
UNIT 1 CASTE AND ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
 - 1.1 Introduction
 - 1.2 Ambedkar's View on Caste
 - 1.3 Annihilation of Caste
 - 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
 - 1.5 Questions to Check Your Progress
- Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to understand :

- Origin of caste;
- Hindu caste system;
- Ambedkar's view on caste; and
- Annihilation of caste.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Caste system in the Indian society has prevailed for many centuries. It divides all members of society into four hierarchical categories called varnas, with Brahmins at the top and Shudras at the bottom:

- Brahmins
- Kshatriyas
- Vaishyas
- Shudras

Membership to one's caste is ascribed by birth and one's progeny also by default falls into the same caste category. In this unit we will discuss castes in India their mechanism, genesis, development and annihilation of caste.

1.2 AMBEDKAR'S VIEW ON CASTE

Ambedkar, during his stay at Columbia University, presented a paper in an anthropology seminar of Dr. Goldenweizer. In the paper, Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development, Ambedkar identifies caste as an important institution. He observes that caste is a complex subject that needs a comprehensive explanation. He contends that before him many subtler minds have attempted to unravel the mysteries of caste, but unfortunately it still remains in the domain of the "unexplained", not to say of the "un-understood". The problem of caste is vast and has been challenged both theoretically and practically.

Ambedkar writes:

As long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders, and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem.

Many great scholars have tried to identify the origin of caste. However, Ambedkar did not endorse most of the theories:

- *Senart*: To the French scholar's statement that the idea of pollution was peculiar to caste, Ambedkar said it was 'a particular case of the general belief in purity'. For Ambedkar, the idea of pollution could be ignored without affecting the working of castes. The idea was attached to the institution of caste only because the caste that occupied the highest rank was the priestly caste, which was associated with purity.
- *Nesfield*: To Nesfield's theory highlighting absence of messing with those outside the caste, Ambedkar said that it was mistaking the effect for the cause. Being a self-enclosed unit, caste naturally limits social intercourse, including messing.
- *Sir H Risley*: Ambedkar did not find Risley's views deserving of a comment.
- *Ketkar*: He agreed with Ketkar, who had defined caste in its relation to a system of castes and had focussed his attention only on those characteristics which were absolutely necessary for the existence of a caste within a system. Ambedkar, however, critiqued Ketkar for taking 'prohibition of intermarriage and 'membership by autogeny' as two characteristics of caste and argued that they were but two aspects of one and the same thing. If intermarriage is prohibited, the membership of those born within the group shall be automatically limited.

Ambedkar further argues that no civilized society other than Indian one practises rituals of the remote past even today. Its religion is essentially primitive, and its tribal code, in spite of the advancement of time and civilization, operates with all its pristine vigour even today. The prevalence of exogamy was well-known in the primitive world. However, with the passage of time and subsequent changes of institutional norms and values, exogamy lost its importance and efficacy, and excepting the nearest blood-kin, there is usually no social bar restricting the field of marriage. But in India the law of exogamy is a positive injunction even today. Indian society still holds on to the clan (gotras) system, even though there are no clans, and this can be easily seen from the law of matrimony which centres round the principle of exogamy. It is not that *sapindas* (blood-kin) cannot marry, but a marriage even between *sagotras* (of the same clan) is regarded as a sacrilege.

Ambedkar notes that endogamy is foreign to the Indian people. The various gotras of India are and have been exogamous: It is no exaggeration to say that to the people of India, exogamy is a creed and none dare infringe it; so much so that, in spite of endogamy of the castes within them, exogamy is strictly observed, and there are more rigorous penalties for violating exogamy than endogamy. Ambedkar writes:

You will, therefore, readily see that with exogamy as the rule there could be no Caste, for exogamy means fusion. But we have castes; consequently in the final

analysis creation of Castes, so far as India is concerned, means the superposition of endogamy on exogamy. However, in an originally exogamous community, an easy working out of endogamy (which is equivalent to the creation of caste) is a grave problem, and it is in the consideration of the means utilized for the preservation of endogamy against exogamy that we may hope to find the solution of our problem. Thus the superposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste (Ibid., 9).

Endogamy means creation of caste.

Ambedkar takes the example of an imaginary group that desires to make itself into a caste and analyses what means it will have to adopt to make itself endogamous. If a group desires to make itself endogamous a formal injunction against inter-marriage with outside groups will be of no avail amidst the practice of exogamy already in place. Again, there is a tendency in all groups in close contact with one another to assimilate and amalgamate and thus to consolidate into a homogeneous society. If this tendency is to be strongly counteracted in the interest of caste formation, it is absolutely necessary to circumscribe a circle outside which people should not contract marriages.

Nevertheless, this encircling to prevent inter-caste marriages creates problems from within, of which there is not easy solution. Roughly speaking, in a normal group, the sex ratio is more or less evenly distributed, and generally speaking there is equality between those of the same age. The equality is, however, never quite realized in actual societies. To the group that is desirous of making itself into a caste, the maintenance of equality between the sexes becomes the ultimate goal; without it, endogamy can no longer subsist. In other words, if endogamy is to be preserved, conjugal rights from within have to be provided for; otherwise members of the group will be driven out of the circle to take care of themselves in any way they can. For the same, the conjugal rights have to be provided for from within. It is absolutely necessary to maintain a numerical equality between the marriageable units of two sexes within the group desirous of making itself into a caste. It is only through the maintenance of such equality that the necessary endogamy of the group can be kept intact, and a very large disparity is sure to break it (Ambedkar: 2014, vol 1. p. 10).

The problem of caste, then, ultimately resolves itself into one of repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it.

The much needed parity between the units can be realized only when a couple dies simultaneously, which is a rare possibility. The more likely scenarios are:

- The husband may die before the wife and create a surplus woman, who must be disposed of; else through intermarriage, she will violate the endogamy of the group.
- The wife may die before her husband and create a surplus man; who must be disposed of; else he will marry outside the caste and will break the endogamy.

Thus, both the *surplus man* and the *surplus woman* constitute a threat to the caste for not finding suitable partners within their prescribed circle. They may transgress the boundary, marry outside and *import offspring that is foreign to the caste*.

To get rid of the surplus woman and preserve the endogamy of caste, the group may be likely to resort to two different ways:

- 1) To burn her on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. This, however, is rather an impracticable way of solving the problem of sex disparity. In some cases, it may work; in others, it may not. Consequently, every *surplus woman* cannot thus be disposed of because it is an easy solution but a hard realization. Therefore, the surplus woman (=widow), if not disposed of, remains in the group, but her very existence invites a double danger. She may marry outside the caste and violate endogamy, or she may marry within the caste and through competition encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brides in the caste. She is therefore a menace in any case, and something must be done to her if she cannot be burned along with her deceased husband.
- 2) To enforce widowhood on her for the rest of her life. So far as the objective results are concerned, burning is a better solution than enforcing widowhood. Burning the widow eliminates all the three evils that a surplus woman is fraught. Being dead and gone, she creates no problem of remarriage either inside or outside the caste. But compulsory widowhood is superior to burning because it is more practicable. Besides being comparatively humane, it also guards against the evils of remarriage as does burning, but it fails to guard the morals of the group. No doubt, under compulsory widowhood, the woman remains, and just because she is deprived of her natural right of being a legitimate wife in future, the incentive to immoral conduct is increased. But this is by no means an insuperable difficulty. She can be degraded to a condition in which she is no longer a source of allurements (Ibid., 11). Thus, the surplus women can be controlled as follow:

Widow burning	Compulsory widowhood
Impractical and hard to implement	Practicable
Inhuman	humane
Eliminates all three evils	
Creates no problem of remarriage outside the caste	The widow may marry outside the caste and violate endogamy
Creates no problem of remarriage inside the caste	The widow may marry within the caste and encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brides in the caste

The problem of the surplus man (=widower) is much more difficult than that of the surplus woman in a group that desires to make itself into a caste. From time immemorial, man is a dominant figure in every group. With this traditional superiority of man over woman, his wishes have always been consulted. Contrary to this, woman is given very low status and also made an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions. Such being the case, one cannot accord the same kind of treatment to a *surplus man* as you can to a *surplus woman* in a caste.

The burning of widower with his deceased wife is hazardous in two ways:

- 1) It cannot be done simply because he is a man.
- 2) If done, a sturdy soul is lost to the caste.

There remain two solutions which can help to “conveniently” dispose him of. Although the man is important to the group, endogamy is still more important, and the solution must assure both these ends. Under these circumstances, he may be forced or induced to remain a widower for the rest of his life. This solution is not altogether difficult. For without any compulsion, some are so disposed as to enjoy self-imposed celibacy or even to take a further step of their own accord and renounce the world and its joys. But given human nature as it is, this solution can hardly be expected to be realized. On the other hand, as is very likely to be the case, if the *surplus man* remains in the group as an active participator in group activities, he is a danger to the morals of the group. From a different point of view, celibacy, though easy in cases where it succeeds, is not so advantageous to the material prospects of the caste. If he observes genuine celibacy and renounces the world, he would not be a menace to the preservation of caste endogamy or caste morals as he undoubtedly would be if he remained a secular person. But as an ascetic celibate, he is as good as burned so far as the material well-being of his caste is concerned. A caste, in order that it may be large enough to afford a vigorous communal life, must be maintained at a certain numerical strength. But to hope for this and to proclaim celibacy is the same as trying to cure atrophy by bleeding.

Imposing celibacy on the surplus man in the group, therefore, fails both theoretically and practically. It is in the interest of the caste to keep him as a *grahastha* (one who raises a family), to use a Sanskrit technical term. But the problem is to provide him with a wife from within the caste. At the outset this is not possible. There has to be one man to one woman, and none can have two chances of marriage. For a caste thoroughly self-enclosed, there are always just enough marriageable women to go round for the marriageable men. Under these circumstances the *surplus man* can be provided with a wife only by recruiting a bride from the ranks of those not yet marriageable in order to tie him down to the group. This is certainly the best of the possible solutions in the case of the *surplus man*. By this, he is kept within the caste. By this means, the numerical depletion through constant outflow is guarded against, and by this, endogamy and morals are preserved (Ibid., 13).

It will now be seen that the four means by which numerical disparity between two sexes is conveniently maintained are:

- 1) Burning the widow with her deceased husband;
- 2) Compulsory widowhood—a milder form of burning;
- 3) Imposing celibacy on the widower and
- 4) Wedding him to a girl not yet marriageable.

According to Ambedkar, burning the widow and imposing celibacy on the widower were the means to preserve endogamy.

These means create and perpetuate endogamy, caste and endogamy being one and the same thing. The existence of these means is identical with caste, and caste involves these means. This, according to Ambedkar, is the general mechanism of the caste system.

He further says that caste in India is a very ancient institution, even though there are no authentic records because the Hindus are so constituted that to them writing history is a folly, for the world is an illusion. (Ibid., 13)

Though institutions may remain unrecorded, they do live for a long time; and customs and morals, like fossils, tell their own history. Ambedkar scrutinizes the solutions the Hindus arrived at to meet the problems of the surplus man and surplus woman.

In spite of complexity of the working of Hindu society, a superficial observer may present three singular uxorial customs, namely:

- Sati or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband.
- Enforced widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to remarry.
- Girl marriage.

In addition, one also notes a great hankering after *sannyasa* (renunciation) on the part of the widower, but this may in some cases be due purely to psychic disposition.

While explaining the above points, he comments that there is no scientific explanation on the origin of these customs even today. The philosophy of why these customs have been honoured exists, but the causes of their origin and existence are not understood. He says he does not know why compulsory widowhood was honoured, and even though he had not met anyone who sang in praise of it, there were a great many adhering to it.

Ambedkar also discusses Manu, ancient India's law giver.

Every country has its law-giver who arises as an incarnation (avatar) in times of emergency to set right a sinning humanity and to give it the laws of justice and morality. Manu, the law-giver of India, was certainly an audacious person. If the story that he gave the law of caste be credited, then Manu must have been a dare-devil fellow, and the humanity that accepted his dispensation must be quite different from the one we are acquainted with. It is unimaginable that the law of caste was given. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Manu could not have outlived his law, for what is that class that can submit to be degraded to the status of brutes by the pen of a man, and suffer him to raise another class to the pinnacle? Unless he was a tyrant who held all the population in subjection, it cannot be imagined that he could have been allowed to dispense his patronage in this grossly unjust manner, as may be easily seen by a mere glance at his "Institutes". I may seem hard on Manu, but I am sure my force is not strong enough to kill his ghost. Manu lives like a disembodied spirit and is appealed to, and I am afraid will yet live long. One thing I want to impress upon you is that Manu did not give the law of Caste and that he could not do so. Caste existed long before Manu. He was an upholder of it and therefore philosophised about it, but certainly he did not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu Society. His work ended with the codification of existing caste rules and the preaching of caste dharma. The spread and growth of the caste system is too gigantic a task to be achieved by the power or cunning of an individual or of a class. Similar in argument is the theory that the Brahmins created the caste... The Brahmins may have been guilty of many things, and I dare say they were, but the imposing of the caste system on the non-Brahmin population was beyond their mettle. They may have helped the process by their glib philosophy, but they certainly could not have pushed their scheme beyond their own confines... One can take pleasure and eulogize its furtherance, but cannot further it very far. The

vehemence of my attack may seem to be unnecessary; but I can assure you that it is not uncalled for. ...There is a strong belief in the mind of orthodox Hindus that the Hindu Society was somehow moulded into the framework of the caste system, and that it is an organisation consciously created by the *Shastras*. Not only does this belief exist, but it is being justified on the ground that it cannot but be good, because it is ordained by the *Shastras* and the *Shastras* cannot be wrong. I have urged so much on the adverse side of this attitude, not because the religious sanctity is grounded on scientific basis, nor to help those reformers who are preaching against it. Preaching did not make the caste system; neither will it unmake it. My aim is to show the falsity of the attitude that has exalted religious sanction to the position of a scientific explanation (Ibid., 16).

For Ambedkar, the question of spread and origin of caste are not separated. According to Ambedkar the caste system has either been imposed upon the docile population of India by a lawgiver as a divine dispensation or it has developed according to some law of social growth peculiar to the Indian people. Ambedkar refutes the notion that the law of caste was given by some lawgiver. Manu is considered to be the law-giver of Hindus; but at the outset there is doubt whether he ever existed. Even if he existed, the caste system predates Manu. No doubt Manu upheld it and philosophised about it, but he certainly did not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu society. His work ended with the confiscation of existing caste rules and the preaching of caste dharma or duties obligations and conduct associated with each caste. Ambedkar rejects the argument that the Brahmin created the caste. He maintains that it was necessary to dismantle this belief because still there is a strong belief in the minds of orthodox Hindus that the Hindu society was moulded into the framework of the caste system and that it is consciously crafted in the *shastras*. It may be noted that the teaching and preaching of *shastras* or the sacred texts is the prerogative of the Brahmins. Ambedkar agrees with the second argument i.e. of some law of social growth peculiar to Indian people about the spread of caste system. According to western scholars, the bases of origin of various castes in India are occupation, survival of tribal organisations, the rise of new belief system, crossbreeding and migration (Ambedkar, 1978:17). The problem, according to Ambedkar, is that the aforesaid nuclei also exist in other societies and are not peculiar to India. Ambedkar asked, “why they did not ‘form’ caste in other parts of this planet?” At some stage, the priestly class detached itself from rest of the body of people and emerged as a caste by itself. The other classes that were subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation. Some of these classes got divided into bigger groups and some into smaller ones.

According to Ambedkar, “This sub-division of a society is quite natural. But the unnatural thing about these sub-divisions is that they have lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-enclosed units called castes. The question is: were they compelled to close their doors and become endogamous, or did they close them of their accord? I submit that there is a double line of answer: Some closed their door: Others found it closed against them. The one is a psychological interpretation and the other is mechanistic, but they are complementary” (Ambedkar, 1978: 18). Explaining the psychological interpretation of endogamy, Ambedkar opined that endogamy was popular in the Hindu society. Since it had originated from the Brahmin caste it was whole – heartedly imitated by all the nonBrahmin sub-divisions or classes, who, in their

turn, became endogamous Perspectives on Caste” castes. Ambedkar quotes Gabriel Tarde’s law of imitation in this context. According to Tarde, “imitation flows from higher to lower”. Secondly, “the intensity of imitation varies inversely in proportion to distance... Distance is understood here in its sociological meaning” (Ambedkar, 1978: 19). Ambedkar points out that some castes were formed by imitating others because crucial conditions for the formation of castes by imitation existed in the Hindu society. He feels, (i) that the source of imitation must enjoy prestige in the group; and (ii) that there must be “numerous and daily relations” among members of the group. Ambedkar opined that the Brahmin is treated as next to God in Indian society. His prestige is unquestionable and he is the fountainhead of all that is good. He is idolized by scriptures therefore, “Such a creature is worthy of more than mere imitation, but at least of imitation; and if he lives in an endogamous enclosure should not the rest follow his example?” (Ambedkar, 1978:19) He argues that the imitation of non-Brahmin of those customs which supported the structure of caste in its nascent days until it became embedded in the Hindu mind and persists even today, is testimony to fact that imitation is the cause of formation of caste. The customs of sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage are followed in one way or the other by different castes. Ambedkar opines, “Those castes that are nearest to the Brahmin have imitated all the three customs and insist on the strict observance thereof. Those that are less near have imitated enforced widowhood and girl marriage; others, a little further off, have only girl marriage and those furthest of have imitated only the belief in the caste principle”(Ambedkar, 1978: 20)

1.3 ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

The speech Ambedkar had prepared for the 1936 Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat- Todak Mandal of Lahore could not be delivered because the Mandal cancelled the conference citing the reason that the views expressed in the speech “would be unbearable to the conference.”

In the speech Ambedkar suggested various steps to annihilate the caste system and reform Hinduism of its discriminations. In *Annihilation of Caste*, he says, annihilation of caste is:

(M)ore difficult than the other national cause, namely *Swaraj*. In the fight for *Swaraj* you fight with the whole nation on your side. In this, you have to fight against the whole nation and that too, your own. But it is more important than *Swaraj*. There is no use of having *Swaraj*, if you cannot defend it. More important than the question of defending *Swaraj* is the question of defending the Hindus under the *Swaraj*. In my opinion only when the Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, *Swaraj* for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery” (Ambedkar 2013:81)

Social Reform versus Political Reform

Ambedkar argues that because of evil customs, Hindu society was not in a state of efficiency and ceaseless efforts must be made to eradicate these evils. Recognising this fact, the birth of the Indian National Congress was accompanied by the foundation of the Social Conference. Just as the Congress was to struggle for political reorganisation of India, the Social Conference would struggle for social reformation of the Hindu society. However this did not sustain for long,

and soon the two bodies became two hostile camps. The issue was what takes precedence: social or political reform. After the two forces being evenly balanced for a decade, the fortunes of the Social Conference started ebbing fast.

According to Ambedkar the Social Conference lost the battle due to the kind of social reforms it was advocating. In this connection, it is necessary to make a distinction between social reforms for Hindu families and social reform in the sense of the reorganisation and reconstruction of the Hindu society. The former has relation to widow remarriage, child marriage and so on while the latter relates to the abolition of the caste system.

The Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindu family. It consisted mostly of enlightened high caste Hindus who did not agitate for the abolition of caste; nor did they have the courage to agitate for the same. They felt quite naturally a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages etc., evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them. They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society. The battle that was fought centred round the question of the reform of the family. It did not relate to the social reform in the respect of the breaking-up of the caste system (Ibid., 42)

The Social Reform Party lost because the reformers were indifferent to the reform of the Hindu society.

Ambedkar questioned the political-minded Hindus, citing examples of inhuman treatment of untouchables by upper caste Hindus:

Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow a large section of your own countrymen like the untouchables to use public school? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public wells? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public streets? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to wear what apparel or ornaments they like? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to eat any food they like?" I can ask a string of such questions but these will suffice... I am sure no sensible man will have the courage to give an affirmative answer. Every Congressman who repeats the dogma of Mill that one country is not fit to rule another country must admit that one class is not fit to rule another class (Ambedkar: vol. 1, p. 38).

Ambedkar came to the conclusion that 'the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people' (Ibid., 42).

Fallacy of the Socialist

Ambedkar was critical of the Indian socialists as they ignored the problems arising out of the social order and viewed humans as economic beings. Socialists advocate that man is an economic creature. His activities and aspirations are bound by economic facts, and property is the only source of power. They, therefore, preach that economic reform by equalization of property must have precedence over every other kind of reform. However, Ambedkar contested their argument and argued that the social status of an individual by itself often becomes a source of power and authority. This is made clear by the sway which the Mahatmas have held over the common man. He has cited examples from India and European countries to show how in some instances religion, rather than money, was a source of power (Ibid. 44).

He argues that economic reform contemplated by the Socialists cannot come about unless there is a revolution resulting in the seizure of power. That seizure of power must be by a proletariat. Here, Ambedkar raises the question: will the proletariats of India combine to bring about this revolution? Men will not join in a revolution for the equalization of property unless they know that after the revolution is achieved they will be treated equally and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed (Ibid. 46).

Ambedkar believes that the assurance of a socialist leading the revolution that he does not believe in caste is not sufficient. The assurance must proceed from much deeper foundation, namely, the mental attitude of the compatriots towards one another in their spirit of personal equality and fraternity. He then puts crucial questions:

- Can it be said that the proletariat of India, poor as it is, recognizes no distinctions except that of rich and the poor?
- Can it be said that the poor in India recognize no distinctions of caste or creed, high or low?
- If the fact is that they do, what unity of front can be expected from such a proletariat in its action against the rich?
- How can there be a revolution if the proletariat cannot present a united front? (Ibid. 47).

Ambedkar believed that even if by some freak of fortune a revolution did take place and the Socialists came to power, they would be compelled to deal with the problems created by the social order prevalent in India? Thus, in order to have economic or political reform the monster of caste had to be killed.

Caste as Division of Labour

In Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar says that some have defended caste in the name of division of labour. According to them, since division of labour is a necessary feature of every civilized society, therefore, there is nothing wrong with the caste system. However, Ambedkar criticized this view on the following grounds:

- 1) The caste system is not merely division of labour; it is also a division of labourers. In Indian society the division of labour is accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments.
- 2) The caste system is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers.
- 3) This division of labour is not spontaneous. It is not based on natural aptitudes. The caste system appoints tasks to individuals in advance, not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on the basis of the social status of the parents. Stratification of occupations on the basis of caste system is positively pernicious. As industry is never static and undergoes rapid and sudden changes, an individual must be free to change his occupation. But the caste system will not allow Hindus to take to occupations where they are wanted if they do not belong to them by heredity. By not permitting readjustment of occupations, caste causes much of the unemployment we see in the country.

The division of labour brought about by the caste system is not a division based on choice and individual sentiments. Individual preferences have no place in it. It is based on the dogma of predestination.

Ambedkar raises a pertinent question: “What efficiency can there be in a system under which neither men’s hearts nor their minds are in their work?” (Ibid. 48). He concludes that as an economic organisation, caste is a harmful institution, because it subordinates man’s natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.

To conclude, although division of labour is a basic characteristic of an industrial organisation, the division of labour generated by the caste system is neither morally acceptable nor desirable.

Hindu Society is a Myth

Ambedkar says that Hindu society is a myth. The word Hindu itself is a foreign name which Mohammedans gave to the natives for the purpose of distinguishing themselves from them. The Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes and their consciousness is only for their survival. Their level of oneness operates when Hindu- Muslim riots occur. On all other occasions, each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from other castes. “Indeed the ideal Hindu must be like a rat living in his own hole refusing to have any contact with others.” The Hindus lack, to use a sociological term, “consciousness of kind”. In every Hindu, the consciousness that exist is the consciousness of his caste. Due to this, Hindus fail to form a society or a nation. Many Indians will not admit that they are not a nation but only an amorphous mass of people. They insist that behind the apparent diversity there is a fundamental unity because of habits and customs, beliefs and thoughts.

However, Ambedkar argues that culture spreads by diffusion and that is why one finds similarity between various primitive tribes in the matter of their habits and customs, beliefs, and thoughts, although they do not live in proximity. This doesn’t mean the primitive tribes constituted a society.

Men constitute a society because they have things which they possess in common. To have similar things is totally different from possessing things in common. And the only way by which men can come to possess things in common with one another is by being in communication with one another. This is merely another way of saying that Society continues to exist by communication indeed in communication. To make it concrete, it is not enough if men act in a way which agrees with the acts of others. Parallel activity, even if similar, is not sufficient to bind men into a society. For that purpose what is necessary is for a man to share and participate in a common activity so that the same emotions are aroused in him that animate the others. Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them.

Therefore, caste system prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being (Ibid. 50-51).

The effect of caste on the ethics of Hindus, according to Ambedkar, is simply deplorable. He opines that caste has killed public spirit, and public charity and

public opinion. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste. There is appreciation of virtue but only when the man is a fellow caste-man. On the point of ethics, therefore he puts a crucial question: "Have not Hindus committed treason against their country in the interests of their caste?" (Ibid. 56-57).

We have so far discussed Ambedkar's critique of the caste system on the ground of biological reasons and his depiction of the pernicious effect of caste on the ethics of Hindus.

Ambedkar also commented on Hindu religion. He said that the Hindu religion is not a missionary religion. The real question is why did the Hindu religion cease to be a missionary religion? According to Ambedkar, Hindu religion ceased to be a missionary religion when the caste system grew up among the Hindus. Caste is inconsistent with conversion. The problem is, finding a place and caste for the convert in the social life of the community is difficult. Unlike a club, the membership of a caste is not open to all and sundry. The law of caste confines its membership to persons born in the caste. Castes are autonomous, and there is no authority anywhere to compel a caste to admit a new-comer to its social life. Hindu Society being a collection of castes and each caste being a close corporation there is no place for a convert. Thus it is the caste which has prevented the Hindus from expanding and absorbing other religious communities. So long as caste remains, Hindu religion cannot be made a missionary religion and shudhi will be both a folly and a futility (Ibid. 54).

Solutions for Casteless Society put forward by Ambedkar

Ambedkar explored various ways to abolish caste.

- *Abolishing sub-castes*: Ambedkar did not favour this view because even if we assume the fusion of sub-castes is possible, there is no guarantee that the abolition of sub-castes will necessarily lead to the abolition of castes. On the contrary, it may happen that the process may stop with the abolition of sub-castes. In that case, the abolition of sub-castes will only help to strengthen the castes and make them more powerful and therefore more harmful..
- *Start Inter-caste dining*: Ambedkar felt this was inadequate because many castes allow inter-dining but that has not destroyed the spirit of caste and the consciousness of caste.
- *Encourage inter-marriage*: Ambedkar believes that fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling of kinship becomes paramount, the feeling of being aliens created by caste will not vanish. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste.

Ambedkar observed that it may take ages before a breach in casteism is made.

But whether the doing of the deed takes time or whether it can be done quickly, you must not forget that if you wish to bring about a breach in the system then you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the Shastras, which deny any part to reason, and to Vedas and Shastras, which deny any

part to morality. You must destroy the religion of the Shrutis and the Smritis. (Ibid. 75).

Ambedkar acknowledges the effectiveness of the inter-caste marriages in abolishing caste. Though they are happening in India, their pace is very slow. Inter-caste marriages must be promoted, popularized and encouraged at individual, social and national level by all castes and communities. The government could provide incentives for such marriages.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

Ambedkar argued that caste was the product of endogamy superimposed on exogamy in a shared cultural ambience. He claimed that evils such as sati, child marriage and prohibition of widow marriage were the outcomes of the institution of caste. The Brahmins, as an endogamous community, gave rise to the system of caste. Endogamous characteristics of caste also roped in other features such as division and gradation of labourers, prohibition on inter-dining and principle of occupation determined by birth. Ambedkar believes the destruction of the caste system is the only solution to the problem.

Of the numerous steps suggested to annihilate caste in India, inter-caste marriages are the best.

The principal points which Ambedkar made in the essay, summarized by Ambedkar himself, are as follows:

- 1) That caste has ruined the Hindus;
- 2) That the reorganisation of the Hindu society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is impossible;
- 3) That the reorganisation of the Hindu Society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is harmful;
- 4) That the Hindu society must be reorganised on a religious basis which would recognise the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity;
- 5) That religious sanctity behind Caste and Varna must be destroyed;
- 6) That the sanctity of Caste and Varna can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the Shastras (Ibid., 86).

1.5 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Write an essay on Ambedkar's view of caste?
- 2) How did endogamy play an important role in the caste system?
- 3) Critically examine the different methods to annihilate caste in India.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches. Vol: I, Ambedkar Foundation, New Delhi, 2014.

Majumder: The Human Genetic History of South Asia: A Review.