



**FACULTY OF JURIDICAL SCIENCES**

**COURSE: B.A.LL.B 204**

**Semester II**

**SUBJECT: SOCIOLOGY-II**

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# Lecture- 23



## LECTURE 23:

Principal features of caste system in India

1. **Segmental Division of Society:** The society is divided into various small social groups called castes. Each of these castes is a well developed social group, the membership of which is determined by the consideration of birth.
2. **Hierarchy:** According to Louis Dumont, castes teach us a fundamental social principle of hierarchy. At the top of this hierarchy is the Brahmin caste and at the bottom is the untouchable caste. In between are the intermediate castes, the relative positions of which are not always clear.
3. **Endogamy:** Endogamy is the chief characteristic of caste, i.e. the members of a caste or sub-caste should marry within their own caste or sub-caste. The violation of the rule of endogamy would mean ostracism and loss of caste. However, hypergamy (the practice of women marrying someone who is wealthier or of higher caste or social status.) and hypogamy (marriage with a person of lower social status) were also prevalent. Gotra exogamy is also maintained in each caste. Every caste is subdivided into different small units on the basis of gotra. The members of one gotra are believed to be successors of a common ancestor-hence prohibition of marriage within the same gotra.
4. **Hereditary status and occupation:** Megasthenes, the Greek traveller to India in 300 B. C., mentions hereditary occupation as one of the two features of caste system, the other being endogamy.
5. **Restriction on Food and Drink:** Usually a caste would not accept cooked food from any other caste that stands lower than itself in the social scale, due to the notion of getting polluted. There were also variously associated taboos related to food. The cooking taboo, which defines the persons who may cook the food. The eating taboo which may lay down the ritual to be followed at meals. The commensal taboo which is concerned with the person with whom one may take food. Finally, the taboo which has to do with the nature of the vessel (whether made of earth, copper or brass) that one may use for drinking or cooking. For eg: In North India Brahmin would accept pakka food (cooked in ghee) only from some castes lower than his own. However, no individual would accept kachcha (cooked in water) food prepared by an inferior caste. Food prepared by Brahmin is acceptable to all, the reason for which domination of Brahmins in the hotel industry for a long time. The beef was not allowed by any castes, except harijans.
6. **A Particular Name:** Every caste has a particular name through which we can identify it. Sometimes, an occupation is also associated with a particular caste.
7. **The Concept of Purity and Pollution:** The higher castes claimed to have ritual, spiritual and racial purity which they maintained by keeping the lower castes away through the notion of pollution. The idea of pollution means a touch of lower caste man would pollute or defile a man of higher caste. Even his shadow is considered enough to pollute a higher caste man.
8. **Jati Panchayat:** The status of each caste is carefully protected, not only by caste laws but also by the conventions. These are openly enforced by the community through a governing body or board called Jati Panchayat. These Panchayats in different regions and castes are named in a particular fashion such as Kuldriya in Madhya Pradesh and Jokhila in South Rajasthan.

**Varna vs Caste –** The difference Varna and caste are 2 different concepts, though some people wrongly consider it the same. Varna Caste Literally 'Varna' means colour and originates from the word 'Vri' meaning the choice of one's occupation. Hence Varna is concerned with one's colour or occupation. Caste or 'Jati' originates from the root word 'Jana' which implies taking birth. Thus, caste is concerned with birth. Varna's are only four in number i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. Castes are very large in number. Castes also have many subdivisions known as sub-castes. It is an all-India phenomenon. Presence of regional variations mostly based on linguistic differences. Mobility pattern Varna's are relatively flexible with one's talent and knowledge, compared with the castes. It is based on rigid principles and mobility is less. It is a closed type of stratification. Varna system is free from socioeconomic and political disabilities. Imposes many restrictions on the members. Varna-class correlation is mostly positive. Caste-class correlation is not always positive, There may be variations in the placement due to economic, political and educational status of various groups.