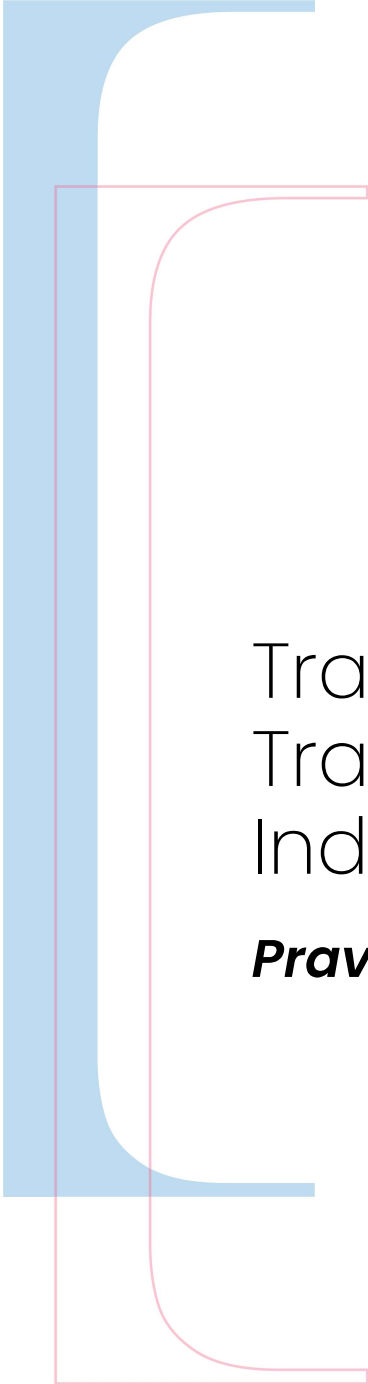




Transmission and Transformation: Caste in Indian Knowledge Systems

Pravat Ranjan Sethi

Department of History, School of Social Sciences,
Central University of Himachal Pradesh
pravatjnu@gmail.com

Abstract

India's vast reservoir of knowledge has been enriched by several disciplines such as astronomy, medicine, and philosophy. Undoubtedly, the caste system, which is a social framework that restricts access and involvement, has had a significant influence on the historical transmission of this information. This study explores the intricate relationship between caste and Indian knowledge systems. This scholarly article examines the historical development and current expressions of the complex connection between caste and Indian knowledge systems. The caste system, an intrinsic social structure in India, has played a significant role in shaping and transmitting knowledge throughout the millennia. In ancient India, the Brahminical caste significantly influenced educational institutions and employed caste-based restrictions to determine eligibility for admission. This research examines the impact of this limitation on the advancement of several disciplines, such as philosophy, literature, and science. Furthermore, we examine the transformations in knowledge systems that occurred throughout both the colonial and postcolonial eras, focusing on endeavours to combat caste-based inequalities and promote the democratisation of education. Furthermore, the significance of excluded communities' endeavours to preserve and enhance indigenous knowledge traditions is emphasised, as their contributions are frequently disregarded in prevailing accounts. This research highlights the persistent challenge that India has in its pursuit of inclusive knowledge generation, achieved via the integration of historical perspectives and contemporary case studies. We advocate for a reassessment of conventional and contemporary educational methods in India to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to acquire knowledge that accurately represents the great variety of our culture. The primary objective of this thorough research is to provide a scholarly contribution to the broader discussion on educational reform and social equity in the context of India's knowledge and caste systems.

Keywords:

Caste system, India, knowledge systems, transmission, transformation, social hierarchy, access, exclusion, marginalization.

Introduction

Ancient Indian thinkers posited three distinct qualities, namely Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, to distinguish between humans, inanimate objects, and impersonal actions. The constituents of "sattva" were truth, knowledge, kindness, and noble and great ideals. The distinguishing traits of a Raja are its wealth, grandeur, vitality, pride, and love for specific pleasures. At the lowest level of the hierarchy, the tamas were characterised by their coarseness and lack of flavour. They were also assigned monotonous and laborious tasks. Individuals who possess the quality of sattva are referred to as Brahmanas, those who possess the quality of rajas are known as Kshatriyas or Vaishyas, and those who possess the quality of tamas are termed Shudras. The 'Karma theory' posits that specific occupations are responsible for the emergence of the Varna system. In *Shanti Parva*, Rishi Vrigu and Rishi Bhardwaj explain how people's professions led them to transition from being Brahmanas to belonging to other *varnas*. However, an alternative interpretation of *Manusmriti* suggests that initially, everyone was born into the *Shudra* caste but subsequently transitioned into one of the four *varnas* based on their chosen employment (Smith 2009, p.155).

The hierarchical social structure of ancient India's caste system had extensive ramifications on several aspects of life, encompassing the dissemination and conservation of information. The knowledge systems of India were greatly shaped by this system, which determined the individuals who were allowed to acquire, transmit, and modify information, and was profoundly embedded in religious and social customs. The caste system, also known as the Varna system, categorised society into four primary segments: the Brahmins, who were intellectuals and clergy, the Kshatriyas, who were warriors and rulers, the Vaishyas, who were traders and landholders, and the Shudras, who were labourers and servants. Outside of this societal structure, there existed a faction referred to as the 'untouchables' or pariahs, who were systematically excluded and deprived of fundamental entitlements. The origins of India's caste system may be traced back several millennia. The upper-caste residents of India constructed a system of social stratification based on birth, which was institutionalised by Indo-European immigrants (Ketkar 2014, p.21).

Knowledge Systems and Caste

Ancient India has a rich reservoir of knowledge including traditional Indian medicine, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and the arts. The diffusion and availability of this knowledge were greatly impacted by caste. The Brahmin caste exerted influence on philosophical and theological discussions. The Vedas and the *Upanishads* were among the sacred texts that were within their jurisdiction for interpretation and guidance. This measure was implemented to strengthen the social dominance of the Brahmins by guaranteeing that religious knowledge remained exclusive to their lineage. Ancient Ayurveda, India's traditional medical system was transmitted through specific channels of Brahmin and *Vaidya* lineages. Due to intergenerational transmission, individuals belonging to lower castes frequently have restricted availability of knowledge on medicinal plants and treatment methods. Brahmins made significant contributions to the fields of astronomy and mathematics, with Aryabhata authoring the *Aryabhatiya* and Brahmagupta formulating the *Brahmasphuta Siddhanta* (Jha 2024, p.34). Due to their association with divine knowledge, these fields of study were predominantly pursued by the privileged social strata. Artisan divisions occasionally encompassed individuals with extraordinary proficiency in metallurgy, weaving, sculpture, and other innovative and practical disciplines. Historically, the transmission of information and the perpetuation of a hierarchical system of work were achieved through apprenticeships that took place within families and communities. Knowledge dissemination and creation did occur beyond the confines of the Brahminical framework, notwithstanding the inflexible constraints imposed by the caste system. Various communities, such as tribal and Dalit groups, have effectively conserved traditional medicine, ecological knowledge, and oral histories. The great variety of Indian knowledge systems is largely attributed to these undervalued traditions (Ambedkar 2020, p.32). Traditional medicine in India is enriched by the profound knowledge of the natural flora and fauna, which indigenous people have diligently stored and further developed. For instance, the Kurumba and Irula tribes of the Western Ghats possess a profound understanding of herbal pharmacology. The treatment of gastrointestinal problems involves the use of *Aegle marmelos* (*Bael*) and *Terminalia chebula* (*Haritaki*), two botanical species renowned for their anti-inflammatory properties. Individuals within the community and its environs who

possess an interest in acquiring knowledge utilize this commonly transmitted information through oral means. The historically marginalised Dalit communities have developed their own traditions of healing that have endured over time. Notably, Dalit healers in Tamil Nadu are renowned for their expertise in repairing fractured bones by combining plant remedies with traditional techniques such as splinting. Although often undervalued, their specialized knowledge is essential for ensuring the affordability of healthcare in rural areas.

Marginalised Voices and Knowledge Systems

Considering the presence of disparity, what are the repercussions of de Tocqueville's theories?

What is their fate within the framework of India's caste system? Dumont starts his exposition on caste and the most recent anthropological research in India by emphasising this crucial aspect.

Given Dumont's co-editorship of *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (1964), *La civilisation indienne et nous* (1965), *Hierarchy and marital alliance in South Indian kinship* (1957b), and *Une sous-caste de l'Inde du sud* (1957a), he possesses the necessary qualifications for the post. Exceptional academic contributions are essential for this endeavour. The scholar must possess a comprehensive understanding of Hindu philosophy and scriptures, as well as an extensive knowledge of Indian caste structures and current field research conducted in India. In addition, Louis Dumont has extensively authored works on Indian politics during the 19th and 20th centuries, demonstrating a profound understanding of sociological theory. Scholars have yet to undertake a task of this magnitude in connection to India, for reasons that are yet unclear. A convergence between the Anglo-American schools of empirical philosophy and behaviourism and French rationalism appears to be occurring once more. Levi-Strauss once visited the place.

Dumont emphasises theological facts as 'facts' to underscore the significance of conceptual frameworks in comprehending society. Similar to Levi-Strauss, Dumont observes that social scientists are intrigued by the non-ideological

aspects of society that relate to conduct. His favourite and most despised example is the attempt to disregard Hindu caste as an inconsequential illustration of 'closed status groups.' Dumont contends that men's cognitive processes and convictions hold equal significance to their tangible behaviours when seen from an alternative perspective. Lastly, we get to the subject of ideology, which Dumont contends is the most elevated manifestation of social norms. An ideology system is evident in one's actions, characterised by its intellectual and sensory nature. In this instance, Dumont's endeavours have a resemblance to his previous ones, whereby he sought to identify overarching principles within the intricate network of Dravidian familial connections (Dumont 1957b; 1961, etc.).

Ideological Framework of Marginalization

Homo Hierarchius as defined by Louis Dumont: As Dumont demonstrates via his study on caste in India, some groups, such as the Brahmins, have the most privileged positions in society, while others, such as the Dalits and tribal populations, hold the lowest rank. This order is not just relational, but also grounded on knowledge. There is a tendency to disregard or overlook the beliefs and practices of the lower castes, while the higher castes are perceived as authoritative and superior.

In Foucault's Conceptual Framework of Power and Knowledge: The thesis proposed by Michel Foucault, which posits the inseparability of power and knowledge, illuminates the manner in which influential institutions exert control over the permissible information. Due to their lack of ability to have their expertise recognized, marginalized groups often have their intellectual contributions disregarded or underestimated.

Post-colonial era and its aftermath: A Critical Analysis of Tocqueville's Perspectives on Equality and Democracy: Notwithstanding Tocqueville's focus on equality, his works on democracy illuminate how democracies may suppress minority voices in the quest for a cohesive national identity. This caused several colonialists and post-colonialists to dismiss indigenous knowledge systems, perceiving them as irrational or obsolete in comparison to Western scientific thinking. Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak argue

that colonial administrations limited indigenous methods of knowing by imposing their knowledge systems on conquered populations. Due to the higher valuation of Western knowledge compared to local institutions, this trend has persisted in post-colonial countries.

Political Disenfranchisement and Social Class: An analysis of B.R. Ambedkar's critique of the caste system might provide a clearer understanding of the marginalization of India's knowledge industries. Moreover, Ambedkar said that the caste system not only subjected the Dalits to economic and social enslavement but also prevented them from acquiring knowledge. The Brahminical dominion over religious and educational institutions guaranteed the methodical suppression of Dalits' and other lower castes' acquired knowledge. Ambedkar's writings offer historical context for comprehending the institutionalization of caste-based exclusion. From its inception, the caste system imposed an inflexible social structure that prevented specific groups from seeking further education and intellectual pursuits, therefore confining them to menial jobs.

Epistemic Suppression and Alternative Cosmologies: Lévi-Strauss' research on myths and cosmologies provides a novel perspective on the process by which diverse civilizations shape their perceptions of reality, a topic greatly pertinent to the field of structural anthropology. However, the dominant methods of acquiring knowledge generally disregard these conflicting cosmologies as irrational or based on superstition. For example, crucial ecological knowledge is forfeited when the perspectives of indigenous people on the environment and natural resources are ignored in favour of scientific reasoning. While the article refers to the significance of other cosmologies, it falls short of providing a comprehensive examination of the widespread suppression of diverse perspectives. The values and behaviours observed in these alternative cosmologies frequently challenge the conventional knowledge frameworks. For instance, the exploitative strategies of contemporary industrial civilization sharply differ from the ecological knowledge of indigenous cultures, which highly value harmonious cohabitation with the natural environment. The marginalization of these cosmologies is indicative of a broader ideological effort to oppose non-Western and non-Brahminical epistemologies.

Dumont asserts that the principle of hierarchy holds great significance in Hinduism. This topic is further explored within the context of the Hindu concept of impurity and purity. A social order emerges when innocence prevails over impurity. The rest of the individuals in Hindu culture adhere to this particular pattern. Indeed, Dumont is now challenging the several often-mentioned cases that seem to contradict these broad generalisations regarding Hindu culture. The analysis of social stratification reveals the inherent intricacy arising from a stance that establishes a strong connection between ideology and behaviour. Dumont and Professor Bailey have presented their arguments in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, among other publications (Dumont 1960; Bailey 1959). He meticulously revisits the subject. He contends that the emphasis on superficial characteristics renders ineffective broad concepts like social stratification, which are crucial to social science and enable extensive comparisons. Consequently, there appear to be 'closed status groups' similar to Indian castes in several nations, such as the US, South Africa, and others. However, this allegation is unfairly defaming Hindu India. The social, economic, political, and religious dimensions of Hindu India's caste system differ significantly when compared to racial relations in America or South Africa. Furthermore, the diverse nature of the past and future challenges faced by these countries is so distinct that categorising them together highlights the insufficiency of sociological classification. Dumont argues that due to its reliance on superficial criteria instead of scientific data, it may be considered nothing more than pseudo-social science. Does Hindu theology establish any caste that is not already present? Undoubtedly, Dumont asserts this. He discusses the many social groups within the Muslim, Christian, and Lingayat communities to provide a comprehensive defence. Barth (1960) conducts a comprehensive analysis of the degrading article but mostly ignores the complex issue of castes in Ceylon.

Indeed, Dumont's assertion that the term 'caste' is only comprehended within the context of Hindu India is founded on his understanding of caste. The author contends that caste is founded upon hierarchical notions derived from the purity and defilement paradigm. According to the author, caste is defined by a certain group known as the Brahman, who holds the highest position in the social structure, and another group at the lowest position. According to the author, priests possess dominion over worldly authorities, such as the Brahman's control over the Kshatriya. At times, Dumont seems uncertain about which of these traits

he considers to be essential for a caste system. He is approaching the point where he may limit his generalisation to only Hindu India by further refining the notion.

B. R. Ambedkar contends that the Vedic culture did not include the shudras as a distinct fourth varna, but rather consisted of only three *varnas*. He stated that despite the absence of a clear hierarchy in the workforce, the economy had progressed to a stage where the division of labour was evident. The author makes references to alternative cosmologies found in Hindu literature, which, unlike the dominant religious beliefs, do not have a supernatural creator or hierarchical structure. Hence, he deduces that the two sections in *Purusha Sukta* are supplementary elements that were incorporated after the establishment of the caste system. According to him, the Shudras played a crucial role in Aryan civilization, especially within the Kshatriya caste. The individual in question has a contrasting perspective to the viewpoint of Western scholars, who argue that the shudras and untouchables were first non-Aryans who were subjugated by the Aryans and then integrated into Vedic society, where they were assigned a subordinate position. Contrarily, the Shudras played a crucial role in the governing class, and a few of them even ascended to the position of monarchs. Ambedkar states that Brahmins ceased performing the '*upanayana*' ritual for certain *shudra* monarchs in retaliation for the insults and maltreatment they endured. Consequently, they were demoted to the fourth varna and stripped of their status. In addition, he asserts that the practice of untouchability originated from the influence of Buddhist teachings, which caused Hindus to renounce traditions such as animal sacrifice and consuming beef. The Hindus' strict avoidance of consuming beef resulted in the social marginalisation of anyone who partook in it. Regardless of one's stance on Ambedkar's thesis on the origins of shudras and untouchables, it is widely accepted among academics that the birth-based Varna system is unequivocally a phenomenon that emerged after the Vedic period and that untouchability developed after the rise of Buddhism. Indications imply that Hinduism did not consistently conform to a caste structure, particularly throughout the initial phase of the religion's extensive chronology, which started approximately around 4000 BCE and persists to the present. Ambedkar himself provides support for this assertion. The eradication of the caste system would not lead to the destruction of Hinduism, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent portion of the essay (Sharma 2012, pp.208-209).

Canonical System and Caste

In this initial section, we shall examine the canonical texts that are occasionally misinterpreted as offering endorsement for the caste system. Subsequently, we examine components that are unequivocally opposed to the birth-based caste system. The few instances in the canon where the caste system is deemed acceptable are found in the *dharmashastras*, which encompass the dharma sutras and the smritis. Conversely, shruti, which includes the Vedas and the Upanishads, is held in high esteem as authoritative texts, but *dharmashastras* have never attained the same level of significance. It is well-established that in cases of conflict between smriti literature and shruti, smriti literature would be given priority. The *Manusmriti* provides explicit endorsement of caste systems; but, in cases of disagreement between this work and the Vedas or the Upanishads, the latter would be deemed more authoritative. While the *Bhagavadgita* (*Gita*) is not considered a component of shruti, it has great reverence and plays a key role in ancient Hinduism. The birth-based caste system is universally criticised and not supported, as we will soon see in detail. Therefore, when there is a conflict between the *Gita* and *Dharmashastras*, the *Gita* is given priority. The Apasthambha Dharmasutra appears to primarily target Hindu critics rather than Hindu believers, although it clearly endorses the practice of untouchability. While a few Hindus may be aware of it, it is not considered canonical in any kind. It was preserved as canonical, irrespective of whether it was discovered by any Hindu. Even though the goal of *dharmashastras* is to uphold the caste system, there is very little agreement among them on this matter. Contrary to the teachings of the *Dharmasutras*, *Sanmskara Ganapti* explicitly asserts that shudras are eligible for upanayana, as highlighted by Ambedkar. Jaimini, the author of *Purva Mimamsa*, asserts that shudras are capable of performing Vedic rituals, as he demonstrates. As per Vasant Moon's research (1990:198–99), Ambedkar also cites the *Katyayana Sruta Sutra* (V 28) and the *Bharadwaja Sruta Sutra* (V 28), which provide Shudras with the power to carry out Vedic rituals. Badari championed the cause of the Shudras and proposed the notion that all individuals, including shudras, possessed the entitlement to partake in Vedic sacrifices, despite conflicting assertions in other *Dharmashastras* (Kane 1990, p.56). *Manusmriti* provides explicit instructions on how to dismantle the fundamental structure of the caste system based on birth. Chapter 4, verse 176

explicitly states that if desire and money contradict dharma, they should be relinquished. Similarly, if dharma causes sadness or provokes fury among the people, it should be forsaken. The term '*dharma*' is predominantly employed to refer to ethical concepts rather than structured religious practices. According to Manusmriti, the principles of *varnas* and caste, known as *varna dharma*, might be disregarded if they cause hardship or outrage to the general population. As to Manusmriti, what is the precise definition of dharma? The question is answered by the opening verse of *Manusmriti* in chapter 2. The passage states that authentic dharma is characterised by adherence from the intelligent, the virtuous, and those who are devoid of strong emotions like as passion and hatred. It also emphasises the importance of dharma resonating with one's innermost feelings. During his speeches, Mahatma Gandhi frequently employed this poem. This passage suggests that the caste system, which is determined by birth, may be rejected according to the Manusmriti if the virtuous and intellectual individuals, who are devoid of wrath and passion, refuse to accept it because it does not resonate with their innermost feelings. We express our utmost gratitude to *Manusmriti* for her unwavering endorsement of the caste system. The *Purusha Sukta* (X 90) in the Rig Veda is a frequently cited literature that is used to support, praise, and glorify the caste system more often than the Manusmriti. The verses in question are as follows:

Yatpurusham vyadadhuhu
kritidha vyakalpayaln
Mukham kinmasya kow bahu
Ka uru pada uchyete// (11th verse)

How many portions did the deities carve Purusha into when they divided him? What did he have in his mouth? Which limbs did he possess? Two objects are purported to have comprised his quadriceps and ankles.

Brahmanosya nukhamasit
bahu rajanyah kritah/
uru tadasya yadvaishyah
padbhyam shudro ajayata// (12th verse)

The brahmana symbolises his lips, the rajanya represents his arms, the vaishya signifies his thighs, and the *shudra* represents his feet, measuring five feet and six inches.

Ambedkar thinks these lines to be interpolated since they deviate from the narrative framework of the remainder of the *Purusha sukta* and instead adopt a question-and-answer structure.

It is impossible to interpret the birth-and-status-based caste system in a manner that supports it, even if it is seen as an inherent component of the *Purusha sukta* rather than an addition. According to the statement, the four *varnas*, which are determined by the allocation of labour, are essential components of society, which is perceived as a cohesive entity. Currently, there is no evidence to establish their affiliation with any certain caste or *jati*. What is being referred to are the diverse occupations or tasks of the *varnas*, which are not always determined by their place of birth. Furthermore, neither of the sections contains any advising or prescriptive wording. The correlation between the physical manifestation of the primal purusha and a certain varna, together with the corresponding occupation or profession, strongly suggests the existence of a division of labour. The vaishyas and shudras were considered to provide economic and productive contributions, symbolised by the feet and thighs of the Purusha. However, this did not always mean that their work was subordinate. Similarly, it was thought that Kshatriyas sprung directly from the arms of Purusha due to their extensive engagement in battle and proficient use of weapons. The mantras were attributed to emanate from the lips of the Purusha, as the brahmins were entrusted with the task of transmitting the Vedas by oral tradition.

Perhaps the traditional perception of brahmins as '*bhojanapriyah*' (food enthusiasts) may have had a part. If the two contentious sections had aimed to rationalise a hierarchical structure, they may have instead posited that brahmins sprang from the top of the Purusha. The Brahmin priests sang the mantras by moving their mouths instead of their minds, a detail that the Vedic sage who composed the *Purusha sukta* could have observed. Therefore, it may

be concluded that the two verses of the *Purusha Sukta* eliminate the need for hatred.

Advocates of the view that the *Gita* supports casteism cite three specific verses as evidence. The pivotal verse in this context is verse 13 of chapter 4 when the Lord Krishna instructs Arjuna to...

“Chaturvarnyam maya srishtam Gunakarma vibhagashah”

I proposed the concept of categorising individuals into the four *varnas* according to their occupation and temperament. Verse 31 of chapter 2 employs the notion that Arjuna is a Kshatriya and that engaging in a just battle is the ultimate achievement in order to persuade him to participate in the conflict. In verse 47 of chapter 18, Lord Krishna emphasises once more that adhering to one's own dharma, regardless of its lack of merit, is superior to imitating the dharma of others. To have a comprehension of the next two, it is essential that you additionally peruse verse 13 of chapter 4. In his teachings, Lord Krishna explicitly refers to the four *varnas* by name and asserts that they were established based on *guna* (nature, aptitude, character) and karma (effort, action, vocation). There is no evidence to suggest that this individual's birth provides the foundation for the fourfold categorization. Instead, it is a categorization based on individuals' skills and passions, determining their respective roles and responsibilities. However, K M Panikkar vehemently opposes caste systems and views the one determined by birthplace as a grievous assault on caste. If Krishna had desired to base his division of work on birth, he might have substituted '*janma-karma-vibhagashah*' or '*jati-karma-vibhagashah*' for '*guna-karma-vibhagashah*', as noted by Kane (19:1635–36). His objective was clearly to '*guna*.' Furthermore, it aligns with Krishna's response to Arjuna's particular inquiry in *Uttaragita*.

Having resolved this matter, it can be stated that the dharma mentioned in the last two verses (XVIII 47 and XII 31) is also based on *guna* rather than birth. Even those inherent nature or qualities did not assign them to the warrior caste yet took part in the Mahabharata battle. The expectation for Arjuna to fight as a Kshatriya was not rooted in caste discrimination. Similarly, the guidance to 'adhere to one's own *svadharma*' simply implies directing your attention towards areas where you possess expertise and a relative advantage. Although she may possess the ability to outperform others in several domains, it would be more advantageous

for a brilliant individual to focus on her areas of expertise and flourish in them. Comparative advantage, rather than absolute advantage, governs international trade. Krishna advocated for the utilisation of the scientific and practical concept of comparative advantage to optimise the welfare of both individuals and society. His advice does not contain any elements that promote caste discrimination. Instead of perceiving comparative advantage as a static concept based on present or existing qualities, one may instead consider it dynamically, focusing on the achievable potential within this particular situation. Shambuka's narrative in the Ramayana is often cited as compelling proof of the strict enforcement of the caste system. Rama executed the *shudra* as a kind of retribution for neglecting his caste duties and practising penance, as suggested by the ministers. This tale is situated in *Uttara Kanda*, a distinct section of the Ramayana written by Valmiki. It concludes in Yuddhakanda with Rama's triumphant homecoming to Ayodhya. Renowned Sanskrit scholar P V Kane asserts that *Uttara Kanda* was unequivocally the result of subsequent interpolators (ibid: Vol 1, Part 1, p 389). During the period of interpolation, the varna system was in a state of disintegration and had been deeply rooted based on one's birth. Although Shambuka asserts that *rishis* only admitted those of 'low lineage' as disciples into ashrams, there exist several instances of individuals from lower lineages who ascended to the status of *rishis* themselves. The *Valmiki Ramayana* holds Rishi Matanga in high esteem (Upadhyay 2013, p.8). In contemporary society, his caste may have been subjected to social shame. Rama encountered him while traversing the forest as a gesture of deference. It is necessary to acknowledge the old Hindu canonical texts that denounce the caste system's inconsistency with the principle of determining an individual's character and social standing solely based on birth or familial lineage. According to Vedanta philosophy, the presence of the divine is inherent in all discourse. In verse 30 of chapter 6, Krishna states, 'The one who recognises my presence in all things and sees all things within me will never separate from me, nor will I be lost to them.' The words that come right before and after it in the *Gita* also convey the same idea. 'The yogi who is supreme is someone who assesses the joys and pains of others in the same way that he assesses his own' (from the sixth chapter). How may this idea potentially support and promote caste inequalities that are determined by one's birth? As per the Lord's teachings, individuals who possess the specific traits mentioned in chapter sixteen are genuinely godlike. He proceeds to elaborate on these characteristics

extensively. These characteristics encompass nonviolence, honesty, universal compassion, absence of wrath and animosity, selfless service and charity, humility, non-covetousness, forgiveness, and chapter 16, verses 1–3. Therefore, a high reproduction rate lacks significance. The Rig Veda emphasises the universal equality of all individuals. Furthermore, it articulates in a contemporary manner the idea that ‘no individual possesses superiority or inferiority over another.’ Everyone is simply a companion on the journey towards achieving achievement. Regardless of one’s caste, every individual is seen as equal in the eyes of God and is deserving of enlightenment (Bougle 1971, p.43).

*Ruchanm no dhehi brahmaneshu
Rucham rajasu naskridh Rucham
vishveshu shudreshu
Mayi dhehi rucha rucham || –Taittiriya Samhita V 7.6 3*

(Guide me towards enlightenment by enlightening our brahmanas, vaishyas, shudras, and commanders (kings)).

Opponents of Hinduism may find it unexpected that Hindu texts have supported humanism and liberalism by emphasising character and inherent value above biological attributes. Mahabharata conveys a significant message against the caste system that is determined by birth.

*Na kulam vrittahinasya Pramanainiti me natihi / Anteshwapij jatanam
Vrittameva vishishyate // – Mahabharata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 34, v 41.*

The absence of moral integrity in an individual renders their privileged social status devoid of significance. However, individuals with exemplary character may distinguish themselves from others, regardless of their socioeconomic status. The Mahabharata reinforces this concept over again:

*Yastu Shudro dame satye
dharme cha satatotthitah /
tarn brahmanamaham manye
vriten hi bhavet dvijah //
– Mahabharata, VanaParva, Chapter 216, vs 14–15*

If a *shudra* consistently upholds the virtues of chastity, honesty, and integrity, I perceive them as a brahmin. A person is born twice only via their own acts. In another conversation named *Uttaragita*, Krishna and Arjuna present a similar argument. Krishna responds directly to Arjuna's inquiry on the establishment of varna:

*Na jatih karanam tata
gunah kalyanakaranam /
Vritasthamapi chandalam
tarn devah brahmanam viduh //*

The statement suggests that birth itself is not the determining factor, but rather it is one's values that play a crucial role in determining one's well-being. Even if a Chandala adheres to the pledge, God regards them as a brahmana. The text above supports our interpretation of the three contentious verses previously provided by the Bhagavatgita. It is well recognised that in the eighth century, Shankaracharya humbled himself before a Chandala. When the second person began obstructing the first person, they were instructed to retreat. The Chandala was curious to ascertain whether the *Acharya's* acts aligned with his own philosophical convictions. He persisted, nonetheless, by inquiring, 'What is the reason for such a puzzling distinction between an untouchable and a brahmin?' Subsequently, Shankaracharya assumes a guru-like stance and starts a part of five poems known as the *Manisha Panchakam*. In the opening verse, he restates his *Advaita* philosophy and defines a guru as an individual who possesses knowledge of the Supreme, irrespective of their social status or caste. Guru Rityesh, Manisha, and their mother are in a dvijoastu. In the thirteenth century, Ramanujacharyas vehemently opposed the caste system. According to Madhvacharya's *Brahmasutra Bhashya* from the 13th century, those who are considered to be of the lowest social status (i.e., untouchables) yet are deeply religious, are entitled to access God's name and wisdom. The text 'Beware that ruin awaits him who contemplates inequity' (116th aphorism) is extracted from *Tirukkural*, a venerable Tamil scripture authored by Tiruvalluvar and revered as the *Tamil Veda* by the Tamil people. Once more, we encounter the following statement: 'Every individual is born with equal status; the variations among them arise from their individual behaviours.' (972 aphorisms) The *Vajrasuchika Upanishad* thoroughly examines and evaluates the caste system's foundation

on birth. The Upanishad's name, when translated literally, means 'Thunderbolt suggestive,' which aligns with its assertion that it eradicates the ignorance that leads to caste distinctions and spiritual isolation. The text consists of nine succinct paragraphs and is written in prose, the collection of *Upanishads* concludes with it. Radhakrishnan edited *The Principal Upanishads* (Radhakrishnan 1994, p.31), along with his translations. It serves as the basis around which the subsequent summary is constructed. The Upanishad adopts an argumentative tone by raising a number of questions in the second paragraph, one of which is: 'Who precisely is the brahmana (brahmin)?' Is he the fundamental essence of a person (*Jiva*)? Does he fabricate the entirety? Does an individual's categorization depend on their birth (*jati*)? Is he capable of instructing? Do one's actions determine their identity (*Karma*)? Does he have authority over symbolic rituals? Consequently, it offers distinct answers for each inquiry. Due to the unchanging nature of souls throughout different incarnations, a Brahmin cannot exist as an independent entity (Radhakrishnan 1994, p.38). Due to the same physical composition of all humans, he will never be able to completely occupy a human body. The nature of his offspring is uncertain, as several smart individuals, regardless of their place of birth, had remarkable qualities. Merely possessing information is insufficient to unveil his nature; numerous individuals who are not of the Brahmin caste, including Kshatriyas, have also attained the utmost levels of wisdom and knowledge, and Brahmins have never been characterised by an inherent inclination towards knowledge. Furthermore, while any individual is capable of performing manual labour, virtuous deeds cannot confer the status of being a Brahmin. Charity and religious events are inclusive and accessible to all individuals. Therefore, please provide me with a definition of a brahmin. Individuals who possess a level of self-awareness comparable to that of a gooseberry (*amalaka* fruit) resting on a palm are oblivious to distinctions in birth, unimpaired state, lack of restraint, and excessive self-importance. Furthermore, they function as the inherent substance of all things. The Upanishad concludes by emphasising the need to meditate on the Supreme while relinquishing all distinctions and egotism. This Upanishad serves as sufficient evidence to support the assertion that Hindu thinking and religion unequivocally reject caste structures, rendering more proof superfluous (Srinivas 1977, p.22).

Potential to Read Hindu Texts as Supportive of Humanism and Liberalism

An exhaustive analysis of the fascinating claim that Hindu texts lend support to humanism and liberalism is necessary. However, it is necessary to present it in connection to the central idea of the composition. An effective application of textual retelling in a study on the impact of caste systems on academics is to question prevailing notions of caste hierarchy and demonstrate how other interpretations could promote more inclusive intellectual traditions.

This article will examine how historical caste-based readings of Hindu literature have limited or dismissed liberal and humanistic interpretations to bolster its arguments. Thus, the part would be more relevant to the broader problem of marginalization and its impact on information systems in the event of such an occurrence. This section should naturally prompt a discussion on the influence of caste on the evolution of certain academic disciplines. Consider, for instance, how caste-based interpretations of Hindu texts have influenced the intellectual foundations of Indian culture and how this may have constrained scientific and literary critical analysis. The research will analyse particular instances when individuals from marginalised groups have encountered obstacles to achieving success as a result of caste in many domains. Consideration may also be given to how revisiting classic literature could stimulate novel study avenues that question the existing caste structure. As per the commitment stated in the abstract, the study would assess the influence of caste divisions on several academic fields. Both the "Canonical System and Caste" sections should make a direct contribution to this study. One such approach is to emphasize the significance of adopting a liberal or humanistic understanding of Hindu Scriptures as a basis for fostering more inclusive academic methodologies. By revisiting these works with a focus on character and inherent worth rather than biological characteristics, the research aims to advance more fair perspectives in philosophy, literature, and science. Furthermore, this would not only align with the abstract of the essay but also provide a direct resolution to the issues arising from caste.

Conclusion

By creating a hierarchical framework for the transmission and processing of knowledge, the ancient Indian caste system marginalised some while benefiting others. The intricate relationship between ancient Indian caste and intellectual life may be better understood because of the vast range of knowledge traditions that survived despite these limits. If we want to solve current problems and create a knowledge system that is more equitable and inclusive, we must first understand this historical background. The capacity of the caste system to endure and change is demonstrated during both the transmission and transformation stages. Although caste has been firmly established in India due to historical considerations, there have been notable, albeit varied, improvements brought about by recent reforms and movements. We must persistently work in the areas of social action, education, and law to eliminate the obstacles posed by caste. Building inclusive knowledge systems that value diversity and work towards social justice might pave the way for a more equitable society. Understanding the complex role of caste in Indian knowledge systems is essential for developing methods that may both recognise and address historical legacies while facilitating extensive and far-reaching transformation.

Notes

1. Dipankar Gupta says: The notion of untouchability did not arise until a considerable time after the Vedic era, even after the decline of the Mauryan empire. The Satapatha Brahmana advises that the leader or noble should share the same bowl as the commoner and vis. The term 'untouchable' does not appear in the Rig Veda. It was not until the second century AD that literature such as the Apastambha Dharmasutra mentioned this social group. See his *Interrogating Caste - Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*, (2000), Sage, New Delhi, p 1.

2. R. S. Sharma concurs with Dr B. R. Ambedkar's assertion that the Shudras did not constitute a separate social class until the later period of the Atharva Vedic era, which is the final Veda in chronological order. This occurrence likely occurred when the Purusha Sukta, which narrates the tale of their origin, was appended to the eleventh volume of the Rig Veda. Arvind Sharma (2000) states in his book *'Classical Hindu Thought'* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi), on page 142, that the source referred to is *'Sudras in Ancient India'* by R. S. Sharma, specifically on page 29.

3. Tocqueville's analysis, especially in *"Democracy in America,"* touches on the dynamics of power, equality, and social structures. His work is often used to discuss how democratic systems can either include or marginalize different voices. The relevance here is in understanding how democratic institutions may inadvertently silence minority voices or knowledge systems that do not align with the dominant narrative.

In *"Homo Hierarchicus,"* Dumont examines the Indian caste system, focusing on the hierarchical

nature of social organization. His work is critical for understanding how certain knowledge systems, particularly those associated with lower castes like Dalits, are marginalized within the broader social order. Dumont's framework helps explain how hierarchy enforces epistemic exclusion.

Lévi-Strauss, through structural anthropology, provides insight into how societies construct and preserve their cosmologies and knowledge systems. His work is important for understanding how Indigenous and tribal cosmologies are systematically marginalized or ignored in favour of Western scientific paradigms. These cosmologies, which often include valuable ecological knowledge, are crucial for understanding the diversity of knowledge systems that exist outside of mainstream narratives.

4. B.R. Ambedkar's critique of the caste system and its historical development is central to understanding the marginalization of Dalit knowledge. His work highlights how the caste system not only excludes Dalits from social and economic opportunities but also intellectual and educational domains, leading to the suppression of their knowledge systems.

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