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Sanskritisation

Meaning, Characteristics, Models and Effects

Meaning The concept 'Sanskritisation' was first introduced by Prof. M.N. Srinivas the famous Indian sociologist. He explained the concept of Sanskritisation.

2. Varna Model: In the Varna system the highest status is given to that of a Brahmin followed by Kshatriya, Vishay and Sudra. Antyaj or the lowest is the fifth Varna that is the lowest and untouchable one in the Varna system. The lower castes coping the ideals and life style of the superior castes. Where the Kshatriyas enjoy superiority, the lower castes followed their life style and ideals. Simultaneously where the vaishyas enjoy superiority, the lower castes followed their life style and ideals. Only the Antyaj or lower caste copy the Sudras. That is to say emulating the life style or ideals of a Varna on the basis of honour and superiority enjoyed by that class is called Varna model or sanskritization.

3. Local Model: In every country, some castes are considered to be more respectful than others on account of their economic power. This caste may be called the "master caste" or the "dominant caste". So the lower caste copies the life style of the local dominant caste in order to improve their status.

Effects of Sanskritization:

1. Sanskritization in social field: The social aspect of sanskritization is much more important from the view point of change. The low caste individuals are inclined towards sanskritization because in that way they can elevate their social status and get higher status in caste hierarchy.
2. Sanskritization in economic field: Economic betterment and sanskritization is another related issue. The lower caste people have given up uncleaned occupation to raise their economic status because clean trades are a symbol of social light.
3. Sanskritization in religious field: Sanskritization also can be observed in the religious field. Like Brahmins many of the lower castes people put on sacred thread. They also go to their temple regularly and perform Arti and Bhajan. They have left prohibited food and un-cleaned occupation. Even they have specialised in performing ceremonies like Brahmins.
4. Sanskritization in living patterns: The living patterns of lower castes have also Sanskritized. Like higher caste they also get Pucca houses built for them. Now they sit along with the higher caste on the cots without any fear or hesitation. They also keep their houses clean and put on dresses like higher castes.

Impact of Sanskritisation on Indian Society Prof. M.N. Srinivas for the first time used the term 'Sanskritisation' in his writing 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India'. The term refers to a 'Process by which low Hindu caste or tribe or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideologies and ways of life in the direction of a high twice born caste to acquire higher status'. At first Prof. Srinivas used the term 'Brahminisation' for this process as he thought that the lower caste people must be trying to reach at the place of Brahmins. But later on he found that not only they are following Brahmins but also other caste groups. So, he replaced Brahminisation by Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation is a process of adaptation of the rituals and life styles of higher castes by a lower caste. It also refers to the process in which the other groups who fall outside the Hindu caste structure like tribal groups enter into the Hindu fold. From all these definitions four points are very clear:

1. The model includes any higher social group. It is not restricted to Brahmins.
2. The groups who follow the higher caste groups constitute lower caste groups as well as some groups who are outside the Hindu social structure.
3. These groups are following customs traditions, rituals, ideology and way of life of higher castes.
4. The main objective of these lower caste groups to attain higher social status through this process.

There are some remarkable points to be discussed in connection to Sanskritisation:

1. The whole process is based on 'relative deprivation'. The society has allotted prestige to the Brahmins, power to the Kshatriya and wealth to Vaisyas. The lower caste groups are deprived of all these benefits of the society. So, they want to raise their status.
2. This process takes place for, the lower caste people feel inferior to the higher caste groups. The feeling of inferior complexity compels the lower castes to raise their social status. They adopted the process of Sanskritisation to raise their social position.
3. The concept of Sanskritisation is very closely related with 'dominant caste'. It helps in the process of cultural transmission.
4. Sanskritisation occurs among those castes who enjoy economic and political powers but have not achieved high ritual ranking. There is a gap between their politico-economic position and ritual position in the society.
5. Economic betterment is not a pre-condition for Sanskritisation. It is not necessary that economic improvement leads to Sanskritisation. In some cases it is observed that economic betterment helps in acquiring political power and

combinedly economic and political power lead to the process of Sanskritisation. 6. There are some factors which help to accelerate the process such as desire to move upward, education, leadership, wealth, power in politics etc. 7. Unit of mobility in the process of Sanskritisation must be a group. The upward mobility of an individual or a family is not considered as Sanskritisation. 8. In this process emphasis is given to vertical mobility and not to the horizontal mobility. 9. It refers to cultural change or positional change but not structural change. 10. The group has to wait for indefinite period to achieve the position in this process. 11. The process depends on the structure of the social system. It will be easier if the society is flexible, open, and free. 12. In the historical context Sanskritisation has been a process of social mobility throughout the history of Indian society. The concept of Sanskritisation suffers from several limitations: 1. It explains only socio-cultural mobility and that to in a very limited way. 2. Prof. Srinivas is not clear about the fact that whether a lower caste as a whole moves up to a higher strata or only a group of Sanskritised families of a particular caste moves up leaving behind the other families of the caste. 3. He is also not clear about the fact that when a caste moves up what happens to the vacant place. 4. He remained silent about occupational mobility and division of labour. Whether the sanskritised group adopts the occupation of the new place or follows the same traditional occupation. 5. This is a process in which the lower caste people follow the customs, traditions and practices of high caste people. But all these elements of high caste people are in diluted condition, due to various forces like modernisation, westernisation, education etc. So, there is confusion in imitating these elements. 6. Now-a-days the process of desanskritisation has also been started. 7. Dominant caste may not allow the lower caste groups to reach at their place. 8. It is a cultural change leaving little scope to raise the social status. However, the process of Sanskritisation is very helpful in explaining the complex pattern of Indian culture.