Insight

EXPLAINING CASTE

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Insight: Explaining Caste

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Introduction

Pre-colonial Indian studies, historic roots, social practices expose Christian, Western framework on caste to drive agenda-based narratives

In Hindutva, Varna and Jaati are distinct concepts often conflated as "Caste" in Western discourse, causing confusion. Varna, rooted in texts like Rig Veda and Bhagavad Gita, is a theoretical framework dividing society into four functional roles based on capacities, qualities and duties they undertake: Brahmins (scholars, priests), Kshatriyas (rulers, warriors), Vaishyas (merchants, farmers) and Shudras (labourers, service providers).

Bhagavad Gita (4.13) stresses that Varna depends on actions and character, not birth, though it later became hereditary. Jaati, by contrast, refers to thousands of birth-based, localized groups linked to specific regions, occupations or traditions shaping social interactions in India. For instance, a single Varna like Kshatriya may encompass multiple Jaatis varying by region and time (Srinivas, M.N., 1985, Caste in Modern India).

The term "Caste," introduced by Portuguese colonizers ("casta," meaning lineage) oversimplifies Varna and Jaati into a rigid hierarchy. Western views often mischaracterize Caste as a uniform, oppressive system unique to Hindutva ignoring its historical fluidity, regional diversity and parallels to class or guild systems elsewhere. This perspective overstates Brahmin dominance sidelining non-Brahmin roles in Hindu society (Dirks, Nicholas B., 2001, Castes of Mind).

In paragraphs below, usage of caste refers to this **complex, interdependent and layered architecture of Jaati and Varna** and is used for simplicity purposes only.

Academia often misrepresent Jaati, Varna categories by viewing it through Christian-colonial lens of hierarchy and exclusion, sidelining its integrative roles in rituals, education and community interdependence. Drawing on historical texts, Dharampal's *The Beautiful Tree*, S.N. Balagangadhara's critique of Western frameworks and contemporary practices, explores: (1) caste's historical and textual origins (2) its lived reality through rituals and education and (3) academic narratives, their limitations and global comparisons.

Part 1: Historical and Textual Foundations

Varna System: Cosmology & Social Structure

The origin of *varna* categorization can be traced to Rigveda's *Purusha Sukta* (10.90.12) which describes four *varnas*—Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants / farmers), and Shudras (labourers)—emerging from cosmic man (Purusha). "The Brahmin was his mouth, both his arms were Rājanya [Kshatriya] made. His thighs became the Vaiśya, from his feet the Śūdra was produced" (Griffith, 1896).

This metaphor integrates social roles into Hindu cosmology, portraying *varnas* as interdependent parts of a unified whole. Scholars like Romila Thapar (*Early India*, 2002) argue it reflects a Vedic shift from tribal to stratified society, justifying roles cosmologically.

Manusmriti (c. 200 BCE–200 CE), a Dharma shastra text codifies *varna* duties, emphasizing endogamy and purity - pollution (eg: 8.270 restricts Brahmins from Shudra roles; 10.65 deems Shudras servile). Most translations of Dharmic texts like *Manusmriti* in Western languages suffer from inaccuracies and tend to conform to a Christian lens rather than context-dependent Dharmic architecture.

For instance, S.N. Balagangadhara (2012, as cited in Rathi, 2023) critiques these interpretations arguing that *varna* is a descriptive, not prescriptive, framework. He suggests that Western scholars impose a Christian theological lens—emphasizing rigid hierarchy—onto a fluid, context-dependent system, missing its interdependence central to Indian traditions.

Travelers' on Varna and Social Structure

- **Megasthenes (c. 300 BCE, *Indica*)**: Megasthenes described seven classes: "All the Indians are divided into seven parts. The philosophers are first in rank… The second are the husbandmen… The third are the shepherds and hunters… The fourth are the artisans… The fifth are the military… The sixth are the overseers… The seventh are the councilors and assessors" (McCrindle, 1877, p. 38, Archive.org link).

  He noted, "No one is allowed to marry out of his own caste or to exchange one profession or trade for another" (McCrindle, 1877, p. 85). These divisions

suggest *jati*-like occupational groups within a broader *varna*-like system, with society functioning through interdependent roles, not rigid prescriptions.

- **Fa-Hien (c. 337–422 CE, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*)**: Fa-Hien observed: "The Brahmans come and invite the Buddhas to enter the city… The Heads of the Vaisya families… establish houses for dispensing charity and medicines" (Legge, 1886, p. 43, Gutenberg link). He noted, "The people… do not eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor use garlic or onions" (Legge, 1886, p. 77), indicating *jati*-specific customs. Society functioned through cooperative roles, with no mention of strict *Manusmriti*-like rules.

- **Hiuen Tsang (c. 602–664 CE, *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*)**: Hiuen Tsang described four classes: "The Brahmins who guard purity and nobility… the Kshatriyas… the Vaiśyas… and the Śūdras, who engage in agriculture and service" (Beal, 1884, p. 149, Archive.org link).

  He noted, "Each class has its own customs and they do not intermingle" (Beal, 1884, p. 150), and mentioned segregation: "Those who deal with impure things… are not allowed to enter the cities" (Beal, 1884, p. 150). Society functioned through specialized roles, with flexibility in Buddhist contexts.

Jati: Practical Reality

While *varna* is theoretical, *jati*—estimated at 3,000–10,000 localized, endogamous groups—defines caste's lived reality. Tied to specific occupations and regions, *jatis* (e.g., Namboodiri Brahmins, Chamar leatherworkers) govern marriage, dining and labour (Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India*, 1962).

Their proliferation stems from tribal integrations, economic specialization and colonial codifications (e.g., Risley's 1901 Census) (Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics*, 1999). Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) argues that *jatis* are not inherently hierarchical but are community-based configurations of social life, misunderstood by colonial ethnographies that framed them as rigid sub-castes.

For instance, in Tamil Nadu, non-Brahmin Vellalar *jatis* often held power challenging Brahmin dominance. Yet, academic narratives overemphasize *varna* hierarchy, ignoring *jati* fluidity.

Travelers' on Jati and Segregation:
- **Megasthenes**: His note on endogamy—"No one is allowed to

jati-like divisions, but he does not mention segregation or *Manusmriti*-style purity rules, indicating fluid roles in the Mauryan period.

- **Fa-Hien**: He described *jati*-like customs, e.g., vegetarianism (Legge, 1886, p. 77) but noted no segregation, suggesting *Manusmriti*'s rules were not strictly applied in Gupta society.

- **Hiuen Tsang**: He observed segregation: "Those who deal with impure things…are not allowed to enter the cities" (Beal, 1884, p. 150), reflecting *jati*-based practices, but these predate *Manusmriti*'s codification, suggesting local customs over textual mandates.

- **Marco Polo (c. 1292–1294 CE, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*)**: Marco Polo noted: "The people are divided by their crafts and none marry or work outside their kind" (Yule, 1903, Vol. II, p. 364, Archive.org link). He described Brahmins as "priests and teachers" (Yule, 1903, Vol. II, p. 365), but no segregation, indicating *jati*-based roles shaped by trade, not textual prescriptions.

- **Ibn Battuta (c. 1333–1341 CE, *Rihla*)**: He noted, "The Hindus have their own classes, each with its own work" (Gibb, 1929, Vol. III, p. 614, Archive.org link) and segregation: "There are some who are not allowed to enter the city, being those who deal with impure things" (Gibb, 1929, Vol. III, p. 616). These reflect pre-existing *jati* practices not *Manusmriti* enforcement.

- **Niccolò de' Conti (c. 1419–1444 CE, *Historia de Varietate Fortunae*)** Conti wrote: "The people are ordered by their crafts… marriage is within their own" (Major, 1857, p. 28, Archive.org link). No segregation was noted, suggesting local *jati* customs over *Manusmriti* rules.

Caste Beyond Hindutva

Caste-like structures persist among non-Hindus complicating Hindu-centric views. Muslim hierarchies (Ashraf, Ajlaf, Arzal) and Indian Christian caste identities (e.g., Syrian Christians vs. Dalit Christians) reflect endogamy and occupational roles (Ahmad, 1978; Forrester, 1980). Balagangadhara (Rathi, 2023) argues that these patterns reflect a broader South Asian social configuration misread as "caste" through a Christian lens of sin and exclusion, unlike India's ritual-based interdependence.

Travelers' on Muslim-Ruled Contexts

- **Ibn Battuta**: He noted Hindu-Muslim integration: "The sultan appoints learned men and warriors to high offices" (Gibb, 1929, Vol. III, p. 615), but also says: "Some Hindus rebel against his authority" (Gibb, 1929, Vol. III, p. 617), with *jati* segregation continuing (Gibb, 1929, p. 616)

- **Court Chroniclers**: Minhaj-i-Siraj (*Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*) noted: "The Hindus pay the jizya and continue their practices" (Raverty, 1881, Vol. I, p. 631, Archive.org link). Hasan Nizami (*Taj ul-Ma'asir*) stated, "The Hindus worship their idols and the Muslims their mosques" (Elliot & Dowson, 1867, Vol. II, p. 215, Archive.org link), indicating Hindu *jati* continuity without *Manusmriti* enforcement.

Hierarchy vs. Interdependence

The *Purusha Sukta*'s body metaphor fueled debates. Louis Dumont (*Homo Hierarchicus*, 1970) emphasized hierarchy with Brahmins (head) superior to Shudras (feet), reinforced by *Manusmriti*'s purity-pollution framework.

The metaphor also implies interdependence, as all body parts are vital, supported by practices like touching feet. Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) critiques Dumont's framework arguing that Western scholars project a Christian moral hierarchy on to caste, missing its functional interdependence.

Travelers' Perspectives

Travelers described interdependent roles—Brahmins for religious issues, Kshatriyas for governance, Vaishyas and Shudras for economy—with strict endogamy (McCrindle, 1877, p. 85; Beal, 1884, p. 149; Yule, 1903, p. 364). Hiuen Tsang and Ibn Battuta noted segregation of "impure" groups (Beal, 1884, p. 150; Gibb, 1929, p. 616), reflecting local customs, not *Manusmriti* mandates. Muslim chroniclers confirmed Hindu practices persisted under Islamic rule (Raverty, 1881, p. 631).

Limited Impact of Manusmriti

Historical evidence from foreign travelers and chroniclers, spanning the Mauryan period to Delhi Sultanate, suggests that *Manusmriti*'s codified rules on *varna* duties, endogamy; purity-pollution had limited influence on lived reality of Indian society. While the text emphasizes strict *varna* roles and purity norms (e.g., 8.270, 10.65), travelers' observations reveal a more fluid, context-dependent social structure driven by local *jati* customs, economic needs, and religious diversity, not rigid adherence to *Manusmriti*.

- **Early Evidence (Pre-Islamic Period)**: Megasthenes (c. 300 BCE) described seven classes with distinct roles—"philosophers… husbandmen… artisans" (McCrindle, 1877, p. 38)—and endogamy, but no segregation of "impure" groups or strict *varna* prescriptions (McCrindle, 1877, p. 85). This fluidity, possibly influenced by Mauryan Buddhist/Jain policies, contrasts with *Manusmriti*'s rigid rules. Fa-Hien (c. 337–422 CE) noted cooperative roles— "Brahmans… Vaisya families" (Legge, 1886, p. 43)—and prosperity without mention of purity-based exclusion (Legge, 1886, p. 77), suggesting local customs over textual mandates in the Gupta Empire. Hiuen Tsang (c. 602–664 CE) observed *varna* divisions and segregation of "those who deal with impure things" (Beal, 1884, p. 150), but this pre-dates *Manusmriti*'s widespread influence, reflecting pre-existing *jati* practices rooted in oral traditions or economic specialization, not a legalistic text.

- **Medieval Evidence (Post-Muslim/Turkish Invasions)**: Marco Polo (c. 1292–1294 CE) described South Indian society as organized by "crafts" with endogamy—"none marry or work outside their kind" (Yule, 1903, p. 364)—but noted no segregation or *Manusmriti*-like purity rules, emphasizing trade-driven prosperity (Yule, 1903, p. 362). Ibn Battuta (c. 1333–1341 CE) observed *jati* segregation—"those who deal with impure things" (Gibb, 1929, p. 616)— but attributed it to Hindu customs, not Muslim imposition or *Manusmriti* enforcement, under the Delhi Sultanate.

  Niccolò de' Conti (c. 1419–1444 CE) noted "crafts" and endogamy in Vijayanagara (Major, 1857, p. 28), with no evidence of textual prescriptions shaping social life. Muslim chroniclers like Minhaj-i-Siraj (c. 1260 CE) and Hasan Nizami (c. 13th century) confirmed Hindu practices continued— "Hindus pay the jizya and continue their practices" (Raverty, 1881, p. 631; Elliot & Dowson, 1867, p. 215)—without reference to *Manusmriti* influencing governance or social roles.

- **Historic and Scholarly Context**: The *Manusmriti* was one of many Dharmashastra texts, primarily a Brahminical ideal rather than a universal legal code. Romila Thapar (*Early India*, 2002) argues that texts like *Manusmriti* were normative, not descriptive, with limited practical enforcement due to India's diverse regional and economic contexts. Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) emphasizes that *jati* systems driven by local customs and economic specialization shaped lived reality more than textual prescriptions.

  Travelers' accounts show fluid interactions—e.g., Brahmins at Buddhist centers (Beal, 1884, p. 170), Hindu-Muslim trade (Yule, 1903, p. 368; Major, 1857, p. 24)—and segregation rooted in pre-textual norms (Beal, 1884, p. 150; Gibb, 1929, p. 616), not *Manusmriti* enforcement. Under Muslim rule, Hindu *jati* practices persisted without evidence of rulers imposing "impure" roles, contradicting *Manusmriti*'s prescriptive influence.

- **Lived Reality vs. Textual Ideal**: The lived reality, as per travelers, was shaped by pragmatic needs—trade, governance, religion—rather than *Manusmriti*'s rules. For instance, non-Brahmin *jatis* like Vellalars held power in South India (Bayly, 1999), and Hindu elite integrated into Muslim administration (Gibb, 1929, p. 615), showing flexibility absent in *Manusmriti*.

  Balagangadhara (Rathi, 2023) argues that colonial translations exaggerated *Manusmriti*'s role projecting a Christian lens of rigid hierarchy onto a system of interdependent, context-driven *jati* roles. The travelers' silence on *Manusmriti*-specific norms (e.g., Brahmin exclusivity, Shudra servility) and emphasis on local customs support this critique, indicating the text's limited impact on India's social history.

Part 2: Rituals, Education, and Interdependence

Interdependence in spiritual and economic spheres

Hindu rituals like *yajna* (fire sacrifice) and *upanayana* (sacred thread ceremony) exemplify integrative nature of *jati* systems functioning as collaborative frameworks rather than rigid hierarchies.

In *yajna* (Yajurveda, Shatapatha Brahmana), roles are distributed across *varnas*: Brahmins recite mantras, Kshatriyas fund the ritual, Vaishyas provide resources and Shudras handle manual tasks.

Modern *homams* in 2025 South India continue this tradition involving diverse *jatis*—Brahmin priests, non-Brahmin landowners and labourers—demonstrating interdependence (Srinivas, 1962). Similarly, *upanayana* ceremonies integrate *jatis* through participation of barbers, cooks and artisans, each contributing specialized skills.

Balagangadhara (Rathi, 2023) argues that such rituals reflect *jati* as a collaborative system, akin to a body's parts, where each group's unique role fosters mutual reliance. Complementing this, Prof. R. Vaidyanathan's *Caste as Social Capital* (2019) extends this interdependence to economic sphere, illustrating how *jati*-based networks facilitate entrepreneurship by providing trust-based access to finance, labour and markets as seen in caste-driven industrial clusters like the Gounders in Tiruppur (knitted garments) or Nadars in Sivakasi (firecrackers).

Academic narratives, such as Dumont's, often overemphasize Brahmin dominance overlooking both ritual and economic interdependence that binds *jatis* collaboratively.

Brahmin Prestige: Merit and Austerity

Brahmin prestige in rituals stems from rigorous Vedic education (10–20 years memorizing texts like the *Rigveda*) and austerity (*tapas*)—simple diets, minimal possessions (*Manusmriti* 6.1–33; *Taittiriya Upanishad* 1.11). Their role requires expertise, as mantra errors can invalidate rituals (*Shatapatha Brahmana* 1.6.3), suggesting merit-based status (Thapar, 2002).

However, restricted access to Vedic education (*Manusmriti* 2.155) blends merit with heredity, a tension critiqued by Ambedkar (*Annihilation of Caste*, 1936). Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) argues that Brahmin prestige is contextual, tied to

ritual competence, not universal superiority and that Western interpretations misread this as oppressive privilege due to a Christian lens of inherent sinfulness.

Vaidyanathan (2019) further contextualizes Brahmin roles within economic networks, noting that while Brahmins may dominate ritual spheres, other *jatis* including non-Brahmin entrepreneurs, leverage caste-based social capital to drive economic activity, suggesting that prestige is not solely Brahmin-centric but distributed across *jatis* based on specialized contributions in both ritual and economic domains.

Inclusive Education:

Dharampal's [The Beautiful Tree](1983) challenges the notion that Vedic education was exclusive revealing an inclusive pre-colonial system. British surveys (1822–1838) in Madras, Bengal and Bellary show Shudras and lower castes comprised 60 – 84 per cent students, outnumbering twice-born (13 – 23 per cent).

Schools taught diverse curricula (e.g., *Ramayana*, arithmetic) tailored to *jati* interests with community funding reflecting collective investment. This inclusivity mirrors ritual interdependence where Shudra contributions are vital.

Balagangadhara (Rathi, 2023) suggests this system reflects India's non-hierarchical social configurations, disrupted by colonial policies that centralized education and marginalized lower castes contrary to claims of British "reform" (Campbell, 1823).

Vaidyanathan's *Caste as Social Capital* (2019) complements this by highlighting how such community-driven systems extended beyond education into economic spheres, with *jati* networks enabling resource mobilization for entrepreneurship.

For instance, "Vaishyavisation" of castes—where traditionally non-business *jatis* like Scheduled Castes and OBCs engage in commerce—demonstrates how *jati*-based social capital fosters economic mobility, akin to inclusive participation seen in pre-colonial education and ritual interdependence. This economic collaboration, evident in clusters like Surat's Patel-dominated diamond industry, underscores *jati* as a dynamic system supporting both cultural and economic integration, challenging narratives of caste as solely oppressive.

Part 3: Academic Narratives & Global Comparisons

Disproportionate Academic Focus

India's social organization like the Jaati and Varna attracts far more attention than global analogues with 1,250–2,500 articles (2020–2025) compared to 50–150 for systems like Japan's Burakumin or Yemen's Al-Akhdam. This stems from India's scale (1.4 billion people), textual depth (*Rigveda*, *Manusmriti*), socio-political relevance (e.g., 2025 caste census), and colonial ethnographies framing caste as uniquely Indian (Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 2001).

Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) argues this focus reflects a Western "culture-specific" lens where Jaati is misread as a religious hierarchy akin to Christian sin-based stratification ignoring its social-ritual basis.

Academic Misrepresentation

Academics often de-contextualize caste, emphasizing exclusion over integration:

- **Overemphasis on Hierarchy**: Dumont (1970) frames caste as a rigid hierarchy focusing on purity-pollution and Brahmin supremacy. [Balagangadhara (Rathi, 2023)](#) critiques this as a Christian projection arguing that Indian traditions lack a normative hierarchy and prioritize ritual interdependence.

- **Rituals and Education**: Studies focus on discrimination (e.g., untouchability), sidelining rituals (*yajna*, *upanayana*) and inclusive education (*The Beautiful Tree*), which show collaboration across *varnas* / *jatis*.

- **Brahmin Prestige**: Brahmin status is portrayed as birth-based privilege ignoring their merit-based roles in rituals and education. Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) notes that Western scholars misinterpret this as oppression lacking an Indian framework of ritual competence.

- **Colonial Distortion**: Colonial ethnographies (e.g., Risley, 1901) rigidified *jatis* into a hierarchical "caste system," a construct Balagangadhara argues is a Western imposition, not reflective of fluid Indian practices.

Global Comparisons and Oversights

Global systems like Burakumin or Osu share endogamy and exclusion but lack India's scale and textual roots. Balagangadhara (Rathi, 2023) argues that Western academia avoids parallels (e.g., European Cagots, U.S. segregation as "caste" per Wilkerson,

2020) by framing them as race or class, preserving a narrative of Indian exceptionalism. He suggests this reflects a colonial strategy to portray Indian society as uniquely oppressive, ignoring similar social configurations globally.

Balanced Perspective

A balanced view acknowledges caste's dual nature, encompassing both hierarchy and integration, shaped by historical, ritual and economic dimensions:

- **Hierarchy and Discrimination**: Textual sources like the *Manusmriti*, ritual practices and historical factors establish a functional hierarchy with concepts like purity-pollution reinforcing status distinctions. Discriminatory practices, such as untouchability, persist in varying degrees (Raj, 2000), underscoring caste's oppressive aspects. However, Prof. R. Vaidyanathan (*Caste as Social Capital*, 2019) argues that this hierarchy is often overemphasized due to colonial and political distortions which rigidified *jati* systems and obscured their economic utility. He suggests that focusing solely on discrimination overlooks caste's role as a collaborative network in economic spheres.

- **Interdependence and Integration**: Rituals, education and economic systems highlight caste's integrative nature. Hindu rituals like *yajna* distribute roles across *varnas*—Brahmins recite mantras, Kshatriyas fund, Vaishyas provide resources and Shudras contribute labour—demonstrating mutual reliance.

  Similarly, Dharampal's *The Beautiful Tree* (1983) reveals pre-colonial education systems where Shudras and lower castes comprised 60–84 per cent students, reflecting community-driven inclusivity. Economic systems like *jajmani* further illustrate interdependence through reciprocal service relationships. Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) emphasizes that caste is a descriptive social configuration, not a prescriptive hierarchy. Vaidyanathan (2019) extends this to economic domain, arguing that *jati*-based networks function as social capital, enabling entrepreneurship through trust-based access to finance, labour and markets.

  Examples include caste-driven industrial clusters like Gounders in Tiruppur (knitted garments), Patels in Surat (diamonds) and Nadars in Sivakasi (fire crackers) where *jati* interdependence fosters economic success in India's informal sector, contributing significantly to GDP.

- **Merit and Birth**: Brahmin prestige, rooted in rigorous Vedic education (10–20 years) and austerity (*tapas*), blends merit with hereditary restrictions

(*Manusmriti* 2.155). Modern reforms, such as non-Brahmin priests in some temples, signal growing inclusivity. Vaidyanathan (2019) highlights a parallel trend in economic sphere, where "Vaishyavisation" enables traditionally non-business *jatis*, including Scheduled Castes and OBCs, to engage in entrepreneurship, leveraging caste networks for economic mobility.

This suggests that merit-based contributions whether in rituals or commerce are not exclusive to Brahmins but distributed across *jatis*, challenging notion of fixed hereditary privilege.

- **Cultural Misinterpretation**: Western frameworks, rooted in Christian notions of inherent sinfulness, often misread caste as a rigid religious hierarchy missing its ritual and social interdependence. Balagangadhara (Pragyata, 2017) argues that caste is better understood as a collaborative system, not a monolithic structure of oppression. Vaidyanathan (2019) reinforces this by critiquing colonial portrayals that oversimplified *jati* into a hierarchical caste system, ignoring its economic dynamism.

He contends that caste's role as social capital, facilitating trust and resource-sharing in business (e.g., Muslim entrepreneurs in Ahmedabad's ₹800-crore kite-making industry), parallels its integrative function in rituals and education, offering competitive advantage akin to community networks in other cultures (e.g., Japanese business networks).

Conclusion

The caste system (**mis-nomenclature by West for Jati / Varna complex**), rooted in *Rigveda*'s *Purusha Sukta* and *Manusmriti*, intertwines *varna* and *jati*, but *Itihasas* (*Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*) and modern Hindu practices prioritize *dharma* over *Manusmriti*.

Rituals like *yajna* integrate *jatis*—Brahmins recite mantras, Kshatriyas fund, Vaishyas provide resources, Shudras labour—showing interdependence.

Dharampal's *The Beautiful Tree* (1983) reveals inclusive pre-colonial education, with 60 – 84 per cent Shudra and lower-caste students.

Vaidyanathan's *Caste as Social Capital* (2019) highlights *jati* networks enabling entrepreneurship (e.g., Gounders in Tiruppur, Nadars in Sivakasi), fostering economic mobility via "Vaishyavisation".

Western academic focus on caste as discriminatory "system" distorts perception (1,250–2,500 India-focused articles vs. 50–150 globally) by ignoring parallels like Japanese networks (Vaidyanathan, 2019).

Caste has flaws, aberrations — discrimination, hierarchy — but its ritual, educational and economic integration offers a functional aspect.

Mixing up western framework of caste as a derivative of Hindutva's functional designation based on 'Varna' or 'Jati', extrapolating it to religious rigidity is misrepresentation from colonial mindset reeking of intellectual dishonesty and agenda-based narrative.

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