The Caste Concern in Social Work in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to bring discourse on the caste concern in social work in India. There are several issues rooted in the caste system such as exist restrictions for the women in the society, deliberately constraints for downtrodden communities in the mainstream development, lack of eradication of untouchability, rising the economic inequality in line of caste, hunger, support and extension of the blind faith to preserve the sectarian hegemony. It is remarkable concern for the enhancement of liberty, equality and fraternity. Almost all the problems of socio-economic, politics, education, health, religion, culture, environment and sports are connected and rooted in the caste system. The study on trained social work educators and practitioners from well-known institute had revealed the caste based hegemony and disrespect for other lower castes is one of notable caste concern in social work in India.

Keywords: Caste System, Social Work Education and Practice

INTRODUCTION

There are several issues rooted in the caste system such as exist restrictions for the women in the society, deliberately constraints for downtrodden communities in the mainstream development, lack of eradication of untouchability, rising the economic inequality in line of caste, hunger, support and extension of the blind faith to preserve the sectarian hegemony.

The economy, politics, education, marriage and religion are most influenced areas of caste system and this influence is from birth to death in the life. Influence of Manusmriti is more on people than the influence of Indian constitution. The caste membership is unacquirable, unchangeable, untransferable and unattainable. (Siddaramu B., 2013). Caste concern could not leave the reformers and rulers in ancient period who tried to struggle for social equality. Verdhaman Mahavir, Budddha, Guru Nanak had shown examples of good life to develop equality in society. Historical background of social welfare is strongly notable in feudal times. The Rulers like Chandra Gupta, Samrat Ashoka, Harshavardhan and few of others were heart of the people for welfare (Mehta B.H., 1986).

The caste concern in modern period again developed intensive nature when some social and political leaders made significance role in social change. Rajaram Mohan Roy (1773-1833) who abolished the practice of "sati". Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) revolutionary contributed in helping of lower class of people and contributed in women education in first time in India. Maharshi Karve (1858-1962) contributed in economical upliftment of women (Joseph J. Fernandes G, 2006). Several social reformers such as Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Kratijyoti Savitribai Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Sant Kabir, Sant Periyar, Shahir Annabhau Sathe and others had scarified their life for the welfare of communities who were faced several constraints due to the caste based social system.

However, there were pretended social reformers and leaders who had created more obstacles for the weaker sections of the society by promoting the caste system in India with the support of dominant caste group. M. K. Gandhi, who opposed the right of 'Separate Electorates' for oppressed community by going for 'fast unto death' that blackmailed Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar for his recognized demand to withdraw. The situation had created alertness of communal violence by dominant caste group to the oppressed community. It resulted in to scarify the demand of rights of oppressed community at Pune that called 'Poona Pact' (Seelam S.R, 2016). Halli C.S. & Mullal S.M. (2016) acknowledged that, several leaders had opposed Hindu Code Bill of women who were treated oppressed in Verna system. The main aim to oppose the Bill was to promote and preserve the Caste or Verna system in India. There were famous Hindu orthodox leaders namely Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Anathasayanam Ayyangar who had opposed the Hindu Code Bill (Halli C.S. & Mullal S.M, 2016). There were other well known

conservative leaders involved in oppose the Bill were Shyama Prasad Mookherjee (Member of Hindu Mahasabha), Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Pandit Madan Mohan Malvia, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Janakibai Joshi who was President of Hindu Women Conference. It was shameful about Jankibai Joshi who was president of women conference and opposing rights of women due to the influence of caste system (www.drambedkarbooks.com). Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had felt very bad about opposition for rights of women of India and had resigned on 27th September, 1951 (Jaffrelot C, 2009). Thus, several social reformers had understood the concern of the caste system in India but strongly fought for the rights of victimized population of the country. Unfortunately, the caste hegemony did not yet eradicated from the social system and remained in developing various hidden and opened forms of discriminations and exploitation.

SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA

The social work history emphasis the main aim of the social work profession is to uplift the weaker sections of the society. The working statement of social work as per the NASW is as "Promot(ing) or restor(ing) a mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and society in order to improve the quality of life for everyone" as working statement of purpose of social work (1981). It is known for its integrated view, which focused on persons in the context of their physical and social environment (Dubois, Brenda L., Miley, Kerla K, 2007:9).

Professional Social Work started in India with establishment of the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work in 1936 with the dream of its first director Dr. Clifford Manshardt. He was from marginalized Protestant missionary of America who had graduated in Theology from university of Chicago, and came to India in 1925. In the line of 'Settlement house of America', he established 'Nagpada Neighborhood House in 1926 through the American Marathi Mission of a Protestant Christian organization in Mumbai slum to train social workers. After successful effort of training social workers; he approached Dorabji Tata Trust and proposed two years graduate course after graduation. Trust accepted the proposal and in 1936 in form of first school of social work in India with name of Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work started and latter renamed as Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai in 1944. Thus, generally, professional social work in India emerged under leadership of person from lower strata of the community who apply the professional methods through the protestant missionary but it has not been reflected the expected results in the social work field due to the caste hegemony in India. M.S. Gore (1988) added that; the societal structure is fundamental caste concern in social work profession for social development in India (Bodhi S.R., 2013).

CASTE SYSTEM

Caste System of India is crucial obstacle in the social work that linked with several other problems. The word 'Caste' is form Spanish and Portuguese in origin which is derived from Latin word 'Castus' mean lineage (ancestry) (Ketkar S.V, 1909). In summarization of Senart about Caste is as "A caste is almost invariably- endogamous in the sense that a member of a large circle denoted by a common name may not marry outside the circle; but within the circle there are smaller circles, each of which is also end Digamous. What I have said about the definition of Senart may be said about this definition "(Ketkar S.V, 1909).

According to Ghurye, there are six most important features of caste system are segmental division of the society are as hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities, privileges of the different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and the restriction on marriage. In India, the caste is main indicator of one's social and economic identity where the birth is ultimately determines the future of the child (Puranik S, 2009:6). Social System of India is strongly based on *Varna* System where the Caste is central concept of function. Society is permanently divided into four classes namely (1) Brahmins, (2) Kshatriyas, (3) Vaishyas and (4) Shudras. Second, the four classes in point of their mutual status are linked together in an order of graded inequality. The Brahmins are at the head and above all others are sequentially degraded as Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras. It is the very soul of Hinduism. "Without Varna Vevastha there is nothing else in Hinduism to distinguish it from other religions," says eminent scholar Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Ambedkar B.R. 1987:189). It may the concern about other religions whether there is caste system or there is no caste system. However, it is also true that, though some castes communities converted into other religions have not yet completely detached from their caste based identity in social system due to the created fear of caste system.

Blessing and Cursing Process of Caste System

Dominancy is depending upon sequence of the caste where the Brahmins are at merit list and the merit will down as per the grades from A, B, C, D and to E etc. Thus, the blessing is distributed as like grades. It is difficult to count under hindered to evaluate in percentage because these are in thousands in numbers. In general, if someone graded A+ from Caste D grade but still in caste system, it will count to be D grade only as a result it is strongly restricted in meritorious perspective also. The Caste is not limited in its major units but segregated in several sub castes which another strong hierarchy. Even Brahmin caste is also classified differently like regional basis classification i.e. Deshashtha Brahmin, Kashmiri Brahmins and Kokanastha (Chitpavana) Brahmin. Some of them are classified based on *veda* memories i.e. from higher level to lower as Chaturvedi, Trivedi, Dvivedi etc. They are also rigid with their own caste and no blood and marriage relationship with other castes. There is hierarchical function of the castes in discrimination level. The people from one castes community will respect people from their upper castes and its opposite such caste people will exploit and disrespect the people from their lower castes. Though such caste is being exploit from upper castes will not be regret and will not be revolt but will be happy because there are their lower castes people who respect them and being exploited by them. Thus, the Caste is generally blessing for upper castes communities and it's mostly veto or curse for lower castes communities where the respect and disrespect is measurement of caste hierarchy where castes and sub-castes are also having their segregation in *Kulas*.

In book, *Castes of Mind* the author remarked that, in comparative sociology and in common, parlance a caste has central symbol for India, Caste is major threat to Indian modernity. In *The Discovery of India*, Nehru wrote that, the caste resisted powerful impact of Buddhism and demanding efforts of innumerable Hindu reformers who raised their voices against caste (Dirks, N. B, 2004). Unfortunately, the professor B. H. Mehta of social work department had emphasized that, the caste system helping to group of the social handicapped community of India. He desperately added that, caste system is important agency of social action all over the country in history of social work, but the fact is contradictory (Mehta B.H., 1986). The variation of the caste based identity such as specific physical and mental indication, language, beliefs, names, surnames and localities are major indicators of identify the category and castes in the society. Every person of the society gets training at home and in society to specify oneself according to the rooted identity and explore the identity of other. It develop concern for social work practitioner to work confidently with the community of divert caste background because, almost all the problems of socio-economic, politics, education, health, religion, culture, environment and sports are connected and rooted in the caste system that described below.

Caste Concern in Social Field

Social problems introduce or increase due to the pathological social conditions (Ahuja Ram, 2012). There are general problems developed by the caste systems are categorized like in social point of view: child abuse and child labour, youth unrest, violence against women, crime and criminals, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, drug abuse and drug addiction and Terrorism. There are few examples of associations with caste systems are as a Marriage system. As per the 102. A.I.R. 1972 S.C. at 1848 revealed that, community peoples perceive that, "a person who born in a particular caste or tribe would not able to alter that status over the course of his or her lifetime" (Grinsell Scott, 2010). A surrender father of her killed daughter told police, "I killed my educated daughter because she was going to marry with other youth from lower caste though he is educated; I am of no regret of killing my own daughter (DNA, 2012). Devdasi tradition is exists in system. Sati tradition that was abolished by Rajaram Mohan Ray before centuries but still in September 1987, Roop Kanwar, 21 year old Rajput girl, who forced to sati on the funeral pyre of her husband in Deorala village of Sikar district of Rajsthan and again the act passed in February 1988 by the state of Rajsthran prescribing serious penalty for persons forcing women to commit sati (Ahuja Ram, 2012). Periodical pollution through menstruation and parturition makes women fundamentally less pure than men according to the caste. Purity and impurity based discrimination of women is higher in upper castes says D. Leena (Dube L, 1996).

Caste Concern in Economy

There are several caste connected problems in economical perspectives can be identified i.e. Poverty, Unemployment, Population explosion, Urbanization, Corruption, Bonded labour, Black money. In India, there are about 390 million people mostly from backward classes are working in unorganized sector. However, the income, livelihood protection, employment regulation and employment

protection are not been taken seriously at policy level either by government itself or social work practitioners. Social Security Bill also not in position to provide any protection to these unorganized workers (Puranik S, 2009). In the top 1,000 companies in India, there were 88% members were insiders, and rest of 12% members were directors. The distribution of board members according to the caste reflects that, nearly 93% were forward caste members; 44%, Brahmin and 46% vaishya. The OBCs and SCs and STs have a meager as 3.8% and 3.5% respectively. This is very strong evidence that, the Indian corporate board consists of a little world dominated with kinship by forward castes and lacking enough diversity (Ajit D, Donker H, Saxena R, 2012). Iyer L and other added that, SCs and STs have still under representation in area of entrepreneurship (Iyer L, Khanna T & Varshney A., 2011).

Caste Concern in Politics

The continuous dominancy of the upper caste communities in all areas as they were and are dominant in political area where they have their Medias to highlight their good things and not reveal the bad. On 11th April 1947, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar came with Hindu Code Bill for giving rights to the disadvantaged section as women but political parties opposed it (Ambedkar B.R., 1995: ix). There is another example of promotion in quota in recent days. Prof. Srinivas has emphasized on caste "is so tacitly and so completely accepted by all, including most vocal elements in condemning it, that is everywhere the unit of social action." The caste influenced in every area, political level and administrative life of the nation (Gulabsingh S., Palekar S.A., 2014).

Caste Concern in Education

There are several problems in educational area, which are associated with caste system such as illiteracy, lack of quality education etc. In India the educational achievement is generally, depend on one's caste background. When the higher castes had started getting quality education as well as education in foreign language where the backward classes were at almost illiterates. The caste system created very huge gap in educational level of these two caste categories (Puranik S, 2009). In India since 1936, there are numbers of training institutions; colleges came up to train the social workers in India. However, social workers could not yet overcome the genuine problems of Indian society such as rehabilitation, eradication of untouchability, upliftment of tribals, the specific problems or labour in unorganized sector, unemployment, women etc (Thomas J, 1996). The professional social worker and well-known activist graduated from pioneer institution of social work had intentionally supported the movement by ignoring the inclusion of the private sector in the Bill as well as ignoring the representation of backward classes is one of the best examples of the caste concern in social work practice in India. With added in such matter, Mr. Dungdung a great activist of tribal community had rightly commented that, such types of leaders grown as leader of failure movement (BML, 2011).

Caste Concern in Health

There are some problems which root cause is caste system is mentioned here like AIDS, Depending upon God for health and care, Traditional Healers at Temples, Fast Tradition. Caste based discrimination in health has clearly highlighted from National Family Health Survey III (2005-06) low levels of contraceptive use among SCs and STs compared to forward castes. Reduce access to maternal and child care, reduction level of antenatal care and institutional and complete vaccination coverage among the lower castes (Jacob K.S., 2009).

Caste Concern in Religion

India is predominantly country of Hindu religious culture. Thus, according to the Hindu religion (Dharma) person who, born in any caste will be die in the same caste and his or her whole life will be the surrounded with his caste concern in socio-economic, political and education areas. It's commonly known that, caste didn't left non Hindus itself. Many Christian Missionaries follows the caste system (Tharamangalam J, 1996). Caste system in India didn't left Muslims as well. Nambodhari Brahmins converted in to Christianity started known as Syrians, the Chritians of St. Thomas who considered themselves to be superior or 'pure blooded' than other. Among Kasauly Muslims, the first and foremost criterion for grading non-Ashraf castes on the degree of impurity or pollution (Bhatty Zarina, 1996).

Caste Concern in Culture and Environment

Upper *forced Shudras* and *Antyajas* to work castes in order to avoid anticipated existence from them. Such technique was used to isolation (Bheemaiah J, 2011). As per the Manusmriti, in any function, Brahmin eats first and thereafter other eat. Brahmin will not eat with Kshatriya or other varna people.

Shudra should not wear good cloths or wear footwears from the entry of the village and these types of discrimination is also seen in village India in open and hidden in urban. In the post-Vedic era, religiously, the Brahmins were sacrificed cows in *Vedic Yagnas* and Manusmriti allowed them to eat beef and flesh of cow at certain occasions. Buddha against killing animal and by his influence they change their eating cows and killing habit of animals. They become vegetarian and latter on this base they started targeting shudras and others (Bheemaiah J, 2011).

Caste Concern in Sports

Caste system did not leave any field of human in India. When there was the news in Times of India, Indian Express and other Medias about achievement of Indian player in Badminton game in Olympic 2016 in which P.V. Sindhu who had won the silver medal as highest achievement among all participated Indian players in Olympic 2016. It was moral duty of all the Indian people to recognize the achievement and to give the wishes to her but instead of giving importance of her achievement in the Olympic, several thousand people were found searching her caste background on the google website to understand that from which caste she belongs. It clearly shows the mentality of caste is strongly developed in the mind of dominant castes people (Verma Tarishi, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Since ancient, the caste has successfully survived in multi religious and multicultural practice in India (Bheemaiah J, 2011). In the studies of Deshmukh (2011), Thorat S. and Newman (2007, 2010) reported that, in spite of affirmative programmes of 60 years in India, social and economic divide between high and low castes groups' preserves (Ajit D, Donker H, Saxena R, 2012). Caste system violated the principle of individual choice as it recruits an individual to perform a task selected not the basis of training or capacity, but basis of social status of his/her parents. Caste system also put the low status on 'physical' work, as compared to 'mental work, with the result that, the dignity of physical labour is nearly absent in the work ethics of the caste system (Ajit D, Donker H, Saxena R, 2012).

Some of the social work educators and practitioners from dominant castes took a stand on the necessity of caste to uphold religious values and traditions; those were identified as being 'conservative traditionalist'. These educators and social work practitioners had rigid devotion to caste and caste roles, high religiosity, always dislike for progressive ideas and not interest of exploring errors of history in which root cause of the problems are exist (Bodhi S.R., 2014).

Intentionally support of the professional social worker and well-known activist who graduated from pioneer institution of social work to the movement by ignoring the inclusion of the private sector in the Bill as well as ignoring the representation of weaker sections is notable concern of the caste in social work practice in India. Bodhi (2011: 298 & 2013) stated that, A. Ramaiah who had initiated first effort to argue for an Anti-Caste Social Work paradigm. A Ramaiah (1998) criticized Indian professional social work for did not take into account of the caste for decades on end and disagreed that most professional social workers were naturally caste prejudiced. He recommended that, they must de-caste themselves unless no social work practice paradigm could contribute sincerely (Bodhi S.R., 2014). Darokar S. added that, ant-caste struggles have a long chequered past within and the Indian-subcontinent but anti-caste as an epistemological foundation was made theoretically sophisticated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and later many struggles followed him (Bodhi S.R., 2014).

Hence, social work student or practitioner must understand the curse of caste in society its association with socio-economic, politics, education, health, religion, culture, environment and sports are connected and rooted in the caste system.

CONCLUSION

Social work is profession of social change but if the social system is influenced by caste-based hierarchy then it is great obstacle in the social welfare and core principles of the constitution i.e. liberty, equality, justice and fraternity. The caste category is a prime touch of the emotional aspect of the people in India. The variation of the caste based identity such as specific physical and mental indication, language, beliefs, names, surnames and localities are major indicators of identify the category and castes in the society. Every person of the society gets training at home and in society to specify oneself according to the rooted identity and explore the identity of other. It develops concern for social work practitioner to work confidently with the community of divert caste background. Thus, the caste concern in social work is a big obstacle in social work in India.

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