

Racial discrimination in india

Sociology



Are the varnas (or, by extension the caste system in modern India) a form of racial discrimination? In India, as well as in other countries, there are a lot of important problems of social character. The situation is redoubled by the system of caste division which refuses the human dignity of some groups of people.

Speaking about varna-caste division we should pay attention to the main characteristics of the caste (these characteristics are closely connected with the main points of race discrimination): endogamy (marriages only within the caste members); hereditary membership (it is almost impossible to transfer to another caste); prohibition to have common prayers and meals with the representatives of other castes and to have physical contacts with them; firmly fixed place of each caste in the hierarchical society structure; limitation for profession eligibility; caste autonomy in social incaste regulation.

Every caste can be divided into into several sub-castes and that is why it is impossible to define even approximate number of social units. The official tendency to understate the sense of caste system caused the disappearance of corresponding column in the census of enumeration. The last information about caste number was published in 1931. The number of castes at that time was 3000. (Caste discrimination - a global problem)

Varna-caste division has deep historical roots. Class - varna - caste, the correlation of these phenomena is one of the most important and undecided problems in oriental studies. Varna as a social institute is of much more earlier origin than caste. It is very difficult to define the caste origin because of its heterogeneity. Castes are ethnical groups (for example, retrograde tribes, which are in number of Dalits), clans of warriors (Rajpoots),

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professional groups, religious sect, and communities. The castes are classified according to the hierarchy of Indian society, social and economical status is taken into consideration.

Indian government pays special attention to Dalits who are greatly discriminated nowadays. Though there are no discrimination in India which is based on the color of skin (as in the USA, for example), there is a discrimination which is based on origin. After many years of discrimination the Dalits began to resist. They organized their own Civil Rights movement. Inspired by the success of American Blacks they began to use the election institution, civil insubordination, and even sometimes they use violence to claim their rights. Dalits movement is very young and scattered. The term “dalit” itself covers many castes and tribes, many of which speak different languages. In contrast to racial segregation in Africa and sex discrimination in Moslem world, caste system did not attract so much attention of West, though the situation is changing now.

We must say that it will be very difficult to crush the caste system in India. Many Dalits tried to leave this system coming to Islam or Christianity. But varna-caste hierarchy is very strong and besides the difficulty is that the Dalits movement can destroy the liberties of upper castes. That is why the representatives are against of destroying the caste system because they can lose cheap labor. Civil Movement in India grows stronger and stronger. The most radical organisation at the movement is “Dalits Panthers” (like “Black Panthers” in the USA). Some Indians of upper castes worry greatly because they consider that there are many work positions for the lower castes. Dalits, on the contrary, say that many positions are not occupied because there are not enough dalits with corresponding qualifications.

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In conclusion we should say that the problem of racial discrimination is very actual today and speaking about human rights today we can not help remembering the experience of the United States of America. American society had to overcome many difficulties and problems before they got the rights and freedoms which are fixed not only in Constitution now, but are the part of self-consciousness. Indian government tries to do everything possible to reduce caste discrimination and make equal conditions for all people who live in India.

Works cited

Caste discrimination - a global problem

<http://www.icare.to/caucus/castecaucus.html>