

## Problems of Communication between Castes in India

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### Abstract:

*According to Richard West, and Lynn Turne (2009) India is divided into four social caste systems and this caste hierarchy inhibits people to communicate with one another. There is a huge communication gap between these castes and is leading to lots of social tensions, violence and affecting the growth rates of country. Throughout ages, experts and scholars have explored various factors why people of several castes in India are not open to each other. This paper focuses on revealing what are those social, religious and perceptual boundaries that affect communication behavior of castes in a simple social interaction. The study argued that people due to some social taboos and traits ignored to speaking to each other in the society. That is why, without the lack of understandable interaction, there are an enormous social trouble, inequality and restlessness in the Indian society. It is observed that people from dominant classes and lower castes practice a selective communication on selected issues. It is well established that both communities follow a social norm of ignoring and dominating to one another in outside their home. That is why the relations between these two communities are not so mature, convenient and deep, but mostly depend on the circumstances and self-interest. In order to keep dominance of their social hereditary over lower group they use guarded and safe communication to maintain their historical relevance.*

**Key words:** caste system, communication problems, India

## **Introduction**

India is divided into four social caste systems and this caste hierarchy inhibits people to communicate with one another (Richard West, and Lynn Turne, 2009). People from different castes in India due to some social taboos and traits ignore to speak openly with each other in the society. That is why, without the lack of understandable interaction, there are an enormous social trouble, tension, inequality and restlessness in the Indian society. It is observed that people of upper castes and lower castes practice a selective communication on selected issues. It is well established view that both communities follow a social norm of ignoring and dominating to one another in outside their home. That is why the relations between these two communities are not so mature, convenient and deep, but mostly depend on the circumstances and self-interest. In order to keep dominance of their social hereditary over lower group dominant classes use exemplified, powerful and strong communication to maintain their historical relevance.

For a few decades, it has been observing that these two communities are now sharing foods, clothes, and places and accepting invitation but there is an abundant lack of exchanging ideas explicitly. No doubt a friendly nature has been developed in cities but the picture of villages is still blurred. And it is also observed that these sharing of things have been occurring only in the people who have been a common habit of drinking and smoking.

In communication, it is believed that most of the conflict or controversies begin in the absence of a reliable communication. Goethe once remarked that no one would talk much in society, if he knew how often he misunderstands others. One of our strongest weapons is dialogue (Nelson Mandela). Several theories and Psychology and Economics literature has confirmed that social identity of people can affect simple social communication and interactions. In reality, this perspective is mostly depending on that communication is

mostly dominated by social caste situations. Even India different classes and religious people come together to work and live in several circumstances, but this communication remains limited to the profession form and the line of caste is not crossed mostly by the dominated classes. May be some situations, caste influence individual thinking but the statistical significance remain very weak and rational. On the other hand the economic growth particularly in cities have changed this caste line but the reservation question degrading and weakening the relationship.

No doubt the concept of social order is sustained by dominated classes, with their political, economic and religious backgrounds. But acquiring these things today by lower castes is changing the old aged perception of dominated classes. Facts revealed that still they are not considered equal in the society and the question of social status remains a riddle. Caste differences affect the communication objectives and understanding the objectives of this interaction. Interaction and communication between those who are from other caste backgrounds is considered by difficulties and mostly depends upon the point of their social environment.

Indeed, communication is so vital for human behaviors and for the existence of the society that it is hard to assume of social and behavioral dealings without presence of communication. Information and communication exchange are fundamental human need in which individuals reflects their character and behavior and make society peaceful and restless. Therefore, in the various branches of communication, Interpersonal communication is supreme that is related to language, social cognition, and social psychology of people. Many thinkers argue that interpersonal communication primarily is focused on motivation, persuasion, social influence, and small group practices. When the people from different class and castes develop same consensus on a dispute or a controversy it will make society stronger and balanced. But

today, society of India is not working the same way. People use guarded communication with one another.

### **Selective exposure between the castes**

People particularly belong to dominated classes have their own pre-existed thinking and predisposition mentality about the social nature and caste merits of lower castes. These criteria mostly stimulate them to select their communication while talking to persons of lower castes. Since the classification of society people expose themselves to information that reinforces rather than contradicts their beliefs and opinions. This one group is not able to see the caste from a neutral perspective and judge the person of lower castes through the sun glasses of old social norms and parameter. Most of the time, they perceives that it is useless to communicate with people of lower castes because they are not equal in social and caste status.

Even their early years at schools and society they are made realized by the people of upper caste that they are untouchable, economically poor and religiously impure. Parents of upper castes also instruct their children to not mingle with them. The sociologist Max Weber once noted that the Indian caste system made it very challenging for individuals to advance in the society beyond their caste.

The Indian Caste System is considered a closed system of stratification, which means that a person's social status is obligated to which caste they were born into. There are limits on interaction and behavior with people from another social status (Sekhon). One more factor that blocks people to speak each other frankly and conveniently is their perception is the unique way in which people respond or interpret an object. Such all-inclusive perceptions not only are seldom correct but they also block mental activity that is necessary for successful communication. Stereotyping is generalizing about a class of people or events that is widely held by a given culture. In case

of stereotyping, people develop communication statements and mindsets about others.

Sometimes both groups hold a negative attitude. They always resist any kind of change in the society. They think that communication and living with another group will make them humorous and insulted in the society. Therefore, they avoid the company of each other. Social pressure is more effective reason to block them not to talk each other. Communication within groups can be difficult because of status barriers. For example, if a low level employee is asked to make a presentation to a group comprised of upper level management the information may not be well received because the managers will consider the employee to be below them in the organization's hierarchy and therefore unworthy of their attention.

### **Social Psychology, Identity and Interaction: The pillars of Social Communication**

In the Indian society, people from several castes reside with their limited and unlimited social freedoms. This pattern of their living is affecting their communication behavior. Since their childhood children are guided and advised by their parents to how to deal with and behave with the people from other castes and groups. It is accepted that the frustration-aggression proposition of caste resentment based upon various backgrounds and their social conflicts. The social perception of people mostly reflects that what their people will think about their status if they communicate openly to people from other castes. Identity of different groups in society is either secure or insecure. This psychological distinctiveness of thinking people different from themselves enhances insecurity, degrade group identification and decrease self-esteem in people of lower castes. This social psychology and low status identity of people, which is difficult to change, leads them to take defenses, and hide the social reality. There are various perspectives on the

nature and relations among these social groups and their psychology.

Undoubtedly, people are normally social animals; they always want the company of other people. But their perception, social psychology and identification come in their way to build and maintain their relationship with other people. But in different situation when both group face a difficulty they become one. This time they observe and analyse other people beyond their perception and knowledge. The idea argued that certain behaviour of a group influences the performance and life of other is seemed correct and rational. The ability to challenge the guidelines and directions of their people leave one's alone and helpless.

It is argued that Indian social communication patterns are differs from other countries because of the Indian society emphasize on social relationships and background. They consider proper human relationships and social status are basis of society. Social identity and image are psychological examination of the role of self-conception in society. Many past researches has confirmed that each of these identities and status can be more or less significant at any moment of time and the relative salience of different identities can significantly affect behavior (Akerlof and Kranton, 2004).

Social interaction denotes to the daily interaction between people. This social interaction takes place under some certain circumstances and social perception and covers an extensive range of attitude and behaviors of the other social group without any communication, to sustained friendly association” (Cook-Sellitz, 1955). But when this identity is hidden, the results and communication behavior occur differently. Indian are mostly stereotyped particularly people from dominant classes and they expect respect and social status from other classes.

Simply, a social identity is awareness of human beings that they belong to a social group or category (Hogg and Abrams 1988). The realizations that they are not heterogeneous

motivate them to indulge in social interaction and can take practices of a friendly greeting, discussion, short or long-term relationship, and companionship. This social interaction between several castes occurs in different situations in different way, at work, home, in the residential neighborhood, at college, hospital, in bus. Literally, the main objective of social interaction is to acquaintance with people in particular situations, involve in conversation, interchange thoughts and experiences, know about each other, discover social relations, improve relationships, and so on. But in practice this concepts fails to organize a social communication between castes.

### **Inside and outside of spiral of silence**

In India, people live, behave and understand things in society according to the guidance, religion and culture they get from their elders. So, people respect the persons from their caste and hate others. This caste belief is the moral and ethical way to look at different castes in different vision. This arrogance and superiority are reflected in their closed communication in all their everyday activities. According to the theory of Neo-Elizabeth people express their opinion expression according to their predispositions such as isolation fear, and demographic factors are also influence willingness of people to freely express opinions on various issues. The spiral of silence happens on a macro level if more people of the perceived marginal remain silent.

The concept of spiral of silence also applies in the communication behavior between castes in India. A person from dominant classes feel and act in different way with lower caste and on the other hand spiral of silence begins with the risk of isolation in society. In order to maintain the dominant structure in society and in the minds of lower caste they do not communicate and behave fairly with them. In every walk of live they try to realize them that they are socially weak, impure and unskilled. If any people from dominant classes take courage

openly to be friendly and helpful with these castes they make fun of him/her. They withdrawal their association for fear of rejection and punishment by peers and unwanted publicity. In respect to avoid becoming lonely and not to lose social status and honor, people from dominant classes do not establish close relationship with other groups. If a person forgets this pattern of living; the society and his people become a wall in front of him. At last he start behaving and expressing himself accordingly the other people.

There are some social, religious and cultural barriers when it comes to the mixing of a higher caste with a lower caste. Therefore, under this caste system every group and caste abides by fundamental customs and well defined standards of interactions (Manali S Deshpande, 2010). However, some social groups decline to confirm the opinion. They argue differently. They say fear of isolation undoubtedly impacts people's willingness to express their thoughts and attitude but it do not apply on entire class of people. According to Noelle-Neumann (1974) people are reluctant to express their opinions that are opposite to the public opinion of perceived majority because of fear of isolation. It is confirmed that human beings fear of being ignored, isolated, and excluded.

### **The Literacy, Economic status and scientific temperament**

Today, India is fourth largest economy of the world. Is it making a sense and importance to the lower castes? Is it changing their mind set, behavior and relations with higher castes in India? Let us take an example of marriages in India. The marriage outside of the caste is usually prohibited in India. But today inter-caste marriages are making a dent in the age-old customs. The contemporary circumstances, economic and several cultural factors are modifying social communication and developing a new sense of thinking towards one another. General economic growth and literacy have led to improve and

changes in the lifestyles and communication of lower castes. But despite all these transformations, still there are huge gaps in the communication practices, talking behavior and patterns. Dominant classes and lower castes do not have convenient relations and communication exchanges. Mostly, most of the times, they want to avoid one another company and presence in the society. But in the big cities, rich people have different opinion and they try to observe people according to their capacity and skills rather than by their castes.

The caste system has been a massive effect on the economic and social development of India. For the last few decades, the life style, education and economic status of lower castes have been improving but this is leading to social tensions and new patterns of violence and hate among dominant classes. The dominant classes are thinking it an encroachment in their age old hierarchy and domination over these people. The professional barriers that existed between higher and lower castes have begun melting but social distinctions are still there. Most of the interactions between these social groups occur in mental shortcut style where they draw speedy conclusion on the social, economic and religious bases.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

It can be argued that under certain circumstances and perception people decide to exchange their ideas and thoughts with another caste. The dimensions of employment, education and updated living styles of lower castes are creating a new stratum in the society. And on the other way, the merit of self-esteem has the guts to challenge all irrationality and function independently. Still a concealed feeling of had ruler and ruled catching both groups. But today dominant and lower classes have their own agendas and change in their living patterns.

Amid this spectrum, both classes are ailed with two different views one from traditional and other from modern. Dominant classes still suffers from their old custom of

domination and considering the lower castes are weak and meaningless to the society. As per the order of social hierarchy in India, lower castes deteriorate at the lower strata where material deficiency and impurity reinforce one another (Beteille, 1998). But, now everybody should look forward rather than looking backward to examine the follies and greatness of each other. The different social identification of people leads them to act differently with other groups. So, when there will be no social unity and harmony the society cannot be strong and peaceful. Is this collective perception is easy to develop in the society? Can people exchange their thoughts easily and freely with their counterparts? It is difficult in Indian but not impossible.

The way people do interpersonal communication it influences society much than any other activities. Today, in India the society is fragmented into small-small groups according to their interests and castes. Therefore, there is need to think deliberately about the positive and negative consequences of every aspect of communication order. It is true that the sharing of facts, information and social values is inherent and basic in human behavior and nature. This habit of exchanging ideas and experiences used to develop human social cultures, human relations, socialization, civilizations, and abused interpersonal communication in exploiting for vested benefits and interests. Colonialism, Slavery, imperialism, and domination are a few examples of vast human exploitation of their basic instinct-the need to share information, facts and ideas (Bryant and Wallace, 1979).

There are large and persistent disparities between the social status of upper castes and lower castes in India. On average, the social status and respect of lower castes is much poorer than the people of dominant classes. For this, an open communication behavior can help to resolve conflict with a perfect sense of what the problem is and what ways are needed. Before anyone examines the social background firstly he should consider other people's thoughts and needs so that one could

avoid the pressure of domination. One should depict his interest in the communication or talk of other person in finding a middle ground to simplify the process of constructive relations. Though today lower castes are acquiring higher education, good administrative position and becoming rich but despite all these factors they blamed of being hated and ignored by dominant castes in society and working places. Sometimes, in the deficiency of strong and confident communication skills the people from lower castes could not express themselves in several circumstances that lower their positions. Finally, I would like to conclude in the words of Albert Einstein “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”.

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