TRANSFORMATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN INDIA

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Abstract

This paper makes an attempt to trace the development in the position of scheduled castes in Indian society from the past times till present. The institutionalization of caste hierarchy and the functionalism attached to it are obdurately followed in the modern Indian society, rather society in transition. The stark difference between the rural and urban India gives a regional character to treatment of Scheduled Castes. However, on a broad basis, the phenomenon of untouchability has been eliminated from Indian society; traumatizing incidents of caste discrimination do emerge in present times. The tenacity of caste system exists in India because of its inherency in the political, economic and social welfare system of India. Therefore, it becomes necessary to trace the changes in the status of the scheduled castes in terms of occupational mobility, education and social norms. Urbanization has facilitated the community of scheduled caste to derive benefit of education system, breaking free from the social stigma and move upwards in the ladder of economic development. Nevertheless, it noteworthy that still, considerable percentages of scheduled castes are engaged in menial and elementary jobs and are homeless. The upcoming and majority of middle class society in India, has given up traditional discriminative values based on caste system, however the rule of endogamy plays a major role in keeping the caste system continued. Here, with the help of seminal work of various social scientists, an effort has been made to analyze the changes in the status of scheduled castes and outlook of society towards them.

Keywords: Sanskritisation, Transformation, Commensality, Untouchability

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Introduction

Social stratification in any society has been prominent and evident, disuniting a common mass into different classes. In India too this stratification, since historic times is done on the basis of caste. However, this social stratification would not pose a real problem, if it has not been involving relations of superiority and inferiority. As Parson in K.L Sharma's Social Stratification in India,(1986) quoted that social stratification always involves a differential ranking of individuals, which give them right to enjoy certain kinds of treatment in the society in certain *socially important aspects*. The inclusion of "socially important" in definition of social stratification is "functional" and "evitable". Caste system in India plays a basic role in dividing society into hierarchal units.

Transformation of a particular category¹ not only requires change in that category but also in all kind of societies. It is a process which is a result of closely interlinked processes of change in technological, economic activity, governance and culture. In a traditional and multi cultured society such as India a change in ideological outlook is required for transformation of any particular category. As Louis Dumont, in his well known study, 'Caste system as hierarchy' assigns ideology an important place as a component of the structural paradigm. (Sharma, K.L ed.1986: 329) The term ideology in his analysis has the connotation of ideas and norms derived from the Hindu civilization of which caste system is an archetypical manifestation. It should be stated here that transformation involves a change of a kind after which one cannot even imagine the previous condition, like it never existed. Hence, **the use of word transformation here is critical** as changes in status of schedule caste varies from place to place in India, however there are some aspects like that of untouchability which hardly exists in present times, so the term transformation and socio economic change will be used correspondingly.

Social stratification on caste basis divides the society broadly into- forward classes, backward classes and untouchables. (Srinivas, M.N 1957: 529) Untouchables are socially and economically deprived class and their lowness is explained by their association with impurities and occupation related to death and organic pollution. Though, their economic importance cannot be neglected, but they are excluded from the mainstream society. A study by Robert Dielige (Dielige Robert

¹ Referring schedule caste as category rather than community because even the culture varies amongst the schedule castes people.

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1992:155) on untouchability demonstrates position of schedule caste in Tamil Nadu- they are kept in periphery and denied means of production.

With the advent of industrialization, modernization and rising of India as a democracy after 1947, equal opportunity is a basic human right; hence any discrimination on basis of caste, religion, ethnicity or any other ground is unacceptable with growing awareness in society. Nevertheless, Yogendra Singh states that unique feature of modernization in India however is that it is being mainly carried forward through adaptive change in the traditional structure rather than structural dissociation or breakdown. (Singh Yogendra 1977) The rigidness of caste system is such that even untouchables have hierarchy within them and discriminate on the basis of ranking amongst themselves.

Traditionally schedule castes are not allowed to possess wealth, since if a schedule caste person becomes rich he would no longer serve twice born classes also they are supposed to engage in menial jobs with no access to education, mobility and interaction or contact with the higher class other than that of serving them. Since this strict follow up of orthodoxy has changed in recent times, it is important to bring to notice that to what extent has this category uplifted or included in the mainstream of society. A total transformation of this category is only possible with structural change in the caste system or dissolution of it, but only modification of Indian caste system is possible in contemporary transitional societies.

This paper deals with the extent of transformation that schedule caste has gone with times. The major objective of this paper will be to examine the socio-economic changes that the schedule castes have gone through with times, and the economic opportunity that they are open to exploit unlike previous condition.

Literature review:

Most of the literature referred for this paper is authored after mid 20th century. After British rule, and various constitutional provisions such as fundamental rights, directive principle, policy of protective discrimination (reservation), civil right act, SCs prevention of atrocities act etc. are made; it became important to study the position of this deprived class.

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Janaki Nath Math and M.N Srinivas studied various aspects of caste system in modern India, both in the context of urban as well as rural India. Janaki Nath Math, in 1954, studied the widespread problem of untouchability and made an attempt to explain who untouchables are. Though he made a conclusion that untouchability in India is dying, because of efforts of government and social organization but he fails to acknowledge that the social up gradation of untouchables in society is not going to take place in certain aspects which is remarkably mentioned by M.N Srinivas in his 'Caste in Modern India' (1957) that how caste played a major role in various changes and movement and took a strong position as an institution. He had given evidence with examples that how untouchable are different from other lower caste and have no means of pushing themselves up in the system unlike latter. His paper written a decade after independence brings into notice the caste system prevailing in British times and benefits enjoyed by upper classes and also spreading awareness due to English education which promoted many anti-Brahmin movements and thus creating caste-consciousness amongst SCs in certain regions. Srinivas admits it that caste in India is accepted by all even by those who vocally condemned it and it poses a huge difficulty in emergence of egalitarian society.

Another important article written on caste which is referred is the 'adaptive function of caste in contemporary Indian society', by Harold A.Gould (1963) where he correctly notices that caste in Indian society is not disappearing because the solidarities inherent in it perform important functions in the contemporary transitional society. (Gould, A.H 1963:427) He acknowledges that with modernization in India, there is a modification of caste system but not dissolution. Caste though, created on the basis of distribution of surplus is not purely economic phenomenon and hence it still holds its position in the society. As Parson quoted in Harold's paper, that: caste in today's India is becoming more and more a kind of adaptive structure and therefore Harold mentions that higher caste use superior means for occupational mobility than the schedule caste people. He has presented the dilemma between the Marx's and Weber's view on caste in Indian society where former proposed that colonialism had laid the foundation for technological and economic changes that heralded the inevitable demise of caste, while latter concluded that caste had been a prime impediment to the emergence of capitalism in the first place and would tend always to inhibit its growth in future. This dilemma that modernization would replace caste system by class is further studied by Victor D'Souza in his "Caste and Class: A Reinterpretation" (1967) published in K.L Sharma, Social Inequality in India, 1999,; where he writes that in Indian



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society caste and class system may coexist. Taking Ghurye's viewpoint that endogamy is the essence of the caste system; D'Souza mentions that according to this view dissolution of endogamous groups is necessary condition for general transformation of caste system into class system. Also he describes MacIver and Page's view that caste system has evolved from class system when class system takes extreme endogamous form. However, D' Souza has taken into notice the hypergamy occurring in some parts of the region and has thus differed class from caste stating caste as a hereditary group and therefore concludes that transformation of caste system into class system would be characterized by a reduction in the potency of the hereditary group as the major basis of social interaction.(D'Souza Victor 1967: 240). Since, there are many parameters evaluating prestige of an individual, such as education, occupation, wealth, level of living, community participation and so on and occupational prestige is highly related with all of them, the social ranking of schedule castes are very low and for any transformation to occur, **change** (upward) is required in all the variables. Therefore, we cannot conclude the schedule castes that have attained a high position in class society have also attained a high rank in caste system or social system. As Victor D'Souza in his another article Changing Status of Schedule Caste (1962) examined the hypothesis that social status of most castes may change in response to socio-economic conditions: that of Brahmins at top and schedule caste at bottom. It follows that whatever the change in occupation or economic standard, the Brahmin cannot come down in social estimation and schedule castes cannot rise. He has given the example of Boad outcastes that how their improvement in economic condition has changed their social status, though partially, they themselves ranked them higher, but not higher castes. Also some Mahars in Maharashtra has given up their unclean occupation and this brought some change in attitude of the villagers towards social status of Mahars. However, this change in attitude is slow and also improved occupational status always does not receive adequate social recognition.

Talking of work on occupational mobility in 1960s, K.N Sharma wrote a paper on Occupational Mobility of Castes in North India Village (1961) published in social inequality in India, where he takes into consideration under which the occupational shift occurs in caste, making an observation that untouchables generally move towards manual field labor because of their poverty and also what happens when a society or village comes in connection with urban contacts. This pattern in occupational shifts manifests inequality between SCs and non- SCs, as studied by R. Chandidas (1969)-" how close to equality are SC?" that SCs are minority and



deprived of being equal members of the community and therefore there advancements in the field of education has been very small and their location in urban areas are very sparse and they cluster location mainly around agricultural sector, also districts with heaviest concentration of SCs are adversely distributed along the developmental scale.

However, M.N Srinivas –"social change in modern India" (1977) gives a detailed insights into the concepts of Sanskritization and westernization, making clear that former is associated with only positional mobility but not structural change and the latter is used to characterize the change brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels- technological, institutional, ideology and values. In spite of this phenomenon of mobility adopted by lower castes, it is hard to find that certain castes of SCs have got the consensus of higher class, to them have attained a higher rank in social system, also Sanskritisation is valid or seen only in certain parts of India. Srinivas takes **mobility as an index** on which he defines social change in India and hence coined these two terms as indicating social change.

Yogendra singh in his Modernization of Indian Tradition(1977) have similar views as that of Harold that "a unique feature of modernization in India however is that it is being mainly carried forward through adaptive change in the traditional structure rather than structural dissolution or breakdown". Since structural features of caste include- institutionalized circumscription of spheres of social interactional and unequal distribution,(Singh Yogendra 1977) it is clear that any transformation would require breakdown of above two points. Also accordant point is that India is a country of multiple traditions and hence any change would require differentiating between beneficial and discriminative tradition.

Other articles written in 1980s, on mobility amongst SCs were from Nandu Ram focusing on intra schedule caste distinctions, processes of social mobilization and merge of SCs with larger society. Yet another work on occupational mobility in schedule caste is done by Jagan Karade in 2009, on occupational shifts of some prominent SCs castes in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra, regarding inter and intra generational mobility and also has noticed that due to urbanization there is a decline in cultural influence on occupational structure and also noted in Kolhapur district majority of SCs work as cultivators, agricultural laborers, household industry workers. But there is a point which should be mentioned that in many districts of Maharashtra, position of SCs are



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much better when compared to other states due to reforms and movements originating there. Study made by D.L Seth on Secularization of Caste and Making of New Middle Class (1999) states that there are certain aspects still existing where casteism exists (endogamy) while in many other aspects castes rules have been relaxed. Caste existing on micro communities based on kinship hardly exists with emerging of new middle class. Members of different castes now interestingly compete for entry into middle class. The result is sizeable number of lower caste people has entered middle class. This class is politically and culturally unified but is diversified in terms of social origins of its members.

Objective and research questions-

The objective of this paper is to show how the socio-economic position of schedule castes has changed with time. Their transition: from untouchables to ex-untouchables, with the abolition of untouchability, the change in people's ideology, regarding rigid caste system and treatment of schedule caste. Following are some research questions which will be tried to answer:

- 1. What kind of change is shown with respect to access to education and employment?
- 2. What is occupational mobility and what are the factors affecting it in schedule caste
- 3. Examine the social change and whether development is inclusive or inclined towards particular class amongst schedule caste.

Sources and methodology:

The first part of this paper will examine the educational improvement in the schedule caste category and also how the educational development has led to better job opportunities for them. Since, it is clear that access to higher education leads to occupational mobility and in India, occupation is the basis of social status. The second part of this paper will deal with the social constraints that schedule castes have to face in spite of their occupational shift which hinders their upward movement in some aspects or events in the society.

Some arguments are supported by data which are taken from NSS 66th round and National Commission for Schedule Caste (NCSC Reports).

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Description:

As written in Manusmriti, Shudras are considered lowest of all Varanas because no sacrament is prescribed for them. All other higher castes are entitled to take birth twice unlike Shudras, and hence the sole occupation of Shudras is considered as serving the twice born. They are entitled to receive the remnants of food, old clothes and the refuge of grain and other old household materials. In any case, Shudra must not be allowed to possess wealth because his entire life should be spending as a servant to a higher caste born family or person. It should be noted that the contribution of schedule caste in the societal and economic relations are not neglected, but they are discriminated against because of their association with the pollution which cannot be ritually treated. Schedule caste people were not allowed to change their occupation. Also any contact of them with the higher caste people was considered as stigma for the higher caste and therefore schedule castes were always bound to live in enclosed clusters with minimum amenities available and no access to education.

However with the changing times after independence, western education and jobs in the administration and urban sources of income and reservation of schedule castes in administrative jobs gave a new sense of self respect and power to the lower caste particularly schedule caste. However this improvement in schedule caste varies from region to region and with the dominance of the upper caste in the region

Educational mobility:

Since schedule caste are mostly associated with traditional occupation i.e with menial jobs and their participation in government and non-government jobs depend on the basis of their education and their ability to overcome their lower position assigned to them by the social structure, it is important to note the improvement in their literacy and also their access to higher education (since literacy is not a appropriate parameter to measure transformation). Observing the level of general education amongst schedule caste and non schedule caste gives us a broad idea about the access to education and opportunities to various castes groups. Table no.1 shows per 1000 distribution of persons of age 15 years and above by level of general education in India.



	Social	Non	Literate and	Middle	secondary	Higher	Diploma/c	Graduat	All
	group	literat	upto			secondary	ertificate	e and	
		e	primary					above	
RURAL	SC	454	242	143	84	42	4	16	1000
	Others	268	242	186	150	90	10	55	1000
URBAN	SC	270	171	173	165	128	18	126	1000
	Others	106	128	146	190	156	22	252	1000

Table 1: Per 1000 Distribution of persons of age 15 years and above by level of General Education in India

Source: NSS: Report no. 543, 66th round.

No doubt there has been improvement in access to education amongst schedule caste society especially in urban areas but as shown in Table no.1, the percentage of population having higher education amongst others is higher than that in schedule caste. Also population having higher education is much higher in urban than that for rural India. Rural India have higher percentage of schedule castes which are literate upto primary level, perhaps because there is high drop-out rates in rural area so that child could learn the traditional occupation and also if there is no skill required for the job than too, a child of lower caste whose family is engaged in traditional occupation is made to give up his education to work because of poverty. However, as pointed out by Majumdar, that urbanization increases opportunities for schedule castes. Also as stated by Benjamin quoted in Jagan Karade's book on Occupational Mobility Amongst Schedule Caste (2009); that after independence, there is a slight change in the status of schedule caste because educational mobility and special reservation policies made for fractured community of society. Since this increasing literacy and higher education comes with the rejection of social system which contributes as one of the significant factors in transformation of schedule caste. However, in real case as shown in Table no.1; higher education gap between SCs and non-SCs is considerably high(that of 1.26% in urban areas while 3.9% in rural) gap is much higher in rural than in urban areas because of strict social and traditional constraints in rural India. Therefore, it is agreeable that urbanization and urban situation constitute important variable in bringing about social change and mobility.

Employment:

Since educational qualifications are growing at a slow pace in schedule castes especially in rural areas, almost 1/4th of SCs working population are still deprived of the regular work opportunities

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and they have to struggle even to get work at least for six months in a year. (Singh Darshan 2009: 529) Also the major population of schedule caste is engaged as agricultural laborers and this has hardly declined from 1981 to 2001.

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If we note the employment of schedule castes in central government services as shown in Table no. 2 below:

Year	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV(inc.
				sweeper)
1953	0.035	1.29	4.52	20.52
1965	1.64	2.82	8.88	17.73
1970	2.36	3.84	9.27	18.09
1975	3.34	4.98	10.27	19.16
1979	4.83	8.07	11.54	20.70
1992	9.70	11.60	15.80	20.70
1995	10.13	13.13	15.46	20.46
2000	10.77	12.13	15.84	22.71

Table 2: Representation of Schedule Castes in Central Government Services (in %age)

Source: NCSC, 2000

As clear from the table, highest percentage of schedule castes are involved in class III and IV posts which indicates that on a large scale SCs have been kept away from the decision making process (class I and II) it should also be noted that except SCs and STs and some backward classes, people from upper caste hardly apply for the post of sweeper, therefore large percentage of schedule castes are found in this class. Though, percentage of SCs has remarkably increased in class I and II from 1953 to 2000. A major part of schedule castes in middle class come from this class I service and other white collar professions.

As it is now clear that giving up their traditional occupation and adopting any new profession for schedule castes some up with various social constraints and hindrance, but with increasing urban contact and increasing awareness and government efforts, sizeable population have come up to form a respectable part of the society and new middle class. Nevertheless, J.S Gandhi quotes Yogendra Singh that "irrespective of types of professional elites chosen, it is revealed that the

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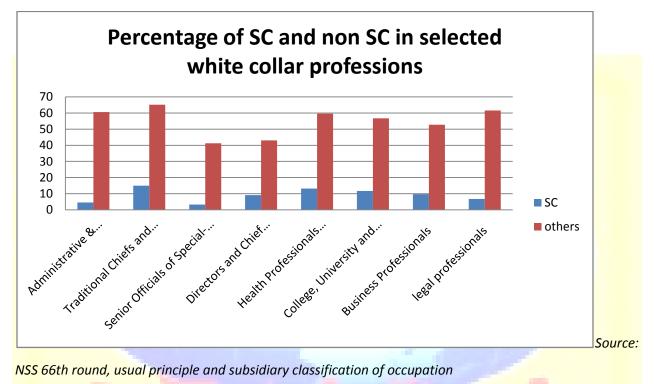




recruitment is heavily biased in favor of the upper castes". Though, this statement is made in 1980s, but it still holds well in recent times to some extent in some regions of India.

Major occupation of schedules castes in recent times:

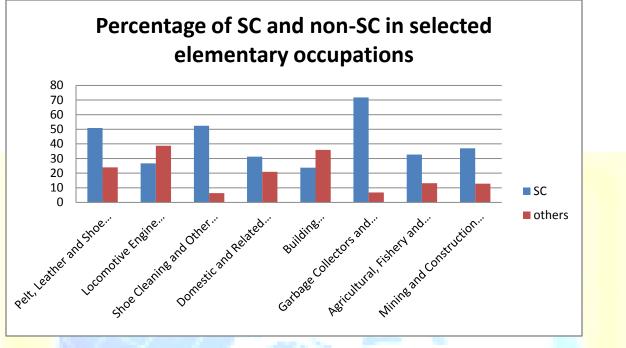






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Figure 2: Percentage of SC and non-SC in selected elementary occupation



Source: NSS 66th round, usual principle and subsidiary classification of occupation

As seen from the two graphs above, pelt leather and shoe making trade workers show 50.9% of SCs engaged, while shoe cleaning and other street services elementary jobs engage 52.40% of SC, domestic and related helpers, cleaners and launderers engage 31.36% of SC while garbage collectors and related laborers engage 71.80% of SC out of total 1,50,3939 workers engaged in this occupation. Elementary occupation shows highest percentage of schedule caste involved because they include menial jobs which higher castes people do not prefer do to. In elementary occupation, sales and service engage highest percentage of schedule caste especially those related with cleaning, servants etc.

Professions such as administration and executive officials, which involves decision making process and power, senior officials, legal, religious professions and nursing professions which involves more contact with people and are associated with values and rituals and life and death involve less than 7% of SCs. On a broad scale, it is largely seen that SCs are involved mainly in inferior professions which cannot bring them to the strata of upper class. Also less SC are involved in high class jobs and business, which has no provision for reservation of seats for them

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M.N Panini quoted in K.L Sharma (ed.) states that: process of industrialization in India, gave a new kind of relationship between man and machine and therefore would also break down the barriers of caste in India. This is somewhat similar to Marx's viewpoint on capitalism and caste in India, but Panini has also stated that India has undergone partial industrialization. Panini made an attempt to take comprehensive view of industrialization and its impact on Indian society. Shirokov (quoted by M.N Panini) points out that there continued to be dominance of what he calls "lower forms of production" in industry too, after independence in India. There was a hierarchy in kind of jobs in industry too. And if we look at the data, majority of SCs are still engaged in the so called "lower forms of production". It is possible to isolate certain caste and community which dominate certain branches of industry in certain regions.

As stated earlier occupational and educational improvement does not get higher status or respect in the society for SCs. Change in ideologies of SCs and non SCs is an important aspect. Since, Indian society is cultural society hence complete transformation of SCs for an egalitarian society do not seem to be possible in atleast recent times. The status of SCs as ritually impure and their exclusion from almost major part of society (they are included in some events) have created a response to exclusion i.e replication (Dielige Robert 1992: 155) and this is Moffat's evidence for cultural consensus for rigid caste system. Thus the divisions of harijans into different grades indicate in a most forceful manner the degree to which the Harijans are in consensus with a system that defines them fundamentally low.

Social changes:

The Hindu orthodoxy of untouchability though hardly exists now but it can still be seen in rural areas and to some extent in urban centers too. As studied by Nandu ram, Social Stratification and Sources of Mobility in Urban Centers where he noticed that members of different castes and sub castes especially in urban areas do not necessarily bring in hierarchical consideration in their daily social transactions. Though they may emphasise, in one form or another, on the superiority or inferiority of their caste status (Ram Nandu 1986:215) he also acknowledges the fact that in modern India, in general, and in particular cities caste system and class structure are heading towards convergence. Though the term Sankritisation is often used for lower caste who give up their traditional occupation and take up relatively "so called" clean jobs and Brahmin lifestyle; for recognition in society, but it should be noticed that most schedule caste families in urban

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areas seek for better standard of living and thus seek job which would give them more money and decent way of life, it is not always that they are claiming of a higher status in the caste strata. It must be noticed that only a small section of SCs who have achieved higher education and are employed in white collar and respectable jobs or are politically conscious enjoys better status, even better than some people belonging to higher castes, because of government policies and programs.

The caste rules of commensality have become relaxed within ones household. But strict rules of endogamy are still most pervasive even in urban areas. Hence it would not be wrong to agree with Yogendra Singh's view that dissolution of caste system can occur with the breakdown of endogamous system. As today's middle class is guided by partly tradition and partly modern cultural and social norms of life hence complete acceptation of schedule caste seems near to impossible in today's times. As studied by Nandu Ram, in Kanpur, the majority of SCs live in residence enclosures and other clumsy and unhygienic areas and also amongst SCs only some castes like Chamars and Koris have come forward to achieve higher education. Most of these castes are found to get attach to their traditional occupation, though outside the pale of jajmani system, in urban areas, educated and better off schedule castes find themselves more closer to their same class.

Conclusion:

The transformation of schedule caste is a critical to show because complete transformation has not yet taken place. The change processes are still going on and transformation has to be achieved. Nevertheless, India is a traditional and multi-cultural society, with this increasing urbanization and education, it can be hoped to conceive some changes in the ideologies of people. Achievement of egalitarian society is rather tough, since once caste system is abolished, a class system emerges. However there is a transition in India between caste and class, especially in urban India. Therefore, it is important to understand that transformation of any category, yet have not taken place. There is obviously, some changes in the status of middle class and high class SCs are seen, and also attainment of power by SCs in rural areas due to efforts made by government, but still discrimination can be observed in certain aspects of promotions in jobs, or marriage and other fields because they are still considered as the so called "lower caste people".

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