

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Crusader against Caste and Untouchability of Hindu Social Order.

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Abstract: The new society which was developing in India since the advent of the British rule had distinct needs differing from those of the old society. The new intelligentsia, which imbibed the liberal Western culture, recognized the needs and launched movement to reform or revolutionized social institutions religious outlooks and ethical conception inherited from the past since they felt that these were obstacles to national advance. They were convinced that the new society could politically, culturally, and economically develop only on the basis of liberal principles such as the recognition of individual liberty freedom of human personality and social equality.

INTRODUCTION

The various socio-religious reform movements, which took place in India during the British rule, were the expression of the rising national consciousness and spread of the liberal ideas of the West among the Indian people. These movements interestingly tended to have a national scope and programme of reconstruction in the social and religious spheres.ⁱ In the social sphere, there were movement of caste reform or caste abolition, equal rights for women, a campaign against child marriage and ban on widow remarriage, a crusade against social legal inequalities.ⁱⁱ

In the religious sphere, there sprang up movements which combated religious superstitions and attacked idolatry polytheism and hereditary priesthood. These movements in varying degrees, emphasized and fought for the principles of individual liberty and social equality and stood for nationalism.ⁱⁱⁱ

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conception inherited from the past since they felt that these were obstacles to national advance. They were convinced that the new society could politically, culturally, and economically develop only on the basis of liberal principles such as the recognition of individual liberty freedom of human personality and social equality^{iv}

The reform movements represented the striving of conscious and progressive sections of the Indian people to democratize social institutions and remodel old religious outlooks to suit the new social needs.

It was the grievances of the Indian Social reformers that the slow advance of social reform was due to the insufficient support to it by the British government, which, they asserted, did not actively assist them in the work of storming the citadels of social reaction and injustices in the country. The rate at which the social reform legislation was enacted was too slow and generally undertaken under the pressure of the advanced opinion in the country. It is true that in the first half of the nineteenth century, the British ruler themselves initiated such progressive legislation as the abolition of slavery, Suttee and infanticide. However their attitude suffered a change later on. In fact the age of consent act passed in 1891 was the only important social reform legislation enacted by government during many decades prior to that date. This only strengthened the determination of the leader of the Indian national movement to secure political power so that they could use it to accelerate the tempo of social and religious reform in India.^v

2. THE HINDU CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system of Hindus, which divided the Hindu community into a multitude of almost hermetically sealed groups, hierarchically graded and based on birth, was one of the principal target of Socio-religious Reform Movement. The caste system was "steel flame of Hinduism". It was ancient than the Veda, which recorded its existence

at that time. Originally, the Hindu society seems to have been differentiated into three or four castes. Subsequently however, as a result of the operation of such factors as racial admixture, geographical: expansion and growth of crafts which brought into existence new vocations, the original caste (Varnas) broke up into various smaller castes (Jatis).^{vi} While Hinduism made for cultural unity of all Hindus in the past, the caste system socially disintegrated them in to an ever increasing number of groups and subgroups. In all vital Social matters such as marriage, vocation and dining each such group or sub groups was an exclusive unit.

The caste system was undemocratic and authoritarian in the extreme. The castes constituting the series were hierarchically graded, each caste being considered inferior to those above it and superior to those below it. The status of a man born in a particular caste was determined by the rank of that caste in the hierarchy. Once born in that caste, his status was pre-determined and immutable. Thus birth decided his status, which could not be altered by any talent he might show or wealth he might accumulate.^{vii}

Similarly, the caste in which a man was born predetermined what vocation he would pursue. He had no choice. Thus birth decided the occupation of a man. The rule of endogamy f governed every caste or sub-caste. A person belonging to one caste could not marry a person of other caste. Thus birth restricted the zone of selection in the matter of matrimony.^{viii}

Since caste system was hierarchically graded, it was based on social and legal inequalities. For example, at the apex of this social pyramid stood the caste of Brahmins who had the monopoly right to officiate as priests with exclusive access to all higher religious and secular learning and knowledge while, at the base swarmed the mass of Shudra together with the untouchable and even unapproachable whom the scheme of Hindu society, sanctified by the Hindu religion and enforced by the coercive power of Hindu state, had assigned the duty of serving all other caste and constrained to follow, under the threat of severest penalty, such low vocation as those of scavengers, tanners and others.^{ix}

The uniqueness of caste system did not consist in that it was based on the difference of functions. Its specificness lay in the fact that it made birth as the basis of social grouping. It implies not only the negation of equality but the Organization of inequality exclusively on the basis of inheritance. Difference there will be in an imaginable society, difference of functions at all events. It is not in

recognizing their inevitability that caste is peculiar, it is in the method it adopts to systematize and control them.

3. PRINCIPAL FEATURES OF THE CASTE SYSTEM.

Since each caste had its own conception of the norms of conduct which it forced on its members, it became culturally separated from other castes which had other conception of ethics. Each caste thus became a separate socio cultural group. Further the caste system was sanctified by the sanction of religion. It's very genesis was attributed to God Brahman. If a member of a caste infringed the caste rules, he did not merely commit a crime against the caste but perpetrated sin against religion. Thus, religion fortified the hold of the caste over its members in fact, the basic demand of Hinduism on its followers was that he should gladly accept the social position in which he was born, i.e. his caste since it was divinely ordained and should fulfil meticulously the duties which the caste assigned to him.

Since caste controlled his life including such vital personal affairs as marriage, vocation and social intercourse. Such as eating with others and since behind the imperatives of the caste stood the sanction of religion, the coercive power of Hindu state as well as the penal authority with which the caste itself was armed, the individual was almost completely shorn of personal liberty. He could not choose his profession he could not marry to whom he desired; he could not eat with whomever he likes. And, further, the rank of the caste in which he was born, in the finally graded caste hierarchy determined his social status and position in the eye of law of the state which was not uniform but varied awarding to the caste a person belongs to.

Hierarchic gradation, social and other inequalities, endogamy, restrictions on dining and the lack of freedom regarding the choice of vocation, were the principal features of the caste system.

The caste system became an obstacle both to the development of the contemporary economy established during the British rule, in India as also to the national unity so vital to win national freedom. For the growth of Industries, it was necessary to have of labour supply. The rigid rule of caste forcing its every member to follow the hereditary occupation came in the way of the plentiful labour supply for industries.

The caste, demanding the fore-most allegiance to it, came also in the way of the paramount need of the subject people subordinate every allegiance to

the supreme allegiance to nationalism. The ruination of the artisans and the impoverishment of farmers made it economically necessary for them to take to other vocations. The spread of democratic ideas such as individual liberty kindled urges to revolt against caste distinctions and inequality among the educated Indians.

It was the educated section of the Indian people who launched attack on caste. It sensed the anomaly of the caste in the new India. For national freedom and advance, political, social, economic, cultural, the caste structure had to be reformed, or even eliminated. The social reformers propagated national progress as the objectives of men.

4. THE SOCIAL REFORMERS AND CASTE SYSTEM

The social reformers attacked inequalities and separatism and stood for equality and cooperation. They attacked the heredity as the basis of distinction, and law of karma as which supplied the religio-philosophic defence of the undemocratic authoritarian caste institution. They called on the people to work for the betterment in the real world. In which they lived rather than strive for salvation after death. The branded the caste system as the powerful obstacles to the growth of national unity and solidarity.^x

There were different angle from which caste was attacked by different social reform groups, Raja Ram Mohan Ray the founder of Brahma Samaj invoked the authority of Mahanirvana Tantra, an old religio-sociological work of the Hinduism, to support his view that caste should no longer continue. The Brahma Samaj opposed the rigid social divisions which caste implied.

Rabindra Nath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen, who succeeded the Raja Ram Mohan Ray as successive leaders of Samaj, were more critical of Hindu scriptures than Raja Ram Mohan Ray. It was Keshab Chandra Sen, who is most unambiguous categorical term, repudiated the caste system without invoking any scriptural authority. The spirit of social revolt, which the Raja inaugurated, reached a climax in the history of the Brahman Samaj under the guidance of Keshab Chandra Sen.^{xi}

The pioneering work of the anti caste movement first started by Brahman Samaj was continued by other organizations which were subsequently formed in the country.

5. PRARTHANA SAMAJ IN BOMBAY

The Bombay Prarthana Samaj carried on the propaganda of the repudiation of caste practically on the same lines of the Brahma Samaj. Both Brahma Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj under the democratic cultural influence of the west denounced the caste as an institution itself in contrast to this attitude, the Arya Samaj started by Swami Dayananda Saraswati preached not to repudiation of the caste system. But the revival of the Hindu society of Vedic period based only on the four castes. The Arya Samaj, while crusading against the minute's dissection of the Hindu society into countless sub-castes, aimed at reconstructing it on the original four fold division. Further, it stood for extending the right to study scripture even to the lowest caste Shudra.

Thus, while both the Brahma Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj were iconoclastic movement with regards to caste, the Arya Samaj stood for reforming caste by eliminating all sub-castes. In addition to Brahma Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj, there was other movement, which also carried on a campaign against caste^{xii}

Telang Ranade, Phooley who founded the Satya Sadhak Samaj (1873), Malabari poet Narmad and other were crusader against the caste system. In the south, the self respect movement, attacking the humiliating disabilities from which the non-Brahmin communities suffered, was organized.

Though Indian nationalism reached the conclusion that political power was vital promise for a fundamental reconstruction of Indian society on a democratic basis, it did not relax its campaign against social evils. However social reform was given auxiliary place in the scheme of its work.^{xiii}

The movements of the lower castes of Hindu society suffering from social, religious, and legal disabilities, as a result of the undemocratic caste system, had two aspects; (1) progressive and (2) the reactionary and anti-national. When a lower caste organized even on a caste basis and fought for democratic freedoms, its struggle helped the general struggle for the unity of the Indian people on a democratic basis. Communalism thrived on privilege on one side and disabilities on the other.^{xiv} When democratic liberties were won and all social and legal inequalities based on the hierarchic structure of society were abolished, communalism itself would vanish. There would survive no distinction between the member of one community and those of other. It would be the democratic merging of all individuals, only to be subsequently classified into social groupings based on their real

role in the existing socio-economic structure and therefore, historically valid. Communalism would end only when the democratic freedom were extended to the unprivileged social groups.

But when a lower caste organized itself for securing a specific weight in the constitution of the country, when it demanded separate electorate, it acted in a reactionary and antinational manner. Separate electorates would only perpetuate communalism. Lower caste would be right in demanding the removal of special obstacles put in their way for the manifestation and development of their talent as a result of hierarchic structures of society. This would be a progressive democratic demand and would help to increase the creative vitality of the people. But if a caste asked for special rights, it acted in an undemocratic and anti-national way. The member of a submerged caste and only common negative interest in as much as they were interested in the removal of disabilities imposed on all of them. But when, due to the establishment of a new economic system, the vocational basis of every caste was disorganized, when every caste was composed of individuals pursuing different vocations and having even conflicting materials interests, there could be no common positive interest of all its members.^{xv}

Similarly non-Brahmin bloc of caste had no common positive interests. These castes were composed of artisans, land labourers, landlords, factory workers, tenants and others. The interest of these groups were widely divergent, within the same caste of this bloc too often there were groups pursuing different occupation.^{xvi}

The non-Brahmin movement was valid and progressive only so far as it struggled to remove legal and social disabilities. Special representation aiming at serving common positive interest had no meaning, since there were no common positive interests of the different castes comprising of non Brahmin bloc.

6. ROLE OF NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The role of nationalist, movement in weakening the caste should not be underestimated. It is true that the basic pillar of the caste, viz. endogamy practically remained intact, but increased collaboration of the members of different-caste in economic, political, and secular cultural movements, steadily grew. The national movement, which already secured a mass basis, affected the narrow caste bonds. Again, the national movement was essentially democratic in principle and based its programmes on equal right of individuals and groups. As such, it was objectively and indirectly in

irreconcilable conflict with the hierarchically graded caste, conserving inequalities based on birth. The national movement unified the people while caste kept them divided. The national movement proclaimed the principles of individual freedom and self determination as much as national freedom and national self determination. So the growth of the national movement weakened the caste.^{xvii}

The social organization of Hindus inherited from the Pre-British period had many oppressive and undemocratic features. The segregation of a section of the Hindus as untouchables, who were prevented from such elementary rights as the right of entry to public temples or of the use of public well and tanks, and the touch of whom contaminated a member of higher castes, constituted a most in human form of social oppression.^{xviii}

The untouchables were the outcaste of the Hindu society. Though belonging to the Hindu society, they were its prescribed parts. Historically, untouchability was the social fruit of the Aryans conquest of India. In the process of social interaction, a portion of the indigenous conquered population was incorporated into the Aryan fold. The most backward and despised section of this incorporated population, it appears, constituted the hereditary caste of untouchables.

For centuries, untouchability persisted in the Hindu society. Even extensive and profound humanitarian and religious reform movements such as started by Buddha, Ramanuja. Ramanand, Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak, Tukaram and others, hardly affected the inhuman and age long institution of untouchability. Hallowed with tradition and sanctified by religion, it continued to exist in all its barbarous vigour for centuries.^{xix}

Hardly any society condemned its section to physical segregation as the Hindu society did in the case of its untouchables. The mere physical touch of the untouchable was a sin, an abomination. In the Hindu society, the hereditary untouchables were assigned such low function as those of scavengers, of remover of dead cattle and others. They are socially and legally, debarred from any other profession. They had no right to study or enter the temple. They had to in a separate area in the village or town and had no freedom to use public wells and tanks which the caste Hindu used. As untouchable was punished for crime, by the law of the Hindu state or village tribunal composed of the caste Hindu, more drastically than a caste Hindu who committed the same crime.^{xx}

The social oppression of the untouchables had religious sanction. As such, it was more firmly entrenched.

Thus, under institution was man so deeply humiliated and crushed as under that of untouchability. The outraging of human personality and human dignity reached its high watermark under it.

It was but natural that the elimination of such as atrocious social phenomenon as untouchability became one of the main plank of the platform of all social reform movement in India.

Though different motive and consideration prompted various group of social reformer in their campaign against untouchability, all recognized it as an institution to be destroyed. It is true that a good proportion of the Hindu community, its numerically strong orthodox section, tenaciously opposed the abolition of untouchability and general disabilities from which these depressed classes of the Hindu society suffered. However, the tendency was towards its increasing elimination.^{xxi}

The socially submerged classes formed about one fifth of the whole Hindu population. The problem of their emancipation, therefore assumed vital importance in any scheme of national freedom and social reconstruction of India. Among the depressed classes themselves, there were social gradations. There were socially superior and socially inferior group among these victims of social injustice themselves. This made the problem further complicated and difficult. Again the extent of untouchability and other disabilities varied from place to place.

In spite of this, the depressed classes were demarcated from the upper caste Hindus by certain fundamental social oppression and disabilities common to them. The removal of untouchability and all disabilities from which the depressed classes suffered, formed an important item in the programmes of all social and religious reform movements that sprang up in India during the British rule.^{xxii}

The Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the social reform conference, even political organization like the Indian Congress led by Gandhi and all India Harijan Sangh, a non-political body founded by Gandhi, strove by propaganda, education, and practical measures to restore equal social, religious and cultural rights to the untouchables. There was a stirring among depressed classes themselves. The spread of education among them brought forth a group of intellectual such as Dr. Ambedkar, who

became the spokesman of their suffering and disabilities and passionate fighter for their elementary human rights. The All India Depressed Classes Association and All India Depressed Federation were the principal organization of these classes. The latter was founded and led by Dr. Ambedkar. In addition, there were numerous local and sectional organizations of the various castes comprising the depressed classes.

The Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj and other religious reform movement of Hindu had for their aim at consolidation of Hindu society on a reconstructed, rational basis. Their leaders strove in the direction of the democratization of Hindu social system. They stood against the gross social injustice from which the depressed Hindu were suffering and generally preached their abolition in the very name of the Hindu Sastras by reinterpreting them.^{xxiii}

The non-religious social reform movement condemned untouchability and other social injustice in the name of individual liberty and equality of human right without trying to secure any favourable verdict of the Vedas on their side. Even those Hindus, who like Savarkar, stood for the Hindu Raj, advocated the elevation of the status of the depressed classes. This was due to the fact that they felt alarmed at the numerical loss which the Hindu community had been experiencing due conversion of untouchables to Islam and guaranteed them more social equality.^{xxiv}

7. GANDHI AND UNTOUCHABILITY

Gandhi, the all India Harijan Sevak Sangh founded by him in 1932, and other bodies were doing extensive work of social reform and educational character for the depressed classes. The Sangh started numerous schools for including residential vocational schools. In addition scavenger's union, cooperative credit society and Housing Society were formed.^{xxv}

A number of Satyagraha movements of the Harijan also took place wherein they disobeyed the ban on their temple entry and strove to enter the temple. Those movements reinforced by growing popular sympathy for their democratic demands, secured for the untouchables and the rights to temple entry in to number of place.^{xxvi}

The Indian nationalists stated that the British Government did not energetically and enthusiastically work for the restoration of the rights of the depressed classes and that it did not exercise its power to strike at the undemocratic denial of elementary human rights to untouchables.

Even Dr. Ambedkar who was not irreconcilably hostile to British government while addressing the untouchables remarked. "Before the British were in a loathsome condition due to your untouchability. What has the British government done to remove your untouchability? Before the British, you could not draw water from the village wells. Has the British government secured you the rights to the well? Before the British you could not enter the temple can you enter there now? Before the British you were denied entry into the police force. Does the British government admit you to the force?"^{xxvii}

Dr. Ambedkar considered that unless the Indian people secured the political power and that power did not concentrate in the hands of the socially suppressed section of the Indian society. It was not possible to completely wipe out all social, legal and cultural disabilities, from which that section suffered.^{xxviii}

This was a strong structure on the neutrality policy of the British government in India in social and religious matters, which objectively tend to perpetuate reactionary and oppressive social custom and institution. It was true that orthodoxy resented and resisted all progressive social measures, but the leaders of Indian nationalism and depressed classes argued that the British government ought not to have evaded its state duty to stamp out social inequalities and injustices. It was true that the British government had intervened in social matters and introduced reforms like the abolition of Sati, equality before law of all citizens' touchable or untouchables alike and others.^{xxix}

The democratic awakening of the depressed classes, their increasing consciousness of their basic human rights was a part of the general national democratic awakening which had taken place among the Indian people during the British rule during that period, a new economic and political system was established all over India. This system was based on the principles that all individual of society were equal units having equal individual liberty and treatment before law. It dealt a heavy blow to the ideas of heredity and status on which the pre-capitalist medieval Indian society was based.^{xxx}

An individual had the equal right and freedom to follow what vocation he liked. He was treated on the whole at par with other fellow citizen before law. This had kindled among the specially submerged classes the urge to break through all Shackles imposed on that freedom for centuries. Their humanitarian activities of the member of the upper caste reinforcing the rebellious struggles of

the submerged section constituted the socio, religious reform movement in India.

Thus a movement to elevate the depressed to improve their miserable economic condition, to spread education among them, to extend to them the freedom to use public well, schools and roads and enter public temples, also to secure for them special political representation, steadily grew in the country and gathered momentum. The Mahad Satyagraha for the right to water led by Dr. Ambedkar was one of the outstanding struggles of untouchables to win equal social rights.

8. DEPERESSED CLASS MOVEMENTS

There was string among the depressed classes themselves. The spread of education among them brought forth a group of intellectuals such as Dr. Ambedkar who become the spokesman of their suffering, disabilities and passionate fighter for their elementary human right through the All India Depressed Class Federation (AIDCF).

The Mahad Satyagraha for the right of water led by Dr. Ambedkar was one of the outstanding struggles of the untouchables to unequal social rights. So he stood against gross social injustice from which the Depressed Hindu were suffering from.^{xxxi}

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar from the case of his heart fought relentlessly to establish a society based on the democratic idea of liberty, equality and fraternity. Echoing the philosophy of Lord Buddha, Ambedkar said that the main evil plague the life of mankind is "Dukha" (sorrow). But unlike Buddha who sought solace in Nirvana, Ambedkar endeavoured to eradicate sorrow (in other words injustice and exploitation) from the human life through the reconstruction of social and economic order which rendered the majority of people as sufferer veritable servitude in economic prosperity, which could be made available to every human being progressively releasing him from want and fear the cause of Dukha.^{xxxii}

A pragmatist to the care Ambedkar believed that in the absence of economic and social justice, political independence would not bring about either social solidarity or the national integration; therefore he laid emphasis on the liquidation of hierarchical structure of society on the basis of Chaturvarna. He advocated the abolition of privileges on the basis of caste status and vigorously fought for the liberty and dignity of the individual. At the same time he was equally forceful in his advocacy of the unity of the nation.^{xxxiii}

Dr. Ambedkar was a towering figure of an astonishingly uncarry foresight, who many times

lasted out against social and economic inequality and wretched Varnashrama system in this country. He believed in the conscious of the Hindus to bring home to them their sins in keeping all the Shudras and Untouchables in perpetual degradation. Luckily all that stormy dust has now settled down and our people are now seeing him in his true light as a great patriot.

Ambedkar has tried to uplift the depressed classes. He has dealt at length with his crusade to save the integral unity of the country.^{xxxiv}34 Ambedkar has taken social reform approach at low level. One, at the level of the Hindu family and other at the level of Hindu society. Because he decided to reconstruct the Hindu society, from the grass root level. The problem regarding the child marriage, widow remarriage, cremation of Sati and post cremation (Sati) relate to the reform of the Hindu family. The problem of the untouchability and the caste system and the modify action of the laws of adoption, marriage and succession related to the reform of the Hindu society.^{xxxv}

Dr. Ambedkar has spoken and written against the Hindu social order which is based on graded inequality with the superiority of the few and degradation of many. To him this can not continue for long and if this ambivalent state of society continues those who suffer from inequality will blow up the "Structure of Political Democracy". Politics can not be the monopoly of a few and other can not remain either beast or burden of prey.^{xxxvi} He vehemently criticized the theory of birth, death and reincarnation which according to popular Hinduism is bound up with the development of caste system. The capacity of man to shape his own destiny is not recognized in this system. Such inequality cannot establish a healthy society. There cannot be the real unity in this country unless the caste system is annihilated.^{xxxvii}

The caste system according to Babasaheb Ambedkar is an integrated part of the Hindu civilization and culture and therefore there are always feud and conspiracy of caste to enslave the weaker section. According to him to get economic equality, it is necessary to complete, bargain to fight, but caste prejudices, ultimately result in conflict and conspiracies to suppress the weak. They result in vested interest and monopoly of only one or two higher castes. The unity of the country is therefore blown up by the caste system and there is no coherence.^{xxxviii}

Providing special safeguard to the minorities and certain classes, who are socially and educationally backward. Through these safeguards he sought to instill in the minority the spirit of nationalism and

tolerance, to accept the rule of the majority even though the majority in India is a communal majority and not a political majority.^{xxxix}

CONCLUSION

The untouchables and other backward classes in India have been enabled to make some improvement in their social, economic and educational situation because of the special safeguard, provided in the Constitution on a preferential basis. Such safeguard are necessary in order to remove the age old disparities existing between the upper caste majority and outcaste minority in India, so that the progressive assimilation of latter into the mainstream of social and national life would ultimately lead to the liquidation of minority.^{xl}

A statesman, scholar, crusader of downtrodden and above all a spiritual guide, Dr. Ambedkar has left an indelible impression on the Indian History. His contribution to uplift the downtrodden made him a cult figure among the depressed classes. He now lives in the heart and mind of the million of the suffering people. They now look at him as immortal soul whose memory will even guide the nation on the path of social justice, liberty and equality.^{xli}

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