

Understanding Caste And Shudras: A Standpoint Of Doctor Bhim Rao Ambedkar

Professor Suresh Kumar¹, Dr. Pintu Kumar², Dr. Sanjiv Ranjan³

¹Dept. of African Studies University of Delhi

²Associate Prof. of History Motilal Nehru College (E) University of Delhi

³Assistant Prof. of Pol. Sci. Motilal Nehru College (E) University of Delhi

Abstract: Nobody can deny that Doctor Bhim Rao Ambedkar was a genius man of letters and words. The present paper is not focusing on this well-known part of his life. It will address another little ignored aspect of his personality i.e. unmatched intellectual creations especially in terms of the scientific, literary and historical analysis of caste and Shudras. His timeless works “Annihilation of Caste” “the Untouchables” and “Who were the Shudras?” will be focus of this essay. It becomes more important because Ambedkar’s struggle for inequality and untouchability found base and ideological strength in these academic creations connecting the root cause of caste and the victims of this system Shudras. Ambedkar treated exogamy and the hatred of Brahmins respectively as the root cause of the origin of caste and Shudras. He saw problems of downtrodden as social and economic but it was a moral problem for Gandhi.

Keywords: Untouchables, Shudras, Endogamy, Exogamy, Caste, Brahmins, Upanayana.

Introduction

Doctor Bhim Rao Ambedkar was a man of actions and letters both, which ascribed him a unique position in Indian history. He was a complete man in this sense since he not only spoke about the problems of India but also come out with their intellectual solutions. Bharat Ratna Ambedkar was social activist and reformer of a repute devoted life for the eradication of inequality, untouchability and caste domination. The present paper is not focusing on this well-known part of his life. It will address another little ignored aspect of his personality i.e. unmatched intellectual creations. Dr. Ambedkar as an expert historian, sociologist and political scientist wrote several academic works related to his actions. Here we will focus on Ambedkar’s viewpoints about caste and Shudras mentioned in his works “Annihilation of Caste” “the Untouchables” and “Who were the Shudras?” It becomes more important because Ambedkar’s struggle for inequality and untouchability found base and ideological strength in these academic creations connecting the root cause of caste and the victims of this system Shudras.

Mook Nayak Newspaper was started with the aim of simple, convincing and forceful language as a mouthpiece of Ambedkar. Hindu society was divided into Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Untouchables. Knowledge and literacy were accumulated and Brahmin monopolized it. Non-Brahmins were backward due to lack of education and power. Untouchables perpetual slavery, poverty and ignorance will overcome through the herculean efforts of providing equal status in religious, social, economic and political fields and offer every man an opportunity to rise in scale in life and creating conditions favorable to his advancement. The spread of education, the development of communications, mode of travelling and the spirit of nationalism had gradually begun to act as effective correctives to the prejudicial ideas of untouchability. Veer Savarkar was released from jail in 1924 and consolidated the Hindu society and upliftment of depressed classes and Untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar had established Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha in 1924 with the aim and objectives of promoting the education, culture and improve the economic conditions of the depressed and untouchable classes. Even the Hindu Mahasabha had passed a resolution in 1923 appealing to the Hindus to open temples, schools and other public places to the Untouchable Hindus. Mahad Satyagraha movement in 1927 and to establish the right to access of the untouchables to the public places. The Chawdar Lake was the public place but the untouchables were not aware of their civil rights. Dr. Ambedkar has drunk water from this pond and thousands of his followers had drunk water after that. This movement rose for the anti-slavery, anti-caste and prohibition of untouchability, free and compulsory primary education culminated in constitutional laws.

Origin of Caste

Dr. Ambedkar's book "The Annihilation of Caste" is an important work to understand the complexity of Indian society resulted from his undelivered speech. The book is written in 1936 discusses the origin of caste and its annihilation from historical to political perspective. It focuses on the inequal and stratified Indian society due to the deeply rooted caste system presenting radical reexaminations of the same. This book refers to the sociological discussion about the existence of God and its formation of social order. The origin of caste system is the man's creation and God treats all equally. Dr B R Ambedkar writes, "I take Religion to mean the propounding of an ideal scheme of divine governance the aim and object of which is to make the social order in which men live a moral order. This is what understands by Religion and this is the sense in which I shall be using the term Religion in this discussion."ⁱ

Dr. Ambedkar describes the historical roots of caste in the chapter two of his book. He links origin, implementation and continuation of caste through religious texts and practices such as Manusmriti. Caste system relates to the Dharma of each individual. Caste origin is deeply linked to Hindu religion. Hinduism links its beginning from the Vedas, which also for the first time mention the division of society into varnas. Lately composed other sastras took references from the Vedas. Upanishads came in subordination to the Vedas also strengthening the caste system philosophically. Dr. Ambedkar writes, "Caste system is an essential feature of Hinduism and a man who does not belong to a recognized Hindu caste cannot be a Hindu. While all this is true, it must not be forgotten

that observance of caste is not enough. Surprisingly, many Muslims and Christians observe caste if not in the matter of inter-dining certainly in the matter of inter-marriage. But they cannot be called Hindus on that account. Both elements must be present. He must be a Hindu and he must also observe caste.ⁱⁱ The identity of caste system has been observed in the Hindu society but the origin of caste system does not observe through the Vedas or Upanishads.

Dr. Ambedkar defines the origin of caste as a natural feature of all stratified societies by continuing its divisions.ⁱⁱⁱ The Hindu system fixed watertight compartments and is seen compartmentalized even today. Babashaheb concluded after studying existing theories related to the origin of castes that the superimposition of endogamy over exogamy is the key source of creation of caste clusters. Endogamy marriage are as universal as Indian villages. Traditionally, marriage within own caste or subcaste is called endogamy.^{iv} Altekar,^v Kapadia,^{vi} and Karve^{vii} noted different kinds of kinship marriages going on in India. Ambedkar treated the customs of 'Sati' and child-marriage are the upshot of endogamy. A caste is a closed class, which occurred before Manu. He simply codified the existing caste rules. Caste in the singular number is an unreality; caste exists only in plural number.' Marriage outside the same caste or subcaste are called exogamous. Manu's rule of exogamy was loose since allowed sagotra marriage leading not to serious or minor sin.^{viii} At present, it is essential to marry within the caste but outside the gotra regulated by caste panchayats, clan leaders, and village heads, a source of political and social power.^{ix}

Dr. Ambedkar writes, "That in primitive times the village settlement consisted of two parts. One part occupied by the community belonging to one tribe and another part occupied by the Broken Men of different tribes. The part of the settlement occupied by the tribal community was regarded as the village proper. The Broken Men lived in the outskirts of the village. The reason why the Broken Men lived outside the village was because they were aliens and did not belong to the tribal community. It is therefore, clear that what is said about Untouchables on the issue of their living outside the village is not without a parallel elsewhere."^x

Ambedkar and Shudras

The Shudra community treated as slave in ancient Indian society pointed and recognized by Manu. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has rightly pointed out the ancient institution of slavery would have been surviving in the post-independent India also if it was not ended in 1843 by the colonial reign.^{xi} Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's book "Who were the Shudras" explains about the Shudras and discusses the Brahminical version about the Shudras. This research work of Dr Ambedkar has recommended about the origin of Untouchables, their status in the Aryan society, their continuous dispute with the Brahmins and their refusal of sacred thread ties to Shudras. The theory and practice of Chaturvarnya (four castes) does not inform about the real nature of Indian society rather explain the graded inequality practiced subject to punishment in case of any disrespect. Dr Ambedkar has analyzed Chaturvarnya with the study of ninetieth Hymn of the Tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda connecting to the Purusha Sukta and compared with the Greek social structure advocated by Plato, two classes of Romans and

three classes of Egyptians and did not find any evidence of discrimination on the basis of division in these societies. But the scheme of Purusha Sukta is unique and is based on the principle of inequality in which the Shudra comes in the end. Purusha Sukta as part of the social classes has also been compared with the old Jewish society but no theology has explained the social discrimination at any front in the society. The sociological scrutiny of Purusha Sukta interlinked it with the terms Savarnas, Avarnas, Dvijas, Non-Dvijas and Traivarnikas but did not find the de jure justification of the untouchability of the Shudras.

The Vedas consists of Rigveda, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva Veda are creation of Vishvakarman that is the Universe of Purusha, creation of Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya. The Taittiriya Brahman mentioned that the Brahmana caste is sprung from the gods and the Shudras from the Asuras. This Shudra has spring from non-existence. Dr Ambedkar critically examined and said that ‘the degradation of the Shudras is the result of a violent conflict between the Shudras and the Brahmins and there is abundant of evidence of it.’ Sudas, descendant of Ikshvaku, removed Vasishtha, Brahmin priest from office and appointed Vishvamitra, Kshatriyas Brahmin as his priest. Sudas appointed Vasishtha as family priest, who helped him to win the battle against the ten kings. Sudas threw into fire Shakti the son of Vasishtha and burned him alive. It averted a deadly enmity growing up between Suda and Vasishtha. The conflict stories between King Vena and Brahmins, King Pururavas and Brahmins, King Nahusha grandson of Pururavas and Brahmins and King Nimi and Brahmins. Unfortunately, the bearing of these cases has not been realized that this conflict was a conflict between Brahmins and Shudras. Even Manu had no idea of this. Sudas was a Shudra and this conflict was between Brahmins and Kshatriya and Shudra were also a branch of the Kshatriyas.^{xii}

Brahmins employed the technique and brought down the degradation of Shudras. Brahmins refused to perform the Upanayana of the Shudras. By this way, Brahmins wreaked their vengeance upon the Shudras and degraded them in the society. Right to property and right to knowledge are the two most important incidents of Upanayana. When Upanayana was open to everyone, Aryan or non-Aryan, it was not a matter of social significance. It was a common right to all. The denial of Upanayana to the Shudras introduced a new factor in the Indo-Aryan society. It made the Shudras up to the higher classes as their superiors and enabled the three higher classes to look down upon the Shudras as their inferiors. This is one way in which the loss of Upanayana brought about the degradation of the Shudras and the rules laid down in the Purva Mimamsa.^{xiii}

The right to property and education is grasped with the refusal of Upanayana and it further degraded the social status and personal rights. The stoppage of Upanayana made this community doomed. Dr Ambedkar writes, “Without Upanayana, it was a most deadly weapon discovered by the Brahmin to avenge themselves against the Shudras. It had the effect of an atomic bomb. It did make the Shudra, to use the language of the Brahmins, a graveyard.”^{xiv} The Upanayana philosophy is so strong that even Shivaji Maharaj was not coronated in the initial stages because he had no Upanayana samskara and belonged to Shudra. This volume has a lengthy discussion on the origin of Shivaji

Maharaj caste by which the author has explained the evil effects of stoppage of Upanayana. Dr. Ambedkar further analyzed this debate and stated, "It is the Brahmins who brought about the fall of the Shudras from the second to the fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan society. That the technique adopted by the Brahmins to degrade the Shudras was to deny them the benefit of the Upanayana. This act of degradation was born out of the spirit of revenge on the part of the Brahmins who were groaning under the tyrannies and oppressions and indignities to which they were subjected by the Shudra kings.^{xv} The last chapter has explained the reason of conflict between the Kshatriyas and Brahmins.

The Kshatriyas were the leaders among the Vedic hymn makers. The Gayatri mantra has mentioned the Vishvamitra who was Kshatriya Brahmin. Both of them has high calibers and Kshatriyas took up this challenge of the Brahmins. The reconciliation between Brahmins and Shudras are scattered throughout the Mahabharata and Puranas. On the basis of different evidences such as description of Paijavana as Shudra and the identification of Paijavana with Sudas of the Rig Veda, admission in the Satapatha and Taittiriya Brahmanas that there were only three Varnas and the Shudras did not form a separate Varna, Shudras were the kings and ministers of State and Shudras were at one time entitled to Upanayana, Dr Ambedkar has proposed the new thesis. This book summarizes the caste system and highlights that "the Shudras were the part of Aryan mixed in the Kshatriyas. The Shudra kings and the Brahmins struggled for supremacy and the Brahmanas rejected sacred thread to the Shudras resulting social decline to the lowest rank of the fourth Varna."^{xvi}

Conclusion

B. R. Ambedkar saw the problems of downtrodden as social and economic. Hindu and Christian saw those as religious. Gandhi found it a moral problem. Not coercion, nor conversion; but moral reformation should be the way was the Gandhian approach. The constitution was promulgated and B R Ambedkar writes, "The ideals that inspired the French Revolution-liberty, equality and fraternity-had also found their reflection in it. Liberty and equality could be achieved through constitutional means. Our Constitution provides for the two deals and also the laws to punish violators. But the third ideal, fraternity, cannot be achieved through mere constitutional mechanisms. It requires public education. For example, untouchability and caste discrimination have been declared as crimes in the Constitution; they are banished from public life. But have they gone from our hearts and minds?"^{xvii}

The goodness of the constitution is evaluated on its implementation. Dr Ambedkar knew well that it fails to deliver if the keepers of it, the good people, lethargic and indifferent, thinking that politics as a vocation is all scum, stay away from it, and in the absence of it, the unwanted power greedy people occupy the power positions. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his famous lecture 'Three Warnings' seems quite worried about the continuity of India's freedom after the announcement on 26 January 1950. He says that India already given her freedom once in the hands of the British due to the treason and disloyalty of few Indians and it will happen again and lost forever if Indian political parties will keep faith above the country.^{xviii}

This is the fact that no special effort was ever made in all these years to inform and educate the people about it. It was only in 2015, sixty-five years after its adoption, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi started celebrating Constitution Day every year. President Ram Nath Kovind speaking on the occasion of the Constitution Day said, “It is a paradox that our citizens, in whose name the Constitution was adopted, are sometimes not sufficiently informed about what the Constitution means for us. Let the 70th year of its adoption be dedicated to enhancing awareness about the Constitution.”^{xix} The untouchability is completely eradicated only once there is a strict adherence to constitutional methods in achieving our social and economic objectives.

Liberty and equality are achievable under Constitution but a constant effort to render justice to untouchable section of society will only bring fraternity. As long as the untouchable society feels discriminated against, the sense of brotherhood cannot be fulfilled and achieved. Dr Ambedkar writes, “Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians-of Indians being one people. It is this principle that gives unity and solidarity to social life. Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It needs to be cultivated. Let the nation dedicate itself to the task of cultivating that.”^{xx} The constitutional morality of Dr Ambedkar has been explained in the movement of Chawdar Lake water use. The municipality of Mahad law stated that the water tanks in the city are open to the public and the upper caste people cannot stop the untouchables using the lake water for drinking. The constitutional morality is in the practice of the constitution and not to be seen as an ornamental artifact.

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