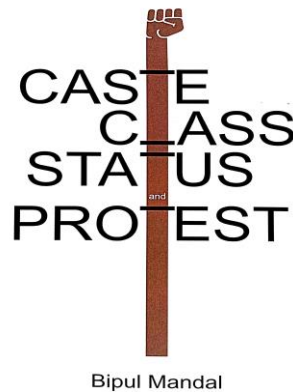


## Book Review



**Bipul Mandal: Caste Class Status and Protest (Kolkata, Sopan Publication, 2021, pp.360,Price:595/p INR)**

**Dr.Tapas Chatterjee<sup>1</sup>**

Castes are rigid social groups characterized by hereditary transmission of life style, occupation and social status but it is a monstrous curse in a modern, progressive and democratic society. The Caste system in India has its origins in ancient India, and was transformed by various ruling elites in medieval, early-modern, and modern India, especially the Mughal Empire and the British Raj. The caste system consists of two different concepts, *varna* and *jati*, which may be regarded as different levels of analysis. The caste system as it exists today is thought to be the result of developments during the collapse of the Mughal era and the rise of the British colonial government in India. The collapse of the Mughal era saw the rise of powerful men who associated themselves with kings, priests and ascetics, affirming the regal and martial form of the caste ideal, and it also reshaped many apparently casteless social groups into differentiated caste communities. The British Raj

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furthered this development, making rigid caste organisation a central mechanism of administration. Between 1860 and 1920, the British formulated the caste system into their system of governance, granting administrative jobs and senior appointments only to Christians and people belonging to certain castes. Social unrest during the 1920s led to a change in this policy. From then on, the colonial administration began a policy of positive discrimination by reserving a certain percentage of government jobs for the lower castes. In 1948, negative discrimination on the basis of caste was banned by law and further enshrined in the Indian constitution; however, the system continues to be practiced in parts of India.

India after achieving independence in 1947 enacted many affirmative action policies for the upliftment of historically marginalized groups. These policies included reserving a quota of places for these groups in higher education and government employment.

Societal stratification, and the inequality that comes with it, still exists in India, and has been thoroughly criticised. Government policies aim at reducing this inequality by reservation, quota for backward classes, but paradoxically also has created an incentive to keep this stratification alive. The Indian government officially recognizes historically discriminated communities of India such as the untouchables under the designation of Scheduled Castes, and certain economically backward castes as Other Backward Classes. The Government of India provides financial incentives to inter-caste couples under the Dr. Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration through Inter-Caste Marriages. Various state governments such as those of Odisha, Haryana, Punjab, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra also have similar schemes.

The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 of India aims to prevent and punish atrocities and discrimination against members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The National Crime Records Bureau includes statistics of crimes reported under the law as part of its annual reports. There has been a growth in total number of crimes reported under the Act in recent years but conviction rates have been low. Crimes against members of Scheduled Caste communities grew by 7.3% and against Scheduled Tribes by 26.5% in 2019.

Article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits discrimination based on caste and Article 17 declared the practice of untouchability to be illegal. In 1955, India enacted the Untouchability (Offences) Act (renamed in 1976, as the Protection of Civil Rights Act). It extended the reach of law, from intent to mandatory enforcement. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was passed in India in 1989 and amended from time to time. The National Commission for SC and ST was established to investigate, monitor, advise, and evaluate the socio-economic progress of these communities.

Critics believe that the economic liberalization has benefited just small elite and left behind the poor, especially the lowest Hindu caste of dalits. Notwithstanding this reality, a recent authoritative survey revealed striking improvements in living standards of dalits in the last two decades. Television ownership was up from zero to 45 percent; cell phone ownership up from zero to 36 percent; two-wheeler ownership (of motorcycles, scooters, mopeds) up from zero to 12.3 percent, dalits running their own businesses up from 6 percent to 37 percent and proportion working as agricultural labourers down from 46.1 percent to 20.5 percent.

He has made an exhaustive study on the history of the caste-system as it was in the past and contemporary among the Hindus of Bengal. He has used the comparative degree with reference to the status of different castes and classes thus assuming beforehand one of the principal characteristics of the society, viz. the hierarchy of the groups. Everywhere in Bengal there is a definite scheme of social precedence amongst the castes, with the Brahmin as the head of the hierarchy.

This is an anthropological study. He has selected some major caste and communities and classes in colonial Bengal like as Rajbansis, Namasudras, Pods, Tiyars, Bauries, Jogis Chasi Kaibarttas or Mahishyas etc. This study also explores a wide range of problems and issues in specific fields of Indian caste system and locates them within wider debates on 'Varna', 'Jati' or 'Zat' caste, classification and surname, identity, 'Sanskritization' or 'symbolic justification', customs or cultural adaptation, policy of 'interactional' and 'attribution' of the backward classes, other backward classes, societal life and status of various caste and communities and their upward mobility movements.

Dr. Mandal has articulated that the Indian society moved from the principle of hierarchy to stratification. According to the sociologists, hierarchy prevailed in societies based on castes

or estates and social-inequalities and were legitimated as naturally given. Stratification, on the other hand, is a feature of modern industrial societies in which inequalities do exist but are not considered as a part of natural or divine order. In this process of social change, inequality did not vanish or reduce, but changed its nature. Now class boundaries became more porous and permeable, individual mobility is possible and society's normative order is based on formal equality.

This book is addressed to sensitive minds of academicians, researchers, scholar and readers who want to know the history of caste, class, conflicts and upward mobility in the society of Bengal in particular. This study focuses on new trends in research in this fluid discipline. The readers will find two chapters in this book, one that deals with the 'Caste, Class and Status in Bengal: Change & Continuity' while the other dealing with the 'Upward Mobility: Caste and Class' in colonial period.

The Book by Dr. Bipul Mandal ( Assistant Professor of History, Kaliyaganj College, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, India) is a brilliant learned research work that captures all the issues pertaining to the caste system in India and its impact on social harmony, democracy, progressive transformations and economic growth besides the cultural context.

I sincerely hope that this Book will answer the connected questions on the subject matter and, at the same time, will generate interests of further academic research.