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Module Structure

Hinduism and the legitimization of Caste hierarchy	This module deals with the theme of Hinduism and the legitimization of caste hierarchy. Hinduism has been an important area of scholarship since long where social scientist have produced a vast body of knowledge. These debates include the different aspect of Hinduism and the legitimization of caste hierarchy. This module attempts to cover these wide range of debates about its origin, different ideas on Hinduism and how it has been viewed by these social scientists and scholars. How caste has been legitimised and followed as an essential order of Hinduism.

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Religion and Society

Module Name/Title	Hinduism and the legitimization of Caste hierarchy
Module Id	Module no. 18
Pre Requisites	An understanding of the sociological understanding of the category of religion in relation with society at large and social sciences perspectives on caste.
Objectives	To understand the various debates on the very idea of Hinduism in the field of social sciences. To understand the process of legitimization of caste as an essential order of Hinduism.
Key words	Hinduism, Caste

Religion and Society

Module 18: Hinduism and the legitimization of Caste hierarchy

Introduction:

This module deals with the theme of Hinduism and the legitimization of caste hierarchy. Hinduism has been an important area of scholarship since long where social scientist have produced a vast body of knowledge. These debates include the different aspect of Hinduism and the legitimization of caste hierarchy. This module attempts to cover these wide range of debates about its origin, different ideas on Hinduism and how it has been viewed by these social

scientists and scholars. In context of caste also that it has been legitimised and followed in social life of Hinduism.

Hinduism: overview of debates and discussions with different perspectives:

Hinduism has been a major area of scholarship and research for social scientists and literature or even for thinkers and writers from different intellectual backgrounds. Let us summarise these debates for a brief understanding through the writings of David Lorenzen.

He writes:-

There are scholars who claim that Hinduism was constructed, invented, or imagined by British Scholars and colonial administrators in the nineteenth century and did not exist in any meaningful sense before this time period. Those who claim this constructionist argument are Vasudha Dalmia, Robert Frykenberg, Chritopher Fuller, John Hawley, Gerald Larson, Harjot Oberoi, Brian Smith and Heinrrich Von Stietencron. WC Smith is considered to be an important precursor of these scholars. Romila Thapar (1985, 1989, 1996) and Dermot Killingely (1993: 61-64) have offered somewhat similar arguments, but both display greater sensitivity to historical ambiguities and distribute the construction of distinctly modern Hinduism among British Orientalists and missionaries and indigenous nationalists and communalists. Carl Ernst writes about early Muslim references to 'Hindus' and their religion but he joins the above scholars in claiming that the terms 'do not correspond to any indigenous Indian concept either of geography of religion. J Laine (1983) agrees with Smith and his modern epigones that Hinduism was invented in the nineteenth century, but credits the invention to the Indian rather than to the British.[1]

John Hawley in his essay titled 'Naming Hinduism' writes:-

Hinduism the word and perhaps the reality too was born in the 19th century, a notoriously illegitimate child. The father was middle class and British, and mother, of course, was India. The circumstances of the conception are not altogether clear. One heard of the 'goodly habits and observances of Hindooism in a Bengali- English Grammar written in 1829, and the Reverend William Tennant had spoken of the Hindoo system in a book on Indian manners and history written at the beginning of the century. Yet it was not until the inexpensive handbook *Hinduism*

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[1] Lorenzen, David (2006) Who invented Hinduism: Essays on religion in History, Yoda Press, New Delhi, Pg. No. 1-2

was published by the society for promoting Christian knowledge in 1877 that the term came into general english usage.[2]

Harjot Oberoi (1994) in the introduction of his work titled 'The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition. He writes:-

It is most striking that people we now call Hindus never used this term to describe themselves. The Vedas, the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita, which today are seen by many as the religious texts of the Hindus, do not employ the word Hindu. That term was first used by the Achaemenid Persian to describe all those who lived on or beyond the banks of the river Sindhu, or Indus. Therefore, at one stage the word Hindu as an ethnographic category came to englobe all those who lived in India, without ethnic distinction. It was only under the Muslim rulers of India that the term began to gain a religious connotation. But it was not until colonial times that the term 'Hinduism' was coined and acquired wide currency as referring collectively to a wide variety of religious sects, some of them with distinct traditions and opposed practices. Sects like the Saivites, Vaishnavites and Lingayats with their own history and specific view of the world were tied together under the blanket category Hinduism.[3]

Lorenzen argues that if someone refers to the word Hinduism as simple the English word itself then the claim that it did not exist before the nineteenth century is correct. Several scholars cite the date 1829 for the first known occurrence in the English, in the form 'Hindooism'. W.C. Smith who is given credit for this cites Oxford English Dictionary as his source (1991: 61, 253). During his research through several early nineteenth century journals, Lorenzen managed to find a one example of the word 'Hinduism' (with a 'u') in a letter published in 1818 volume of The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register and no less than seven examples (also with a 'u') in an article by John Crawfurd on Hinduism in Bali published in the 1820 volume of Asiatick Researches. There are two appearances of the term in English language text by Rammohan Roy published in 1816 and 1817 that have been discussed also by Dermot Killingly in his work. [4]

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[2] Lorenzen, David (2006) Who invented Hinduism: Essays on religion in History, Yoda Press, New Delhi, Pg. No. 5.

[3] Ibid, pg. No. 6

[4] Lorenzen, David (2006) Who invented Hinduism: Essays on religion in History, Yoda Press, New Delhi, Pg. No.3.

In 1816 Rammohan Roy made this critical comment: 'The chief part of the theory and practice of Hindooism, I am sorry to say is made to consist in the adoption of a peculiar mode of diet.' In 1817, on the other hand, he claimed that the doctrines of the unity of God are real Hinduism, as that religion was practiced by our ancestors, and as it is well known at the present day to many learned Brahmins.'[5]

This contradicts the view point of proponents of British construction of Hinduism to admit the fact that an Indian born Hindu seems to have been the first to coin the key label for this supposedly British construct. It has argued that the word 'Hinduism' became common in English only in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and mostly in books by British authors. One important work published then was Alexander Duff's book India and India Missions: Sketches of the Gigantic system of Hindustan Both in Theory and Practice in 1839.[6]

The variants of the word 'Hindu' were current in Persian and in Vernacular Indian Languages long before the nineteenth century. If this word referred to follower of beliefs and practices drawn from the religion which now we call Hinduism then the constructionist argument would be refuted from the beginning. This would be the case even if no specific word or phrase equivalent to Hinduism could be identified. Lorenzen writes that the religious sense of Hindu has long coexisted and overlapped with an ethnic and geographical sense.(2006: 6)

The idea of construction or invention of Hinduism is not only coining the term Hinduism but also the claim that mainly Europeans and more specifically the Britishers who imposed a single conceptual category on a heterogeneous collection of sects, doctrines, and customs that the Hindus themselves did not recognize as having anything essential in common. Therefore according to this view it was only after this concept of Hinduism was constructed by these Europeans that the Hindus themselves adopted the idea that they all belonged to a single religious community. This argument was first developed by W.C. Smith in his book *The Meaning and End of Religion* published in 1962. Smith argued that religion must be analysed using religious categories rather than through the medium of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, literature or even philosophy and history. He strongly opposed any attempt by

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[5] Ibid,pg. No.3-4

[6] ibid

outside observers to impose their own categories and explanations on religious phenomena. With regard to Hinduism he argues that the naming of this religion by Europeans was a mistake: there is no Hinduism either in the minds of the Hindus or in empirical reality itself (Smith 1991: 144-45). (2006:4)

Richard King in his essay titled 'Orientalism and the Modern Myth of "Hinduism"' writes that the modern concept of Hinduism is not merely the product of western orientalism. Western Orientalism was necessary but not a sufficient causal factor in the rise of this particular social construction. It is significant to understand the crucial role played by indigenous Brahmanical ideology in the construction of early orientalist representations of Hindu religiosity.[7]

In this essay Richard King quoted Talal Asad. Talal Asad (1993) writes "Anthropologist who would study Muslim belief and practice will need some understanding that how religion has come to be formed as concept and practice in the modern west. For while religion is integral to modern western history, there are danger in normalizing concept when translating Islamic traditions."

Richard King argues that this statement of Talal Asad is equally applicable to the study of Asian culture in general. In recent years scholars have become more aware about the power relations between the western and Asian societies. They are aware that how these power relations reflect discourse by western scholarship about Asian societies in general. Therefore in postcolonial era it has become extremely crucial to understanding this relationship critically.[8]

Hinduism and the legitimization of Caste hierarchy:

A very critical understanding of Hinduism and its most integral hierarchical system of caste became one of the major area of scholarship of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's work.

Dr. Ambedkar critically writes about Hinduism in his work titled 'Philosophy of Hinduism' where he raised the question whether Hinduism recognise equality? The question instantaneously brings to one's mind the caste system. One of the most striking feature of caste is that it do not stand as horizontal series but rather different caste in Hinduism are placed in a vertical series one above the other. He writes that Manu may not be responsible for creation of caste but certainly preached the sanctity of caste. Therefore Manu can be charged with with being the progenitor if

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[7] King, Richard (1999) Orientalism and the Modern Myth of "Hinduism" , Numen, Vol. 46, No. 2 (1999), pp. 146-185.
[8] ibid

not the author of the Caste System. Manu is responsible for upholding the principle of gradation and rank.[9]

In this gradation of caste system by Manu in Manusmriti[10] Brahmin is placed at the first rank. Below Brahmin is Kshatriya at the next rank in the vertical series. Below Kshatriya is the Vaishya. Below Vaishya is the Shudra and Below Shudra is the Ati-Shudra (the Untouchables). He further writes this inequality in status is not merely the inequality that one sees in the warrant of precedence prescribed for a ceremonial gathering at a King's Court. It is a permanent social relationship among the classes to be observed to be enforced at all times in all places and for all purposes. It will take too long to show how in every phase of life Manu has introduced and made inequality the vital force of life. Ambedkar described that how Manu has introduced and made inequality the vital force of life by writing in detail about examples from slavery, marriage and rule of law.[11]

Caste system and Slavery:

Manu recognizes Slavery. But he confined it to the Shudras. Only Shudras could be made slaves of the three higher classes. But the higher classes could not be the slaves of the Shudra.

But evidently practice differed from the law of Manu and not only Shudras happened to become slaves but members of the other three classes also become slaves. When this was discovered to be the case a new rule was enacted by a Successor of Manu namely Narada which runs as follows:

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[9] Ambedkar, BR (2014) (1st ed. 1987)Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol. 3, Ch.1 Philosophy of Hinduism, pg no.25, Reprinted Edition, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.

[10] In context of Manusmriti Dr. Ambedkar writes that It will be argued that it is wrong to consider that Manusmriti as the book of Hindu Religion and the true Gospel of Hinduism is contained in the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita. To answer this question about Manusmriti he gives a detailed explanation in his 'Philosophy of Hinduism'. See page no. 78-82.

[11] Ambedkar, BR (2014) (1st ed. 1987)Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol. 3, Ch.1 Philosophy of Hinduism, pg no.25, Reprinted Edition, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.

"In the inverse order of the four castes slavery is not ordained except where a man violates the duties peculiar to his caste. Slavery (in that respect) is analogous to the condition of a wife."[12]

Caste system and Marriage:

On Marriage Manu writes:

"For the first marriage of the twice born classes, a woman of the same class is recommended but for such as are impelled by inclination to marry again, women in the direct order of the classes are to be preferred." [13]

"A Shudra woman only must be the wife of Shudra: she and a Vaisya, of a Vaisya; they two and a Kshatriya, of a Kshatriya; those two and a Brahmani of a Brahman."[14]

Manu is of course opposed to intermarriage. His injunction is for each class to marry within his class. But he does recognize marriage outside the defined class. Here again he is particularly careful not to allow intermarriage to do harm to his principle of inequality among classes. Like Slavery he permits intermarriage but not in the inverse order. A Brahmin when marrying outside his class may marry any woman from any of the classes below him. A Kshatriya is free to marry a woman from the two classes next below him namely the Vaishya and Shudra but must not marry a woman from the Brahmin class which is above him. A Vaishya is free to marry a woman from the Shudra Class which is next below him. But he cannot marry a woman from the Brahmin and the Kshatriya Class which are above him. This discrimination existed because Manu was most anxious to preserve the rule of inequality which was his guiding principle.[15]

Caste System and Rule of law:

The other aspect about which Manu wrote was Rule of law as explained by Dr. Ambedkar is in context of Rule of law in Hinduism. He points out through his question focusing on the strange contrast between Hindu and Non-Hindu criminal jurisprudence and how inequality is writ large in Hinduism as seen in its criminal jurisprudence? In Manu we find an irrational system of

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[12] Ambedkar, BR (2014) (1st ed. 1987)Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol. 3, Ch.1 Philosophy of Hinduism, pg no.26, Reprinted Edition, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.
[13] ibid.
[14] ibid.
[15] ibid.

punishment. The punishment for a crime is inflicted on the organ concerned in the crime such as belly, tongue, nose, eyes, ears, organs of generation etc., as if the offending organ was a sentient being having a will for its own and had not been merely a servitor of human being. Second feature of Manu's penal code is the inhuman character of the punishment which has no proportion to the gravity of the offence. But the most striking feature of Manu's Penal Code which stands out in all its nakedness is the inequality of punishment for the same offence. Inequality designed not merely to punish the offender but to protect also the dignity and to maintain the baseness of the parties coming to a Court of Law to seek justice in other words to maintain the social inequality on which his whole scheme is founded. It is based on these arguments he argued that how Hinduism graded inequality in society. He also argued that how Hinduism also graded religious inequality through matters which are connected with what are called sacraments and Ashrams.[16] It is through these arguments in his 'Philosophy of Hinduism' Dr. Ambedkar criticized proponents of Hinduism and established the point that Hinduism did not stand on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity but on the other hand is based on the principle of graded inequality.

The Hindu Social Order:

In another important work called 'The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles' Dr. Ambedkar writes:-

The Hindu social order does not recognise the individual as a centre of social purpose. For the Hindu social order is based primarily on class or Varna and not on individuals. Originally and formally the Hindu social order recognized four classes: (1) Brahmins, (2) Kshatriyas (3) Vaishyas and (4) Shudras. Today it consists of five classes, the fifth being called the Panchamas or Untouchables. The unit of Hindu society is not the individual Brahmin or the individual Kshatriya or the individual Vaishya or the individual Shudra or the individual Panchama. Even the family is not regarded by the Hindu social order as the unit of society except for the purposes of marriage and inheritance. The unit of Hindu society is the class or Varna to use the Hindu technical name for class. In the Hindu social order, there is no room for individual merit and no consideration of individual justice. If the individual has a privilege it is not because it is due to him personally. The privilege goes with the class, and if he is found to enjoy it, it is because he

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[16] Ambedkar, BR (2014) (1st ed. 1987)Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol. 3, Ch.1 Philosophy of Hinduism, pg no.31-32, Reprinted Edition, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.

belongs to that class. Contrawise, if an individual is suffering from a wrong, it is not because he by his conduct deserves it. The disability is the disability imposed upon the class and if he's found to be labouring under it, it is because he belongs to that class.[17]

Does the Hindu social order recognize fraternity? The Hindus like the Christians and the Muslims do believe that men are created by God. But while the Christians and the Muslims accept this as the whole truth the Hindus believe that this is only part of the truth. According to them, the whole truth consists of two parts. The first part is that men are created by God. The second part is that God created different men from different parts of his divine body. The Hindus regard the second part as more important and more fundamental than the first.[18]

The Hindu social order is based on the doctrine that men are created from the different parts of the divinity and therefore the view expressed by Paul or the Pilgrim Fathers has no place in it. The Brahmin is no brother to the Kshatriya because the former is born from the mouth of the divinity while the latter is from the arms. The Kshatriya is no brother to the Vaishya because the former is born from the arms and the latter from his thighs. As no one is a brother to the other, no one is the keeper of the other.[19]

It is because of these principles of Hinduism Dr. Ambedkar in his historic speech on 15th October 1956 after accepting Buddhism said:-

"Even though I was born in the Hindu religion, I will not die in the Hindu religion"

Max Weber on Hinduism:

Max Weber in his study of India writes about the economic development and capitalism within the context of Hinduism and its caste system.

Weber writes:-

"During the same period at which Hinduism became systematised, trade and manufacture reached a peak in India. But the influence of Hinduism, and of the emergent caste system which interlaced with it, effectively inhibited any economic development comparable to modern European capitalism. 'A ritual law,' Weber remarks, 'in which every change of occupation,

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[17] Ambedkar, BR (2014) (1st ed. 1987)Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol. 3, Ch.2.The Hindu Social Order—Its Essential Principles, pg no. 99-100, Reprinted Edition, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.

[18] Ibid, pg no.100.

[19] ibid.

every change in work technique, may result in ritual degradation is certainly not capable of giving birth to economic and technical revolutions from within itself…"[20]

Different cultural traditions of India:

David Lorenzen (2006) writes about the major theoretical discussions among modern anthropologists about the relation of Indian cultural traditions to caste and class divisions reveal the existence of two general sets of conceptual concerns.

According to Lorenzen (2006: 78) during the period from about the end of second world war to the mid-1960s, the theoretical concepts which attract most attention namely those of 'Great' and 'Little Traditions', stemming from Redfield and Singer and of sanskritization associated with Srinivas, strikingly downplay and even reject any serious attempt to distinguish the cultural values and institutions of upper and lower caste groups, much less those of classes.

He writes that the culture of low caste groups is taken as being either representative of the Little tradition relatively uncontaminated by the Great Tradition, or else as being poorly sanskritized by prototype of upper caste culture. This ultimately amounts to what Joan Mencher (1974) has called a view 'from the top down' since upper caste.

Another set conceptual scholarship, according to Lorenzen's analysis, began with anthropological studies since mid-1960s. These anthropological studies include works by Pauline Maha Kolenda (1958, 1960,1964), Owen Lynch (1969,1972), Eleanor Zelliot (1966, 1970, 1981), Michael Moffatt (1979), Mark Juergensmeyer (1980), and Ravindra Khare (1983). Most of these scholars have reflected through their work that there are significant differences between the cultural traditions of low caste Hindus compared to those of 'caste' Hindus. Other notable scholars like Robert J Miller (1966), Juergensmeyer (1980, 1982) and Gail Omvedt (1980) have argued that there exists an alternate or parallel or counter cultural tradition carried principally by either the Untouchables or the Adivasis. (2006:79)

Jawaharlal Nehru on Hinduism:

Jawaharlal Nehru in his book Discovery of India writes about Hinduism. Nehru argues critiquing Smith's usage of the word 'Hinduism' and 'Hinduised'. He writes that it is not correct to use them in this way unless they are used in the widest sense of Indian culture.They are apt to

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[20] Weber, Max (2005)(1st ed. 1930) The Protestant Ethic and the spirit of Capitalism, Taylor & Francis e-Library, pg. No. xiv.

mislead today when they are associated with a much narrower, and specifically religious, concept. The word 'Hindu' does not occur at all in our ancient literature. The first reference to it in an Indian book is, as he was told, in a Tantrik work of the eighth century A.C., where 'Hindu' means a people and not the followers of a particular religion. But it is clear that the word is a very old one, as it occurs in the Avesta and in an Old Persian. It was used then and for a thousand years or more later by the peoples of western and central Asia for India, or rather for the people living on the other side of the Indus river. The word is clearly derived from Sindhu, the old, as well as the present, Indian name for the Indus. From this Sindhu came the words Hindu and Hindustan, as well as Indus and India.[21]

He writes that the famous Chinese pilgrim I-tsing writes in his record of travels mentioned 'northern tribes' that is people of central Asia as India 'Hindu' but he adds that this is not at all a common name and the most suitable name for India is the Noble Land (Aryadesha). The use of the word 'Hindu' in connection with a particular religion is of very late occurrence. He further writes that the old inclusive term for religion in India was Arya dharma. Dharma really means something more than religion. It is from a root word which means to hold together; it is the inmost constitution of a thing, the law of its inner being. It is an ethical concept which includes the moral code, righteousness, and the whole range of man's duties and responsibilities.[1946 (1985:74)]

He writes:-

"Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other. Its essential spirit seems to be to live and let live. Mahatma Gandhi has attempted to define it: 'If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: Search after truth through nonviolent means. A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth. .. Hinduism is the religion of truth…." [1946 (1985:75)]

Conclusion:

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[21] Nehru, JL [1st published 1946 (1985)] Discovery of India, OUP, New Delhi

It can be concluded with the point that Hinduism has been an important area of scholarship and research not only for social scientists but for individuals belonging to different domains of public life. It is important here to put in perspective the location of the one who is interpreting these meanings and attempting to contextualise them. In Ideology and Utopia Karl Mannheim (1954) seeks to throw light on the question of how the interest and purposes of certain social groups come to find expression in certain theories, doctrines and intellectual movements. Similarly the sociology of knowledge is also concerned with role of knowledge and ideas in maintenance or change of the social order. (1954: xxx)

In context of Hinduism we can observe that how Hinduism has been deeply influenced Brahmanical ideology which even influenced western orientalist as argued by Richard King. We also come across the writings of Dr. Ambedkar who writes that How Brahmanical ideology of Manu legitimised caste and how Hinduism is a religion of graded inequality where liberty, equality and fraternity doesn't exist. We also observe that there are 'outside' and 'inside' perspective to develop an understanding and idea about Hinduism. But we know that these 'outside' and 'inside' perspective is also a social construct which has happened over a long period of time and space and is multilayer and multidimensional in nature. We also observe the role of power relations in interpreting these meaning and symbols of Hinduism as Richard King point out in context of interpretation of Asian societies by western scholarship.

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