



## Casteism in Politics and Indian Society: Role of Community Radio in its Mitigation

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**Abstract:** India enjoys the pride and glory of being the largest functioning democracy across the globe. The main principles of democracy are equality and freedom to all the people. It is a system which ensures the equal opportunity for every citizen to participate actively in the decision making process either directly or indirectly through elected representatives. Ever since the independence, India has been living and developing through a democratic system of governance involving a self-rule of its people. In the more than last seven decades Indian democracy has worked successfully and achieved a lot. However, it must be admitted that along with all achievements, there continues to be present several socio-economic challenges before the Indian democracy. It has got success but mostly in its political sphere. As far as its social and economic dimensions are concerned, the success rate is only partial and quite moderate. Poverty, illiteracy, rural under-development, unemployment and slow development of infrastructure continue to keep the Indian economy and polity under strain. Various social and economic inequalities, gender injustice, regional imbalances, social evils and an incessant caste-based social system together act as added limitations. To help neutralize the casteism in Indian society, Community Radio can play a very big role. It broadcasts programmes based on government policy guidelines, schemes and projects to root out the caste system. Community Radio gives chances to every person of a society without discriminating on the basis of caste, creed, race, faith, religion and language to participate in the programmes' production as well as programmes' presentation. It also tries to suggest some possible ways and the role of community radio which can help neutralize the evils of casteism in Indian society to ensure a sustainable democracy. This paper discusses casteism in particular as a major hindrance in the nation-building process of India and also as a major challenge in smooth functioning of the Indian democracy.

**Keywords:** Community Radio, Society, Democracy, Casteism, Nation-building, etc.

Received 20 Oct., 2022; Revised 01 Nov., 2022; Accepted 03 Nov., 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

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### I. Introduction:

The root of caste system in India is very deep. The term 'caste' gets its origin from the Spanish and Portuguese 'casta' which, according to John Minshen's Spanish Dictionary (1599), means "race, lineage, or breed". Though the Spanish, when they colonized the New World, used the word to mean a "clan or lineage", it was, however, the Portuguese who first employed 'casta' in the primary modern sense of the English word 'caste' when they applied it to the thousands of endogamous, hereditary Indian social groups they encountered upon their arrival in India in 1498. First time in 1613, the modern meaning of 'caste' was attested in English.

In Indian sub-continent, the term 'caste' refers to a social structure which is hereditary and hierarchically organized. The caste identity of an individual is very much different from other identities. Unlike class which is based on the essential principles of achievement through the utilizations of one's capabilities, caste in Indian society refers to a social group where membership is decided by birth. Apart from class, religion, region, tribe, gender and language, caste in Indian society is one of the main dimensions where people are socially differentiated from each other.

There are many theories behind the origin of the Indian caste system. Some of them are religious while some others are biological. According to the Rig Veda, an ancient Indian book, the primal man, Purush, destroyed himself to create a human society and the different organs of his body created the four different varnas. Thus, the Brahmins came from his head, the Kshatriyas from his hand, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet. The varna hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the various parts of the

body from which the varnas were created. Another religious theory claims that the varnas were created from the different body parts of Brahma, the creator of the world in Hinduism.

The biological theory claims that all existing things inherit one of three categories of qualities. Varna means different shades of texture and colour and represents mental temper. This theory also says that there are three Gunas: Satva, which is white, Rajas, which is red, and Tamas, which is black, and these three Gunas, in combination of various proportions, constitute the group or class of people over the world with temperamental differences.

It is, however, the beginning of caste system in India is believed to be with the arrival of Aryans around 1500 BC. Of the diverse and different cultures that flourished in India, the literary records of Indo-Aryan are not the earliest. They do, however, contain the first mention and a continuous history of the factors that make up the caste system. The Aryans practiced a particular principle of social ordering called 'Varna Vyavastha'. This system was based on the four hierarchical divisions of function in society. They were placed in order of decreasing e.g. Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra.

**Importance:** religious and educational functions, military and political functions, economic functions, and menial functions.

The fluidity of caste system was affected by the arrival of the colonial era. The British brought with them their own traditional form of government and, as Christians, they did not have much sympathy for the Hindu institutions. During the beginning days of the British East India Company's rule, caste privileges and customs were encouraged, but the British law courts began to disagree with the discrimination against the lower castes. However, the British policies of divide and rule contributed a lot towards the hardening of caste identities in India.

**Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Casteism:** Dr. Ambedkar played a very significant role for the uplift of the downtrodden in India. He himself was a member of Untouchable community, so he had a better experience of caste discrimination and exploitation, and that's why he raised the issues related to untouchability. There were many leaders who were against the prevailing caste system in India and who also raised their voice against it, but Dr. Ambedkar was at the top. He opines that Outcaste is a by-product of the caste system and there will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the annihilation of the caste system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of the Hindu Faith of this odious and vicious dogma. And after noticing the evils of the prevailing caste system and its impacts on the suppressed human beings, he was prompted to create an egalitarian society wherein justice, social, economic and political rights prevail which also includes equality of status and opportunity for all irrespective of caste system.

**Indian Constitution and Caste:** Indian constitution and several other laws enacted under it have attacked the Indian caste system with a view to weaken it, particularly for neutralizing the evils of it, including the inhuman evil of Untouchability. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution affirms full faith in popular sovereignty and recognizes the sovereign equality of all the people of India. The Constitution makes it clear that the State in India will be governed by the objective of securing the welfare and development of all the citizens of India without discriminating them on the basis of caste, colour, creed, race, religion, language, place of birth or sex. It seeks to secure justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity for all the people of India. The Constitution, in its Part III, grants and guarantees equal fundamental rights of equality, freedom, freedom of religion, against exploitation, cultural and educational rights, and the right to seek the protection of courts for the security of their rights. It also affirms that no person can be denied access to any shop, public places, hotels, restaurants, parks, theatres, wells, tanks, bathing ghats, and tourist or picnic places. The Constitution has granted every citizen of India the right to religious freedom. A person can adopt and follow any religion of his/her choice. He/she has even the freedom not to follow any particular religion. All religions enjoy equal status. Every person of India, under the holy Constitution, has been granted the freedom of pursuing any business, trade, industry or occupation. With a view to make the citizens active, full and equal partners in the Indian socio-economic-political-cultural system, special safeguards and privileges have been granted to persons of weaker section of society. Untouchability has been made a crime. Practice of this inhuman evil entails punishment for the guilty. The Constitution also stresses that the need for diluting the rigid higher and lower demarcations between caste groups must be nourished and encouraged by strengthening the process of national integration. It also says that rapid industrialization can lead to a transformation of caste based divisions of society into clan based distinctions. This economy phenomenon has divided the society into two groups, in which one group became stronger and richer while other group became weaker and poorer. Thus a big rift has been created between them. It also emphasizes that caste is only an identity, it cannot be permitted to be a basis for any discrimination against any person in the society. Indian political system should function in such a way that the objectives of securing social, economic and political justice, equal rights and freedom for all and unity and integrity of all the citizens of India can be achieved irrespective of their caste, religion, sub-culture and language.

**Modern India and Casteism:** The Indian caste system is believed to be a closed system of stratification which means that a person's social status is obligated to which caste he/she was born into. There are limits on interaction and behavior with people from another social status. It has evolved into a highly rigid and closed social system where rigidity is maintained through the principles of heredity, endogamy, restrictions of food and specific economic, social, cultural and religious practices, norms and regulations. Now, the caste system consists of two different concepts- Varna and Jati. The real concept of Varna has almost been disappeared in the present context and has changed into Jati. The former was based on colour of the skin, the latter, on birth. The caste system has become such a deep-rooted and pervasive concept in our society in which mobility of rank and status is not allowed. It has literally split up the society into hundreds of hereditary castes and sub-castes and promoted a spirit of exclusiveness and class-pride, narrowed the outlook and created colossal gaps among the various sections of the community. It has perpetuated the exploitation of the economically weaker and socially inferior castes. It is protecting the privileged castes and thus building up economic discontent and social prejudices.

**Evils of Casteism and its Effects:** Casteism, in its true meaning, is not a negative word. Caste-based behavior and caste-based decisions do not necessarily have to be against nation-building or integration of a democracy as it is intrinsic nature of people to look after their own. But, it definitely becomes a problem when any caste tries to promote socio-economic interests of its own at the expense of other castes, and that is the case in India. Caste system in our country has become filled with inequality and injustice. There is no point in casteism as a system or process, rather it has developed into an evil. Indian society has become caste-ridden. The people of one caste do not like to mix with others. The division of society into so many religions, castes and sub-castes comes in the way of unity and integrity of Indian nation. People elect their representatives on caste and religion and do not consider the merits of the candidates.

The caste system has emerged into a major determinant of social and political life in India. Its presence as one of the most ancient features of our society has naturally been acting as a factor of social and political relation. And, it is not for nothing that J.P. Narayan once observed that caste has acted as "the most major political party in India". It has become a determinant in political participation, voting behavior and almost all other aspects of Indian politics. Political parties and leaders use castes to secure their objectives in politics. Caste determines the nature, organization and working of political dispensations and interest groups, legislatures and bureaucracies and, in fact, almost all political structures and functions. Caste-based voting, caste-based candidatures, caste-based riots, caste conflicts, caste violence and the issues of reservations versus non-reservations have been factors of Indian politics.

Indian Democracy is based on the principles of equality, liberty, justice and fraternity. On the other hand, the caste system operates on the basis of inequality of status and opportunities which often creates conflict and tension in the society. This system acts as a hindrance in the normal and smooth functioning of democracy. No doubt India has got political freedom but it must be the concern of every citizen that real freedom cannot be cherished without attainment of the social and economic democracy. It is unfortunate that the Indian society is sharply divided into so many different castes and sub-castes which acts as a barrier in our nation-building process.

**Ways for Casteism Reduction:** The eradication of the Indian caste system cannot become possible without changing the mindset of the people. The caste system is a great social evil. From time to time, social reformers and thinkers have tried to eliminate this evil, but to no avail. Even Gandhi Ji do much for the eradication of the curse of Untouchability. Many contemporary leaders, prominent social reformers do their best to eliminate the social evils and casteism system rooted in Indian society. Those social reformers and leaders became successful to some extent in this regard but these social-cultural curse are still alive more or less in our society. It is a deep-rooted problem which has defied all solutions so far. The problem has persisted largely because of the illiteracy and ignorance of the people. Their ignorance makes them conservative and superstitious. Consequently, they do not accept any social change. They want things to prevail and continue as they are. Every measure of social reform is strongly opposed and considered to be an attack on their religion and caste by the religious and casteist fanatics.

But under the influence of the process of continuous development, Indian liberal democratic system and the social system have been going some positive changes. From a caste-based stratified society, Indian society can develop as a class-based developing society. However, such a change can take place only gradually and through a process of evolution. Indian democracy has been trying to maintain an environment which can be greatly conducive for such a transformation of Indian society from a caste-based into a class-based.

For limiting, preferably neutralizing the negative and harmful role of caste in Indian society and politics, I would like to prefer these suggestions for consideration:

a. Indian mass media should continuously try to less focus and expose on caste oriented news and views. It should keep itself away from discussing and analyzing a caste-based voting behavior and results of Indian elections.

- b. Local administration should always remain alert to control and eradicate caste-based violence through committed and well organized efforts. It should not hesitate in taking stern and quick action against the perpetrators in every case of caste discrimination and violence.
- c. Political parties should come forward to refrain from airing caste politics. They should also not use caste as a tool for securing support for their power goals.
- d. The social service organizations, NGOs and the civil society should organize mass campaigns for integrating the people in the process of socio-economic-political-cultural development. They should participate in a bigger way in the adult literacy and child education programmes. Universalization of education can play a big role in liberating the human mind from the bondage of caste-oriented thinking and narrow-mindedness. They should also try to ensure the success of secular living by organizing social movements and campaigns.
- e. A mass spread of education and removal of ignorance through concerted efforts (school education and non-formal education) can go a long way in helping the people to go beyond their narrow caste affiliations and loyalties.
- f. All admission forms in schools, colleges and universities and all job application forms should not include any such column as may seek caste-based information. Sub-caste as a surname be retained but each and every effort should be made to downplay the caste. Government census may record the caste of a person but only for its records and nothing more.
- g. All schools should encourage community living by organizing community meals and make sure the availability and involvement of all students and teachers both as organizers as well as active partners. School textbooks and curriculum should in no way contain anything that may make the students conscious of their caste.

**Role of Community Radio:** The purpose and objective of Community Radio is to provide communities a platform for its people to participate for a variety of causes. In this process it provides community members a voice to air their concerns and opinions, share their ideas and thoughts, joys, sorrows, songs and cultural expressions. It is also an important outreach and learning medium to keep abreast of local events and important information that can help fuel change and bring development. Several Community Radio stations have found immense value being created for the listeners by including information of Government schemes and demand accountability from local administrations. Since it broadcasts its different programs in local languages, all its activities can empower the voice of the common community member and in the process it can help bring a lot of changes in caste-oriented concepts and beliefs. Community radio provides a platform to every individual of the society without discrimination of cast, creed and religion to share his/her opinions, thoughts, raise voice against the social –cultural problems, injustice or exploitation. Community radio broadcasts programs based on untouchability, social justice, gender inequality and advocates freedom of speech and expression and equal opportunity to all and against the cast system and inequality. Community radio station is a good example of democracy, where each and every has equal right, equal opportunity, freehand in programme presentation as well as programme production. Community radio is a third model of radio broadcasting, serves geographic community and community of interest. Community radio acts as a vehicle for the community and voluntary sector, civil society, NGOs and citizen to work partnership to community development aims. The local communities remain the first responders, so we need to prepare and equip them for dealing with cast system and polity. The local dialect community radio stations have been warning residents about social-cultural evils and helping them to cope with erratic situations.

Prime minister Narendra Modi's "Mann Ki Baat" programme was aired through All India Radio network covering medium wave, short wave, FM, Vividh Bharati, local radio stations and some community radio station. Community radio is a medium used to reach directly to the people residing in posh area as well as cluster region of Indian society. Prime minister's messages reached directly to the local community through community radio that offered them charm and excitement.

Recently, there are almost 251 community radio stations running successfully throughout the nation. Community radio can be a viable tool in raising political and social awareness among the people of localities only if used appropriately.

## **II. Conclusion:**

As the caste system leads to inequality on the basis of caste, creed, political and social structure of the population, it is a curse for the society. In the last seven and half decades, caste and casteism have together continued to be the biggest block in the way of Indian social integration and nation-building. In this new millennium, which is already about two decades old, we must work steadfastly to remove the scars of casteism from our society. This can be achieved by adopting, promoting and encouraging fraternity as the objective and secularism as the way of life. Fraternity is needed most for securing the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation, it is the cement required for nation-building. Secularism as the way of life is the

another tool to meet the challenge posed by casteism. For this, our educational institutions should secure freedom from such factors as caste, religion and language. They must impart qualitative, secular and empowering education. Community radio is a powerful medium and has tremendous effect. So, this should be used as a tool to eliminate the casteism as well as the social evils in Indian society and to disseminate the message of Indian constitution. If not, democracy will become a mockery owing to this evil, casteism.

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