

# Caste

Caste is most overwhelming factor in Indian life. Those who deny it in principle also accept it in practice. Life moves within the frontiers of caste and cultured men speak in soft tones against the system of caste, while its rejection in action just does not occur to them. If they are reminded of their acts, which are in such unbelievable conformity with caste, they point out with indignation their thought and speech. In

fact, they hurl the charge of caste-mindedness against those who remind them of their caste behaviour on the plea that while they engage in a healthy debate on principles and great outlines, their critics vitiate the discussion by bringing into it the polluted sphere of action. It is the critics, so they say, who create the atmosphere of caste. Who knows if the strange split between thought and action, characteristic of

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Indian culture more than of any other, is not the result predominantly of caste. An unalterable frame is what caste is. To live within it must necessarily demand a great deal of ingenuity, of thinking and acting in double, treble or more numerous sets.

The great facts of life such as birth, death, marriage, feasts and other rituals move within the frame of caste. Men belonging to the same caste assist one another at these decisive acts. Men of the other castes are there at the periphery, more or less bystanders and onlookers. A common mistake must be rid of at the start. A certain amount of inter-caste activity appears to have taken place in recent decades in large areas of the country. In the first place, such activity is confined to the lesser rituals of feasting and does not extend to the major ones of wedding and child-bearing. Secondly, this activity is only superficially and deceptively inter-caste. Various groups of the high caste are sometimes known to feast or wed one another. But the great schism between the high-caste and the low-caste is as great as ever, if not greater, in the sphere of real collective action. When people talk of inter-caste marriages and the like, they merely mean weddings between groups within the high-caste.

Caste is presumably the world's largest insurance for which one does not pay a formal or regular premium. The solidarity is always there, when everything else fails. In fact, there are few occasions for other things being tried out. Men just tend to make friends within the caste, their family most certainly. Such a close solidarity at child-bearing, funeral obsequies, weddings and other rituals must necessarily have its consequences on other aspects of life including the political. It must, in fact, influence and almost determine the mind and its basic thought. The political aspects are easily influenced. When a continual get-together takes place on all major and personal events of life, it would be somewhat bizarre if political events took place outside that framework. When men are puzzled at a caste voting more or less alike, they behave as though they had come from another planet. What would one expect a group to do that lives, child-bears, weds, dies and feasts together? To this most formidable list of common activity must be added the still more decisive activity of bread-earning, the common profession. Even where

the common profession is in some ways no longer a mark of certain castes, the informal, often lame and halting, but almost unfailing scheme of insurance against unemployment provided by one's own caste continues to operate. If the caste did not vote together, that would be a puzzle. Even such breakaway from caste voting which hardly, if ever, goes upwards of 20 percent is ascribable to some substitute security that has been found in place of caste.

This division of Indian society into hundreds if not thousands of castes, which have a political as much as social significance, explains why India wilts before foreign armies. When she has not so wilted in her history, it has almost always been those periods when the bonds of caste were loose. A great misreading of Indian history is current. The tragic succession of foreign conquests, to which the Indian people have succumbed, is ascribed to internal quarrels and intrigues. That is nonsense. The largest single cause is caste. It renders nineteenth of the population into onlookers, in fact, listless and nearly completely disinterested spectators of grim national tragedies.

Castes have endured over thousands of years. They have bred certain traits and aptitudes. Some kind of a selection has taken place that is socially as significant as a natural selection. Certain skills of trade, craft, husbandry or administration or handling of principles have become hereditary. A real breakthrough is almost always the work of a genius. With such castewise determination of skills, one might expect great advantages to flow out of such age-long selections. That would have been so if all skills fetched an equal social status or monetary reward. They obviously do not. Some skills are believed to be unbelievably superior to others and there is an interminable series of steps in the ladder. Castes of inferior skills are downgraded. They congeal into an almost lifeless mass. They cease to be the reservoir from which the nation may refresh and renew itself. Numerically small castes of the most superior skills are the habitual providers of the nation's leadership. In order to maintain their most unnatural dominance, they become a seething mass of chicanery but superficially most smooth and cultured. The masses are lifeless, the elite are Caste has done that.

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A study of castes in all its periods is not being attempted here. We are only concerned with the system of caste as it is today and as it probably has been in all periods of national decline and caste rigidity. In a sense, caste is a universal phenomenon. The tiny beginnings of its roots were laid bare by Mr. Khrushchev when he bemoaned in present-day Russia, the unwillingness of persons with a higher education to do manual work. This rift between manual and brain work and evaluation of one as the lower and the other as the higher and the increasing complexity and permanency of this rift are behind the formation of caste. The Indian experience of caste goes farther than that of any other nation and all the world may have lesson to learn from it. At the moment, we are concerned with the terrifying damage castes have done India and how she may rid herself of it. The entire scale of values has been upset. The high-castes are cultured and chicane, the low-castes are stagnant and lifeless. What goes as scholarship in the country is but the name of a speech and grammar rather than substance of knowledge. Generosity is abridged to mean selfish appropriation through restricting its route to caste and relations. To beg is believed to be less shameful than to do manual work, for through beggary of certain higher types, the giver is favoured with inestimable benefits in the other world. Craftiness, open submission and secret insubordination become the marks of successful men of state rather than the virtues of straight dealing and bravery. Lie is enthroned as the supreme virtue of public life. A general atmosphere of fraud prevails, for to protect caste men and relations becomes an aim rather than to protect justice and national well being. In essence the needs of caste are at war with those of the nation. Caste prevails, because it is the only reliable re-insurance of the individual against calamity or routine ill-being.

The utter imbecility to which caste has brought the nation was typified by the recent and total disrespect that the Prime Minister showed towards his own tongue. In the course of a fortnight, he made three solemn declarations, once, never to retire, then, to retire and, again, not to retire. That he does not hold much by man's gift of speech and thought is patent. That the nation does likewise is equally and more terrifying patent. How can the nation tolerate such imbecility? Partly because of caste, which blurs the

vision, and of the great schism between the high and low caste, which makes the high-castes stick together through lie and deceit and even murder in certain situations. A word of unconscious insight, however, fell from the Prime Minister's lips. He bewailed that he was so popular and yet the people did not act as he wanted them to. This was one of those rare occasions, when Mr. Nehru tells the truth.

Wherein lies the mystery of this chasm between great popularity and equally great importance. The man is just not prepared to risk his popularity for the sake of any big change. Mahatma Gandhi knew how to risk his popularity. He had a calf, the child of the sacred cow, injected to death in a certain situation, he had a monkey shot, he took Harijans into temples, he refused to attend weddings unless they were inter-caste, he sanctioned divorce, he had the large sum of 55 crores and more given to Pakistan at a time when Hindus held that treasonable, he acted and not alone spoke against property, in brief, he hardly ever missed doing anything that brought new life to the nation even if it brought calumny and danger to him. Nothing great ever got done without enraging some people. The great changes of society are always accomplished after some sections of opinion, sometimes large, are thoroughly angered. The old can always command votaries; only their number differs in varying situations. The skill of a great leader lies in narrowing the numbers of those whom he angers and the duration of their anger. But anger them, he must. He must risk his popularity with them, although that may eventually bring him an increased reputation. The Prime Minister, like any other typical product of the caste system in the country, is congenitally incapable of risking his popularity for the sake of any change.

The system of castes is a terrifying force of stability and against change, a force that stabilizes all current meanness, dishonour and lie. An unholy fear prevails, lest, if some meanness or lie were to tumble the whole structure might topple. Post-freedom India is but a strict continuance of British India in most essential ways. The Indian people continue to be disinherited. They are foreigners in their own land. Their languages are suppressed and their bread is snatched away from them. All this is done for the alleged sake of certain high principles. And these principles tie up with the

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system of caste, the great chasm between the few high castes and the four hundred million of the lower castes. These high castes must maintain their rule, both political and economic and, of course, religious. They cannot do it alone through the gun. They must instil a sense of inferiority into those whom they seek to govern and exploit. This they can best do by turning themselves into a select caste with speech, dress, manners and living of which the lower castes are incapable. The attitude of India's political parties is governed by this supreme consideration of having to instil a complex of inferiority among the mass of the people. Peoples' languages are undeveloped, their housing and general styles of living incapacitate them from good or great action and their mind is not worth considering. So must the high castes weave the net of illusion. Current political opinions in India, because they reflect the false and unnatural interests of the high castes, are not worthy of consideration.

The political behaviour of the lower caste is amazing. Why they should become a willing part of this conspiracy is beyond understanding. One reason is clear enough. Caste gives them insurance, indeed, on less than an animal level, more than it does to the high-castes. They would feel helpless without it. Oft-times, one gets the impression about these lower castes as though their strenuous labour of the day were but a preparation for the caste feasts and rituals that are to follow. They are the real thing and all else is but a shadow. Anything that interferes with them must appear to them as highly undesirable. They have in fact legends and myths that justify their lowly situation and transform it into a symbol of sacrifice and lustre. The Kahars, variously known as Mallahs, Kaivarts, Naviks, who probably number more than a crore, tell stories about their mythical ancestors, who were simple, ungreedy, brave and generous and who lost to other ancestors of Kshatriyas and other high castes because of their greater greed, wiliness and deceit. Taken so, their current life of misery must appear to the lower castes as an unending succession of sacrificial acts for the sake of high principles. This sacrifice is for mythical symbols. It is undertaken not as an active principle that seeks change but as a passive submission to the existing. Such sacrifice has no meaning in history. But sacrifice is always consoling. Talking of these Mallahs and Kahars who are boatmen and

fishermen when there is water, and domestic servants when further inland, one must mention their inordinate capacity to hold their breath while diving under water in search of the edible Makhana. Mallah boys of ten and under become active practicers of deep breathing yoga, and that under water, which can hold in a single breath for fifteen minutes and more. Similar yogis among the high caste, of seemingly literate speech or refined dress, would probably hold that their mind is striving to be a vacuity during their yoga, while the Mallah boy's is not. As it is not possible for any one person to go into the minds of both these types, it is difficult to hazard an opinion. May not the minds be alike in either situation? If they are so utterly different as they are claimed to be, that is condemnation enough of the caste system.

The political behaviour of the lower castes would appear to be a little less inexplicable on the assumption that a long tradition of ideological subjection has made them stagnate. This assumption is wholly founded. Centuries have instilled into them a meek acceptance of the existing, aversion to change, sticking with the caste in times of adversity as of good luck, and the search for high life through worship, rituals and general politeness. This can change. In fact, this must change. The revolt against caste is the resurrection of India or shall we say, the bringing into being of a unique and a hitherto unrealized occasion, when India shall be truly and fully alive. Is such a revolt possible? Scholars may with right deny it. Men of action will continue to affirm it. Some hope of success arises at the present time. The attack on caste is not single-barrelled. It does not climax into a shrill cry devoid of action. It is in fact as political as it is social. From the political attack on caste, in the sense of drawing the nation's leadership from all the castes in the country, may come that revolution which gives to all Indian society the solidarity and re-insurance now given to smaller groups by caste.

Elsewhere may be found extracts from the constitution and the annual report of the Calcutta Club. This club is the top meeting ground of the Calcutta bourgeoisie, which is the largest segment of the Indian bourgeoisie. Its main activity centers around wine imbibing, while its patron is the President of the Republic. India's Republic is pledged to the policy of

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prohibition with very considerable police repression as a consequence in certain areas. That the President of an alcohol repressing republic should be the patron of an alcohol drinking club, is a measure of fraud and perfidy which India's higher castes are practicing upon the country and themselves. The President, but more so, the government which advises him are guilty of treason against the republic in a yet more major way. Europeans in India are one in three thousand and more of the population. Of Calcutta's population, they are surely no more than one in four hundred. They enjoy far greater comfort and security than any section of India's population. And yet they are accorded equal representation on the committee of this club. This equality of representation is guaranteed by the club's statutes.

The club continues to think that England's monarch still rules India through her viceroy, although the President of the Republic is its patron. Some may be inclined to pass this over as a relic of the past which has escaped notice. These acts are in reality the result of deliberate design. India's bourgeoisie is ever imperiled. A vast sea of miserable humanity surges around it. It clutches at all kinds of symbols old and new and all kinds of authority both substantial and empty in order to keep itself afloat. India's higher castes and their government have therefore to practice continually treason against their Republic.

A farce symptomatic of the present set up of the higher caste in the country was recently staged in this club. India's business classes are largely Bania, while her professional classes consist of Brahmin and Kayastha with the Baddis of Bengal thrown in and the Europeans enjoy their place of honour in either rank. A Bania recently asked for admission into this club. In pre- Freedom India, he would probably not have made this request, for the business classes were largely nationalist while the top of the professional classes was largely pro-British. The Banias are now trying to make up for lost time. This applicant claimed to belong to the House of Tantias and was promptly blackballed presumably also by the British president of the club, Mr. Blease, who said he had heard of the Birlas and Tatas but not of the Tantias. An older brother of this gentleman is the newly

elected Treasurer of the Congress Parliamentary Party. All estimable Banias of somewhat nationalistic record are now trying to acquire culture which they had not so far done either because of their hurry to make money or because of Gandhiji. Mr. Biral and his family have also changed. From the closed collar Jodhpurs of the Gandhi era they have now travelled to the coat and tie of the European. They run schools where little children are charged the most fantastic fees. One such school is ironically enough named the Hindi School, while its most privileged section of children from the age of five onwards is taught alone through the medium of English, and is not permitted to talk any other language. We are definitely living in a climate of nightmares, somewhat subdued and not sharp enough. To these men of money, now in hurry for culture, the Calcutta Club must be appearing as a paradise of romance and enlightenment. It must appear so to the mass of people. There gather top lawyers, the top executives, the top captains of trade and industry, occasionally with their fair ladies of perfumed breath and sparking jewels. If only the people knew the Calcutta Club as any other club of the Indian bourgeoisie for what it actually is, a joint of wine bibbers, bribe takers and bribe givers, and pimps and of purveyors of state jokes and monkey English, they would repose their dream of enlightenment and for romance in worthier places.

Foreign rule set the Hindu against the Muslim, but that does not rub out the discord which native religions had created in the country. The policy of divide and rule, which governments pursue, must fasten on already existing elements of decision. British rule in India had made use of the element of caste in the same manner that it made use of the element of religion. As the divisive force of caste was not nearly as strong as that of religion, the effort met limited success.

The Maratha Party in Western India and also that of the Scheduled Castes, the Justice Party in the South and the mission-led block of Adivasis in Eastern India were fruits of this effort. To them must also be added the block of native princes and big landlords in Eastern India, which followed the lead of foreign rule and, during its last days, appeared discredited beyond recovery.

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At the time the British made this effort, they were justifiably condemned. Foreign rule habitually accentuates and widens differences; it does not compose them. It must be condemned. But such condemnation does not remove the ground on which differences originate and thrive. British rule has ended but the caste parties that it gave birth to have continued into free India and are enjoying fresh access of strength. The Workers and Peasants Party and the Republican Party of Western India, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of South India and the Jharkhand Party of Eastern India alongside of the Ganatantra and Janata parties are not only regional parties but also caste parties. In fact, they represent and embody regional castes. These regional castes are decisively numerous in their area. The Adivasis of Chota Nagpur are the life-blood of the Jharkhand, the Mahars of the Republicans, the Marathas of the Workers and Peasants, the Mudaliars but also other non-Brahmins of the Dravida Munnetra, and the Kshatriyas, not nearly as much of the Ganatantra and the Janata.

A patriot and a progressive would look askance at the growth of parties of regional caste, even when they don a radical garb. Their capacity to disintegrate dare not be overlooked. They disintegrate the people. They disintegrate the mind. What, however, is the use of recognition by other castes of this capacity to disintegrate? The caste that becomes the instrument of such disintegration must recognize it. When can it do so? That raises the question of injury that castes have done to society or, in other words, the injury that society has done to the caste, which is in a position to hit back and does so.

The castes that went to form the Maratha, Justice or Scheduled Caste parties suffered ill-treatment from society. The British rulers made use of this sense of grievance and injury, a very bad use indeed, but they did not and could not have created it. That is why the problem has persisted. In some cases, the caste that has suffered the injury and that which has caused it have changed places. But that does not solve the problem of injury. Furthermore, numberless castes have yet to make themselves vocal and effective and are today content to play a passive or a subsidiary role to the contending giants. This is the chief source of injury and injustice.

The political inter-play of castes has unfolded itself fascinatingly in Maharashtra and the drama is not yet over. Until 1930 and a little after, the Maharashtra scene was bafflingly simple, and its backdrop was Brahmin versus the rest. The succeeding period of around twenty-five years has done nothing to diminish the amazing simplicity of the scene. Only the dominating caste has changed. The backdrop is today represented by Maratha versus the rest.

The Marathas are a peculiar caste of Maharashtra, who claim to be Kshatriyas but are more like the cultivator-Sudras of North India. They have been the largest single downgraded caste of that area. Additionally, West India has new Vaishyas and Kshatriyas and the Kayasthas too are negligible, so that the Dwija or the high caste are largely represented by the Brahmin. The Maratha was the spearhead of the revolt against the Brahmin in Maharashtra although other down-graded castes assisted him in varying degrees. The revolt was pro-British in the beginning, because the Brahmins were on the whole anti-British, but the nationalist movement proved strong enough to absorb it. The Maratha entered the party of nationalism, the Congress Party, and almost took it over. The phenomenon of caste exclusion was witnessed again, with the roles changed. On the one hand, the Brahmin began gradually to lose his monopoly of political power and, on the other, the Maratha did not share his new found authority with the other downgrade castes. The change of the earlier situation, Brahmin versus the rest, was natural enough. When the dust of topical controversy has settled down and men are able to go behind the dispute between a bilingual state for Maharashtra and Gujarat and a unilingual state for Maharashtra alone, the equally strong driving force of caste will be laid bare. There is no need to deny the force of language. With it is also mixed the equally potent force of caste. Bilingualism and the government party, which was earlier the revolting nationalist party, is represented by the Maratha. Unilingualism and the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, which is now the party of dissent against the government, is represented by the rest. The subterranean forces of caste have been all too powerful in this drama superficially around language. The Brahmin, who has increasingly been losing political power, and the down-graded castes other than

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Maratha, which have felt left out, have been yearning for an opportunity to hit out. Their earlier effort to hit out on the Goa issue, when the Brahmin Shanwarpet of Poona had for a while again become the cultural capital of Maharashtra, proved a curtain-raiser to the present language effort.

The Marathas have themselves to thank for this development. They proved to be a greedy for power and monopolistic as any. They used the revolt of the down-graded castes for the assertion of their own supremacy and not for the destruction of castes as such and the injustice that goes with them. Ever and ever again, the revolt of the down-graded castes has been misused to upgrade one or another caste rather than to destroy the entire edifice of caste. The Maratha could perhaps not have acted differently. The Brahmin is perhaps again repeating his earlier mentality. Though the Samiti is composed of the rest versus the Maratha of the Congress Party, the leadership of the Samiti is preponderantly Brahmin. Should the Samiti come to power, the wheel may perhaps again revolve to its earlier point of Brahmin versus the rest. In an economy where there is very little in authority and even less in money, the scramble is hard, far-sight almost impossible and group cohesiveness an inescapable need. Is there then no way out? Is the wheel exactly identical?

When disputes repeat themselves without a movement and with continuing stagnation, lethargy of the spirit is inevitable. A likelier outcome, however, is an increasingly improving regrouping. Even while the present conflict is on and before it has been resolved, the Maratha of the Congress Party may be able to make political friends with some of the rest and the Brahmin of the Samiti may likewise acquire a genuine though limited kinship with the rest. Such a development will not, however, be as probable as the emergence of a new nucleus around which men of all castes may gather with the determination to end caste. The nucleus is perhaps already there. Its capacity to attract the people may take time to manifest itself. In fact, it may truly express itself only at the end of the present and the succeeding conflicts.

The exclusion of the high caste from political power does not necessarily imply their exclusion

from economic and other types of power. In the first place, such political exclusion has nowhere been total, not even in the South. The Brahmins have in recent years, as the sole representative of the high caste, been increasingly eliminated from legislative and administrative power in Tamilnad. Even so, they still occupy a fantastically privileged position. Although only 4 per cent of the population, their share in the gazetted services of the administration must be around forty per cent. At one time, it was nearly seventy per cent. A second more remarkable development is the acquisition of economic power by the Tamil Brahmin. He has increasingly been buying up Mount Road from the retiring British. It would therefore be not correct to describe the high castes in terms of any general decline or to bemoan their fate in any part of the country.

The Tamil situation is very intriguing. Elements of the non-Brahmin and the Dravida movement have influenced alike the Congress and the anti-Congress parties. Both the Dravida Kazhagams are openly Dravidian. So is the Congress Party in a concealed and somewhat milder way. All four elements of the Dravida movement, Brahmin Versus non-Brahmin, Aryan Versus Dravidian, North Versus South and Hindi Versus Tamil are present in varying degree alike in the Congress and the anti-Congress movements. Not being obstructed by all-India considerations unlike the Congress Party, the anti-Congress Dravidian movements are fiercer in their opposition to the North, Hindi or the Brahmins as the situation demands.

But that is only the difference of degree. And, being the government party, the Congress Party is somewhat more effective, although its absorption of the Dravidian spirit is indeed more discriminating.

A confident forecast of the future is made somewhat difficult by the absence of clearly stated economic programmes. The anti-Congress Dravidian parties are even more fuzzy than the Congress Party in respect of economic programmes. Some of them have even allowed the more illusory North-South and similar prejudices to obscure and weaken the substantial caste issue. A happy outcome would have been if both the Dravidian streams, freed as they already have been of high caste influence, had increasingly rid themselves of geographical and linguistic prejudices and aimed

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single-mindedly at the destruction of caste and if one had tended to adopt conservative and capitalist and the other radical and socialist economic policies.

A likelier and harmful development would be the further accumulation of prejudices. If it accepted that India's economic condition including that of the South and Tamilnad is not likely to improve in the next decade and more, the stage is set for explosively irrational politics. The people may lend their ear more and more to cries of geographical and linguistic oppositions. Political parties would not be human if they did not exploit such opportunities to rise to power. The likeliest development is somewhat more hopeful. It may take time to unfold itself fully. While the empty game of the prejudice is played out between the Congress and the anti-Congress parties, increasing sections of the people may begin to yearn for wholesome positive and concrete programmes. Such a programme would have to base itself on socialist principles in the economic sphere and, in the social sphere, on the total destruction of caste. It would therefore make use of the healthier aspect of the Dravidian spirit while it would try to absorb the individual Brahmin, equally with the non-Brahmin into the coming social order. It would for some time to come have to aim at the destruction of high caste privileges even through the award of preferential treatment to the backward castes. Developments somewhat further north in the Andhra Pradesh have been, in a sense, of greater interest. The Reddys of Andhra are a cross between the Kshatriyas and the Ahirs of north India, either of whom are almost absent from the Andhra scene, and have definitely become the most influential single caste of their state. They are, the ruling caste of Andhra par excellence but they have been elastic enough not wholly to displease the Brahmins whom they ousted from political power and have been wise enough to share their power with smaller castes like the Velmas. They have, however, been unable to make friends with the Kammas, a caste almost wholly similar to the Kurmis of north India both in respect of their appellation and their sound cultivator status. Economically somewhat enabled and politically disabled, the Kammas of Andhra have been somewhat restless in the past decade. They have almost as an entire caste sought to revenge themselves on the Reddys through the instrument of

the Communist Party. Having failed in that effort at least for the time being, they might make one more bid through the instrumentality of Prof. Ranga before they make their second bid through the Communist Party.

When would the Andhra political scene shift to the most numerous but the least influential castes? These are the Kapus, the Padmashalis, the Malas and Madigas, in fact, the combination which has from time to time been known as the Chetty Sangham. The Kapus are the most numerous cultivating caste, they are very poor occupancy tenants, and even poorer sharecroppers when they are not actually agricultural labourers. In order to put energy and activity into this mass of Kapus a political party would have to arise that frees itself almost wholly from the stranglehold of the landowning Reddy and the Kamma castes. Such a party would have to aim at the abolition of sharecropping and, as a first step, perhaps at the award of one-third or even less to the landowner and the rest to the cultivator. The Communist Party has not been such a party and perhaps can never become such. It is far too much of a landowning party, not so much the big landowners as the smaller ones. It has indeed achieved remarkable success in acquiring for itself the loyalty of the agricultural labourers, who are by and large the Harijan castes. This phenomenon of Harijan loyalty to the Communist Party prevails over all of south India. Not unless a new nucleus emerges, which wages Kapu share-croppers' struggles as much as the Harijan wage-earners' struggles, would there be any chance of enlivening the large mass of Andhra population or of causing a shift in Harijan loyalty.

The rise of regional and caste parties like the Jharkhand and Ganatantra embodies exceptionally singular phenomena. The Jharkhand has almost never fought for the rights of Adivasis or forest-dwellers nor against the vicious laws or practices that oppress them. In fact, the Socialists and similar persons have fought for them in certain areas. And yet they vote for the Jharkhand, because it lives with them, eats and dances with them, sorrows and makes merry with them and is generally a part of them. Caste in this as in certain other cases, has driven a wedge between political and social kinship. Not unless the political and economic parties of national reach learn to live socially, in their births and wedding feasts and deaths,

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with different castes and tribes, will they be able to wrest from parties like the Jharkhand their undoubted dominion over select areas.

The Ganatantra tells a somewhat different story. It is not the story of a continuing darkness. It is the story of a light that has been blown out, of a relapse. The new tyrants of the Congress Party have proved so irksome and, in areas, so foul to the people that they are willing to opt for their old tyrants, the rajas and the landlords. The Congress Party has truly broken its word to the people. The Orissa evidence is incontestable. It is difficult to predict the future. The people may well risk their fate with their former tyrants once again in sheer disgust. This and the ensuing disillusionment may well take another ten years to run out its course. Or some miracle of rapid development throughout the country may well compress the events of a decade into the compass of a year or two. In any event, the new nucleus of casteless loyalty, true to its pledged word and unsullied with the alliance of the old or new tyrants, must be there to bind the people, when they are ready.

How does this new nucleus differ from the Congress and Communist parties in respect of its attitude towards caste? Everybody is against caste these days. And yet caste flourishes, in some ways, as never before. Eminent sociologists like Max Weber have proved thoroughly wrong in their prognostications about this virus. They had thought that Europe-educated Indians bred to rational concepts and ways of life, would destroy caste on their return home. Little did they realise that these Europe-returned Indians would be drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of the high-caste and would further reinforce the caste system with its exclusive marriages because of their education and high status. Speech against caste may well go with acts in furtherance of it.

Three distinct types of opposition to caste may be noted, one wordy, the second low level and mixed, and the third real. The wordy opposition is the loudest in respect of such generalised condemnation of caste as leaves the existing structure almost intact. It condemns the caste system as wholly evil, but would equally condemn those who resort to active steps to destroy the system. It sanctifies the principles of

rising standards of living and of merit and equality of opportunity as solvents of caste. Raise everybody economically; give everybody an equal opportunity! So say these false advocates of destruction of caste, as though rising standards and opportunities would be restricted to the low caste. When everybody has an equal opportunity, castes with the five thousand year old traditions of liberal education would be on top. Only the exceptionally gifted from the lower castes would be able to break through this tradition. This is what India's political parties, Congress, Communist and Praja Socialist, under Mr. Nehru's leadership have in mind. They would want men and women of exceptional ability from the lower castes to join their ranks. But they would want the structure as a whole to be kept intact. They are themselves drawn overwhelmingly from the higher castes. They have no hesitation in denouncing their caste or the distinction of high and low castes, so long as their social group based on traditions, ability and manners is left unaffected. If anybody qualifies in ability and manners from among the lower castes, he is welcome. But how many would qualify! Very few. It would be the battle of five thousand years of oppressive training and tradition against an individual talent. Only the genius or the exceptionally able would win in this battle. To make this battle a somewhat equal encounter, unequal opportunities would have to be extended, to those who have so far been suppressed. But India's political parties of a superficially European orientation under the leadership of that pseudo-European, Mr. Nehru, raise a gruesome shout against this doctrine of unequal opportunities as a blasphemy on their own doctrine of imported and vested interest socialism.

A vested interest socialism talks of political and economic revolution alone, meaning thereby the award of increased wages or bonus on the lowest level and the destruction of private property in factories and the like on the highest level. Even in the Europe of changing classes, such a revolution would keep intact the distinction between manual workers and those with the brain. In India of fixed castes, this distinction would spell ruin to the health of society. Workers with the brain are a fixed caste in Indian society; together with the soldier caste, they are the high-caste. Even after the completed economic and political revolution they would continue to supply the managers of the

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state and of industry. The mass of the people would be kept in a state of perpetual physical and mental lowliness, at least comparatively. But the position of the high-caste would then be justified on grounds of ability and in economic terms as it is now on grounds of birth or talent. That is why the intelligentsia of India which is overwhelmingly the high-caste, abhors all talk of a mental and social revolution of a radical change in respect of language or caste or the bases of thought. It talks generally and in principle against caste. In fact, it can be most vociferous in its theoretical condemnation of caste, so long as it can be allowed to be equally vociferous in raising the banner of merit and equal opportunity. What it loses in respect of caste by birth, it gains in respect of caste by merit. Its merit concerning speech, grammar, manners, capacity to adjust, routine efficiency is undisputed. Five thousand years have gone into the building of this undisputed merit. A true doctrine of equal opportunity would have to undo the work of five thousand years by giving preferential treatment to the lower castes over a period of at least a few decades. India's political parties, Congress or Communist, are under Mr. Nehru's leadership, thoroughly hostile to the award of preferential treatment on any large scale. They denounce it as a caste-motivated measure while they are themselves viciously caste-ridden, perhaps unknowingly. They denounce caste by birth, but in enthroning the principle of merit, they keep secured their privileged positions.

On no account do the high castes comprise more than one-fifth of India's population. But they keep to themselves almost four-fifths of the nation's leadership. In respect of the top leadership of the four main departments of national activity, business, army, high civil services and political parties, the highcastes easily comprise four-fifths. When we talk of the top leadership of political parties, we mean not the members of legislatures but the directing executives which choose them. When more than four-fifths of a nation's vital leadership is traditionally selected from among one-fifths of its population, a state of atrophy is bound to ensue. Four-fifths of its population sinks into a state of listlessness and inefficiency. The nation is sick and continually on the point of death. To revitalise such a nation, a designed selection of leadership has to be made. At least half or sixty per

cent of the nation's top leadership must be selected by design from among the lower castes. This need not be done by law. It had better be done through a purposeful understanding. A start can be made through change in the nation's political leadership. That it can be done was recently demonstrated in the elections to the National Committee of the Socialist Party. True enough, the party has had to suffer a grievous maligning at the hands of ignorant high-castes, both outside and inside its ranks. Time alone will show whether the maligning succeeds. Whatever happens on this occasion and in this party, the attempt to revitalise the nation's leadership in terms of caste must be made again and again until it succeeds.

The overwhelming majority of the high-caste truly belong to the ranks of the lower castes, but they are ignorant of this situation. It is this ignorance, which is preserving the most artificial social order the world has ever known. No more than half or a million men are the true high-caste. They are the men of money or talent or influence. They belong to the very special castes such as Bengali Baddis, Marwari Baniyas, Kashmiri Brahmins, which spew out the leaders of trade or the professions. On this pinpoint dagger of a million truly high caste persons rest the eight crores or so of false high-castes, on whom in turn are heaped the thirty crores or so of the lower castes. The dagger has torn apart the vitals of the entire nation.

The wheel of caste revolves remorselessly. If it grinds out the hundreds of millions of the lower castes, it also divides the high-caste into the true high-caste and the false high-caste. The true high-caste wears coat and tie or Sherwani and Chudidars. They are the Brahmins and Baniyas, Kshatriyas and Kayasthas of Delhi and the capital towns. To them are only illusorily related the hoards of Dwijas or the twice-born, who live in the villages or small towns. These false high-castes wear the dhoti or pyjama of the people. But they hug the illusion and discard the reality.

They are no longer men; they have become listless shadows of tradition. In actual fact even the true high-castes are pointless shadows of tradition in the midst of a mobile world where Khrushchevs and Eisenhowers stride with the energy of somewhat activist nations. Mr. Nehru and India's political leaders may appear big

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to their own countrymen; to world history, they are the performing pygmies of weakened nations. Caste more than anything else causes debility to the nation.

How irrational caste is and how remorselessly its wheel grinds is obvious from the schism, not merely real, but also in nomenclature, within the Bania caste. The well-to-do Bania,

the wholesaler, of ancient times became the Vaishya. It is difficult to say how exactly this happened. It may well be that the wholesaler or the well-to-do remained the Vaishya, while the rest became the Bania. The vast mass of the Bania caste, the Teli, the Jaiswal, the Pansari and the like, are treated by orthodoxy as Sudra. They are the retailers of ancient times, and, largely so, of today. The former wholesaler is the Dwija, the former retailer the Sudra. The wholesaler and the priest have hitherto always combined in Indian history. Their political, economic and social intimacy so picturesquely described as the Sethji- Bhatji combination by Maratha politics, has turned them into the twice-born and the high-caste par excellence of modern Hindu society. And this most obvious fraud continues, which shows up caste as nothing but the congealing of money and status.

This first wordy war on caste, led by the Dwija, is evenly matched by the second empty struggle against caste led by select Sudra groups. Among the Sudras, certain castes are numerically powerful, even overwhelming in some areas. The age of adult franchise has placed power in their hands. Some castes like the Reddys and Mudaliars of south India and the Marathas of west have made use of it. They and, not the Dwija, are the political overlords of their areas, though, even here the high-caste has strengthened his economic grip and is making most clever and deceptive efforts to stage a political comeback. This is possible chiefly because these are empty struggles against caste. They do not change the social order in the sense of making it more just, mobile or active. They do not give power to all the lower castes, but only to the largest single section within them. They do not therefore destroy caste, but merely cause a shift in status and privileges. Some of the trappings of the high-caste belonging to the Brahmin or Vaishya are stripped off them and patched on to the Maratha or the

Reddy. This solves no problem. Rather, it disgusts all the other lower castes and enrage the high caste. Caste, with all its debility and some more of its irritations, remains.

Taking the country as a whole, the Ahirs, variously known as Gwalas, Gopes, and the Chamars, also known as Mahars, are the two most numerous lower castes, the former Sudra and the latter Harijan. They are the colossi of the Indian caste system, like the Brahmin and Kshatriya among the Dwija. Ahirs, Chamars, Brahmins and Kshatriyas, each comprise around 2 to 3 crores of people. Together they are roughly 10 to 12 crores of the Indian population. That still leaves a little less than threefourths of the entire population outside their fold. Any struggles that leave unaltered their status or condition must necessarily be deemed empty. Shifts in the status and conditions of the four colossi may be of the greatest interest to them but are of little significance to society as a whole.

The Ahirs and Chamars of north India have made efforts, perhaps without much awareness, similar to those of the Reddys and the Marathas. They were bound to fail, because the Dwijas are far more numerous in the north and, second, because, they are not quite so numerically strong among the lower castes of the north. Nevertheless the effort continues on a somewhat lower key. Democracy is in many ways government by numbers. In a country where groups cohere through birth and long tradition, the most numerical groups tend to acquire political and economic privileges. Political parties run after them to select candidates from among them for elections to parliament and assemblies. Additionally, their shout is the loudest for share in trade or the services. The result is most disastrous. The myriad lower castes, each of whom is numerically weak, but who together form the bulk of the population, stagnate. A war on caste must necessarily mean an elevation of all, and not merely of any one large section. A sectional elevation changes some relationships within the caste system, but it leaves the basis of castes unaltered.

Sectional elevation is dangerous in yet another way. Those among the lower castes who rise to high positions tend to assimilate themselves to the existing high-castes. In this process, they inevitably appropriate

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the baser qualities of the high-caste. Everybody knows how the lower castes, on their rise, tend to segregate their women, which again is a quality not of the top high-caste but of the medium high-caste. Also the lower castes that rise begin to wear the sacred thread of the Dwija, which has so long been denied to them but which the true high caste has begun discarding. All this has an additional result of perpetuating the distinction. Furthermore, such a rise does not cause a general ferment among the lower castes. The risen are alienated from their own groups; instead of fermenting their own original lower groups they seek to become part of the higher castes to whose positions they rise. This process of an extremely sectional and superficial rise gives birth to another misfortune. The lever to the rise is supplied not by the cultivation of good qualities or talent but by the arousing of bitter caste jealousies and the play of intrigues.

A somewhat peculiar situation obtains in an area like Bengal. It is commonly supposed that Bengal has no caste-politics. What is meant is that the vast bulk of the lower castes are too unaware to speak, much less to shout. They are silent. The high-castes are very vocal. Furthermore, they are somewhat like the Europeans, for every single high caste has tended, at least in the towns, to acquire an individualised personality. This silence of the lower castes and the comparative modernisation of the higher castes has obscured the true position in Bengal, the most caste-ridden portion of India. Someday, the silence will break. That will be the time when empty struggles against caste may repeat themselves. The Mahishyas, Sudra, and the Namsudras, Harijan, are the two most numerous lower castes of Bengal. They might assert themselves, not with a view to destroy caste but in order to equal or rival the Brahmin and the Kayastha. The time to prevent such empty struggles is now. A deliberate policy of uplifting all the lower castes and not merely the Namsudra or the Mahishya into positions of leadership must be followed.

This brings us to the third and true struggle against caste now on the agenda of India's history. This struggle aims to pitchfork the five downgraded groups of society, women, Sudras, Harijans, Muslims and Adivasis, into positions of leadership, irrespective of their merit as it stands today. This merit is at present

necessarily low. The tests of merit are also such as to favour the high-caste. What long ages of history have done must be undone by a crusade. The inclusion of all women, including Dwija women, which is but right, into the downgraded groups of society raises their proportion to the entire population to 90 percent. This vast sea of submerged humanity, nine out of every ten of India's men and women, has drowned into silence or, at best, some routine noises of seeming life. Economic and political uplift, by itself, may put some fat on their lean limbs. A restoration of self-respect through the abolition of caste, of course, when it goes side by side with economic uplift, can rouse them into the activity of full men and awakened peoples. Let it not be forgotten that the high-castes, Dwija, have also suffered grievously from this atrophy of the people, their education and culture hides, under the veneer of good speech and manners, the deadly poison of the lie and self-advancement through deceit. A crusade to uplift the downgraded groups would revive also the high-caste, would set right frames and values which are all today askew. This crusade must never be confused with the niggardly award of preferential positions to a few scores among the lower castes. This only irritates the high caste. A howl goes up. It does not at all ferment the lower castes. What matters if a dozen or two of the lower castes are added to the high-caste oligarchy of several thousands in any sphere of life? There is need to add them by the hundred and the thousand. That will turn into a crusade what is today only a vote-catching, quarrel-making and jealousy-inspiring device. The fact that an entrant or two from the lower castes into the higher reaches receive sharp notice, while dozens of simultaneous entrants from the higher castes are accepted in the usual course, indicates what a hot crusade would be necessary. It must be emphasized again and again that hundreds of lower castes, who might otherwise stay unnoticed, must receive greater attention in a deliberate policy than the two colossi who would attract notice anyway.

This policy of uplift of downgraded castes and groups is capable of yielding much poison. In fact, care may only mitigate some of the worst aspects of the poison; it cannot be totally eliminated. A first poison may come out of its immediate effects on men's minds; it may speedily antagonise the Dwija without speedily influencing the Sudras. With his undoubted

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alertness to developments and his capacity to mislead, the Dwija may succeed in heaping direct or indirect discredit on the practitioners of this policy long before the Sudra wakes up to it. Secondly, the colossi among the lower castes like the Chamars and Ahirs may want to appropriate the fruits of this policy without sharing them with the myriad other low castes, with the result that the Brahmin and Chamar change places but caste remains intact. Thirdly, the policy may be misused by selfish men among the lower castes for individual advancement, who may additionally use weapons of intrigue and caste jealousies.

This would rend society further apart and subject it to grosser selfishness without bringing it any benefits of weakening and expansion. Fourthly, every single case of election or selection between a Sudra and Dwija may become the occasion for acrimonious exchanges. The baser elements among the downgraded castes would use it as a constant weapon. In their over-weaning desire to eliminate the particular Dwija against whom they are ranged, they would in total seek to oust all Dwijas or to fill the air with darker suspicions when they fail. Fifthly, economic and political issues may be obscured or relegated into the background. Reactionaries among the lower castes may misuse the anti-caste policy to serve their own ends. For instance, the Backward Castes Commission Report, by which the lower castes are swearing, has side-stepped the great issues that confront the people such as abolition of land tax on uneconomic holdings and the impositions of a ceiling on all incomes. Its concrete recommendations are just two in number, one good and the other bad. It has recommended reservation in services for the backward castes and the reservation could justifiably be more disproportionate than the Commission has wished. But it has erred in making a similar recommendation for education. Let the backward castes ask for two of three shifts in schools and colleges, if necessary, but let them never

ask for the exclusion of any child of India from the portals of an educational institution.

Such is the poison that this policy may bring forth. Continual awareness of this poison may check it in great measure. But the fear of the poison should not blind us to the miraculous power of this policy to create and cure. India will know the most invigorating revolution of her history. The people will have become alive as never before. She may also have indicated in the process a lesson or two to mankind. Karl Marx tried to destroy class, without being aware of its amazing capacity to change itself into caste, not necessarily the ironbound caste of India but immobile class anyway. For the first time, an experiment shall have been made in the simultaneous destruction of class and caste. The young high-caste must now rise to his full measure, instead of seeing in this policy an attack on his interest, he should view it for its capacity to renew the people. After all among the very few relationships of marriage between high and low castes, those between Dwija and Harijan can be named but not so between Sudra and Harijan. The young high-caste must decide to turn himself into manure for the lower castes, so that the people may for once flower into their fully glory. If human nature were capable of infinite sacrifice, we would have the high-caste become advisers, while the executives are all low-caste. If this is not possible everywhere, let it be so in as many places as possible. With faith in the great crucible of the human race and equal faith in the vigour of all the Indian people, let the high-caste choose to mingle tradition with mass. Simultaneously, a great burden rests on the youth of the lower castes. Not the aping of the high-caste in all its traditions and manners, not dislike of manual labour, not individual self advancement, not bitter jealousy, but the staffing of the nation's leadership as though it were some sacred work should now be the supreme concern of women, Sudras, Harijans, Muslims, and Adivasis.

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