such a person would find horrendous a meat eater like you.

Why would he find it so horrendous? Since he has never touched or tasted meat and believes it as unclean due to their cultural upbringing. Such people do throw up by seeing simple acts as eating an omelet. Yes, this might not be a big issue for some people but when a person is marriage, every single habit is reflected to the opposite gender.

However, I do not see, this as a cultural unity among people, this is a place where, there is huge cultural dissent among various sub-sects of Castes.

Argument for social upbringing

From the previous paragraph, it can follow that parents from each community want to teach habits, which they find as ethical and valuable. The caste system preserves each communities' habits and social upbringing.

There are subtle cultural habits and traditions in each community. Once, I was traveling on a train, I met a Women who was in her late fifties. What followed from my encounter was interesting?

One can know, whether a woman is married by recognizing the 'thali' (necklace), usually it is either gold or yellow marked with symbols affirming to their religion.

I recognized that she was wearing more than one and I asked her the reason behind it. She explained her tradition of getting married again to the same person when they both reach fifty. That was quite different from my own community.

So, each community wants to preserve their own traditions. Now there are so many different traditions for each community, which I do not know right now. I merely want the reader to know subtle things within the Caste System

Argument for up lifting a socially downtrodden community

Now this is a major reason from political view and government regulates this old system. I will explain this briefly and make it concise. Due to untouchability in the last century, a lot of castes were

forbidden to have access to temples, schools.

They were ostracized by upper castes. This is followed strictly and accepted by all communities. A person in lower caste cannot have food with someone from the upper caste as it will create a social stigma that both are equal.

A person in higher caste was considered high in every aspect of Life. But in Modern society in Tamil Nadu, this is not widely accepted and people do not discriminate others for un-touch ability.

Due to these past issues, the government decided to create four classes of Castes. There are millions of Castes all over India but they all fall into any of the four groups. So the people from low caste such as people who live in Forests (I have not encountered these people in my real Life), are given reservations. By Reservation, I mean in education, job, and financial aspects of life.

They will get more benefits than a person from a higher caste. Life is easier for them if they work just a little hard but they cannot access all these easily. One reason would be that they might live in a forest and have no access to schools. In order to encourage them, the government would give them with certain benefits in every aspect of Life.

Meanwhile, a person from a higher caste is in a serious disadvantage as he cannot get any benefits. I will write more about this in my latter works. This will be more complex if I start to analyze the benefits and impact it could do for the communities.

Dr. Ambedkar

Ambedkar, considered to be the father of Indian constitution was from a low caste of untouchables. His dissertation topic was on the Caste system and he defended it successfully and earned a doctorate at Columbia University, New York in 1922.

Since young age, He faced a lot of discrimination.

A brief example could help you to understand the situations of Dalit's (untouchables)

In public schools, he was asked to sit on the floor with a rug. If he sits near other people (high caste)

They would automatically become unclean. When he wanted to drink water from a common place, he was not allowed to open the tap but someone from the higher caste had to open it.

This reminds me of racial segregation in America. Anyway, the issue is more detestable in India.

A person from lower-caste was not allowed to get water from a common well. A person from lower caste is not allowed to walk into a street if it is designed to a higher caste community and if he does, people will pour water over the street and clean it.

I could go on and write the ill things happening in the name of Caste. But that wouldn't help in any way.

There are numerous people who have written about it.

I should focus more the core underlying principle and finding ways where people can escape from it.

Ambedkar's solutions to the Caste System:

Dr. Ambedkar has fought this evil system and has considerably impacted a lot to the Modern Society in India. Let us focus on the

solutions presented by him. I think, it is really important to analyze solutions & present new models.

Inter-marriage & Inter-dinning.

By Intermarrying, he is proposing people to marry a person from a low caste to someone from higher caste. It might happen between any different castes, not just those two groups.

He says, if people start doing this, the caste system will soon collapse and everyone will start accepting each other. I failed to see the pragmatic ideas to make this happen in real life.

However, I must say, this is not a pragmatic solution in real life.

A Dalit marrying Brahmin is unheard and I have not come across this in real life. But you might raise the question, that is not a problem and can happen in the future to break the system. I would disagree with it because unless people are willing to accept it in real life, it won't happen.

There's already a conscious wall, built within each person. Both will disagree with each other eventually as they figure out their Castes. For argument sake, let's presume that people are intermarrying but then again the child inherits his Father's caste.

There is no way to break this system even though you may marry someone from outside of your sect.

Therefore, this pragmatic approach fails to break down the conscious barrier, which is more important. In this solution proposed by Dr. Ambedkar, he failed to realize the inbuilt barrier within people. He assumed that if people start intermarrying, this will solve the inequality within the system. As Karl Marx, failed to realize the sin

problem of Man, which tries to please self and not the Creator, his system of political ideology was a disaster, and caused great destruction in the 20th century.

By assuming people should intermarry would not really make them intermarry between different sects of Caste. To further bolster my claim of my disagreement with his solution, let me present an analogy.

When children are young, they grow up with this identity of Caste. Most of the parents teach rituals, habits and imbibe their children, a knowledge of their ancestors pertaining to their caste. Thus, a child growing up feels to be a part of this identity (or) sect.

Therefore, to come out of this small sect and enter into another sect is a bold decision, especially between the highest castes and the lowest castes.

There's also a real life situation, where a couple elope due to infatuation (or) love. In this situation, the couple's parents are furious as their children have disobeyed them and broke this system. It will be really hard for them to reconcile that this system is a mere illusion. Meanwhile, the couple are discriminated and ostracized. By Ostracizing, I am putting friends, relatives, and neighbors in the system.

These relationships are powerful social tools and being ostracized upsets the couple 'emotionally.' Why does the society ostracize them? Since they are already inside this system where "intermarrying" is taboo and considered unfaithful to their parents. Society deems them to be traitors.

Going back to history, I came across many Christian missionaries

who trained the local converts. They were well trained for almost twelve years. One of the local teachers (Pastor) when asked to inter-dine with another person from "untouchable" caste refused to do so. He was dismissed from his position. The European missionaries strongly wanted to make the new Christians united to fight this tyranny system.

The person dismissed was a Tamil catechist; he argues that he cannot lower his social status, his customs, and his tradition.

This seems to me like a reasonable claim. The Tamil Christians together argued that once someone gets familiar (palakam) with a lower caste and engages with him. He loses his identity. For this, I would argue that, one is putting their own system (familiarity) more than their faith. But in the Christian faith, Jesus came to serve others, he claimed to be God, the Jewish messiah (Isaiah 53), he lowered everything and gave his life for everyone to have a relationship. He Came to fulfill the Law and lived a perfect life. But coming back to the Caste system, There's always a sense of haughtiness within the Caste system.

Fervent efforts by the missionaries were futile to unite the local people into one single community. They thought by bringing all the new Christians under one umbrella would help them to intermarry. Eventually establishing a great mobility among the people.

Therefore this solution failed back in history and also cannot be supported. It failed to note the presumption of the identity a person has built within himself.

Educating the masses:

This is his second proposed model for eliminating the caste and conscious barrier. His conclusion in this model was that once if everyone has enough education, they would soon realize the foolishness of this system as it creates inequality and untouchability. By the early 1940's there has been many efforts by him to reach out to the uneducated and lower caste people. This has been successfully in providing education for all.

Let me argue my case for this based on the present situation in India. There are no untouchability issue as far as I have seen in Tamil Nadu, India. There could be in rural villages.

But leaving that asides. I would argue that the well-educated people from Brahmins (highest caste), do not want to even visit a Tea stall, run by a schedule caste (low-caste)

This is not a statement but based on personal experience. Now, you might argue that one person would be different among a community. I am skeptical of this claim, as temple priests are still Brahmins and they do not really mingle with the people of other castes' especially in food habits. For a Western person, you might imagine the Jews in this case.

Although he knows to treat them equally, his conscious doesn't agree with him.

What benefit is there when one who is educated doesn't disagree in this horrendous system?

One can also argue the same for the Dalit's (untouchables)

The issue here is mobility among different castes, the conscious barrier.

Are we able to eliminate these through these ways?

Is there a way to eliminate the thought of looking down on Low

Caste?

After all the education, a person still would want to marry within their sect.

Therefore, I do not find educating the masses the perfect way to eliminate the conscious barrier of caste.

But I really support this model for economic benefits for the people of Lower caste. The Government of India has seen the benefits of this model and has made special reservation for people on the Lower caste.

Conversion to another religion:

Dr. Ambedkar was quite fascinated by Buddhism. Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism. Without going into details about Buddhism, I would present you the reasons of Dr. Ambedkar found this model to escape from the oppressive Caste System.

He asks the following question,

Does Hinduism recognize their worth as human beings? Does it stand for their equality? Does it extend to them the benefit of liberty? Does it at least help to forge the bond of fraternity between them and the Hindus? Does it teach the Hindus that the untouchables are their kindred? Does it say to them Hindus it is a sin to treat the untouchables as being neither man nor beast? Does it tell the Hindus to be just and humane to them? Does it tell the Hindus to be just to the untouchables? Does it inculcate upon the Hindus the virtue of being friendly to them? Does it tell the Hindus to love them to respect them and to do them no wrong? In short, does Hinduism universalize the value of life without distinction?

Buddhism promotes liberty, equality and fraternity. Especially equality among women, He found these ideologies enticing and embraced Buddhism. Therefore, he found this as a way to escape the Caste system. A Huge number of people from Harijan Caste followed him and came to this new found faith.

But even after embracing this new found religion, they still have that caste labeled unto them.

They are born into a caste and it cannot be changed. It is like an immutable property for a person born in India.

I also want to argue that by embracing Buddhism, Ambedkar thought of it as a superior religion and therefore looking down on the Hindu people as inferior. Now again, we are trapped in the conscious barrier.

Does embracing a new religion eliminate the conscious thought?

Only if the religion promotes to look at everyone equal and if the Creator loves everyone equally regardless of his faith.

Perhaps, this is a good way to improve social status in society in Modern India.

The recent reconversion programs by "RSS", a right-wing Hindu paramilitary group is trying to bring people back to their faith. RSS has a rough history – Godse was a prominent member in RSS, he assassinated Mahatma Gandhi.

Let me not go deep into the organization but Ambedkar would ask the people of that faith as

Why would they want someone to come back to their own faith if it doesn't promote equality, fraternity, and liberty?

Would they like to be subjugated in society?

Also, all God's are one according to the organization & their faith.

Therefore, it is not a matter of Faith.

The only reason I could see promoting 'reconversion programs' is that they don't want people to escape from this oppressive system.

Caste System: The Problems

The problems in

Abstract model of Caste System (Still in progress)

It seems to me that Caste system is a huge ladder where endogamous groups are closely knit as they follow certain traditions, rules. Each category of castes are placed in the ladder.

Currently, the Government has given certain 'benefits and privileges' making people in the lower half of the Ladder jump directly to the highest.

Now, the group on the top cannot do anything but to bear with these. They may feel helpless, meek as people from the lower half of the ladder jump easily without any effort. This creates a hatred naturally for them towards people of the lower caste in the Ladder as they gain benefits.

Caste system is rigidly endogamous but it doesn't teach equality. As I keep researching more and more about this system, it pointed to

the social order (or) class in every society in human history. We are primitives, what I mean by this is that we are materially rich but comparing the social structure from ancient times till now, nothing has really changed much. The names have been changed, kings are called as Presidents.

The reason why I brought this up was this model goes back to the social order in society.

Let me try to create a model for the caste system

I might imagine the Caste system as a big apartment with four floors and many houses in each floor

Now each house will host a large amount of rooms.

Let us walk through each floor.

As you enter the building, the first floor is the Forward Caste,

One special thing you note about this floor is they used to hold some privileges to outside access to education, religious devotion.

Next floor is Backward Caste; they were banned from going downstairs to the first floor.

Third floor is the Most Backward Caste

Fourth floor is the Schedule Caste

Fifth floor is the Schedule tribe

Now, everyone is allowed to go to the first floor and get education, move in economic status.

Where the problem lies?

The floors are open to anyone to walk outside of the building but everyone is comfortable within their houses in their floors. They prefer to be within the same house (endogamous)

As a result of this study, I found that humans have this Conscious wall built within dictated by their ideologies.

Conscious wall

In the Caste System, the conscious wall is built within each person as they grow up. As a child grows up, he is being taught the ways and small cultural traits and thus accepts his way to be the right way. Our caste has these gunam(characters) and if we mix with a person from another caste, all our traditions, culture is lost.

Now a child buys into this and imbibes, this conscious wall is always there even when he engages in conversation. This is a great hindrance during marriage in society(Considering Caste System)

The conscious wall can be applied to a Caucasian who would say that everyone is equal, no matter what race or color but on the inside he does not prefer an African American.

The Conscious wall could be kept as a preference for each person. A person might prefer certain worldly attributes attached to such a person. However, I do not see, how Caste would be a conscious wall. Perhaps, this brings up another interesting idea that, the general population is afraid to go out of their comfort zone. **People draw inferences on their past experiences to support their decisions, Also, they draw conclusions from older people** as they have already took such decisions to follow this endogamous system. A person, who wants to break this system cannot draw many inferences, as the general opinion is to marry within the same sect,

due to their conscious wall.

The Famous Philosopher John Locke said, **“No Man’s Knowledge can go beyond his experience.”**

I think, we can connect this with the general population.

There are not a lot of people, who have this knowledge of **unknown** [beyond Caste system] **and thus they reject it.**

Even within a system, a person normally does not want to change or question rationally as to why people hold such opinions, only, when such person experiences a different system, he wants to question and improve his own system.

The question arises to me, whether this conscious wall is a philosophical problem?

In order for me to recognize this as a philosophical question or not, I need to find out if this conscious wall problem, would fall under the sphere of philosophy.

What determines a problem to be under the realm of philosophy?

If it is a matter of preference, there can never be an equal opinion on it, people will have different preferences.

The Caste System is more interesting to hear from local people.

The most common indoctrinated belief is that people are born with a character in a caste.

A Caste is put into thief category; before even they commit a crime.

This is really sad and an unacceptable prejudice, people are I think beliefs, have nothing to do with intelligence or education. Most of the people are not confronted or they are attacked much for their beliefs. A lot of older generation would be questioned for Caste based prejudice by young generation, however, older people quickly appeal to superiority to justify their opinion, I think, this is a logically incoherent.

How does character develop?

How does
Prejudice

Here are some of the pictures; I took, to show the reader to gain more insights on how Caste System looks.

Notice, the painting, colors, pictures.

Each color denotes, some sect of Caste. These colors, mean, people of X caste live in this place. It might a way to express their territory.

Long term Goals:

One of my goals is to look at the various issues present in the Caste System. I will be exploring Issues such as inequality, social status,

opportunities presented by this system. There are also several advantages in every system and I will explore this side of the issue too. Overall, I will be seeing it as a huge circle where people are placed in different orders within the system.

I finish my writing for now but I will continue researching more and present the arguments for destruction in society made by the Caste System.

Update: Dec 2017, I have not worked on this issue due to Edmund Burke's writing on this, and his ideas on Classical Conservatism.

Update: March 8, 2018, I have not worked on this Essay as I have not read Edgar Thurston's works on Caste. Thurston had observed and documented all kinds of caste.