Caste, Corruption, and Constitutional Dynamics: Unveiling Non-Materialistic Exploitation in India

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Corruption refers to the deliberate exploitation and misuse of authority by individuals in positions of power, to obtain personal benefits, whether in the form of financial gain or preferential treatment. It navigates the societal landscape where corruption isn't merely a transactional aspect but deeply ingrained in the social fabric through intricate processes of socialization. The study probes the origins of corruption, emphasizing its early roots in cultural practices and social norms. By unraveling the societal mechanisms at play, it sheds light on how corruption thrives within the framework of rituals, traditions, and societal expectations. From the perpetuation of dowry demands to exploitative practices in labor relations, temples, and economic structures, the paper uncovers the systemic nature of corruption woven into the fabric of Indian society. Furthermore, this work reframes the discourse around communalism, traditionally examined through religious lenses, by scrutinizing it from the vantage point of caste dynamics. It argues that communal tensions are often politically constructed through the 'othering' of certain religious communities, and reveals how these dynamics are intricately tied to the hierarchical caste system. The paper accentuates the need to comprehend the deeper, nuanced layers of Indian society beyond materialistic views of corruption. It advocates for a holistic understanding of the caste-based societal structures and the subtle mechanisms that perpetuate corruption, thereby fostering a more comprehensive approach to tackling these societal maladies within the constitutional framework of India.

Keywords: Religious Lense, Caste Dynamics, Temple, Constitutional Framework.

Introduction:

In the rich tapestry of India's socio-political landscape, the intersections of caste, corruption, and constitutional dynamics unfurl a complex narrative. Beyond the tangible manifestations of power and wealth, lies a deeper undercurrent of non-materialistic exploitation that shapes the country's societal fabric. This intricate interplay between historical caste structures, systemic corruption, and evolving constitutional frameworks unveils a profound saga of social, economic, and political complexities in India. Delving into this nexus unravels not just the overt power struggles but also the subtler dynamics that perpetuate inequality, wield influence, and mold the contours of Indian society. Transparency International characterizes corruption as the misuse of authority for personal benefit, encompassing various actions from officials soliciting bribes to politicians misappropriating public resources for favors to their allies or families (Transparency International, 2011). According to the UNDP, corruption significantly hampers human development (UNDP, 2008a) and obstructs the realization of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It undermines democratic structures by eroding institutions, legal frameworks, and public confidence in governments and leaders. While a single, universal definition of corruption is absent, for this research, corruption pertains to the exploitation of

entrusted power for personal profit, manifested through actions such as bribery, extortion, nepotism, money laundering, influence peddling, illicit accumulation of wealth, and patronage. The exact roots of casteism remain elusive, yet it is commonly believed to have taken shape approximately two thousand years ago [1].

The prevalent belief portrays corruption as an undefined adversary. However, a closer examination, considering both broader and more specific definitions, reveals that corruption is intrinsically linked to caste identity. By a broader definition, corruption embodies a mechanism through which a small segment of society withholds an array of rights and privileges from the majority, spanning human rights, economic, political, and social equality, occupational liberty, residential freedom, religious practices, and fraternity. Tracing this concept to ancient times prompts the inquiry: who constructed structures systematically denying these rights to the majority for centuries? Who monopolized governance, education, and production institutions? Undoubtedly, it was the so-called 'upper castes.' Leveraging their ritual and social standing, they fostered and perpetuated a corrupt social order characterized by inequality and a lack of liberty and fraternity. In the colonial period under British rule, this trend persisted. Highlighting the Brahmins' multifaceted exploitation in 1873, Phooley depicted their role not only as priests but also as governmental officers monopolizing lucrative positions. Their influence extended to village police, money lending, administration, and various government departments, fostering nepotism, bribery, and corruption due to the dominance of a single caste in governance. Numerous theories speculate on the inception of India's caste system. Among these, one prominent notion suggests that casteism originates from divine sources and extends from the Varna system. According to this traditional perspective, the four varnas are believed to have emerged from the body of Brahma, forming the basis of caste divisions [1]. The racial theory suggests that the Sanskrit term "varna," which translates to "color," is equated with the concept of "caste." Within this framework, the political theory contends that casteism functions as a strategic creation engineered by the Brahman caste. This construction aims to fortify and maintain their supremacy at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy [2].

In earlier times, the caste system was organized around occupational roles, assigning specific titles based on professions. For example, those involved in warfare were labeled as "Kshatriyas," while individuals in subordinate roles were termed "shudras," among other classifications. However, in modern society, the caste system has transformed into a hereditary institution, transitioning from its occupational roots to a more rigid, inherited structure [3]. The origins of the caste system find their earliest documented records in the Vedas, ancient Sanskrit texts dating back to around 1500 BCE. Furthermore, insights into the caste system can also be gleaned from the Bhagavad Gita, a literature believed to have been composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE. These early sources of casteism primarily mention four fundamental castes, providing foundational glimpses into the system's inception [4].

The term "Brahmin" denotes a socially and intellectually esteemed group within Hindu society, historically linked with the highest caste as clergy members. The Kshatriya caste embodies individuals identified as warriors and nobility. The Vaisya social class encompasses individuals involved in agricultural practices, trade, and craftsmanship. The Shudra caste predominantly includes those engaged in labor as tenant farmers and servants [5]. Indeed, Indian society encompasses an extensive array of castes, sub-castes, and communities, numbering in the thousands. It's crucial to recognize that the caste system extends beyond the Hindu population in India. Other religious communities within the country also organize themselves into caste-based structures, reflecting a similar pattern observed in the Hindu society [6]. The introduction of Islam into the Indian subcontinent led to a social stratification among Muslims, giving rise to distinct classes such as Pathan, Sheikh, Syed, Qureshi, and various others. These classifications delineated social hierarchies within the Muslim community in the region [7].

Corruption involves individuals in public office leveraging their positions for personal gain. This phenomenon encompasses both materialistic and non-materialistic dimensions. Non-materialistic corruption, although present, often evades detection due to the prominence of materialistic corruption in our nation. The prevalence of materialistic corruption tends to divert attention away from these subtler forms of corrupt behavior [8]. There's a widespread belief that India's caste system fosters non-materialistic forms of corruption, including favoritism and preferences based on caste. Post-independence, India's founding leaders collectively decided to establish a democratic, socialist, and secular nation. As per the ideological framework of these leaders, a distinct separation was envisioned between the realms of religion and state [9]. The Constitution of India significantly addresses the eradication of untouchability and associated caste-based discrimination, establishing these principles as fundamental rights. Alongside these provisions, the Indian Constitution allows for affirmative action to uplift socially disadvantaged sections of society [10].

Caste-Based Discrimination Contributes to the Proliferation of Corrupt Practices:

Absolutely, Tajfel's social identity theory emphasizes how the mere act of categorizing individuals into groups, even arbitrarily, can spark in-group favoritism. This bias represents a tendency to display more positive attitudes and responses toward individuals within our own defined in-groups while showing less favorable or sometimes negative responses toward those perceived as part of out-groups. Such categorizations, when rooted in factors like caste, foster groups and can significantly influence social behaviors and interactions [11]. In India, where the population exceeds 1.3 billion, various castes form a stratified social structure. Individuals associated with a particular caste often display a preference for assisting others within their own caste over those from different castes. This tendency is notable among influential figures who frequently extend support or opportunities predominantly to members of their own caste [12]. Offering assistance to individuals is indeed a commendable act, but it's crucial that such aid remains impartial, and free from any biases based on caste or religion. In India, numerous reported cases highlight instances of both religious and caste-based favoritism, underscoring the need for fair and unbiased assistance across all sections of society [13].

Caste favoritism, while not always directly linked to materialistic corruption, can significantly fuel non-materialistic forms of corruption within the societal framework of India. This insidious influence is evident through various avenues within the caste system. One prominent aspect lies in the preferential treatment accorded based on caste affiliations, creating unequal access to education, employment opportunities, and social privileges. Such biases perpetuate a system of social exclusion, marginalizing individuals and communities solely due to their caste identity. Moreover, this form of corruption manifests in the systematic denial of fundamental rights and benefits to certain castes, amplifying inequalities across the social spectrum [14]. Additionally, biased representation or decision-making rooted in caste affiliations in social, economic, or political realms further entrenches these non-materialistic corruptions. These multifaceted expressions of corruption underscore the enduring impact of caste dynamics, obstructing the path towards social justice and equality within Indian society [15]. Selecting a candidate exclusively on their caste despite two candidates having similar qualifications can be deemed a form of corruption, albeit a non-materialistic one. Similarly, offering preferential treatment or extra support to someone in a professional environment based on their caste constitutes a corrupt practice. Furthermore, including caste as a prerequisite in the hiring process presents another instance of non-materialistic corruption within the system. These actions underscore how caste-based considerations corrupt fair practices and hinder equitable opportunities in workplaces [16].

Upper Caste Dominance in Indian Politics:

Caste and personality cults have had a profound influence on Indian politics since its inception [13]. However, it is the so-called upper castes that have predominantly benefited from

caste's social and cultural clout within the upper echelons of Indian politics. From independence in 1947 to the last election for the 16th Parliament, with rare exceptions, they have held sway, whether in government or opposition. Figures like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajeev Gandhi, and their successors have dominated Indian politics. The saying goes that the Congress (I) party can only survive under someone from the Nehru-Gandhi family. Even when the opposition gained power, leaders like Morarji Desai and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, both Brahmins, became Prime Ministers. Presently, a right-winger supported by the Rashtriya Swaymsewak Sangh (RSS), committed to Brahmanical values, leads as Prime Minister, with a cabinet dominated by upper castes.

The dominance of upper castes isn't just in individuals; their social and symbolic capital influences their daily functions. For instance, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, symbolically honored by Brahmins in a yajna celebrating his position, highlights the Brahmins' symbolic capital [16]. Similarly, Nehru's swearing-in ceremony, described by Anderson, exemplifies this symbolism [13]. Nehru's leadership saw Brahmins occupying most of the Government of India offices. Observably, Brahmin dominance expanded further in the second generation after Nehru's era, especially with Indira Gandhi's tenure. After her, P.V. Narsimha Rao, a Brahmin, dominated Indian politics with Sonia Gandhi's blessing. Subsequently, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, another Brahmin, led a cabinet again dominated by upper castes. Despite a Sikh Prime Minister, India was primarily led by Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi. The 67 years post-independence reveal upper caste dominance in Indian politics. How can numerically minority castes hold such national political sway while numerically dominant castes are sidelined? The answer lies in the structural design of caste and the social, cultural, and symbolic capital held by the upper castes despite their numerical minority.

Historically, upper castes have enjoyed ritual privileges and, in modern times, excelled in institutions introduced by the British—judiciary, bureaucracy, industry, academia, and media. Networks developed within these institutions, locally and globally, further boosted their status. This amalgamation of high ritual and secular status from structural location gives upper castes an advantage. They use this leverage to access administrative functionaries and political organizations, earning respect and influence. In contrast, lower castes face social stigma and exclusion in both realms, leaving them without social capital. Their political achievements are ignored or negatively portrayed. The media, primarily dominated by upper castes, magnifies the acts of upper caste leaders while often neglecting or downplaying the achievements of numerically dominant castes. Consequently, the latter cannot establish a personality cult cutting across caste lines, unlike their upper caste counterparts.

Engaging in Labor Avoidance Based on Caste Distinctions:

The social psychology of belongingness to one's caste fosters various mechanisms that contribute to the proliferation of corruption. One frequently observed phenomenon is the inclination of Indian voters to show favoritism toward political parties claiming to represent their specific castes [17]. The influence of the caste system within electoral processes, whether direct or indirect, presents a substantial barrier to national development and effective governance. The politicization of caste has notably impeded progress in both development initiatives and the functioning of efficient governance structures [18]. Political parties that anchor their strategies around caste often depend on the caste system, where individuals from particular castes use their caste affiliations to enter politics. The interrelation between caste and politics holds substantial importance for both realms. This process can be likened to a dog chasing its tail. The rise of a dominant caste happens when a particular caste group's activities become intertwined with politics or predominantly revolve around political affairs [19]. A dominant caste signifies a social group that holds numerical superiority over other castes, consequently wielding substantial influence and control within a society. The political strength of this group stems from its numerical prevalence. When a political party based on caste secures

power, it becomes vulnerable to the sway of caste dynamics in shaping national policies. Policies, initiatives, programs, and statements are crafted with a mindful consideration of caste-related factors [20]. The hereditary caste system ingrains specific ideologies in children from birth, molding their socialization and subsequently shaping their political perspectives, whether they belong to a high or low caste. The origins of caste-based politics can be traced to the transition of power from British elites to Indian elites post-independence [21]. The transfer of power happened without significant changes to the existing social and economic structure. Notably, leaders within the independence movement predominantly hailed from the upper castes, affording them a relatively advantageous position to assert authority. This scenario has played a role in perpetuating caste-based politics, posing ongoing challenges for dismantling this system and perpetuating the struggle against it [22].

This paper examines the multifaceted impact of casteism, highlighting its role in promoting corruption, obstructing national cohesion, undermining democratic principles, hindering economic development, and disregarding individuals' skills and effectiveness. The analysis includes a case study of the term "Pradhan," signifying a position of leadership or authority in various contexts. Furthermore, the study delves into the Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), an initiative launched by the Prime Minister of India on August 15, 2000. This program aimed to enhance rural connectivity by constructing roads within villages [23]. The mentioned initiative, a fully sponsored program by the central government, aims to offer high-quality, all-weather road access to previously isolated settlements. Recent scholarly investigations into contract allocations under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) have unveiled a substantial correlation between contract awards and caste considerations [24]. There's a suggestion that the probability of a contractor securing a contract rises when both the MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) and the district collector share the same surname. This correlation appears to inflate the construction costs of these roads, indicating an increase ranging from 7 to 12 percent. A publication in the Journal of Development Economics from Princeton University reveals that between 2001 and 2013, state legislators unjustly awarded contracts worth 3592 crores (540 million USD) for rural road and building projects to contractors of their own caste [25]. The allocation of contracts, identified as unfair, often results in escalated costs, and in some cases, evidence suggests that road construction might not have aligned with the 2011 census data. This serves as an illustrative example showcasing how India's prevalent caste system fosters the spread of corrupt practices. Using caste as a decisive factor in securing contracts diminishes the possibilities for efficient governance and advancement [26].

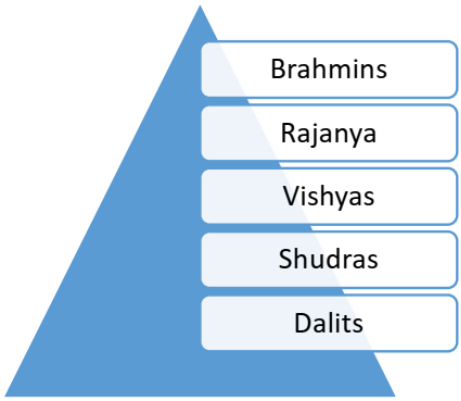

Figure 1: Social Order of Hindus

Constitution and Casteism:

The roots of the Indian caste system stretch back to ancient texts, particularly within the Hindu scriptures, which discuss varnas categorized into four distinct classes. According to religious doctrine found in the Rig Veda, an ancient Hindu text, it's suggested that the primal man, "purush," self-destructed to establish a societal structure. This process formed varnas

associated with specific parts of the primal man's body. In the traditional Hindu social hierarchy, Brahmans considered the highest class, originated from the deity's head; Kshatriyas, warriors, were created from the deity's hands; Vashyas, associated with commerce and agriculture, emerged from the thighs; and Shudras, seen as the lowest class, were formed from the feet. However, the formalization of the caste system during colonization was primarily influenced by the British. The conceptualizations of caste, as commonly understood today, were shaped during the colonial era under British rule. Susan Bayly, an anthropologist from Cambridge University, argues that during the colonial period, most people in the region, despite residing in what's known as the Hindu heartland, didn't necessarily attribute significant importance to caste distinctions. The structures and beliefs integral to the conventional caste system started taking shape in the early 18th century. India's post-independence era saw intellectuals drafting the Constitution with explicit provisions in the fundamental rights section, emphasizing the prohibition of discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth (as in Article 15) and the abolition of untouchability. The Indian Constitution does not condone or support casteism. While reservations exist to address social and economic disadvantages faced by some segments, this doesn't entail exploitative discrimination based on caste. Instead, it emphasizes the constructive concept of equality. If a specific segment faces a relative disadvantage, the state has a duty to enact measures to improve their circumstances. An illustrative example clarifies this: A financially disadvantaged mother with two children can provide only one glass of milk daily for each child. When one child falls ill and needs more nutrition, a prudent mother might temporarily allocate more milk to the ailing child from the healthy one until recovery. Similarly, India, post-independence, consciously allocated privileges to certain castes to aid their socio-economic progress. The Constitution mirrored these considerations. It advocates protective discrimination, not exploitative discrimination, aiming to safeguard historically oppressed segments pre-independence. Understanding the Constitution is crucial for Indian citizens to deter endorsing corrupt practices rooted in caste affiliations.

Corruption's Root in Socialization: Impact on Indian Society:

Individuals don't simply become corrupt overnight; it's a result of prolonged socialization within their society and cultural framework. In Hindu society, there are established norms and practices from childhood that inadvertently encourage corrupt behavior. People are not only conditioned to exploit institutionalized practices but are also molded to willingly partake in them without objection. For instance, observing parents making offerings to priests during home or temple rituals ingrains the idea of financial gestures being a part of religious practice. Children are taught to make offerings to deities during exams or important life events. This pattern extends further, such as the ingrained demand for dowry in marriages, the reluctance to pay laborers what they deserve, the accumulation of wealth in temples without using it for public welfare, and the exploitation by moneylenders through exorbitant interest rates. Even within corrupt practices, there exists a societal mechanism of seeking absolution through religious rituals like offerings, fasting, chanting, and bathing in holy rivers.

This ingrained corruption is not only a socialization process but also a feature of festivals like Diwali where elites exchange significant gifts, perpetuating a culture of favoritism and bribery. Consequently, Indian structures and societal processes inadvertently train individuals to engage in corrupt practices later in life, normalizing the giving and taking of bribes. Additionally, the analysis of communalism in India, traditionally viewed through a religious lens, gains a deeper perspective when examined through the prism of caste and its structure. Scholars argue that communalism isn't an inherent process but rather a product of competitive politics. It's essentially a mechanism where an 'other' is invented within society, often driven by religious pretexts. In India, this 'othering' has historically been constructed around the notion of a particular religion, such as Islam, originating from outside the country. Identifying the forces behind the construction of this 'other,' it becomes evident that the deprived and excluded castes

at the bottom of the caste hierarchy lack the cultural and symbolic capital to create this idea of the 'other.'

The upper castes, particularly the Brahmins, wield significant influence and have historically constructed this 'other' on the basis of land ownership and religious lineage. While the upper castes can ideologically create this divide, they lack the numerical strength to confront it. Hence, they seek collaboration from lower castes who, excluded from mainstream acceptance within the Hindu social order, perceive an opportunity to assert their belonging. Additionally, geographical proximity and shared economic statuses often lead to collaboration between lower castes and minorities, resulting in communal violence. As this violence spreads from urban to rural areas, the relationship between caste and communalism grows stronger, often orchestrated by the upper castes leveraging their weapons and networks. In essence, understanding the caste perspective is crucial to comprehending communalism in India.

Conclusion:

In summary, the analysis presented strongly indicates that casteism in India contributes to non-materialistic corruption, hindering the country's socio-economic advancement and impeding effective governance. To achieve prosperity, addressing non-materialistic casteism and corruption is paramount, necessitating decisive actions to mitigate their adverse effects. Additionally, Indian political parties must grasp the harmful impact of caste-based politics and refrain from its practice to foster national progress and effective governance. The Indian Constitution advocates affirmative action to address socio-economic disparities and uplift marginalized segments, emphasizing that it does not endorse exploitative discrimination. It's crucial for citizens to understand this distinction. For the nation's improvement, individuals must abstain from non-materialistic practices like casteism and corruption. This collective effort is vital for India's betterment.

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