

‘Surname’; An Instrument of Caste Discrimination

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INTRODUCTION

There is a close relation exist between our names and identities And this relationship is more critical under social traditions and problematic in the Indian context that has caste in the foundations of the sociocultural architecture and where the names, association with this caste element renders the identities in a more sophisticated form. A minute observation of the names can be useful in understanding the various elements in the composition of the names and little understanding of the societies, culture and the history of the place can facilitate the analyses of the names particularly surnames and their relation with the identity and its place in the social hierarchy. While moving on the path of evolution, rationality, democracy and modernity, we have abandon habits, practices, traditions, infect emotions that were repugnant to this path of change, but it’s unfortunate to observe that many of these customs are still the part of our societies and psyche and it is ridiculous that the custodial of the equality, liberty and fraternity are handicapped by the reality of the democracy (majority) and social configurations . this continuation of social norms have continue the discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion on the bases of caste. The use of the surnames in the names is such tradition, that has close relation with caste discrimination, and ironically, it exists and proliferates in the society, and being promoted by the state. Only in the names of customs and social compulsions. One of the major cause of the continuation of any discrimination is that we are ignorant and unaware of the process and its outcomes. The centuries long traditions of discrimination have made them comfortable and these discriminatory norms have incorporated all sections of the society and the hierarchy have forced the entire society for the participation in the discrimination and our caste hierarchy has provided opportunity at each level for the elimination of the lower sections of the society, Accept those who are at the bottom of the pyramid. The work is intended to look into the caste discriminations by devising the surnames in the Indian context. It is argued that there is an inherent relationship between the caste and the surnames and there by surnames and occupations, surnames and regions, and so on and so forth with keeping the fact in mind that the many surnames are caste neutral such as Kumar, Pal, Ram, Lai, Chand and Nath.¹ The discrimination on the bases of surnames has been observed in the governance and administration, recruitment and selection procedures, marital relationships and other incidences belong to the daily life and the social functioning.

¹Tulsi Patel, Stigma Goes Backstage: Reservation in Jobs and Education, Indian Sociological Society. P9

It is important to note that the discrimination through surnames happens at the mental level and arrangements are such that these discriminations cannot be pointed with an evidence, therefore, the experiences are selected for the analyses and it is facilitated or supported with the observations.

The caste is not a secret or invisible social structure in India, and it is visible through customary practices, life styles, profession, and at the topmost by the self-declaration by the individual and communities. Caste can be looked more clear when seen by the political lance's on the slides of reservation. However, the enshrined inequality principles of constitution do not recognized caste and any discrimination on the bases of caste is further penalized through various acts and policy directive principles of governments. But everything that guaranteed by the constitution and facilitated by the statutory measures may not match the ground realities. And media reports surveys, agitations, and contemporary incidences clearly shows that caste discrimination is the reality of the Indian society regardless of the education level, urban and rural setup, regions, and religions. If caste discrimination is a codified offence² then it is important to understand how does it happen with in the political or administrative circles. When the castes are rearranged in the general, OBC, SC, and SC categories, actual caste are not being entertain in governance and when there is a flexibility of becoming a part of general category then how does a few particular castes prevails over the other in the selection process. The analyses of the names can answer this question and the surname can be an instrument of understanding the process of discrimination or the way in caste operates in society in general and governance in particular. If we except the relation between caste and surname then we can also understand caste discrimination association with the prefix and suffix of the name. surname is the most easy way to check the differences and the similarities between social status, financial strength, religion, culture, and other values for various purposes. It is also cause of invoking solidarity among individuals and communities. One can easily disqualify somebody in the marital selection just by looking at the surname and wise-versa. The surname is sufficient to decide whether somebody is eligible for entrance in a temple and other religious structures. Similarly, a particular surname can put somebody in trouble while traveling abroad.

The surnames and its association with caste cannot be over looked, in the study aimed at the caste discrimination and its process in the Indian society. Reading surname as the discriminatory device it is essential that we understand the relationship between different surnames and castes and use of these aliases in the social and administrative framework. There are two major opinion in regard to the relationship between caste and surnames. The first school of thought denies the inherent relationship between these two and its supports the argument by providing the historical facts that shades light on the origin of the surnames. According to ethnographic surveys that are conducted in the colonial and post-colonial period for the administrative purposes, shows that surnames are not rigidly interlinked with the caste as many of them are associated with the clan, region, occupation, and even the household items etc. moreover, surnames has suffix and prefixes and have no uniformity with in the family and caste as people uses the surnames as per their choice that has various interests associated with it.³ For example: there are many castes which are at the lower level in the caste hierarchy, do not prefer the traditional surnames to avoid inferiority associated with the particular caste and they better prefer the "caste neutral" surnames in order to deflect discrimination. But it is worth noting that this flexibility of choosing surnames is popular or its

2 Constitution of India, part iii, article 15,16

3Hein Streefkerk, *Industrial Transition in Rural India: Artisans, Traders, and Tribals in South Gujarat*, Popular Prakashan, 1985. P 99

practiced in so-called lower castes of by the individual and the groups those who suffer from caste discrimination or who have inferiority complex.

The second school of thought though recognized the fluidity between caste and surnames up to aslighter extend but it firmly believe in the close and necessary relation between both. Looking in the traditional caste structure and their respective³ relationship with the region, occupation or customs, the surname is compulsorily deemed in the association of caste and this view do not ratify the convertibility of the surnames. Both of these conclusions are basically based on the ideology of the scholar and a quick reading of the evolution of the Indian caste and its relationship with the geography, profession of social practices is sufficient to trace the relation between Varna's, Gotras, Castes, Surnames occupations etc.⁴ any denial to the this relationship between caste and surnames would be an attempt to overlook the reality and to interpret the sociocultural facts, for manufacturing evasive categories of analyses.

The customary usages of surname in society can be considered for a while as mentalities do not change overnights, but this is not the case with constitutional and legal actions. The state that is duty bound to indemnify equality at least up to the constitutional limits, paradoxically the same state is using the surnames for administrative purposes. The main argument in the support of using surnames for administrative purposes claims that, the state uses the surnames to avoid or minimize the duplication of the identities and it is the most easy and accessible criteria of identification and categorization. But if one have basic knowledge of data handling and understanding of very basic database schematic, can easily challenge this logic. It must be understood that one cannot rely only on the name and surname for identification as duplication of names and surnames generally occurs and we therefore use other information for making unique identities, for example date of birth, parents name, address etc. combination of these elements makes impeccable IDs that are more transparent and trustworthy. Moreover the use of photograph and biometrics are alone sufficient for producing unique identities. The provision of separate column for First name, Middle name and Last name is only helps if there are surname related queries have to be devised for purposes not related to data management or filtering duplication and establishing unique IDs but for other political interests and ideology of preferentialism. The recognition of the surnames in the administrative procedures is an easy tool of discrimination in the hands of those who are aware of the relation between the surname and the caste and biases towards a particular caste or community. The signature of the surname on the paper invoke solidarity among the people sharing the similar surname and caste and regions through these surnames. Discrimination happens at the level of the interviews and it is the pure affair based on the reason of the man in charge. And therefore it is almost impossible to identify such discrimination in the society in general and in governance in particular.

The caste discrimination is not limited to the governance rather it more happens in our society in our day to day lives and surnames assist such discriminations. As some of us are becoming smart and want to show ourselves liberal, some time we do not ask for somebody's caste directly but our slavery of caste ideology pushes us towards other ways of finding the caste of our counterpart and surnames works just perfectly in the process. Asking "Full Name" and telling "Full Name" are smart ways of inquiring castes and declaring castes without the risk of being labeled conformist. The knowledge of castes and surnames renders this firsthand information useful in making mindset about the people. People experience discrimination at the movement their surnames are disclosed and may be someone would not express problems with your caste vocally, but incompatibilities

4C. Dwarakanath Gupta, Socio-cultural History of an Indian Caste, P 12

become visible through gesticulations. It is the reason behind the strategy of deflecting stigma by changing the surname by the victim of caste discrimination. "The following example from eastern Uttar Pradesh, in northern India, illustrates the point very well indeed. The oldest living male member of one Dalit family, who became a middle-rank district police officer in the 1960s, used the surname Ram throughout his career. Ram was the tag added to the names of men in the family in his father's generation, all of whom worked as farmers, craftsmen, and laborers in the village. By contrast, all the younger male members of the police officer's family, now educated and urban-dwellers, go by other surnames. The police officer gave his younger brother, fifteen years his junior and now a prominent Dalit ideologue, the surname Prasad. His four sons use the surnames Chandra, Kumar, and in two cases Pracheta. The name Pracheta, first adopted by the older of these two sons when he went to college in Delhi, is particularly difficult to place in the existing social order because it has no established caste connotations. In this respect, it is a little different from Ram, Prasad, Chandra, and Kumar, which are commonly used by Dalits today without being exclusive to them. A cousin of the police officer has taken on the upper-caste surname Sahni."⁵ Changing names and surnames is an individual's or a group's attempt at presenting itself as what he/she wants others to view him/her or the caste group as. In the case of SCs it is a conscious attempt at covering up their inferior identity, a special attempt at transformation of social cognition through such re-baptizing with the goal to affect social transaction. The self-presentation through changed surname portrays attempts at disembedding from an inferior social, especially ritual ranking and embedding into a higher ranking group. Such attempts by individuals and groups to change their occupations, eating practices, and other customary rituals and practices have been familiar to us through Srinivas' (1956) concept of sanskritisation.⁶

It must be noted in the conclusion that the surname is a crucial instrument of caste discrimination along with profession, regions and traditions. There cannot be denial to the fact that surnames are also associated with occupational, local and genealogical legacies, still its connection with caste supersedes all the relations .moreover, there are stigmas attached to the surnames and they have created prejudice that have become so permanent in the nature that, ever the education could have not swipe it from the mentality of the masses. An attempt of an individual of deflecting the stigmas by dropping the surnames, choosing the neutral form of it, or making them meaningless through the random use has also not been able to resolve the problem rather the emptiness or the alteration of surnames have become another way of identification and discrimination. The face of joy with tears has been selected as a word of a year by the oxford dictionary that symbolize and recognize the fact that generation is not ready to carry the luggage of the linguistics, and this can be further observed in the use of acronyms by this generation. But, the same generation is comfortable with the idea of caring the histories of years or centuries and tools of discrimination along with the names. Hence it is the responsibility of the generation and necessity of the time that people do not relay on the surnames for their identities, status, etc. there is also need to rid of the bogus argument that finds surnames as an easy tool of data analyses, and at the time of higher connectivity and computing technology along with the technologies of identification that is biometrics. State must disassociate the surnames from administrative purposes and not withstanding majority pressure as it was done in the case of prohibition of untouchability, it is important for abolition of caste

⁵Gyanendra Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States*, Cambridge 2013. P 209

⁶Tulsi Patel, *Stigma Goes Backstage: Reservation in Jobs and Education*, Indian Sociological Society. P10

discrimination that statutory provisions prevail over customary compulsions.

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