Caste system and spatial placement in rural India - An Essay

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Abstract

Indian culture has a long history of stratification and inequity. They manifest in the uneven stratification of castes and classes within India's social order. The fundamental concepts of dharma (normative order), karma (individual moral commitment), or jti (caste) that make up the Indian cultural heritage are also the foundations of hierarchy or social stratification. In this study, we've made an effort to provide a sweeping and in-depth look at how many researchers feel about the enduring cultural hallmarks of caste in India today.
Keywords: Indian society; varna; jāti; caste; class; dharma; karma

Introduction

Spanish for "breed," "race," "strain," or "a combination of hereditary traits" is "Casta," from which we get our English term "caste." The jati, or caste, of Indians was given this name by the early Portuguese. An adaptation of the original term, "caste" entered the English language.

A caste system is a social stratification in which members of different social groups are separated from one another in accordance with strict ceremonial purity codes. In the Hindu caste system, those at the bottom of the social hierarchy are not allowed to participate in ceremonies. Each tier of this religious caste structure is deemed more ritually pure than the one below it. The caste system exemplifies social closure (q.v.), in which some social groups are denied access to riches and reputation because they are forbidden from taking part in certain sacrificial rites. The practice of endogamy (q.v.) further enforces this ceremonial division. Caste was a significant example of prestige-based social stratification, which M wher was interested in studying as part of a larger focus on outcast communities in India. Whether castes emerged from the separation of ethnic groups or from the specialization of occupations, easte governed market access and social reputation in a battle for power and survival.

In this work, we examine caste homophily in 75 communities spread throughout rural Karnataka in India. For the sake of understanding caste, it is helpful to think of the social stratification of each village in terms of racial or ethnic classifications. Caste is an important category in India, yet there is much variation in how it is organized within and across different communities, castes, and social networks. This study expands upon previous research on the topic by examining the degree to which the amount of caste

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homophily varies along various dimensions, namely the work of Brubaker (2004; 2015) & Wimmer (2008; 2013).

In each village, I track the ratio of people from low to high castes who are in eight distinct sorts of relationships, using a homophily metric developed by James Coleman (1958) and improved by Bojanowski and Corten (2014). People prefer to associate with and share resources with others of a similar social status in the caste hierarchy, a phenomenon known as "caste homophily." However, there is a wide range of homophily among regions, families, and communities. Lending and borrowing money, a vertical link between high and low castes, tends to reduce it. However, it appears to be stronger among upper caste groupings. Social bonds including the loan of rice and kerosene as well as advise giving and major decision making are notably commonalities between the two communities.

Literature review

The diversity of India can be seen in almost every area of its culture and society. Ethnic, linguistic, regional, religious, socioeconomic, and caste differences create distinct subsets of the population. In addition to these regional variations, there are also significant discrepancies in India between rural and urban areas, between the traditional and the contemporary, between the sexes, and so on. Traditional Indian culture is characterized by a number of defining characteristics, such as the prevalence of Hinduism and its tenets of reincarnation, the immortality of the soul, karma, dharma, and moksha, and the importance of merit, conduct, and morality; a strong emphasis on family and community; and a commitment to dharma, or moral obligation. People in traditional Indian society have a strong sense of belonging to the groups into which they were born, whether those groups be families, clans, subcastes, castes, or religious communities; another major theme is social hierarchy, which is evident in individual caste groups, in families and kinship groups, whether in northern or southern India, in urban or rural areas, among Muslims or Hindus. One possible translation of the root 'vri' in Varna is "option according to intrinsic features." Color is the direct translation of the Sanskrit word varna.

Theoretical foundations: The concept of color here is presumably a classifying tool. According to the Vedic text Yajurveda, colors may serve as a kind of categorization as well. From the perspective of engaging in one's vocation, Hindu society is divided according to professions. The 'divine hypothesis' of the varna system's foundation holds that the four orders of society sprang from Purusha's voluntary sacrifice of himself. In this sense, Purusha is the creator and supreme entity in Hindu philosophy. In the words of the Slka (hymn) from the Rig Vedic text Purushasukta.

Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas were three attributes that ancient Indian speculators recognized in humans, inanimate things, and inhuman activities. The qualities of "Sattva" were high-mindedness, virtue, kindness, truth, and intelligence. Lifestyle, passion, extravagance, pride, and velour are all indicative of Rajas. Lastly, tamas, which includes traits like coarseness and dullness, excess without taste, and the strength to do hard labor without

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inspiration, was at the bottom. People who are more sattvic are known as Brahmans, those who are more rajasic as Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, and those who are more tamasic as Shudras. According to the 'karma hypothesis,' the division of society into castes is based on occupation. According to a discussion between the sages Bhrigu and Bhardwaj in Shanti Parva6, all humans started out as Brahmans before they specialized into one of the four castes, or varnas. In contrast, another interpretation of Manusmriti holds that everyone starts off as a Shudra but is sorted into one of the four varnas based on their occupation.

According to Herbert Hope Risley's "transplantation hypothesis," Aryans who came to India from Persia or Iran already had a varna-like structure. Before the Aryans conquered India, the country of Iran had a caste system similar to India's four varnas. Color was originally used as a basis for the system. Therefore, the term "varna system" was coined to describe it. The original intention was to differentiate the lighter-skinned Aryans from the darker-skinned Dsas, hence ancient Indian culture was first split into two categories: Aryans and non-Aryans. Shudras were those who were not of the Aryan race and were assigned manual labor.

Post-Vedic societies institutionalized the practice of untouchability because it became linked to low-status jobs such as those involving the disposal of animal and human waste, the tanning of animal skins, the disposal of dead corpses, and other dirty tasks. Panchama and Antyaja were the names given to the members of these lowest social classes. They were not deemed to fall within the Varna classification. In actuality, though, they were a crucial element of the Varna system. Therefore, during this time period, the Chaturvarna model was revised by adding a sixth hereditary caste of artisans known as the Panchama Varna.

The Modern Projections of Caste Hierarchies: According to J.H. Hutton, the terms Varna and caste (also known as Jti) are commonly used interchangeably despite having distinct meanings. He also notes that there seem to have been four distinct castes in the Varna system at its inception, and that during Vedic times, differentiation between social strata was less strictly enforced, such that a Kshatriya may theoretically rise to the status of a Brahman. However, each of the four Varnas was linked to a certain hue.9 According to G.S. Ghurye, who bases his definition on the Rig Veda, the term "Varna" is never used to refer to Brahmans or Kshatriyas but rather to distinguish between the many shades of social status within a community. All that separates the Arya Varna from the Dsa Varna is a reference to their skin tone. According to Ghurye, the split between the Arya and the Dsa paved the way for the Arya and the Shudra. There were only three castes in Vedic society: the priestly Brahman, the warrior Kshatriya, and the commoner Vaishya. The fourth Varna, Shudra, was not mentioned until the later Vedic era. The Aryans, he claims, invaded from outside India and vanquished the native population, elevating themselves to a higher social level while condemning the defeated to the lowest.

Contrary to popular belief, M.N. Srinivas argues that the Caste system is much more nuanced and nuanced than the Varna system. In Indian civilization, a Varna refers to the

overarching identity of a social group, whereas a Caste refers to a more specific subset of that group. Varnas are the sole social stratification, yet Castes number in the thousands. Similarly, the Varna system allows for movement but the Caste system does not.

Each Hindu belongs to a certain Varna and has a set of responsibilities and moral guidelines to uphold based on their Svadharma (own obligations). People are organized into four Ashramas (life phases) and four Varnas (social classes).

Listed below are the responsibilities of each of the four Varnas:

1. A society's vision and ideals are set by its Brahmanas, who are responsible for both education and spiritual leadership.
2. Kshatriya: The kshatriyas are the nobles, the guardians of society, and they are required to exhibit great physical and moral fortitude.
3. The Vaishyas are the most prosperous social group.
4. The Shudras are the only members of society who are expected to take jobs provided by the other Varnas, who are considered to be economically and professionally independent.

Types of Duty (Dharma)

First, there is smnya dharma, which applies to everyone regardless of their Varna, as outlined in the Vedic texts. Nonviolence, honesty, tidiness, control of one's senses, nonacquisitiveness (one must not own material possessions more than one's minimum necessities), devotion to vara (God), confidence in one's parents, love for all animals, etc., are all part of this universal code of behavior. Viea dharma refers to the distinct responsibilities that each varna has. Dharma, a moral code based on varna, would be the basis for this.

Some academics argue that the primary characteristics of a caste system are (1) a shared name, (2) a shared lineage, (3) a shared vocation, and (4) the formation of a single, cohesive society. Hereditary membership and endogamy, according to S.V. Ketkar, form the foundation of caste as an organic framework of interactions. The organic quality of caste is shown by the peaceful coexistence of many caste communities. J.H. Hutton (1946) views the caste system from a pragmatic perspective.

He offers three uses for the caste system:

1. Activities for certain team members,
2. Activities for the community, and
3. Performs a societal or state-level role.

G.S. Ghurye (1950) provides a comprehensive definition of the word "caste." He identifies the following as the six defining characteristics of the caste system: (1) societal segmentation; (2) group hierarchy; (3) dietary and social isolation; (4) varying degrees of religious exclusion and privilege; (5) occupational sexism; and (6) marital repression. The caste system is very stable due to endogamy. Marriages between people of different castes or religions have been more common in recent years, especially in urban areas.

Some more perspectives on caste include: (1) Karl Marx's theory that the caste structure in India helped maintain the Asian method of production. H.J.S. Maine (2) argues that caste exemplifies a'status society' that is not based on contracts. Senart (3) values ancestry and profession honesty above everything else. (4) According to Louis Dumont's interpretation, the caste system is a reflection of the pollution-purity ideology that underpins Hindu culture. (5) According to Hocart, the establishment of the caste system was predicated on the observance of certain religious rites and the rendering of specific duties to feudal rulers. (6) According to Max Weber, the supernatural teachings of Hinduism provide the foundation for the caste system. C. Bougle's interpretation of the caste system places an emphasis on hierarchical placement and mutual aversion among members of the same caste.

Current Concepts of Caste : Various official definitions have been proposed.

Nonetheless, some of them are classified as caste.

i.   Riskey - has defined as "a grouping of families or a collection of families containing a common name; arguing a common desent to a common ancestor (human or divine); prifessing to follow identical hereditary ealling; as well as regarded by those qualified to give an opinion as developing a single uniform community."

ii.   Lundberg claims that A caste is nothing more than an inflexible social class into which one is born and from which one may escape or es cpae only with great difficulty. When it comes to social mobility and status differences, this sort of stratification is the most inflexible.

iii. A caste is defined by E.A.H. Blxmt as "an monogamous or a collection of polygamous groups, bearing a common title, the affiliation of which is hereditary; imposing on its members certain restrictions in the area of social intercourse; either following a common conventional off occupation or clarifying a prevalent origin; and generally regarded as developing a single homogenous community."

iv.   According to H. Cooley, a caste is "where a class is some thing completely hereditary."

Caste and Varna – A Compression:

Both the similarities and differences between the ideas of caste and varna will be addressed here. In India, there are several tiers of society based on Varna and caste. In India, there are several tiers of society based on Varna and caste. One is often substituted for the other. However, the difference between the two is crucial to the study of sociology. One may point to the following as the primary distinctions between the two:

The number of varnas is fixed at four, but the number of jatis is infinite. The "chaturvarna concept" asserts that the four varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras) described above existed throughout the Vedic and post-Vedic periods. While castes may be found in huge numbers, these four varnas symbolized the fourfold partition of ancient Hindu society. Estimating the precise number of castes in India is quite challenging. It's common knowledge that India is home to thousands of distinct castes and sub-castes.

While varna is determined by one's profession, caste is determined by one's birth. A person's membership in a caste is established at the time of their birth. Those who belong to a caste are said to have been born into that caste. People of the Brahmin, Reddy, Jat, and so on castes tend to have their children born into their own communities. The Varna system, prevalent throughout the Vedic era, was a social stratification established on the basis of one's profession. Individuals were assigned to a certain Varna according on their "Karma," or current line of work. Lord Krishna is quoted as saying in the Bhagavad Gita that a person's "Guna" and "Karma" determine which Varna they belong to.

In contrast to the closed nature of the caste system, which prevented individuals from switching castes, the Varna system allowed for individuals to switch the Varna to which they belonged. A guy from the Kshatriya Varna, for instance, may switch to the Brahmin caste.

Likewise, a Vaishya might elevate to the ranks of Kshatriya or Brahmin. It was possible for a Shudra to attain Brahmin status. Vishwamitra, who was a Kshatriya at one point in his life, converted to Brahmanism. Vedavyasa, the author of the "Mahabharata," came from a family of Shudra Varna fishermen but chose to become a Brahmin later in life. However, since caste membership cannot be transferred from one group to another, the caste system is considered closed. As a result, there is very little room for promotion or demotion inside an organization.

The Varna system is officially recognized by Hinduism, although the caste system is not. The historical context of the Varna system reveals that it was in reality predetermined by the gods. Lord Krishna claims in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter xiv, sloka 13), echoing the beliefs of many ancient philosophers, that the four varnas originated from the Prajapati Brahma's (divine king's) four distinct organs.

 On the other hand, there is no divine authority behind the caste system. The Varna system of ancient India may be seen as the ancestor of the modern caste system. That the Varna system is where the caste system got its start. Many Hindu intellectuals, like Swami Vivekanand, have argued that caste is not supported by Hinduism. Vivekanand argues that the caste system is incompatible with Vedanta faith.

The "Varna system" and the "Varna model" are theoretical constructs that have never been implemented in practice. Varna, or caste system, is now a thing of the past. Today, the caste system in all its forms still exists.

Variation in caste homophily by village and context: 68.84% of India's population resides in villages, therefore understanding how different ethnic groups are represented there is crucial (Judge, 2014: 9). While many researchers (especially in the field of anthropology) have focused on studying isolated communities, very few have looked at differences across villages. It seems plausible to me that the intensity of caste homophily will vary from village to village, even if it will remain a prominent category of social structure in every community.

Caste makeup, the size of each caste, and other individual traits like education, gender, age, and employment vary greatly from one hamlet to the next. Entwistle et al.'s (2007)

research on 51 villages in Nang Rong, Thailand, is the only equivalent effort that has compared the social structures of different communities. They claim that settlements are not isolated nor uniform, even within the same area.

Using two different kinds of networks (sibling relationships and rice sharing), they analyze the connections between families both inside and across communities. In terms of the density of relationships and the amount of cohesiveness within villages, as well as the extent to which households are related to those in neighboring villages, their results reveal that there is considerable heterogeneity among villages in social networks. They claim that studies cannot generalize even regionally about the socioeconomic structure of communities.

Although White and Watkins (2000) as well as Conley and Udry (2010), McCreesh et al. (2011), have all examined multiple villages, none of these studies systematically compared network's features across villages.

Caste in Karnataka – An Example : Karnataka has more than sixty million inhabitants, making it the sixth most populous of India's twenty-nine states. Speakers of Kannada, the official language of the state, live across the state. Urdu (in Muslim populations), Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, and many more languages and dialects are also widely spoken. While Hindus make up the vast majority in this state, Muslims and Christians make up the greatest religious minority. The bulk of the state's population resides in rural regions, and over half of its citizens are directly engaged in agricultural production. However, Bangalore, the condition capital, is one of the primary centres of India's active technical sector and a focus of industrial activity. Members of the SCs and STs make up a disproportionate share of the impoverished in these regions, and they face disproportionately severe health and educational disparities. The following claims are based on research on caste in Karnataka conducted by Indian social scientists, as well as the 2005 Karnataka Development Policy Report (Government of Karnataka, 2006), a comprehensive report compiled by the state's government in order to measure the effects of its development regulations on issues related to education, gender, caste, agriculture, and social exclusion.

About a third of rural residents belong to the General Classes (GCs), although they no longer play a prominent role in community life. Many Brahmins fled to the cities in the early 20th century as a result of a political movement led by members of the lower and middle castes that challenged Brahmin power (Shetty 1978; Jacob 2000). According to Jacob (2000), the Lingayats, a Shaivite sect that emerged in the 12th century as part of a movement toward certain Hindu orthodoxies, such as caste, but who have since become incorporated into the caste order (Weber 1958: 305; Srinivas 1986), and the Vokkaligas, a dominant agriculturalist caste, benefited the most from the displacement of the Brahmins. Both the Brahmins' agricultural land and their symbolic prestige within the caste system fell under the power of these tribes once they displaced the Brahmins.

Modern Day Aspects of Caste and Class: One-sixth of Karnataka's population belongs to the Scheduled Castes, who are described as "the poorest in terms of partisan,

economic, social, and cultural resources" (Government of Karnataka, 2005). Despite land reforms and reserve rules, the vast majority of the state's Native American population still lives in rural areas and below the poverty line. Unfortunately, even for landowners, farming is seldom profitable enough to be their only source of income. Lower castes in Karnataka have historically developed powerful social organizations to combat these persistent disparities (Shetty 1978; Yadav 2007). The Adi Karnataka (Mandal 1991) are the largest Scheduled Caste group in the state, comprising about 34% of the SC population. The Bhovis, who make up 10% of the SC population in the state, and the Adi Dravidas, who make up 7%, are two additional prominent groups that feature in the statistics. Due to low rates of education and literacy, most SCs are unable to compete for higher-paying jobs in the labor market.

Brubaker's (2004) assertion that "groupness is a contextually changing variable" is supported by a wealth of data. The findings demonstrate that groupness varies not only with the group under study (with higher castes exhibiting stronger tendencies towards homo compatibility than lower castes), but also with the network context (with high levels of homo compatibility in social relations, but proof of inter-group exchange patterns in economic relations). While most social interactions occur inside a certain caste, we may also see vertical relationships of economic reliance between castes. Regression methods enable us to see the correlates of homophily even while cross-sectional data prevents us from modeling the actual tie-formation process.

Homophily seems to increase when the number of members of lower-status groups increases. These discrepancies might have two possible causes: First, a large number of SCs and STs is indicative of a scenario where the lower castes are more reliant on the higher castes, resulting in less homophily. Second, a large percentage of SCs will force the higher castes to create deeper within-group links since they will not form ties to Untouchables if social ties between high and low castes are rare. Homophily may also be predicted with high accuracy by the proportion of villagers who were born and raised in the same village. This may suggest that each community is home to sizable endogamous kinship groups engaging in sexual and/or other forms of social inbreeding. These results show that segregation may be more severe in rural areas with high concentrations of persons of lower socioeconomic level who also tend to be less mobile. Evidence suggests that modernisation and urbanization are reducing the prominence of caste, as shown by the fact that the number of families with electricity decreases homophily among upper castes (Srinivas 1966).

Conclusion

Understanding the connections between ethnic homo compatibility and other variables, both structural and personal, is crucial for social scientists and policymakers. Longitudinal data collection is essential for this purpose since it allows researchers to track changes over time and see how networks grow and collapse. It seems that only some social categories are relevant in terms of the patterning of social interactions, notwithstanding Harrison White's (2008: 53) claim that social activity has a propensity to

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"create groups out of categories." People that congregate in the same physical location eventually establish a shared sense of identity and a shared set of linguistic and social skills (Wimmer, 2013), allowing us to see the inverse process at work: the construction of categories from groupings. The connection between categories of society and social structures is best understood by delving into these processes.

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15. The Brahman was his head, of both his arms was the Kshatriya made. His thighs became Vaishya, and his feet became the Shudra.
16. The four varnas are divine creations based on inherent qualities.
17. The Book of Peace (the twelfth of eighteen books of the Indian Epic Mahabharata).
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21. See Bhagavad Gita, Chapter xiv, sloka 13. 12 See Swami Vivekanand, India and her problems, chapter IV.