

# Patrician College of Arts and Science

Department of Journalism

Social Issues in India

AGA2B

Even Semester

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# **CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTE SYSTEM**

- **SEGMENTAL DIVISION:**

- So far as caste system is concerned, each caste is an autonomous group independent of the other. Membership in a caste is based on birth. Hence it is unchangeable.

- For this reason mobility from one caste to another is impossible. Each caste has its own way of life. It has its own rules and regulations, customs, traditions, practices and rituals. It has its own governing body called the caste council to enforce the caste rules. In this way each caste is a social world by itself.

- **HIERARCHY:**

- The caste system is hierarchical in nature.
- It comprises four varnas or castes. These in descending order of ranking are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.
- There are many castes between the two extremes-the Brahmins and the Shudras.
- Their social status depends upon their distance from the Brahmins.

- **ENDOGAMY:**

- Endogamy refers to marriage within the caste.
- The principle of endogamy forbids its members to marry outside the caste.
- The violation of the rule of endogamy would mean ostracism and loss of caste.
- Marriage within the Gotra or clan is prohibited. This rule of exogamy is observed strictly in the rural setting.
- Further, it is worth mentioning in this context that there are a few exceptions to the rule of endogamy in the form of anuloma and pratiloma marriage.

- **FIXITY OF OCCUPATION:**

- Caste system is characterized by fixity of occupation. Occupations are hereditary and the members of a caste are expected to follow their traditional occupation without fail.
- Brahmins are engaged in performing religious ceremonies. Washermen regard it their duty to wash clothes of other caste people.
- Some occupations like trade, agriculture, military service are, however, regarded as anybody's callings.

- **COMMENSALITY:**

- Refers to the beliefs, practices, rules and regulations that determine inter-caste relationships and are observed with regard to the kind of food and water taken.
- The members of a caste accept 'kachcha food' only from either their own caste or castes ritually higher than their own.
- They are also required to observe certain restrictions while accepting water from members of other castes.

- The Brahmins do not eat onions, garlic, cabbage, carrot, beetroot etc. Eating beef is not permissible except for the untouchables.
- The members of a caste also observe certain restrictions pertaining to social intercourse.
- There are certain castes whose touch is considered to be a pollution and hence they are regarded as 'untouchables'. For example, in Kerala, a Nayar can approach a Nambudri Brahmin but would not touch him.



- **PURITY & POLLUTION:**

- The caste system is said to be founded on the concepts of purity and pollution.
- The concepts of purity and pollution provide one of the main criteria for determining the position of a caste or sub-caste in the hierarchical order.
- The Brahmin is said to be the purest group. He is placed at the zenith of the caste hierarchy.
- On the other hand, Harijans, not included in the Varna scheme are considered as the most polluting and rank the lowest.

- **CIVIL & RELIGIOUS DISABILITIES:**

- The people belonging to lower castes suffer from a set of civil, social and religious disabilities. Generally, the impure castes are made to live in the outskirts of villages.
- They are forbidden to make use of places of worship, cremation grounds, schools, public roads, hotels etc.
- The very touch and sometimes even the shadows of the members of the lower caste are enough to defile an individual of a high caste.
- In Kerala a Nambudiri Brahmin is defiled by the touch of a Nayar, but in the case of a member of Thiya caste a distance of thirty-six feet must be kept to avoid being defiled and in the case of member of the Pulyan caste the distance must be ninety six feet.

- **ROOTED IN THE DIVINE PLAN:**

- Caste system is believed to have been ordained by God and the system rests on the doctrine of karma, the theory of rebirth etc.

- **Intra-village and inter- village mechanisms**
- Last but not least, castes have, intra-village and inter- village mechanisms of social control and conflict resolution.
- In fine, these are the traditional characteristics of the Indian caste system.
- However, these traditional characteristics have been severely affected in recent times as a result of various processes of social change like industrialization, urbanization, modernization etc.



# Thank you

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