

Caste—Key Ideas

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Chapter One:

- Introduction to current situation: Election of 2016, climate change, pandemic etc.

Chapter Two

- Caste system defined—artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking that sets one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on basis on ancestry and often immutable traits.
- These traits are ascribed life-and-death meaning in hierarchy favoring dominant caste whose forebears designed it.
- Uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep groups apart, distinct, and in assigned places
- 3 systems throughout history—India, Nazi Germany, and US.4
- Caste system justified as divine will originating from sacred texts or presumed laws of nature and reinforced throughout culture and handed down through generations
- It's about power—which groups have it and which do not.
- In US caste system based on race
- Caste and race are neither synonymous nor mutually exclusive. Race is the visible agent of the unseen force of caste
- Caste is fixed and rigid. Race is fluid and superficial, subject to periodic redefinition to meet needs of dominant caste in US

Chapter Three:

- Similarity with system of outcasts in India—example that when MLK was in India, he was recognized by the Dalits as an outcast which was a startlingly revelation for him but one that felt appropriate.

Chapter Four:

- Slavery was reinforced by self-interested interpretation of Bible as to the hierarchy . “Caste makes distinctions where God has made none.” Charles Summer
- Only after migrating to US to Europeans become “white” as opposed to Polish, Swedish, Italian.
- “No one was white before he/she came to America” James Baldwin

Chapter Five

- Each of us is in a container of some kind.
- In a caste system the label on the container is often out of sync with the contents, putting many people on the wrong “shelf” which hurts many people and institutions in ways we may not always know.

Chapter Six:

- Idea of race—relatively recent phenomenon in human history.
- Term *Caucasian* came from a German professor of medicine, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach who thought that a skull he found in the Caucasus Mountains of Russia was the most beautiful, well-proportioned skull he owned. He gave the group he belonged to (European) that name.
- The mapping of human genome has shown us that the race is not real at all yet it has become accepted as a sacred truth. Almost like a superstition.
- Racism has often been reduced to a feeling which when conflated with prejudice becomes a means of judging whether or not a person is a good person or not.
- Nazi Germany studied the US's rules surrounding race to adopt to their plans yet found that the definitions of the US were too strict. The "one drop" rule in the US was too strict. They used other determinations, e.g. if someone was ¼ Jewish, then they were Jewish. Or if someone had a Jewish grandparent, e.g.
- Caste predates the notion of race and still defines structure and ranking.
- Racism—any action or institution that mocks, harms, assumes or attaches inferiority or stereotype on basis of social construct of race is racism.
- Casteism is any action or structure that seeks to limit, hold back, or put someone in a defined ranking, seeks to keep someone in their place by elevating or denigrating that person on the basis of their perceived category is casteism.
- Casteism is the investment in keeping the hierarchy as it is in order to maintain your own ranking, advantage, privilege, or to elevate yourself above others or keep others beneath you.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the only theologians to publicly denounce Hitler and who died in prison during the war of mystery circumstances, said, "Silence if the face of evil is evil itself."
- In US racism and casteism frequently occur at same time, or overlap or figure into same scenario.
- The invisibility of casteism is what gives it power and longevity.

Chapter Seven: Eight Pillars of Caste: Pillar One-- Divine Will and Laws of Nature

- US and India are oldest and largest democracies in human history, both built on caste systems undergirded by their reading of the sacred texts of their respective countries
- These tenets—interpreted by those who put themselves on high would become the divine and spiritual foundation for the belief in a human pyramid willed by God, a Great Chain of Being that would be sculpted in the centuries
- The first pillar of Caste is formed by these beliefs that it is Divine Will and the Laws of Nature that organizes principles inherent in any cast system

Chapter Eight: Pillar Two: Heritability

- You were born to a certain caste and remained in that caste, subject to the high status or low stigma it conferred, for the rest of your days and into the lives of your descendants."
- Caste conferred by status of mother which went against centuries of English tradition of status being conferred by father
- Class is different from caste and in that class can be acquired through hard work and ingenuity but there is no way to work one's way out of caste.

Pillar Three: Endogamy and the control of Marriage and Mating

- Endogamy means restricting marriage to people within the same caste.
- 41 out of 50 states passed laws making intermarriage a crime.

Pillar Four: Purity vs. Pollution

- White is pure—color is dirty.
- Delineated a hierarchy of trace amounts to preserve whiteness
- In US one drop of African, Asian, or Native American tainted the “so-called purity”
- Led to restrictions of Immigration Act of 1924 and Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
- Exclusion was used to justify exclusion.

Pillar Five: Occupational Hierarchy: the Jatis and the Mudsill

- In housebuilding, the mudsill is the bottom that everything else rests on. Caste was used to keep people of color assigned to menial duties because that requires a low order of intellect which Sen James Henry Hammond of South Carolina said, “requires the very mud-sill of society.” Aka people of color
- People of color restricted from many professions and even from the effort of trying to better one’s self, e.g. learning to read.
- African-Americans were allowed to perform which has led to the entrée of blacks into sports, entertainment,

Pillar Six: Dehumanization and Stigma

- Dehumanization is standard in creating an out-group against which to pit an in-group and it is a monumental task. You must declare another human being as not human and that takes programming and energy to reinforce the stigma associated with that
- Dehumanizing a group and you have completed the work of dehumanizing any single person within it and have effectively quarantined them from the masses you choose to elevate.

Pillar Seven: Terror as Enforcement, Cruelty as Means of Control

- Only way to keep an entire group in their artificially fixed place of below all others is through terror and violence, psychological and physical, to preempt resistance before it can be imagined.
- Evil asks little of the dominant caste but silent complicity
- Such terror even forces members of the subordinate caste to do the “dirty work” of enforcement, e.g. Jews in concentration camps forced to discipline their peers, black overseers who were forced to “control” others

Pillar Eight: Inherent Superiority versus Inherent Inferiority

- There is a presumption and continual reminder that there is inborn superiority of the dominant caste and inherent inferiority of subordinate.

- Understood that one group was superior and inherently deserving of the best in a given society and those who were deemed lowest were deserving of their plight.

Chapter Ten and Eleven: Central Miscasting and Precarity of Highest Rung

- Famous experiment of “Blue Eyes Brown Eyes” were kids learned discrimination
- People often miscast by color of skin with being white is higher. You can take away all possessions but can’t take away whiteness.
- When people live with assumptions long enough, they no longer need to be spoken.
- By adulthood most Americans have been exposed to enough negative messages about marginalized groups that 80% have unconscious biases.
- Whites experience “ dominant group status threat.” –fear of losing their power and what they believe they are entitled to.
- If someone of lower caste is promoted, the power group feels as though this is a demotion of oneself, thus equality feels like a demotion.
- “Who are you if there is no one to be better than?”
- Caste system makes a captive of everyone within it.

Chapter Twelve: Scapegoat to bear the Sins of the World

- A scapegoat caste has become necessary for collective wellbeing of castes above it and smooth function of the caste system.
- Dominant groups cast out lower groups as worse aspects of society.

Chapter Thirteen: Insecure Alpha and Purpose of an Underdog

- Those born to dominant caste (alphas) believe they have the innate capacity or deservedness to be leaders.
- Concurrently, those of lower caste supposedly do not have those skills.
- Tragedy because there are many overlooked alphas from marginalized groups whose talents have gone untapped.
- Tragedy for all of humankind.

Chapter Fourteen: Intrusion of Caste in Everyday Life

- US has history of controlling and overriding rightful role of lower caste parents to control their children e.g. selling off parents from children, removing children to boarding schools, etc.
- People of color have to deal with daily intrusions of the belief of caste and inferiority on airplanes, stores, even walking down the street.

Chapter Fifteen: Urgent Necessity of a bottom Rung

- Greatest threat to caste system is when those of lower caste succeed. Undermines core belief upon which caste system is constructed.
- Greatest backlash and punishment comes when someone from lower caste is successful—Ida B. Wells, Obama, Satchell Paige, etc.
- Our culture plays up stereotype that affirm lowness and minimize indications to the contrary in t.v. ads, articles of criminality, lack of news of “lower caste” successes, etc.

Chapter Sixteen: Last Place Anxiety, Packed in a Flooding Basement

- “The stigmatized stratify their own because no one wants to be in last place.” anthropologist J. Loran Matory.
- Caste helps explain the otherwise illogical phenomenon of African-Americans or women or other marginalized people who manage to rise to authority only reject or diminish their own.

Chapter Seventeen—through Chapter Twenty-Six: Early Front Lines of Caste

- Caste system thrives on dissensions and inequality, envy, and false rivalries that build up a world of perceived scarcity.
- One does not have to be in dominant caste to do its bidding.
- Caste system is the ability of a group of people to follow one man who hates (Hitler)
- The enemy is not one man—it is us, all of us
- Caste system is upheld by its own inertia and by the superior caste’s interest in upholding it.
- Caste is more than rank, it’s a state of mine that holds everyone captive
- Caste traps us in someone else’s definition of who they should be
- It comes in whispers and billboards
- Keeps people separated with written and unwritten codes
- The stress of the caste system causes health concerns for those of “lower status.”
- President Obama was significant departure from the American Caste System
- No aspect of American life can be fully understood without considering caste and embedded hierarchy
- Many believe Trump was elected because he channeled insecurities and disaffection among white voters who feared losing status.
- Politics is embedded in the caste system .

Chapter Twenty-Seven and Twenty Eight: Symbols of Caste

- US removing confederate flag from state flags
- Removal of statues of Civil War Confederate leaders.
- Do we honor courage or evil?
- Credibility and intellect are not restricted to one group

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Price we pay for a Caste System

- Caste system builds rivalry and distrust and lack of empathy to one’s fellows.
- We highest incarceration rate of A/A in the world
- Life expectancy lower than other developed countries
- Mass shootings

A World without Caste

- Tyranny of caste is that we are judged on the very things we cannot change.
- Once awakened, we then have a choice. We can be born to the dominant caste but choose not to dominate.

- We can be born to a subordinated caste but resist the box others force upon us. All of us can sharpen our powers of discernment to see past the external and to value the character of a person rather than demean those who are already marginalized or worship those born to false pedestals.

A world without caste would set everyone free.