

“DR.B.R.AMBEDKAR’S CONCEPTUALIZING CASTE, TRANSFORMATION AND ANNIHILATION”

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Abstract

Caste is a prevailing feature of our Indian Society. It is just like a blood circulating in the veins of the physique of Indians. According to Dr. S.V. Ketkar, Indians can carry their caste identity wherever they go in the world. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar says that it is the concept of Endogamy that has preserved the caste system perpetually in Indian society. The origin of caste system is attributed to Iranians by Dr. R.C.Mazumdar and later to the Aryans and by Mahatma Phule to the Brahmans. On the basis of orthodox caste system humans are divided into thousands of castes and sub-castes where we find that there is comensal taboos imposed on the so called lower castes. Some castes have been lifetime privileged social position as against the low caste.

If there has to be transformation in the caste system, we have to implement our Indian Constitution and its provisions. It has provided Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice to all the citizens of India irrespective of any of the distinction. As equals to be treated equally, Unequals unequally so can be justice given to each and every individual. It has provided reservation to the castes which have been thousands of years been treated inhumanly on the basis of caste discrimination. Some castes have been enjoying

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perpetuate highest social pre-eminence. E.g. all the Shankaracharyas have been from single caste and right to perform all the religious rituals also have been reserved for a particular caste.

If we wish to annihilate caste system in India, we will have to find its origin in the religion, then to Shastras which preaches religion and then have intellectual debates with the person who teaches Shastras to be followed lest the followers will be deprived of Salvation.

Introduction

Caste is the real life of Indian society without which society cannot function. The Indian society has been divided into thousands of castes and the sub-castes alike. These castes and sub-castes are looking at each other in a manner where they are sometimes following the commensal rule together but when the question of religion or inter-caste marriage arise the relations of commensality are forgotten and they rise to riots and honour killings. These days many caste groups wanted reservations and for that they have conducted many kinds times and many kinds of agitations to the government. Even these groups have given ultimatums and threatened to take law and order situation into their own hands.

Recently, the castes groups asking for reservation in employment in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana etc. but don't want to leave their castes or do not want to get themselves looked down upon being the reserved category and so the backwards castes. Some recent trends are leaning towards reservations on the basis of economic backwardness as they interpret reservations as the programme of poverty amelioration. But they don't think that in Indian corrupt system anybody can get the certificate of the economically backwardness. One can be economically backward by his bankrupt habits and will get certificate of the same. Anybody can be backward and forward many number of times in their generations. But social backwardness is perpetual in Indian society though the socially backward, now have become economically

forward but in India they will remain socially backward in perpetuity. Therefore, I want to argue what is the system of caste understood by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar which keeps this perpetuity? What is the mechanism of caste? How did it originate? How did it transform into the fighting for dalit rights? We as Indians, can we annihilate this caste system from India? The paper answers all these questions.

Conceptualizing Caste

According to Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, “Caste is mainly the custom of endogamy that has preserved the castes and prevented one caste from fusing into another.”¹ The well-known historian SuviraJaiswal says that caste endogamy was not a borrowing or survival of aboriginal practice. It evolved and consolidated in the process of regulating hierarchical subordination of groups and reproduction of patriarchy. Hierarchy defined as separation and superiority of the pure over the impure.”²

The caste system may be defined as a form of differentiation in which the constituent units justify endogamy, on the basis of putative biological difference which are semaphored by the realization of multiple social practices.³ The Indian society has always been an unchanging society, based on caste structure, which in turn made it oppressive and averse to any change, or alternatively, that it was an idyllic society characterized by harmony and an absence of social tension---a utopian society---these beliefs are still with us.⁴ History has often been used in the search for an identity. Each contemporary group seeks its own identity in the past.⁵ In the process of abolishing caste; the war of nerves needs to be fought at two levels---one at the level of one’s own mind, one’s family and one’s caste, and the other at the level of spiritual democracy versus spiritual fascism.⁶

The Origin and antiquity of Caste System

Dr.R.C.Majumdar compares the origin of caste system with Iranians and says, “The earliest Iranian society was divided into four classes (pishtras) corresponding to those described in the PurushaSukta. Thus the Athravas (Priests) would correspond to the Brahmans, the Rathaesthas

(warriors) to the Kshatriyas, the Vastriyas-Fshouyants (chief of family) to the Vaisyas and the Huitis (labourers) to the Sudras.⁷ There is some force in Ludwig's argument that as the religious ideas contained in the Rig-Veda reach back to the time when the Iranians and the ARYANS lived together, we have a right to take the social ideas also as representative of the same period; that if we admit the absence of similar class distinctions in the age of Rig-Veda, we are bound to presume that the Aryans originally had the distinctions in their society, subsequently lost them and had built them up again at some future period.⁸

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule says, "The Aryan Brahmins invented the pernicious fiction of the caste system, compiled (learned) treatises to serve their own self-interest and indoctrinated the pliable minds of the ignorant Shudras."⁹

Dr. Ambedkar says, "Brahmins were the originators of this 'unnatural institution' founded and maintained through these unnatural means."¹⁰ At some time in the history of the Hindus, the priestly class (Brahmins) socially detached itself from the rest of the body of people and through a closed door policy became a caste by itself.¹¹ Brahmin class first raised the structure of caste. While making themselves into a caste, the Brahmins by virtue of this, created non-Brahmin caste. Dr. Ambedkar clarifies that before the Brahmins invented caste system, what we had in India was a tribal society similar to today's African continent where thousands of tribal units co-exists with their respective customs, manners, languages, rituals and religions. What existed in India then, was a perfect democratic system based on the principle of 'equal but separate' i.e. Horizontal social system. The Brahmins twisted this horizontal society into a vertical one, placing one caste above the other and placing themselves at the apex of this caste pyramid. Eminent Sociologist G.S. Ghurye reviews, "It may be taken to be an historical fact that the people calling themselves 'Arya' poured into India through the North-West somewhere about 2000 B.C."¹² Ghurye also admits that Brahmins were the moral guides and legislators of the immigrant Aryans. Caste is very often mentioned in their Sanskrit books. He also says, "The Vedic Indians and Iranians lived together as one community, designating themselves by the term Arya."¹³ Ghurye says, "Caste in India is a Brahminic child and that 'endogamy', the outstanding feature of caste, was first developed by the Brahmins..."¹⁴

Dr. Ambedkar says, “By the Hindu social system the communities are placed in an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt.”¹⁵ The system of caste, with its alleged basis in religion and ritual, was regarded as traditional, and was seen as functioning in conjunction with the integrated, ‘self-sufficient’ village community.

Transformation and Annihilation of Caste

The provision of reservation for particular castes incorporated in the constitution of India has provided the principal axis around which the debate is a continuous phenomenon. This provision rendered largely necessary by the legacy of colonial rule, was turned into an instrument for the fight against ‘social injustice’ and advancement of the ‘weak’ by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.¹⁶ The reservation has produced a paradoxical situation. Even as it has enabled members of the so called lower castes and Dalits to press for more privileges, it has permitted the privileged upper castes to pose as the ‘champions of equality’ and question ‘compensatory discrimination’¹⁷

The so called upper caste people wanted that castes are to be annihilated that means to them is to abolish caste based reservations. They want to destroy the external characteristics of the caste system without affecting it materially. They want to change the form without changing the content. They don’t want to share their Brahmanical monopoly over the power and privileges of the Brahmanical social order. They want to take Harijans (untouchables) to Hindu temples; but will not tolerate Harijans demanding priesthood. They are happy to welcome the dalits and tribals to upper caste-owned hotels, but will not allow dalits to become hotel owners. They want to propagate that caste is the blot on Hinduism and don’t believe it anymore but they will not marry their daughters to so called low castes, instead will commit honour killings if any dalit marries the upper caste. The people opposing caste system want to cure the symptoms of the disease but Ambedkarites want to cure the disease itself.

The powerful castes will have a feeling of superiority over the powerless servile castes. They want only cosmetic changes. They want the scavenger to continue as a scavenger without any sense of inferiority. They advise a better scavenger. E.g. ASulabh International headed by a Bihari Brahman and wanted scavenger to be proud of his profession. No Brahman so far as demanded that a non-brahman at least Kshatriya or Vaishya (not of Shudra) should succeed a

Shankaracharya. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar says, “The root of the untouchability is the caste system; the root of caste system is the religion attached to Varnashram; and the root of Varnashram is the Brahmanic religion; and the root of the Brahmanic religion is authoritarianism of political power.”¹⁸

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar in his book ‘Annihilation of Caste,’ puts an argument on how to bring about the reform of the Hindu Social Order? How to abolish caste?

He says, “People are not wrong in observing caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which inculcated this notion of caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy is not the people who observe caste, but the Shastras which teach them this religion of caste. Criticizing and ridiculing people for not inter-dining or inter-marrying or occasionally holding inter-caste dinners and celebrating inter-caste marriages, is a futile method of achieving the desired end... You must not only discard the Shastras, you must also deny their authority, as did Buddha and Nanak. You must have the courage to tell the Hindus that what is wrong with them is their religion- the religion which has produced in them this notion of sacredness of caste.”¹⁹

Brahmanic forces can dominate the public only because of their caste strength promoted through their religious Mutts which are centres of caste consolidation. The people, the victims of their castism can end their domination only by consolidating their castes and by setting up their own caste Mutts. Brahmans are not a single homogenous caste. There are hundreds of sub-castes (gotras) among them and each sub-caste has its own religious Mutt through which each sub-caste consolidates its jati identity. Each religious Mutt like the Shankaracharya Mutts is presided over by a male, unmarried swami. The Brahmans, to whichever Mutt they belong, adore this swami. Through the power of their Brahmanic monopoly over the media, they frighten even non-Brahman leaders to publicly prostrate before that swami.²⁰Dr.B.R.Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for depressed classes and a separate settlement and later separate religion are the political programme based on this caste consolidation method.²¹ Carter G. Woodson, a Black Historian and educationist asked his people to use ‘segregation against segregation’.²²

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar argues that the outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. And nothing can emancipate the outcaste except destruction of the caste system.

Therefore, the destruction of caste system will automatically result in the destruction of outcastes system. Otherwise whatever the measures employed to annihilate the caste system will only result in the transformation. And in this transformation that the opposite aspects of outcastes system will cease to exist in their previous forms. At least for transformation, the outcastes must become the governing classes. Until this process of transformation, servile class into governing class is completed, caste contradictions cannot be resolved. This process essentially presupposes the strengthening of the oppressed castes on the lines of 'Caste' alone. The elimination of all castes, a theoretical goal set by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar is the end and not the beginning.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar says, "The governing class in India has no such intention of making any sacrifice on the altar of Indian freedom. Instead of surrendering its privileges in the name of nationalism, the governing class in India is using or misusing the slogan of nationalism to maintain its privileges. Whenever the servile classes ask for reservations in the legislatures, in the executive and in public services, the governing class raises the cry of 'nationalism in danger'. People are told that if we are to achieve the national freedom, we must maintain national unity, that all questions regarding reservations are inimical to national unity and therefore, for anyone interested in national freedom it is a sin to stand out for such governing class. It stands in glaring contrast with that of the governing class in Japan. Far from sacrificing its privileges for nationalism, it is exploiting nationalism to preserve them."²³

The constitution of India nowhere describes India as a nation. It is a "Union of States". Nonetheless, it recognizes caste so as to ensure the participation of the subalterns in administration. But it prohibits discrimination on the basis of castes but not caste as an identity.

The term nation implies the need for territory which has to be occupied by a nationality to make it a nation-state. According to Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, the above definition means that India is a country with several 'nations'. At the time of presenting the constitution he said, I am of the

opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. He raises a question that how can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? ²⁴

“Caste and Jati distinctions may not disappear in India in spite of the broadbasing and economic growth, but the feelings of caste/jati hierarchy are bound to weaken very much. Communities organized on caste basis have in the past played a useful role by stimulating collective action for their betterment.”²⁵

Conclusion:

The Indian citizen must understand the concept of Jati or caste in India, their mechanism, their creators, and based on that how society is divided into shackles. Also the so called upper caste people talking of removal of caste discrimination must rationally think who dominated the people to believe casteism. Equals be treated equally and unequals unequally so as to get social justice. Then only the process of annihilation of caste will start.

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