

SANSKRITIZATION

Meaning:

The concept 'Sanskritization' was first introduced by Prof. M. N. Srinivas the famous Indian sociologist. He explained the concept of Sanskritization in his book "Religion and society among the coorgs of South India" to describe the cultural mobility in the traditional caste structure of Indian society. In his study of the coorgs of Mysore, he came to know that the lower castes were trying to raise their status in their caste hierarchy by adopting some cultural ideals of the Brahmins. As a result they left some of their ideals which are considered to be impure by the Brahmins. To explain this process of mobility, Srinivas used the term 'Brahminization'. Later on he called it 'Sanskritization' in a broad sense.

Defining Sanskritization Srinivas writes, "Sanskritization is a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice-born caste."

Characteristics of Sanskritization:

1. Sanskritization is a process of imitation in Indian society, the social status of an individual is fixed on the basis of caste hierarchy. There are many lower castes who suffer from economic, religious or social disabilities. So in order to improve the status, the lower castes people imitate the life style of the upper caste people.
2. Sanskritization is a process of cultural change towards twice-born castes. Sanskritization is a process in which the lower castes adopt the cultural patterns of the higher castes, to raise their status in the caste hierarchical order. In some societies the lower caste people followed not only the customs of the Brahmins but also the customs of the locally dominant castes like Kshatriyas and Vaisyas to raise their status.
3. Sanskritization is helpful in the social mobility of lower caste:
In this process a caste is only trying to change the status and not the social structure.
4. Sanskritization process also followed by the tribal:
Sanskritization process is not only confined to the caste people of Hindu society, it is also found among the tribal society.
5. The concept of Sanskritization has also given rise to *De-sanskritization* . There are some instances in modern times, some of the higher castes are imitating the behaviour pattern of lower caste, and for example Brahmins have started taking meat and liquor. This process is called De-sanskritization.

Models of Sanskritization:

Sanskritization may follow any of the following models such as:

1. Cultural model
2. Varna Model
3. Local Model

1. Cultural Model:

Castes have been assigned high or low status according to cultural characteristics of Hindus. The wearing of sacred thread, denying the use of meat and liquor, observing endogamy, prohibition of widow remarriage, observing the restriction in caste system, worship according to the modes and methods described in the religious text books, giving respect to the religious and mythological stories etc. have been given sanctity in traditional culture. They are considered to be the measuring standards of sacredness and purity. Accepting these behaviour and code of highness and purity as described in religious texts in a form of Sanskritization.

2. Varna Model:

In the Varna system the highest status is given to that of a Brahmin followed by Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. Antyaj or the lowest is the fifth Varna that is the lowest and untouchable one in the Varna system. The lower castes copying the ideals and life style of the superior castes. Where the Kshatriyas enjoy superiority, the lower castes followed their life style and ideals. Simultaneously where the vaishyas enjoy superiority, the lower castes followed their life style and ideals. Only the Antyaj or lower caste copy the Sudras. That is to say emulating the life style or ideals of a Varna on the basis of honour and superiority enjoyed by that class is called Varna model or sanskritization.

3. Local Model:

In every country, some castes are considered to be more respectful than others on account of their economic power. This caste may be called the "master caste" or the "dominant caste". So the lower caste copies the life style of the local dominant caste in order to improve their status.

Effects of Sanskritization:

1. Sanskritization in social field:

The social aspect of sanskritization is much more important from the view point of change. The low caste individuals are inclined towards sanskritization because in that way they can elevate their social status and get higher status in caste hierarchy.

2. Sanskritization in economic field:

Economic betterment and sanskritization is another related issue. The lower caste people have given up un-cleaned occupation to raise their economic status because clean trades are a symbol of social light.

3. Sanskritization in religious field:

Sanskritization also can be observed in the religious field. Like Brahmins many of the lower castes people put on sacred thread. They also go to their temple regularly and

perform Arti and Bhajan. They have left prohibited food and un-cleaned occupation. Even they have specialised in performing ceremonies like Brahmins.

4. Sanskritization in living patterns:

The living patterns of lower castes have also Sanskritized. Like higher caste they also get Pucca houses built for them. Now they sit or eat along with the higher caste without any fear or hesitation. They also keep their houses clean and put on dresses like higher castes.

In a word, in the wake of globalisation and industrialisation, the caste hierarchy has become weak where achievements dominate over ascriptions.