

AMBEDKAR'S CRITIQUE OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

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Preface

I come from North India a place called Barbigha where caste system still prevails. I had several events where I had gone through the bitter experience of caste system. I am privileged to work for the Dalits, who are marginalized, oppressed and subjected to all sorts of injustices are done to them. Till today Dalits are not considered as full human beings. It is very much shameful for our nation, where cow is given more important than human beings. It is surprising that when five dalits were killed, because they had skinned a dead cow in Punjab. Even today Dalits women are paraded naked or gang raped. I had a great opportunity to join the birth celebration of Ambedkar in Pune in 2002. I was surprised to see thousands of people paying homage to Ambedkar. The spark of fire engulfed me that day and my commitment towards dalits has doubled. In the sea of great personalities Ambedkar stands out first. His life has inspired me mentally, intellectually, and spiritually. He is a great model for me and I have great respect towards him.

This paper attempts to see how Ambedkar was responsible for demolishing the caste structure in society. In general it deals with the abolition of caste and creation of a new society. The first chapter deals with his early life, studies and his contributions to Indian society. The origin of caste, its development and implication are dealt with elaborately in the second chapter. The third chapter puts forward Ambedkar's revolutionary ideas about the abolition of caste and social, economic and political reforms. The vision of Ambedkar of a new society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity is highlighted in the fifth chapter. It also answers the question why Ambedkar chose Buddhism, why conversion, and why he called upon other Dalits to embrace Buddhism. The sixth chapter gives a critical appraisal of Ambedkar and throws light on how Dalits should assert for their identity by deconstruction of the old distorted images and reconstructing a new identity.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It would not be an exaggeration to call Dr. Ambedkar second Moses or modern Manu. He was the voice of the voiceless, hope of the hopelessness, light of those in darkness and a support for those, who were deprived and exploited in the Indian society. He brought them out of the clutches of untouchability, bondage of oppression, and the leprosy of the caste system. He empowered the untouchables to stand firm and assert themselves as human beings in a society dominated by caste Hindus. He showed them the way to stand firm and erect, to hold their heads high and to think and talk the language of free men and women. He took them to the feet of Buddha to give them a glimpse of a potential future, and how they can reconstruct their lives in the light of reason and on the principles of justice, liberty equality and fraternity.

1.1 Childhood and Youth

Whenever there is injustice, social unrest, oppression and chaos, there I am born, says the Bhagavad-Gita. A messiah was born among the untouchables, that is, Ambedkar. He came into this world so that others may have life, life as dignified and fuller human beings. The platform of the untouchables on which he invested much of his life's work became his launching pad. Ambedkar's life and work constitutes a glorious chapter in the history of India and ungrateful would be the nation, which forgets the service he rendered in writing that memorable chapter in modern Indian history.

His phenomenal career was organically interwoven with the geography, sociology, history and culture of the land in which he was born. He strove to cleanse and reconstruct a better world. Dr. Ambedkar emerged as a powerful speaker of the depressed classes, walked the stage as a latter-day Moses striving to free his people from bondage. Ambedkar belonged to the Mahar caste, one of the numerous untouchable castes in Maharashtra. His ancestral village was Amgavade in Mandangad Taluka of Ratnagiri district of the Bombay province. Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 in Mhow, near

Indore, where his father, Ramji Sakpal, was an instructor in the local military school. Ramji was deeply attached to the devotional mystical Varkari sect. He became a follower of the Kabirpanth and was an admirer of Jotirao Phule who pioneered major reforms among the lower castes in Maharashtra. At Satara, Ambedkar completed his primary education and joined the Elphinstone High School where he finished his matriculation in 1907. It was the kindness of Maharaja Sayaji Rao of Baroda, which gave him the opportunity to complete B.A. from Elphinstone College in 1912 with English and Persian as his subjects.

1.2 Bitter Experience of Caste System

Although Ambedkar belonged to the highly respected Mahar community, he experienced untouchability when he had to interact with the people of social layers beyond the confines of untouchable castes. He recalls:

The first incident which I am recording as well as I can remember, occurred in about 1901 when we were at Satara. One summer day my elder brother, my nephew set out to meet our father who worked as a cashier at Goregaon. We got in at Padali railway station. Due to some reason father did not receive our coming better in time, so he could not come to receive us. After waiting for long wear hours, we could with difficulty persuade the station master, who was a caste Hindu, to secure us a bullock-cart, and started for Goregaon. Hardly had the cart gone a few yards when the god-fearing caste Hindu cartman, to his wrath came to know that the well-dressed boys in his cart are the accursed untouchables! In a fit of rage he threw us on the road as one overturns the dustbins, for he felt we had polluted his wooden cart and destroyed the purity of his domestic animals. This incident has a very important place in my life. But it has left an indelible impression on my mind. Before this incident occurred, I knew that I was an untouchable and that untouchables were subject to certain indignities and discriminations. For instance, I knew that in the school I could not sit in the midst of my class students according to my rank but that I was to sit in a corner by myself. I knew that in the school I was to have a separate piece of gunny cloth for me to squat on in the classroom, and the servant employed to clean the school

would not touch the gunny cloth. While in the school I knew that children of the touchable classes, when they felt thirsty, could go out to the water tap, open it and quench their thirst. But my position was separate; I could not touch the tap unless a touchable person opened it for me. It was not possible for me to quench my thirst. The situation was such that no peon, no water. At home I knew that my elder sister did the work of washing clothes and cutting the hair. Not that we could not afford to pay the washer men and barber, but it was because we were untouchable. (Rodrigues 52)

In spite of these hurdles, he never put off the zeal to fight back these difficulties. He joined Columbia University in 1913 and completed M.A. In 1920, he collaborated with Shahu Mharaj of Kolhapur in forming the Depressed Classes Forum which organized the first All India Conference of the Depressed Classes in Nagpur, where he argued that the emancipation of the depressed classes was possible only through their own initiative. It was at Columbia University that he came to shape his learning and perspectives, from great teachers such as John Dewey, Edwin Seligman and Golden Weiser. He obtained an M.Sc. degree in 1921 and later Ph.D. He came back to India to set fire among the untouchables by giving everything he had.

1.3 Ambedkar and the New Vision

The main aim of the Hindu leaders including Gandhi was to protect and strengthen Hinduism. They wanted to keep the untouchables within the Hindu fold. They were not serious about their upliftment. Ambedkar came on the scene in 1927 and led a mass movement of the untouchables to take water from a public tank at Mahad. He wanted to emancipate the untouchables and liberate them from the slavery of Hinduism. He wanted to achieve equal rights, human, civic and political, for the untouchables. He wanted them to grow into a third force beside the Hindus and Moslems in free India and share power with them. It was only they, he believed, who would be able to fight against the wrongs done to them by an unjust society.

Ambedkar tried to unite the untouchables under one banner in order to fight for justice and equality. Their wrongs could be righted, he told them, only when they got a

share in the political power and in the administration of the country. He realized that for achieving both these ends, education was most crucial. Ambedkar wanted a separate electorate for the untouchables which was granted to them by the British Government. But Gandhi undertook fast unto death to cancel it. It was not so much to help them but to save Hinduism and the Hindu society. Ambedkar believed that, in order to have power, the untouchables and the minorities must have a party of their own. He established The Republican Party. In 1924, he founded the Bahiskrit Hit Karni Sabha. The organization started a hostel in Sholapur for depressed classes. In 1927, he led the famous Mahad Satyagraha to assert the right of untouchables to have access to community wells and tanks. The *Manusmriti* was publically burnt by Ambedkar and his followers on 25 December 1927 to show that the untouchables were no longer prepared to abide by the religious ritual restriction imposed by caste Hindus.

1.4 His Contribution

Ambedkar was the chairman of the drafting committee of the *Mahar Manu of Nav Bharat*. The collective labours of the assembly resulted in that remarkable product, the Constitution of India. As Gandhi is said to be the father of the nation, Ambedkar is rightly revered as the father of the Constitution.

Ambedkar was so fearless that his expression was never inhibited even by Gandhi's creed and praxis. Essentially, he was a constitutionalist and felt that violation of law, even in the shape of civil disobedience, might lead to dangerous consequences. He was a great dissenter against the unjust social order but the value of his dissenting voice was not negative. His protest was positive and a vote for the construction of a just system where everyone had the freedom to assert his views, unafraid of defying tyrants. Ambedkar was an individualist and never resigned himself to the abject surrender to the fuhrer syndrome. In the struggle for freedom, he was a rebel against the caste Hindu leaders and his boldness and outspoken criticism of many who led the masses often reminded one of the famous statement of Mill: If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more

justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind (qtd.in Iyer 31).

The most creative contribution made by Ambedkar was as an uncompromising fighter for Indian humanity, particularly of the humblest. There is a common impression in the minds of the post-Independence generation that Gandhi was the principal savior of the untouchables of India. But when we consider the stature and achievement of Ambedkar as an intrepid warrior for socio-economic liberation of the lowliest, the lost and the last, especially the dalits and the exploited tribals, there is no doubt that without diminishing the tremendous conscientisation of the Hindu community by Gandhi vis-a-vis untouchability and Harijan debasement, Ambedkar's ceaseless war on behalf of the proletariat, in its widest connotation, is incomparable. He was not a mere depressed-class leader but a defender of human rights of the weaker and the exploited people. So he setup educational institutions to raise the level of consciousness of the serf-like people. "Tell the slave that he is a slave and he will revolt against his slavery," was his motto. So he started journals and educational institutions for the dalits and fought for women's equality and labour rights.

CHAPTER 2

CASTE SYSTEM

Ambedkar's understanding of the caste system underwent certain significant changes over the period of his writing. Initially, he had argued that the characteristic of caste was superimposed on exogamy in a shared cultural ambience. He found that the caste name is an important feature, which keeps the solidarity of the caste intact. He increasingly argued that graded inequality of members is the normative anchor of the caste system. He found Gandhi subscribing to caste initially and later opposing it but upholding *varna* instead. He however, felt that the principle underlying Gandhi's conception of *varna* is the same as that of caste; that is categorizing a person on the basis of birth rather than on the basis of the worth and the value of a human person's worth.

Caste system is part and parcel of the Hindu society. It has been coming through the ages, and it and it will remain with the Hindu society for ever. Ambedkar's perspectives on caste can be seen in his works such as *Caste in India, Annihilation of Caste* and *Who Were the Sudaras?* In these works he has critically analyzed the caste system from the historical and social perspective. Before we go deeper into his perspective on the caste system, it is necessary to understand some of the theories that have been put forward by others concerning the nature, origin and function of caste (Ambedkar 33).

2.1 The Nature of Caste System

Everybody knows that caste is the name given to groups of a certain kind into which Hindu society is divided, but it is not easy to define the term precisely. Castes are not all built on the same model. The system has grown up slowly and gradually, and castes, which are of different origin, are also of different nature. They all have, as a common characteristic, a spirit of exclusiveness, which has the effect of restricting the intercourse of their members both with each other and with other castes. One caste forbids the remarriage of widows, others permit it; one accepts food from certain outsiders, another forbids such acceptance from anybody but a caste fellow. In the

Northern India, certain castes are regarded as conveying pollution by touch. In other parts of India, similar castes are regarded as conveying pollution not only by touch but also by mere proximity.

2.2 Definition of Caste

Blunt in his book, *The Caste system of North India*, says:

A caste is an endogamous group, or collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary, arising from birth alone, and imposing on its members certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse either – (a) Following a common tradition occupation, or (b) Claiming a common origin, or (c) Both following such occupation and claiming such origin, and generally regarded as forming a single homogeneous community. (Blunt 5)

There are many scholars who have tried to define the caste system Senart, a French authority, defines a caste as ‘a close corporation, in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary: equipped with a certain traditional and independent organization, including a chief and a council, meeting on occasion in assemblies of more or less plenary authority and joining together at certain festival, bound together by common occupations, which related more particular to marriage and to food and to question of ceremonial pollution, and ruling its members by the exercise of jurisdiction, the extent of which varies, but which succeeds in making the authority of the community more felt by the sanction of certain penalties and above all, by finding irrevocable exclusion from the group.

According to Sir H. Risley, A caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional calling and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.

The caste system of India is unique. There are significant differences in the understanding and manifestation of caste in Hindu India from place to place. However, caste can also be defined in terms, which gives the concept cross-cultural applicability. Caste in India means an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite unites, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy.

2.3 The Origin of Caste

The scholars trace the origin of caste by providing a general historical framework, which is supported by some evidence. The dominant view tracks down the origin of both caste and untouchability to the Aryans themselves and the way they related to the people of India with whom they came into contact. The Aryans, a highly self-conscious tribe sharing a common language and religion, began invading India from the northwest around 1500 B.C. For centuries they remained involved in constant conflict with the indigenous people, they despised them as culturally inferior and racially unclean.

In the post Rig-Vedic literature there are more frequent references to primitive forest-dwellers who were kept on the fringes of Aryan society in the conquered regions. Among these were the Chandals. Although the Chandals were severely stigmatized in the later Vedic age, it was only during the period between 600 B. C and A.D.200 that untouchability, appears as such. In the *Dharma Sutra* and in *Kautilya's Arthasastra* the Chandals are treated as untouchable. In *Manusmiriti*, this theory, as also the Varna theory and the classification of caste in a hierarchy based on occupation receives its classic statement. Manu holds that the four varnas were divinely ordained from the very beginning.

In the Sangam literature (300-600) there are references to broad divisions of society somewhat similar to the four varnas as well as to law and excluded groups such as goldsmith, cobblers and drummers. This description locates the origin of caste and untouchability but does not offer explanation for them. They are Aryan institutions going back to around 600 B.C; but why the Aryans developed such form of social organization and of segregation remains a matter of conjecture. Therefore, the quest for the origin of

caste, untouchability and of specific dalit castes ends in speculation, uncertainty and frustration. It does not provide much that is of decisive significance for settling the political and ideological battle of today.

2.3.1 Manusmriti and the Varna System

Manusmriti is one of the greatest texts that uphold the varna system. Manu the author of *Manusmriti* express clearly the partiality and dogmatism in his treatment of caste. He presents a detailed code of and caste duties and penalties in unequivocal terms. He divided people into four varna namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Sudras.

Manusmriti does not acknowledge a fifth varna. It explains the concept of mixed castes, which included these people who were born out of inter-caste marriages. The offspring born of them are considered the most degraded people in society. According to Manu, the lowest groups were the Chandals who were the offspring of inter-caste marriages. The Chandals are a mixed race born of a Sudra father and a Brahmin mother. They live outside the villages.

For Manu, the highest duty of a *Sudra* is to serve the Brahmins. The service of a Brahmin is declared to be an excellent occupation for a *Sudra*. A *Sudra* is not entitled to perform sacrifices or study of Vedas. *Sudras*, want to gain merit and knowledge but they are not given. They imitate the practice of various men without reciting the sacred text. The varna system is a unique social framework of the Hindu social order. It signifies a division of labour, placement in social hierarchy, and normative expectations. The caste system, it is said, is a perverse form of the varna system, which signifies consonance between capacity, ability and adoption of specific work in the society. Manu's description of the varna system reveals a more or less rigid hierarchy with greater privileges for the Brahmins.

2.3.2 Untouchability

Untouchability means pollution by the touch of certain person by reason of their birth is a particular caste. It is practiced in Indian society only. The problem of dalits is

more social than economic. The poverty of *dalits* is a product of social oppression. Ambedkar cites some of the insults and great injustice done to the untouchables:

Under the rule of Peshwas in the Maratha country the untouchable was not allowed to enter and use the public streets if a Hindu was coming along lest he should pollute the Hindu by his shadow. The untouchable was required to have a black thread either on his wrist or in his neck as sign or mark to prevent the Hindus from getting them polluted by his touch through mistake. In Poona, the capital of Peshwa, the untouchable was asked to carry, strung from his waist, a broom to sweep away from behind the dust he treaded on lest a Hindu walking on the same, should be polluted. (Ambedkar 33)

The untouchable was to carry a pot, hung from his neck wherever he went, for holding his spit lest his spit falling on earth should pollute a Hindu who might unknowingly happen to step on it. Any amount of economic assistance will not bring us social equality. Jagjivan Ram was one of India's richest untouchable ministers. He was said to have millions of rupees. He was the deputy Prime minister of India during the Janata regime. He once unveiled a statue in the Sanskrit University in Varanasi. The moment he left, Brahmins rushed to the Ganga and brought the holy water and cleansed the statue, which was said to have got polluted by the untouchable Ram. When this can happen to Jagjivan Ram, one of the richest and former P.M, what will happen the lesser untouchables?

2.3.3 Caste in Relation to Religion

Writers of the older school hold that the Hindu religion and the Hindu caste system are inseparably connected. Eggeling has asserted that the cardinal principle which underlies the caste system is the preservation of purity descent, religious belief and ceremonial usage. This view is related to the old theory of the origin of caste, which represents it as artificial product of the Brahman priesthood. Caste and religion have effect upon each other. Religion in Sir Hervert Risley's words exercise a subtle influence on family ritual and domestic usages and through these tends insensibly to modify and transform the internal structure of Indian society. Religion has caused the formation of

four important sectarian castes. It is also responsible for the formation of new endogamous groups within a caste.

2.3.4 Caste in Relation to Occupation

In all times and in all countries the social status of individuals has been affected and even determined by the nature of the occupation from which he derives his livelihood. Certain occupations and professions are regarded as suitable, other as unsuitable to the rank of life in which he is born. For instance, in India only Brahmins are considered fit for learning. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that occupation has also exercised and still exercises, a marked influence on the Hindu social system. Mr. Nerfield indeed goes so far as to regard that the caste system as based entirely on differentiation of function, which is represented as the sole cause of the origin of caste.

2.3.5 Caste in Relation to Politics

Ever since the lawgiver Manu divided ancient Indian society into a hierarchical system, every aspect of a Hindu's life name, schooling, occupation, housing, marriage, worship, rights has been determined by caste. Manu's system segregated individuals on the basis of "ritual purity." Caste Hindus were considered essential to the functioning of life and subdivided into four principal categories, or varnas. Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (warriors) enjoyed an exalted position in society and a monopoly on religious education and political power. Vasishyas (trader and merchants) were allowed some privileges and the chance to acquire wealth and land Sudras (peasants and artisans) worked to provide for the other castes.

Persons considered "too fallen" to merit inclusion in any caste became the untouchables. Considered "human pollution," they were shunned by caste Hindus and forced to live on the periphery as scavengers and dung-gatherers. Along with India's ancient tribal people, who were seen as backward and subhuman, they were reduced to living in appalling conditions with no land or legal rights. Since the caste system was abolished in 1950, successive governments have instituted programs to assist the untouchables, who call themselves dalits, or "broken people". These include a series of

land reforms; job, reservations and affirmative action programs intended to give dalits and tribals access to government jobs and education. But such programs have been fiercely resisted by members of the upper castes, who are eager to preserve their privileged lifestyle, and who are acutely aware that dalit and tribal emancipation would undermine the entire caste-based feudal economy. Official figures show that Brahmins, who makeup just 5 percent of the population, still hold 70 percent of senior government jobs and 78 percent of all judicial positions.

Politics in contemporary India is marked by the resurgence of caste politics. In a sense, this is true. The past two decades have seen a dramatic collapse of the old political formations and parties, which had dominated the politics of the Nehruvian era. Even the movements of that period, right up to the mid-1970s, were largely movements on economic issues and questions of corruption, black-marketing, hoarding and food shortages. Through the decade of the 1980s, there was a gradual erosion of the Nehruvian secular-nationalist imagination, and one of the factors responsible for it was the re-emergence of caste in public discourse. Michael says:

The watershed in this respect of course, was the famous Mandal commission agitation, which has become something of a metaphor in contemporary Indian politics. The commission, which was instituted in 1978 during the Janata Party government, under the stewardship of B.P. Mandal, a socialist leader from a backward caste, was given the task of looking into the question of backwardness of certain castes and suggesting remedies for its redressal. For about a decade after it submitted its recommendations in 1980, these lay in cold storage after the Congress under the leadership of Indira Gandhi returned to power. It was implemented under extremely contentious circumstances in 1990 under the prime ministership of V.P.Singh. (Michael 146)

In Political society, caste was a central category that framed the common ways of seeing and being in the world. Caste is the suppressed /repressed 'unconscious' as it were, of the modern moral self. Yet, caste is a hidden principle that gives access to all kinds of modern privileges precisely because it functions, on the caste system. To the oppressed castes, especially the lowest among them the dalits or the untouchables, this

repression of caste appears as a conspiracy of the Brahminical castes to deprive them of their voice. It appears to them to displace what is their bitter lived experience to another domain that of class, for instance. The story that the dalits want to narrate can only be told with reference to the history of caste oppression. It is there that the secret of their exclusion and cultural mutilation lies. One of the critical elements of the recalcitrance of caste in contemporary Indian politics is, therefore, the search for a past, a cultural legacy, a history and a sense of self. The oppressive structure of caste functioned, in relation to the dalits in particular, through their almost complete exclusion from society.

2.3.6 Caste in the Past, Present and Future

Caste in the past has made internal separation, but it has also made external unity. There seems no reason to suppose that, in the future, it will have any different effect. Every nation must have its social system; surely, it is advisable that it should maintain a system that is suited to its people. Herbert Risely has remarked: Caste is more than a mere mode of grouping the loose atoms of humanity. It is congenital instinct. There may be times when National and caste interest will clash, when somebody may cry I am a caste man first and Indian afterwards. That has often happened in many nations and it is always a dangerous cry (Blunt 324). In many parts of rural India things have not yet altered very much. Millions of Indians certainly do live in villages; mainly ones that are remote from urban influence and having been little agricultural, infrastructural or educational development, in these villages there has been relatively little social change during the half-century since independence. In many other settlements, however, considerable changes have occurred and caste in particular has become like institution.

CHAPTER 3

AMBEDKAR AND CASTE

Born an untouchable, Ambedkar was not an exception in facing the same humiliation and tribulation, which every untouchable had to face in those days. He had seen people not having sufficient food to eat, no roof over their heads to give them shelter and no land to grow food, women with no clothes to cover their bodies. Ambedkar wanted to find out the reason for this poverty and inhuman existence. One reason was that the social system sanctified by Hinduism. In his own words: “This religion and social order had ruined them. But this is not going to stop them. This would ruin the Hindus themselves and ultimately India” (Chalam 46).

3.1 Ambedkar’s Understanding of the Caste System

Ambedkar in his writings and speeches had dealt exhaustively and pointedly with the evils of caste system. According to Ambedkar, the caste system is not merely a division of labor. It is a hierarchy in which one laborer is graded above the other. This division of labor was not spontaneous; it was neither based on natural aptitudes nor on choice. Individual’s sentiment had no place in it. It was based on the dogma of predestinations, Ambedkar writes “Caste system involves attempt to appoint tasks to individuals in advance, selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of social status of the parents” (Ambedkar, vol.1, 35).

There was no readjustment of occupation, and therefore, caste became a direct cause of much of the unemployment. Referring to the harmful effect of the caste system Ambedkar remarked:

An economic organization caste was, therefore, a harmful institution, in as much as it involved the subordinations of man’s natural powers and inclination to the exigencies of social rules (Ambedkar 37)

He further said, Caste did not result in economic efficiency. It had not improved the race. It had completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus (Ambedkar37). He found that there was no Hindu consciousness as such. In every Hindu, the consciousness

that exists was the consciousness of the caste. Hindus did not even form a federation. Their habits and customs, beliefs and thought were not enough to constitute them into a society. Men constitute a society because they had things, they possessed in common. The caste system prevents common society and by preventing it, it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being. There is only individual share or part in the associated activity (Ambedkar 41). According to him, castes are autonomous and there was no authority anywhere to compel caste to admit a new corner to its social life. The Hindu society being a conglomeration of castes and each caste being a close corporation, there was no place for a convert. The Hindu religion ceased to be a missionary religion when the caste system grew up among the Hindus. Caste was inconsistent with conversion. So Ambedkar said, “So long as castes remain, Hindu religion cannot be made a missionary religion and shuddhi will be both a folly and futility” (Ambedkar 43).

3.2 Ambedkar’s Understanding of Varna System and the Origin of Sudras

Ambedkar believed that there were only three classes in the past and at that time a member of one clan had the freedom of changing one’s clan. The origin of the varnas may be traced back to the well known struggle for supremacy that took place in ancient past between the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the conflict is conflicted in the allegorical story of the many long wars between them which was rooted in the question of and is superior in matters relating to the institution of priesthood.

In this conflict Raja Sudras, the supporter of Viswamitra, held the key position. However, Visista was the ultimate winner and the celebration of his triumph was followed by the degradation of the progeny of Sudras to menial ranks that led them to occupy the lowest place in the social ladder. The technique employed by the Brahmins for the degradation of the Sudras, according to Ambedkar, was that the Brahmins refused to perform *upanayans* ceremony for them (Ambedkar 140)

3.3 Ambedkar's Refutation of the Racial Theory

It is commonly accepted that the Aryans came from outside India and they are racially different from the natives. But Ambedkar believes that the terms *arya*, which occur in the Vedas, had not been used in the racial sense at all. So far as the Rig Veda was concerned, there was not a particle of evidence suggesting the invasion of India by the Aryans. The theory of the Aryan race is just an assumption by Westerners. The theory of invasion is an invention is necessary because of a gratuitous assumption, which underlies the Western theory. The assumption is that the Indo-Germanic people who are the purest of the modern representative of the original Aryan race (Ambedkar 78).

The distinction between the Aryas on the one hand, the Dasa and Dasyus, on the other, was not a racial distinction of colour. It was the European scholars who held that the white race is the best race and insisted that the word *varna* meant colour. He concludes that there is no evidence in the Vedas of any invasion of India by the Aryan race and there is no racial distinction between the upper caste Hindus and the lower caste people (Ambedkar 291).

3.4 Ambedkar's Understanding of the Origin of Broken Men

Ambedkar believes that before the emergence of untouchability, there was a group of people residing outside the villages, who were known as broken men. Before giving an explanation of the origin of untouchability, it is necessary to know how these broken men who formed a fifth varna came to live outside the villages.

Ambedkar gives an elaborate analysis of the factors which to lead to the emergence of the broken men who we call dalits today. He believed that the primitive societies consisted of nomadic tribes. This early nomadic community in its earliest stages had as its wealth cattle. The cattle had to move from one place to the other so the primitive people moved from one place to another. But later on the art of farming and cultivating developed and accumulation land gained momentum. These new developments lead the people to remain in a particular fixed place. So there emerged as

settled communities. The primitive tribes however could not settle at one place at one time. So there was always warfare between the already settled people and the nomadic communities. In such a hostile condition, the defeated tribe was broken into bits and scattered. The defeated tribes who were scattered around had nothing of their own.

Thus came a group of people known as the broken men, whom we call today the dalits. It was in this critical situation that the settled communities and the broken men struck a bargain whereby the broken agreed to do the work of watch and ward for the settled tribes and the settled tribes agreed to give them food and shelter. As the broken men were aliens, they could not be accommodated within the core village, and they had to live outside the village. So Ambedkar says, the broken men were not admitted with in the fold of the varna. These became the untouchables. The difference between a Sudra and an untouchable is that the former is a *savarna*. “According to the Hindu order of creation, the word *antya* means one who is born last, who is born last in the order of creation”(Ambedkar278). But to Ambedkar “the term *antya* means not the end of creation but the end of village. It was a name given to those who lived in the outskirts of the village” (Ambedkar 278).

This pioneer attempt of explaining the roots of dalits by Ambedkar is further strengthened by Suresh Narain Srivastava’s work *Harijans in Indian Society*, in which he says:

The pre-Dravidian settlers were the native of India... The Dravidians were the first to have attacked the aboriginals of India ... They did not make aboriginals their own slaves ... After the Dravidian, the Aryans made another major attack. Aryans looked upon their opponents and called them as Dasa-Dasyus and the Nishadas. Therefore the defeated aboriginals were made slaves in the social order ... these slaves have been included in the fold of Hinduism by placing them on the lowest ring of social ladder ... Those who did not accept the offer of becoming their social, economic and cultural distinctions ... In the course of time, these people were divided into two classes. Some became nomadic tribes and others roaming from place to place. These roaming people were criminal tribes. (Srivastava 86)

Srivastava too emphasizes that the dalits are an indigenous people and were attacked by the Aryans whom Ambedkar considers not as invaders but as one of the settled communities of India. Then how did the notion of untouchability come into existence and how did these broken men come to be known as untouchables? (Ambedkar 361-362)

3.5 Ambedkar's Interpretation on the Causes of Untouchability

According to Ambedkar there are mainly two reasons for the origin of untouchability: concept for Buddhism and beef eating. The emergence of Buddhism and beef eating are said to be the cause of the origin of untouchability. Ambedkar did not have many evidences to prove. Since Hinduism had practice of caste system broken people left Hinduism and embrace Buddhism. Their acceptance was only to get rid of the caste system and practice of untouchability. When there was a large number of a conversion into Buddhism, Brahmins could not stomach it. Brahmins began to hate both, the broken men as well as the Buddhists. They considered broken men very low caste because of beef eating. Since then the concept of the untouchability came into existence.

The broken men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were enemies of Buddhism. Since broken men were called untouchables they converted to Buddhism. Hence it is possible to conclude that the root cause of untouchability is Brahmins themselves and their jealousy (Ambedkar, 317). In this opinion, beef eating is the reason for the spread of untouchability. Ambedkar quoting various instances from early Hindu scriptures asserts that the slaughter of the cow was not prohibited in the early Vedic period. *Yajna* of the Brahmins was nothing but killing of animals. Manu too did not regard cow as a sacred animal, on the other hand, he regarded it as an impure animal whose touch caused ceremonial pollution. He had whatsoever no objection at all against the killing of the cow. The reason why broken men were untouchables was only because they were eating beef, which Brahmins did not like. Brahmins worshiped the cows (Ambedkar 320).

In order to putdown Buddhism and to regain their lost position, the Brahmins gave up the habit of beef eating and made the cow a sacred animal. Thus the goal of the

Brahmins in giving up beef eating was to snatch away their social prestige from the Buddhist. Having adopted this means, the Brahmins declared all those who eat beef as untouchables. The broken men having no choice left behind continued their beef eating (Ambedkar 320).

CHAPTER 4

ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

“Annihilation of Caste” is a revolutionary speech prepared by Ambedkar for the 1936 Annual conference of Lahore. Due to certain misapprehension, it was not delivered in the conference. However, this famous address invited the attention of Mahatma Gandhi as well as many caste Hindus, and enlightened intellectuals, who were active in abolishing enforced widowhood, child marriage, etc, but were not eager to abolish the caste system because they did not have the courage to stand against it. During the British rule, the issue of political independence got precedence over the social reform, and therefore, social reform continued to remain neglected. Ambedkar invited the socialists to fight against the caste and he asserted that caste is not based on the division of labour. In his speech he called upon the Hindus to annihilate the caste system, which is a great hindrance to social solidarity, and to establish a new social order based on the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, and the principles of democracy. He suggested that the institution of society must be based on reason and not on atrocious traditions (Ambedkar xiv). Thus the speech consistently brings out various methodical steps to annihilate the whole caste system and to reform Hinduism, which is considered the womb of all discriminations.

4.1 Social Reform

Hindu society is historically marked by a rigid form of social stratification based on varna or *jati* model of social organization in which the Brahminical religious principle, namely, purity and pollution, played a central role in defining social hierarchy and separation. This led to a verity to of social inequalities characterized by social oppression and economic exploitation. However, caste as a social fact is now fast losing its significance in many areas of social life. The association of individual castes with specific occupations has to a great extent broken down. The system of production and structures of authority and power have detached themselves from the ideology of caste under which they were for centuries subsumed. In other words, the individual’s position

in the system of production and structures of power is no longer tied to caste as in the past. A steadily rising awareness among the members of lower castes, especially the dalits, and their aspiration for equality in every sphere of social life has led to a continued questioning of the fundamental principles of the caste system and its practices. The idiom of caste is invoked today by the oppressed for the purpose of political and social mobilization to challenge the traditional oppressive institutions and oppressors. But in spite of these changes in the public domain, the idea of caste continues to be an important factor in Indian private and domestic life (Michael 165).

Ambedkar always raised his voice for the upliftment of the untouchables and low castes in our society. Through his writings, speeches, mass contacts and meetings with the British bureaucracy, he supported the cause of the untouchables so that their socio-economic life could be improved. Time and again, he threw serious challenges to the custodians of Hindu society as well as sought the support sympathy of the enlightened section of society. The task indeed was difficult, but he never felt disheartened and throughout his career he worked actively for the upliftment of the dalits as a prelude to freedom to freedom.

4.2 Political Reform

The exploitative structure is very strong. Dalits do not have a competent and an efficient leader of their own in the area of politics. Even the Church does not allow the dalit Christians to become a priest or a bishop. Mostly the Brahmins and other higher caste people are the leaders of politics and Government officials. Who do not wish the development and well being of dalits? The participation of the dalits in the decision making process at the local government level is close to nil. Quite often their needs and aspirations are not even heard. The Political awareness among the people is very low. During election time they are paid certain amount of money by political leaders in order to get their votes. So their participation in the democratic process is limited. Election will be only voting and nothing else. Since they are ignorant and their force is feeble even the political parties do not take steps to come to their help.

Ambedkar strongly advocated the need for social reform for the advancement of political freedom. It was at once time recognized that without social efficiency permanent progress in the other field of activity was not possible, that owing to mischief wrought by the evil customs, Hindu society was not in a state of efficiency and that ceaseless efforts must be made to eradicate these evils (Ambedkar 38). Citing various instances from history, he tried to argue that political revolution should be preceded by social and religious revolution. Before the Arabs became a political power they had undergone a thorough religious revolution started by prophet Mohanmad. Even Indian history supports the same conclusion. The political revolution led by Chandragupta was preceded by the religious and social revolution of Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by the religious and social reform brought about by the saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikh was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nank (Ambedkar 44).

Ambedkar did not launch the temple entry movement because I wanted the Depressed Classes to become worshipping of ideals which they were prevented from worshipping or because I believed that temple entry would make them equal members in and an integral part of Hindu society. So focus as this aspect of the case is concerned, I would advise the depressed classes to insist upon a complete entry Satyagraha only because I felt that that was the best way of energizing the depressed classes and making them conscious of their position. As I believe I have archived that, therefore I no move use for temple entry. I want the Depressed Classes to concentrate their energy and resources on politics and education. (Qtd.in Zelliot 131)

Thus the need of the hour, as Ambedkar felt, was to bring a radical social reform. Bring radical change is the field of social mobilization. Social awareness and education at grassroots is very necessary for this. We have to put the seed of education in each village, each home of depressed class. There should be mass education which will give them a ray of hope to walk in the light and get enlightened from the ignorance and prejudices and come out from bondage of oppression.

4.1.1 Social and Economic Change

Ambedkar was strongly convinced that without change in Indian society no real change is possible. Ambedkar knew very well that in India, respect for caste is far more important than wealth, money, property, education, etc. A Brahmin's son even though he is stupid, still has a higher position in Indian society. That religion is a source of power, is illustrated by the history of India where the priest holds a survey over the common man, where everything, even such things as strikes and election, so easily take a religious turn and can so easily be given a religious twist (Ambedkar 44). Ambedkar makes it clear that in India, social status does not depend on educational qualification or wealth. The very sight of millionaires prostrating at the feet of *sadhus* and *fakirs*, political giants and temple priests offering them *pooja*, manifests the importance of religious, rituals, priests and holy men.

4.2 Ambedkar's Response to Caste System

Ambedkar's response to the caste system points out the nature and function of the caste system. It is a pity that caste even today has its defenders. It is defended on the ground that caste system is another name for division of labour and that division of labour is a necessary feature of every civilized society. Then it is argued that there is nothing wrong in the caste system. But Caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labours. Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labours into water-tight compartments. The caste system is merely a division of laborers which is quite different from division of labour--it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of laborers are graded one above the other. In no other country is division of labour accompanied by this gradation of laborers. There is also a third point of criticism against this view of the caste system. This division of labour is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitude or social and individual efficiency required us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make own career. This attempts to assign task to individuals in advance, selected not on the basis of trained or original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parent.

Looked at from another point of view, this stratification of occupations, which is the result of the caste system, is positively pernicious. Industry is never static. It undergoes rapid and abrupt changes. With such changes an individual must be free to change his occupation. Without such freedom to adjust him to changing circumstance it would be impossible for him to gain his livelihood. Now caste system will not allow Hindus to take to occupations where they are wanted if they do not belong to them by heredity. If a Hindu is seen to starve rather than take to new occupation not assigned to caste, the reason is to be found in the caste system. By not permitting readjustment of occupations caste becomes a direct cause of much of the unemployment we see in the country. As a form of division of labour, the caste system suffers from other serious defects. The division of labour brought about by the caste system is not a division based on choice. Individual sentiment, individual preference has no place in it. It is based on the dogma of predestination. Considerations of social efficiency would compel us to recognize that the greatest evil in the industrial system is so much poverty and suffering that involves as the fact that so many persons have callings which make no appeal to those who are engaged in them. Such calling constantly provokes one to aversion, ill will and the desire to evade. There are many occupations in India which on account of the fact they are regarded as degraded by the Hindus provoke those are engaged in them to aversion. There is a constant desire to evade and escape from such an occupation. This happens solely because of the blighting effect which they produce upon those who follow them owing to the slight and stigma cast upon them by Hindu religion. "What efficiency can there be in a system under which neither men's hearts nor their minds are in their work? As an economic organization, caste is therefore a harmful institution, in as much as it involves the subordination of man's natural power and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules" (Valerian 263).

Some have dug a biological trench in defense of the caste system. It is said that the objective of caste was to preserve purity of race and purity of blood. Now ethnologists hold their opinion that men of pure race exists nowhere and that there has been a mixing of all races in all parts of the world. This is true especially is this the case

of the people of India. Mr. D.R.Bhamdarker in his paper on *Foreign Element in the Hindu population* has stated:

There is hardly a class or caste in India which has not a foreign strain in it. There is and admixture of alien blood not only among the warrior classes the Rajputs and Marathas but also among the Brahmins who are under the happy delusion that they are free from all foreign elements. (Ambedkar 34)

The caste system cannot be said to have grown as means of preventing the admixture of races or as a means of maintaining purity of blood. As matter of fact, caste system came into being long after the different races of India had comingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of castes are really distinctions of race and to treat different castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of facts. What racial affinity is there between the Brahmins of the Punjab and the Brahmins of Chennai? What racial affinity is there between the untouchables of Bengal and the untouchables of Chennai? The caste system is a social division of people of the same race. An immense lot of nonsense is talked about heredity and eugenics in defense of caste system. Few would object to the caste system if it were in accord with the basic principle of eugenics because few can object to the improvement of the race by judicious mating. But one fails to understand how the caste system secures judicious mating. Caste system is a negative thing. It merely prohibits belonging to different caste from intermarrying.

4.3 The Effects of Caste System on Society

The effects of caste on the Indian society are multifarious and vicious. Caste is the mother of most of the ills that exist in the Indian society. Caste does not permit a true spirit, but promotes a narrow caste spirit. We do not have a united society, but many societies each caste being a separate society. Even in the same caste there are many sub - castes, many mini societies. The result is disastrous; endless division in society. Caste is antisocial in spirit. Caste has thwarted the emergence of what the sociologists calls “consciousness of kind” (Ambedkar, 50). It is extremely painful to know that in Indian society, some groups of people are traditionally branded as criminals. They become the first targets of the police and are suspected and often tortured by the police for a crime

committed by somebody else. The cause of all this is the caste system. Many killings, kidnappings, murders, rapes and all sorts of social unrest are caused by the caste system.

Hindu religion cannot become a missionary religion because it cannot integrate the other social groups into its fold on the basis of equal footing. Civilizing the aborigines means accepting them as your own, living in their midst, cultivating a sense of family feeling. How is it possible for a Hindu to do this? His Very religion teaches him to do this, the more he does this, the better a Hindu he becomes. In this sense Hinduism is just a conglomeration of castes, not a religion as such. Caste is therefore, the real explanation of why the Hindu has left the savage to remain a savage (Ambedkar 67). The stagnation that we see today in the Indian society has its roots in the caste system. In the Hindu society, the caste rules are Vedic in origin and they justify status quo. Social change would mean crossing the barriers of these, and this in turn would mean radical rejection of the existing social norms. But this is exactly what the Hindu society is opposed to.

4.3.1 Abolition of Caste

According to Ambedkar, an ideal society would be based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar gives concrete suggestion for the abolition of caste and the establishment of a society based on true liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar says:

There is no doubt, in my opinion that unless you change your social order you can achieve little by way of progress. You cannot mobilize the community either for defense or for the offence. You cannot build anything on the foundation of caste. You cannot build up a nation. You cannot build up a morality. Anything that you will build on the foundation of caste will crack and will never be a whole. (Rodrigues 288)

The only question that remains to be considered is how to bring about the reform of the Hindu social order? How to abolish caste? This is a question of supreme importance. There is a view that in the reform of caste, the first step to take is to abolish sub-caste. This view is based upon the supposition that there is a greater similarity in the manners and status between castes. There is no doubt that from the standpoint of making the transit from one caste to another easy, the fusion of the Kayasthas of Northern India

and the other non-Brahmins of Southern with the non-Brahmins of the Deccan and Dravid country is more practicable than the fusion of the Brahmins of the South with the Brahmins of the North. But fusion of sub-caste is not going to help the abolishing of the caste. In that case, the abolition of sub-castes will only help to strengthen the castes and make them more powerful and therefore more mischievous.

4.3.2 Inter Dining and Inter Marriage

The action for the abolition of caste is to begin with inter-caste dinners. This is also an inadequate remedy. There are many castes which allow inter-dining. But it is a common experience that inter-dining has not succeeded in killing the spirit of caste and the consciousness of caste. The real remedy is only inter-marriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling of being aliens created by caste, will not vanish.

Among the Hindus inter-marriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life than it need to be in the life of the non-non-Hindus. Where society is already well knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where society is cut as under marriage, as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste. Your *Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal* has adopted this line of attack. Why is it that a large majority of Hindus do not inter-dine and do not inter-marry? There can be only one answer to this question and it is that inter-dining and inter-marriage are repugnant to the beliefs and dogmas which the Hindus regard as sacred. Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of mind. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a notional change.

4.3.3 Rejection of the Authority of Vedas

People are not wrong in observing caste. What is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of caste. The Shastras teach them about this religion of caste.

The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Vedas. Not to question the authority of the Vedas to permit the people to believe in their sanctity and their sanctions and to blame them and to criticize them for their acts as being irrational and inhuman is an incongruous way of carrying on social reform. Reformers working for the removal of untouchability, including Gandhi, do not seem to realize that acts of the people are merely the results of their beliefs inculcated in them by the Vedas and that people will not change their conduct until they cease to believe in the sanctity of the Vedas on which their conduct is founded. To agitate for and to organize inter-caste dinners and inter-marriages is like force-feeding brought about by artificial means. Ambedkar says: "Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Vedas, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notion founded on Vedas, and he or she will inter-dine or inter-marry, without telling him or her to do so" (Velarian 290).

CHAPTER 5

AMBEDKAR AND BUDDHISM

Ambedkar believed that Buddhism was the greatest of all the religions in the world as it was not merely a religion but also a great social doctrine. His research-oriented mind was fully convinced by the logical, empirical, humanistic and pragmatic teaching of the Buddha. He observed that besides *ahimsa*, the Buddha taught many other things such as social, intellectual, economic and political freedom. It would be difficult to find a religious teacher to compare with Buddha whose teachings embrace so many aspects of social life and whose doctrines are so modern and whose main concern was to give salvation to people during their life on earth and not to promise it to them in the heaven after they are dead.

Recognition of human suffering, and inquiry into its causes and ways of its removal were the real basis of Buddhism. Ambedkar declares, “Never in the history of the world has any founder of a religion taught that the removal of this misery is real purpose of it” (Ambedkar 131). He was much impressed by the Buddhist interpretations of the traditional concepts. He observed that Buddha did not believe in soul. Indeed, in his opinion, the belief in the existence of soul is far more dangerous than belief in God. Regarding rebirth the Buddha seemed to believe in the regeneration of matter and not in the rebirth of the soul.

5.1 Ambedkar’s Understanding of Religion

In simple terms, religion means belief in the existence of god or gods, especially the belief that they created the universe and gave human beings a spiritual nature, which continues to exist after the death of the body. “Some people think that religion is not essential to society. I did not hold this view. I consider the foundation of religion to be essential to life and practices of society” (Keer 58). In all his writings and speeches Ambedkar has mentioned the necessity of religion. According to him Religion is part of one’s inheritance. It pains me to see youths growing indifferent towards religions. Religion is not opium as some holds it. What good things I have, have been the benefits

of my education to society I owe them to the religions feeling in of me. I want religion, but not hypocrisy in the name of religion (Keer 304).

Religion to him was the driving force for human activities. He remarked, “Man cannot live by bread alone. He has a mind which needs food for thoughts” (Keer 462). According to him religion must be judged by social standards based on social ethics. He linked religion with social wellbeing of the people. To him religion, social status and property were all sources of power and authority. He wanted to have religion in the sense of spiritual principles truly universal and applicable to all countries and all races. He treated Hinduism as a mass of sacrificial social, political and sanitary rules and regulations all mixed up. He treated religion as source of social and spiritual unity. But his reason and his religious conviction were circumscribed by social environment. Ambedkar’s religion was a social force, a source of power, and a plan of action to realize man’s hope for a fuller and happier life in this world. Religion, which gave hope, inspiration and enthusiasm to enrich the present and build a future, is the only true and useful religion. So Ambedkar had no contempt for religion but pleaded for a change in the structure of religion and also in the attitude of those who profess religion. He defined religion as something that offered prosperity or elevation first in this world and then in the other world.

Ambedkar wished to replace the religion of rules with true religion, the religion of principles, which is the basis for civic government. Thee principles, liberty equality, and fraternity are true religion. He says, True religion is the foundation of the society. For Ambedkar these principles were religious principles. He was perfectly well aware that these were the principles of the American and French revolutions. However, he wanted to bring Indian ways of thinking, which in effect meant identifying a strand of his own indigenous culture, which could legitimately be presented as a critique of Hindu ritual orthodoxy.

The religion of caste hierarchy described by Ambedkar reveals the opposition between Brahmin purity and dominance, on the one hand, untouchable impurity and

subservience on the other. These ritual values permeate traditional Hindu society and are most clearly codified in texts such as the *Manusmriti*. The other concept of religion is similar to Western democratic principles and institutions, based on the belief in the formal equality of all individuals, equal right under the law, the abolition of hereditary status, personal freedom to choose one's own occupation and to develop one's own individual talents. These were the principles, which he was to build into the Constitution. These sacred principles are what Westerners generally like to think of as the secular, the non-religious but which Ambedkar suggests is the basis for a concept of true religion. This is one reason why Ambedkar's view of religion is interesting. For him, the basis of religion is values, and it is values that hold a society together.

Thus the concept of religion implied in this kind of analysis is not essentially about supernatural beings, transcendental worlds or spiritual salvation in life after death. It is about the fundamental values, which make possible different kinds of social institution; in one case, the institution of caste, which is based on the sacred Brahminical principles codified in the *Smriti*, and, in the other case, the institution of democracy, which is based on the sacred principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

However, one significant way in which these sets of values differ from each other is that, for Ambedkar, the democratic values are universal in the sense that they apply equally to every one in principle, for all humans are individual and all humans have equal rights and obligation, and all humans deserve the opportunity to discover their talents. In contrast, the Hindu values are particularistic. There is one set for Brahmins, one for the Maratha, one for the Mahar and one for the dalits. In a democratic world, one can become president get a good education, marry the partner of ones choice regardless of caste, and live in their preferred neighborhood, be respected for what they are or do rather than for their inherited status. But in the case of the caste system in India, rules apply to particular people in particular situations.

In a democratic kind of society, freedom of the individual implies a new kind of freedom, the freedom to choose one's religion. We have a different concept of religion

emerging. Here religion is conceived as a body of doctrine about salvation which the individual can choose to adhere to because he finds it the best, the most rational, and the most suitable for his /her personal needs. The religious principles of equality, liberty and fraternity make possible a secular society in which religion becomes a matter of personal commitment and choice. Ambedkar calls a religion a private affair; a matter of personal choice and commitment, something one gets converted to. According to Ambedkar's understanding, *Buddha* and *Dhamma* are essentially morality. By morality he means compassion, caring for one's fellow human being and for the natural world, feeling a sense of responsibility and commitment being actively committed to the wellbeing of the world. Morality, unlike ritual obligation, springs from the heart of the individual and is based on a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood.

5.2 Why Conversion?

A large majority of untouchables who have reached a capacity to think of their problem believes that one way to solve the problem is for them to abandon Hinduism and be converted to some other religion. There are many opponents of the conversion of untouchables. They ask what the untouchables can gain by conversion. Conversion can make no change in the status of the untouchables; it is only a materialist need and so on, they say.

In order to understand why conversion, we should pay attention to its purpose and function in society. According to Charles A. Ellwood, the purpose of religion is to project the essential values of human personality and of human society into the universe as a whole. It inevitably arises as soon as he tries to take a valuing attitude towards his universe, no matter how small and mean that universe may appear to him (Rodrigues 226). Religion emphasizes and universalizes social values and brings them to the mind of the individual who is required to recognize them in all his acts in order that he may function as an approved member of society.

The function of religion is the same as the function of law and government. It is a means by which society exercises its control over the conduct of the individual in order to

maintain social order. It may not be used consciously as a method of social control over the individual. Nonetheless, the fact is that religion acts as means of social control. As compared to religion, government and law are relatively inadequate means of social control. The control through law and order does not go deep enough to secure the stability of the social order. The religious sanction, on account of its being supernatural has been on the other the most effective means of social control, far more effective than law and government have been or can be. Religion is the most powerful force of social gravitation without which it would be impossible to hold the social order in its orbits. Today, the untouchables can very well ask the protagonists of Hinduism the question which Lord Balfour asked the positivists. They can ask:

Does Hinduism recognize their worth as human beings? Does it stand for their equality? Does it extend to them the benefit of liberty? Does it at least help to forge the bond of fraternity between them and the Hindus? Does it teach the Hindus that the untouchables are their kindred? Does it say to them Hindus it is a sin to treat the untouchables as being neither man nor beast? Does it tell the Hindus to be just and humane to them? Does it tell the Hindus to be just to the untouchables? Does it inculcate upon the Hindus the virtue of being friendly to them? Does it tell the Hindus to love them to respect them and to do them no wrong? In short, does Hinduism universalize the value of life without distinction? (Rodrigues 227)

No Hindu can dare to give an affirmative answer to any of these questions. On the contrary, the wrongs to which the Hindus subject the untouchables are acts which are sanctioned by Hindu religion. How can the Hindus ask the untouchables to accept Hinduism and stay in Hinduism? Why should the untouchables adhere to Hinduism which is mainly responsible for their degradation? To be poor is bad but not so bad to be untouchables. In Hinduism there is no hope for them.

The opponents of conversion are determined not to be satisfied even if the logic of conversion was irrefutable. They ask another question. What will the untouchable gain materially by changing faith? It is true that they will not gain wealth by conversion. But socially, they will gain absolutely and immensely because by conversion they will be

members of a community whose religion has universalized and equalized all values of life. Such blessing is unthinkable for them while they are in the Hindu fold.

5.3 Rejection of Hinduism

Ambedkar's role as a prominent constitution maker of India is quite well known. However, his views on religion, particularly his reason for renouncing Hinduism, the religion of his birth, are not so widely known. Ambedkar, who was born in an untouchable family, carried on a relentless battle against untouchability throughout his adult life. In the last part of his life, he renounced Hinduism. What were his reasons for doing so?

Studying his works *The Buddha and Dhama*, *Annihilation of Caste*, *Philosophy of Hinduism*, *Riddles in Hinduism*, etc can obtain a detailed answer to this question. Some of his articles, speeches and interviews before and after his conversion to Buddhism can also throw some light on this question. Ambedkar's statement in 1935 at Yeola Conference is quite instructive in this regard. Ambedkar believed that the untouchables occupied a weak and lowly status only because they were a part of the Hindu society. When attempts to gain equal status and ordinary rights as human beings within the Hindu society started failing, Ambedkar thought it was essential to embrace a religion which will give equal status, equal right and fair treatment to the untouchables. He clearly said to his supporters, select only that religion in which you will get equal status, equal opportunity and equal treatment, after a comparative study of different religions. He became convinced that Buddhism was the best religion from this point of view (Ambedkar 13).

He appealed to all the untouchables to leave Hinduism, which does not help them to grow in the society. He remarked and argued about religion and said:

I tell you, religion is for man not man for religion. If you want to organize, consolidate and be successful in this world, change this religion. The religion that does not recognize you as human beings or give you water to drink or allow you to enter the temples is not worthy to be called a religion. The religion that forbids you to receive education and comes in the way of material advancement is not

worthy of an appellation religion. The religion that does not teach its followers to show humanity in dealing with its co-religionists is nothing but display of force. The religion that asks its adherents to suffer, the touch of animals but not touch of human beings is not religion but a mockery. That religion which precludes some classes from education, forbids them to accumulate wealth and to bear arms is not religion but a mockery. (Keer 275)

According to Ambedkar the religion of the Hindus is nothing but a multitude of commands and prohibitions. Ambedkar delivered a speech on the Buddha Jayanti day in Delhi in which he attacked Hindu gods and goddesses and praised Buddhism because it was a religion based on moral principles. Besides, he points out, unlike the founders of other religions, who considered themselves emissaries of God; the Buddha regarded himself only as a guide and gave a revolutionary meaning to the concept of religion. He said that Hinduism stood for inequality, whereas Buddhism stood for equality. On May 1956 talk by Ambedkar titled why I like Buddhism and how it is useful to the world in its present circumstances was broadcast from the British Broadcasting Corporation London. In his talk Ambedkar said:

I prefer Buddhism because it gives three principles in combination, which no other religion does. Buddhism teaches *prajana* (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), *karuna* (love), and *samata* (equality). This is what man wants for a good and happy life. Neither God nor soul can save society (Kuber 92).

In his last speech delivered in Bombay, on May 24, 1956, he declared his resolve to embrace Buddhism. Ambedkar observed:

Hinduism believes in God. Buddhism has no God. Hinduism believes in soul. According to Buddhism, there is no soul. Hinduism believes in *Chaturvarnya* and the caste system. Buddhism has no place for caste system and *Chaturvarnya*. (Michael 126).

It is obvious that Ambedkar regarded Buddhism as a religion, much more than Hinduism. His main objection to Hinduism was that it sanctified inequality and untouchability through its doctrine of *Chaturvarnya*. Buddhism on the other hand,

rejected *chaturvarnya* and taught equality. He recommends Buddhism for rejecting God and soul and for emphasizing morality. According to him, *prajana* (understanding against superstition and supernaturalism) *karuna* (love) and *samata* (equality), which Buddhism alone teaches, are all that human beings need for a good and happy life.

Ambedkar's final religious act was to embrace Buddhism. His work *the Buddha and His Dhama* contains his own understanding and interpretation of Buddhism. We may say that Buddhism, as expounded in this book, is what Ambedkar embraced and recommended. It is widely recognized by scholars of Buddhism that the Buddha did not believe in God and soul and rejected the *Varna-vyavasth*. However, according to the traditional interpretation of Buddhism, Buddha did believe in rebirth and the related doctrine of bondage and liberation (*Nirvana*). Ambedkar's interpretation on this point differs from the traditional interpretation on this point. But regrettably, Ambedkar has not documented his book *Buddha and Dhama*. Therefore, it is not possible to say how he arrived at his alternative interpretation of Buddhism. From a rationalists and humanist point of view, one may say that Buddhism is a better religion than Hinduism and that it is closer to rationalism and humanism compared to any other religion. Still, it cannot be denied that Buddhism is a religion and certain elements like faith, worship and other worldliness or supernaturalism, which are common to all religions, are also found in Buddhism.

5.4 Conversion to Buddhism

Ambedkar proclaimed that though he was a Hindu with full conviction, he assured them that he would not die as Hindu. He, by his conviction and affirmation, visualizes a separate community outside the Hindu fold carving out for themselves a future, worthy of free citizens. Though the caste Hindus leveled and characterized Ambedkar's attitude as escapism, some far-sighted Hindu society reformers hailed him as a messiah born to reorganize the Hindu society and revitalize Hinduism. Having found Buddhism a source of light to bring a radical change in society, he called upon all untouchables to embrace Buddhism. He defended his conversion to Buddhism on the basis of these following reasons. (a) He tried to prove that the untouchables were

Buddhists. (b) Buddhism was an Indian religion and the Buddha was nearer to the untouchables. (c) The untouchables would join with the world Buddhist community and thus pave the way for world brotherhood.

So Ambedkar, in the year 1956, embraced Buddhism along with three lakhs of dalits and vowed that he would dedicate his life for the spread of Buddhism throughout India. Since Ambedkar emphasized the dignity of the human person, his philosophy of social humanism concerns itself with the dalits, the exploited and the marginalized, who had been stripped of their dignity as persons? He considered them as humans and as humans they are entitled to human dignity, social liberty and equality of opportunities for self-development. Thus Ambedkar regarded social humanism as the philosophy for social transformation and Buddhism as a religious means to attain it.

CHAPTER 6

AMBEDKAR: AN OUTLOOK

Ambedkar's life was a search for social justice. Like any other dalit of his time and their brethren in many parts of present-day India, Ambedkar had experienced the inhuman practices of the caste system, particular by untouchability. Today Ambedkar's life, mission, and writings have become a source of inspiration to the downtrodden people of India. He was the first to systematically bring out the nature and evils of caste system. Being a social reformer, he systematically studied the origin and development of caste system and questioned the very foundation of Hinduism. Even though the problem of caste was complex in nature, he understood the problem, analyzed it and highlighted it in such a way as to give a new thrust to the liberation of dalits. The principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity became the guiding principles of his in social reformation.

Ambedkar successfully gave a new turn to the history of India. But till today the abolition of caste remains a mere dream. The evils of the caste system are still actively prevalent and are affecting the lives of people. Caste is so deeply rooted that it seems to be ineradicable. It is linked to each and every aspect of our lives in the society. Many reformers came and made their presence felt in the society but none of them could completely eradicate the caste system.

Having determined not to die as a Hindu, Ambedkar embraced Buddhism as a way of salvation to the low castes. Many dalits followed him and embraced Buddhism and their descendents from a group of new Buddhists. So conversions have not in any way helped in removing the stigma of caste. Today, we have dalits in all religions in India. In spite of the change of religion, the caste stigma follows them like a shadow.

Ambedkar had his many followers, and wellwishers who admired his selfless work and his commitment towards the downtrodden. There are many scholars who try to look at his work from critical perspectives. Among those many critics is Arun Shourie

who viewed Ambedkar from an upper-caste, establishment perspective. In his work *worshipping false gods*, he has criticized Ambedkar and his work very much.

6.1 Ambedkar and the Dalit movement

Ambedkar was born in the post-industrial world, in one of the import centers of colonial oppression. He was born in an untouchable community, the curse and bane of a fragmented society. He has become an inspiring symbol, a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of India's dalits, the oppressed, deprived and disposed. He epitomized the relentless struggles of the dalit masses for human rights, dignity and freedom. He argued that the heart of the problem of untouchability was the caste system. As long as there is caste system, there will be outcaste. Nothing can emancipate the outcastes except the destruction of the caste system, which he believes, cannot be brought about without destroying Hinduism.

As Jesus says in one of the Gospels whatever we do to the least of my brothers or sisters that we do to him and in another passage He says, "I have come to this world not to be served but to serve." Following this Ambedkar dedicated his life for the dalits. That is why people used to call him by different names like our saviour, messiah and the father of the nation and so on.

Ambedkar acquired the highest qualification in all the branches of modern knowledge and disproved the theory of dalit inferiority, which excluded the exclusion of untouchables from the intellectual domain. He led relentless struggles against untouchability and segregation of human beings. He started with the slogan, "Educate, Agitate, and Organize". Conscientisation of the masses, the dalits and an ideological offensive against the entrenched system of privileges to the upper castes, rights, which had full religious sanctity, was his primary task. He organized the masses to challenge the denial of basic human rights. He led their struggles against the denial of entry to temples. He declared that the political independence from foreign rule is meaningless, if freedom is not achieved from the millennia old system of bondage and untouchability. He fought

for constitutional and legal safeguards for the dalits and in political, educational and economic spheres.

Soon after his arrival in Bombay after completing his studies abroad in 1923, he plunged into the work of the emancipation and upliftment of his fellow brothers and sisters. These unlettered poverty stricken and superstition-ridden people had to be told that they were leading a miserable, almost a sub-human life and that they should strive to alter their life drastically. He, therefore, set before them certain goals and guided them about how to reach the goal. His main aim was to make the dalits aware of their miserable plight, their legitimate right to arouse among them consciousness of their right. In pursuance of this aim, he gave them a pronged message, “Educate, Organize and Agitate”.

6.2 A Modern Manu

A great day dawned in the history of the world on August 15, 1946, when India became a free nation. A great force was released in Asia in the form of Indian Independence. But its happiness was marred in one respect. It was mutilated to create Pakistan. In the wake of this success, a development took place, which led Ambedkar to the top of the ladder of eminence. On August 29, the constituent assembly appointed a drafting committee with N. Madhava Rao, Sir Krishna Machari, T.T. Krishna and two other as members and Ambedkar as its chairman. Ambedkar the untouchable who was kicked out from carts, segregated in schools in his boyhood who was insulted as a professor, ousted from hostels, saloons and temples in his youth as despicable and decried as an executive councilor, became now the first law minister of a free nation and the chief architect of the constitution to define the will, aim and vision of India. It was a great achievement and a wonder in the history of India. India chose; to amend her age-long sin of untouchability, by appointing as her new lawgiver someone from among a caste which had been dehumanized, demoralized and devitalized for ages. New India entrusted the work of framing her new laws to a man who had a few years earlier burnt the *Manusmriti*, the code moral of Hinduism.

The chief minister of Bombay paid glowing tributes to Ambedkar describing him as one of the most learned men among political leaders of the country. Addressing a meeting at Sewri, Bombay S.K.Patil told his audience that Ambedkar was a great servant and a great power, and his gift was seed that he could alone run the central government. Describing him as a great architect of future India, the Bombay boss of the congress prayed to God that the great son of India be spared for another twenty-five years for the conduct of national affairs. *The National Standard of Bombay* said that Ambedkar's conception of reform embrace the entire field of Hindu regeneration and described him as a leader gifted with a rare political acumen. The paper observed that he was a fighter who fought for the principles of idealism ensured the abolition of social injustice and uplift of the underdog. As law minister, it added, he was a tower of strength to his colleagues.

Ambedkar's knowledge was extensive, varied, profound and encyclopedic. His learning instructed and his thoughts provoked thinking. He wrote for the writers, thinkers. Yet he used words not as an artist but like a fighter. He wrote not for literary fame, but for a great cause. His writings might be, according to some critics, open to the charge of harshness. The man of mission prevailed over the historian in Ambedkar who was not satisfied with the defeat of rival arguments. He lacerated his opponent till the latter swooned. That was unavoidable, for dissection is always associated with blood. The critics said that the theory was novel but convincing.

6.3 The Leadership of Ambedkar

Gandhi and Ambedkar are known to different groups as the saviour of the untouchables. Gandhi was a caste Hindu, the Father of Independence who is said to have spoken and written more on untouchability than on any other subject. Ambedkar was the most highly educated untouchable chief spokesman, the founder of a political party for the untouchables, and the moving spirit behind organizations, schools, and colleges established for their upliftment.

Ambedkar's commitment to education as a major means for untouchable advancement led him to initiate in 1920 a program for the creation of hostels for

untouchable's students. This effort by the people's education society, founded by Ambedkar in 1945 through which he exhorted numerous conferences of untouchables to expand their educational opportunities at every level, much of his own effort was aimed at producing highly educated men, capable to function at the highest level Indian urban society. He also advocated the abandonment of customs and practices associated with the stereotype of untouchable, including the consumption of alcohol and carrion of beef. Ambedkar's pronouncement on the need to live clean and moral lives sounds very much like other reformers. His vision of the untouchable's future role went far beyond that of Gandhi, or indeed that of any other untouchable leader.

The untouchable caste he came from had begun social and political movements before he assumed a position of leadership. His contribution was to raise these attempts to a level of such effectiveness that the caste could achieve a religious conversion, build a political party, and greatly increase its participation in education at all levels. Beyond his caste, Ambedkar helped to shape the vast program of legal rights and safeguards for untouchables, which India developed. He directly influenced some other untouchables the castes through the conversion movements of his political Party. Indirectly he affected many more. As lawyer, writer, statesman, constitutionalist, he was an example to all India of what an untouchables could become.

In addition to the vital element of self-respect, which Ambedkar engendered among untouchables, his vision of progress through education and politics, rather than the Gandhian vision of a change of heart among the caste Hindus has come to inspire most scheduled caste leaders. However, these leaders and their followers are rarely united beyond their own region. In general, the support goes to the communist party of the area. In Tamilnadu the support goes to the DMK while in many other states the support goes to the Congress. Only in Maharashtra and portion of Uttar Pradesh has Ambedkar's Republican Party commanded any significant number of seats in recent elections.

Ambedkar's view that the problem of the untouchables is economic, social and political, as well as religious, widely prevails in India. The untouchables who enter the

modern sector or government service are comparatively free from earlier social disabilities. Even though there may be subtle discrimination in some areas, and a closed door in others, the educated untouchables function in a world where a concern with pollution is mitigated by other considerations. However, for the majority of untouchables, who are landless villagers, the only open road to a higher economic and social status entails leaving the security of their village and somehow obtaining education. Gandhi may have softened the Hindu heart, Ambedkar may have awakened self-respect and entrust in politics among untouchables, but economic dependence upon others continues to restrict the upward movement of the untouchables.

The great service of Ambedkar to the cause is the awakening that he created among the dalits. He gave them a leadership, which they sadly lacked and which was very badly needed. He puts the problem of dalits before the country in its true perspective-political social and economic (Zelliot 175).

6.4 The Philosophy of Ambedkar

Is it possible to speak of a philosophy of Ambedkar? Is there anything like Ambedkarism? According to Sharad Patil, Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar had developed independent philosophies. Phule developed theistic materialism while adopted Ambedkar Neo-Buddhist socialism. Patil's main concern is to bring about a synthesis of Marxism Phuleism and Ambedkarism. According to his the principles of a struggle or a war are common to all the three of them. For Marx it is a struggle between the classes; for Phule it is a struggle against varnas and for Ambedkar it is a struggle against Brahmanism and capitalism.

Ambedkar was not an abstract philosopher. In the speech he made on 3 October 1954 on all India Radio, he said that each human person must have a philosophy of life. Philosophy is nothing but a standard or a norm, which regulates human life. In his speech he claims that his social philosophy can best be summed up in the three concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity. The words at once remind of the French Revolution. But he insists that he has not borrowed these ideas from the French Revolution. His liberty,

equality and fraternity are rooted in religion. He claims that he has derived these concepts from the teaching of Buddha. Political liberty and political freedom are not enough. There must be a social freedom and social equality. In a country like India, where society is divided by the varna ideology, political democracy must be translated into social democracy. The principle of equality is the cornerstone of a well-organized and stable society. The basis of the principle of social equality is the dignity of the human person. The word “human” “humane” and “humanity” are at the center of Ambedkar’s social philosophy. Neither class nor varna nor jati (caste) can be central to a special democratic philosophy. In the Ambedkarit philosophy, it is the individual who is at the center. For him every human person is one value. Only such value, based on the understanding of the human person, can promote fraternity. It is the principle of fraternity, which serves as a safeguard against excessive liberty and excessive equality. It is the same principle of fraternity, which must be the norm for social ethics and social morality.

It is because of its emphasis on the dignity of the human person that Ambedkarism concerns itself with the dalits, the exploited and the marginalized. The dalits, the exploited, the marginalized and the oppressed are humans, and as human they are entitled to human dignity, social liberty and equality of opportunities for self-development. In Ambedkarism these people on the periphery move to the center stage. Ambedkarism is also characterized by its bias for the labouring groups. The dalits, the oppressed and the marginalized are constituted those who are landless agricultural labourers, menial workers and people doing odd jobs. They represent, what Tarachand Khandekar calls, *shraman sanskriti* (culture of the labouring classes) as against Brahmin *sanskriti* (culture of upper castes). Brahmanic culture is marked by such concepts as the soul, God priesthood, heaven, *punerjanma* etc, and has, therefore, another-worldly reference. But *shraman sanskriti* is the culture of the common man and has this worldly bias. For instance, in Brahmin culture the arts become performing arts, whereas in *ramansh sanskriti* the function of arts is to provide relief during hard physical labour (Arvind 5).

A competent study of Ambedkar's economic thought is found in M.K. Dengre's Economic thought of Ambedkar. Total liberty for all human persons is basic to Ambedkarism, and for this he undertook a radical economic analysis of the Hindu society. He maintained that while considering Indian economics, it was necessary to keep in mind the social group that constitutes the Indian society. Ambedkar has maintained that the caste system has affected and influenced such features of Indian economy as division of labour, exchange, distribution, capital and consumption. The system has provided for the exploitation both economic and political, of the dalits by the upper castes. He repudiates Nesfield's occupational theory of caste system. Ambedkar argues that the varna *Dharma* is not based on the division of labour, rather it divides the labourers into castes and sub-castes. Economic development assumes change, but the caste system is a rigid phenomenon. The society that has no place for social change can only promote static economics, and result in the inefficiency of the labouring classes, says Ambedkar. Because of the rigidity of the Indian caste system, the capital investment becomes unproductive. Ambedkar was the chief architect of Indian constitution but he clearly saw that his own vision for his motherland had not been fully realized after completing his task, he said in the constituent assembly:

On 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradiction. In politics we will have equality and in a social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one-man vote and one value. In one social and economic life we shall, by reason of our economic structure continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How shall we continue to live this contradiction? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction as the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this assembly has so laboriously built up. (Nirmal 7)

For Ambedkar the completion of the constitution, a political document, was only the beginning of the real task of giving Indian democracy a social and economic content. The total revolution and

transformation envisioned by him has yet arrived. He firmly believed that constitutional state-socialism with parliamentary democracy would be right answer to India's socio-economic problems.

The center of Ambedkarism is the individual human person and his/her dignity. He fought against the economic, religious social and political forces for the freedom of human person throughout his life. He was not a philosopher of individualism. His individual human person is the individualism in the society. His political thought, therefore, considers the issues of the individual in relation to the social and political structures. His whole approach is relational and integrative. Democracy for him was more than a mere political system. It was a way of life. He writes "Democracy is a made of associates living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of the associated life between the people who form society" (Nirmal 8). Ambedkar was not a static political thinker. The three parties and their manifestoes, namely, the Swatantra Mazdur Praksha, the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Republican Party represent his ever broadening and ever-deepening political vision. The Swatantra Mazur Praksha was established for the welfare of the labouring classes. His Republican Party was to include all the weaker section of the Indian society. It, in a way, anticipated the Mandlisation of the political process in India.

How prophetic was Ambedkar when we find ourselves harassed by the politics of defection in contemporary India. According to Ambedkar fair, politics requires a free culture. He learnt from his guru, John Dewey, which the problem of freedom and of democratic institutions is tied up with the question of what kind of culture exists with the necessity of free culture for the free political institutions. He was aware that the Indian culture and the Hindu society were not free because of the varna system that denied social, political and economic freedom. Therefore he writes:

No one can say that to have the problems of social reform put aside is a desirable state of things. Whenever there are social evils the health of the body political requires that they shall be removed before they become the symbols of suffering and injustice. For, it is the social and economic evils which every where are the parent of revolution. (Nirmal 10)

Finally I come to Ambedkar's religious philosophy. Religion must sustain, buildup sublimate and stabilize society. A religion based on morality alone can perform these functions. A religion, therefore, has social functions. Religion and society must complement each other. The three criteria to judge the adequacy of a religion are liberty, equality and fraternity. It is on the basis of these three principles that religion should attempt a total social transformation. Religion is for humans and not vice versa. A religion must also promote, sustain and safeguard human dignity. On the eve of his religious conversion he declared that conversion for him was a means to full human dignity. At the centre of religion was the individual human person. It was Ambedkar's is humanity-centered understanding of religion that made him embrace Buddhism.

He did not accept Buddhism uncritically. His is a reinterpreted Buddhism. He applied three principles in reinterpreting Buddhism. The first principle was that of rationalism. Buddha was nothing if not rational, if not logical. Anything therefore which is rational and logical may be taken to be the word of Buddha. The second principle was that of utilitarianism. The Buddha never cares to enter into a discussion, which was not profitable for human welfare. Therefore, anything attributed to the Buddha, which does not relate to human welfare cannot be accepted as the word of Buddha. The third principle was that of certainty. Buddha made a distinction between matters about which he was certain, and about those uncertain matters the Buddha expressed opinions which were tentative.

6.5 Personal Reflection

The caste system in Indian society is a great concern for me. In the words of Gandhi, India is made of villages. After the 56th year of independence, it is painful to see that practice of caste system is still prevalent in the villages. Though we many developments, in the other fields but when it comes to caste system it remains a matter of concern for a large number of Indians. It is painful to see that India is still living in the primitive age where social barriers play a major role in our country. In the changing scenario we find that in the towns and cities, there is less practice of caste system but

when it comes to the village level, the first question raised is what caste does one belongs to.

I find that in the name of caste there is lots of discrimination taking place. In this global world, the marginalized downtrodden, and dalits are victims of the caste system. In this competitive world they suffer in two ways first they are not able to cope up with the situation and secondly, they are discriminated against. I feel that the only way to overcome this leprosy of caste system is to have mass education as well as to constientization of the dalits. I feel that education is a must. Education is the key factor to overcome all sorts of discriminations. For me education is light which illuminates all kinds of darkness in life. Why is so much discrimination of dalits or any lower castes? It is because they are not educated. They are illiterate. Thanks to all the missionaries for educating them. They are, a ray of hope for these people. The way to come over the caste system is to give certain awareness to them. Self-realization is best means to break through the caste barriers. They should realize that they are worth as human beings. They are often told that they are low of caste, not worthy of anything. These suggestions made them feel inferior. They do not consider themselves good. We have to take this notion out of their mind. The question is who will bell the cat? As a Jesuit I am called to do that, otherwise my life, as a Jesuit has no meaning.

6.6 Conclusion

Ambedkar was not a leader of the untouchables only, but he was a leader of national stature. A true democrat at heart, he wanted to reconstruct the Indian society on the principles of liberty, equality fraternity. He was a man of conviction. He was deeply interested in human dignity. He had the guts and courage to raise his voice against Gandhi; this speaks about his inner conviction. He wanted to educate people not for degree but to waken them so that they may know about human rights. He was a person who would not sit on anybody's bandwagon like an opportunist but he would take up challenges and fight till the end.

At last I would say that time has come to make a humane society where all are considered human beings and respected as they are and not according to their caste or

creed. The launching of human rights movements all over India would bring a radical change in society. Today, it is a positive sign that the dalits along with other backward classes are forming political parties to gain political power. They are coming up in all aspects of life. It was indeed a historical moment for India when, in 1995 a dalit woman for the first time became chief minister. It is also noteworthy that the previous president of our country was a dalit. If the dalits together with other marginalized could mobilize their forces to gain political power, sooner or later, Ambedkar's dream of the emancipation of dalits could become a reality. It is proper time for us to march with them, lead them and guide them. It is our dream to rub our shoulders with them to create a just society. The radical mobilization of people irrespective of caste and creed will create a new society in India, the foundation for which was laid by Ambedkar.

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