

Caste and Religion

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Certain scholars of caste have considered jati to have its basis in religion, assuming that the sacred elements of life in India envelop the secular aspects, for example, the anthropologist Louis Dumont described. The ritual van kings that exist within the jati system as being based on the concepts of religions purity.

In any society there keep on emerging internal conflicts or disputes. These are caused because of various reasons social economic and political. The social reasons arise from the social structure of the society. The cast system is the most silent feature of the Hindu social structure. The cast system in its most general aspect can be described as system of status and hierarchy. Cast is an important factor in Indian society and politics. We witness struggles of various caste groups for political power, for economic betterment and social justice. Cast conflicts continue to be a major concern of conflict management.

Another important aspect of pluralism of India and at times cause for a social conflict is RELIGION. India is home to many religions. These include Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and several others in small numbers. At social level in general there is harmonious co-existence and respect for each other's religions sentiments of masses to keep them divided. Some vested (interests for political support, exploit the religions).

India is one of the most diversified plural societies. Apart from language culture and ethnicity the very important aspects of diversity are cast and religion. Caste is a uniquely Indian social institution : It is a type of social grouping based on hierarchical gradations of birth, consideration of purity and pollution and occupation. In Independent India, caste came to be used as an important means of electoral mobilisation.

Like Caste, a significant aspect of plurality in India is Religion. Civil society has to play a protective role to create awareness among masses about the ulterior designs of vested interests and also builds among different cast and religions communities. Gandhiji believed that politics must be guided by ethics drawn from religion. Caste division is special to India. All societies have some kind of social inequality and some form of division of labour. In most societies, occupation are passed on from one generation to another. Caste system is an extreme form of this.

Caste and religion are two fundamental institutions of Indian society.

They play a significant role in shaping social identity, cultural traditions, and community life.

2. Caste System

a) Definition

Caste is a hereditary system of social stratification based on birth.

G.S. Ghurye : “Caste is a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life.”

b) Features of Caste

1. Hereditary membership.
2. Endogamy (marriage within caste).
3. Hierarchical ranking of castes.
4. Occupational specialization.
5. Restrictions on food and social interaction.
6. Strong social control through customs and traditions.

c) Functions of Caste

Provides social identity and security.
Regulates marriage and social relations.
Preserves traditional occupations.
Promotes cultural continuity.

d) Demerits of Caste

Creates social inequality and discrimination.
Leads to untouchability and exclusion.
Restricts individual freedom.
Obstructs social mobility and progress.

3. Religion

a) Definition

Emile Durkheim : “Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things.”

Religion gives meaning to life, provides moral guidance, and ensures social solidarity.

b) Functions of Religion

Creates a sense of community and belonging.
Provides moral values and ethical guidance.
Offers psychological comfort during crises.
Preserves cultural traditions.
Acts as an agency of social control.

c) Role of Religion in India

Influences family, marriage, festivals, and rituals.
Promotes unity but sometimes also causes communal conflicts.
Plays a vital role in politics and social reform movements.

Relationship between Caste and Religion

Caste and religion are closely interlinked in Indian society.
Caste divisions are often justified through religious texts and traditions.
Religious rituals and temple entry were historically influenced by caste.
Reform movements like Bhakti and Buddhism challenged caste-religion linkages.

Modern society seeks to separate caste discrimination from religion.

Changing Nature of Caste and Religion

Modernization, urbanization, and education have weakened caste restrictions. Inter-caste marriages and occupational mobility are increasing.

Secularism in the Indian Constitution promotes equality of all religions.

Laws (like abolition of untouchability) and social reforms have reduced caste-based discrimination.

Conclusion

Caste and religion have historically shaped Indian society.

They provide identity, cultural continuity, and social cohesion.

At the same time, they have also been causes of inequality and conflict.