



FACULTY OF JURIDICAL SCIENCES

COURSE: B.A.LL.B 204

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Lecture- 27



LECTURE 27:

These criticisms are enumerated below: 1. Dominant caste today is found only in traditional villages: Srinivas has argued that a dominant caste has most of the power in the village within its fold. In fact, it is the dominant caste which runs the village; maintains the village system. The empirical reality today has undergone vast transformation. Surely, in the past, the powerful families in the village were the big landowning families. The Brahmins and the Rajputs, in the earlier periods of history, got immense favour from the feudal lords and the British rulers. In order to keep these higher castes in favour of the ruling group land was given as gift. Those who received such favours included Brahmins, Rajputs and the Marathas. Viewed from this perspective admittedly, the Brahmins and the Rajputs became big landowning castes. But, with the land reforms including land ceiling and abolition of zamindari and jagirdari, big landowning has ceased to be a determinant factor of dominant caste. In place of big landholding, political power has become a decisive factor in the formation of a dominant caste. Andre Beteille very rightly observes: The powerful families in the past were the big landowning families. These included the principal Brahmin families among non-Brahmins, the Maratha family. Today political power whether in the village or outside it is not as closely tied to ownership, of land as it was in the past. New bases of power have emerged which are, to some extent, independent of both caste and class. Perhaps most important among these is the strength of numerical support. D.N. Majumdar, who conducted the study of Monana village of Uttar Pradesh in 1958, observes that the Brahmin and the Thakur were the dominant castes in Mohana. But, at a later stage, he finds that the dominance of the Thakur group has begun to be shaken up, ever since the legal removal of its economic pillar the zamindari system which was the strong medium through which it held the various other castes in a position of economic subordination... But Majumdar also finds that with the abolition of zamindari, much of the economic power of the Thakur is retained. He says that "with their wide money lending business they still are a powerful group". If economic power is considered to be an important factor of the formation of a dominant caste, it is only limited to the traditional villages, such as, that of tribals which have not received the impact of modern political transformation. 2. Dominant caste is not always numerically a preponderant caste: Yet another criticism of dominant caste falls into two camps. One camp of scholars argues that in traditional villages it is not the numerical strength but secular power and ritual status that determine the status of a dominant caste. Among those who stand for this argument include D.N. Majumdar and others. However, the second group consisting of Andre Beteille, M.N. Srinivas and Yogendra Singh has advanced the idea of ritual and secular status of a caste as dominant. This group asserts empirical, evidence that nowadays "with the coming of adult suffrage, numerical strength has become very important and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have assumed a greater importance". Majumdar does not consider numerical strength as a decisive factor in the formation of a dominant caste. Historically, "Indian villages probably never exercised majority rule or accepted majority verdict. The feudal India did not compromise with numerical strength. Besides, alone-Brahmin, a sadhu, a zamindar, alone social worker each has exercised more influence than a numerically preponderant community in the village". Majumdar denies the idea that scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, though; having numerical strength may occupy a status of dominant caste. According to him, "the backward classes, scheduled castes preponderate in many villages, even a particular caste like the Lodha or the Pasi may be numerically the largest caste in a village, but authority and importance may attach to the few upper castes families, or to the zamindar family, i.e., the social matrix of India village". Thus, on one hand, it is argued that numerical strength has ceased to be a factor in the making of a dominant caste while it is also held on the basis of empirical strength that the modern forces of democracy and development including the improvement of the status of scheduled groups have gone a long way in making a group dominant in a village. 3. Dominant caste is a part of structuralist approach: Most of the criticism labelled against the dominant caste is that of those theorists who oppose structuralist approach in the study of Indian society. Louis Dumont is the leader of this approach. M.N. Srinivas, while giving the concept of dominant caste, also follows the

line of a structuralist. Srinivas stands for hierarchy, i.e., the opposition between pure and impure. He looks at the pure caste, namely, Brahmins and Rajputs as the higher castes in the caste system; he has taken upper caste view in the construction of dominant caste. This perspective of Srinivas has been criticised by Edmund Leach. In fact, Srinivas has overlooked the force of history when he writes: Historical data are neither as accurate nor as rich and detailed as the data collected by field anthropologists, and the study of certain existing processes in the past. The making of a dominant caste, thus, is highly empirical and does not take into consideration the forces of history. A cursory view of the contemporary rural India would immediately show that much of the relevance of dominant caste has fallen into erosion. As a matter of fact, there has been sea-change in the social reality of Indian villages that much cannot be comprehended with the help of this concept. The reservation given to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the intensification of democratisation, and the introduction of Panchayati Raj through 73rd amendment to Indian Constitution have gone a long way in shrinking the influence of dominant caste. However, there are some politically dominant groups which have begun to exercise influence on the villagers. Note point M.N Srinivas has been one of the researchers in the field of Dominant caste in any group. He defined it as a particular caste economically, spiritually and politically above any other castes. For example in India, Brahmin caste is considered as a dominant caste, thus it is having a superior frame over other castes. Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas (1916–1999) was an Indian sociologist and social anthropologist. He is mostly known for his work on caste and caste systems, Social stratification, Sanskritisation and Westernisation in southern India and the concept of 'Dominant Caste'. A caste is dominant when wields economic or political power and occupies a fairly high position in hierarchy (even in the traditional system of a caste which acquired economic and political power did succeed in improving its ritual status)