OLD HABITS DIE HARD: CASTE SYSTEM RESURRECTED

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Abstract
The seven new social class hierarchy, an expansion of the usual three classes, brought shock and surprise to, not only the British, but the entire world. This new classification disposed the leaders to look back and see how they are leading or how they have been leading. The paper made an attempt to exhume the history of the caste and the class systems, their origins. Though controversial, superior argument holds that it is a religious affair which the colonists capitalized on for effective control of their colonies. In conclusion the paper warned that leaders should be wary of introducing policies for the sake of perpetuating leadership because the after effect may be disastrous. 

Keywords: Caste system; Social class; Hinduism; British class system; Classification; Leaders.

INTRODUCTION
“Wonders never end” was a constant exclamation from one of my respected lecturers in the university. He always used it when a surprising event happened. Really, wonders never end! This year, 2013 month of April has proved that statement true with the British class system issue. How could anybody, who has been following how critical people have condemned the “caste” system, imagine the United Kingdom, of all countries, coming up with a seven-class system. Well, the Christians say that seven is a perfect number and this could be its fulfillment; but who knows whether it would not get to seventeen or seventy-seven?

The caste system has been existing in India since before the 3rd century when it was mentioned by a none Indian, Megasthenes. Quoting Ghurye (1969), who, despite studies by many, still concluded that:

We do not possess a real general definition of caste. It appears to me that any attempt at definition is bound to fail because of the complexity of the phenomenon. On the other hand, much literature on the subject is marred by lack of precision about the use of the term (Ghurye, 1969: 5).

The recent survey conducted by the London School of Economics (LSE) has led credence to the suspicion that the British played an important role on the sustenance of the caste system in India. This survey research involving a whooping number of 160,000 people is a phenomenal one and has a high significance. United Kingdom has a culture of a three class system; but that rigid structure has been broken “with a seven-tiered system that considers house values, cultural activities and jobs of friends” to belong to a class (Miller, 2013).

The role of the British on the caste system in India is controversial. Some sources suggest that the caste system became formally rigid during the British Raj, when the British started to enumerate castes during the ten-year census and meticulously codified the system under their rule (Dirks, 2001; Stokes, 1973).
Why do we have classes? Why should we have classes? Is classification of human beings necessary? How do we classify human beings? What will be the outcome of classification of human beings? These are questions that demand answers.

This paper is not coming from a social historian, nor from an economist, nor from a politician, nor from an idealist, nor from a warrior, and not also from a religionist; but it is coming from a concerned individual who like to see human beings as beings created equal in the sight of the Creator God. Why should we have classes? Is it because of poverty or leadership? Is it because of weakness or strength? Is it because of literacy or illiteracy? The Holy Bible, speaking from the mouth of the owner of the universe, Christ Himself said, while He was being anointed by Mary for His burial (as He made His disciples to understand) that “You will always have poor people with you, but you will not always have Me” (John 12: 8). The statement indicated that poverty may never be eradicated. In other word, there will always be people below others whom they will call masters. The Bible always talks about the relationship between servants and masters, is this a kind of class? If it is, then the class system is inevitable since the creator himself recognized it. But does recognizing it mean establishing it or creating it? It was not the intention of God create man unequal. Sin has done damage beyond human comprehension and erasure. Only the creator of the world can redeem the world from the entanglement of sin.

DEFINITION OF CASTE AND CLASS

Are caste and class principles to be followed in life or are they edifices created by circumstance? Human beings have been existing since they were created by God. Only two persons, a man and a woman were formed by God, though one before the other. All their progeny came from the same two individuals. How come now that we have hierarchy in humanity called caste or class? Before we really delve into the origin of caste and class it would be nice to define both terms.

Caste is from a Portuguese word casta literally meaning race, lineage; from the feminine of casto from Latin castus meaning pure, chaste (Webster, 2000: 177). Continuing the definition from Webster’s Dictionary, caste is (1) one of the hereditary social classes in Hinduism that restrict the occupation of their members and their association with the members of other castes (2) a division of society based on differences of wealth, inherited rank or privilege, profession, or occupation (3) a system of rigid social stratification characterized by hereditary status, endogamy, and social barriers sanctioned by custom, law, or religion. Barnhart (1988: 148) defined caste as a “hereditary social class, as among the Hindus – race, breed, lineage, borrowed from Spanish and Portuguese casta (earlier casta raca unmixed race) originally feminine of casto chaste from Latin castus pure, related to castrare to cut off. Etymologically, the word caste originated from Portuguese. It has a religious imbroglio coupled with ethnic or lineage disposition.

From a social point of view, Shashi (2007) sees caste as “a social category in which membership is fixed at birth and usually unchangeable”. To him, “caste systems are traditional, hereditary systems of social stratification, such as clans, gentes, or the Indian caste system”. Anthropologists use the term more generally to refer to a social group that is endogamous and occupationally specialized. With this, there is no problem with the system since there is nothing wrong with recognition of individual by their profession.
Class, according to Webster (2000: 211), is (1) “a group sharing the same economic or social status (2) social rank; especially, high social rank”. Attaching social to class to form social class presents the real meaning of class. The term social class refers to a group of people within a society who possess roughly the same socioeconomic status. Virtually all societies have some form of social ranking with a variety in terms used to describe it. Sociologists view social classes as existing hierarchically, with those at the top enjoying certain advantages over the rest. A person’s social standing may be based on such factors as wealth, occupation, family relationships, ethnicity, religion, and level of education. So, social class is the grouping of people by occupation where doctors, lawyers, and university lecturers are ranked higher than the peasants or the artisans or the unskilled labourers.

In librarianship, class is grouping of objects or ideas or concepts based on their characteristics, attributes, qualities, properties or any other inherent distinguishing factor that they have in common. The purpose of the grouping is to classify them according to an established system that uses symbols to denote each group called “classification system” (Reitz, 2005). Classification is “The process of dividing objects or concepts into logically hierarchical classes, subclasses, and sub-subclasses based on the characteristics they have in common and those that distinguish them” (Reitz, 2005:145). In this recognition, class is grouping entities according to their characteristics.

ORIGIN OF CASTE AND CLASS SYSTEMS

Many beliefs in the origin of the caste system exist but religion is regarded as a stronghold in the establishment and uphold of the caste system in India. India has an indigenous religion called Hinduism; so it is pertinent to have a look at this religion to see its role in propagation of the caste system in India. What is the origin of this religion? Take a glance at this statement:

Hinduism is unique among the world religions in that it has no founder or date of origin. While most major religions derive from new ideas taught by a charismatic leader, Hinduism is simply the religion of the people of India, which has gradually developed over four thousand years. The origins and authors of its sacred texts are largely unknown (religionfacts.com, 2013)

“Hinduism is a collective term applied to the many philosophical and religious traditions native to India. Hinduism has neither a specific moment of origin nor a specific founder. Rather, the tradition understands itself to be timeless, having always existed. Indeed, its collection of sacred texts is known, as a whole, as Sanatana Dharma, "The Eternal Teaching." (Patheos.com, 2013).

Other facts from the Patheos Library: Hosting the Conversation on Faith are that Hinduism was formed about 2000 B. C. E.; it originated from India; it has about one billion followers; it is a polytheistic religion; it has four sacred writings namely: Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Epics; and that the religion has no headquarters as its base location. Daniel (2005) wrote that there are different theories about the establishment of the caste system namely, religious-mystical theories, biological theories, and socio-historical theories. Hindus believe that the first human being (primal man, Purush) destroyed himself, and out of his different parts of his body parts created human society. Depending from which part of the primal man’s body part one is
created gives him his caste. Those created from the head of Purush are more superior to those created from his hands or thighs or feet. In the biological theory, living things – animate and inanimate – have three qualities apportioned in different proportions. These are Sattva qualities which includes the gift of wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness and other positive qualities; Rajas qualities like passion, pride, valour and other passionate qualities; and Tamas, which include the ugly qualities of dullness, stupidity, lack of creativity and other negative qualities. The belief is that people with different doses of these qualities are inclined to be more useful in certain occupations thereby belonging to a certain class. In this case each person’s class depends on his ability to apply wisdom.

The social historical theory is believed to be an imported idea to India from the Aryans. Before the Aryans came to India around 1500 B. C. from Europe there were the Negrito, who had physical features like the Africans, the Mongoloid, who had Chinese features, the Austroloid, who were believed to have come from Australia, and the Dravidian, who were believed to have come from the Mediterranean (Daniel, 2005). The Aryans organized themselves into three groups named Rajayana which was later changed to Kshatria, and these were the warriors. The second group, known as the Brahmans, was the priests; and the third group known as Vaisia, were the farmers and the craftsmen. This group, the Vaisias, became landlords and businessmen and ascribed much power unto themselves. Though this theory is upheld by a strong group of scholars who “think that it was the doing of the people who came from West Asia who migrated and settled here around 3000 – 4000 years ago”, Balasubramanian (2013) is of the opinion that “patrilineage and demographic events seem to have brought in social strata and restricted gene pools, not external intervention”. Confusion sets in when one wants to be categorical on some issues. The origin of the caste system is one of such. Using the abrogated Osu system in Igbo land in Nigeria as an example, it is pertinent to believe that the caste system is a religious invention.

The class system started since time immemorial. Using classification as the basis for “class system” and using ‘grouping’ as a method to classify items, then class system started with God the creator Himself. The Bible, the sacred book of the Christians, in the book of Genesis 1:1-5 says:

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the power of God was moving over the water. Then God commanded, “Let there be light” – and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light “Day” and the darkness “Night”.

Throughout chapter one of this book of Genesis God created, separated, and named the creatures. This is the beginning of “class”. But this grouping was for the purpose of distinct identification and not prioritizing. Is this CLASSification the same with what is happening in United Kingdom now? Classification is not the same as stratification which the caste or the social class system depicts. God was grouping His creation according to their species and not according to ranks or superiority as is implied in social class system.

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BRITISH CLASS SYSTEM TRANSPORTED TO INDIA

It is strenuous to decipher exactly what is the truth about the claim that the British gave strength to the Indian caste system. From literature it is expedient to believe that the Indian caste system is either religious or it was imposed to them by the Aryans. Going by reactions of leaders from different epochs in British and Indian histories, it is subservient to align with the idea that the British was behind the sustenance of the caste system in India (Mtholyoke.edu, 2013). Read critically these two quotations:

British rule, without wanting to, was triggering fundamental social changes in India. The lower castes were becoming officials, the Brahmans were leaving religious occupations and becoming policemen and farmers, and the three pillars of the caste system according to Bouglé — hereditary occupation, social hierarchy and exclusionary repulsion (Bougle, n.d. pp. 80-123).

In August 1932, the then Prime Minister of Britain, Ramsay Macdonald gave his 'award' known as the Communal Award. According to it, separate representation was to be provided for the Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, Dalit. The depressed classes were assigned a number of seats to be filled by election from special constituencies in which voters belonging to the depressed classes only could vote.

Kerr (2007) in the above statements implied that the British where playing lip service in their purposed efforts to stamp out the caste system. How would they ever do that and loose out in economy?

The class system has been part of the British rule for ages. What is happening now is the deepening of the system and raising it to another height that was never thought of. Formerly it was three classes – the Working class, the Middle class, and the Upper class – but today, according to the “century’s astonishing survey” which Miller (2013) said was a ‘shake up’, “The traditional British class system has received a shake-up, with a new model concluding there are now seven social classes operating in the UK”. It is on record that various British leaders made efforts to stop the class system but how genuine were their efforts. Gammell (2009) recorded that in 1997, the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, pledged to create a "classless society" in which no group of people would prevail over another. Cannadine (1999) also recorded that the class system had “ceased to carry the conviction they once did. Instead, an alternative interpretation has come to prevail that, although not always explicitly Thatcherite, certainly shares her assumption that class should be downplayed, disregarded, and denied and that grouping people in confrontational collectivities is a subversive rhetorical and political device rather than an expression or description of a more complex, integrated, and individualist social reality”. What a confusion we were in? What do we believe? Has the recent seven class system of the British people brought to null the historical argument by Cannadine? Rather has it not proved him right? Here him:

But the difficulty with banishing class from modern British history in the way it has increasingly become fashionable to do is that it leaves us incapable of
understanding what it was that John Major was talking about or why what he said resonated--and is still resonating--so widely. For if he was right in asserting that Britain is still a class-bound society, then it is little short of bizarre that in recent years historians have been spending so much time and effort denying that this was so and, by implication, that this is still so. If we accept, as we are surely correct in doing, that class is one of the most important aspects of modern British history no less than of modern British life, then it is at best regrettable and at worst plain wrong for the current generation of historians to show minimal interest in the subject. Even if, in its crudest forms, the Marxist approach to class no longer carries conviction, that is no reason for dismissing class altogether. The baby, still kicking vigorously, should be retained, even though the bathwater, long since grown tepid, has rightly been jettisoned. For the most important and immediate task is neither that of denying nor rehabilitating old-style class analysis but of defining the subject afresh and envisioning it anew.

Actually, rehabilitating old-style class analysis is what the London School of Economics has done by surveying 160,000 people and getting their opinion about the British class system. The old three-tier class structure has been replaced with the new. As Miller puts it “the London School of Economics (LSE), has replaced that rigid structure with a seven-tiered system that considers house values, cultural activities and jobs of friends”.

THE SEVEN NEW BRITISH SOCIAL CLASSES
The new classes are based on an individual's income and home value (economic capital), their cultural interests (cultural capital) and the number and status of people they know (social capital).

Elite
The most privileged class, with high levels of economic, social and cultural capital

Established middle class
A culturally engaged class with strong levels of all three capitals

Technical middle class
A class of people with high economic capital but who seem less culturally engaged, and have fewer social contacts

New affluent workers
A young and active group with medium levels of economic capital and higher levels of social and cultural capital

Emergent service workers
A class with low economic capital but rising cultural capital and high social capital. This class tends to be young people in urban areas.

Traditional working class
This class tends to be older and scores low on all forms of the three capitals, though they are not the poorest group.
Precariat
The most deprived class of all, with low levels of economic, cultural and social capital.
(Miller, 2013, Via BBC through the Net).
Who knows if this is not the beginning of stratification? Are we ending with these seven classes? Other countries may have a different way of classifying their citizens. If you are to classify the citizens of your country, how many social classes will you have? In my country, there will be eight, the prisoners, the wretched, the unemployed, the retirees, the poor, the rich, the crafty business men and women, and the politicians who are at the peak of the class. In other countries some may be sarcastic about it, though with a pinch of bitter truth like Sparrow Prince logged in, in a blog. Probably, he is an Australian.
“Yep - good to be Australian
We only have:
1. Pensioners class
2. Unemployed class
3. Indigenous class
4. Working class
5. Upper class (yes, there are some of those) and
6. The Elite (Gina and her ilk) and lastly
7. The politicians living off whatever cream they can scrape from Australia, placing their noses in the troughs of the public purse and setting themselves up after retirement/dismissal for another round on the public purse.
So we are 'lucky' we only have 7 classes”

CONCLUSION
One of the reasons for this discourse is to show how hard established customs die. A big lesson from this is that some policies made to solve a temporary problem may end up becoming a custom and eventually a law. Who would ever think that a simple division of human beings for the purpose of good rulership and for economic growth and sustenance would be an issue that would keep the whole world awake? Our leaders should be wary of setting precedents that may boomerang. Our leaders should not make policies whose intention is to perpetuate them in office hoping that when they leave others will not follow suit. What the leaders, some of them, bosses, do today may affect their children multiple-fold in years to come. Presidents, emperors, kings, queens, ministers, governors, and all cadres of leaders heading one government post or the other should be careful with the type of leadership they exhibit because when they leave, their children suffer its consequence. Religious leaders should also be mindful of how they lead their adherents. Examples set by the leaders in other to perpetuate their tenure as leaders will leave an indelible mark on the road of the incomers, the future leaders.

REFERENCE


