

SOCIAL CHANGE AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN NEW STATES *

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THE problem on which I desire to set down a few observations relates to the transition in the new States from the existing social organization to a new one which will be more conducive to the working of a liberal democracy. It is not necessary to describe in full the existing social situation in any particular country or region. It will be sufficient to point to the main relevant features. In what follows, discussion centres round the situation in India. Attempt is, however, made to place it on as generalized a level as possible; so that it may, at least in part, have relevance to the situation in other regions such as, for example, South East Asia or the Middle East.

The most important characteristic of the Indian social situation is the dominance of caste. The caste system places groups in society in a pre-determined, relatively ranking order, and one's position in the caste structure is determined by birth. Theoretically, not only social status but also economic occupation was supposed to be determined by caste. However, occupational determination was, perhaps, never rigid, and during recent times this has been confined to preventing entry of members of some groups to some pursuits. Today, direct effect of caste in this regard may be considered to be negligible. However, the historical importance of the factor in shaping the existing economic situation should not be minimized. This varies from region to region in India. In the Maharashtra region, the results of a number of field enquiries indicate close correspondence of the ranking in terms of (1) caste hierarchy, (2) income levels, and (3) educational attainments of the three groups of urban, professional, priestly and trading castes; of the peasant, and artisan castes; and of the depressed, untouchable, low occupational and rural labour group. In talking of the social situation created by the caste structure, it is necessary to bear in mind these lasting historical effects. They remain even where social ranking is no longer regarded, or where entry to any occupation or vocation becomes conceptually free.

Within the general framework of caste society, each group, caste, or sub-caste was relatively self-regulated. There was overall determination

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